

# **Afraid of Commitment:**

## **Gamal Abdel Nasser's Ephemeral Political Ideology – a New Definition of Nasserism**

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## Abstract

Gamal Abdel Nasser played an integral role in Middle East politics in the 1950s and 1960s. He led a military coup against the incumbent King, and then successfully converted his political capital into a national revolution. The transition of power occurred without major complications because of the socio-political conditions in Egypt at the time and because of Nasser's particular style of rule. Without a steady, autocratic leader, Egypt likely would have fallen under the direction of a foreign power. Nasser used decisive action to stabilize Egypt's internal politics and prevent foreign agents from agitating Egypt's domestic stability. From this stability, he projected power at the regional level and remained independent from the major foreign powers that attempted to control Egypt. Egypt's geopolitical importance guaranteed its relevance in international politics. Foreign powers competed for the chance to control Egypt – a nation ideally situated to project power throughout the Middle East and North Africa. However, each contending superpower grew frustrated with Nasser because his rule relied on personal judgment, making Egypt's policies unpredictable and inconsistent. Nasser realized the value of his freedom to act and utilized this ability to retain Egyptian sovereignty. Scholars attempted to define Nasser's political ideology, but his policies were so ephemeral that they needed to create a new ideology – Nasserism – just to describe the man's political tendencies. I argue that Nasser was not ideological in the 20<sup>th</sup> century sense of the word, but that he harbored specific core concepts that framed his decisions. These concepts allowed him to select the best course of action without being hindered by ideological constraints. His political history – including his actions in times of crisis, his use of charismatic authority, his manipulation of nationalist sentiments, and his construction of a new Egyptian cultural identity – illustrates his flexibility and willingness to change tracks as long as his core concepts remained intact.

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**Introduction-**

**“We have to go along a road covered with blood. We have no other alternative. For us it is a matter of life or death, a matter of living or existing. We have to be ready to face the challenges that await us.” - Nasser**

“There is no longer a way out of our present situation except by forging a road toward our objective, violently and by force, over a sea of blood and under a horizon blazing with fire.”<sup>1</sup> In 1952, Gamal Abdel Nasser and the Free Officers Corps incited revolution in Egypt. Nasser oversaw the transfer of power to his Revolutionary Command Council and became President of Egypt in 1953. During his time in office, Nasser instituted substantial economic, social, and political reforms. He transformed Egypt from a strategically important area to an independent nation with its own domestic and foreign policy. Nasser changed Egypt’s national and cultural identities so that they fit with his new image of Egyptian-ness, ensuring his own personal status and asserting Egyptian power at both the regional and international levels.

His method of rule provoked extremely polarized reactions throughout his time as President. His authoritarian style and independent personality tempted many scholars to characterize Nasser’s political activities. However, his actions did not clearly fit into any single ideological strain. Their inability to classify Nasser’s behavior with a traditional label led these scholars to define his approach as *Nasserism*.<sup>2</sup> These academics and journalists analyzed Nasser’s behavior from their own perspectives and have yet to produce a uniform definition of Nasser’s political ideology. This thesis constructs a new definition of Nasserism to clarify the motivations behind Nasser’s most important decisions and examine Nasser’s ability to successfully rule via personal, charismatic authority.

It is important to first lay out the extent to which Nasser’s politics were driven by his personality. A deeper examination of the man and his policies is needed to understand the

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<sup>1</sup> A Biography of Nasser,  
<http://www.nationalcoldwarexhibition.org/explore/biography.cfm?name=Nasser,%20Gamal>

<sup>2</sup> A term used to describe the political policies and tendencies of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser

meaning behind his actions. Nasser approached each political situation in a different way. His flexibility on political issues stemmed from his personal reactions and experiences. Showcasing his “inconsistent” policy, Nasser relied on the U.S. State Department to prohibit British retaliation after the July 1952 revolution.<sup>3</sup> Four years later, Nasser refused to rely upon American funding and oversight for his Aswan Dam project.<sup>4</sup> Despite having the same contacts within the U.S. State Department, Nasser reacted to potential international aid differently. His personality – which included his unwillingness to allow international influence on domestic issues – created a policy that was dependent on his personal feelings, feelings that rejected any consideration of submitting to foreign rule.

Nasser was confrontational, autocratic, and stubborn. He insisted “People do not want words – they want the sound of battle – the battle of destiny.”<sup>5</sup> This quote demonstrates the martial mindset with which Nasser approached many problems. He believed in absolute decisions, to be achieved regardless of the cost, because of his military background. He witnessed the effectiveness of directed action in the July revolution and would continue to utilize it throughout his career.

Nasser’s military experience promoted his reliance on instinct and personal feelings. As a junior officer, Nasser directed troops on the front lines. A competent officer learns to make quick, accurate decisions from minimal information under great duress. It was this characteristic that prevented him from cowing to international pressure in times of crises and allowed him to emerge from such crises successfully. He was trained to respond swiftly during such times, and

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<sup>3</sup> Hugh Thomas, *The Suez Affair* (Great Britain: C. Tinling & Co. Ltd., 1967) 22.

<sup>4</sup> David Lesch, “Abd al-Nasser and the United States: Enemy or Friend?” in *Rethinking Nasserism: Revolution and Historical Memory in Modern Egypt*. Ed. Elie Podeh and Onn Winckler (Gainesville, FL: Gainesville University Press, 2004), 212.

<sup>5</sup> A Biography of Nasser,

<http://www.nationalcoldwarexhibition.org/explore/biography.cfm?name=Nasser,%20Gamal>

he designed a political system that would ensure his ability to make critical decisions unhindered.

Nasser's political system depended on his personality for the nation to run efficiently. However, his style of rule made Egyptian politics inconsistent and unreliable. Foreign nations grew weary of dealing with Nasser because of his propensity to act independently. The World Bank refused to fund the Aswan Dam project because of his regime's record of censorship and oppression, a record trumpeted by British emissaries during the deliberation process.<sup>6</sup> The United States initially supported Nasser's revolution but then changed course after they grew concerned about his "socialist" tendencies.<sup>7</sup> The Soviet Union courted Nasser for several years before it funded the Aswan Dam project. However, the USSR became frustrated with Egypt's spontaneous reforms, projects, and new programs that countered the Soviet vision for the nation's future.<sup>8</sup> International support for Nasser's regime dwindled as the international community realized that Egypt was not a predictable ally.

Despite this opposition, Egypt became a dominant player in Middle East politics. International pressure did not affect Nasser's national political standing because his approval rating was above 80 percent for the duration of his career.<sup>9</sup> Nasser's popularity was a key asset in his political strategy because it enabled him to act without bureaucratic or legislative restrictions. His political security in Egypt was directly related to his nationalist policies and his

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas, 23.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas, 24.

<sup>8</sup> Rami Ganat, "Nasser and the Soviets: A Reassessment" in *Rethinking Nasserism: Revolution and Historical Memory in Modern Egypt*. Ed. Elie Podeh and Onn Winckler (Gainesville, FL: Gainesville University Press, 2004), 212.

<sup>9</sup> Jean Vigneau, "The Ideology of the Egyptian Revolution" in *The Middle East in Transition*. Ed. Walter Z. Laqueur (New York, NY: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968), 138.

refusal to submit to foreign alliances. Nasser understood the underlying source of his power and promoted policies that guaranteed popular support for his regime.

Examining Nasser's career based on his response to different geographic threats or political pressure produces a muddled picture at best. However, by viewing the core concepts that Nasser applied to many of his decisions, clarity emerges. Any definition of Nasserism should include Nasser's propensity for direct action, the dependence of the state on Nasser's personality, direct enlistment and mobilization of public support, and his unwillingness to allow outside nations to influence Egyptian domestic policy.

### **Nasserism: Past Definitions and their Inconsistencies**

Egypt's geopolitical importance and Nasser's critical role in regional politics is evidenced by the extent of literature attempting to define "al-Nasiriyya."<sup>10</sup> This literature does not produce a consensus definition for Nasserism. The theories generally reflect the displeasure of a particular scholar with Nasser's style of rule. Each theory is dependent upon the author's political and economic convictions.

Many western academics characterize Nasser as a Socialist. In the 1960's, the label "socialism" was used pejoratively to indicate a fundamental conflict between the nation in question and the United States. Nasser's economic conversion to a more socialist system – especially following the breakdown of the Aswan Dam negotiations – exacerbated these existing tensions.<sup>11</sup> The academic analysis that referred to Nasser's political and economic philosophy as

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<sup>10</sup> Arab term for "Nasserism."

<sup>11</sup> *Nasser: A Political Biography* by Robert Stephens, *Arab Socialism: A documentary Survey* by Sami Hanna and George Gardner, and *Nasserist Ideology* by Nissim Rejwan all stressed that the conversion of Egyptian Society into a socialist state was the main purpose of the new regime.

“Arab Socialism” gained traction during this period. This theory was fueled by anti-socialist sentiments in America.

The tensions of the 1950s and 1960s between the United States and the USSR resulted in the belief that any nation not in direct alliance with the U.S. was, by default, allied with the Soviet Union. The anti-communist fervor in the United States shaped the political beliefs of American scholars towards an absolutist view of socio-economic policies. The Cold War included a negative factor that precluded an impartial judgment of Nasser’s political ideology by liberal western scholars.

Soviet and Marxist scholars also criticized Nasser’s political activity. However, these academics contradicted their liberal counterparts, asserting that Nasser inhibited the masses from realizing their full potential.<sup>12</sup> The Marxists contended that the social stratification caused by the military’s rise to prominence represented a class struggle between the landowning elite and the new middle class. These scholars believed that Nasser obstructed the inevitable process of a proletariat revolution by creating the new military elite power group.<sup>13</sup>

The capitalists condemned Nasser’s socialist tendencies while the Marxists criticized his role in preventing the achievement of social equality. Nasser served as a negative foil for each ideology. Each side described Nasser’s behavior as counter to their traditional political and social values. In asserting their opposition to Nasser’s regime, Soviets and Americans failed to realize that the new Egyptian government represented unique interests and that Egypt was not allied with, nor beholden to, the Americans or the Soviets.

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<sup>12</sup> *A Class Conflict in the Middle East* by Reshma Hussam and *Egypt’s Military Society: The Army Regime, the Left, and Social Change* by Anwar ‘Abd al-Malik stated that the military-led revolution retarded the natural process of proletariat awakening and revolution.

<sup>13</sup> Raymond A. Hinnebusch Jr., *Egyptian Politics under Sadat: The Post-Populist Development of an Authoritarian-Modernizing State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 3.

Both sides failed to grasp that Nasser was not committed to a specific economic or political system. He maintained his flexibility to take advantage of opportunities and boost popular support. His economic policy was geared not towards maximizing capital gains, but instead towards gaining usable political capital. The tactic of manipulating economic policy for personal political benefit can be added to Nasserism's core concepts.

A different interpretation views Nasserism as a modernization movement.<sup>14</sup> This theory argues that Nasser's pan-Arab and socialist references were tools that he used to catalyze Egyptian modernization. It proposes that Nasser's political decisions were merely a means to boost economic production and overall agricultural output. His social reforms and economic plans were therefore an extension of Mohammed Ali's modernization effort that began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This theory implies that Nasser's charisma and political policies focused on guiding Egypt into the modern world, socially, politically and economically.

Nasser did use modernization reforms to encourage Egyptian growth. For example, he supported women's right to vote and receive an education.<sup>15</sup> However, Nasser became notorious for his strict media censorship program and regulation of Egyptian political parties. He supported modernization that he could control through state authority, but did not allow reform and progress to occur outside of the state's purview. Thus, his support of new programs and progressive reforms that he could control should be added to the group of Nasserism's core concepts.

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<sup>14</sup> *Egypt's Uncertain Revolution under Nasser and Sadat* by Raymond Baker, *Modernization in the Middle East: The Ottoman Empire and its Afro-Asian Successors* by Cyril E. Black and Carl Brown, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* by Daniel Lerner and David Reisman, *Modernization of the Arab World* by Jack Thompson and Richard Reichshauer, and *The Contemporary Middle East: Tradition and Innovation* by Benjamin And Joseph S. Szyliowicz (Editors) Rivlin described Nasser's political ideology as being focused around economic and social modernization.

<sup>15</sup> Onn Winckler and Gad G. Gilbar, "Nasser's Family Planning Policy in Perspective," in *Rethinking Nasserism: Revolution and Historical Memory in Modern Egypt*. Ed. Elie Podeh and Onn Winckler (Gainesville, FL: Gainesville University Press, 2004), 284.

Another school of thought proposes that Nasser manipulated native anti-colonial feelings into a protest movement. This theory was most commonly asserted by Israeli diplomats and historians, but was also suggested by native Egyptians who opposed Nasser's policies.<sup>16</sup> These theorists believed that Nasser used the popular image of protest to gain political momentum and propel his regime to power.

A main asset of Nasser's ideology, according to the theory that he headed a protest movement, was the ability of the movement to strike at the national trauma caused by Egypt's period of subjugation to foreign powers. Egypt would protest foreign intervention in regional affairs by condemning the creation of Israel. After the breakdown of UN security talks in 1968, Nasser proclaimed "Our basis (of action) is clear and definite: no negotiations with Israel, no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, and no deals at the expense of Palestinian soil or the Palestinian people... We will not in any way agree to give away one inch of Arab territory in any Arab country."<sup>17</sup> Israeli and Egyptian academics had difficulty assessing Nasser's political ideology because they concentrated on his anti-Israeli rhetoric more than his actual politics.

These academics' focus on Nasser's anti-Israeli rhetoric provides another core concept for Nasserism: the mobilization of the Egyptian audience by presenting a foreign threat to national sovereignty. Nasser spoke often about Israel and the threat that its existence posed to all Arab states. His rhetoric did not become actual policy until Egypt blockaded the Gulf of Aqaba in 1967. Before the conflict, Nasser would trumpet the injustice of foreign intervention in the Middle East. He also criticized the United States for its role in destabilizing the region. Nasser

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<sup>16</sup> "The Decline of Nasserist Messianism" by Elie Podeh, "Nasserism: The Protest Movement in the Middle East" by Leonard Binder and "A Socio-Cultural Paradigm of Pan-Arab Leadership: The Case of Nasser" by Fuad I. Khuri claimed that Nasser institutionalized the protest movement as a way to oppose the existing political, economic, and social structures.

<sup>17</sup> Gamel Nasser, "We Shall Triumph." Speech.

criticized US involvement in Arab affairs when he asserted “Giving arms to Israel while it is occupying Arab territory means that the United States supports Israel in the occupation of Arab territory.”<sup>18</sup> He unified Egypt and boosted popular support because by openly criticizing the United States and identifying them as a threat to Egyptian sovereignty.

Finally, a school of thought correlates “Nasserism” with populism – a political philosophy supporting the rights and power of the people in their struggle against the privileged elite.<sup>19</sup> Nasser designed most of his policies, in particular those made before his consolidation of power, to boost his national support. He planned out methods for uniting and mobilizing Egypt’s poor population into working political capital. Nasser then directed this group to stabilize his regime, eliminate political opposition and support “the revolution.” His early populist politics won Nasser the support of most Egyptians, empowering him to act according to his own volition.

Populist politics fits into this definition of Nasserism as a final core concept. Nasser manipulated the public into supporting him by enabling peasant land ownership, providing basic goods and services, and altering the Egyptian national identity. However, it is important to note that Nasser shaped the Egyptian cultural and political identity around his own personality. This meant that the Egyptian people would often look to Nasser for an example of how to react, contradicting the traditional populist ideology. His policies engendered such strong support from the masses that he established a permanent support base. From this foundation, Nasser derived the political legitimacy and autonomy to act that was imperative to his successful reign.

This thesis argues that Nasser based his personal political system on several fundamental tenets: the preservation of his autonomy to act, domestic sovereignty, economic flexibility,

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<sup>18</sup> Nasser, Triumph.

<sup>19</sup> Elie Podeh and Onn Winckler, “Introduction: Nasserism as a Form of Populism,” in *Rethinking Nasserism: Revolution and Historical Memory in Modern Egypt*. Ed. Elie Podeh and Onn Winckler (Gainesville, FL: Gainesville University Press, 2004), 284.

popular politics, charismatic authority, Egyptian nationalism and cultural unification. Nasser instilled these concepts into the different aspects of his political rule. They are particularly visible through an examination of his political decisions, his charismatic authority, his manipulation of the Egyptian national identity and his construction of a new Egyptian cultural identity.

The first section of this thesis demonstrates that Nasser acted without ideological restraints as leader of the revolution. It critically examines Nasser's ascent to power, his reactions to international and domestic challenges, and his political decisions in times of crises. The evidence begins by providing primary sources that portray Nasser's formation of the Free Officers Corps. The section also investigates Nasser's use of the United States to block British intervention during the July Revolution and his implementation of the Land Reform act. These examples illustrate the pragmatism and adaptability that Nasser employed throughout his political career. This section establishes that Nasser did not abide by the convictions of a single ideology, but rather maximized the end result of each situation by choosing the best available course of action.

Section I uses primary sources to analyze Nasser's policies and actions. It does not attempt to characterize his behavior within the greater context of a particular ideology. These primary sources reveal the isolated purpose of each circumstance, absent of any forced linkage with other situations, and allow for a better comparison of Nasser's activities. English and Arab language sources are utilized to illustrate Nasser's political approach, and how his rhetoric did not always mirror his politics.

While the English sources provide context, the Arab sources present more valuable content for analysis. These Arab language sources evidence the emotion of Nasser's speeches

and highlight the connection between *al-Ra'is*<sup>20</sup> and his audience. Sources include video footage of Nasser's speeches, articles and interviews that appeared in al-Ahram newspaper, the Egyptian national charter, the Free Officers Corps statement of purpose, Nasser's personal writings, economic planning surveys, and the memoirs of press magnate Mohammed Haikal. These sources confirm that Nasser avoided adhering to a specific ideology because it could have reduced his ability to act in times of crisis.

The downside of ideological convictions is that they often dictate a predictable, inefficient course of action. This results in part because ideologies exist independent of each specific situation. For most of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, agreements between Egypt's monarchy and the British government dictated Egyptian policy. In contrast Nasser implemented a pragmatic regime that refused to submit to restrictive alliances in order to preserve political flexibility.

The second section examines Nasser's charisma and the role that it played in his political achievements. Max Weber, the accepted authority on charisma, writes "The term 'charisma' will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities."<sup>21</sup> Nasser charismatically integrated his personal character into the Egyptian identity, molding existing nationalistic sentiments for the benefit of his personal regime. This section illustrates the importance of Nasser's personality to his political success.

Nasser did not rely on a specific ideology to bind together the nation. He instead utilized several different strategies to consolidate power under the RCC and manipulate Egypt's national

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<sup>20</sup> A term of endearment given to Nasser by the Egyptian People. In English, "the president" or "the chief."

<sup>21</sup> Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. Ed. Talcot Parsons (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1947), 359.

identity. The powerful charismatic effect of Nasser's dialogue appears in many different primary and secondary accounts of his public speeches. His charisma played an integral role in his creation of the Free Officers Corps, his retention of power, and his successful promotion of a revamped Egyptian national identity.

Secondary sources, such as Weber's *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, outline the qualities of a charismatic figure and help define the sociological reasons behind the effect of Nasser's charisma. Personal accounts of Nasser's public appearances establish the profound impact that Nasser affected on his audience. Secondary source descriptions of these speeches verify the primary reports.

The third section investigates Nasser's manipulation of nationalism for the achievement of his political ambitions. Nasser reformed nationalism and national unity around the revolution to establish the RCC's permanent status as the political party of Egypt. Nasser's successful maintenance of power, Egypt's internal stability and the popularity of his regime were directly linked to the unification of different strata in Egyptian society. He bonded Egyptians together by focusing their attention on external threats to domestic security and condemning the corruption of former administrations. The common goal of his tactics was to promote Egyptian nationalism to stabilize the nation under his rule.

This section highlights Nasser's adaptability. He did not rely on a single strategy to bond post-revolution Egypt together. Nasser implemented several different strategies to collectivize and unify the new nation. A study of his policies and behavior illustrates the variety of strategies that Nasser used to achieve personal power and maintain national autonomy.

The final section of this thesis examines Nasser's manipulation of cultural policies for his personal political gain. Section four shows that Nasser's influence on Egypt's national identity

continued into the construction of a new cultural identity. Nasser supported the creation of a new Egyptian cultural identity to help remove pre-revolutionary influences from society and to instill himself as the leader of Egypt's Cultural Revolution. The new cultural policies increased Nasser's personal legitimacy while unifying Egypt, which ensured domestic stability and deterred foreign interference. He used the prestige from his patronage of Egyptian cultural icons to bolster his political career, establish the RCC, and prevent future external threats through the manipulation of Egyptian culture.

This section scrutinizes Nasser's cultural policies and investigates his motivations for engineering the unification of Egyptian society through cultural reform. As Nasser developed this collective cultural identity, he continued to attack challenges with practical solutions. For example, he recognized the growing importance of radio broadcasts in Egypt – almost every rural village and most urban households owned a radio by 1956 – and used this advance in technology as a medium for the promotion of the new Egyptian popular culture.<sup>22</sup> Rather than opposing the spread of certain technologies, or the growth of a spontaneous modern popular culture, Nasser harvested them to build a national culture based around his personal rule.

His calculated influence over Egyptian popular culture ensured his political security as the President of Egypt. Nasser continued to blunt his adversaries' influence with his manufactured cultural policies even after having secured his base of power. He viewed the shared collective culture as a guarantor of political stability. Nasser's belief in the power of common culture is apparent in several different types of sources and actions: the songs of Abdel Halim Hafez and Umm Kulthum, his creation of the New Cultural Council, the growing Egyptian film industry, his control of the media, and his patronage of prominent musical artists.

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<sup>22</sup> Joel Gordon, "The Nightingale and the Ra'is," in Elieh Podieh and Onn Winckler ed., *Rethinking Nasserism* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), 307.

His cultural policies illustrate the importance Nasser placed in unifying the nation through a common culture and also shows how he fused the new culture to his personal regime.

It is clear that Nasser approached the challenges facing his regime pragmatically. He successfully presented contextual solutions to each obstacle, often boosting his own popularity in the process. Nasser's charisma further solidified his political standing amongst Egyptians, while his policies delegitimized his political opponents and foiled future threats to his autonomy. It allowed him to create positive outcomes from negative situations. His cultural reforms created a new Egyptian culture and promoted the development of a common national identity. His pragmatic approach to cultural unity and charismatic public appearances permitted Nasser to retain a high rate of national approval without sacrificing his autonomy to act.

Many scholars attempt to cast Nasser in a particular political role. They analyze his actions and policies to fit his political decisions into a previously defined ideology. In my definition of Nasserism, I argue that Nasser did not employ specific ideologies. Rather, he chose how to act based upon his core concepts and adapted different ideologies to fit with this image. His political decisions, cultural programs, nationalist rhetoric and charismatic public appearances were all designed to guarantee the success of Egypt's revolution through Nasser's personal ability to act.

While he employed different aspects of populism, democracy, socialism, and other ideologies, he never actually committed himself or Egypt to a single course. He maintained his core concepts without allowing ideological inhibitions to block any potential openings. In this way, he managed to ensure his own personal power and take advantage of political opportunities that would have otherwise not been available. Nasser's flexible politics and charismatic

personality assured that he would remain at the forefront of a secure government during a period of dynamic change in Egypt.

**Historical Background-**

**“What was taken by force, can only be restored by force” - Nasser**

**A Prelude to the Revolution**

Nasser emphasized past events to legitimize his political actions. He frequently used history, or lessons derived from his study of the past, to justify his decisions. On the first page of Nasser's *Philosophy of the Revolution*, he writes "The stories of national struggles have no gaps that can be filled with nonsense. Neither have they the surprises that spring into existence without preludes."<sup>23</sup> His political strategies often originated in past resistance movements. He studied the past behavior of Egypt's military officials and its population to figure out which policies succeeded and which failed. Thus, it is important to understand the history of Egyptian resistance prior to the July 2<sup>nd</sup> revolution because Nasser conscientiously crafted his policies to play upon the significance of Egypt's past. An overview of the historical context also highlights the unique domestic circumstances that enabled Nasser's comprehensive transformation of Egyptian society and politics after King Farouk's ouster.

### **Egyptian Resistance**

Historically, Egyptians have participated in insurrectionist movements led by strong individuals. The first major uprising in modern Egyptian history occurred in 1881. Colonel Ahmad Orabi Pasha, who was originally interested in improving native officers' salaries and chances for promotion, recruited the Egyptian population to support his cause by proposing the institution of a popularly elected legislative assembly.

Orabi's motivations were ultimately revealed to be selfish – he agreed to end his movement in exchange for an appointment as Egypt's War Minister – but he was able to relate to common Egyptians. Desmond Stewart of the *Middle East Forum* writes that Orabi was "Of a remarkable intuitive intelligence, and a sincere, halting eloquence, his education has been of the

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<sup>23</sup> Gamel Nasser, *Philosophy of the Revolution* (Cairo: Dar el-Maaref, 1954), 25.

simplest.”<sup>24</sup> While Stewart romanticized Orabi’s contributions to Egyptian resistance in his article, he does point out that Orabi exercised his charismatic authority over many Egyptians. Similar to Nasser, Egyptians felt linked to Orabi because he was a native, lower-class Egyptian. Orabi did help to politically awaken some Egyptians despite his unscrupulous motives. It was this awakening that led to native political representation.

After World War I, the *Wafd* party began to assert itself as a powerful political organization. Wafdists claimed that they were a nationalist group working in the interest of all Egyptians. Prime Minister Saad Zaghloul established the *Wafd* party as a force in Egyptian politics by manipulating popular nationalist sentiment. His rhetoric mobilized the masses against British and Royal authority in order to gain political concessions.<sup>25</sup>

Zaghloul’s leadership led directly to the British Declaration of February 1922.<sup>26</sup> Overnight, he became Egypt’s most identifiable political figure because he opposed the British, refused to compromise and wrangled a significant concession from Whitehall.<sup>27</sup> The Wafdists’ sought two main objectives: independence for Egypt from foreign control and the establishment of their party’s authority. They intended to accomplish this by setting up representative institutions in place of an autocratic dynasty.<sup>28</sup> This promotion of democracy and anti-imperialism allowed the *Wafd* party to enlist mass public support against a common foreign enemy.

The superficial unity forged in reaction to colonial British authority masked the stark conflicts of interest between *Wafd* party leadership and the Egyptian people. Saad Zaghloul was

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<sup>24</sup> “The Revolution that failed,” *Middle East Forum*, XXXIII, No. 7, 12-16.

<sup>25</sup> PJ Vatikiotis, *The Egyptian Army in Politics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1961), 23.

<sup>26</sup> Vatikiotis, 24. The Declaration was an important symbolic achievement, but it resulted in little actual change because the British sent “advisors” to “help” the King rule Egypt.

<sup>27</sup> The location of the British Foreign Office in England

<sup>28</sup> Vatikiotis, 23.

able to maintain that unity, but after his death in 1927 the party fragmented and lost its potency. Zaghloul's personality enabled him to unify different sects within the *Wafd* party while also garnering the support of the masses. He became popular because of his staunch resistance to British authority. His popularity provided Zaghloul with political capital, which he used to expel "official" British authority from Egypt.

The success of these two individuals showed that the Egyptian people were ready and willing to participate in a movement against British Colonial authority. This receptivity catalyzed the revolution and constituted a useful political weapon for Nasser moving forward. However, after 1935, many people were also eager for reform because of their economic, political and social marginalization. The Anglo-Egyptian treaty<sup>29</sup>, signed in 1936, was regarded by many Egyptians to be the final step towards independence from British rule. Egypt's prospects seemed bright with an elected parliament, a new King, and Britain's exit on the horizon.

### **Socio-Political Conditions Prior to the Revolution**

However, the Anglo-Egyptian agreement specifically stated that the treaty was only valid during peacetime. During World War II the British presence in Egypt again grew substantially, negating any of the progress achieved under the treaty. At least 500,000 British soldiers were stationed in or shuttled through Egypt at some point.<sup>30</sup> The British military's presence nullified the Egyptian Parliament's earlier progress because it shifted power back to the monarchy and removed the main source of the elected officials' political clout – mass civil unrest. Egyptians

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<sup>29</sup> The treaty required the United Kingdom to remove all of its troops from Egypt except for the 10,000 needed to secure the Canal Zone.

<sup>30</sup> Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2004), 202.

felt politically frustrated because they could no longer affect Egypt's reform process and again were forced to submit to British rule.

In winter 1942 the ruling coalition resigned. British ambassador Sir Miles Lampson decided that a *Wafdist* government under the leadership of Mustafa al-Nahhas was more aligned with British interests. Known as the February 4<sup>th</sup> Incident, Lampson asked for an official audience with the King, travelled to the palace with a cavalcade of tanks and entrenched British troops in offensive positions inside the palace grounds. King Farouk was given two choices: he could either invite the *Wafd* to form a government or he could abdicate. The British forced Egypt's parliament and cabinet to resign, then placed their own candidate into power by force.

The new government attempted to rebuild its credibility by enacting social and labor-legislation, such as legal recognition to trade unions, but the willingness to abandon their political principles in exchange for increased political power exposed the *Wafd* party's true colors to the people of Egypt. The *Wafd* party was no longer a nationalistic party for the people; it had become inextricably linked with British Colonial authority. Its subsequent downfall created a vacuum in official national politics.

Because the Wafd party was unable to satisfy the needs of Egyptians, many turned to extremist religious groups for solutions. The postwar period of 1946 – 1952 was marked by three defining characteristics: increased terror operations against the central government by extremist political-religious groups, King Farouk's insistence on absolute control over the government, and the conclusion by most Egyptians that only a revolution would facilitate actual change.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Vatikiotis, 29.

The decline in official government power led to an increase in the influence exerted by informal radical groups, primarily the Muslim Brotherhood. By 1946 the *Ikhwan*<sup>32</sup> consisted of nearly 1 million members. These members represented every level and strata of Egyptian society. The *Ikhwan* established a well-armed, trained militia, and exercised power through this physical manifestation of force. More importantly, the Brotherhood was able to channel nationalist and religious sentiments into serious, meticulous, organized planning.<sup>33</sup> Despite the Brotherhood's growing influence in Egyptian politics, a large majority of Egypt's rural population remained outside of the *Ikhwan*'s sphere of influence. So did the army.

In 1947, with the eventual creation of a Jewish state in the Middle East seemingly inevitable, King Farouk met with other Arab leaders and agreed in principle to commit Egyptian troops to any anti-Zionist military action.<sup>34</sup> The King did not have official authority or support for this agreement; the Nuqrashi cabinet did not know that the King was meeting with other Arab leaders at the time. The same cabinet met with parliament in 1948, to consider military action in Palestine. They concluded that, based on the General Headquarters report about the operational, logistical, and general state of readiness of the Egyptian army, no large-scale military operations should even be considered at that time.<sup>35</sup> Five months later, Prime Minister Nuqrashi reversed his position, at the behest of King Farouk, and officially endorsed a military assault on the new Jewish state of Israel.

The ensuing Egyptian defeat in Palestine devastated Egyptian society. The Army was essentially abandoned without weapons or supplies as Israeli forces bombarded Arab positions with superior firepower. The desperate conditions created dissent within the ranks, creating

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<sup>32</sup> Arabic word for "The Brotherhood," commonly used in Arabic to signify the Muslim Brotherhood

<sup>33</sup> Vatikiotis, 30.

<sup>34</sup> Goldschmidt Jr., 86.

<sup>35</sup> Vatikiotis, 32.

an open space for Nasser's Free Officers movement. Cultural icons in Egypt, such as Umm Kulthum, sympathized with the soldiers through impassioned public performances that inherently implied King Farouk's incompetence. The fight against Israel was likely intended to distract the people of Egypt from their poor living conditions and inadequate political representation with a common foreign threat. Their defeat at the hands of a fledgling Israeli army instead revealed the extent to which Farouk's regime had become obsolete.

Egyptians witnessed the shortcomings of Farouk's regime while the *Wafd* party lacked both the authority and the will to affect positive reform. The people needed an organized, disciplined, and authoritative voice to guide the nation. They wanted a leader who would ensure their constitutional rights and provide hope for the future. The people of Egypt were ready for a just dictator. As Nasser planned his revolution, he recognized the importance of popular support. He also understood that the people responded to powerful, charismatic individuals. This constituency had been particularly loyal to politicians who promoted national interests and protested British influence in domestic affairs. Nasser's political strategy included all of these tactics, allowing him to harness the full potential of Egypt's population long-term.

**Section I**

**“He who cannot support himself cannot take his own decisions”- Nasser**

**An examination of Nasser’s political decisions that proves his need for independence of  
action**

A close examination of Nasser's most critical political decisions clearly demonstrates that he was not beholden to a particular political ideology. In fact, he would never have committed to such an ideology because it would have limited his political flexibility and restricted his autonomy to act. Nasser's decisions instead were dictated by his preternatural situational awareness and his pragmatic problem solving approach. By not identifying with a single ideology, Nasser was able to capitalize upon vulnerabilities and exploit situations opportunistically to derive benefits at the personal, domestic and international levels.

### **The Politics of the Free Officers Corps**

Nasser's first active participation in Egyptian politics was his formation of the Free Officers Corps. This group of junior military officers bolstered some of the weak points in Nasser's revolutionary plan. Nasser learned from Colonel Orabi's failed uprising in 1887/8 that the political goals of a group seem much less selfish than those of an individual. Orabi's insurrection also illustrated the power of a united popular movement. Orabi captured the anti-imperial and anti-British hatred and used it for his own personal gain. His motivations eventually became apparent because he had not legitimized his movement via the creation of a political party. He compromised his insurrection for a personal appointment in the ruling administration.<sup>36</sup> The Free Officers Corps protected Nasser against the appearance of a selfish power-grab because they were ostensibly a group of Egyptians working together to fix Egypt's problems.

The Free Officer Corps legitimized the revolution while also insulating Nasser against official repercussions. A revolution led by a single man could easily be stopped with an arrest or execution. However, creating an organization that reached throughout the military enabled

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<sup>36</sup> Vatikiotis, 16.

Nasser to act more boldly against the ruling regime. He was able to facilitate Farouk's abdication because the Free Officers possessed the clout and willingness to act that was needed for the success of such a drastic political maneuver. Freedom and determination to act were always key components of Nasser's political strategy, and his maximization of both from the start of his political career is an indicator of the important role that each played in his policies.

Without the support of the other members of the Free Officers Corps, Nasser could never have seized power in Egypt. An insurrection involving one individual would not be insulated enough to protect the agitator from the incumbent authority. Nasser knew that the revolution would not succeed without his fellow officers' support. He actually started developing his revolutionary plans in 1947 clearly illustrates this point. Nasser temporarily joined the Muslim Brotherhood in 1947 in a mutually agreeable arrangement; the Brotherhood wanted to infiltrate the Army chain of command while Nasser attempted to network with Brotherhood contacts to benefit and give legitimacy to his revolution.<sup>37</sup>

Reaching back even further, Nasser had written to several friends about the different ways to potentially rid Egypt of British colonialism during WWII. Nasser wrote "What is to be done now that the catastrophe (February 4<sup>th</sup> Incident) has befallen us, and after we have accepted it, surrendered to it and taken it submissively and meekly?"<sup>38</sup> Even though he felt extremely dissatisfied with the ruling regime, Nasser waited until the most apt time before activating the revolution. This is not the behavior of an ideologue, but an opportunist.

The Free Officers Corp expanded as the revolutionary movement gained momentum. Originally a homogenous group of junior officers from similar backgrounds, Nasser encouraged

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<sup>37</sup> "The Red Major," Khaled Dawood intv. of Khaled Mohieddin, Al-Ahram Weekly. July 18, 2002.

<sup>38</sup> Nasser, 30.

the charter members to recruit other military personnel from every social strata.<sup>39</sup> This expansion increased the power of and support for the Free Officers Corps. It also changed the general makeup of the Free Officers, so that every Egyptian social group was now represented. Even members of the elite gave their support to Nasser's council.<sup>40</sup> This diversification further boosted the group's legitimacy and appeal to its national audience. It also increased the stability of the new regime and reduced the potential for class-based insurrection.

Nasser needed the Free Officers Corps to successfully remove King Farouk from power. Without the Free Officers, Nasser would not have had the freedom to act that allowed him to demand that Farouk step down. Nasser had yet to build up the ubiquitous public approval that marked his future tenure as President. He needed the support and networks that the other members of the Free Officers Corps brought with them to the group. The Free Officers gave the movement legitimacy, constancy, and stability.

### **Domestic Consolidation of Power**

The Revolutionary Coalition Council's first act<sup>41</sup> after taking power was to issue the Agrarian Reform Law. The Agrarian Reform Law initiated a land apportionment program that decreed "No single person may own more than 200 *feddans*<sup>42</sup> of land."<sup>43</sup> It also set limits on lease agreements and land prices so that the new owners would be able to pay taxes. Lastly, the

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<sup>39</sup> Mohieddin, *The Red Major*.

<sup>40</sup> Vatikiotis, 54-55.

<sup>41</sup> The RCC was formed after the Free Officer's assumed power so as to appear more political than military. This transformation helped the Free Officers seem like a legitimate political revolution rather than just a military led coup. While this transition from Free Officers Corps to RCC incorporated new members into the movement, the Agrarian Reform Law had clearly been planned by the Free Officers leadership without the help of new RCC members.

<sup>42</sup> 1 *feddans* is equivalent to 1.038 acres

<sup>43</sup> Gamel Nasser, *Kelemat ra'is Gamal Abdel Nasser fi ihtifal al-lejuna al-aa'lia al-sullah al-zura'a*, July 29, 1954

Agrarian Reform Law established cooperatives for farmers owning less than 5 *feddans*. This policy helped support small-plot farmers by allowing them to pool their resources and buy farm equipment, fertilizer and seed in bulk. This reduced overhead costs while providing the *fellaheen*<sup>44</sup> with tools to increase agricultural output.

While not exactly giving the group the political legitimacy that it needed, this act was a strong first step towards gaining national approval. It signified that the new regime understood the socio-economic issues that plagued many Egyptians and would enact legislation to rectify these problems. In particular, Egypt's utilization of cooperatives helped to substantially boost agricultural production.<sup>45</sup> This successfully policy boosted the group's national appeal because the previous regime had ignored the problems plaguing the *fellaheen*, such as unjust tax farming<sup>46</sup>, a lack of modern equipment and inadequate irrigation.

The land reforms undercut the main base of power for the Egyptian elite. Much of the elite's political influence was derived from their control of large plots of land.<sup>47</sup> From this ownership, the gentry controlled the collection of taxes, the total crop yield, the types of crops produced and the voting tendencies of their laborers. They also used their wealth to purchase political influence via appointed officials.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The *Fellaheen* constitute the rural agrarian population in Egypt. Native Egyptians identify with this group because of their symbolic significance to the Egyptian National identity. This group was ignored under the previous administration, but Nasser elevated the status and living conditions of the *Fellaheen* with his Land Reform act, along with other legislation that addressed socio-economic inequalities in the "heartland."

<sup>45</sup> Amy J. Johnson, *Reconstructing Rural Egypt: Ahmed Hussein and the History of Egyptian Development* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 169.

<sup>46</sup> Rather than personally collecting and counting their internal revenue, past Kings sold the right to tax specific lands to wealthy merchants and land owners. These tax collectors used their license to collect taxes as a way to bully the peasantry and coerce as much money as possible from the poor. This system was inherently inefficient and unfair.

<sup>47</sup> Nasser, *keleamat ra'is*.

<sup>48</sup> Johnson, 26.

Under the former regime, this elite class comprised the leadership of the *Wafd* party and represented the single most powerful domestic socio-economic group. Before 1952, just 6% of Egypt's population owned 65 % of all Egyptian land.<sup>49</sup> 75 % of Egypt's total revenue was earned from rents on private property, meaning that the wealthy landowners pocketed three quarters of Egypt's total revenue each year.<sup>50</sup> The Agrarian Reform Law confiscated this extra land and redistributed it among the rural population. The creation of a minimum wage further diminished the profits of former estates while raising the standard of living for Egypt's poorest economic class.

The Agrarian Reform law addressed problems at multiple levels of Egyptian society, meaning that no group felt omitted from the benefits of the revolution. The law provided practical solutions for ill-equipped, poor agrarian farmers. The new reforms instituted an actual tax code that increased government revenue while also increasing agricultural production. It also addressed the social inequality between the landed elite and rural laborers.

Nasser capitalized on this opportunity because of his political and social flexibility. No alliance or predisposition bound him to retain outdated socio-economic structures. This first act positively impacted Egyptian society at almost every level and legitimized his new regime. It initiated the public belief that Nasser and the Free Officers were the people's champions, working to protect and improve the rights and living conditions of all Egyptians. Nasser learned from Orabi and Zaghloul that the Egyptian people constituted a powerful political asset, and he harnessed their support to strengthen his regime's political position.

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<sup>49</sup> <http://www.economywatch.com/agrarian/1952.html>

<sup>50</sup> *ibid*

By taking land and wealth from Egypt's elite and giving it to poor agrarian laborers, Nasser and the Free Officers gained popular approval without giving any actual government aid to the poor. They used their new legislative power to boost popular appeal while diminishing the political threat posed by the landed elite.

Some Liberal academics argue that the Agrarian Reform Law betrayed Nasser's socialist tendencies. However, Nasser was more focused on neutralizing his political opponent and maximizing agricultural efficiency than he was on furthering any type of ideology. In a congratulatory speech to the members of the Agrarian Reform Board, Nasser makes no mention of Socialism, but instead says "kul wahid fikum lazim yusharu b-al-fakhir fi nufsuhi... wa istatau'im faala an tethbetu abda' misr yustauti'u an yahququ al-Aa'jib."<sup>51</sup> Nasser congratulated the Agrarian Labor Board for its increased agricultural gains and improved living conditions for the *Fellahen*. This speech joined the positive impact of the Agrarian Reform Act with Nasser's regime, thus building his rural support base and showing the rest of Egypt that Nasser's pragmatic style of rule was more efficient and productive than the former King's.

Nasser willingly used parts of many different ideologies, but his pragmatic and independent personality dictated that he not be beholden to any specific one. As the Free Officers transitioned to a more traditional political party –the Revolutionary Coalition Council – Nasser's situational awareness and his ability to adapt had affected positive change in Egypt and rallied popular approval to his political group.

Nasser and the RCC understood that announcing a junior officer as Egypt's first President conflicted with the nation's deeply ingrained social norms. This pronouncement would

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<sup>51</sup> Nasser, Keleamat ra'is. In English, "Each and every one of you should be proud of himself... You have actually proved that the people of Egypt can actually achieve marvels."

have created room for dissent against the new regime. Instead of permitting this vulnerability, Nasser and the RCC proposed Mohammed Naguib as their candidate for election in 1953.

As for Naguib's actual role in the RCC, founding member of the Free Officers Corps Khaled Mohieddin stated in an interview for al-Ahram that "Naguib had no relation to the Free Officers,<sup>52</sup> but he was a popular and respected senior officer. We also wanted to keep him for a later stage as a front for the movement, due to his seniority and popularity."<sup>53</sup> Nasser's willingness to support Naguib's candidacy illustrates several important components of his political strategy. He recognized the need for popular legitimacy and allowed someone else to hold the more prestigious title because it fit the public's expectation.<sup>54</sup> He understood that the appearance of a dignified, accomplished General would serve the interests of the RCC, and by default, his interests as well.

Nasser loathed allowing someone else to serve as Egypt's first president. Popular admiration for RCC officials created conflict between Nasser and Naguib because each enjoyed appearing in public to experience the national reverence of the leader of the revolution. Free Officers Corps founding member Khaled Mohieddin remarked "Seeing the demonstrations in his support wherever he went, Naguib started saying that he should be the one to represent the revolution and meet with the public. This led him to clash with Nasser, who had the same strong tendency, loving to appear in public and enjoy the support of the masses."<sup>55</sup> Despite his pride, Nasser set aside the distress caused by his temporary "subservience" because he knew it would increase his political legitimacy and prevent opposition movements long term.

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<sup>52</sup> Note- While the Free Officers Corp became the RCC – Revolutionary Coalition Council – not every member of the council took part in the initial revolutionary activities with the Free Officers. Many joined after the Free Officers had transitioned to a political party in late 1952

<sup>53</sup> Mohieddin, The Red Major.

<sup>54</sup> For a short time

<sup>55</sup> Mohieddin, The Red Major.

This episode showcases Nasser's pragmatism and situational awareness. He understood that Egyptian society valued experience and familiarity.<sup>56</sup> Most leaders, in particular revolutionary upstarts, would not risk allowing a more experienced hand to take apparent control of their revolution. Two conditions allowed Nasser to take this risk: his cemented status as leader of the RCC and his self-confidence in his personal ability to rule. Where most revolutionary leaders would have felt threatened and vulnerable, Nasser could rely on the makeup of the RCC, which guaranteed loyalty first to Nasser because of their common rank and shared military experiences. Likewise, his military command gave him confidence in his ability to lead.

Nasser continued to consolidate power domestically after eliminating the *Wafd* party from Egyptian politics. He was able to focus on internal problems because of his skillful manipulation of foreign superpowers. He made both the United States and the U.S.S.R believe that he was leaning in favor of both nations without actually declaring his official position.<sup>57</sup> The Charter of National Action discussed both the merit of democratic authority and the practical application of socialism, while his statement to Hearst newspaper dispelled the rumors of an Egyptian conversion to a Soviet satellite state.<sup>58</sup> Nasser stated, unilaterally "an misr, leisat menhirfa nehu rusia, la fi alaqtuha siasia, wa la fi alaqtuha al-iqtisaudia."<sup>59</sup>

With the *Wafd* party no longer acting in any significant capacity, the Muslim Brotherhood represented Nasser's final domestic political opposition. The Brotherhood particularly disagreed with the RCC's overt secularist nature. The Brotherhood's strength was its ability to fund, mobilize and organize protests at the street level. They were very influential

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<sup>56</sup> Vatikiotis, 75.

<sup>57</sup> Gamal Nasser, *tusaurih al bekbash Gamal Abdel Nasser 'an hiad misr*, Dec. 7 1953.

<sup>58</sup> *Tusaurih al-Ra'is*

<sup>59</sup> In English, "Egypt is not skewed towards Russia, not politically, and not economically."

amongst the lower class urban population, a stratum critical to Nasser's political ambitions. In 1954, he banned the Muslim Brotherhood from participating in Egyptian politics.<sup>60</sup>

Nasser eliminated the group after its members botched an assassination attempt against him. When asked if the attempt actually occurred or if it was merely a ploy, Khaled Mohieddin responded "The man who fired the gun was a Brotherhood member. When I asked him (brother and RCC member Zakariya) whether they had exploited the incident in order to liquidate the Brotherhood, he replied, 'yes, of course. They made the biggest mistake in their lives.'"<sup>61</sup> The Muslim Brotherhood identified Nasser as the guiding influence of the Revolution. They did not try to supplant the RCC or incite a popular uprising. They realized that the only way to disrupt Egypt's new secular regime was by eliminating its leader.

Sensing their vulnerability, Nasser quickly moved against the *Ikhwan*. He was still in the process of building his political credibility and Nasser recognized that he could not dismiss such a powerful organization without the appearance of legitimacy. The attempted assassination provided Nasser with ample cause for dismissal, or as Mohieddin put it "liquidation."

Nasser had thus solidified his status as the unquestioned leader of the revolution. The RCC was the only legal political party remaining in Egypt and Nasser ruled at its head. Nasser had accomplished this by applying his core political concepts to the critical situations that ensued from Egypt's newfound independence. He refused to cater to special interests, preserved his independence of action and unified a nation with significant socio-economic divisions.

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<sup>60</sup> Vatikiotis, 29.

<sup>61</sup> Mohieddin, "The Red Major"

## Nasser's International Policy of Preserving National Sovereignty

Nasser avoided locking himself into a particular ideology because it would have limited future options and negotiating power at the international level. During his dynamic era of domestic reform, Nasser declined to commit to a specific political ideology in order to preserve the stable global stalemate between the United States, the USSR, Great Britain, and France.

Nasser focused his attention on Egypt's first major project involving outside aid, but only after he thoroughly consolidating domestic political power. He planned to build a hydroelectric dam along the Aswan River. Nasser worked tirelessly on this project because it would highlight several new accomplishments of the revolution: it would bring electricity to poor rural areas, showcase Egypt's developing infrastructural modernization effort and display Nasser's ability to negotiate and come to terms with world superpowers.

Nasser fielded offers from both the United States and the USSR, but believed that a working partnership with the United States would benefit Egypt to a greater extent.<sup>62</sup> He recognized the potential of economic integration with the United States economy, cultivated friendships within the U.S. State Department and appreciated how the United States minimized British retaliation against the new regime.<sup>63</sup> However, the United States misinterpreted Nasser's negotiating tactics because of its sensitivity to Soviet expansionism. Great Britain lobbied against extending a loan to Egypt and justified its opposition by construing Nasser's habits as pro-Soviet. The U.S.'s ideological insecurities, when combined with Britain's vindictive machinations, prevented an agreement between the two nations.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Nasser, *We Shall Triumph*.

<sup>63</sup> Thomas, 12.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas, 14.

Nasser seemed pro-Soviet to the Anglo-American alliance because he objected to outside supervision and oversight of national issues. The British pushed for an opening of democratic processes to be a condition of the loan.<sup>65</sup> Nasser rejected this condition because it would have limited his ability to act in the future. Additionally, Egyptians had already experienced the negative effects of having a foreign power dictate to them their political and economic options.

The United States and Britain interpreted this refusal to “open” democratic processes – such as allowing multiple political parties or removing press censorship – as an action declaring Egypt’s conversion to Arab socialism.<sup>66</sup> But Nasser was not endorsing a specific ideology, he simply wanted to build the Aswan dam without opening domestic politics to foreign intervention.

Nasser failed to negotiate an agreement with the United States for the funding of the Aswan High Dam. This failure led directly to the defining moment in Nasser’s political career, the nationalization of the Suez Canal. The Suez Canal represented the last remaining vestige of British colonialism in Egypt. Britain refused to evacuate troops from the Canal Zone despite American and Soviet diplomatic pressure throughout the 1950s.<sup>67</sup> On July 26, 1956, Nasser signed and announced that the Suez Canal, its protection, operation, and revenues would be transferred to Egyptian ownership.<sup>68</sup>

This is yet another example of Nasser recognizing a weakness and seizing the advantage. Having already been spurned by the United States, Nasser agreed in principle to use Soviet funds to build the Aswan Dam.<sup>69</sup> He understood that this act informally allied Egypt with the Soviet Union. He therefore no longer needed to avoid acting directly against American interests. While

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<sup>65</sup> Anthony Eden to John Foster Dulles, April 18, 1956.

<sup>67</sup> Marshal Bulganin to Guy Mollet, multiple letters from June-September, 1956

<sup>68</sup> [http://www.menziesvirtualmuseum.org.au/transcripts/Speech\\_is\\_of\\_Time/301\\_NationalizationSuez.html](http://www.menziesvirtualmuseum.org.au/transcripts/Speech_is_of_Time/301_NationalizationSuez.html)

<sup>69</sup> Vatikiotis, 72.

Britain and France did attempt to retake the zone, the plan was eventually aborted because the United States refused to lend actual support.<sup>70</sup>

The United States strongly opposed the use of violence in the Canal Zone because of the potential for a nuclear reaction by the USSR. One senior member of the State Department even exclaimed “We must stop this before we are all burned to a crisp!”<sup>71</sup> His alliance with the Soviets empowered him to seize a prized British possession because he knew that the United States would not support British retaliation.

The Suez Crisis positively affected Nasser’s status because its success translated on multiple levels: he could personally retaliate against America’s refusal to fund the Aswan project while also promoting nationalism and boosting his regime’s overall popularity. Nasser’s name and face would forever be synonymous with the final eviction of British forces from Egypt. He recognized that his new alliance with the USSR gave him the autonomy to act against Egypt’s historical oppressor and he seized the opportunity.

### **Final Impressions of Nasser’s Political Decisions**

Nasser structured his international political strategy to ensure Egypt’s national sovereignty. In order to satisfy and distance foreign powers, Nasser designed his decisions to illustrate a sense of domestic stability, while also aligning Egypt’s internal politics with whichever nation Nasser was working with at the time. His overtures to the United States prior to, and immediately after, the revolution restricted British retaliatory options. By juggling its allies, Egypt remained unharmed and intact despite Britain’s hostility towards the new regime. His timely agreement with the USSR to fund the Aswan Dam project, an agreement that resulted

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<sup>70</sup> Thomas, 136

<sup>71</sup> Robert D Murphy, *Diplomat Among Warriors* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1964), 476.

from Nasser's reliance on his core concepts, permitted him to move forward with the nationalization of the Suez Canal.

Nasser's foreign policy centered on removing foreign influences from Egypt's domestic politics. Nasser satisfied foreign powers without giving them anything substantive. This appearance of a mutual understanding maintained the possibility of political relationships without a restricting alliance. The absence of such an alliance created an international contest to befriend Egypt, resulting in both protection and support for the revolution from many nations without any Egyptian reciprocation.

His diplomatic flirtations with the United States and the Soviet Union led to concessions from each country. While both nations turned hostile, Egypt preserved its national sovereignty while gaining short term international benefits. In protecting Egypt's national sovereignty, Nasser prevented foreign powers from influencing Egypt's domestic governance and preserved his personal autonomy.

He designed his domestic policies to ensure personal political status, freedom to act, popular support, and national stability. His core concepts dictated the best available course of action so that he maximized the outcome from each situation without compromising his political beliefs. He capitalized on the uncertain political climate following the revolution by acting decisively against his opposition, first by building up popular support and then by legislating them out of existence.

A close examination of Nasser's most critical political decisions clearly illustrates that he operated outside of any ideological constraints. Nasser instead relied on his core concepts to guide him through several different situations. These concepts prevented him from locking into a single mode of action. Nasser's decisions instead were predicated on his ability to think

critically and solve problems. By not identifying with a single ideology, Nasser was able to capitalize upon vulnerabilities and exploit situations in order to derive benefits at both the domestic and international levels.

**Section II**

**“We were not defeated in Palestine in 1948, for the Egyptian army did not fight in 1948.” –  
Nasser**

**Nasser’s use of his charismatic authority for personal political benefits**

## The Importance of Charisma to Nasser's Success

Nasser's charismatic leadership was a key factor in his longevity and popularity as ruler of Egypt. In their discussion of "Nasserism," some authors discuss Nasser's charisma, but they do not assert that his charismatic authority constituted a major part of his political legitimacy. These authors focus on the nature of protest movements or his speaking ability, but ignore that Nasser implemented his most meaningful reforms in conjunction with charismatic performances.

Many different aspects of Nasser's character – both natural and constructed – contributed to his charismatic authority. His authority differed from his predecessors in that he was able to connect with his constituency while still seeming "exceptional."<sup>72</sup> Because of this, the public viewed Nasser as a "just dictator" despite his autocratic tendencies. Nasser's charisma engendered a national belief in his abilities. His decisions did not originate from past judgments or judicial theory; he instead explained the decision-making process to his audience as a recognition of a necessary change. Egyptians felt connected to Nasser's decisions because they understood his rationale and supported his acts.

Returning to the sociological reasoning behind Nasser's success, the term "charismatic authority" is defined as "power legitimized on the basis of a leader's exceptional personal qualities or the demonstration of extraordinary insight and accomplishment, which inspire loyalty and obedience from followers."<sup>73</sup> Max Weber, a German sociologist and the expert on charismatic authority further asserts that with charismatic authority "there is no system of formal rules, of abstract legal principles, and hence no process of judicial decision oriented to them...

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<sup>72</sup> Max Weber specifies that charisma applies to "an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities." Weber, 358-359.

<sup>73</sup> Kendall, Diana, Jane Lothian Murray, and Rick Linden. *Sociology in our time* (2nd ed.), 2000 (Scarborough, On: Nelson), 438-439.

Formally concrete judgments are newly created from case to case.”<sup>74</sup> These definitions explain Nasser’s tendency to retain personal authority and his motivation to prevent outside actors from challenging his decisions. He derives his power from his “insight and accomplishment,” without which he would have no basis for authority. Therefore, the more decisions Nasser makes, and the more power he wields, the more he confirms his legitimacy as a ruler.

Egyptians supported Nasser because many of his reforms tackled issues that had been ignored or exacerbated by the previous government. His reforms connected with problems that the people found important but had received little attention from Farouk’s regime. In listening to the constituency and working to ameliorate them, Nasser employed certain elements of populism, a core concept, to muster popular support for his policies and differentiate his new regime from its predecessor. Weber confirms this aspect of Nasser’s charismatic authority “Rational and traditional (Bureaucratic and Patriarchal) authority are specifically forms of everyday routine control of action; while charismatic authority is the direct antithesis of this.”<sup>75</sup> Nasser increased his national popularity by condemning the former King’s policies vocally through his performances and inherently through his style of rule.

Much of Nasser’s success depended upon his audiences ability to see, hear and respond positively to Nasser’s proposals; “The only basis of legitimacy for it (charismatic authority) is personal charisma, so long as it proved; that is, as long as it receives recognition and is able to satisfy the followers... this lasts only so long as the belief in its charismatic inspiration remains.”<sup>76</sup> Nasser realized that his influence and political stability were firmly controlled by the Egyptian population; therefore, he needed to control them. His political legitimacy, initially, was

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<sup>74</sup> Weber, 361.

<sup>75</sup> Weber, 361.

<sup>76</sup> Weber, 362.

wholly dependent on popular support. Nasser's policies – political and cultural – illustrate his understanding of this dependence, and he intentionally strengthened his charismatic authority over the Egyptian population in order to ensure that his authority persisted.

Nasser's status as a charismatic leader is not in doubt. Of the three types of legitimate authority outlined by Weber – rational, traditional, and charismatic<sup>77</sup> – Nasser consistently displayed the traits that Weber attributes to a charismatic leader. Nasser established the perception of his remarkable judgment and character early in his political career. He became the first common Egyptian to visibly promote himself into a leadership role without patronage from the corrupt elite, evicted British troops from Egypt and parceled out elite land holdings to the *fellaheen*; all remarkable accomplishments in a formerly stagnant nation with no prospects for self-improvement.

The people supported Nasser in part because he rejected Egypt's traditional power structures. Nasser cast aside the resolute bonds of class stratification in Egyptian society. He showed the population that Egyptians were capable of governing themselves. He also showed that, in Egypt's new government, merit and effort could trump the corruption and nepotism that had stalled national development since the death of Muhammad Ali.

By asserting himself as the leader of Egypt he ended the political, economic, and social atrophy that contributed to such a corrupt, stagnant system. These characteristics and accomplishments seemed remarkable to native Egyptians because they illustrated a man who contradicted the established standard of government corruption and apathy. The masses saw a man who was pioneering a new path accessible Egyptians. Nasser understood the importance of

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<sup>77</sup> Weber, 358.

his national appearance and that his image as an honest, hard-working Egyptian would endear him to this audience, providing him with increased autonomy to act.

Nasser also expelled British troops from Egypt, nationalized the Suez Canal, and gave a sense of autonomy and independence to the office of President. These acts were remarkable because they completely defied the established norms: the British ruled Egypt through King Farouk, upward social mobility was not possible because of rigid social stratification, and Egyptian politicians in the *Wafd* party were incapable of enacting positive political reform.<sup>78</sup> Nasser's acts displayed a political fortitude that contrasted starkly with King Farouk and the *Wafd* party's habitual acquiescence.<sup>79</sup> By standing up to Egypt's traditional authority, Nasser proclaimed his belief that he, and therefore Egypt, was able to govern itself competently. His outspoken belief in Egypt's potential earned him support from his Egyptian audience. While his political acts instilled greater pride in Egyptian-ness and increased Nasser's personal popularity, these changes could not have been enacted without Nasser's charismatic pull felt by other military officers, as well as by his public audience. While many Egyptians supported his social and economic reforms, these comprehensive changes would not have occurred without Nasser's charismatic authority as the guiding force.

### **Nasser and the Free Officers Corps**

Nasser's situational awareness attuned him to the feasibility of a successful revolution, but it was his charisma that attracted other officers to his movement. Nasser knew that he needed a tightly knit group who would support the drastic action and reform that Egypt needed to address its fundamental issues. Nasser decided to use junior military officers as the main core of

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<sup>78</sup> Vatikiotis, 28.

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*

his revolutionary movement.<sup>80</sup> Nasser reached out to men who, like him, suffered through the humiliating defeat in Palestine. In 1949, Nasser formed the Free Officer Corps, a group of like-minded servicemen who supported Nasser's plan to remove Farouk from power and expel British troops from Egypt permanently. The importance of the Free Officers Corps to the revolution cannot be overstated.

Not even Nasser could mobilize the junior officers against their commanders without just cause. He reached out to his fellow officers only Egyptian forces suffered a devastating defeat in Fallujah. Poor strategy, inferior weaponry<sup>81</sup>, and a general lack of preparedness showcased the ineptitude of Egypt's military and political high command.

Many members in the Army felt that the administration lost the war before it began. Major Khaled Mohieddin explains "The war in Palestine in 1948, and the humiliating defeat we suffered, was an important turning point. The Egyptian army was forced to enter that war without being prepared for it, particularly in terms of arms and training."<sup>82</sup> Nasser used the failed war in Palestine as a catalyst to galvanize his "vanguard" into action. The officers Nasser targeted for recruitment had personally dealt with the physical effects of Cairo's incompetence. Nasser played upon this shared history and common cause to bond the group together.<sup>83</sup>

Nasser's charisma positively affected the group dynamic of the F.O.C. Nasser incorporated potential recruits and other members of the group in the decision making process,

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<sup>80</sup> For a report extolling merits of this choice, see Nasser's *Philosophy of the Revolution*.

<sup>81</sup> The weaponry purchased by King Farouk's administration from the British was meant to be used for training exercises only, the rifles had not been primed for actual combat.

<sup>82</sup> Mohieddin, *The Red Major*.

<sup>83</sup> This claim disagreed with his explanation in *Philosophy of the Revolution*, where he asserted that the defeat in Palestine had nothing to do with the Officers' decision to revolt. Nasser reached out to two different audiences with the same situation, first to the officers, with whom the war would resonate, and next with the national population, who would care less about the Military's lack of training and inadequate weaponry and more about socio-economic inequality.

but retained the ultimate authority for his discretion. He involved others so that they felt invested in and personally responsible for the group's success but constructed a group hierarchy revolving around his individual decisions.

Founding members of the Free Officers Corps felt actively involved in key decisions. Major Khaled Mohieddin said in an interview with *al-Ahram* "When the war ended, I met with Nasser and we decided we had to do something. He told me that he was already in touch with a number of nationalist officers, and we agreed to meet for the first time at Nasser's house in the summer of 1949."<sup>84</sup> Other members of the free officers have also used the word "we" when describing any Free Officers activity.<sup>85</sup> This shows that each member bought into the group dynamic and felt integrated within the decision making process. Each felt as if he, along with the rest of the group, was directly responsible for the well-being of the revolution. Nasser's charisma and inclusiveness helped forge a group that felt both invested in and accountable for Egypt's political future.

According to Mohieddin, Nasser offered his personal residence to the group as its official meeting place. By choosing to hold the meeting in his home, Nasser proclaimed his trust in his fellow officers. He used an apparent vulnerability – any investigation into the meeting would likely have resulted in Nasser's arrest and execution for treason – to further bind the group of officers together. He also symbolically gave a part of himself – his personal property – to the group. His sacrifice demonstrated his personal involvement in the cause and physically showed his comrades that he was fully committed to the revolution. The use of his house also proclaimed Nasser's ultimate control of the group. With one move Nasser engendered trust amongst his fellow officers and physically asserted his leadership of the movement.

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<sup>84</sup> Mohieddin, *The Red Major*.

<sup>85</sup> See the memoirs of Anwar es-Sadat and Kamal Rifaat

He also used the group to help recruit new officers to the revolutionary movement. According to Mohieddin “We all agreed that each of us would recruit more officers, each in his own unit. Our meetings continued, and in early 1950, we issued the first statement signed by the Free Officers entitled, 'An Appeal and a Warning.' At that time, we were around 40-50 officers in all.”<sup>86</sup> The humble backgrounds of the Corps’ founders<sup>87</sup> did not hinder their ability to recruit new members from the aristocratic and bourgeois classes.<sup>88</sup> Nasser understood that the same military bond that linked the original members of the Free Officers corps would also connect those founding members with the other men in their military unit; men that came from every different social and economic group. As the Corps members worked to expand the reach of their group, they actually fell even further under Nasser’s autonomy because they committed themselves to the Free Officers Corps with each new member they recruited. Nasser’s strategy created a culture of trust and accountability amongst the movement’s members, and his charisma encouraged other members to take initiative while ensuring Nasser remained at the head of the group’s political hierarchy.

### **Nasser and the people**

Nasser used his charisma to create a dynamic and focused revolutionary group. After Farouk’s abdication, Nasser adapted his strategy to include all Egyptians in a national revolution. However, Egyptians as a group were not politically active. Ruled by Colonial governments for centuries, Egypt’s national psyche had endured significant trauma at the hands of foreign rulers.

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<sup>86</sup> Mohieddin, *The Red Major*.

<sup>87</sup> Vatikiotis, 45.

<sup>88</sup> Vatikiotis, 46.

Egypt watched as each new foreign ruler exploited its resources and labor force without recompense.<sup>89</sup> The resulting gap in wealth increased further as Isma'il and Farouk indebted Egypt to European creditors. Social reform was mostly superficial or non-existent. Even in the 1940s, most Egyptians remained politically isolated because of Egypt's lack of infrastructure. The resentment against King Farouk's regime existed, but this resentment did not manifest itself as political action. Colonialism had separated native Egyptians from national politics. In order to utilize the power of the masses, Nasser first needed to mobilize them.

Part of Nasser's charismatic aura was created by his ascent to power from outside Egypt's traditional political structures. He did not gain power through traditional or bureaucratic channels, but rather claimed it defiantly from the existing government. This contributed to the public perception of Nasser's exceptional qualities. This perception extended to the rest of the RCC. The main leadership, aside from General Naguib, was comprised of junior officers.<sup>90</sup> This lack of experience actually worked in their favor.

A reason that the Egyptians did respect the RCC so readily was because the group had not bowed to the corrupt practices of the Egyptian political system. Instead, the Free Officers circumvented the traditional channels and asserted themselves in their own way. The *Wafd* party would generally negotiate settlements with Farouk and the British High Command,<sup>91</sup> settlements that would directly reward the *Wafd* party leadership for their cooperation. This led to an image of meekness and collusion to which the new RCC stood in stark contrast.

After the forced abdication of King Farouk, the RCC quickly enacted several policies that showed the public the comprehensive differences between the new regime and the old

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<sup>89</sup> Vatikiotis, 11.

<sup>90</sup> Vatikiotis 54-55.

<sup>91</sup> John Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: The Political Economy of Two Regimes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 5.

monarchy.<sup>92</sup> His charismatic authority allowed Nasser to assume power in Egypt without going through the normal routine; furthermore, the new government was not sullied by past political missteps. He would actually reference the past mistakes made by his predecessors as one justification for the revolution. Nasser learned from the former regime's missteps and used them as a national rallying cry.

Until Nasser and the Free Officers Corp claimed power in July of 1952, the group had not interacted with Egypt's general population in any official capacity. The most crucial work of the new regime was fusing popular interests with the goals of the revolution. In early 1953, Nasser met with the representatives of Upper Egypt to discuss the new nation's direction. He said that the children of the new nation "al-awal mara, fi hatha al-qua'a, wa qud turku wara'uhum al-muhahirat wa al-minaza'at, wa atejuhu bqelb wa ahad wuruh quya nhu huduf wahid."<sup>93</sup> With this line, placed at the beginning of his speech, Nasser condemned the past conferences as being divided and unproductive. He also promoted the unifying force of the revolution and showed that his rule directly contributed to the execution of a productive, united conference between the people of Lower and Upper Egypt to find common cause. Indeed, Nasser's greatest political skill was his ability to talk to, work with, and bring together different parts of the Egyptian population and convince them to work together in the name of the revolution.

The people felt as if Nasser knew them because he, like Orabi Pasha before him, was born into the lower middle-class.<sup>94</sup> His national awareness was one part of the charismatic

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<sup>92</sup> According to Max Weber, charismatic authority is "sharply opposed to both bureaucratic and traditional authority, whether in its patriarchal, patrimonial, or any other form."

<sup>93</sup> In English, "Have met for the first time, in this room, and left behind the bickering and disputes of the past, to turn one heart and one strong (united) spirit towards a single goal."

<sup>94</sup> Middle-Class in Egypt at the time meant that his father held a paying job

authority that bonded Nasser with his constituency and contributed to his ability to bring together different socio-economic groups for enhanced stability and production.

However, Nasser's charisma did not simply stem from his political support; the people also embraced Nasser and responded to him because of how he spoke and how he interacted with his audience. Many of Nasser's policies were designed to elicit positive feedback from the *sha'ab*. However, this still does not explain the fervor with which the people of Egypt supported Nasser's every act. It also does not explain the overwhelming outpouring of public grief after Nasser's Death in 1967.<sup>95</sup> His charismatic power and shared national identity would connect Nasser to other native Egyptians via a bond that was both intensely emotional and inherently loyal.

Nasser connected with the people of Egypt at a familial level. After the assassination attempt on his life, Nasser spoke out to his fellow Egyptians over broadcast radio. His address began "Ya mowaatanun."<sup>96</sup> With a simple greeting, Nasser integrated each citizen into Egypt's revolutionary struggle. He officially recognized every Egyptian as a protector of the revolution, encouraging them all to stand up in support of the movement. Nasser's conscious decision to speak first of the revolution and then the assassination attempt showed his audience his willingness to sacrifice everything for the greater good.

He used this rhetorical device to tie his own well-being to his fellow citizens and the health of the revolution. He later commends the audience when he proclaims "faqd ahsastu fi al-tajriba al-letii te'rthtu liha an quelwabakum ahadtuba, wa waquaftu bjaniba, wa wujuhtu ala'dan

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<sup>95</sup> Joel Gordon, *The Nightingale and the Ra'is: 'Abd al-Halim Hafiz and Nasserist Longings in Rethinking Nasserism: Revolution and Historical Memory in Modern Egypt*. Ed. Elie Podeh and Onn Winckler (Gainesville, FL: Gainesville University Press, 2004), 312.

<sup>96</sup> In English, "Dear citizen guardians."

ma'a."<sup>97</sup> His expression of national solidarity after such a traumatic experience proved his passion and devotion for the people of Egypt. Nasser used this situation to connect at a deeper level with his national audience, and the people responded to his "commitment" with an outpouring of grief and support.

Nasser's charismatic ability was natural, but he also endeared himself to the public in other ways so as to enhance his effect on the national audience. He refused to live in the Presidential Palace, eschewed the trappings of his office, and appeared in public to support local events.<sup>98</sup> Nasser connected with the people while differentiating himself from the corrupt politicians of the past. Rather than diminishing his prestige, Nasser's rejection of the traditional spoils of power increased the national belief in his morality. It also increased their trust in his leadership capacity. The people believed in Nasser's virtue because of how he responded to his elevated status. Nasser learned from Orabi that the appearance of selfishness negatively impacted revolutionary campaigns and worked to disassociate his movement from any selfish imagery. He applied Orabi's lesson to his political decisions and his lifestyle to help cement his status atop Egypt's political hierarchy.

The most important result of Nasser's charisma was his integration of Egyptian society while retaining his political security. In emphasizing his core concepts, Nasser showed his national audience – audience because all of Egypt watched Nasser's actions, speeches, and appearances religiously – that his remarkable judgment and political acumen would guide the new nation into the future.

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<sup>97</sup> In English, "I experienced a feeling in my heart, that you all stood beside me, and we faced the aggression together."

<sup>98</sup> According to Sam Witte in his biographical piece *Gamal Abdel Nasser*.

**Part III**

**Nasser's Manipulation of Egyptian Nationalism for Political Stability and Support**

Nasser believed that a united and resolute population could easily force imperialist forces out of Egypt, permanently. He wrote to a friend, after British tanks surrounded Abdin palace and forced King Farouk to select a new Prime Minister, in February 1942, "I really believe that Imperialism is playing a one-card game in order to threaten only. If ever it knew that there were Egyptians ready to shed blood and to meet force by force it would withdraw and recoil like a harlot. This, of course, is the state of Imperialism everywhere."<sup>99</sup> He recognized the potential of popular support in Egypt well before he enlisted its help in 1952. He correctly assumed that the capacity, strength and longevity of the future revolution would be derived from the determination of the Egyptian population. He could only achieve enduring success through a coordinated effort involving every part of Egyptian society.

Nasser comprehended that the best way to create a unified, driven movement that collectivized Egyptians into a single entity was with nationalism.<sup>100</sup> He intentionally constructed, manipulated and promoted Egyptian nationalism to benefit his personal political rule.

Nationalism scholar Benedict Anderson writes in his work *Imagined Communities* "(The nation) is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."<sup>101</sup>

Nationalism connected the entire population, regardless of class or location, with a common purpose. He created a sense of commitment to the new nation through his policies; thus involving the public in the revolution and creating a vested interest in its success. His strategy of national incorporation mirrors the tactic he used when creating the Free Officers Corps. By

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<sup>99</sup> Gamal Abdel Nasser. *The Philosophy of the Revolution* (Buffalo, NY: Economica Smith, Keynes & Marshall, 1959), 27.

<sup>100</sup> Anthony Smith theorizes that it (nationalism) should be understood as referring to "a language and symbolism, a sociopolitical movement, and an ideology of the nation." He goes on to define nationalism as "An ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity for a population which some of its members deem to constitute an actual or potential nation."

<sup>101</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006), 6.

fostering a national purpose, and thereby asking every citizen to participate in the revolution, Nasser created a sense of personal accountability that encouraged positive action and initiative in all Egyptians.

Nasser endured the same troubles faced by many Egyptians. He therefore understood the enmity that the people felt towards Farouk's monarchy and their British overlords. The people never felt as if King Farouk fought for their interests. Many of Nasser's political decisions were made in direct contradiction with the historical precedent to further separate the new government from the old.<sup>102</sup> Nasser took this repudiation a step further. He argued that Egypt's past history was not even Egyptian at all. It was anathema to Egypt's future prospects.

He effectively used Egypt's colonial and imperial subjugation as an excuse for the nation's current economic and societal problems. By blaming King Farouk and the British, Nasser declared his belief that Egyptians could govern themselves better than any foreign power; a popular nationalistic claim that boosted his regime's popularity and perceived legitimacy.

His repudiation of the past was an integral part of Nasser's political strategy and contributed to his national appeal. He presented Egypt's history under foreign rule as an enemy of the revolution. He used this common enemy to help unite the disparate sections of Egyptian society and mobilize them towards a common goal. Nasser admitted to the difficulties of national unification and mobilization when he wrote "I thought that we would only be in front for a few hours, and that we would be soon followed by the solid masses marching to the goal...I was shocked by the reality."<sup>103</sup> He continued about the divisiveness in Egyptian politics at the time "Every leader we came to wanted to assassinate his rival. Every idea we found aimed at the

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<sup>102</sup> Weber hypothesized "Charismatic authority repudiates the past, and is in this sense a specifically revolutionary force."

<sup>103</sup> Nasser, *Philosophy* 32.

destruction of another.”<sup>104</sup> This quote explains Nasser’s political strategy and showcases his powerful prose. He lauds the RCC for being “in front” of the revolution while criticizing Egyptians for not becoming more involved, earlier. In the next line, he delegitimizes his political competition by calling them selfish and corrupt. In a single paragraph, Nasser enlisted popular support for the revolution and improved the RCC’s national standing.

Nasser was motivated on several different levels to construct a new national identity. His personal connection with his national audience became stronger because the new identity installed Nasser as a father figure atop the nation’s political identity. Egyptians called Nasser “al-Ra’is,”<sup>105</sup> signifying his national identification as the President of the new Egypt. Egypt depended on Nasser for guidance on how to act. When Nasser was distraught after the United States cancelled a funding plan for the Aswan High Dam, Egyptians rioted.<sup>106</sup> By participating in the construction of a new national identity, Nasser generated a public dependency on his personal emotions and actions. In this way Nasser was very much the opposite of a populist. Instead of his looking to the masses for the most popular course, the people looked to their leader for an example of how to act.

His promotion and subversion of Egyptian nationalism reversed the traditional populist dynamic from the leader satisfying the needs of the people to a case of the people meeting the demands of their leader. Nasser identified the potential vulnerability posed by his reliance on popular support, and quickly worked to minimize this chance. Nasser began many of his public speeches with the greeting “aiya mowathnun!”<sup>107</sup> This opening promoted the nationalistic belief that the new Egypt incorporated every citizen into its strategic defense of national sovereignty

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<sup>104</sup> Nasser, *Philosophy* 33.

<sup>105</sup> In English, “the president” or “the chief”

<sup>106</sup> Lesch, 217.

<sup>107</sup> In English, “Dear citizen guardians.”

and domestic freedom. Nasser's nationalistic rhetoric bound Egyptians together and promoted Egypt's new national identity.

His manipulation of Egyptian nationalism illustrates Nasser's need for autonomy of action and further shows his reliance on the application of his core concepts to solve personal and domestic challenges. Nasser imbued his own personal qualities into the Egyptian identity so that the success of Egypt became inseparable from Nasser's personal success, ensuring his political status and personal stability.

At the political level, nationalism also addressed the potential problems posed by Egypt's era of urbanization. Egypt's period of urban migration resulted in a marked increase in political participation. As population density increases, so does the expression of political thought. Political discourse is commonly accompanied by dissent, opposition movements, and insurrection. A unifying force to help insulate the new regime against these threats and incorporate fringe participants into the political arena contributed to the revolution's domestic success.

Globally, internal conflict often encourages foreign nations to intercede on behalf of one political figure or another in exchange for future concessions. The most effective way to outmaneuver foreign machinations is by presenting a solid, united front against foreign intervention. Indeed, Marshal Bulganin of the USSR wrote to Egypt's would be assailants:

Is it not clear that to all that if France was forced to mobilise almost half a million troops against the unarmed people of Algeria... then, should France and Britain launch a war against the armed Egyptian people fighting for the just cause of the defense of their national independence, its outcome cannot but specifically result in grave consequences?

Nasser ingrained a deep revulsion of international concessions and dependence on foreign powers in the new national identity to prevent foreign involvement in domestic affairs. Foreign

nations recognized the extreme aversion to foreign subjugation that was embedded in the Egyptian identity.

In an impassioned speech that he delivered to the UN Security Council, Nasser declared “Brothers, there is no alternative to victory for our nation... The domestic front is the pillar of the fighting front. We must expose, defeat and crush all enemy attempts to influence the domestic front.”<sup>108</sup> Because a nation is inherently “sovereign,” any threat to its borders constitutes a threat to the entire community’s well-being. The Egyptian identity was even more sensitive to the threat of foreign oversight because of its past status. Nasser seized upon this natural revulsion of foreign influence and utilized it as a tool to boost his popularity and legitimacy.

Nasser frequently referenced common enemies and obstacles to increase nationalist fervor in Egypt. He would use this connection to incorporate the audience into his speech and stress the importance of working together as Egyptians. In May 1967, Nasser said to Arab Trade Unionists “Talk is easy and action is difficult, very difficult. We emerged wounded from the 1956 battle. Britain, Israel and France attacked us then. We sustained heavy losses.”<sup>109</sup> Considering the date and the audience, the relevance of the topic could be questioned, but Nasser used this crisis from the past to illustrate how foreign powers would target Egypt if the nation was not internally *wahid*.<sup>110</sup>

The language in Nasser’s speeches and writings promoted nationalism as well. He would often speak in military terms to include the people in the actual revolution. He enlisted the whole nation in the fight against oppression and imperialism while he spoke. Nasser always

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<sup>108</sup> Nasser, *We Shall Triumph*.

<sup>109</sup> Gamal Nasser, *Speech to Arab Trade Unionists*, May 26, 1967.

<sup>110</sup> Arabic term for one, or one-ness. It is often used to describe national solidarity.

referred to his party's political activities as "the revolution." Participation in the revolution was a major attraction for public support because each Egyptian felt as if they were actively involved in Egypt's political changes.

Confirming this sentiment, Major Mohieddin noted that "When I toured different towns, I found people saying that the return to democracy would mean putting an end to the revolution, and even my wife and family members opposed my stand on behalf of democracy."<sup>111</sup> The popularity of the revolution allowed Nasser to call on the people for support of myriad new policies; they would always answer if the revolution was at stake.

Nasser's political policies promoted a new type of Egyptian nationalism, one foreign to both Orabi and Zaghloul. The new notion of Egyptian nationalism was constructed around and focused on Nasser's behavior. The people looked to him for guidance and supported him without pause. It almost seems as if, without Nasser, the people believed that there would be no revolution at all. As Mohieddin established, Egyptians loved the very concept of the revolution. It was each individual's means to personally strike back against the centuries of colonial oppression that burdened the national consciousness. Nasser honed this sentiment and utilized it to accomplish substantial reforms while also guaranteeing his own personal political security.

### **Final Analysis –**

Typically nationalism supports a candidate that embodies popular national and cultural ideals. However, these ideals are first established in a dynamic time of political and cultural revolutions. Nasser's career arc differed from the traditional trajectory because he ascended to

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<sup>111</sup> Mohieddin, *The Red Major*

power first and then reinforced his power through nationalism. He engineered the increase in nationalist fervor by uniting the different social strata together against a common enemy. He used nationalism to consolidate his power, improve his regime's stability, and preserve his autonomy to act. Nasser took advantage of his opportunities because he was not committed to one ideological track, and therefore could choose the tactics that best suited his needs rather than the ones dictated by an ideology. This allowed him to meet the needs of the people and handle political crises.

**Section IV-**

**“Events are not a matter of chance.” – Nasser**

**An analysis of Nasser’s cultural programs and his patronage of the arts in order to create a new Egyptian cultural identity**

After consolidating his political power, Nasser constructed and harnessed Egyptian popular culture to cement his political support. Rather than improving Egypt's economic problems or providing infrastructural support, Nasser became a patron of the arts. He used his popularity to promote different performers, such as Abdel Halim Hafez, and he joined their rise in popularity with the approval of his government. In so doing, Nasser asserted himself as the figurehead of the Egyptian culture movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s. He tied the progress of Egyptian culture to his own personal regime's political success. This status of Nasser as a new cultural icon, and as progenitor of Egypt's most popular artists, prevented Nasser's opposition from challenging him. Nasser created the association that, if an opposition party challenged Nasser they were challenging all of Egypt as well.

Nasser understood the importance that national unity played in ensuring the permanence of the 1952 revolution. A revolution driven only by the lowest classes could not persist unless the middle and upper classes also embraced the RCC's revolutionary reforms. While his political policies helped to win popular support for his regime, it was Nasser's focus on cultural programs, and the establishment of an overarching Egyptian cultural and national identity, that guaranteed the revolution's perpetuation. His programs caused Egypt's different social strata to coalesce. This promoted unity and prevented societal fragmentation; a development that would have encouraged foreign intervention. It also brought together the Egyptian community under the direction and leadership of Nasser.

Nasser's greatest successes in creating cultural icons came through his work with musical artists. In general, music holds a special place in Egyptian popular culture. More specifically, during the first half of the twentieth century many Egyptians viewed music as the last bastion of national identity unadulterated by British Colonialism. Music was used in the proclamation of

Quranic verses, prayers, religious rites, funeral lamentations, political demonstrations, and joyous celebrations. Music incorporated poetry, metaphor, spirit, and passion into its performance. In short, it was the perfect medium for expression in Egyptian society.

Singing was not bound to a specific class, nor was it prohibited to any distinct social strata. Similar to poetry readings, Egyptian singers performed their songs for standing-room only audiences. While private performances for the King were somewhat common, in public these singers did not discriminate between performing for elites or for the *fellaheen*.<sup>112</sup>

The best artists sculpted their performances to fit the mood and desires of the audience. They would repeat sections of their songs, multiple times, to satisfy the audience.<sup>113</sup> Those in attendance would then leave the concert feeling intimately connected to the performance that they had just witnessed. The audience actively participated in the shaping of the tone, length, and spirit of the performance. Its inclusive nature helped to power much of music's post-revolution popular appeal, as it often represented the people's voice.

Music exerted a tangible influence on Egyptian society; even Nasser recognized it as a powerful means for promoting a collective Egyptian consciousness and social de-stratification. Music provided a common link which allowed the people to bypass the strict social boundaries which had existed before the July Revolution in 1952. Regardless of class or social status, Egyptian music was accessible to almost all Egyptians. Nasser ensured that all Egyptians could listen to Egyptian popular music, as well as his own speeches, by stipulating that every rural village should possess at least one transistor radio. Most urban households owned a radio because the cost was heavily subsidized by Nasser's regime.<sup>114</sup> He invested in the cultural

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<sup>112</sup> "Umm Kulthum: A Voice Like Egypt," dir. Michal Goldman (VHS, 1996).

<sup>113</sup> <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=124612595>

<sup>114</sup> Find source

identity and unity that Egyptian radio stations, such as “Voice of the Arab,”<sup>115</sup> forged amongst all Egyptians.

In the entire twentieth century, native Egyptians gathered in the streets *en masse* to mourn the passing of just three individuals: Gamal Abdel Nasser, Umm Kulthum, and Abdel Halim Hafez.<sup>116</sup> Two of the three people who triggered this almost visceral public outpouring of grief were musical performers. This support proves just how inextricably linked music was with the post-revolutionary Egyptian identity. Umm Kulthum and Mohammed Halim Hafez, both of whom ascended from the bottom rung of Egyptian society to international stardom, personified the national hope for positive change, and therefore became symbols of the revolution.

Nasser understood the value that music and song held within the national culture. Immediately following King Farouk’s abdication, the Egyptian Musicians Guild rejected Umm Kulthum and banned her songs from being played on the radio. They wanted to ostracize Umm Kulthum from Egyptian music because she had performed privately for the royal family. When Nasser learned of this development he exclaimed “What are you, crazy? Do you want Egypt to turn against us?”<sup>117</sup> He identified the ubiquitous support felt by Egyptians for Umm Kulthum and her irreplaceable standing within the region as “the Lady.” In this case Nasser recognized and utilized Umm Kulthum after she had already become “kawkab al-sharq.”<sup>118</sup> Her talent and stardom had already developed, while her nationalist feelings and socialist tendencies made her an ideal figurehead for revolutionary support.

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<sup>115</sup> William Rugh, *The Arab Press: News Media and Political Process in the Arab World*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1987), pg.

<sup>116</sup> Majdi al-Imrusi, *A'azz al-Nass* (Cairo: 'Adil al-Balak, 1994), 105.

<sup>117</sup> “Umm Kulthum,” *Al-Ahram Weekly*, February 6, 2000

<sup>118</sup> In English, “The Star in the East”

Umm Kulthum was also deeply connected with the religious community: her career began as a village singer of *hadiths*<sup>119</sup> and she recorded a religious poem, “Salou Qelbi,” that became an instant classic. Because Nasser’s secularism did not mesh well with the religious community, Umm Kulthum represented a key intermediary for the RCC between the new regime and established Imams. Nasser improved his standing in the religious community through his patronage of Umm Kulthum despite his overt secularism.

She also connected with the heart of the *shaab* through her religious intonation. Suheir Hammad, a Palestinian-American immigrant asserts in an NPRM interview that “there’s something about the fact that, even when she’s not saying Allah, she has said it so many times in her life that everything is inflected with the notion of Allah of the most high.”<sup>120</sup> Her devout piety, impassioned performances, and nationalistic zeal endeared her to her Egyptian audience, which led to her ascent as an influential figure in national and regional politics. Nasser recognized her popularity and encouraged her to work with some of Egypt’s, and the Arab world’s, best songwriters to write and record nationalist and Arabist anthems.

Umm Kulthum recorded her most famous song after she began working with famous composer Mohammad ‘Abd al-Wahab in 1965. Titled “*Enta Omri*,”<sup>121</sup> the piece is framed around the premise that Umm Kulthum has finally met her true love. She regrets that she had to wait so long to find love, and considers her earlier life to have been a waste. In the opening stanza, generally regarded as the most important lines of the song because they convey the overall theme, emotion, and are repeated often, Kulthum sings “Ragaa’ouni a’enaik el Ayam illi

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<sup>119</sup> Sayings of the Prophet

<sup>120</sup> <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=124612595>

<sup>121</sup> “You are my Life”

rahou// A'alamouni andam a'ala El-Madhi wi gerahou.”<sup>122</sup> Literally translated, this stanza means “Your eyes took me back to my days that are gone/ they taught me to regret the past and its wounds.” While on its surface this song could be viewed as a standard love song, Kulthum is actually lamenting the amount of time that Egyptians endured the shackles of British colonialism without a representative, virtuous government.

The song presents strong imagery that relates the literal meaning of the song to a more metaphorical reverence of the Revolutionary regime. In particular she uses dawn and the imagery of the rising sun to represent the unlimited potential and pure nature of the new government. This image of an immaculate Egyptian rebirth recurred frequently in popular culture at the time. The people wanted to believe that the new regime and the new Egypt, unsullied by British manipulation, would reach its full potential.

However, Umm Kulthum’s song lyrics were not the main reason that she was popularly regarded in Egypt. Even more important was the way in which she performed. Depending on the audience, Umm Kulthum could perform one song for up to an hour and a half. She would allow the audience’s exhortations to guide her performance; thus creating an interactive setting in which the spectators played an integral role in the concert.

By incorporating the audience into each recital, Kulthum created a dynamic relationship between herself and her fans, allowing each to thrive off of the other’s emotional energy. This is clearly exhibited in video recordings of Umm Kulthum’s live performances. Following each stanza, and occasionally each line in particularly impassioned performances, Kulthum will either repeat the line or move on based upon the public response. Despite the fact that she repeats each

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<sup>122</sup> ‘Abd, Al-Wahhāb Muḥammad., Kulthūm, Umm, and Aḥmad Shafīq. Kāmil. *Anta ‘umrī Enta Omri. Ṣawt Al-Qāhirah*, [199.] CD.

verse, however, the implicit meaning behind her words is never repetitive. She switches her intonation and emphasis within the verse to illustrate deeper and more complex meanings for the audience. Her performances captivated the theater to such an extent that Kulthum's voice was described by several viewers as *tarab*<sup>123</sup> because, in the words of ethnomusicologist Virginia Danielson, it "is the experience of really being carried away by the music."<sup>124</sup> Kulthum captivated her audience by integrating them in her performances, and in so doing she captivated the hearts of Egypt.

Abdel Halim Hafez, in contrast, was unknown until Nasser anointed him the "voice of the revolution"<sup>125</sup> in November of 1952. His first recording attempt, "Liqa," floundered. His debut performance, just ten days after the July Revolution, was critically declaimed and sparsely attended. Yet after Nasser proclaimed the importance of art in the forging of a new Egypt, Hafez flourished. Nasser's continued patronage, despite Hafez's slow start, enabled Hafez to achieve his future superstar status. Setting Hafez up for success, Nasser teamed him with acclaimed nationalist composer Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahab to record *wataniyyat*<sup>126</sup> and popular songs. Nasser was able to turn the strong feelings of nationalism that were present following the July 2<sup>nd</sup> revolution into support for Hafez. After performing several of al-Wahab's *wataniyyat*, Hafez possessed a solid foundation of national support. "The black nightingale"<sup>127</sup> turned this support into a fervid fan base, emerging as Egypt's most popular singer and actor in the mid to late 1950s.

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<sup>123</sup> "Enchantment"

<sup>124</sup> <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=124612595>

<sup>125</sup> 'Abd al-Halim Hafez, *Hayati* (Cairo: Ruz al-Yusuf, 1977), 147-148.

<sup>126</sup> Nationalist Anthems

<sup>127</sup> Endearing nickname for Abdul Halim Hafez

Abdel Halim Hafez produced popular music in several different genres. It was his foundation of *wataniyyat*, however, that propelled him to superstardom in the Arab world. Hafez uses imagery, metaphor, and nationalist sentiments in his songs, connecting a broad, regional audience with Egypt's revolution, as well as the greater regional struggle for self-determination. In his song *Mawood*,<sup>128</sup> Hafez sings "*Mawood wa dayman bel gerah/ Mawood ya alby.*"<sup>129</sup> He has cast Egypt in the role of a spurned lover. The song displays the devastating residual effects of British colonialism on Egypt.

Hafez personally plays the role of Egypt, unable to find happiness or to forget the transgressions of past loves. He communicates his anguish by inflecting each word with the pain and melancholy that 2,000 years of oppression has inflicted upon the Egyptian psyche. He goes on to sing "*Wala betehda, Wala beterta.*"<sup>130</sup> This line, the most often repeated line in *Mawood*, stresses the importance that the past cannot be fixed. Instead, Egypt must move forward in a different direction because it is impossible to reconcile the differences between the monarchy and the revolution. Written by al-Wahab, Nasser matched his greatest nationalist song-writer with Egypt's most popular vocalist to produce this type of anthem; an anthem that highlights the negative aspects of the past, unites the population against past depravities, and confirms the positive direction of Egypt's revolution.

While Hafez sang publicly at concerts across the Arab world, his most meaningful performances came in films. Hafez utilized Nasser's investment in the burgeoning Egyptian film industry to transform from a musical talent to an Egyptian cultural icon. By performing in movies, the national audience was able to see more of Hafez and his personality than would

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<sup>128</sup> In English, "I've Been Promised (with the implication that he is used to being let down)."

<sup>129</sup> In English, "You are used to being wounded/ my heart you are used to it."

<sup>130</sup> In English, "The pain and the wounds never really heal."

ordinarily be revealed in a concert. This openness, a style of public interaction embraced by Nasser, endeared Hafez to all Egyptians. They all thought of him as a friend and extended family member. If Nasser served as an Egyptian father figure, Abdul Halim Hafez was the favorite uncle. His openness, vocal talent, passionate feelings of nationalism, and dynamic on-screen personality provided Nasser with the perfect cultural icon to lead Egypt out of the revolution.

Hafez's nationalist songs were especially meaningful to the Egyptian public because he was not an official employee of the Egyptian government. Throughout the 1960s, Nasser increased official control over Egyptian newspapers and radio broadcasts.<sup>131</sup> International agencies began to characterize Nasser's regime as "brutally authoritarian" and "repressive." However, reports from inside Egypt assert that the people of Egypt wanted "a just dictator."<sup>132</sup> Nasser recognized that Hafez's support held greater merit because he was not officially associated with the regime.

This juxtaposition of Egyptian nationalism with popular music fused the purpose of the revolution to Egypt's inherent culture within the minds of the people. In this way music served to legitimize Nasser's regime: because Egyptian culture and the Egyptian government were in harmony, there would theoretically be no dissent except for from those operating outside of the true Egyptian cultural sphere. Regardless of the political implications, the people connected with Hafez's music because his life was representative of the new Egypt. In Mohammed Halim Hafez, the people could see the positive tangible effects that resulted from the new regime's policies. The people felt Hafez's successes as though they were Egypt's own triumphs.

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<sup>131</sup> Rejwan, 119.

<sup>132</sup> Mohieddin, The Red Major.

Abdel Halim Hafez is associated with the revolution to a greater extent than Umm Kulthum because of Nasser's patronage. He emerged as the preeminent Arab performer after Nasser blessed Hafez as the voice of the Egyptian revolution. Nasser's Ministry of Culture promoted Hafez's development because he served as a uniting force for the different social strata in Egypt, and also bonded the government with Egyptian culture. Umm Kulthum captivated Egypt because of her willingness to put the needs of the audience before her own preferences. Both performers treated their voices as gifts that should be shared amongst the people. The film "Umm Kulthum: A Voice Like Egypt" reveals just how greatly Egyptians admired and revered this woman who began her life in a poor eastern Egyptian village. Her passion, nationalism, and wish to accommodate all Egyptians imbued her music with the new national identity constructed after the July revolution. Her value as a figurehead for the people was indescribable, and she wanted to use her influence to promote the dawning of a new era in Egypt's history.

Nasser managed to intertwine his regime with the health of Egypt's Cultural Revolution by intentionally patronizing native artists, musicians, and cultural programs. He gained public support for the new government by embracing and advancing popular musicians through his broadcasting networks, and by paring these musicians with the best composers in the Arab world. He promoted a new Egyptian culture that depended on Nasser's patronage, and therefore depended on his grace as President of Egypt. By representing a single front of government and culture joined together, Nasser effectively limited any political opposition movements before they could even begin. His cultural policies made Egypt and its new cultural identity dependent on Nasser's personal rule.

**Conclusion –**

**“People do not want words - they want the sound of battle - the battle of destiny.” – Nasser**

Gamel Abdel Nasser focused his political actions around several core concepts. Nasser preserved his autonomy to act at all costs. He manipulated Egypt's nationalist sentiments and constructed an Egyptian cultural identity. He combined popular politics with charismatic authority to ensure a foundation of support for his policies. These accomplishments directly stabilized his rule, consolidated domestic power and enhanced his ability to act.

Nasser was not an ideologue, nor was his political behavior an amalgamation of several different ideologies, as some scholars define Nasserism. He utilized these ideologies when needed, but was certainly not beholden to them. Nasser's political career illustrates that he adapted to each new crisis and pragmatically decided the best recourse. In examining his policies, it becomes clear that Nasser would never limit his options by committing to an ideology. He valued the ability to act without restrictions.

Nasser secured his autonomy by manipulating Egypt's common national and cultural identities. He understood that past nationalist movements had drawn strong support from the masses. He translated his national popularity from the Land Reform act into more permanent support by reshaping the tenets of Egyptian nationalism. He manipulated the post-revolutionary nationalist fervor into a national identity that depended on his personal rule for success.

Similarly, Nasser transferred his political popularity into his new cultural programs. He designed these programs to culturally unify Egypt in order to solidify his political position. The unification also prevented foreign intervention in Egyptian affairs by presenting a single front to foreign provocateurs. The Cultural Revolution fostered further dependency on Nasser and his regime, boosting his national approval.

Nasser used his charisma to legitimize his political and cultural reforms. He combined his knowledge of history with his situational awareness to comprehend the shame and common

cause that bound together the members of the Free Officers Corps. He formed the Free Officers Corp so that he could directly access every level of Egyptian society and insulate his revolution from official retaliation without compromising his core beliefs.

His charisma also contributed to the stability of the Free Officers Corps and the RCC during and after the revolution. The strength of his personality prevented any group fracturing, as was seen in the *Wafd* party after Zaghloul's death. His successful policies and force of personality maintained the revolutionary "vanguard." Nasser prospered as he instituted his policies because of his politically flexibility and charismatic authority. He considered all of the possible solutions before deciding on a course of action. He was not limited by personal or political commitments. His charisma allowed Nasser to lead the revolution and ascend to the position of President without becoming entangled in restrictive alliances.

His refusal to acquiesce to domestic or foreign interests also preserved the popular image of Nasser's morality. The *sha'ab* saw Nasser as an independent Egyptian working to eradicate the negative influences of corruption and colonialism. Nasser did not follow the trend of most other Egyptian politicians. Nasser created and controlled his political system and environment during his career. Since the direction of Egypt was grounded in Nasser's decisions rather than established political precedents, the Egyptian political system was reliant on Nasser. The crux of Nasserism is that the state came to revolve around the man. He immersed himself in every aspect of Egyptian life while still remaining extraordinary.

His remarkable achievements afforded Nasser public trust and admiration. However, he actively worked to foster a national and cultural dependence on his personal rule. He manipulated nationalism to reflect his own personality while constructing a new cultural identity that depended on his personal character. After his death, Egypt completely broke down and

President Anwar es-Sadat scoured any remnants of Nasser's rule from Egyptian politics because Nasser had created a system that was entirely dependent on one man's abilities.

Nasser's replacement would never match his popularity, legitimacy, and charismatic authority. Sadat realized that he needed to construct an entirely different system to govern effectively without Nasser. This highlights the national dependence on Nasser for guidance, direction, and inspiration. Nasser purposefully constructed a system that was entirely dependent on his rule because it ensured that he would never be replaced. Nasser wanted to lead Egypt. His charismatic and independent personality allowed him to do it.

Before the 1952 revolution, native Egyptians possessed no prospects for socio-economic progress. A myriad of troubles plagued the administration and infrastructural investment was limited. Any person with the ability to elevate the nation from such a quagmire must, by default, be an eclectic opportunist. Nasser seized upon several different issues and immediately addressed them, with significant success. He made a virtue of necessity, using Egypt's desperation to justify his drastic reforms and autocratic methods.

Egypt's strategic significance makes Nasser's achievements even more impressive. Three major foreign powers attempted to control Egypt because of its geopolitical importance. Nasser did not cower to the foreign interests. He received support from the United States and the USSR but was not bound by either. His personal politics and charisma empowered Nasser to deal with foreign representatives while refusing to ally Egypt with them in a restrictive agreement.

His core beliefs gave him flexibility and stability. These concepts formed the basis of Nasserism, and he utilized them to solidify his political status. Nasser died as President, 18 years after the revolution. Over 5,000,000 people attended his funeral. He made his own decisions for

the good of Egypt: Nasser's Egypt. In an era defined by academic Cold War ideologies, the man able to best manipulate the world's superpowers and control his nation's political environment was a man who created his own ideology; Nasserism, a political model of behavior based around Nasser's personal core concepts, which he applied pragmatically and independently to each relative personal, domestic or international situation.

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