

## *Chapter nine*

**AFTER THE WAR, Egypt became a member of the Arab League, and also of the United Nations Organization. This double promotion in international affairs was important for Egypt's future.**

**Her political horizon now covered the entire Arab world, from the Persian Gulf to the Atlantic coast, and from the Indian Ocean to the plateaus of central Asia. But intelligent Egyptians realized that our country was at a standstill. We had neither the political power nor the physical means to play an active role in international affairs. Only a revolution would enable Egypt to assume its place as leader of the Arab world.**

**The Arab League was formed, on Egypt's initiative, on March 22nd, 1945. Its object was not only to foster closer cultural, political and economic ties between member states, but also to free those Arab states which were still under foreign domination. At first, suspicion was aroused by the fact that the League had been**

supported by the British, and had been formed on the initiative of Nahas Pasha and Nouri Es Said, the Prime Minister of Iraq—both of whom had been put in power by Churchill tanks at almost the same moment, and in identical circumstances. Patriots saw the new League as a Wafd-Hachemite combine, engineered by the British Foreign Office.

Nahas Pasha conceived the League as a politicians' club—an association of nationalist parties whose aim was to achieve Arab unity and independence by fomenting agitation.

After Nahas' fall from power, Farouk tried to turn it into a kind of Holy Alliance, in the hope of steadying his tottering throne. In March, 1946, he invited the Arab sovereigns and heads of state to the Inchass Conference, while the political leaders met at Cairo. There was now no question of unity. Farouk was merely concerned with preserving the status quo.

**When Nahas had failed to make the Arab League a Wafd party platform, and Farouk had failed to make it an instrument for reactionary despotism, it ceased to serve any specific purpose, and gradually became a tribune from which the voice of the Arabs made itself heard in the outside world.**

**Far from being the vehicle for British interests dreamed of by Anthony Eden when he supported it in the House of Commons early in 1943, the League became an organization devoted to the struggle against imperialism in the Middle East. Despite the intrigues, personal ambitions and rivalries, a compact and vigorous institution was built up which the world would have to contend with in international affairs.**

**From May, 1945, until July, 1952, Egypt lived under a regime of terror, in which freedom of the press, speech and public assembly were rigidly curtailed. This pre-revolutionary period was one of the most unhappy in Egypt's history. We were isolated in international**

**affairs, unpopular abroad, and torn by anarchy at home. A terrible epidemic of cholera swept the country.**

**Two equally dangerous forces arose to take advantage of Egypt's weakness at this time: Communism, and the Muslim Brotherhood, During the war, and in the years immediately following, a wave of revolution broke on the world, sometimes under the banner of Nationalism, sometimes under the banner of Communism, but always aiming at greater social justice.**

**It is in countries where social unrest and resentment may be exploited that Communism gains a hold. The Middle East; as long as it remained under the imperialist yoke, took the line of least resistance to Communism. In Egypt, at this time, we were witnessing the birth of a new fanaticism—Communism—and the revival of the old fanaticism of the Muslim Brotherhood.**

**At first taking parallel courses, the two creeds finally converged and united.**

The passive role played by the Egyptians during the war had left untapped a source of militant energy and enthusiasm. The only nationalist party—the Wafd— had no attraction for the younger generation, being, at bottom, reactionary. The Brotherhood, therefore, absorbed these dynamic and explosive forces.

The Muslim Brotherhood made many overtures of alliance to the Army at this time. Our feeling was that the Brotherhood was a powerful group, and the only one with which we could safely cooperate in the difficult years which lay ahead. It was vital that we should strengthen our position by such alliances. Gamal agreed that cooperation would be valuable, but refused to countenance any merger with the Brotherhood, for this would inevitably result in our being swallowed up by it.

I myself believed that great things would come of our combined efforts, but our mentor, General Aziz EL Masri, was more cautious.

**"Join the Muslim Brotherhood if you like," he told us. "But beware—they are a sect of fanatics." He understood the nihilism which lay hidden beneath the mystic ideas of the Brotherhood, and which was to break out in the form of terrorism and violence.**

**It is now no secret that many of our officers sympathized with the Brotherhood. The link between the two groups was now Abdul Moneim Abdul Raouf, who had replaced me. Candidates for the Brotherhood, after passing certain preliminary tests, were sent to major Mahmoud Labib, who was responsible for their initiation.**

**The initiation ceremony was designed to create a powerful atmosphere of mystery.**

**The candidate was ordered to proceed, by night, to the Saliba district. On arrival, he was guided through a maze of dark, narrow streets to a house where he was received by the officiating members, and taken to a dimly lit room on the first floor. One of the officiates, almost invisible in the dark shadows, then invited him to**

sit at a table upon which were placed a Koran and a revolver. Placing one hand on the Koran, the other on the revolver, the candidate had to repeat, word for word, the oath of loyalty, obedience and secrecy. The oath bound him as a member of the Brotherhood, and he was henceforward an instrument in the hands of his superior. When this ceremony was over, the officiants left him alone in the room for a few moments, to meditate. Then, fully initiated, he was guided out of the district.

The cooperation between our organization and the Brotherhood was at best a makeshift affair; soon there were frequent clashes and misunderstandings. The Brotherhood made mistakes in handling some of our officers. No distinction was made between soldiers and civilians, so that, during training, Army officers might find themselves being given a course of instruction in the use of the rifle by a civilian. This state of affairs was not much to the liking of our officers, for the soldier instinctively dislikes receiving orders from anyone but his own superiors.

Moreover, they found that the Brotherhood had no consistent or intelligent plan of campaign. Even the highest officials seemed to be ignorant of its real aims. Sometimes the officers asked: "What do you expect of us?" "Your complete faith in the Supreme Guide, and your readiness to do what he asks, when he asks it," was the reply. There was a vague notion that 'something was going to be done,' and that was all.

Thus the union between the Army and the Muslim Brotherhood was far from ideal, but as the Brotherhood had not yet thrown aside the mask and set out on its career of terrorism and murder, to have broken with it at this crucial moment in our preparations would have been a grave tactical error.

In August, 1945, the Prime Minister, Nokrachy Pasha, announced his intention of negotiating a treaty with England which would result in the withdrawal of foreign troops, and the incorporation of Sudan with Egypt. In November, the King announced that negotiations had already begun.



The tone of the official announcements could not hide the fact that public opinion, inflamed by the newly liberated press and the eloquence of the Muslim Brotherhood, was growing extremely impatient. It was obvious that unrest would sweep through the whole country unless Nokrachy Pasha could obtain concessions from the British which would satisfy the nationalist mood of the people. But the British, with incredible lack of foresight, showed no sign of making any conciliatory gesture. The British troops in Cairo seemed to have taken root there, while all the best houses had been requisitioned for the Middle East Headquarters, which seemed very disinclined to clear out. Public opinion was roused, and there were riots, bloodshed and attacks on British soldiers.

In December, 1945, the Nokrachy government returned to the attack, addressing an official note to London which demanded the revision and readjustment of relations between the two countries. It warned the British Foreign Office that the continued presence of

**imperialist troops would be regarded by every Egyptian as an insult to their national pride.**

**It was useless. The Foreign Office answered evasively, in order to gain time.**

**These delaying tactics angered the people, and once again rioting and violence broke out. Three ministers were dismissed from office and the government itself eventually fell.**

**There were only two alternatives left to the King in this crisis: to recall the Wafd, or to entrust the government to an independent of sufficient character to face up to the situation. Farouk chose Ismail Sedky, an independent. It was the least offensive choice.**

**The new government, composed of liberals and independents, received the support of Parliament, but its political complexion was not of the type to appease the growing discontent of the people. On March 7th, 1946, three weeks after it came to power, the government announced that negotiations had been opened with the British Foreign Office. The people were not satisfied,**

and rose in revolt. There were riots and barricades in the streets, and, as always, there were deaths. A pitched battle took place on the Gizeh Bridge, where twenty students were mowed down by machine guns.

These waves of violence had a salutary effect on the British. The Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, decided to withdraw all troops from Cairo and Alexandria. The Ambassador to Egypt, Lord Killearn—now hated by all Egyptians—was recalled to London. On July 4th, 1946, the Citadel of Cairo was handed over to the Egyptian Army. On July 30th, it was announced that the middle East Headquarters would be withdrawn from Cairo to the Canal Zone before the end of the year, and that all troops stationed in Egypt would be transferred to the Canal Zone before May 1st, 1947.

We should have followed up our advantage immediately. Instead, Ismail Sedky preferred to embark on the usual interminable discussions with Britain, and to conclude a pact with the Muslim brotherhood, so as to avoid having to tackle the problem of terrorism. Our

**organization considered that the Brotherhood had betrayed the revolutionary ideal by this pact, and we broke off with them temporarily.**

**In the meantime, Britain was still pulling strings and playing for time. Ismail Sedky left for London, where he met the Foreign minister, Mr. Bevin. He brought back with him the draft of a treaty, which was "torpedoed" on December 7th by an unfortunate statement by the governor-General of the Sudan. On the following day, Sedky fell from power.**

**He was succeeded by Nokrachy Pasha. On January 27th, 1947, the new Prime Minister broke off negotiations with London. In July, he sent a strong memorandum to the United Nations Security Council, demanding the immediate and total withdrawal of British troops from Egypt, and the termination of colonial rule in the Sudan. At Lake Success, Nokrachy himself brilliantly defended the Egyptian claims. Egypt's position was very strong, both from the moral and the legal standpoint.**

**It was at this solemn moment that Nahas Pasha chose to send the Security Council his celebrated telegram, in which he claimed that Nokrachy did not represent Egypt, and that the Wafd did not consider itself bound by any decision which the Council might take. This ill-timed intervention is probably without precedent in the history of diplomacy. The whole of Egypt was stunned. This incident proves—if such proof were needed—how principle was always subordinated to personal ambition and party faction in the old regime.**

**By February, 1947, the situation had become very threatening. On February 24th, the British Ambassador in Washington informed the State Department that his government had decided to withdraw all British troops from Greece and Turkey. Imperialism was tottering on the edge of an abyss. The withdrawal of British troops from the Eastern Mediterranean, coinciding as it did with the climax of the Palestine crisis and the rioting in Egypt, left the Middle East dangerously open to a Russian advance. The Middle East became the weak link in the international strategy of the Western powers.**

In taking a step so humiliating to her self-esteem, England was trying desperately to concentrate her forces on the military base of the Suez Canal. She was not to keep it for long.

While these events were taking place on the political stage, we, the revolutionaries, were gathering in the wings.

Our Society now numbered more than one thousand officers. Destiny thrust a few of them into the limelight, others remained in the background. Some became members of the Revolutionary Council, the others carried out their more obscure tasks with ardor and loyalty. Our solidarity was such that not a single member of the organization proved a traitor or a defeatist between now and the *coup; d'etat* of July, 1952.

We met regularly to take stock of the changing situation, for one of our principles was that we should adapt ourselves to circumstances, and not be bound by pre-

conceived ideas. The meetings were generally held in the home of one or other of our members. Always present were Abdul Hakim Amer, Abdul Meguid Fouad, Talaat Khairi, Abdul Moneim Abdul Raouf, and many others.

It goes without saying that we did not manage to enlist every officer in the Army. There were certain vacillating elements who could neither help nor hinder us. The militant groups, such as the one formed by Moustapha Sedky, were too vague in purpose to be of use to us. And there were, of course, the opportunists, who were more concerned with their own careers than with the revolution.

Our immediate aim was to organize opposition to the government. Our ultimate goal was the overthrow of the monarchy and the setting up of a democratic republic. The success of these two plans presupposed the complete cooperation of the Army: we had to be certain that the officer corps was politically awakened.

**Our Executive Committee therefore decided to abandon secrecy, and to turn to open propaganda. The movement was now too strong to be kept within the limits of a secret organization. Clandestine at the beginning, the movement now came out into the open, only to go underground again for the final preparations.**

**Members were encouraged to infiltrate every branch of the Army to find new recruits. We organized lectures and public debates for the discussion of current problems. These meetings attracted a large number of young people anxious to learn and to make their own ideas known. Previously, the Army officer's life had been a daily routine of mathematics, military history, ballistics, theory of strategy, field exercises. The study of social reform gave their lives new meaning.**

**We broke with the Muslim Brotherhood, for it had denied its own ideals by compacting with a government which oppressed the people. Finally, we sent a representative to the King's chief adviser, Ahmed Hassanein, informing**



him of the Army's grave disquiet at the deplorable mismanagement of the affairs of the State.

**The Revolution gave its enemies every chance!**

The senior ranks of the Army, who still adhered blindly to the King, were disturbed by the unrest among the junior officers. The government thought we could be bought off by filling our pockets, and there was an unexpected wave of promotion. This went on right up to July 25th, 1952 two days after the *coup d'etat*—when Farouk bestowed the Field Marshal's baton upon General Neguib. The King's motive was too obvious, and the baton was refused. It was always said that the last King of Egypt would remain unscrupulous to the bitter end.