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## Foreword

Sitting in a café in Cairo watching the world go by, I can't help but wonder about the long term significance of what I see. Am I seeing the past through the proverbial rose-colored glasses: is there really less color, less laughter, fewer smiles, and less gaiety on the streets? Many men and women are so drably dressed that they appear to have gone out of their way to prove the inaccuracy of the view that some anthropologists subscribe to which asserts that self-adornment is a universal value that can be found in all cultures. Many young women, often holding their boyfriends' hands, are, however, dressed in form-hugging jeans or skirts and skin-tight tops. Yet their hair is demurely covered by the now popular *hegab*, a seeming contradiction: clothing that leaves little to the imagination, but hair, as modesty supposedly requires, covered. It's the fashion of the day. More bizarre sights can be seen: a *hegabi* in a restaurant enjoying a beer, or stores displaying the latest *hegab* and *niqab* fashion next-door to shops with their windows full of saucy bedroom attire for women.

How and why are these seemingly contradictory attitudes so commonplace on the streets? Is this the Egyptian nature at work, playing lip service to the powers that be while molding things to their liking by following fashion in a way that is acceptable? I remember the more conservative *baladi women* wearing the traditional Egyptian burka made of widely-spaced netting that covered nothing, and the black sheet (*melaya laff*) that they wrapped around themselves under the arms then over one shoulder, often so tightly that what was designed for modesty became a sexy attire. Is my memory playing tricks on me? I doubt it, but some facts are indis-

putable. The triangle-shaped bright-colored scarfs with their dangling sparkling sequins, called *mandeel abu ooya*, has been replaced with a variety of unappealing drab-colored garments. Everyone seems to have forgotten that *hegabs* and *niqabs* are a relatively recent imported fashion that dates back to around the late 1970s. Prior to that one could have scoured the streets of Cairo or Alexandria or any town and not seen a single *hegabi*, never mind *neqabi*, or a single store selling such clothing. This change in fashion is, of course, reflective of a much deeper conservative trend in Egyptian society. So the question arises: Where did this all begin? How was a nation of jovial, fun-loving people transformed into what they have become today?

Researching and writing this book has been an intense journey for me. Beginning as an attempt to understand why so many societies are moving forward and solving their problems while Egypt seems to be not only standing still but going back, it took me back not only through the times of my own recollections but also through those of my forbears.

When Nasser came to power in 1952, I was a boy enjoying riding his bicycle around the tree-lined streets of Zamalek, Cairo, past the graceful villas and the many embassies with the comings and goings of foreign diplomatic functions; stopping at a friend's house to invite him along; and returning "hellos" from neighbors out for a stroll. Life was good for me, a boy from a middle-class family. From my perspective it was not so good for the farm workers and their families I saw on my visits to my grandfather's farm, but neither was it quite as dire as some people maintain. Life on the farms followed a soothing, almost mesmerizing, rhythm that paralleled the flooding and ebbing of the Nile waters. Crops grew with a minimum of human effort in the silt-rich soil, families worked the fields together, and food was plentiful. Strolling along one of the many irrigation canals there, I would hear the laughter of the workers in the fields, return the cheerful greetings of men, women and children alike, and be lulled by the undulating gait of the peasant girls and women performing what was to me the amazing feat of balancing pots or huge bundles on their heads. That slow, melodic, swaying gait was as timeless and flowing as the Nile and the twinkle of mischief in their eyes was like droplets from the river's flowing wa-

ters caught in a beam of sunlight. They went about their daily tasks shoulders relaxed, teasing each other—and me when I was around, eyes bright with a *joie de vivre* that seemed to say “live and let live,” no matter the situation. Urban Egyptians largely shared that “live and let live” approach, and perhaps the most commonly used word was *ma’lish*, never mind, to almost any problem.

As a young boy I had no inkling of the future implications of the coup, of Nasser’s era, or of his foreign adventures or nationalization plans. But then again I don’t think any Egyptian did.

More than a decade into Nasser’s rule, I returned to Cairo, after studying in England, with my English wife and two sons. By this time the full impact of Nasser’s misguided policies and squandering of national resources was becoming clear. Daily life was fraught with problems. Limitations on imports and a breakdown in the domestic means of production and the agricultural sector resulted in periodic shortages of consumer goods as well as basic staples. Meat was rationed and increasingly beyond the means of more and more Egyptians; sugar and oil were rationed; people lined up to buy chicken—when it was available. Cornflakes were a luxury sold on the black market. The country was falling apart. The grand architecture of Zamalek and downtown Cairo had begun to look more like neglected ruins. The city had become permanently grimy, the government corrupt. The atmosphere grew more and more apprehensive and repressive. I found myself drawing a blank when I tried to remember why I had brought my wife and children here to live, so in the early 1970s we left.

After living abroad for over three decades, I returned to find superficial ‘improvements.’ The shops were full of every variety of consumer goods. Fast food chains such as McDonalds and KFC offered an alternative to traditional street food to those who could afford their prices. Everyone in the country seemed to have a mobile phone, and the rates of motor vehicle ownership soared, but the traces of problems and signs of decay were easily observed. The city is pretty much permanently at a standstill with undirected traffic. It’s not uncommon to see a live electrical wire springing out from the wall of a nineteenth-century French design building, now in noticeable disrepair and sometimes causing great hazard when the occasional piece of masonry dislodges itself and falls to the pave-

ment. More telling still and profoundly disturbing is the change in Egyptians themselves. As an Egyptian I know that the live-and-let-live attitude is deeply embedded in the psyche of every Egyptian, yet it is rapidly disappearing, just as the constant stream of jokes that used to circulate throughout the population and that always served as a safety valve is drying up. The word *ma'lish*, however, is not in danger of disappearing since now it is used to avoid addressing the very real problems in a society in which corruption and mismanagement are endemic and have become entrenched and institutionalized.

On my visits to Egypt during those thirty years away, I was pretty much like any other visitor. My goal was limited: to touch base with my family and the bigger picture was on the periphery of my attention. The bigger picture is not on the agenda of other visitors either; they come to Egypt to see the sites and that is what they have paid for. This is a blessing for Egypt since a significant percentage of its GNP derives from tourism. There is a telling irony in this though. What the visitor does not know is that many of those who depend on the tourist dollars for their bread and butter have learned to scorn, even despise, the very heritage that helps keep Egypt financially afloat; that some of the forbears of modern Egyptians went to great lengths over the centuries to try and wipe out the record of that ancient heritage that now supports them.

When the majority of societies excavate and proudly display their society's artifacts, why then do so many Egyptians scorn their ancient heritage? Why does an admittedly small minority view that heritage as heathen symbols that should be destroyed? Why did a rich country like Egypt stop building monuments and grand public buildings after the end of the pharaonic era?

The visitors also do not know, of course, that less than forty years ago all three of the pyramids there on the Giza Plateau could be seen from the beginning of the Pyramid Road. No buildings or pollution haze blocked the view, the land along either side of the road was agricultural, and it was not uncommon to drive that road and have it almost to oneself from the beginning to the end. And a moonlit evening visit to the pyramids with a group of friends was a unique and magical experience.

Visitors are not alone in not knowing these facts. The majority of Egyptians today were born after the 1952 coup, and they do not know either. They have no idea why they think the way they think, why they live the way they live. Nor do they appear curious enough to ask why. For the most part they seem to live reactively, not proactively, and appear to make little or no attempt to develop themselves as independent thinkers.

And the question remains: Why?

Curiously, many Egyptians seem to recognize these traits and seem to be self-critical, but in a most peculiar way: without the slightest intention of remedying the traits or making the criticism constructive. Instead they offer various glib reasons for this state of affairs: We are lazy; it's the system; it's too powerful to do anything about; we just can't organize ourselves to do anything; we need a just leader, etc., etc.

And the question remains: Why?

Both frustration and curiosity led me to the instinctive destination of most educators: the library, where I read anything that might provide the answers I sought, from politicians' and intellectuals' memoirs to ninth century historians. Initially I was ready to place all the responsibility on the shoulders of Nasser and his fellow 1952 coup conspirators. As I dug deeper, however, I began to find connections and causes that went further and further back in time. Initially I had no intention of addressing the worn out and seemingly unanswerable question of how the descendants of any sophisticated ancient civilization end up losing the traits of their forbears that created that ancient civilization. Yet I began to discover cause and effect connections that are traceable to Egypt's ancient civilization. So in this book, I have set out to map the series of events that reflected and influenced social and cultural values and practices in Egypt through the centuries.

Egypt is unique given the length of the occupation it endured and the degree to which its identity was diluted. A civilized society may survive the onslaught of an invasion of a less advanced social group that would eventually be absorbed into the social fabric and become part of the conquered society, but in Egypt's case the scale of migration of the Bedouins who brought their preliterate culture

and social values with them from the Arabian Peninsula reversed this process and the indigenous population and native culture was overwhelmed by its conquerors.

Writing this book was an attempt to understand the present by peeling off the layers of the onion and finding clues to the hidden reasons for what is at the core of an Egyptian's worldview and self-view. For Egyptians like me, the exploration can be a journey of self-revelation. For the general reader interested in the world around them and in societies that today impact their own, the journey can be illuminating.

The journey has been a roller-coaster ride of pride and despair: pride in the magnificent ancient past that as an Egyptian I can lay claim to; pride in the ability of my forbears to survive, although not unscathed, their tumultuous history; despair at our inability to withstand the seemingly relentless onslaught of negative influences still invading our borders; and despair at having no satisfying answer to: What next?

What next? It was at the core of the questions that prompted me to take this journey, and it is the question to which I found no answer. What the journey did give me, however, is the backstory that I and my fellow Egyptians share and that provides answers to why we are where we are now, today. It sheds light on but does not attempt to justify the real face of Egypt today, the paradox of wealth coupled with mismanagement that Napoleon recognized.

It is the face that is hidden from the eyes of visitors marveling at the pyramids, gazing in awe on the temple of Karnak or the tombs of our distant ancestors. While visitors cannot fail to see the surface squalor, the real face of Egypt is as surely hidden from view as the facial features of those women who now wear the full facial veil, the *niqab*, in Egypt's public places. Hopefully this account will contribute to lifting that veil.



# Timeline

Circa 3100 BCE	Namer unites Upper and Lower Egypt and becomes the first Pharaoh of Kemet, the black land (a reference to the color of Egypt's fertile soil).
2755-2255 BCE	The Old Kingdom of Egypt is characterized by advances in science and engineering building of the first pyramids.
Circa 1674 BCE	Weak pharaohs fail to repel an invasion by Semitic herders from Asia, the Hyksos, who occupy the Delta and rule it for about 105 years.
Circa 1550 BCE	Ahmos, succeeds in the struggle for liberation begun by his ancestors Seqenenre-Taa and Kamose expels the Hyksos and reunites the country. He founds the New Kingdom (Eighteenth Dynasty), restores neglected and ruined temples, and ushers in an era of security, stability, and prosperity.
331 BCE	Alexander the Great invades Egypt, founds the city of Alexandria.
51 BCE	Cleopatra VII becomes joint ruler of Egypt with her ten-year-old brother, Ptolemy XIII.
37 BCE	Cleopatra marries Marcus Antonius
31 BCE	Octavius, later known as Augustus Caesar, defeats Antonius and Cleopatra in the naval battle of Actium.
30 BCE-395 CE	Egypt is annexed by Rome after the suicides of Antonius and Cleopatra.
Circa 50 CE	St. Mark brings Christianity to Egypt and founds the Coptic Church.
64 CE	Emperor Nero begins to persecute Christians in the Roman Empire

395 CE	The Roman Empire divided into two empires after the death of emperor Theodosius. The Western half is ruled from Rome and the Eastern half, from Nicomedia then from Constantinople.
395-641 CE	Egypt ruled by Byzantium (the eastern half of the Roman Empire).
451 CE	Monophysitism, which the Coptic Church of Alexandria adheres to, is declared a heresy by the Council of Chalcedon.
641	Egypt is conquered by Bedouin Arabs led by Amr ibn el-Aas and becomes a province of the Islamic empire.
641-661	Egypt is ruled from Mecca then from Kufa during the reign of the Guided Caliphs.
661-750	The Umayyad caliphate. Egypt is ruled from Damascus.
750-935	The Abbasid Caliphate. Egypt is ruled from Baghdad.
870	Ahmad ibn Tulun, a Mamluk, seizes power in Egypt and becomes semi independent from Baghdad.
969-1171	The Fatimids invade Egypt; establish a new caliphate and el-Azhar University.
1171	The Ayyoubids led by Kurdish leader Salah al-Din el-Ayyoubi (Saladin) invade Egypt and defeat the Fatimids.
1249	The Seventh Crusade under Louis IX of France lands in Egypt and takes the town of Damietta.
1249	Sultan el-Salih Ayyoub, accompanied by his wife Shagaret el-Dorr, leads an army to confront Louis IX but succumbs to tuberculosis, dies of before the decisive battle and is succeeded by his son irresponsible Turanshah.
1250	Shagaret el-Dorr takes control of the critical situation. Turanshah is killed by the army commanders who repel the French taking Louis prisoner, and the jubilant army commanders,

- and later, the people proclaim Shagaret el-Dorr the first Mamluk ruler and the only Muslim queen to rule in her own right.
- 1517 The Ottoman sultan, Selim I, captures Cairo and ends formal Mamluk rule of Egypt but they remain more or less the de facto rulers of the country.
- 1798 Napoleon Bonaparte arrives in Egypt ending centuries of isolation from Europe and promises reform.
- 1801 France's loss in the Abu Kir naval battle and continuing skirmishes with the British-Ottoman alliance make the French presence in Egypt untenable and they leave and instability and public disorder ensue.
- 1801 Mohammed Ali, a junior commander of an Albanian contingent serving with the Ottomans arrives in Egypt, falls in love with the country, and impresses the *ulama* with his ideas.
- 1805 The Ottomans accede to the Egyptians demand and appoint Mohammed Ali to the post of viceroy of Egypt.
- 1811 The Mamluk massacre. Dozens are killed as they attempt to leave the Cairo Citadel after attending a dinner invitation with Mohammed Ali. The Mamluk era comes to an end with this event and Mohammed Ali becomes absolute master of Egypt and embarks of an ambitious program of modernization and reform.
- 1840 Treaty of London obligates Egypt to dismantle its arms industry and remove import tariffs designed to protect emergent local industry.
- 1854 Ferdinand de Lesseps is granted the concession to construct a canal from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea.
- 1866 Mohammed Ali's son, Khedive Ismail embarks on an extensive program of modernization and inaugurates Egypt's first parliament.

- 1869 The Suez Canal opens.
- 1882 Britain occupies Egypt.
- 1914 The British government changes the status of Egypt from a Turkish province to a British protectorate.
- 1919 When Britain imprisons the leaders of the independence movement the country erupts in Revolution. All social classes, including upper class women take to the streets carrying signs showing the cross and crescent as their emblem to show the Muslim-Christian unity. Riots and civil unrest continue for months.
- 1922 Britain grants Egypt limited independent with continued a British military presence in the Suez Canal area.
- 1923 Promulgation of the constitution.
- 1936 King Fuad dies and is succeeded by his son Farouk.
- 1952 Junior army officers led by Gamal Abdel Nasser take power after a military coup.
- 1953 Constitutional monarchy abolished and Egypt becomes a republic.
- 1956 Britain, France, and Israel attack Egypt after Nasser nationalizes the Suez Canal but the UN, with strong support from the US, condemns the attack. Britain, France comply immediately and withdraw their forces from the Canal area and Israel turns over control Sinai to UN. Peacekeepers and withdraws its forces in 1957.
- 1967 Nasser orders the withdrawal of UN. Peacekeepers from Sinai and Israel attacks Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, taking Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, the Golan Heights, and Jerusalem.
- 1970 Nasser, dies on September 28 and is succeeded by his vice-president Anwar el-Sadat.
- 1973 Egypt's army storms the Bar-Lev line on the eastern shore of the Suez Canal and begins the liberation of Sinai.

- 1977 Anwar el-Sadat travels to Jerusalem to propose a peace plan to the Israelis.
- 1978 Anwar el-Sadat and Menachem Begin sign an Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty mediated by President Jimmy Carter.
- 1981 A religious extremist assassinates Anwar el-Sadat and vice-president Hosni Mubarak succeeds him.
- 2011 Mubarak is ousted by a popular revolt led by Egypt's young men and women.
- 2012 Muslim Brothers' candidate Mohammed Morsi narrowly wins presidential election.
- June 30, 2013 Mass demonstrations demand Morsi's resignation and accuse the Muslim Brothers of hijacking the revolution and attempting to monopolize power and impose shari'a.
- July 3, 2013 General Abdel-Fatah el-Sisi, the armed forces commander announces the ouster of Morsi and nominates Adli Mansour, the head of the constitutional court as interim president.
- May 2014 Presidential elections are held and General el-Sisi is elected president.

## Religion and the Rhythm of Life in Pharaonic Egypt

The constant interaction between a people and their physical environment plays a major role in shaping the way of life, culture, and social values of society and is particularly evident in Egypt. There the concentration of population along the narrow strip of fertile land that constitutes the Nile valley and that is bordered by an arid and unforgiving desert was a major factor in shaping ancient society. These particular features of the physical environment made the setting up of permanent settlements possible, facilitated communications and transportation between the different settlements, and provided an incentive for the eventual establishment of centralized government. It also impacted all other aspects of the pharaonic culture and social values, and after thousands of years defined Egyptians at their core. The Nile was the pivotal axis around which life in Egypt revolved and its centrality in the culture and lives of Egyptians is evidenced by the fact that before being admitted to the abode of the gods, a deceased pharaoh had to attest in his negative confession that "I have never stopped [the flow of] water."<sup>1</sup>

Order, stability, and continuity were of paramount importance to the ancient Egyptians,<sup>2</sup> who believed that the goddess Maat created the world out of confusion and disarray and that the proper observances of religious rituals honoring the gods were the only means of maintaining order.<sup>3</sup> Disarray, disorder, and chaos were ever-living threats and perpetual dangers that the Egyptians were reminded of by the empty wastelands that surrounded their fertile valley.<sup>4</sup> Egypt was an agrarian society that owed its very existence to the Nile and to its annual inundation, which regenerated and fertilized the soil. This is what gave rise to the need for a central

authority with the resources needed to keep accurate records of the levels of the Nile waters and to ensure that the maintenance and dredging of the irrigation canals were carried out in a timely manner and in accordance with the crop growing cycles.

It is this absolute necessity of regularity and predictability that may well have resulted in the Egyptians' traditional conservatism and fear of disorder and chaos.<sup>5</sup> Chaos was an ever-present threat that the Egyptians sought to protect themselves from by developing the first system of centralized authority in recorded history. At the head of this authority and the bureaucracy that served it stood the pharaoh who was an absolute ruler responsible for all aspects of life. As a semi divine being, the pharaoh was the people's only means of communicating with the gods. He controlled all of nature's forces and interpreted and implemented the gods' wishes, thus ensuring the provision of society's livelihood and maintenance of the order and stability Maat had created. As the pharaoh's legitimacy and authority stemmed from the belief that he was a living god and the preserver of Maat,<sup>6</sup> his absence would have been seen as an inconceivable transgression against the goddess of order.<sup>7</sup>

Dating back to the Old kingdom circa 2700 BCE, and perhaps even to the pre-dynastic period about a thousand years earlier, the social structure of Egypt revolved around the pharaoh. Through him (rarely, although occasionally, her), the main social institutions: economy, religion, government, and education, were closely linked. As both god and ruler, he was the mediator between the world of humans and the world of the ever-living gods, which he joined upon his death.<sup>8</sup> He was the provider of economic and political security as well as spiritual wellbeing.<sup>9</sup> The vital importance and centrality of the pharaoh in Egypt's culture cannot be overstated.

In his worldly role, the pharaoh stood at the top of the social structure and presided over every aspect of life in society and every sphere of daily existence.<sup>10</sup> His actions and policies made the growing of crops possible. He ordered and financed the building and maintenance of the irrigation canals that watered the fields. This task was crucial to the economy because the annual flood that brought silt and rejuvenated the fertile soil also weakened the levies and dykes and clogged the irrigation canals. He employed workers and scribes to measure and record the Nile flood levels. When the

flood level was high and provided an abundance of crops, the pharaoh ordered the building and stocking of warehouses to ensure against possible future shortages. During the lull in farming when the land was inundated during the annual flood of the Nile, both peasants and craftsmen were employed in public works projects: maintaining waterways and irrigation canals, building temples, pyramids, and other structures that, while dedicated to the after-life, were viewed as inseparable parts of this life.<sup>11</sup> In addition to economic security, the pharaoh provided physical security and safety through maintaining law and order and by defending his people against marauding nomads and the invaders who inhabited the world of chaos beyond Egypt's borders.

In this sense, the pharaoh played the role of a competent administrator as well as a benevolent father figure. Public works projects such as dredging irrigation canals were not necessary merely to ensure agricultural security but also kept people busy, productive and earning a living. The ancient monuments were huge public works projects that created a skilled economy and that additionally provided national coherence and pride. Fortunately for the ancients, a pyramid or monument was what a pharaoh required, not a horde of cash and mansions around the world.

Properly trained priests were necessary to perform religious rituals, and properly trained scribes were necessary to keep records. The pharaoh provided both training facilities and employment opportunities for both professions. Through endowing the temples and performing the appropriate rituals, he also ensured that the gods were pleased and that the Nile would, therefore, flood on time every year and bring with it the silt that fertilized the land and enabled Egypt to maintain its prosperity. The pharaoh both represented and controlled - to use Emile Durkheim's terminology - the sacred as well as the profane domains.<sup>12</sup> He personified the link between the supernatural that his subjects did not understand and the familiar routine of their daily lives. Sometimes he interceded with the gods on their behalf as he did after an extended period of drought when the Nile failed to rise to its usual flood levels in seven consecutive years causing crop failures, food shortages, and widespread suffering.<sup>13</sup> According to the myth preserved by a Ptolemaic inscription, the pharaoh, who might have been the Third



Dynasty King Djoser, travelled to the Island of Elephantine in Upper Egypt, which housed the floodgates.<sup>14</sup> There, he secured an audience with Khnum, the Nile god who lived there and controlled these floodgates of the Nile. Khnum told the Pharaoh that he had been less generous with his floodwaters because he was unhappy with the fact that his temples had not been properly maintained and attended.<sup>15</sup> The Pharaoh promised to remedy the situation, and in turn, Khnum promised to open the gates.<sup>16</sup> Upon the Pharaoh's return, he levied new taxes and the temples were spruced up and staffed.<sup>17</sup> The following year the river rose again as it had done before the drought and all was well again in Egypt.<sup>18</sup>

The pharaoh, therefore, was at the very core of religion and religious rituals and practices, and every aspect of the ancient Egyptian culture revolved around religion. The government, economy, law, language, literature, and worldview, were all tightly knit through religion and the pharaoh. Religion fueled, energized, and stimulated science and engineering achievements, and this interdependency between the different components of the social culture provided the basis for the wide-ranging social consensus that was the key to its durability and intransience for thousands of years.

The rhythm of life established over the millennia of pharaonic rule was disrupted at times by the numerous invaders tempted by the prosperity in the Nile valley. These less refined marauders were the nomadic Semites who, according to Egyptian mythology, inhabited the red lands,<sup>19</sup> the vast and desolate deserts that seemed to stretch endlessly beyond the fertile valley. They were less advanced than the Egyptians in every way, and their unceasing raids on what must have seemed to them paradise on earth were a perpetual threat that the country's rulers had to tackle. Strong pharaohs kept the raiders at bay during their reigns and often followed them beyond the borders of Egypt in the hope of discouraging future raids and maintaining peace and prosperity in the land. That ever-present threat and the manner in which the pharaohs dealt with it is shown in a relief from the First Dynasty at Abydos which depicts the gaunt figure of a Bedouin chief about to meet a violent end at the hands of his Egyptian vanquisher.<sup>20</sup> The term *amu* that appears to have been used to describe the Asian desert nomads is mentioned repeatedly in Egyptian records, and this relief is one of the earliest references

to Bedouins.<sup>21</sup> The army's expeditions beyond the country's borders were generally intended to punish raiders and discourage future raids rather than to take control of foreign territory, and Egypt has had roughly the same borders for 6,000 years.

When a weak pharaoh who was unable to protect his subjects from pillagers and foreign incursions sat on the throne, there was unrest and social disorder, but the impact of the invaders was generally short-lived, and society enjoyed relatively long periods of order and stability. The two notable exceptions were the Persian invasion of 525 BCE and the Hyksos, who, at a time of political turmoil and social disintegration that had left the country in the hands of several weak regional rulers, managed to take over Lower Egypt after the conquest of Memphis in 1674 BCE. The Hyksos ruled the country until Ahmos, who founded the Eighteenth Dynasty and ushered in the era of the New Kingdom, finally expelled them in 1550 BCE and might have taken some of them as slaves and put them to work as builders. While there is some debate as to the origins of these people, they are known to have been nomadic shepherders, possibly from central Asia, the Arabian Peninsula,<sup>22</sup> or Palestine. What is also not in doubt is that they were Semitic tribes who left no monuments or works of art that suggest an urban cultural tradition or a civilization. The Egyptians referred to them as the Hyksos, which can be translated either as shepherd kings or as captive shepherds. One of the most notable consequences of this period of subjugation to the nomadic herders was to make the Egyptians less inward looking,<sup>23</sup> but despite the Hyksos' long stay in Egypt, their impact on culture seems to have been relatively minor except in the field of military techniques, such as the use of the horse-drawn chariot and composite bow. The later Persian rule lasted almost a century, with independence regained after several revolts and challenges by several princes from Lower Egypt.

Thus, there were both successes and failures in the endless struggle to protect the coveted bounty of the Nile and repel aggressors. However, the impact of the marauders on religion and social culture remained relatively minor and short lived.<sup>24</sup> Although these foreign invaders posed a perpetual threat to Egypt from the beginning of history, the fertile Nile valley provided Egyptians with food and security, and a surplus that allowed them to develop a rich

and sophisticated civilization that was usually able to defend itself and keep those invaders at bay. People expected and anticipated setbacks such as droughts, foreign invaders and weak pharaohs, but were confident that through proper planning their effects could be minimized and in time balance would be restored.

By ancient standards, life for the majority of the Egyptians was very good and held the promise of more joy than suffering. The ancient Egyptians were open to all of life's pleasures, were spontaneous, and enthusiastically embraced all of the delights of life with a *joi de vivre*.<sup>25</sup> Socializing, parties, fashion, music, humor and wine were all part of an Egyptian's life. The ancient Egyptians' satisfaction with their life is also evidenced by their view of the afterlife. The afterlife that they conceived of was no more than a reproduction of life in Egypt except that it was on a grander scale. The crops were plentiful and never failed, the fish in the Nile were abundant, and the people were perpetually young, healthy, and well dressed.<sup>26</sup> For the Egyptians, the afterlife was simply eternal life in Egypt. They had no wish to leave *home* even after they died. That attachment to the soil still survives among contemporary Egyptians. The Egyptians' patriotism has always tended to be expressed in simple love of the soil rather than jingoism or sloganeering.

Measured against some contemporary standards, pharaonic Egypt may certainly not have been a paradise. However, for the nomads of that age who were not lucky enough to be living in the Nile valley, *paradise* was precisely the term that they used to describe Egypt.<sup>27</sup> Members of the primitive cultures that existed in the harsh and punishing physical environment of the red lands were not as fortunate as the ancient Egyptians. Hunger, poverty, utter deprivation, wretchedness, and constant threats to personal security were all that the nomads had to look forward to from the day they were born to the day they died. In such an environment, life may not be as precious as in a less hostile environment, and for them leaving home was a very attractive proposition. Attachment to the barren soil was minimal to nonexistent, and the willingness to abandon *home* was reflected in the value system,<sup>28</sup> in which dying for a "righteous" cause provided both an escape from suffering and an entrance to paradise. The best that members of such cultures could hope for was that the afterlife would be somewhere *other than*

*home*. Unlike that of the Egyptians, the desert nomads' view of the afterlife was the exact opposite of what *home* was like. The nomads' conception of paradise in the afterlife was almost an exact replica of life in the Nile Valley. Unsurprisingly, the hungry, as the Egyptian proverb goes, dream of the bread market.

# Appendix

## Gamal Abdel Nasser

Nasser cast such a giant and lasting shadow over the country that studying the dramatic changes in Egypt during the 1950s and 60s is, as some authors have observed,<sup>1</sup> almost synonymous with studying Nasser himself. The task is somewhat complicated by the paucity of biographical material on him, especially during the early formative years of his childhood and youth.<sup>2</sup> The most reliable means of gaining insight into his character are his public utterances, actions, and policies. The mountain of books and articles written about the adult Nasser by academics, journalists, and those who worked with him, or were influenced by him or his policies, constitute another resource providing the material is treated with caution. Much of what has been written is polemical, and portrays him either as the image of perfection or the incarnation of evil. Some works are no more than attempts to settle old scores,<sup>3</sup> which makes them too subjective to be reliable; others are too full of praise to be wholly believable.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, careful analysis of some of the works about Nasser and examination of his policies, conduct, and patterns of behavior do provide us with enough material to draw a reasonably accurate portrait of the man.

Vatikiotis identifies three stages of Nasser's personal and political development. The first stage was his unhappy early life when the main stimuli behind his actions were his feelings of alienation, isolation, and despondency.<sup>5</sup> The second stage provided a measure of stability when he found refuge in the military for his instinctive traditionalism and his inborn tendency to be domineering.<sup>6</sup> The third stage was his experience in the 1948 Palestine war, when his main stimuli were feelings of dishonor and disgrace at the loss on

the battlefield and the loathing for the political régime that was responsible for it.<sup>7</sup> Several sources have suggested that Nasser's interest in acquiring power seems to have developed during the latter part of the second stage and during the third stage, between 1946 and 1949. It was during that period that his juvenile yearning for fame as a novelist, reflected in an unfinished novel, seems to have been sublimated and replaced by a craving for political control of the country.<sup>8</sup>

### Upper Egyptian Roots

Nasser was born on January 15, 1918 in cosmopolitan Alexandria, the son of a barely literate<sup>9</sup> minor clerk in the Egyptian postal service. His father had moved there from Bani Murr, a village in Upper Egypt where some Arab tribes, from one of which his grandfather claimed descent, had settled after the Arab invasion. Contemporary *sa'idis* tend to be more socially conservative than *bahari's* (those who come from Lower Egypt), and the area traditionally suffered from regular outbreaks of violence, insurgency, and lawlessness,<sup>10</sup> suggesting that the area's relative remoteness enabled the Arab settlers to retain some of their Bedouin social values.<sup>11</sup> Even today, there are periodic media reports that suggest that Bedouin social values and a propensity to disregard the law are still widespread in some of these isolated pockets of the country.<sup>12</sup> A socio-cultural background rooted in tribal nomadic traditions, combined with his father's humble rank in society would, in all likelihood, have provided the foundation for several of Nasser's character traits. Nasser apparently felt pride in his Arab roots and seems to have shared the durable emotional attachment that some contemporary *sa'idis* have to their Arab ancestors who migrated to Egypt after the seventh century invasion.

He also seems to have shared the attitude, sometimes held by earlier immigrants to a country, that those who arrive later than them do not quite belong. His ancestors had come to Egypt, perhaps centuries earlier, as part of the occupation forces and had been partially assimilated with the passage of time. Nevertheless, their attachment to their Arab roots remained strong, and Nasser appears to have retained the original Arab conquerors' view that

ethnic Arabs are the only people entitled to make Egypt their home and become Egyptians. He seems to have denied that possibility to later non-Arab immigrants and, often used the term “Egyptianized”<sup>13</sup> disparagingly in his speeches to refer to descendants of later non-Arab arrivals such as the royal family whose founder, Mohammed Ali, had arrived in Egypt only a century and a half before the coup. He seems to imply that the only ‘real’ Egyptians are the Arab immigrants. In this sense, his attitude appears to echo the attitude of his Bedouin Arab ancestors who nursed a deep grievance against the Mamluks. The Bedouin Arabs, especially those who settled in Upper Egypt constantly rebelled against the Mamluks, who were not ethnically Arab,<sup>14</sup> because they believed that being Arab gave them more right to rule the country.<sup>15</sup> The Arabs’ feelings towards the country they conquered and lived in also appear to have been those of possession rather than of belonging. Ironically, Mohammed Ali, the Albanian great grandfather of the man that Nasser exiled, who was born in the Macedonian town of Kavala<sup>16</sup> and whom most historians refer to as the founder of modern Egypt, appears to have felt a stronger emotional commitment to Egypt and its potential than Nasser, who was born in Egypt.

Social conservatism that is often expressed in restrictive attitudes towards women and their position in society, in xenophobic tendencies, and in an exaggerated sense of personal dignity and pride are among the most prominent characteristics of this *sa’idi* cultural background, and Nasser took great pride in identifying with that background.<sup>17</sup> These classic *sa’idi* traits that Anwar el-Sadat observed in Nasser<sup>18</sup> can be seen then as the normal outcome of his childhood experiences and of the socialization practices of the Upper Egyptian families that came from lower middle-class segment of society. Great concern with honor and appearances, wariness in all interpersonal relationships, suspicion of outsiders, and social conservatism are all traits that are nurtured in this environment.

Such social conservatism continued to be a prominent feature of Nasser’s personality throughout his rule and a major influence on his policies as well as on his personal conduct. His wife, for example, always stayed in the background and her photograph was rarely seen in the media. She was never featured on the national

scene even in connection with what are termed women's issues, often a first lady's favorite public relations role. His *sa'idi* attitudes were too deeply entrenched to allow for the possibility of making a superficial concession to appearances, or even to the demands of the role of head of state.<sup>19</sup>

Nasser's conservative ideas about women<sup>20</sup> extended beyond his own family and clearly created something of a conflict since they often jarred with those of other leaders he admired and wished to emulate. After Nasser attended the Bandung Conference of Non-Aligned Nations in 1955, he began to see himself as a world leader of the caliber of Nehru of India and Tito of Yugoslavia, and their opinions of him apparently mattered to him. When Tito was on one of his frequent visits to Cairo, his wife commented to Nasser on the absence of women in leadership positions on the Egyptian national stage. The comment evidently had an impact on Nasser because as soon as his guests left he announced, to everyone's surprise, that he had decided to appoint a woman minister for the first time in Egypt. When Amer, another socially conservative *sa'idi*, heard of this development, he vowed that he would not serve in a Cabinet with a female colleague. Being mindful of Amer's feelings, Nasser waited until Amer left the Cabinet to become vice-president and went ahead and appointed Dr. Hekmat Abu Zaid to the ministry of social affairs.<sup>21</sup> Researchers acquainted with Egyptian cultural practices, however, were aware that the act reflected his concern with appearance rather than the progressive and modernizing attitudes still prevalent in Egypt until the sixties,<sup>22</sup> and the selection process provides ample evidence of the hollowness of the gesture. Nasser, to the surprise of his staff, asked for photographs of prospective candidates despite the fact that he knew most of them. It became apparent after the appointment that Nasser had been staring at these photographs in search of the least attractive candidate to avoid the possibility that anyone might think that the new minister was selected because she had an inappropriate personal relationship with him. Apparently, the strategy was successful because Amer often mocked the unfortunate appointee afterwards, telling his colleagues that Nasser tricked them all into believing that they had a woman with them in the Cabinet.<sup>23</sup>



### Early Life

Nasser, under the dictates of an unaffectionate father, was shunted back and forth during his early life between relatives and friends and separated from the mother to whom he was very attached, which can only have been unsettling to the young boy. The loss of his mother at the age of eight would have been a major traumatic event for Nasser and was compounded by the humiliation of learning of her death and of his father's hasty remarriage only when he returned home for the summer break.<sup>24</sup> That hasty remarriage and the life-long gulf between father and son<sup>25</sup> were probably among the causes of Nasser's insecurity, caution, secretiveness, and lack of concern for others, as well as his feeling of humiliation and exaggerated concern with pride.<sup>26</sup> These inherent *sa'idi* traits, exacerbated by his difficult relationship with his father, seem to have combined into a need for total control. Although soft-spoken, he was single-minded, and had, in Jean Lacouture's terms, an "almost native taste for deviousness."<sup>27</sup> He was cunning and suspicious<sup>28</sup> of everyone, a zealous schemer,<sup>29</sup> and a bitter, manipulative, and street savvy individual.

### Teenage Influences

Other aspects of Nasser's character are likely to have been rooted in his high school and military experiences (1933 to 1937, and 1937 to 1952). That period is, as Vatikiotis points out, key to understanding Nasser's web of complex passions, sentiments, and urges that were often in conflict with one another. His inflated sense of his own dignity went hand in hand with humiliating others. He publicly promoted modernization, while at heart he was a conservative adherent to traditional *baladi* values who carefully guarded the privacy of his family life. His belief in epic romantic ideals and of himself as the romantic hero meting out justice went hand in hand with indecisiveness, cynical and callous egotism, self-protectiveness, a proclivity for scheming, and a propensity for the limelight.<sup>30</sup>

Nasser's high school readings of Mahmoud Abbas el-Aqqad and Tawfiq el Hakim appear to have left a lasting impression on him.<sup>31</sup> The former wrote at length about heroic personalities in

Muslim history, and the latter explored the theme of Egypt's rejuvenation and rebirth at the hands of a leader endowed with extraordinary talent and a strong personality.<sup>32</sup> These writings were probably the most likely sources of his dreamy and idealistic notions of gallantry and valor,<sup>33</sup> and the turbulent political debates of the 1930s and 1940s were bound to have left their mark on him.<sup>34</sup>

Sharing the same uncertainties and anxieties of his generation, and coping with his tense family relationship and insecurity about his future made him ripe for recruitment to the Young Egypt Society. Its fiery and impassioned utterances and proclamations would have been too enticing for him to resist, and the most discernible influence on Nasser's political formation was his reading of the Society's fervently anti-British articles in their newspaper, *el-Sarkha*, in addition to the tenets espoused by the Muslim Brothers and el-Wafd's blue shirts.<sup>35</sup>

The Young Egypt Society's espousal of a program that was a mix of religion, quasi-fascism, anti-colonialism, and xenophobia, and that called for land reform, social justice, and the violent overthrow of the government<sup>36</sup> appealed to Nasser's inborn tendencies and internalized social values,<sup>37</sup> and he joined the group two or three years after it was formed.<sup>38</sup> These were the same sentiments that drew him to the Muslim Brothers<sup>39</sup> and to developing a close personal friendship with one of its major theoreticians Sayyid Qotb, whom he trusted and appointed as his cultural advisor after the coup.<sup>40</sup> For Nasser, the ardent and stirring mix of patriotism, religion, and politics fused his personal apprehensions and dilemmas with the national turmoil.<sup>41</sup> The society's rhetoric offered Nasser simple, or in the view of some observers, simplistic, answers to both levels of his concerns.<sup>42</sup>

The influence of the Young Egypt Society on Nasser's political development is clearly reflected in the similarity between the writings of Ahmad Hussein, the group's founder, and Nasser's clandestine activities and early policies.<sup>43</sup> Nasser's social and political profile placed him squarely in the socio-economic class that one researcher termed "the new *effendiyya*," who divided the world into east and west and placed Egypt into the "eastern"<sup>44</sup> sphere as opposed to the Mediterranean or "western" where European educated intellectuals such as Taha Hussein placed it.<sup>45</sup> Many of the

members of this society came from a similar background to Nasser, and the parallels between that group's ideas and the Free Officers' goals, as well as the fact that some of its members were appointed to senior positions after Nasser took power, also seem to support the claim of the groups' influence on Nasser's political views.<sup>46</sup> Fathi Radwan, one of the society's founders who knew both Nasser and Ahmed Hussein well, maintains that Nasser was a great admirer of Ahmed Hussein, looked up to him as a role model, and imitated his style of public speech.<sup>47</sup>

Although he was heavily influenced by the ideas of the Young Egypt Society and the tenets of the Muslim Brothers, there is little concrete evidence that Nasser involved himself much in either of the two groups' political activities. The state controlled media during Nasser's reign and some of Nasser's biographers have tended to magnify his participation in student demonstrations against corrupt governments and the British occupation. These political events, however, as Vatikiotis points out, were unlikely to have been major influences on his character formation.<sup>48</sup> Accounts of Nasser's earlier political struggles on behalf of patriotic causes and of his being injured (in fact slightly) in one of the demonstrations could probably be more accurately viewed through the lens of the hero building, myth making, and sycophancy that were integral ingredients of the Nasser era.

### **College Experience**

One of the other factors that played a role in shaping Nasser's personality was his military college experience. The Egyptian military, unlike the European, was not an institution that was shaped and molded by an elite segment of society and characterized by a well-developed subculture of distinctive social values and ethics.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, the 1936 agreement with Britain had allowed Egypt more freedom of action in the area of defense, which Britain had previously been solely responsible for. This in turn necessitated an increase in the size of the army. As a result the government relaxed the entrance requirements to the military college, and the number of the newly admitted cadets were Muslims who hailed from socio-economic backgrounds that were closer to the bottom than the top

of the social scale.<sup>50</sup> Nasser's admission to the military college in March 1937, therefore, did not signal an entrée into a well-defined subculture or an exclusive club. He was not joining an elite officer corps and beginning a process of being socialized into its long established rites, ceremonies and distinctive military ethics and traditions. Instead, he was joining a group of young men many of whom came from similar socio-economic backgrounds to his and had similar social and political experiences and views.<sup>51</sup> He was, as would be expected of a serious young man who saw life in a military barracks as the only escape from an unhappy home life,<sup>52</sup> a single-minded student throughout his one and a half years at the college. A military uniform must have been a powerful incentive for him, holding out as it did the prospect of the authority, personal respect, social esteem, economic security, and opportunity for a role in politics that he craved.<sup>53</sup>

He had no public political involvement, however, until 1945,<sup>54</sup> and seems to have jealously guarded his privacy and anonymity.<sup>55</sup> His excessive concern with pride and dignity, which was an integral part of his personal makeup from early in his life, does not appear to have been ameliorated by donning the military uniform. The uniform may in fact have intensified it since dignity became a recurring theme in his speeches after he came to power.<sup>56</sup> President Sadat's first impression of Nasser when he met him in 1939 soon after his graduation from the military college was that he was serious, touchy, and humorless.<sup>57</sup> Although he listened attentively to his colleagues' political discussions, he kept himself apart from them and did not like his colleagues to joke with him lest they insulted his dignity. As a result, they all avoided him.<sup>58</sup>

### **Political Education**

Although a man of very limited formal education, who may in fact have never read an entire book other than those required in the Military College,<sup>59</sup> and *The Prince* by Machiavelli, which he claimed to have read seventeen times,<sup>60</sup> he was a fervent reader of the print news media.<sup>61</sup> That passion for news must have served him well when he was assessing the possible implications of the coup he was contemplating prior to 1952. Attuned to the Young Egypt Society

and the Muslim Brothers through his own involvement with these groups, the knowledge of local and international political developments that he gleaned from these publications would have been useful in assessing both the foreign and other local players on the Egyptian political scene before the coup. Nasser had also been introduced to the prominent journalist Ahmad Abul Fath six years before the coup.<sup>62</sup> He visited him on a regular basis to engage in political discussions, and must have benefited from his considerable knowledge, insight, and experience. During that period and through the first few months after the coup Nasser was apparently a good listener,<sup>63</sup> and he appeared to have been drawn to the company of journalists.

Nasser's shallow view of the world could, therefore, probably be directly attributed to his almost total reliance on oral discussions, newspapers, and magazines as sources of information, rather than books in which the topics addressed could be examined in more depth. His offer of the premiership to Ahmad Lutfi el-Sayyid shortly after the coup<sup>64</sup> is indicative of his sketchy knowledge of the intellectual currents in the country. He was obviously unfamiliar with el-Sayyid's writings and did not know that his views on national identity were radically different from those Nasser himself had formulated from the newspapers that he had been reading. Unlike Nasser, who eventually expunged the word Egypt from the map and replaced it with the word Arab, el-Sayyid's long held view was that denying one's Egyptian identity amounted to treachery and self-hatred.<sup>65</sup>

He never formulated a clear ideology that informed his policies and tended to see the world in simplistic terms where everything was either black or white with no shades of grey. *The Philosophy of the Revolution*,<sup>66</sup> published soon after he assumed power, provides clear evidence of this lack of ideological focus. Nasser may have claimed to be a socialist, and many of the policies that he implemented were indeed socialist. The motives that drove these socialist policies, however, were anything but socialist. Nasser used socialist terminology, but there is much anecdotal evidence to suggest that his sentiments were neither ideological nor idealistic. Many of those around Nasser have readily admitted to his lack of political focus. Khalid Mohi el-Din maintains in his memoirs

that Nasser was not a socialist but that he did edge towards socialism and implemented socialist policies to appease the workers and peasants.<sup>67</sup> This is evident in his hackneyed, clichéd, and tangled public statements about his version of socialism.<sup>68</sup> He certainly did not tolerate committed socialists, whom he hounded, jailed, and tortured or murdered, as happened with Professor Shohdi Attia in 1960.<sup>69</sup> The triteness of Nasser's socialist policies is illustrated in a statement that he made to Hassan Abbas Zaki, one-time Minister of the Treasury, of Economics, and of External Trade, as well as Deputy Prime Minister. Zaki once asked Nasser why he wanted to implement socialism.<sup>70</sup> Nasser's surprising answer was that he was convinced that people wanted him to implement socialism because whenever he went to an Om Kalthoum<sup>71</sup> performance people clapped whenever she sang, "you [Nasser] are at the forefront of all the socialists."<sup>72</sup>

His early associations with the right wing MB, the Young Egypt Society, and left leaning officers such as Mohi el-Din show that he was searching for an ideology, but his actions and statements also show that he never fully committed himself to one. His decision to publish a left leaning newspaper showed that his concern with appearance remained a stronger motivation than any socialist notions. The reason that he gave Mohi el-Din for wanting the newspaper was that he felt a sense of dishonor at not having a leftist newspaper like other Arab countries and that he wanted an evening paper because it would have smaller readership.<sup>73</sup>

There were other decisions that might, mistakenly, have appeared to be motivated by a socialist impulse but were nothing more than a reflection of personality issues such as a family or childhood issue,<sup>74</sup> or negative feelings towards land owners and the financial and social elite,<sup>75</sup> or fear that the wealthy could pose a danger to his régime and should be stripped of their resources.<sup>76</sup> Whatever the motivation behind Nasser's pursuit of socialist policies, it certainly was not his belief in socialist principles. It was not ideology but animosity towards the socio-economic elite, self-protection, and/or his pedestrian and simplistic views of complex issues that were most likely at the root of Nasser's socialist policies. These same characteristics also appear to be at the root of his impulsive behavior, and examples of spur of the moment decisions in a variety of situations

are not difficult to find. Cabinet ministers,<sup>77</sup> military commanders, and government employees were often hired and fired on a whim.<sup>78</sup>

More serious was the impact of this impetuosity on foreign relations. Unsubstantiated reports led him once to make a speech attacking and insulting the United States and on another occasion to sever diplomatic relations with Iran.<sup>79</sup> Decisions affecting the nation were, it seems, frequently nothing more than reflections of Nasser's moods.<sup>80</sup> Nasser never managed to develop a political insightfulness or acuity that matched his stature as the leader of the Arab World. His simplistic and shallow worldview contrasted sharply with the high level of respect that he commanded as an influential Third World player on the world stage. In spite of his near absolute power, and his unprecedented popular appeal, Nasser remained no more than an able conspirator whose defeat in the 1967 war was precipitated by a mundane and simplistic view of the world and an absence of meaningful political insight into what happened during the Suez crisis of 1956.<sup>81</sup> Even those who knew Nasser well never ceased to be taken aback by his one-dimensional approach to matters of vital importance.

His shallow grasp of state affairs was reflected in his statement to a colleague that he had "discovered" Israel's war objectives by reading a British newspaper.<sup>82</sup> This simplistic approach extended even to technical military details that were presumably his forte, his field of special expertise that his media touted by reminding the public on occasion that he used to teach in the Staff College. Yet the questions he asked General Kamal Hassan Ali<sup>83</sup> after the 1967 Israeli invasion surprised him by their simplicity and the lack of knowledge they reflected.

In Nasser's Egypt, every aspect of life became a reflection of one aspect or another of his personality quirks and idiosyncrasies. His social conservatism, his impulsiveness, and his simplistic worldview all influenced life in Egypt during that period. Nasser's burning, almost monomaniacal need for power and total control, coupled with his equally unhealthy obsession with secrecy, meant that virtually all major, as well as countless minor and inconsequential decisions, were made solely by him. These personal traits, combined with Nasser's impetuosity and dreams of being Egypt's savior, noted by Vatikiotis,<sup>84</sup> his *sa'idi* background, and the fact that

he never seemed to outgrow his role as a secret conspirator, are probably the most logical explanations for many of his actions.

### **Governing Style**

The promulgation of a new constitution on January 16, 1956 and the dissolution of the RCC removed the last vestige of collective leadership and signaled that Nasser was well on the road to absolute power. That power was soon demonstrated in June of that year when a plebiscite was held and Nasser was elected president of Egypt by 99.8 percent of the voters.<sup>85</sup> Thereafter, holding a plebiscite became a favorite practice, and several were held during Nasser's reign, always with the same impressive results, and Nasser himself began to believe these results<sup>86</sup> despite having rigged them himself.<sup>87</sup>

Nasser had a need to strive for total control of what takes place in the country, and that was reflected in his choices for top positions such as vice-president and ministerial posts. He was convinced that he had all answers to all problems and eventually cast out all independent thinkers from his inner circle. Khalid Mohi el-Din, for example was exiled, tamed, and given editorship of a low circulation evening newspaper shortly after the military coup. Zakaria Mohi el-Din and Abdel Latif el-Boghdadi were sidelined and resigned eventually. That Anwar Sadat and Hussein el-Shafei were the only members of the original conspiracy who remained with him until he died was no accident. The former was smart enough to give the impression of being unambitious, vacuous, and compliant throughout his association with Nasser. Hussein el-Shafei on the other hand was apparently the ideal candidate for high position. Nasser described him as the best member of the RCC, as a God-fearing nonviolent man who was useless and neither did any good nor caused any harm because all he cared about was his moustache, the way he put on his beret, and being photographed at an angle that showed his good looks.<sup>88</sup>

Mustafa Amin, the journalist and onetime Nasser informer<sup>89</sup> reports that Nasser told him on one occasion that he planned to appoint some intellectuals to ministerial positions and asked Amin to compile for him a list of possible candidates. When Amin complied with the request, Nasser rejected all the nominations saying,



he was looking for ministers that he could manage not ones who would manage him.<sup>90</sup> Sadat's statement that Ali Sabry's fear of taking responsibility for making any decisions had been the reason that Nasser selected him for the premiership adds creditability to Amin's anecdote.<sup>91</sup> Mahmoud Fawzi was another of Nasser's favorite appointees who never fell afoul of Nasser and served for years as minister of foreign affairs. He was another member of Nasser's team who was referred to as a Man of the Hour/Clock<sup>92</sup> behind his back.<sup>93</sup>

Nasser never wavered in his belief that he knew best, in his determination to keep a tight hold on the reins of power, or in his refusal to entrust the Cabinet with any major decisions. This was true even in the aftermath of the 1967 disaster when he was announcing to the public that he was in the process of making radical changes in the way that he ran the country by allowing voices other than his to be heard. His statement to his intelligence chief, Salah Nasr, provides a clear indication of his intended policy. He told Nasr that he did not want anyone to "philosophize and state his opinion,"<sup>94</sup> and that simply listening to him and carrying out his orders are what he expected of everyone around him.<sup>95</sup> This leaves no doubt whatsoever that contrary to his public statements; it was business as usual as far as Nasser was concerned. The Cabinet would continue to be merely a stage for him and a forum where the ministers were no more than passive participants.<sup>96</sup> They were expected simply to be attentive, write down his directives, and not attempt to discuss the merits of any of these instructions, and he was liable to explode in anger if any of them broached a topic that displeased him.<sup>97</sup> Nasser ran the country as a private fiefdom, or as a powerful Bedouin chief ran his tribe. He appeared to view social and political institutions and processes as either part of the décor or as mere personal sources of information or tools of control. Hassan Sabry el-Kholi, who was his personal representative reported that in his ten years in the post, he met with Nasser alone twice, and both times were at his (el-Kholi's) own request.<sup>98</sup> Hussein Zolfiqar Sabry, his foreign affairs advisor confided to a friend that the only question that Nasser ever asked him was after he had been his advisor for nine months. They had both been at the wedding of a senior officer and as Nasser passed Sabry's table, he asked him how he was.<sup>99</sup>

### Means of Political Control

The extensive security apparatus, which formed a significant mainstay of Nasser's régime and kept tight control of every segment of society, was a reflection of his belief in secrecy and need for total control. By the mid-fifties, Nasser had established the Military Investigations Office, the Military Intelligence Organization, the General Intelligence Organization, and the General Investigations Organization.<sup>100</sup> Secret cells were formed within the military and among the students at the Military College.<sup>101</sup> Another security organization attached to the office of the president was assigned the task of spying on government departments and high-ranking officials,<sup>102</sup> and eventually tens of thousands of ordinary citizens were recruited to these organizations<sup>103</sup> which gave him control of almost every aspect of life in Egypt.<sup>104</sup> He encouraged competition between all the security organizations,<sup>105</sup> and promoted fear to sustain this competition<sup>106</sup> by assigning the same task to individuals who were known to mistrust each other<sup>107</sup> while he himself never fully trusted any of them.<sup>108</sup>

His long-time aide, Sami Sharaf, provides a glimpse of the minute details<sup>109</sup> that Nasser was interested in. Sharaf recounts with pride in his memoirs that Nasser knew the smallest details of everything that took place in the country and that if an inconsequential chat between any two individuals meeting in a club touched upon political subjects or certain activities, he would hear about it and submit a report about the conversation to Nasser.<sup>110</sup> If a group of people sat together, somewhere like the Gezira Sporting Club for example,<sup>111</sup> and criticized him, Nasser was told about it. Even jokes were reported to him and analyzed. Another example recounted by Sharaf is of an obscure schoolteacher who once made a joke using inappropriate language (sexual innuendo) and it was reported to Nasser who was offended by it.<sup>112</sup>

Social psychologists researching small group dynamics have shown that as a group size begins to increase, so does the number of possible combinations of alliances within the group. Nasser seems to have been instinctively aware of that and to have relied upon inter-personal rivalries, differences of opinion, and shifting alliances to keep abreast of all currents within his original small

group of conspirators and to keep a firm grip on it. There was always someone willing to tell him who said or did what, and his knowledge of what might have been no more than petty quarrels, casual conversations or inconsequential tidbits of gossip were useful tools that helped him to manipulate the group.

He sincerely believed that he could manage the whole society in the same manner as he did the original group, that the resources of the state and the vast number of spies would enable him to continue using the same tactics to run the country that had been effective in controlling his original group. He took the time to listen to reports about taped casual conversations and mete out punishments<sup>113</sup> for the type of minor indiscretions or inconsequential infractions that many people, let alone heads of state, would have had neither the time nor the inclination to listen to.<sup>114</sup>

While eavesdropping and acting upon casual conversations might have satisfied an apparent streak of pettiness in Nasser's character, they also gave him a sense of control over the people that he dealt with. The taped conversations gave him something to threaten others with, and he seemed to enjoy delivering the threat personally at times. For example, he once made a prominent journalist listen to recordings of a tryst with his mistress<sup>115</sup> and did the same to one of his Cabinet members.<sup>116</sup> Ironically, Nasser's passion for total control and his inability to accept the physical impossibility of one man listening in on every conversation in the country allowed those around him to have some control over him by being selective in terms of what tidbits of gossip they passed on and convincing him to fire<sup>117</sup> or jail<sup>118</sup> their rivals or enemies.

Both the Muslim and Christian religious establishments were brought under control. For example, Abdel Hakim Amer was given direct control of the Sufi organization. The Grand Sheikh of el-Azhar was no longer elected by senior religious scholars but appointed by Nasser, and similar mechanisms were utilized to control the Christian organizations' appointments to leadership positions.<sup>119</sup>

The press fell under Nasser's control even before it was nationalized. Censorship, opportunism, fear, and sycophancy were his weapons of choice in that field. Forty-two newspapers were closed down soon after the coup<sup>120</sup> and new ones such as *el-Gomhuriyya* were established. Cooperative journalists, such as the former king's

press secretary, Karim Thabet, who published his memoirs demonizing the king that he once praised, were in abundance. Even prominent journalists were not immune to sycophancy,<sup>121</sup> but Mohammed Hassanein Heikal who came from a more humble social stratum, was pushier, and better motivated, managed to push them all out of the way and soon became Nasser's confidant.<sup>122</sup>

Those who did not fall in line immediately were fired,<sup>123</sup> often for obscure,<sup>124</sup> insignificant,<sup>125</sup> or even unspecified missteps,<sup>126</sup> or publicly accused of receiving secret allowances from previous governments to sully their reputation, and others were jailed after being convicted of various offences by kangaroo courts.<sup>127</sup> Even the renowned literary figure, Taha Hussein, who had once defended the revolution's right to protect itself from some writers through censorship,<sup>128</sup> suffered similar indignities.<sup>129</sup>

Nasser never hid the fact that he sought control of the press. He summoned Ehsan Abdel Qoddous to his house after releasing him from jail for writing an offensive article and told him that he subjected him to psychological therapy by throwing him in jail.<sup>130</sup> Evidently, the therapy was successful since it was Abdel Qoddous who later called for nationalization of the press.<sup>131</sup> Nasser wanted nothing less than complete control of everything that was written or published anywhere in the country which is what the Journalism Organization Law enacted on May 24, 1960 guaranteed.<sup>132</sup>

In spite of all the measures that Nasser took to ensure his control of every aspect of life in the country, his overly suspicious nature, and conspiracy orientation, seem to have denied him the luxury of ever feeling fully secure in his position. When former King Farouk, who was as ineffectual in exile as he was while on the throne, collapsed and died in a Rome restaurant on March 18, 1965, the rumor in Egypt was that Nasser had poisoned him. The rumor was never substantiated, but the secrecy surrounding the king's burial supports the contention that Nasser persisted in the belief that the king, even after his death and contrary to all evidence, was a threat to his own position in the country.<sup>133</sup> Nasser denied Farouk's wish to be buried in the Rifa'i Mosque in Cairo next to his father, but Ismail Shireen, the king's brother-in-law, managed to convince him to grant Farouk's wish to be buried in Egypt.<sup>134</sup> The body was secretly flown into Cairo after midnight on March 30, and the king was bur-

ied without fanfare in a secret location away from his father's grave with only his sisters and their husbands in attendance. The public was informed only after the fact.<sup>135</sup>

### **Eloquence, Charisma, and Consequences**

One of Nasser's unique characteristics was his overpowering charisma and his superb eloquence, articulateness, and oratory talent. He had charm and a powerful presence that often overwhelmed those who met him in person, and he presented himself well and hid his innate suspicion of foreigners in their company.<sup>136</sup> But his public statements and speeches presented a different side of him. They were replete with chauvinistic and intolerant pronouncements and constituted an important component of the public image that he projected to the masses that shared these feelings. These sentiments were sincere and the masses came to view him as one of them.<sup>137</sup>

However, charismatic leadership does have one major drawback. A charismatic leader's popularity is dependent upon his ability to provide his flock with one accomplishment after another,<sup>138</sup> and Nasser, true to type, presented Egyptians with a constant stream of 'victories', most of which were either no more than mere slogans or later turned out to have had disastrous effects on Egypt's national interests. These purported victories were usually presented at huge, well-choreographed events, attended by large carefully selected crowds of mostly uneducated workers and peasants, where he would dramatically reveal a new 'triumph' to his audience.<sup>139</sup>

The first 'victory' was the evacuation agreement with the British in 1954 that solidified his position in the power struggle with Naguib by raising his popularity. Nasser's success in presenting the agreement as a victory in spite of its well-known flaws and widespread opposition to it must have been a powerful indicator to him of the utility of that tactic. The Egyptian media, under his control, touted that first 'victory' and began to promote him as a national super hero and recite his praises in popular songs.<sup>140</sup> Apparently seduced by his own fabrications, he too began to believe that these were real victories.

In 1955 developments on the international stage contributed to solidifying Nasser's own belief in his role as Egypt's savior and to increasing his popularity among the masses. The conference of Non-Aligned Nations in Bandung, Indonesia was a watershed event. Summit conferences are great ego boosters. For politicians in general and dictators in particular, they provide them with the opportunity to appear alongside world leaders and make what are often meaningless announcements on the important matters they discussed, at no political cost to them. The thirty-seven-year-old ex-army officer who came from a modest background and had little education, now found himself sitting with, and being taken seriously by, such world leaders as Chou En Lai of China, Nehru of India, and Tito of Yugoslavia. He conducted himself well at the conference, charmed these leaders, and began to develop a personal relationship with them.<sup>141</sup> He was enthralled by his success,<sup>142</sup> which must have confirmed in his own mind his sense of mission and the notion that he was a hero, as well as setting off his lifelong love affair with summit conferences.<sup>143</sup>

Another watershed event was the Soviet arms deal concluded later that same year, which was announced with much fanfare and presented to the public as a great victory for the nation. An Israeli raid on the Egyptian administered Gaza strip a few months before the arms deal was concluded had served to highlight the need for finding a solution to the West's reluctance to sell defensive arms to the Nasser régime.<sup>144</sup> Nasser's popular appeal both at home and in the Arab world soared after that deal, which was probably the moment when he began to see himself not only as an Arab leader, but also as a world leader.

Basking in the glory of these 1955 successes, Nasser appears to have lost all sense of proportion and decided to take on the British and the French. The Suez crisis of 1956 that ensued is both an illustration of how momentous decisions affecting a whole nation became dominated by the impetuous caprices of one man and of that man's ability to delude both himself and the public contrary to the glaring evidence in front of them. In his speech in Alexandria on July 26, 1956, Nasser provided the audience with the usual litany of victories against imperialism, the agents of imperialism, and the reactionaries who were all plotting against the country. Then he

dramatically announced that he was nationalizing the Suez Canal Company, that his orders to take it over were being implemented as that very moment, and that the revenue from the Canal would help build the High Dam.<sup>145</sup>

The buildup to the crisis was also classic Nasser. He had taken a fancy to the old project to build another dam on the Nile in the southernmost part of Egypt, which had been proposed by a Greek-Egyptian engineer and rejected by previous governments. Dr. Abdel Aziz Ahmad, a leading authority on the Nile at the time, and chairman of both the Nile Water Control Board and the Hydroelectric Power Commission, also strongly opposed the project on both technical and ecological grounds.<sup>146</sup> Initially the World Bank, with support from the United States and Britain, had offered to finance the dam, but the British and American offer was withdrawn in 1956<sup>147</sup> because of Nasser's increasingly hostile attitude and violent tirades against the West. The deteriorating relationship with the West had started after Bandung when Nasser began to see himself as an anti-imperialist world leader. Nasser, ever sensitive to real or imagined insults to his dignity, which he confused with Egypt's dignity, took the West's renegeing on its offer to finance the dam as a personal insult and decided to retaliate by nationalizing the Suez Canal Company.

The decision, like most of his other decisions was impetuous, not well thought out, and taken without advice from those who were more knowledgeable and levelheaded and who might have counseled against it. Although most of the Canal company's shareholders were either British or French, the company was legally Egyptian, and its concession to manage the Canal was due to run out in 1966 or 1968<sup>148</sup> when control of the waterway would, legally and peacefully, revert to the Egyptian Government. Nasser was either too impatient or in need of another 'victory' for the masses to wait till then. Any rational political analysis would have shown that the nationalization, combined with Cairo's constant stream of anti-Western rhetoric that had created an atmosphere of hostility towards Nasser's régime in Europe, would lead to serious consequences. In Egypt, the proverbial man-on-the-street predicted that a serious retaliatory response by France and Britain would be an almost certain consequence of nationalization.<sup>149</sup>

Nasser apparently did not share that assessment and had kept his intentions secret from most of his lieutenants. According to el-Boghdadi, Nasser informed him of the decision to nationalize the Canal during a trip back from Yugoslavia on July 18, 1956.<sup>150</sup> His closest friend and commander of the armed forces, Amer, was, according to Salah Nasr, the intelligence chief, not informed of the decision until they were both on the train to Alexandria where Nasser was planning to make the nationalization speech. Amer, naturally, was offended at not being consulted about such an important decision.<sup>151</sup>

The decision-making process in this case provides several clues to Nasser's character and management style. It shows that he never outgrew the suspicious, conspiratorial aspect of his character, or the need to play one person against another by confiding the decision to some colleagues and not others. It also speaks to his growing belief in his own infallibility. He expressed this fantasy in clear terms to his intelligence chief once when he declared to him that there was not a single person in the country (of thirty million people) who could "grasp" everything except him.<sup>152</sup> These thirty million unfortunate Egyptians had, of course, to suffer the consequences of such an ill-considered decision. They believed Nasser's declaration that he was nationalizing the Canal so that he could use the revenue to build the High Dam. Instead, acting as if Egypt was a private estate whose income he was free to spend as he pleased, Nasser apparently donated the entire revenue of the Canal to a favourite personal charity and kept his magnanimous gesture secret from the public. Algeria's former president, Ahmad Ben Bella, who greatly admired Nasser, stated in a 2001 interview that one of the reasons for his continuing idealization of Nasser was that he handed over *all* of the Suez Canal's revenue to the National Liberation Front's (FLN)<sup>153</sup> leaders after it was nationalized.<sup>154</sup>

The decision to nationalize the Canal also reflects the degree to which Nasser's impetuosity allowed him to ignore or, perhaps, compartmentalize the realities staring him in the face. It could also be argued that arrogance had also set in and that he believed himself to be infallible. The reality was, however, that by 1956 the British had concluded that Nasser was not the best alternative to King Farouk after all. He was meddling in the affairs of other Arab coun-



tries<sup>155</sup> and threatening Britain's interests in the region. The French were alarmed at the intensifying war in Algeria where Nasser was arming,<sup>156</sup> training,<sup>157</sup> and financing<sup>158</sup> the FLN, which was fighting an increasingly bloody war to expel them from the country. The two powers convinced the Israelis, who were always amenable to an opportunity to grab their neighbor's land, to join them in an invasion of Egypt. The Suez Canal nationalization was the excuse they needed for their move. The plan called for Israel to launch a land attack on Sinai, then for Britain and France to issue a joint ultimatum to Israel to withdraw to a distance of ten miles east of the Canal, and for Egypt to withdraw to a distance of ten miles west of the Canal. The two European powers would then land their forces in the Canal Zone, ostensibly, to separate the combatants and protect the Canal.<sup>159</sup> Preparations for the attack had been underway for weeks and troops were being stationed in Cyprus, but the Egyptian intelligence apparatus was either too busy spying on Egyptians or too incompetent to notice the buildup.

When the invasion began the Egyptian army's chain of command promptly collapsed. The 'infallible' Nasser panicked and, according to Sadat, went to the command center on October 29, 1956 and issued an order to the whole army to withdraw from Sinai immediately.<sup>160</sup> The hasty and chaotic withdrawal of the army resulted in the loss of hundreds, perhaps thousands of lives; however, a reliable official estimate of the actual number was never disclosed to the public. The much-touted Soviet arms that cost Egypt dearly were destroyed, and Sinai was occupied. The Suez Canal was closed to navigation and its revenue, which would have been enough to buy the Suez Canal Company's shares on the open market, was lost.<sup>161</sup> Disastrous as the outcome was, it would have been worse if world opinion had not been outraged at the naked aggression, and the United Nations, lead by the United States, had not demanded a cease-fire and withdrawal of the three armies from Egyptian soil.

The régime, primarily because of America's condemnation of the attack, survived, although the offensive was, by any standards, a resounding defeat for Egypt. The Israelis occupied Sinai and the British and French occupied the Canal Zone, but in a demonstration of Nasser's talented demagoguery and ability to both manipulate the masses and believe his own fantasies, he turned into a miracle

maker who reached into a bag of unequivocal failures and reversals and produced a shining triumph for his spectators.<sup>162</sup> He began to refer to the event as a resounding victory over imperialism, while Israel embarked on an analysis of the events in preparation for the next round.<sup>163</sup>

The 'victory' required Nasser to make two major concessions that were kept secret from the public. The first was that Egypt would drop its claim that international maritime agreements put the Tiran Straits, at the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba, within Egypt's territorial waters and agree to allow Israeli shipping through it.<sup>164</sup> The second was that, despite the fact that it was Israel that attacked Egypt not visa-versa, Egypt, not Israel, would now be obligated to keep its army ten kilometers away from the border and to station United Nations observers on its soil along its border with Israel. What was widely disseminated in the media instead were naïve and childish accounts about the heroic exploits of the Egyptian air force and the army's shrewd and well-planned retreat to the west side of the Suez Canal.<sup>165</sup> Some of these accounts serve to illustrate both Nasser's increasingly firm grip on both the media and the opinion-makers in the country as well as to support Tawfiq el Hakim's assertion that Nasser had an extraordinary ability to induce a mass loss of consciousness that prevented his audience from seeing the lack of logic in his pronouncements. For example, the media at the time praised the leadership's foresight in having seen through 'the plot' as soon as the attack on Egypt began, and sending all Egypt's military planes to neighboring countries to protect them from the invading forces. It occurred to no one, or perhaps no one dared, to ask the logical question: why spend so much on building and equipping an air force only to send it all abroad to save it from destruction when the country was attacked?

The 1956 'victory' proved to be a bad omen and a harbinger of more future 'victories'. The military junta had only been in power for four years, and it had already brought a major disaster upon the country, yet Nasser's popularity with the masses in both Egypt and the Arab World soared, and he, as Sadat recounts, became preoccupied with the legend that he began to be turned into. The myth grew in both Egypt and the Arab world, which started to view him as the hero who had achieved a great victory over two formidable pow-

ers, Britain and France.<sup>166</sup> Mohsen Abdel Khaleq, one of the original group of Free Officers concurs with Sadat's view. He recounted a conversation with Nasser in 1956 after his newly acquired status as the nation's savior that left him with the definite impression that Egypt was embarking on an era of adventures.<sup>167</sup>

The building of a personality cult now began in earnest and appears to have both reinforced and magnified fundamental and deep-seated aspects of Nasser's personality. The society as a whole began to be gradually molded in Nasser's image. Self-delusion, vindictiveness,<sup>168</sup> xenophobia, suspicion,<sup>169</sup> and paranoia, seeing plots everywhere, and viewing the world in simplistic terms, were no longer confined to a small segment of the population. In Nasser's Egypt, these traits became part of the mainstream culture and the generally accepted norm in society. To be sure these characteristics had always lurked below the surface among certain segments of the Egyptian population, but they were always less widespread among the intellectuals, the Western-educated social and political elite. The dangers inherent in such a personality cult and the total control it allowed Nasser became glaringly evident in Nasser's reaction to Israel's other stunningly successful attack on Egypt a decade later and in the public's wholesale acceptance of his self-serving version of events.

Nasser moved from one blunder to another after 1956. He rushed into a hasty, financially costly, and ill-considered union with Syria in February 1958 only to see it collapse in September 1961. Rather than being the outcome of careful planning<sup>170</sup> and consideration, the union was meant to be a strike against Iraq and Jordan,<sup>171</sup> whose leaders he was feuding with and whom he denounced as traitors.<sup>172</sup> Nasser was riled by the loss of face and the perceived insult to his dignity when the union collapsed. He blamed King Saud of Saudi Arabia for the failure of the venture, which, according to his confidant, Heikal, was the reason that he readily agreed to support the 1962 rebellion against the Imam of Yemen. King Saud sided with the Imam in the civil war that ensued and Nasser did not want to give Saud an opportunity to score another victory against him.<sup>173</sup> The result was that the Egyptian army was mired for years in a tribal war in a country where Egypt had no vital or fundamental interests.<sup>174</sup> Everyone, as General Kamal Hassan Ali maintains, was

against Egypt's intervention in Yemen: the USA, the USSR, Saudi Arabia, France, Jordan, Iran, and Pakistan. Nasser was finally forced to withdraw his forces from Yemen after the June 1967 disaster. That October, as the last Egyptian troops massed in the port of Hodeida to board the ships that would take them home, young Yemenis held a violent anti-Egyptian demonstration.<sup>175</sup> One hundred Egyptians were killed by the very same people that they had been sent there to save before the demonstration was controlled.<sup>176</sup> This "unnecessary war," as General Mortagi, who commanded the Egyptian army in Yemen called it, cost the army between ten and fifteen thousand casualties.<sup>177</sup> The financial cost of that entanglement ran into billions of pounds and was never disclosed to the people who paid the price in blood and treasure.

By 1966, the fallout from Nasser's 'victories' and from his governing by whim and caprice was beginning show on every front. His squandering of Egypt's wealth on supporting any opportunist around the world who set up a group and called it a liberation movement began to be felt. Inflation was rising and food shortages were becoming endemic,<sup>178</sup> but those in power never had to go short.<sup>179</sup> Factories were idle due to shortages of spare parts,<sup>180</sup> and the country lost a large number of professionals who left the country when Nasser, anxious to relieve some of the pressure, decided to allow emigration.<sup>181</sup> On the political front, there was a wave of arrests: MBs charged with plotting a coup, communists on various charges, others labeled reactionaries and feudalists.<sup>182</sup> The net was cast so wide and the régime's paranoia was so deep that the security services were once sent to arrest a member of the ancien régime who had died ten years earlier.<sup>183</sup> On another occasion, they arrested a prominent Christian as a member of the Muslim Brothers.<sup>184</sup>

The Committee to Liquidate Feudalism, formed in 1966,<sup>185</sup> lifted the country towards another level of fear, subjugation, and degradation.<sup>186</sup> It had been formed after a simple brawl in a rural railway station escalated, a man was killed, and his wife informed Nasser's brother that the "feudalists" killed her husband. Upon hearing the story, Nasser ordered the formation of the committee,<sup>187</sup> which quickly expanded its mission to cover the whole country and began an extensive campaign of interrogations and intimidation by the Military Intelligence.<sup>188</sup> Agricultural land, houses, cattle, thorough-

bred horses, and agricultural machinery were confiscated,<sup>189</sup> and an atmosphere of terror permeated the countryside.

The armed forces were in no better shape than the rest of society. Keeping seventy thousand troops fighting in Yemen<sup>190</sup> had drained on the military budget and forced Nasser to reduce allocations to other areas of the military.<sup>191</sup> Thus the reserve units, according to General Mohammed Fawzi, the former Commander-in-Chief, were discharged three months before the end of their service in order to save funds.<sup>192</sup> In addition, a plan to reduce the size of the armed forces by a third was launched on May 1, 1967.<sup>193</sup> The army suffered shortages in every area: 40 percent in personnel, 30 percent in small weapons, 24 percent in artillery pieces, 45 percent in tanks, and 70 percent in trucks.<sup>194</sup> The air force was in an equally deplorable state. Trained pilots and equipment to repair runways and provide land services were all in short supply, and some airports had no air defense at all.<sup>195</sup> The shortage of trained pilots was so acute that a whole squadron of Sokhoy planes was stored in the crates in which they were imported,<sup>196</sup> and no one dared to question the decision to purchase such expensive equipment just to keep it in storage. General Kamal Hassan Ali, who led an armored division in 1967, claimed that the relationship between the political and military leaderships was so tense in May 1967 that Amer, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, rarely went to his office in the command center and left everything to his office manager, the inexperienced, Shams Badran, who lacked intelligence, imagination and foresight.<sup>197</sup> Confusion, Ali added, reigned on both the political and military levels.<sup>198</sup> General Anwar el-Kadi, who was the Chief of Operations in 1967, also claimed in his memoirs that senior military personnel would sometimes spend months attempting to see Amer or contact him without success.<sup>199</sup> Yet no orders could be carried out unless they were signed by Amer, and the chief of staff had no authority other than conveying Amer's orders.<sup>200</sup> During the five-year period between 1962 and 1967, Amer carried out only three inspection tours of the forces in Sinai.<sup>201</sup> Training was often cancelled for what was termed "security reasons,"<sup>202</sup> or because it would be too "tiring" for the officers who had served for a long time in Yemen.<sup>203</sup> Those in charge of the country's defenses viewed training so cavalierly that in 1965/66 the infantry tank support units did not fire one shot in maneuvers.<sup>204</sup>

On the international level, Egypt's relations with many countries were either severed or strained, and Nasser, to his great chagrin, was being depicted in the Saudi and Jordanian media as a coward who was unable to defend his borders and hid behind the UN force in Sinai.<sup>205</sup> True to form, Nasser, whose purported victory in 1956 had gained him a reputation as the savior of the Arab World, is reported by his intelligence chief to have been irked by the accusation and eager to expel this force<sup>206</sup> in spite of the appalling state of his armed forces. When the Syrians and the Soviets brought fabricated<sup>207</sup> news of Israel massing its troops on its border with Syria<sup>208</sup> he walked into the trap and decided to be a hero again and take the pressure off Syria.

In May 1967, he expelled the UN force that had been stationed at the border with Israel since his last 'victory' in 1956,<sup>209</sup> ordered the Egyptian troops to Sinai and provoked Israel further by belligerent and fiery rhetoric and by blockading the Tiran Straits to Israeli shipping,<sup>210</sup> thus vastly increasing the probability of an Israeli attack. This brinkmanship, in view of the dire economic and political conditions in the country<sup>211</sup> and the deplorable lack of preparedness of the armed forces, was a classic illustration of Nasser's shortsightedness. It demonstrated once more his pedestrian understanding of world affairs. His shallow grasp of the situation was exemplified by his astounding claim to Kamal el-Din Hussein that there was no risk of an Israeli attack before six or seven months and that Russia was prepared to start WW III if the West intervened.

That statement was made on May 29, 1967, when Hussein warned him, in the presence of Hassan Ibrahim and Abdel Latif el-Boghdadi that closing the Tiran Straits would bring about a swift Israeli attack.<sup>212</sup> It was a tragic replay of his 1956 blunder. Even the proverbial man-in-the-street, if Mrs. Mortagi can be taken as an example, understood the implications of Nasser's actions and challenged her husband, General Mortagi. She asked how they could send the army into Sinai, assume an offensive posture and threaten to start a war when it was clear to the ordinary person that Israel would take advantage of the fact that most of the army was in Yemen and attack Egypt.<sup>213</sup> Nasser apparently did not understand that simple fact until three years later when he met with the Arab heads of state in Cairo on September 25, 1970, by which time the Is-

raelis were well dug in on the east bank of the Suez Canal. The Arab leaders, true to their tradition of generosity with Egypt's blood and treasure appear to have been urging some risky venture upon Nasser because he retorted by informing them that he was not willing to antagonize Israel and give it an excuse for another attack.<sup>214</sup>

In the event, Israel's surprise attack on Egypt on June 5, 1967 showed that Mrs. Mortagi's understanding of the situation was better than Nasser's. The attack destroyed the Egyptian air force, and Nasser's incompetent commander-in-chief, Abdel Hakim Amer, promptly panicked and ordered a chaotic and disastrous complete withdrawal of the army from the Sinai Peninsula. After six days of a one-sided war, the Egyptians were left with no army or air force to defend them. Only seven tanks were left in Cairo,<sup>215</sup> and Nasser decided to offer his resignation. The Nasser magic effectively ended after that event, and although he remained in office for another three years, his era was deemed by some historians to have ended then.

### **Final Note**

Nasser appeared on the Egyptian political scene at a point in history when the country was ripe for a major political change and a significant transformation was bound to take place. He, as both his defenders and his detractors are apt to admit, possessed unique qualities. The forces arrayed against this young adventurer and his group of unremarkable junior officers as he made his bid for power were numerous and powerful, but none proved to be a match for the charismatic and able conspirator.

He eventually won to his side all those who might have blocked his path to power. He had the ability to make those he talked to believe that he agreed with them<sup>216</sup> and that he was candid and trustworthy.<sup>217</sup> Nasser did not limit his contacts to those who shared his views and won his opponents' support by leading them to believe that he shared their views.<sup>218</sup> This enabled him to play on the differences between the political forces that might have opposed him, fan the flames between them, then stand back and watch as they fought and weakened each other. The Wafd, for example, was used against the MB, and the different factions within the MB against

each other.<sup>219</sup> He was a skillful manipulator who played a different tune to each one of his potential opponents, and when the time was ripe, he eliminated those he saw as real or potential nuisances or as still standing in his way. To the Americans he was an anti-communist socio-political reformer. To the leftist parties and activists he was either a sympathizer with the leftist HADETU, or if the rumor was true, a secret member whose code-name was Maurice.<sup>220</sup> Either way, he appeared as a democratic campaigner for equality and social justice. To the Muslim Brothers he was a fellow believer in their cause and onetime member who had stood in the customary darkened room and sworn an oath of allegiance and obedience to their Supreme Guide. To the masses, once he began his public career, he was the orator and demagogue par excellence.

The masses were one of his main pillars of support. To them he was the liberator and master spellbinder who was adept at utilizing the Bedouin rooted fascination with words, slogans, and grand-standing rhetoric to keep them mesmerized and under his spell in spite of the often glaringly obvious contradictions between what he said and what they saw with their own eyes. Dignity, for example, was a favorite theme in Nasser's speeches,<sup>221</sup> and he enthralled his audience by his constant use of a set of code words that evoked pride and a sense of self-worth in them.<sup>222</sup> Repeated references to the thwarted plots by the usual coterie of bogymen, enemies of the revolution, reactionaries, Zionists, imperialists, and their representatives and spies, exhilarated the crowds. Talk of his resounding victories against these powerful enemies electrified the masses. His claims of successes in settling scores and paying them back for their perceived misdeeds and evil machinations were spellbinding. He offered his audience the comfort of beautifully strung words while corrosion gnawed away at society.<sup>223</sup> National resources were squandered on foreign adventures while every aspect of life in society deteriorated. One of his favorite slogans "raise your head brother, the era of enslavement is over" was often quoted by the media. And the crowds appeared to be oblivious to reality, to the point of being delusional, when they accepted his rather arrogant claim in 1954, only a few short months after grabbing power, that he, a young officer with limited education and experience, was the one who "taught them pride and dignity."<sup>224</sup> These same crowds



failed to grasp the contradiction between the man's words and actions. He, as Vatikiotis correctly points out, "perhaps unwittingly, imposed the greatest and widest servility on the country in its modern history,"<sup>225</sup> and drove it to the brink of bankruptcy and ruin. As Louis Awad notes, he talked so much about freedom that the public began to believe that Egypt was the protector of all oppressed peoples around the globe, and that it was endeavoring to liberate everyone, break everyone's chains, and banish everyone's fears.<sup>226</sup> Yet the Egyptians themselves became ever more fearful and their chains grew ever more restrictive.<sup>227</sup> The terms "freedom" and the "era of freedom" were endlessly bandied about in speeches, songs, and slogans, yet anything even whispered without Nasser's explicit approval led to jail.<sup>228</sup>

It is a sad irony that Nasser's personal strengths were also his, and Egypt's, undoing. His strength of personality, superb gift for plots, intrigue and manipulation of others, and overwhelming charisma, enabled him to become a near absolute ruler of a country that had great potential and whose problems could have been manageable. These same qualities were what led that country to bankruptcy and set the seeds of the litany of problems that the country suffers from till today. It would certainly be difficult for a neutral observer to deny the negative impact of abolishing democracy, squandering Egypt's resources on foreign ventures, destabilizing the currency, destroying the old middle class, vilifying the entrepreneurial segment of society, devaluing the rule of law, and turning the army into a giant and enormously influential institution in society. That was Nasser's lasting legacy.