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I met today for three and a quarter hours with President Nasser in his house in Cairo. President Nasser received me at noon and, despite my suggestion several times that I was taking too much of his time, kept me until approximately 3:15. We discussed, in the course of the conversation (in which we were alone in his garden receiving room) almost every conceivable subject from the events of the revolution in 1952, the state of armaments in the Egyptian armed forces today, his health, his visits to Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, his discussions with Robert Anderson, through peace plans, air engagements with the Israelis and the beneficial effects of sauna baths. In this memorandum, I will attempt only to hit on the high spots of our conversation.

In general, President Nasser was more relaxed and looking in better health than I have ever seen him. He was in a white sport shirt, laughed a great deal and we joked and spoke extremely frankly. He was probing and thoughtful in his questions and remarks and spoke with his usual charm and candor. At the end of our conversation, he shook hands with me three times on the way to the door and urged me to write to him any time I had any thoughts or suggestions about his current situation. I told him about my forthcoming book and told him that I had attacked him along with others in the book. He laughed and said that was not unusual but what had I said. I told him in detail that I accused him of not understanding the nature of power. He laughed about this as this had been a theme that recurred throughout this conversation and previous ones. He asked me to give him the last pages of my book in which I bring forth a suggestion for a peace plan in the Middle East. After my visit had ended, I had lunch with the Minister of Agriculture and Nasser's personal assistant, Hassan Sabry Al-Kholi. Then at six o'clock Hassan Sabry Al-Kholi called to say that President Nasser had asked Mohammed Hassanein Haikel to visit with me tomorrow morning at 10:30 to resume aspects of the conversation which we had only touched slightly today.

I started our conversation by outlining the desalting project for Alexandria. I pointed out to President Nasser that I saw this as a four-stage operation. In the first stage, now largely completed, preliminary studies would be made on the feasibility, from largely abstract criteria, of the economic aspects of the project. From this material, a pilot project should be prepared.



In the second stage, which we are now approaching, a pilot desalting complex composed of equipment to convert approximately 10 million gallons of water daily and land irrigated of approximately 3,000 acres, would be undertaken. In the pilot stage, careful and detailed studies would be made of different crops, the technology of salt water conversion, agricultural aspects of the project and, most importantly I felt, of sociological, cultural, health, and "political" aspects of the project. I laid particular stress on these latter factors as the only conceivable way of avoiding the horrendous mistakes made during the Industrial Revolution in the cities. I pointed out to President Nasser that if these studies were correctly undertaken, he could hope to carry forward the creation of the "new men" into the rural sector of his society. We discussed this at some length and he professed complete agreement with my project. I then indicated that the final result of the pilot project stage would be the completion of a proposal, presumably to the World Bank and/or the Kuwait Fund, to fund the third stage. In the third stage, approximately 350,000 acres would be irrigated and in the fourth stage, this would be multiplied ten fold. He asked me about the time table for these events and I indicated that I hoped that we could get started in January on the pilot stage and that this would run for approximately four years. The third stage could be finished roughly by 1977 and the fourth stage by the end of the 1980's.

He said several times that when this had first been reported to him he thought these were largely dreams but, he emphasized, dreams must be followed. Several times in the conversation he mentioned the fact that he was now a grandfather (at the age of 51) and that he felt that it was critical for Egypt to move to a stage of preparing for future generations. I pointed out to him that I felt the project was risky but that we should be able to prove it out during the pilot stage and that my hope was that we in the United States could raise the hard currency component of the project if he were willing to have his government subscribe the Egyptian currency. He said, "We must do this."

Inter alia we discussed the issues of family planning. I emphasized that I felt it would be tragic to undertake the technological aspects of the study only to create either new slums around automated, advanced, industrial, agricultural projects or to simply give the basis of a new explosion of population. President Nasser said he completely agreed but that he was baffled by the population problem. We discussed

the project the Stevenson Institute has in India, which I explained in general terms, and he laughingly said, "we are doing no better than the Indians." He said, "You know, here in the cities we have the cinema and television to occupy us in the evenings but in the villages making love is the only way that a man can find any pleasure. And so, children come." He said that he would have no objection to our planning very carefully the family planning aspects but that he felt that we would have a great deal of trouble trying to control too tightly the movement of people into the area and educational standards.

I pointed out the contrast between the 1858 Egyptian and Ottoman land laws with their emphasis on mulk and miri as categories of land ownership. Nasser appeared to be delighted by this example and said, "Yes, this is exactly the kind of thing we must know and this is what you must find out in the pilot project."

I discussed with President Nasser also the Tom Sorensen-Sy Weintraub project for a film in Egypt and explained this to him in some detail. President Nasser appeared to be delighted by the project and indicated that he was prepared to move ahead with it. He said, however, that funding may be a problem. I emphasized that it is the problem. He asked me to discuss this further with his Minister of Culture which I will do tomorrow at two o'clock. He did say, however, in closing this subject that he felt we must move ahead with it and he fully understood the repercussions on tourism and on the Egyptian "image" abroad.

This led me into a discussion of Egypt's image and of the dilemma in which Egypt finds itself as a consequence of the Arab-Israeli conflict. I indicated to him my own views on the confusion of real and apparent power and the high cost that Egypt pays for buying large amounts of Soviet equipment on the one hand and on the other hand, the facile equation in the West of the Egyptians with the American Negroes and the Israelis with the American and other European Jews and the transposition of this into the David and Goliath story. We discussed this for quite a long time in various ramifications including the course of fighting in the last war.

We particularly discussed his relationship with various sectors of his own government and army. President Nasser emphasized the fact that in his military and his intelligence



forces had largely isolated themselves and had built independent bases of power. He said that he had warned his military chiefs some days before the outbreak of fighting that the closure of the Straits of Tiran would definitely lead to fighting but that this was not the opinion of his intelligence force or his military. As late as Saturday before the war, he said that he had indicated to them that the Israelis would certainly attack on Monday but had been categorically refuted by his military leaders. He said of Field Marshall Amr that he was closer to him than a brother but that people in the intelligence organization were constantly seeking to drive a wedge between them and had, apparently, convinced Amr that Nasser intended to get rid of him.

We reviewed the course of the fighting and course of events leading up to the war. I told President Nasser that as a student of him, I was convinced that the man who had made the largest impression on his thinking about strategy was John Foster Dulles. He burst out laughing and said yes, that is quite true. We then discussed brinksmanship, the Cuba missile crisis, the Bay of Pigs, Soviet actions on Czechoslovakia and the events leading up to the June War. I will not review those here except to say that President Nasser apparently bought completely the argument of the events that I put forward in my chapter in The United States and the Arab World.

We then discussed the question of personnel in the Egyptian government. I indicated to him my own feeling about the difference between real and apparent power by suggesting that the major missing ingredient in Egypt was middle level man power. I told him that I felt he only weakened his case by buying more military equipment because he did not have the society upon which to base it. I pointed out that in driving to his house in the last few blocks I had passed several thousand people in the streets with probably less than one per thousand who could in any way understand President Nasser's program or could do anything serious to facilitate its execution. Nasser nodded in agreement. I pointed out, in contrast, that if one drove down the streets of Tel Aviv he would be sure to find that 90 out of 100 people could not only understand but contribute to the effectiveness of an Israeli government program and that this was the basic disparity between the two countries, not the number of tanks or airplanes involved. Nasser said that he quite understood and agreed with this proposition but that after all the Israelis had occupied Egyptian territory and that he was under great pressure, naturally, to acquire the military means of protecting Egyptian territory and of ousting the invaders.

We reverted several times after this to the likelihood of an outbreak of major fighting. I suggested to him my own belief that it is likely to occur before the end of this year. He professed to be surprised by this pronouncement and asked me why I thought so. I told him that I believed that he had executed the most dangerous of all moves in world politics, namely, putting his adversaries in a corner from which they had no logical move. He asked me to elaborate on this further and I suggested that the Israelis, after having done their utmost in the June War now found themselves little better or no better off than they were before. Indeed, they now found themselves in the dangerous position of having internalized the Arab-Israeli problem to a greater extent than ever before. I suggested that if I were planning Israeli strategy I would feel it absolutely necessary to prevent encouragement of internal terrorist and guerrilla activities such as everyone knew the Egyptians were encouraging. I would not, I suggested, be concerned about his acquisition of formal military power but I would be concerned about the bifurcation and further polarization of the Israeli and Israeli-dominated community. We discussed this, Vietnam, Yemen and Algeria in considerable detail. Nasser said, of course, "I do not have final control over the terrorists." I replied that this was inevitably the case in all such issues, pointing out that after President Kennedy had issued his orders on the blockade of Russian ships, he had lost control himself of the situation and I told the story of Barbara Tuchman's The Guns of August and its impact on President Kennedy. President Nasser had read Robert Kennedy's article on the Cuba missile crisis and we discussed this in some detail.

We then came to concrete issues of war and peace. He asked me what I would do if I were in his place at this time. I suggested to him that I thought there were two major courses of action ahead. The one upon which he was embarked at this time appeared to me to lead definitely to warfare in which Egypt could only be further hurt and humiliated while the other, apparently more dangerous and more far out, might be the only one offering any real hope. He asked me to elaborate this and I told him that I had indeed written it down and he asked me to pass it along to him today which I plan to do. In fact, this is the last section of my book, The United States and the Arab World.

President Nasser told me of his most recent conversation with Robert Anderson. He said that Anderson had told him point blank that Egypt had two choices: "either to surrender to the Soviet Union or to surrender to Israel." President Nasser said he had been absolutely astonished by this and had thought about it a good deal since Anderson's visit and discussed it with most of the members of his government. He said, "If this is indeed the real choice, then we must surrender to the Soviet Union." I emphatically disagreed that these were the real choices. I did say, however, that I felt it would take a great deal of wit and wisdom on his part -- and I stressed that he was the only Arab capable of making this move -- to prevent a catastrophe in the weeks ahead. What this meant, I emphasized and reemphasized, was a turning away from reliance on overt military force. This is what I called apparent power. Nasser questioned me again on the meaning of apparent power. I said that I meant by this the reliance on the tools and toys of warfare rather than on the development of an educated, coherent and dedicated population. The latter, I stressed, was the work of schools and of decades while the former, apparently available on order from the Soviet Union, was a snare and a delusion which could not only cost Egypt years in its development process but might well cause the destruction of Nasser's government.

We came back to this point repeatedly. At this time, I suggested, that the Israelis, having failed to accomplish the political purposes which the June War was really all about were faced with the dilemma today of seeing Egypt rearm itself to a point which they might regard as dangerous. It seemed to me that the same factors could be operative today as in May of '67 and that this time the Israelis, in desperation, must try not simply to destroy the Egyptian Air Force (at this point President Nasser intervened to point out that it would not be possible this time since the Egyptians had built cover for their aircraft and had their other equipment widely dispersed. He also pointed out that in the first hours after the war began he discovered that he only had a handful of tanks out of the thousand that he started with and practically no airplanes.) This time I stressed the Israelis would have to try to destroy him and his government, gambling on the fact that something easier to work with might follow them. He laughed and said that this was the prospect of Operation Musketeer in the 1956 war. I looked at my watch and said, you never can tell, they might be trying to do it right now. For the only time in the conversation, he looked quite startled at me but I emphasized that if I were planning Israeli strategy, I would feel myself at this point to be in a corner from which the only thing I could do was to increase military pressure in the only sensitive point, namely against President Nasser himself. The great danger, I emphasized, of all strategies is putting the other side in a corner from which he has nothing



to lose and can only strike out blindly. This was the thing, I emphasized, that President Kennedy was most intent on not doing during the Cuba missile crisis. The President said that he fully understood this position but what could he do. We discussed, at some length, the pressures upon him by his own military for rearmament and for retaliatory raids. He hinted several times at his own problem of achieving a sensitive, far-seeing and accurate intelligence. He pointed out, for example, that in the raid on upper Egypt which he put out as an air raid, he did so because this was the first report that he received on it. He then told me in detail what in fact the raid had consisted of.

I emphasized to him my own evaluation of the situation in terms of the contrast between Zambia and Rhodesia, pointing out that Egypt was now widely despised throughout the world both for vain boastfulness and then for inept performance and that he, President Nasser, was widely regarded as a modern Hitler, a dangerous figure on the world stage who had no ideas of moving toward peace, indeed, a man with whom peace could not be made. This, he retorted, was absolutely untrue.

I urged him, in rebuttal to my point and the belief of many others around the world about him that he put together, at this time, an Egyptian peace package, those things for which he would agree to move.

He thought for quite a while and then said, "you know, we cannot give on any element of territory." I questioned him in detail about each piece. He said it was not simply a matter of Egypt as Dean Rusk has asked him to emphasize but that rather Egypt could not agree to the diminution of the Arab cause in any particular. We went point by point on the Golan Heights, Jerusalem, the West Bank, Gaza and Sinai. On each of these he was completely inflexible and emphasized again that there could be no change of territory. I said that it was my belief, if I were in the Israeli government, that I would insist on the demilitarization of the Golan Heights, I would insist on the change of the frontier in the Gaza area to move the frontier further from Tel Aviv and that it was my belief that the Israelis would not agree to do anything on Jerusalem. I asked whether internationalization of Jerusalem was a real possibility and he said that, at this time, internationalization effectively only meant internationalization of the Arab area and this was not likely to lead very far since the Israelis, with determination, money and skill would undoubtedly undermine the Arab position even in an internationalized area. He said, "you know, it is often said that there are 100 million Arabs. Of course, there are not 100 million Arabs. It is usually said.



that there are only 2 million Jews in Israel but there are not 2 million Jews in Israel. There are many millions abroad who are for all intentional purposes their full supporters. They have had a plan since the time of Herzl and they have carried it forward point by point with precision and persistence. They will continue to do so in the future."

I reverted to the question of an Egyptian peace package, pointing out that President Nasser's Foreign Minister had, in his United Nations press conference, indicated a great many things on which real movement could be made and suggested to him that he combine these into an Egyptian approach to peace enunciating a position to get some movement toward peace talks begun. I suggested to him, as an earnest of his move in this direction that he consider a unilateral ending of the problem of the Straits of Tiran: simply by having Egypt adhere to the International Treaty, which I pointed out the Soviet Union had also signed, on free use of international waterways. This, I pointed out, would prevent him from having to knuckle under to Arab hawks who urged him to close the waterway. This touched a vibrant chord in his memory and he told me of a number of times in which his own military had tried to force him to close the Straits, going back to 1965. They had, he said, pointedly remarked that even King Farouk had closed the Straits of Tiran.

Seizing upon this point, I suggested that it was ephemeral to think, as a number of Arabs do, that the advent of the Nixon Administration would create a more favorable climate for the concourse of our two nations in itself. I suggested, using his analogy of his own military that the ability of a statesman to operate is largely conditional upon the norm which is accepted by the affected parts of his population and government and that even he, President Nasser, with all of his power, was indicating how clearly limited was his own freedom of action. I suggested that in the best of circumstances, a statesman's freedom of action might be 25% and that the Nixon Administration might, conceivably, have 3% more or 3% less latitude than a Humphrey Administration in regard to the Middle East. But, I emphasized, what was really important was to work on the other 75%. Thus, when President Nasser left open the issue of the closure of the Straits he left to his own enemies and to those within his government who were trying to push him, the capability of doing so. They could, since this issue had not been foreclosed, use it as a lever to move him in directions in which events got out of his control. But, if he moved ahead to foreclose this possibility, for example by the International Treaty on the use of the waterways, he would restrict the course of action open



to those who were trying to push him and would in fact allow himself more latitude in his actions.

At this point, the conversation began to become circular and we went back over many of the previous points we had discussed. In touching on personnel, we discussed the case of Salah Dessouki, my good friend who was the Governor of Cairo. Nasser told me that he was still very annoyed with Dessouki whom he had sent to Finland, as he put it, "to put him on ice". He indicated that his annoyance with Dessouki was because of Dessouki's assumption of aristocratic ways but told me what close friends he and Dessouki had been before the revolution. He pointed out that in the only assassination attempt in which he was involved, the arms for the attempt had been stored in Dessouki's house although Dessouki was out of the country. He then told me with great laughter the story which appears in the philosophy of the revolution.

Finally, for the fourth or fifth time, I suggested that I should leave him and we stood up. I remarked that he seemed in quite good health and we discussed his treatment in the Soviet Union, his back trouble and his diabetes. He has a pinched nerve, similar to mine, which affects his left leg and last year after the troubles, his diabetes got temporarily out of control. When he told me about his back, I asked him if he used a bed board. We discussed the methods of sleeping for quite a while and I urged to sleep with a pillow between his knees as I do. He said that he had always done that because he was unable to sleep on his back and asked why I did not use the medicine that I suggested to him, sleeping on my back. I said that I could not sleep that way and he roared with laughter and said neither could he. I told him about my sauna and urged him to get one. He told me that he would deputize Hassan Sabry Al-Kholi to get one and would try this out. We then shook hands warmly for the first of several times and started walking slowly toward the door. He led me all the way out to the car, repeated several times how much he had enjoyed the visit and asked me to get in touch with him either through the United Nations or his office in Washington or directly any time I could and to come see him on any occasion that offered itself. He promised complete and absolute support for the Stevenson Institute program and said that he would move as rapidly as he could to appoint an official to head the separate authority that he was establishing for the desalinization scheme. He said that he thought this would probably be Mahmud Yunis, whom I had suggested, to lend the project real stature and to head it with a man of energy and determination. I pointed out to him that unless this were done, the whole project could be



bogged down in the bureaucratic morrass. He sighed and said, yes, he understood very well how that could happen but that we must not let it do so. Again, he made me promise that I would communicate to him in writing my suggestions for bringing the Israeli conflict to a halt and promised to give them very serious attention.

As I left his office at 3:15, Hassan Sabry Al-Kholi was waiting for me across the street, absolutely delighted at how long the President had kept me and pointing out that he had broken a number of other engagements for this purpose. Since he is acting as President, Prime Minister and Chief of the Army, he is burdened with a tremendous number of meetings and performances.

William R. Polk