

NASSER AND THE NEUTRAL COUNTRIES

Can Nasser Assume and Develop the Role That Once Was Nehru's?

Paul F. Power

To justify Nikita Khrushchev's removal from office, the new Kremlin leaders have cited this grievous fault: during the Aswan Dam celebrations in May 1964 he granted a Hero of the Soviet Union award to President Nasser of the United Arab Republic without first securing approval from the Supreme Soviet's Presidium. This example may or may not take a major place in the catalogue of Khrushchev's purported mistakes, but the award itself points up the attention Gamel Abdel Nasser still receives in world politics after a decade of controversy and uncertainty about his international status. Russian medals—and American corn—do not prove Nasser's arrival as a leader with significant standing, although great power recognition contributes to that status. That proof depends upon the rank he may gain as the leader of the nonaligned world.

There are signs that Nasser is the foremost candidate for this task, replacing India's Nehru who had held the post of first neutralist for seventeen years when he died last spring. The place Nehru occupied, redefined by new circumstances, is open to a qualified prospect such as Nasser. (The role that Nehru actually played in his last few years is not what is involved. By then the sensitive Brahmin had become overly moderate; neither his propaganda nor his tactics met the changing spirit of neutralism, especially after 1960 when Nasser and Sukarno, among others, began to compete with him for the front place.)

The successor to Nehru will have to meet three qualifications. *First* he must be an ideologist capable of feeding the anti-imperialist and, by implication, the anti-capitalist fires that the Indian leader banked at the Belgrade meeting. The newcomer must either find fresh examples of Western abuses or invent them. Without these abuses, real or imagined, neutralism will fade. On this score Nasser, an early critic of "neo-colonialism" and "dollar Zionism," is qualified.

A *second*, related qualification is to possess the

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skill evident in Nehru's foreign policy until the Sino-Indian crisis of 1962—to take a benign view of international communism, but also to edge back toward the West when there is a danger of losing control to external or domestic communism. The first part of this qualification is no problem to many Afro-Asian leaders who have drunk from Marxist springs at some time in their career, but the second part is troublesome. Sukarno and Nkrumah are not especially good at this brinkmanship, and Sekou Touré and Burma's Ne Win are not much better. Despite his antagonism to the West, Nasser has shown an ability to keep his friendly policy toward Moscow from determining his freedom of movement, partly by altering his treatment of domestic Communists and partly by dividing Egypt's vital cotton export between Communist and Western buyers.

A *third* requirement is that the neutralist leader come from a middle size or large nation in the non-aligned community that the great powers judge to have strategic importance in international politics. This requirement eliminates many smaller nations, among them, Ceylon, Ghana and Tunisia. The Congo, India, Indonesia, Nigeria and Yugoslavia are clearly qualified, whatever drawbacks they have. So, too, is the U.A.R. with over 27 million people, a crossroads position in an oil-rich region, and a value enhanced by the shifting of neutralism's power center from Asia toward Africa.

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Nineteen sixty-four was Nasser's moment of truth in deciding how to pursue his international ambitions in the nonaligned camp. That he has had these ambitions since the Suez crisis is apparent. But for some years the major powers' dislike or suspicion of Nasser even when he received their help and Nehru's front-rank position kept him from taking bold steps to become the first spokesman for the neutralist persuasion. By 1964, partly because of Nasser's success in playing off the major states, they no longer had the objections to him they once did, however strong the French and British memories of 1956. When the Indian Prime Minister died in the spring

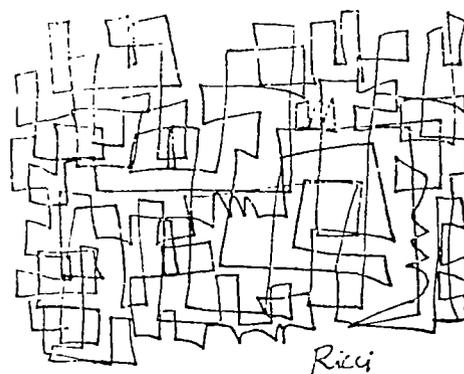
an opportunity arose for the U.A.R. In 1964 international meetings in the U.A.R. became the occasions for Nasser to press forward. Arab summit meetings in January and September, an African summit in July, and the second Conference of Nonaligned States in October, lower level meetings of various groups concerned with Africa and Palestine—all of these provided excellent opportunities to publicize the U.A.R. and its executive. Moreover Chou En-Lai's two-month African tour which started in Cairo on December 14, 1963—plus the opening on May 13, 1964 of a preliminary stage of the Russian-subsidized Aswan Dam complex with Khrushchev as the patronizing guest of honor—was a conspicuous sign of the international recognition bestowed on the U.A.R. and its leader. Archbishop Makarios' visit to Alexandria in late August, when he thanked Nasser for supporting the Greek Cypriots, was additional evidence of the Arab leader's importance in the Near East.

A closer look behind Nasser's hosting of these meetings and visitors is necessary if we are to understand the problems he has confronted or will face in advancing his leadership claims. If he is to lead the nonaligned camp under present conditions he must maintain friendship with the Soviet Union and relative coolness toward Peking, despite its bomb. This means accepting the Khrushchev line of peaceful coexistence, a thesis endorsed by Brezhnev and Kosygin, and opposition to the "confrontation" line of Peking that Indonesia failed to put over in the neutralist Cairo meeting. Militant as Nasser is about imperialism and capitalism, he upholds the Russian line, and is rewarded by Moscow through economic and military aid.

Moreover, in the uncertain aftermath of Khrushchev's removal and during the tense period following the Congo crisis, the new Russian government sent Deputy Premier A. N. Shelepin to head a delegation to Cairo. There he reassured the U.A.R. of Soviet friendship and said that Russia will honor promises to help complete the Aswan High Dam by 1967. Possibly Nasser's boast in his December 23 speech at Port Said that the U.A.R. had sent arms to the Congolese dissidents and would continue to do so is related more to his Russian than to his African policy. For the Cairo government has a greater need for the Russian military and technical aid the West will not supply than for the American foodstuffs he is willing to risk losing. Moscow, perhaps more than Cairo, wants a disturbed Central Africa because the new Russian leaders must com-

pete with China in national liberation efforts. The Tshombe regime and the Stanleyville rescue operation are levers that both manipulate; yet Nasser's role is partly to impress Moscow with his deserving and reliable character. If this interpretation is correct, the bonds of self-interest between Cairo and Moscow are considerable and they are elastic.

On the question of relations with Communist China, Nasser's government has blended correctness with reservations. As an aftermath of Sino-Egyptian contact at Bandung, Cairo gave Peking its opening in Africa through diplomatic recognition in May 1956. When two years later he permitted the headquarters of the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization to settle in Cairo, Nasser gave China another base in African propaganda work. Peking set up a Chinese-African Friendship Association and Institute of African Affairs. When difficulties arose between Egyptians and Chinese in the Solidarity Organization, Cairo tended to take a Russian view of national liberation. In the Sino-Indian dispute, however, the U.A.R. acted more as conciliator than a partisan of New Delhi. Nasser's welcome to Chou in late 1963 was no more than correct. In the Cairo conference that took place only days before the Sinkiang explosion, Nasser joined with other neutralists to deplore the spread of nuclear weapons. But unlike India, the U.A.R. may move closer to



China should its nuclear capacity prove attractive to key neutralists. Here Russian influence on Nasser may be important; he may not be able to shift toward Peking, unless the new Kremlin leaders take a less critical view of nuclear China. In this event the U.A.R. is back to the simpler problems of dealing with two camps in world politics, a preferable situation for neutralists. Over-all, Nasser has room to maneuver in relations with Peking which is still feeling its way in Arab and African affairs despite its influence in Brazzaville Congo, Burundi, Somalia and Tanzania.

The question of African nations and neutralism

deserves a special comment. For a variety of reasons Black Africa has caught the imagination of Western public opinion. But Black Africa has not produced a major state having a cohesive domestic life that permits the active pursuit of external ambitions. Strategically an African state like the Congo has the potential of greatness in the neutralist camp, but from Lumumba through Tshombe it has had grave problems of leadership and nation-building that undermine its candidacy. Nigeria, the most populous state in Africa, is beset with cultural and political problems that keep it from becoming a logical contender to lead neutralists within and outside of Africa.

The present lack of an outstanding Negro African state does not, of course, deny the importance of Africa in the third world and the need for a potential neutralist statesman to have an effective African policy. Here Nasser is in a reasonably strong position. In *The Philosophy of the Revolution*, written shortly after he came to power in 1952, Nasser said that Egypt would stand with black Africans in the struggle against European colonialists. He pledged that his nation would guard the northern gate to the continent. He also indicated that Egypt had a responsibility "in diffusing the light and civilization into the farthest parts of that virgin jungle." Needless to say, this last theme has not been part of Nasser's overt Africanism. With the other themes Nasser has worked hard among African nationalists, especially that of solidarity with anti-imperialism. Cairo has also used Islam to increase its own prestige and spread its influence in Moslem parts of Negro Africa. This approach to a multi-faith Africa that is increasingly secular has been less effective than the U.A.R.'s post-Bandung call for "positive neutrality," the concept that Nasser and Nkrumah preferred when they became important in the third camp after 1955.

Cairo vigorously projected its militant understanding of neutralism into the emerging African world but Nasser had to contend with the anti-Arab themes in the rising ideologies of African nationalism, Pan-Africanism and *négritude*. By May 1963, when the Organization of African Unity was established, Nasser had ridden out the storms and emerged as a continental leader in the upper range. He now stands behind the venerable Haile Selassie and the aging warrior, Jomo Kenyatta, but probably ahead of Ben Bella and Nkrumah who frighten African moderates, and ahead of Nigeria's Azikiwe and Nyerere of Tanzania.

Nasser's record in Africa is mixed. In terms of raw power, he failed when the Sudanese chose in-

dependence over merger with Egypt, and Negro African fears of Egyptian imperialism continue. But most African governments concede that at least part of Nasser's heart is with them despite his Arab-Egyptian origins.

Politically, Nasser gained when he had Tshombe excluded from the Cairo meeting in October. More dramatically, the Thanksgiving Day burning of the Kennedy Library in Cairo showed the anti-Tshombe African militants that the U.A.R. was with them in protesting the American part in the Congo rescue operation.

The fact that Nasser is a partial success but not a complete success in sub-Saharan Africa is an asset in his bid for leadership of the neutralist community. Too close an identification with one region would detract from his ability to speak for many. But if this is true, what of Nasser's involvements in Arab nationalism and anti-Zionism? Don't they limit him, making him parochial instead of international?

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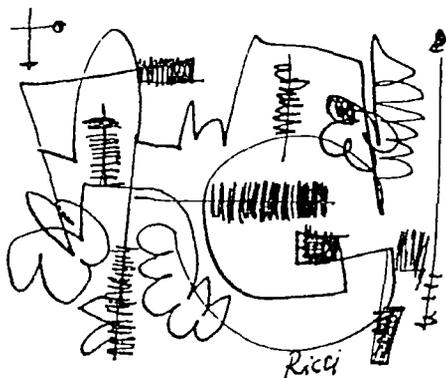
Taking Arab nationalism first: because of the way he responds to problems in Arab countries, he is relatively disengaged and in a position to rise above his region. Beneath the considerable prestige that Nasser enjoys in the Arab world there are, however, problems the Cairo press and radio do not admit. For example, Cairo's intervention in Yemen has compounded prior fears of Nasser in Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Kuwait, Syria and, of course, Saudi Arabia. Nasser is aware of these fears and suspicions and moves cautiously, but it is likely that Nasser believes much Arab fear to be principally the opposition of "vested interests" to the revolution he represents. Nonetheless he is convinced that time is on his side and that socialism, modernism and republicanism will usher in Arab unity.

Nasser also has the bait of anti-Zionism to attract friends and weaken his opponents. It is necessary to realize that the U.A.R.'s opposition to Israel and Zionism has become more of a diplomatic and psychological method of gaining international support for the Nasser regime than a military and political policy to eliminate Israel in a *jihad* religious war. It is true that the Arab summits took strong anti-Israeli positions and that the nonaligned meeting in October also called for "full restoration of all rights of the Arab people of Palestine to their homeland." This resolution tends to pressure India, Burma and Nigeria to break relations with Israel. But confronting these proposals are a number of inhibiting conditions: a) Israel's superior military and psychological power with respect to all the Arab states;

b) the U.A.R.'s weak air and logistic preparations east of the Suez where, presumably, a large share of an anti-Israel war would be fought; c) the deterrent power of the United States in the Middle East that protects Israel from overt Arab attacks. There is little evidence that the U.A.R. missile program is well enough advanced to offset these conditions. Even if it becomes a significant tool, Israel is likely to gain balancing weapons, if necessary, to perfect atomic arms that Cairo's technology will have grave difficulty in matching.

The question of "liberation" is, of course, an exciting one to Arab propagandists and Palestinian Arabs. But in practical terms it is an illusion, because the basis for an *internal* revolution is lacking among Palestinian Arabs. Israel's Arab minority is too small and circumscribed to provide this basis, and Israel's bar against the reentry of refugees excludes any important opportunity. The lack of an internal basis is an important reason why no Palestinian government in exile has been established, although the "Palestinian people" were represented at the second Arab summit meeting in September.

If the anti-Israeli propaganda is cleared away, it becomes evident that President Nasser sets limits to an anti-Zionism that is actually directed against the existence of Israel. His adviser, Mohammed Hasanein Haikal, editor of *Al Ahran*, wrote as much last September. In place of a dangerous military game that might risk the achievements of his revolution, Nasser uses anti-Zionism to help build an ideological infrastructure in the Moslem world and beyond. It is not the only means, but it is readily understood wherever Moslems live. The important point for Nasser's potential leadership of the neutralists is that his anti-Zionism is much less of a state policy with military objectives than a method to attract diplomatic and emotional support.



Clearly one important basis for neutralist evaluation of Nasser is how he manages relations with the West. The neutralists are not of one mind about how this should be done. Burundi, Ghana, Guinea,

Indonesia and Mali have agreed that peaceful coexistence, between the emerging nations and the capitalist-imperialist states is impossible, but most neutralist countries follow the moderates, led by India, the U.A.R. and Yugoslavia, and uphold the Khrushchev view that states coexist but ideologies struggle.

Nasser may yet be caught off base as a moderate within the nonaligned world, but he is now in a relatively advantageous position to deal with the West. His developed anti-imperialism is no drawback. Imperialism is so much on the defensive that Cairo can work for the liberation of the Arab South from British influence and condemn settler rule in Southern Rhodesia with impunity. Nasser can even quietly support the Maltese Labor Party's efforts to take newly freed Malta out of the Commonwealth. France, too, he criticizes without risk, especially for its scientific and military aid to Israel.

The Suez Canal and Arab oil also influence relations between Washington and Cairo, although the U.A.R.'s leverage is smaller than with Western Europe. Until late autumn in 1964, U.A.R.-American relations had improved considerably from the difficult 1955-58 period. That phase included the withdrawal of the United States offer to help finance the Aswan project, the American refusal to help bombing victims in Port Said (despite Washington's stand against Anglo-French and Israeli aggression), the Marine landings in Lebanon, and the Eisenhower Doctrine which Nasser believed was meant to deter him as much as communism. The United States did most of the adjusting. Washington abandoned desires to secure military allies within the Arab world and developed a self-restraint about judging Middle Eastern events in cold war terms. Since 1954 the United States has provided the U.A.R. with over one and one-half billion dollars of unqualified aid, chiefly in food. Without publicity Nasser came to prefer American to Russian help, but this attitude does not overshadow his gratitude for Moscow's military support and Aswan aid.

It is speculative to evaluate the serious decline in relations between the United States and the U.A.R. that began, according to one's viewpoint, either with the Stanleyville air-lift operation or the destruction of the Kennedy Library in Cairo. The subsequent downing of the oil company plane, a callous or inefficient act, compounded problems. Then at Port Said in his "sea water" speech, Nasser revealed his anger over Washington's deliberate delay in considering his request for an additional \$35

million worth of surplus foods, a delay that will cost the U.A.R. heavily in shipping charges effective with the new year by act of Congress for all recipients of surplus food. Certainly that legislative body now asks some hard questions of the Johnson Administration about its diplomacy in the area. Yet it would be a mistake to try to punish Nasser or bargain with him. His anger is an indicator of weakness and frustration that are independent of his personality and widespread in the Arab world. These problems stem from cultural difficulties that only time and patience, and compassion, are likely to resolve.

Over-all the U.A.R. secures revenues, loans and knowledge but little liking from the West, pressing strategic and ideological advantages within a definition of limits that both sides apparently recognize. The neutralist camp as a whole or individual nations might not obtain the benefits that Nasser's Egypt is able to get from the West. Yet his vantage point and his skills are part of his credentials as its potential leader.

The main risk Nasser and most neutralists run in their dealings with the West but also with the Com-

munist states is a decline in the *peaceful* competition of the great powers in the emerging regions. The decline might come in one of two ways. The major blocs might adjust downward their interests and concerns, refusing to participate in play-offs and disengage themselves from the uncommitted zones. On the other hand the big powers might turn to concerted military or revolutionary action in these areas, forcing the weaker neutrals to join one of the main camps. In either case the external reasons for having a preeminent neutralist leader would deteriorate. For the nonaligned community would tend to disintegrate because the chief actors no longer cared, or it would break up through their intervention. To avoid this watershed that leads in two undesirable directions, Gamel Abdel Nasser must call upon skills that are not part of Nehru's overly intellectual bequest to the in-between states. He must also have a vision of a plural, interdependent world at peace that the Indian leader did not have. President Nasser probably has the requisite skills. Does he have the vision? If he is to speak for the uncommitted world his greatest challenge is within himself.

other voices

SHOULD THE CHURCHES SPEAK ON INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS?

The following view of the churches' role in foreign policy was written by Kenneth Johnstone, the chairman of the Christian Frontier Council in whose publication, Frontier (September 1964), the article appeared. The Council, with offices in London, describes itself as "a fellowship of thirty to forty laymen and women who . . . have met regularly for twenty years to explore with each other the practical implications of their faith. They include members of all denominations."

The question may seem a pointless one, but the point about it is that it is asked, and not only in a hostile or negative sense. And to ask such a question administers a salutary jolt to those who, like the writer, are professionally concerned with the churches' international relations.

When the question is sincerely asked (often by Christians), there are generally two main thoughts behind it. One is that, although we may all agree that there should not be one morality for Sundays (or at least Sunday mornings) and another for week-

days, nevertheless there is a distinction to be drawn between the sacred and the profane: the Church should exert her influence in such spheres as politics through the individual action of Christians engaged in politics, and, at most, if she feels obliged to utter on political matters, should do so only on the highest moral level and should confine herself to the enunciation of principles.

The other thought behind the question is concerned with the Church's good name. It is felt that the Church, as such, has no particular expert knowledge or authority in the complicated field of politics: her judgments are bound to be amateur and are liable to be shown up by the professionals. This being so, it is more dignified not to utter at all. This argument is in part a reflection of the rule of experts under which we live. Sometimes, too, it is used by statesmen in pique when some utterance of the churches happens not to be in line with their policy at the time. On these occasions, and especially at election time, one may point out in reply that to confine judgments on international affairs to the ex-