

12 Strong Men Stand Between Egypt and Communism

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CAIRO.—Twelve strong men, all but one in their thirties, stand between Egypt and communism.

In power little more than a year, 52-year-old Maj. Gen. Mohammed Naguib and 11 disciples have set their sights on one objective—an independent, democratic country.

They attack communism in two ways—by moving directly against rabble-rousing Reds, and by trying to strengthen the nationalist spirit which may someday restore to Egypt some of its lost glory.

Above all, the Army Revolutionary Council, as the officers call themselves, wants to get the British out of the new republic. President Naguib has made it abundantly clear that, if diplomacy fails, he will fight.

He and his Vice Premier, Lieut. Col. Gamal Abdal Nasser, have called on their countrymen to prepare for total war against the British occupation of Suez. At Mecca not long ago, the devout Naguib prayed for unity of all Moslems “in order to continue our crusade” against foreign occupants of Moslem territories.

Says Nasser: “Life is limited. One can die in the Suez Canal Zone as well as anywhere else if fate wants it so.”

JUST AS STRONG as this nationalist feeling is the council’s hatred of communism. Police raids on Red centers are frequent. A special military court has been set up to handle Communist cases. Red printing presses, documents and news organs are suppressed.

The young army officers, mindful of the monstrous poverty, misery and helplessness that characterized the regime of former King Farouk, are determined to make Egypt free, strong and prosperous. Communists will find no easy pickings here in the process.

The council, set up after the revolution which turned out Farouk, meets almost daily to hammer out Egypt’s future in a small guarded palace overlooking the Nile. Naguib presides. In conferences which often stretch 14 or 16 hours, the council talks about everything from

Egypt’s bitter dispute with Britain to the price of bananas.

Formality and ceremony are unknown. Naguib stolidly puffs on his pipe. The other officers sit or stand around the table smoking cigarettes. When a marathon meeting is on, they order sandwiches and eat while continuing debate.

They often joke in the midst of stormy arguments. After every facet of an issue has been examined and everybody has had his say, they vote. One vote for each officer, two for Naguib. The decision of the majority stands.

WHO ARE these men?

Much has been written about Naguib, a sincere, modest and religious man determined to lead Egypt to democracy. But little is known about the men who rule Egypt with him.

Perhaps his most colorful aide is 35-year-old Colonel Nasser. Rumors, not borne out by facts, have been circulated that Nasser is the “Gray eminence” behind Naguib—the man who pulls the strings and who will eventually take over power.

Close associates of the two men report that they work in perfect harmony, based on mutual respect and confidence.

Last spring, when Naguib made a state tour of southern Egypt, Nasser was at his side. The cheers of the crowd were for Naguib. Nasser refused to appear publicly without his chief and declined to make any statements on his own.

When the Naguib party stopped off at the old Nasser homesite in Beni-Morr, the colonel took the occasion to refute publicly the rumors that he was a string puller.

“We are ready to march under his (Naguib’s) leadership,” he said with feeling. “We are his soldiers. We are ready to meet death behind him.”

IT WAS NASSER who engineered the July, 1952, revolt among fellow army officers fed up with Farouk and the clique of rich, land-owning pashas who kept Egypt poor. But the man in front was Naguib, the hero and man of the hour. Nasser and the others swore fealty to the general and promised to share with him the responsibility of the giant tasks ahead. All have stuck by their pledges.

Nasser was a frontline officer in the Arab-Jewish war of 1948. He won the title “Tiger of Falluja,” when he led a counterattack which freed the besieged Egyptian garrison at Falluja.

Following Naguib’s example, Nasser has not changed his private life, despite his important post in the new government. He makes about \$500 a month as Interior Minister plus about \$230 a month as a lieutenant colonel. He lives in a modest suburban apartment with his wife and two daughters.

Most outspoken member of the council is the Minister of State in Charge of Sudan Affairs, Maj. Salah Salem, 32. He created a sensation last year when he stripped to his shorts and followed a Sudanese chief in a ritual dance while on a diplomatic mission.

A fervent supporter of Naguib’s republican regime, Salem wants to raise Egypt’s standard of living. He says:

“We are all sons of the people. It falls on us to work for the people in all fields.”

Slim of build, he wears dark glasses continuously, even after dark. He is married, the father of three girls and a boy.

SALEM’S OLDER brother, Wing Comdr. Gamal Salem, 35, was a pioneer in developing Egypt’s air force. He is in charge of enforcing Naguib’s land reform program—one of the government’s most immediate projects.

A sturdy and efficient worker, Gamal Salem has placed his faith in the rural development program.

“The people,” he says, “will be strong when the village is strong.”

Like his brother, Gamal is all out for the republican regime. He is unmarried.

Minister of War is 36-year-old Wing Comdr. Abdel Latif Baghdady, who fought in the guerilla raids against British garrisons in Suez in 1951-52. He advocates a policy that seems far in the distance—development of industry. Mild-mannered but energetic, Baghdady wants above all “to erase the sentence the British have imposed—that Egypt is an agricultural country.”

Baghdady, father of three girls and a boy, speaks English fluently, is a squash and gymnastics addict.

Commander in chief of Egyptian armed forces is Maj. Gen. Abdel Hakim Amer, 34. He was promoted from major to his present rank when Naguib vacated his command to become President.

Amer, one of the council’s most enthusiastic members, speaks with energy and conviction of Egypt’s poverty-stricken people.

“The man in the street? You mean my

son? My father? My cousin? We are all men in the street. I work for the man in the street. He is my blood and my country and I shall devote myself to him as long as I live.”

Amer is married, the father of four children.

CHIEF OF ARMY Intelligence, Lieut. Col. Zakaria Mohieddin, 38, bosses the campaign against Communists and others who threaten the republican aims of the revolution. He has only one purpose, he says—to make Egypt strong.

Mohieddin is married and father of a new baby girl.

His cousin, Maj. Khaled Mohiedden, 31, is the council’s parliamentarian. An admirer of Sun Yat-sen, Khaled is a vigorous promoter of Egypt’s new liberal constitution.

A sportsman, he is the father of a boy and girl and believes in “healthy socialism based on work—the one and only source of revenue.”

Lieut. Col. Anwar El Sadat, 35, in charge of public relations and an official in the National Guidance Ministry, is the symbol of the professional revolutionist. He fought against the Farouk regime for several years prior to last year’s coup. Handsome, deeply religious and an ardent patriot, El Sadat claims he has put aside all personal ambition to serve Egypt. His slogan: “Love, friendship, fraternity and equality.”

Lieut. Col. Hussein El Shafei, 35-year-old cavalry commander, is the council’s outstanding soldier. An advocate of personal heroism, he led motorized units which spearheaded the revolution.

WING COMDR. Hassan Ibrahim, 36, and Maj. Kamal El Din Hussein, 32, round out the council. Both serve as advisers on military training.

Ibrahim, the only member of the group opposed to forcing the British out of Egypt, takes a somewhat fatalistic view of the future. His motto: “Do what you must, no matter what the consequences.”

Hussein is responsible for training the units which will fight the British in the Suez Canal Zone if necessary.

The council already has drawn up a new constitution for Egypt to replace the old one granted by Fuad I in 1923. The new charter, while it vests in the President most of the prerogatives once enjoyed by Farouk, rejects the inviolability of the chief of state’s person—an integral part of the old constitution.

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Devout President Mohammed Naguib, No. 1, of Egypt's 12 strong men, performs the rite of purification

prior to prayers at Moslem's holiest mosque on his recent pilgrimage to Mecca.

It provides for a two-chamber legislature, to be elected by popular suffrage (including women), which must pass on all laws before they become effective.

Naguib says he will serve as President only for a three-year transitional period. After that, a new president will be

elected in accordance with the new constitution.

The 12 men who rule Egypt today are not specialists in government. But what they lack in political skill, they make up for in honesty, enthusiasm and faith, which makes all things possible.