

# EGYPT'S LIBERATION

*The Philosophy of the Revolution*

PREMIER GAMAL ABDUL NASSER

*Introduction by*  
*Dorothy Thompson*

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## INTRODUCTION

"These impressions of the philosophy of the revolution of July 23, 1952 were not meant to be published as a book . . . these thoughts are an effort to explore ourselves," says Premier Nasser in the preface to this short and in many ways remarkable book.

It is remarkable because it is an account of a revolution by a revolutionary leader who is conscious of the limitations of revolution—and of force.

It is remarkable for the absence of the Jacobin spirit which has undermined the spirit and institutions of the once revolutionary Liberal Democracies to the point where they tremble before the counter-revolutions that threaten the doom of order and liberty.

It is remarkable for the absence of personal egotism and power-lust so common to initiators of coups d'etat.

And it is remarkable for the painful, humble, self-searching and self-analysis that the leader of the Egyptian revolu-

PART ONE

*Elementary school student. The ultimate roots. Whence the revolution? Egypt was the center of our dreams. A great Faluja. Even the enemy. Before February 4. And before 1935. Truth . . . and vacuum. Aspirations and measures. The role of vanguard. Symbol of the revolution. Weapon in the hand of hate. Evils of egotism. Duties and responsibilities. The complete picture. Between the millstones. Only the army. On two roads at once. The will of fate.*

First, I should like to dwell for a moment on the word "philosophy". It is a big word. As I contemplate it, I feel that I stand before a boundless world, a bottomless sea — and a trepidation restrains me from plunging into it since, from my point of vantage, I see no other shore to head for.

The truth is, I want to avoid the word "philosophy" in what I am about to say. Besides, it is difficult to discuss the philosophy of the Egyptian revolution — difficult for two reasons. [In the first place, an exposition of the philosophy of the revolution of 1952 would require the thorough investigation by scholars into its roots, which strike so deeply into the history of our people. The story of national struggle contains no gaps filled with nothingness; neither does it feature any surprises that leap into existence without introduction. The struggle of any people, generation after generation, is a structure rising stone upon stone.] And just as each stone finds firm support in the stone beneath it so, too,

do the episodes in the struggles of a people support each other. Each new event stems from the one preceding, and each becomes in turn the basis for a new one to follow.

*Elementary School Student*

I do not want to claim for myself the role of a history professor; nothing could be further from my mind. But were any elementary school student to attempt a study of the struggles of our people, he would discover that the revolution of July 23rd marks the realization of the hope held by the people of Egypt since they began, in modern times, to think of self-government and complete sovereignty.

There was an unsuccessful attempt to realize this hope when Sayyid Omar Makram led the movement to install Muhammed Ali ruler of Egypt in the name of its people. Another attempt failed when Arabi tried to secure a constitution. Many other attempts that also ended in grief were made during the period of intellectual ferment between the Arabi revolution and the

1919 revolution. This 1919 revolution, which was led by Sa'ad Zaghlul, was no more successful than the others in fulfilling the hopes of the people.

*The Ultimate Roots*

It is not true that the successful revolution of 1952 stemmed from what happened in the Palestinian War; nor is it true that it was due to the defective weapons which caused the death of our men and officers. Still further from the truth are statements that the cause lay in the electoral crisis in the Army Officers Club in 1951.

In my view, the real cause must be sought further and is more profound. Had the Army officers attempted the revolt in their own account because they were inveigled into the Palestine War, or because they had been shocked by the defective weapons scandal, or because of the attack on their honor in the club elections, it could not have been called a revolution — mutiny would have been a more appropriate name.

These were only incidental causes. Perhaps their greatest influence was to give us added impetus to going ahead with our plans for the revolution, although we had already embarked on this course for other reasons.

*Whence the Revolution?*

Let me now try, after all that has happened and after the long years that have gone by since the idea of revolt began to take root, to go back in my memory to the first day I discovered within myself the seeds of this idea.

The seeds were planted long before those days of November 1951, when the crisis in the Army Officers Club began. For by that time the Free Officers' organization was in existence and active. In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that the election crisis in the club was chiefly due to the activity of the Free Officers, for we intended at that time to enter the battle to test our strength of solidarity and organization.

The day we conceived that idea was also long before the scandal of defective weapons broke upon us. The Free Officers were already in existence, and it was in fact their pamphlets which first sounded the alarm. Their activity inspired the uproar which followed the scandal.

*Egypt Was the Center of Our Dreams*

No, the idea started long before that. It was further back even than May 16, 1948, the day which marked the beginning of my involvement in the Palestine War.

[When I now try to recall the details of our experience in Palestine, I find a curious thing: we were fighting in Palestine, but our dreams were centered in Egypt. Our bullets were aimed at the enemy in his trenches before us, but our hearts hovered over our distant country, which we had left to the care of the wolves.

In Palestine, Free Officer cells found opportunity to study and investigate and to meet in the trenches and command posts.] Salah Salem and Zakaria Muhyi ed-

Din came to me in Palestine after breaking through the siege lines into Faluja. We sat there in our besieged positions, not knowing what the outcome would be, but our conversation dwelt only upon our country, which it was our soldiers' duty to defend.

One day, Kamal ed-Din Hussein was sitting near me in Palestine, looking distracted, with nervous, darting eyes. "Do you know what Ahmed Abdul Aziz said to me before he was killed?" he said.

"What did he say?" I asked.

He replied with a sob in his voice and a deep look in his eyes, "He said to me, 'Listen, Kamal, the biggest battlefield is in Egypt.'"

#### *A Greater Faluja*

Not only did I meet in Palestine the friends who collaborated with me in the work for the sake of Egypt, but I encountered there also the ideas which illuminated the path ahead of me. I recall a time when I was sitting in the trenches

thinking of our problems. Faluja was surrounded, and the enemy was subjecting it to a terrific air and artillery bombardment. I used often to say to myself: Here we are in these foxholes, surrounded, and thrust treacherously into a battle for which we were not ready, our lives the playthings of greed, conspiracy and lust, which have left us here weaponless under fire.

And when I would come to this point in my thinking, I used to find my thoughts suddenly leaping across the field and over the borders into Egypt, and I would say to myself: Over there is our country, another Faluja on a larger scale. [What is happening to us here is a picture in miniature of what is happening to Egypt. Egypt too is besieged by difficulties and enemies; *she* has been deceived and forced into a battle for which *she* was not ready, *her* fate the toy of greed, conspiracy and lust, which left *her* without weapons under fire.]

#### *Even the Enemy*

In addition to the companions who dis-

cussed with me in Palestine the future of our country, and the experience which hammered out our ideas as to the possibilities of its fate, the enemy, too, played a role in reminding us of our country and its problems. A few months ago, I read some articles written about me by an Israeli officer named Yeruhan Cohen, which appeared in the *Jewish Observer*. In these articles the Jewish officer relates how he met me during the armistice negotiations.

"The subject which Gamal Abdul Nasser always talked about with me," he wrote, "was the struggle of Israel against the English, and how we organized the underground resistance movement against them in Palestine, and how we were able to muster world public opinion behind us in our struggle against them."

*Before February 4th*

The seeds of the revolution were present within me long before the episode of February 4, 1942, a day after which I wrote

to a friend, saying, "What is to be done now that the die was cast and we accepted what happened on our knees in surrender? As a matter of fact, I believe the Imperialist was playing with only one card in his hand, with the object of threatening us. But once the Imperialist realizes that some Egyptians are ready to shed their own blood and meet force with force, he will beat a hasty retreat, like any harlot rebuffed."

Such, of course, is the usual practice of Imperialism. As for us, as for the Army, the episode had a new electrifying effect on our spirit and sensibilities. Heretofore officers who had talked only of selfish amusement now began to talk of self-sacrifice and their readiness to die in defense of their honor. They all voiced their regret for not having intervened, despite their obvious weakness, to restore to their country its honor and cleanse it with their own blood.

But for him who waits, tomorrow is close.

Some indeed tried to do something after-

wards by way of retaliation, but the opportunity was irretrievably lost, leaving our hearts full of bitter anger and sorrow. Actually this action (on the part of the Imperialist), or rather this stab, revived the spirit of some of us and brought home to us the fact that when our honor was involved we might be prepared to defend it. It was a lesson, but it was a hard lesson.

*And Before 1935*

The day of my awakening was even earlier than that explosive period when, as a student, I marched in 1935 with the demonstrators who clamored for the restoration of the 1923 Constitution (which was actually restored), and when I was going around with delegations of students to the homes of Egyptian leaders in an attempt to get them to unite in behalf of Egypt. The National Front was formed in 1936 as a result of those efforts.

I recall that during that period of ferment, I wrote a letter to one of my friends. It was dated September 2, 1935.

"Dear Brother,

"I talked to your father on the telephone on the 30th, asking after you. He told me that you were at school. So I decided to put down in writing what I intended to communicate to you on the telephone. Allah said 'Oppose them with whatever forces you can muster.' But where are these forces we are supposed to have in readiness for them? The situation today is precarious, and Egypt's situation is even worse. We are on the verge of collapse and death, for truly the temple of despair has mighty columns. But, who is to pull it down?" I continued my letter in this vein.

When was the day on which I discovered the seeds of revolution within me? [The truth is that these seeds were not only hidden in me; I found them also in the hearts of a great many others, who in turn could not pinpoint the beginnings of their existence.] Is it not clear then that these seeds were implanted in us when we were born, and that they were a hope concealed

in our subconsciousness, put there by the generation before us?

*Truth . . . and Vacuum*

I have made this long digression in order to describe the primary reason for the difficulty confronting me in speaking of the philosophy of the revolution because such a discussion requires the deep research of scholars into the historical origins of our people.

The second reason is that I myself was inside the maelstrom of the revolution, and from those who find themselves in a maelstrom, some of its more distant details are hidden. I was heart and soul involved in everything that happened and the way it happened; how, then, can I deal with it objectively, or with the hidden significance behind it?

I am one of those who believe that nothing can exist in a vacuum; even truth cannot so exist. Truth is that which we feel and know in our hearts to be right, or to be more exact, that which our souls em-

brace. Our souls are the vessels in which everything we are is contained; and everything we are, everything placed in these vessels, must take their shape, even truth. I try as much as humanly possible to prevent my soul from altering the shape of truth very much, but how far can I succeed? That is the question.

Beyond this, I want to be fair to myself and fair to the philosophy of the revolution. So I leave it to history to draw up its outlines as I see them, as others see them, and as they are demonstrated by events — and then to distill from all this the full truth.

*Aspirations and Measures*

What, then, can I say? I am qualified to talk of two things. The first is embraced in the term "aspirations", which began in the form of a vague hope, then developed into a defined idea, and finally into a practical program at midnight July 23rd.

The second is the measures we have taken to put these aspirations, with all their vague hopes, their defined ideas and their

practical programs, into practical execution since midnight July 23rd up to now.

It is about these aspirations and measures that I wish to speak.

For a long time I have been asking myself: Was it necessary for us, the Army, to do what we did on July 23, 1952?

[I have already observed that the revolution marked the realization of a great hope felt by the people of Egypt since they began, in modern times, to think in terms of self-government and to demand that they have the final word in determining their own future.] But if that is so, and if what happened on July 23rd was neither a military mutiny nor a popular uprising, why then was it entrusted to the Army, and not to other forces, to bring it about?

I have always been a confirmed believer in the ideal of the military service. It imposes one duty on the Army: that it should die on the frontiers of the motherland. Why did our Army find itself obliged to act in the capital of the motherland instead of on the frontiers?

Again, let me draw your attention to the fact that the rout in Palestine, and the defective arms, and the crisis in the Officers' Club were not the real sources from which poured out the torrent: all these were only contributory factors to the speed of the flow; but, as I said before, they were never the real origin.

But why the Army? I have long asked myself this question; I asked it during the stages of hope, thinking and planning prior to July 23rd, and I have continued to ask it during the many stages of action since then.

There were various justifications before July 23rd which made it clear to us why it was necessary for us to do what we did. We used to say, "If the Army does not do this job, who will?" We also used to say, "We have been used by the Despot as a bogey to give the people nightmares; now it is high time that the bogey be turned against the Despot to shatter his own dreams." We said many other things, but we felt to the depth of our beings this was

our soldiers' duty and that if we failed to discharge it, we would be failing in the sacred trust placed in us.

I confess, however, that the full picture did not become clear in my mind until after a long period of trial after July 23rd. It was the details of this experience which filled in the details of the picture.

### *The Role of Vanguard*

I can testify that there were certain critical occasions since July 23rd when I accused myself, my comrades and the rest of the Army, of stupidity and madness for doing what we had done on that day.

Before July 23rd, I had imagined that the whole nation was ready and prepared, waiting for nothing but a vanguard to lead the charge against the battlements, whereupon it would fall in behind in serried ranks, ready for the sacred advance towards the great objective. And I had imagined that our role was to be this commando vanguard. I thought that this role would never take more than a few hours.

Then immediately would come the sacred advance behind us of the serried ranks and the thunder of marching feet as the ordered advance proceeded towards the great objective. I heard all this in my imagination, but by sheer faith it seemed real and not the figment of imagination.

Then suddenly came reality after July 23rd. The vanguard performed its task and charged the battlements of tyranny. It threw out Farouk and then paused, waiting for the serried ranks to come up in their sacred advance toward the great objective.

### *Symbol of the Revolution*

For a long time it waited. Crowds did eventually come, and they came in endless droves — but how different is the reality from the dream! The masses that came were disunited, divided groups of stragglers. The sacred advance toward the great objective was stalled, and the picture that emerged on that day looked dark and ominous; it boded danger. At this moment

*Just like liberator  
leadership*

I felt, with sorrow and bitterness, that the task of the vanguard, far from being completed, had only begun.

We needed order, but we found nothing behind us but chaos. We needed unity, but we found nothing behind us but dissension. We needed work, but we found behind us only indolence and sloth. It was from these facts, and no others, that the revolution coined its slogan.

#### *Weapon in the Hand of Hate*

We were not yet ready. So we set about seeking the views of leaders of opinion and the experience of those who were experienced. Unfortunately we were not able to obtain very much.

Every man we questioned had nothing to recommend except to kill someone else. Every idea we listened to was nothing but an attack on some other idea. If we had gone along with everything we heard, we would have killed off all the people and torn down every idea, and there would have been nothing left for us to do but sit

down among the corpses and ruins, bemoaning our evil fortune and cursing our wretched fate.)

We were deluged with petitions and complaints by the thousands and hundreds of thousands, and had these complaints and petitions dealt with cases demanding justice or grievances calling for redress, this motive would have been understandable and logical. But most of the cases referred to us were no more or less than demands for revenge, as though the revolution had taken place in order to become a weapon in the hand of hatred and vindictiveness.

#### *The Evils of Egotism*

If anyone had asked me in those days what I wanted most, I would have answered promptly: To hear an Egyptian speak fairly about another Egyptian. To sense that an Egyptian has opened his heart to pardon, forgiveness and love for his Egyptian brethren. To find an Egyptian who does not devote his time to tear-

ing down the views of another Egyptian.

In addition to all this, there was a confirmed individual egotism. The word "I" was on every tongue. It was the solution to every difficulty, the cure for every ill. I had many times met eminent men — or so they were called by the press — of every political tendency and color, but when I would ask any of them about a problem in the hope he could supply a solution, I would never hear anything but "I".

Economic problems? He alone could understand them; as for the others, their knowledge on the subject was that of a crawling infant. Political issues? He alone was expert. No one else had gotten beyond the a-b-c's of politics. After meeting one of these people, I would go back in sorrow to my comrades and say, "It is no use. If I had asked this fellow about the fishing problems in the Hawaiian Islands, his only answer would be 'I'."

#### *Duties and Responsibilities*

I remember visiting once one of our uni-

chousma

versities where I called the professors together and sat with them in order to benefit from their scholastic experience. Many of them spoke before me and at great length. It was unfortunate that none of them advanced any ideas; instead, each confined himself to advancing himself to me, pointing out his unique fitness for making miracles. Each of them kept glancing at me with the look of one who preferred me to all the treasures of earth and heaven.

I recall that I could not restrain myself, so I stood up and said, "Every one of us is able in his own way to perform a miracle. His primary duty is to bend every effort to his work. [And if you, as university professors, were to think of your students' welfare, and consider them as you should, your basic work, you would be in a position to provide us with the fundamental strength to build up our motherland.]

"Everyone must remain at his post, to which he should dedicate all his efforts. Do not look at us — we have been forced by circumstances to leave our posts in

order to perform a sacred duty. If the motherland had no need for us other than to stay in the ranks of the Army as professional soldiers, we would have remained there."

What I did not say at that time was to give them the example of the members of the Revolution Council. I did not want to tell the professors that, before they were called to a greater duty, these men had been devoting all their energies to their jobs. I did not point out to them that most of the Revolution Council were professors at the General Staff College, and that this constituted a proof as to their distinction in their field as professional soldiers.

Likewise, I refrained from pointing out that three of the Revolution Council, Abdul Hakim Amer, Salah Salem and Kemal ed-Din Hussein, were given exceptional promotions on the field of battle in Palestine. I did not want to mention all this, because I do not want to boast about members of the Revolution Council, they being my brothers and comrades.

2 revolutions ↗ Political  
↓ Soul

*The Complete Picture*

I confess that this whole situation produced in me a psychological crisis; but the events that followed, and my reflections thereon, together with the real meaning I could adduce from them, tended to ease my distress and set me to seek a justification for this situation, which I found when the whole picture of the motherland's plight rose somewhat clearly before my eyes. This clarification, moreover, brought me the answer to the question which had long bothered me, namely: Was it necessary for us, the Army, to do what we did on July 23rd?

The answer is yes, beyond any subterfuge or equivocation. I can say now that we did not ourselves define the role given us to play; it was the history of our country which cast us in that role.

I can now state that we are going through two revolutions, not one revolution. [Every people on earth goes through two revolutions: a political revolution by which it wrests the right to govern itself

from the hand of tyranny, or from the army stationed upon its soil against its will; and a social revolution, involving the conflict of classes, which settles down when justice is secured for the citizens of the united nation.

Peoples preceding us on the path of human progress have passed through two revolutions, but they have not had to face both simultaneously; their revolutions, in fact, were centuries apart in time. For us, the terrible experience through which our people are going is that we are having both revolutions at the same time.

#### *Between the Millstones*

This terrible experience stems from the fact that both revolutions have attendant factors which clash and contradict violently. To be successful, the political revolution must unite all elements of the nation, build them solidly together and instill in them the spirit of self-sacrifice for the sake of the whole country. But one of the primary features of social revolution is that

it shakes values and loosens principles, and sets the citizenry, as individuals and classes, to fighting each other. It gives free rein to corruption, doubt, hatred and egoism.

We are caught between the millstones of the two revolutions we are fated now to be going through. One revolution makes it obligatory that we unite and love one another, fighting side by side to achieve our ends; the other brings dissension upon us against our desires, causing us to hate each other and think only of ourselves.

Between these two millstones, for example, the 1919 revolution was lost; it was unable to make secure the results it should have achieved. The ranks which formed in 1919 and faced up to tyranny were soon scattered by the outbreak of strife and conflict between individuals and classes. The result was dismal failure. Tyranny tightened its grip afterwards, overtly by means of occupation troops, and covertly through its masked stooges led by Sultan Fuad and King Farouk after him. The

people harvested nothing except self-doubt, evil, hatred and rancour between individuals and classes.

*Only the Army*

The hope reposed in the 1919 revolution was thus dimmed. I say dimmed, but not extinguished, because the natural forces of resistance called into being by the great aspirations of our people did not cease to be active and to prepare for a new attempt.

This was the state of affairs which existed after the 1919 revolution, and which singled out the Army as the force to do the job. The situation demanded the existence of a force set in one cohesive framework, far removed from the conflict between individuals and classes, and drawn from the heart of the people: a force composed of men able to trust each other; a force with enough material strength at its disposal to guarantee a swift and decisive action.

These conditions could be met only by the Army.

In this way, as I have already remarked, it was not the Army which defined its role in the events that took place; the opposite is closer to the truth. The events and their ramifications defined the role of the Army in the great struggle to free the nation.

I have been aware since the beginning that our unity is dependent upon our full realization of the nature of circumstances in which we found ourselves, the historical circumstances of our country. For we could not alter the circumstances by the mere stroke of a pen, nor could we turn back the hands of the clock, or advance them — we could not control time. It was not within our power to stand on the road of history like a traffic policeman and hold up the passage of one revolution until the other had passed by in order to prevent a collision. The only thing possible to do was to act as best we could and try to avoid being ground between the millstones.

It was inevitable that we go through the

two revolutions at the same time. When we moved along the path of the political revolution and dethroned Farouk, we took a similar step on the path of the social revolution by deciding to limit land ownership.

I continue to believe that the July 23rd revolution must maintain its initiative and ability to move swiftly in order to perform the miracle of traveling through two revolutions at the same time, however contradictory our resulting actions might at times appear.

When one of my comrades came to me saying, "You want unity to face the English, but at the same time you allow the treason courts to continue their work," I listened to him with our great crisis in mind, the crisis of the millstones — a revolution on the one hand which obliges us to unite in one phalanx and to forget the past, and on the other hand, another revolution which demands that we restore lost dignity to our moral values by not forgetting the past. [I might have replied that our

only salvation lies, as I said before, in maintaining our speed of movement and our initiative, and our ability to travel through two revolutions simultaneously.]

This situation does not exist because I wished it, or because all those who participated in the revolution have wished it. It is brought about by the act of fate, the history of our people, and the stage it is passing through at the present time.

long last together, and weld them in unity for the future—the future of Egypt—strong and free.

PART THREE

*Geographical limits. A role in search of a hero. The first circle. Positive efforts in the Arab circle. Impressions on the field of battle. Imperialism and its results. Necessity of the common struggle. Numerical balance sheet of power. The interior of the dark continent. Islamic Parliament.*

For a third time, I return to my thoughts on the philosophy of the revolution. I come back to it after a lapse of three months filled with swiftly developing events. During the three months I have repeatedly tried to find time in which to set down these further reflections but always the high winds of events blew upon these attempts and scattered them.

But the winds which dispersed my attempts at writing did not blow away the reflections themselves. True, they were not put upon paper, but they continued to dominate my thoughts, together with other reflections, and I constantly searched for more details, either in my memory or in daily events, in order to add them in creating a clear and correct picture.

What is this clear picture which I want to draw at this time, and what relation does it have to the attempts I have made before in the first and second parts of these reflections on the philosophy of the revolution?

In the first section, I discussed the beginning of revolution in our minds as individuals, and in our hearts as typical examples of the youth of our generation. I also talked of revolution in the history of our nation, and of the place of the July 3rd Revolution in that history.

In the second section, I spoke of attempts along the way to revolution, and how the history of our people headed us in this direction, either when we looked back at the past—a past which is so full of lessons—or when, in our yearning hopefulness, we looked forward to the future.

Since my emphasis in the previous two sections has been, then, on time, I therefore feel that "place" is claiming its right to be examined. So now let me talk about place.

It is not my intention to enter into a complicated philosophical discussion of time and place, but there is no doubt that the whole universe, and not only our own country, is conditioned by the interaction of time and place. And when I say that in

our reflections on the conditions of our country we cannot forget the element of time, it is equally true we cannot forget the element of place.

In simpler terms, we cannot go back to the tenth century; we cannot wear its clothes, which appear strange and exotic to our eyes, and we cannot become lost in its thoughts, which now appear to us as layers of darkness without any ray of light.

We also cannot behave as though we were a part of Alaska, which is a part of the northernmost regions, or as if we were on Wake Island, so desolate and far away in the stretches of the Pacific.

Time, therefore, imposes its developments upon us, and place imposes on us its geographic realities.

I have tried twice to deal with the time factor. Let us try now to explore in the realm of place.

#### *Geographical Limits*

There is one thing we should agree upon

at the beginning, and before we proceed with the discussion, and that is the definition of the limits of place as far as we are concerned. [ If anybody tells me that place for us means this capital where we live, I differ with him. And if anyone tells me that place for us means the political boundaries of our country, I also differ.

If the whole matter were limited to our capital, or our political boundaries, it would be much simpler. We would shut ourselves in, and live in an ivory tower, and we would try to our utmost to get away from the world, its problems, wars and crises, which all burst in on us through the doors of our country and influence us, though we have nothing to do with them.

The age of isolation is gone.

[ And gone are the days in which barbed wire served as demarcation lines, separating and isolating countries from one another. No country can escape looking beyond its boundaries to find the source of the currents which influence it, how it can live with others, how . . . and how . . . ]

And no state can escape trying to determine its status within its living space and trying to see what it can do in that space, and what is its field of activities and its positive role in this troubled world.

Sometimes I sit in my study reflecting on the subject, asking myself: What is our positive role in this troubled world, and where is the place in which we should fulfill that role?

I review our circumstances and discover a number of circles within which our activities inescapably must be confined and in which we must try to move.

Fate does not jest and events are not a matter of chance—there is no existence out of nothing. We cannot look at the map of the world without seeing our own place upon it, and that our role is dictated by that place.

[ Can we fail to see that there is an Arab circle surrounding us—that this circle is a part of us, and we are a part of it, our history being inextricably part of its history. ]

These are facts and no mere idle talk. Can we possibly ignore the fact that there is an African continent which Fate decreed us to be a part of, and that it is also decreed that a terrible struggle exists for its future—a struggle whose results will be either for us or against us, with or without our will? Can we further ignore, the existence of an Islamic world, with which we are united by bonds created not only by religious belief, but also reinforced by historic realities? As I have said once, Fate is no jester.

[ It is not without significance that our country is situated west of Asia, in contiguity with the Arab states with whose existence our own is interwoven. It is not without significance, too, that our country lies in northeast Africa, overlooking the Dark Continent, wherein rages a most tumultuous struggle between white colonizers and black inhabitants for control of its unlimited resources. Nor is it without significance that, when the Mongols swept away the ancient capitals of Islam,

Islamic civilization and the Islamic heritage fell back on Egypt and took shelter there.] Egypt protected them and saved them, while checking the onslaught of the Mongols at 'Ain Jalut. All these are fundamental realities with deep roots in our lives which we cannot—even if we try—escape or forget.

#### *A Role in Search of a Hero*

I do not know why I recall, whenever I reach this point in my recollections as I meditate alone in my room, a famous tale by a great Italian poet, Luigi Pirandello—"Six Characters in Search of an Author." The pages of history are full of heroes who created for themselves roles of glorious valor which they played at decisive moments. Likewise the pages of history are also full of heroic and glorious roles which never found heroes to perform them. For some reason it seems to me that within the Arab circle there is a role, wandering aimlessly in search of a hero. And I do not know why it seems to me that this

role, exhausted by its wanderings, has at last settled down, tired and weary, near the borders of our country and is beckoning to us to move, to take up its lines, to put on its costume, since no one else is qualified to play it.

Here, let me hasten to say that this role is not one of leadership. It is rather a role of interaction with, and responsibility to all the above-mentioned factors. It is a role such as to spark this tremendous power latent in the area surrounding us; a role tantamount to an experiment, with the aim of creating a great strength which will then undertake a positive part in the building of the future of mankind.

*The First Circle*

[There can be no doubt that the Arab circle is the most important, and the one with which we are most closely linked. For its peoples are intertwined with us by history.] We have suffered together, we have gone through the same crises, and when we fell beneath the hooves of

the invaders' steeds, they were with us under the same hooves.

[We are also bound in this circle by a common religion.

The center of Islamic learning has always moved within the orbit of its several capital cities—first Mecca, then shifting to Kufa, then to Damascus, next to Baghdad, and finally to Cairo.]

Lastly, the fact that the Arab states are contiguous has joined them together in a geographical framework made solid by all these historical, material and spiritual factors.

[So far as I can recall, the first glimmers of Arab awareness began to steal into my consciousness when I was a student in secondary school. I used to go out on a general strike with my comrades every year on the second of December to protest the Balfour Declaration which Britain had made on behalf of the Jews, giving them a national home in Palestine, thus tyrannously wresting it from its rightful owners. And at that time, when I asked myself

why I went out on strike with such zeal, and why I was angry about this act by a country I had never seen, I could find no answer except in the echoes of sympathetic emotion.

Then a kind of understanding began to develop when I became a student in the Military Academy, where I studied in particular the history of all past military campaigns in Palestine and in general the history of the area and its conditions which have made of it during the past hundred years an easy prey for the fangs of hungry beasts. Things grew still clearer and the underlying realities became apparent when, in the General Staff College I began to study the late Palestine campaign and the problems of the Mediterranean in detail.

[The result was that when the Palestine crisis began, I was utterly convinced that the fighting there was not taking place on foreign soil, nor was our part in it a matter of sentiment. It was a duty necessitated by self-defense.]

*Positive Efforts in the Arab Circle*

I remember that just after the announcement of the decision to partition Palestine in September 1947, the Free Officers held a meeting and decided to help in the resistance. Next day I knocked on the door of Hajj Amin al Husseini, Mufti of Palestine, who was then living in Zaitoun. I said to him, "You have need of officers to lead in the struggle and to train volunteers. In the Egyptian Army there is a large number of officers who wish to offer their services. They are at your command any time you wish."

He said that he was pleased with this spirit, but that he thought the permission of the Egyptian Government would be necessary. Then he said, "I will give you my answer after asking permission." A few days later I went back and he told me that the Government's reply had been negative.

However, we did not let this stop us.

Some time later, the artillery of Ahmad Abdul Aziz began to bombard the Jewish

colonizers south of Jerusalem. The commanding officer of the artillery was Kemal ed-Din Hussein, a member of the Constituent Committee of the Free Officers, which has since become the Council of the Revolution.

I remember another secret of that time—the best secret of all. Hassan Ibrahim had gone to Damascus to meet with some of the officers of Fauzi al-Qawuqji, who was leader of the Arab Liberation Forces, and who was preparing for a decisive battle in northern Palestine. Hassan Ibrahim and Abdul Latif Baghadt drew up a bold plan to strike a successful blow in this battle. The main feature of the plan took account of the fact that the Liberation Forces had no air support to give them the advantage: attack from the air might indeed be the decisive factor in the battle. But where could the Liberation Forces get the aircraft to implement this attack?

Hassan Ibrahim and Abdul Latif Baghadt did not hesitate. They decided that the Egyptian Air Force should fulfill this

mission. But how? Egypt had not yet entered the war in Palestine. And the armed forces, including the Air Force, were kept under strict surveillance. Nevertheless they did not give in to despair.

There had been a strange activity on the military airfields. Planes began to be repaired and prepared; the infection of these obvious efforts traveled like a fever among the pilots. But only a few knew the secret, knew that planes and pilots were making ready for the day when a secret signal should come from Syria, whereupon they would take off to engage with all their strength in the decisive battle over the Holy Land. Then they would proceed to the airfield near Damascus, land, wait for reaction in Egypt, and then decide what to do next. It seemed likely that every pilot participating in this action would be court martialed; I remember that many of them had put their affairs in order in case circumstances should prevent their return for some years.

In planning this bold enterprise, the

underlying motive of the Executive Committee of the Free Officers—and certainly the same idea inspired all the pilots participating in the plan—was not simply a love of adventure, or only fellow-feeling for the Palestinian Arabs. It was rather the clear awareness that Rafah was not the real outer boundary of our country, and that our own security required the defense of the boundaries of the sister Arab states among whom we were placed by Fate.

*Impressions on the Field of Battle*

The plan was not carried out because we never received the secret signal from Syria. And afterwards, circumstances brought about the official entry of the Arab armies into Palestine.

For the present, I do not wish to dwell upon the details of that war. It is a subject about which accounts differ. What concerns me is the important lesson it teaches.

The Arabs entered Palestine in a single

wave of enthusiasm. They did so on the basis of common knowledge and a common estimate shared by all as to the outer borders of their security. The Arab states emerged from Palestine with a common bitterness and disappointment; then, each in its own internal affairs encountered the same factors, the same ruling forces that had brought about their defeat, and forced them to bow their heads in humiliation and shame.

I thought about these things a good deal while alone in the trenches and fox-holes of the Menshia hills. I was then with General Staff, Sixth Battalion, which was stationed in that sector, sometimes defending it, more often moving to the attack. I used to go out among the ruins left by enemy artillery fire and there let my imagination soar.

Sometimes I would be carried high up to the region of the stars; from this lofty height I would gaze down in my mind's eye over the whole region. And the picture began to be more distinct.

Down there below is where we are dug in and surrounded; here is the position of our battalion, and there are the other battalions with us in the line. Beyond are the forces of the enemy surrounding us; and beyond them, more of our forces, who are in turn encircled, though less restricted in movement.

We were sorely pressed, but the political climate in the capital, whence we received our orders, created a siege there—a tighter and more crippling siege than anything we experienced while dug in at the Faluja pocket.

Then, over there, are the forces of our brothers-at-arms, our brother Arabs, brothers in the common enterprise and in the common urge that hastened us all to the land of Palestine. There are the armies of our brothers, army after army, each one surrounded by those same circumstances which have also throttled their governments.

They all, armies and governments, seemed to be pawns, devoid of power and

self-motivation, moved only by the hands of players. And behind the lines, all our peoples seemed to be the victims of a well-knit conspiracy which deliberately suppressed the realities of what was happening, the facts of the actual situation.

And then I would come down to earth again, and feel that what I was doing was to defend my home and children, nothing more; that my fanciful dreams—Arab capitals, nations, peoples, history—all this meant nothing. This was when, wandering among the ruins, I would come across refugee children looking for shelter, having fallen into the clutches of the siege following the destruction of their homes and the loss of their possessions. I remember one small girl who was about my own daughter's age. I saw her just as she had wandered into a zone of danger and whistling bullets, driven by the lash of hunger and cold to search for a bit of food or a piece of cloth. [And I said to myself: This could happen to my little girl.

For I was certain that what was hap-

pening in Palestine could happen to any one of the Arab states so long as it remained subject to the factors and forces that governed it at that time.]

*Imperialism and Its Results*

[When the struggle was over in Palestine and the siege lifted, and I had returned to Egypt, the Arab circle in my eyes had become a single entity. The events that have taken place since have confirmed my belief. I have followed developments in the Arab countries, and I find they match, point for point. What happened in Cairo had its counterpart in Damascus the next day, and in Beirut, in Amman, in Baghdad and elsewhere. This all fitted in with the picture drawn by long experience. It is a single region. The same circumstances, the same factors, even the same forces, united against all of it.

And it was clear that the foremost of these forces was imperialism.

Even Israel itself is but a result of imperialism.] For if Palestine had not fallen

under the British mandate, Zionism would never had been able to muster enough support to realize a national home in Palestine. The idea would have remained a mad hopeless dream.

As I set down these reflections, I have before me the memoirs of Chaim Weizmann, first President of the Republic of Israel and its real founder. They are published in his well known book *Trial and Error*. There are certain passages that are most revealing. For example, he says:

"It was necessary that a great nation support us, and there were in the world two nations, either of which could do so: Germany or Great Britain. As for Germany, it had already decided to stay aloof. But Britain had surrounded us with care and sympathy."

And then this statement struck me:

"During the Sixth Zionist Congress which we convened in Switzerland, Herzl's stand made it clear to world Jewry that Great Britain, and Great Britain alone, to the exclusion of all other nations, recog-

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nized the Jews as a nation having a distinct and independent existence. We Jews deserve to have a fatherland and a state: Herzl proceeded to read a letter from Lord Latterson on behalf of the British Government which proved the point, and which offered Uganda as a national home.

"The members of the Congress decided to accept this offer, but afterwards we stifled it in the cradle and quietly buried it. After this episode, Great Britain turned around and offered us the region around al-Arish in Sinai: Britain was eager to please us. As a result of this offer, we formed a large commission of Jewish scholars who traveled to Egypt to study the area. They were received in Cairo by Lord Cromer, the British High Commissioner, with a show of every concern for our aspirations for a national home. The commission, however, did not consider the region to be one which would satisfy the objectives we sought in a national home.

"Later, I met Lord Balfour, Foreign Minister of Great Britain, who began im-

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mediately to ask questions. 'Why didn't you agree to establish the national home in Uganda?' I replied, 'Zionism is a nationalistic, political movement, it is true. However, we cannot neglect the spiritual side of it. I am absolutely certain if we neglect the spiritual side, we shall never be able to realize the nationalist political dream.' Then I said, 'What would you say if someone said to you: Take Paris in exchange for London. Would you do it?'

Again, this passage caught my eye:

"I returned to London in the fall of 1921 with the objective of supervising the writing of the draft terms of the British mandate in Palestine. It was necessary that this document be presented to the League of Nations for final approval, the mandate having been previously confirmed in principle at the San Remo Conference.

"Lord Curzon had taken over the Foreign Office from Lord Balfour and was responsible for the draft proposal. In London with me was the famous jurist Ben Cohen, one of the most able legal drafts-

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en in the world; and Eric Forbes-Adam, Curzon's secretary, cooperated with us.

"Between us and Curzon there were differences from start to finish. We wrote for the draft preamble a phrase by which we wanted to bind Britain to the promise of Lord Balfour and insure that its policy in Palestine should be based on the principle of the Jewish national home. The text we wanted was: 'Recognizing the historic rights of the Jews in Palestine,' but Curzon said that he preferred to soften the phrase so the Arabs should not be made angry in reading it, and that he thought it should read: 'Recognizing the historical connection of the Jews in Palestine.'"

I would like to go on at length quoting from Weizmann's book, but we all know that these bygone events were the germs of the terrible complications which rent Palestine and finally destroyed its existence.

*Necessity of the Common Struggle*

Let me go back, now, to what I was say-

ing — that imperialism is the great force that is imposing a murderous, invisible siege upon the whole region, a siege one hundred times more powerful and pitiless than that which was laid upon us in our trenches at Faluja, or that which encircled our individual armies and our capitals whence we received our orders.

[When all these truths had impressed themselves upon me, I began to realize the need for a common struggle.] I said to myself that so long as the region is one region, sharing the same conditions and problems, and the same future (and, however he tries to change his disguise, the same enemy) — so long as this is true, why do we scatter our efforts?

The experiences which followed the July 23rd revolution have increased my conviction of the necessity for a common struggle. And now, the hidden parts of the long developing picture began to be disclosed, the obscuring shadows began to disappear.

I admit that in the process, I also began to see the great obstacles which block the

path to the common struggle, but I began to believe that these obstacles, being the creation of the common enemy, had to be removed.

Finally, I began to make political contacts for the sake of unifying the struggle by whatever means. [After a month of such contacts, I came to the important conclusion that the first obstacle in our path is doubt. It was clear that the roots of this doubt were planted in us by our old common enemy in order to prevent us from embarking upon unified action.]

I recall sitting recently talking with the brother of an Arab politician. One of his colleagues was with us. I led the conversation; his part was to reply to my questions. He would say something and then turn around to his colleague to gauge the effect of what he was saying, instead of gauging its effect upon me. I said to him: "Overcome your doubts. Say what you think. Look me in the eye instead of turning your face away."

I do not want to minimize the obstacles

to unity in the common struggle. There is no doubt that these obstacles have their roots in the nature of the situation and in the historical and geographical circumstances of our people. But it is also certain that with a little flexibility, based on foresight, not on neglect, it will be possible to call into being a plan upon which everyone will be able to agree without reservation—a plan for carrying out the common struggle.

I do not doubt for a moment that our common effort will achieve for us and our peoples everything we desire. For I shall always maintain that we are strong. The only trouble is that we do not realize just how strong we are.

#### *Numerical Balance of Power*

We make the wrong definition of strength. It is not strength to shout at the top of the lungs: real strength lies in acting positively with all the effective means at our command. When I try to analyze the elements of our strength, there

are three main sources which should first be taken into account.

The first of these sources is that we are a community of neighboring peoples linked by all the material and moral ties possible, and that we have characteristics and abilities and a civilization which have given rise to three holy religions — factors which cannot be ignored in the effort to build a secure and peaceful world. So much for the first source.

As for the second source of strength, it is our land itself and its position on the map — that important, strategic position which embraces the crossroads of the world, the thoroughfare of its traders and the passageway of its armies.

There remains the third source: oil — a sinew of material civilization without which all its machines would cease to function. The great factories, producing every kind of goods; all the instruments of land, sea and air communication; all the weapons of war, from the mechanical bird above the clouds to the submarine beneath

the waves — without oil, all would turn back to naked metal, covered with rust, incapable of motion or use.

Here I would like to pause for a moment to deal with the subject of oil. Perhaps its existence as a material necessity which has been established by facts and figures will afford a useful model for our analysis of the importance of the sources of strength in our country.

I read recently an article published by the University of Chicago on the world oil situation. It would be a good thing if every Arab could read it, grasp its implication, and see the great significance revealed by its statistics.

The article points out, for example, that in the Arab countries the effort to extract oil requires comparatively little capital. Oil companies spent 60 million dollars in Colombia, beginning in 1916, and did not discover a drop of oil until 1936. They spent \$44 million in Venezuela, and did not get a drop of oil for 15 years. They spent \$39 million in the Dutch Indies be-

fore they struck oil. According to the article, it all adds up to the fact that the cost of producing a barrel of oil in North America is 78 cents, in South America, 48 cents, but in the Arab countries the cost is only 10 cents.

The article further says that the center of world oil production has shifted from the United States, where oil wells are going dry, where the cost of land is going up and the wages of workers have risen, to the Arab area, where the fields are still virgin, where vast tracts of land continue to cost almost nothing, and where labor is comparatively cheap. Half the proved reserves of oil in the world lie beneath Arab soil, the remainder being divided among the United States, Russia, the Caribbean area and other sections of the globe.

It is a fact, too, that the average daily production per well is 11 barrels in the United States, 230 barrels in Venezuela, and 4,000 barrels in the Arab area. Have I made clear how great is the importance of this element of strength? I hope so.

Se we are strong. Strong not in the loudness of our voices when we wail or shout for help, but rather when we remain silent and measure the extent of our ability to act; when we really understand the strength resulting from the ties binding us together, making our land a single region from which no part can withdraw, and of which no part, like an isolated island, can be defended without defense of the whole.

*The Interior of the Dark Continent*

So much for the first circle in which we must turn, and in which we must act with all our ability — the Arab circle.

[If we consider next the second circle — the continent of Africa — I may say without exaggeration that we cannot, under any circumstances, however much we might desire it, remain aloof from the terrible and sanguinary conflict going on there today between five million whites and 200 million Africans. We cannot do so for an important and obvious reason: we are *in* Africa.] The peoples of Africa will con-

tinue to look to us, who guard their northern gate, and who constitute their link with the outside world. We will never in any circumstances be able to relinquish our responsibility to support, with all our might, the spread of enlightenment and civilization to the remotest depths of the jungle.

There remains another important reason. It is that the Nile is the life-artery of our country, bringing water from the heart of the continent.

As a final reason, the boundaries of our beloved brother, the Sudan, extend far into the depths of Africa, bringing into contiguity the politically sensitive regions in that area.

The Dark Continent is now the scene of a strange and excited turbulence: the white man, representing various European nations, is again trying to re-divide the map of Africa. We shall not, in any circumstance, be able to stand idly by in the face of what is going on, in the false belief that it will not affect or concern us.

I will continue to dream of the day when

I will find in Cairo a great African institute dedicated to unveiling to our view the dark reaches of the continent, to creating in our minds an enlightened African consciousness, and to sharing with others from all over the world the work of advancing the welfare of the peoples of this continent.

*Islamic Parliament*

[ There remains the third circle, which circumscribes continents and oceans, and which is the domain of our brothers in faith, who, wherever under the sun they may be, turn as we do, in the direction of Mecca, and whose devout lips speak the same prayers.]

When I went with the Egyptian delegation to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to offer condolences on the death of its great sovereign, my belief in the possibility of extending the effectiveness of the Pilgrimage, building upon the strength of the Islamic tie that binds all Muslims, grew very strong. I stood before the Ka'ba, and in my mind's eye I saw all the regions of

the world which Islam has reached. [Then I found myself saying that our view of the Pilgrimage must change. It should not be regarded as only a ticket of admission into Paradise after a long life, or as a means of buying forgiveness after a merry one. It should become an institution of great political power and significance. Journalists of the world should hasten to cover the Pilgrimage, not because it is a traditional ritual affording interesting reports for the reading public, but because of its function as a periodic political conference in which the envoys of the Islamic states, their leaders of thought, their men learned in every branch of knowledge, their writers, their captains of industry, their merchants and their youth can meet, in order to lay down in this Islamic-world-parliament the broad lines of their national policies and their pledges of mutual cooperation from one year to another.

Pious and humble, but strong, they should assemble, stripped of greed, but active; weak before God, but mighty

against their problems and their enemies; longing for an afterlife, but convinced of their place in the sun, a place they must fill in this existence.

I remember that I mentioned some of these thoughts to His Majesty, King Sa'ud, and he said to me, "It is indeed the real *raison d'être* of the Pilgrimage." To tell the truth, I myself am unable to imagine any other *raison d'être*.

[When I consider the 80 million Muslims in Indonesia, and the 50 million in China, and the millions in Malaya, Siam and Burma, and the nearly 100 million in Pakistan, and the more than 100 million in the Middle East, and the 40 million in the Soviet Union, together with the other millions in far-flung parts of the world — when I consider these hundreds of millions united by a single creed, I emerge with a sense of the tremendous possibilities which we might realize through the cooperation of all these Muslims, a cooperation going not beyond the bounds of their natural loyalty to their own countries, but none-

theless enabling them and their brothers in faith to wield power wisely and without limit.

And now I go back to that wandering mission in search of a hero to play it. Here is the role. Here are the lines, and here is the stage. We alone, by virtue of our place, can perform the role.]

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#### NOTES ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gamal Abdul Nasser was born in Beni Mor, a small town in Asiut Province, Upper Egypt, on January 15, 1918, the son of a good middle class family. At the age of eight, he was sent by his father to be educated in Cairo, where he was so taken by the beauty of the city that he often expressed his feelings in his letters to his parents.

In the same year, his mother, to whom he was strongly attached, died. Her loss deeply affected him and tended to increase his natural propensity for privacy and contemplation.

In 1934, his father and three brothers joined him in Cairo. He obtained his Secondary School Certificate with distinction from Al Nahda Al Misria School. He displayed an interest in law and the history of great men.

He entered the Military College in 1937. At that time the number of students was less than ninety, but it had begun to increase steadily after the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. As a student, young Nasser was noted for his exemplary conduct, his self-reliance and his serious outlook.

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