Cairo between Worlds

Britain, India, and the Middle East, 1935-1942

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Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Michaelmas, 2018

Abstract

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This thesis follows a cast of British, Egyptian, and Indian figures—politicians, diplomats, military attachés, journalists, bureaucrats, activists, and artists—whose lives and work intersected in Cairo between the late 1930s and early 1940s. It traces the connections between them through personal correspondence, diaries, published memoirs, newspapers, and government archives, while documenting the emergence of the Egyptian capital as a global city of the interwar period. The project offers new insight on the international history of the 1930s and '40s, viewed from the colonial East. It argues for the reassessment of these years as a 'Collaborative Moment' in which relations between the British Empire and nationalist movements in Egypt and India were briefly redefined.

Research is organised into four key lines of enquiry which intersect. These are, first, British policy in the Middle East; second, Government of India contributions to, and interventions in, British policy in the Middle East; third, Egyptian foreign and domestic politics; and fourth, Indian nationalist engagement with Egyptian and Middle Eastern politics.

Chapters provide original interpretations of the Abyssinian Crisis; the negotiation of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936; the Arab Revolt, and the 1939 St James' Conference on Palestine; the evolution of nationalist politics in Egypt and India, and the relationships between their leaderships; and the comparative impact of the Second World War on both countries. The thesis culminates with a meditation on the transformation of Egyptian and Indian society between 1935 and 1942, in light of the ideas of a near-contemporary, the Italian Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony provides an original lense through which to consider the triangular relationship between Britain, India, and the Middle East during this period, and the essential role of Cairo within it.

For Heather, who blazed the trail

and for David, who has walked with me every step of the way.

Acknowledgements

This project originated in a correspondence with Margaret MacMillan in 2012. In those early exchanges, as in all of our subsequent interactions, Margaret managed to be both warmly encouraging about my ideas, and devastatingly thorough in her criticism. I cannot now imagine how I would have begun—let alone finished—without her spritely enthusiasm, sage advice, and sharp editorial pen. I have been so fortunate as to accrue a second, comparable debt of gratitude to Eugene Rogan, whose diligence and kindness since coming aboard as co-supervisor in 2016 have been relentless in equal measure. My work has benefitted not only from his insightful feedback, but also from the experience of teaching together on an undergraduate paper, *The Middle East in the Age of Empires*, between 2016 and 2018. I consider myself blessed beyond reason to have had not one, but two supervisors I could rely on for honest intellectual criticism, unfailing encouragement and support—and prompt email replies. Truly, they have made this process an almost unalloyed pleasure.

On the subject of emails, I can go no further without expressing my groveling thanks to Penny Cooke, Personal Assistant to the Warden of St Antony's College, who has moved mountains, expedited shipping, and baked homemade bread on my behalf. Coordinating regular face-to-face meetings between the Warden, the Director of the Middle East Centre, and a lowly graduate student might have proved impossible in less capable (or creative) hands, but Penny always found a way to squeeze me onto the Excel sheet. I am forever in her debt.

In the early stages of the DPhil, my thinking about Egypt, India, and the British Empire benefited immensely from conversations and oral examinations with John Darwin and James Belich of Oxford's Faculty of History. Debbie Usher of the Middle East Centre Archives at St Antony's College was also exceptionally helpful in identifying useful resources. Jim Jankowski was kind enough to meet with me at a coffee shop in Colorado, and share a bibliography of relevant material (as well as tips on local ski hills). Noor Khan shared lunch with me at Kew, providing invaluable information about sources, and heartfelt encouragement. Wm Roger Louis hosted me at All Souls and asked wonderful questions which helped me to refine my own. Faisal Devji indulged me in a long interview about Indian Muslim politics, and steered me towards the autobiography of Khaliquzzaman. Paul Dalgleish, Special Collections Archivist at the Academy Library, University of New South Wales at Canberra, provided invaluable assistance in obtaining access to an extremely rare, later memoir by the same author.

I am grateful for the community surrounding the Oxford Transnational and Global History Seminar, which has provided both friends and mentors. Thanks go to Duncan Money for his early efforts to foist me onto committee. Arthur Asseraf, my predecessor as Convenor, remains a source of constant inspiration, invaluable guidance, and irrepressible laughter. Greg Hynes, my colleague and successor at

TGHS, has also been my most stalwart and trusted ally over the past four years. He has supported me through every stack of files, and every inch of typescript, and I can never thank him enough.

Partial support for this project has come from the T.E. Lawrence-All Souls Scholarship in History; the Canadian Centennial Scholarship Fund; the Beit Research Scholarship in Imperial & Commonwealth History; and St. Antony's College. As mentioned, I also had the pleasure of working on the teaching team for *The Middle East in the Age of Empires* for three academic years, during which time I feel sure I learned more than I taught, thanks to a brilliant group of colleagues. Hannah Louise-Clarke, my first teaching mentor, met with me after every lecture and seminar for coffee and a detailed postmortem, and continued to offer lunch, insight, and advice long after her formal responsibilities had ended (and her maternity leave had begun). Via Hannah, James MacDougall unwittingly loaned me his office for several terms while on sabbatical. I thank him heartily for it, as well as for spearheading the 'Ethics & Empire' op-ed in *The Conversation,* which saw our undergraduate paper become perhaps the first in Oxford's long history to have the majority of its tutors subjected to ad hominem attacks in the *Daily Mail*. I also wish to express my profound gratitude to Hussein Omar, my co-teacher and co-conspirator, whose thoughtfulness, humour, and professional generosity have been a sustaining force in my work. I honestly don't know where I would be without his dry remarks and persistent nudges in (a better) direction.

For the past 16 months, I have been a part-time resident of Stanford University, and I would like to acknowledge the kindness of Joel Beinen, Priya Satia, and Ali Yaycioglu at the Department of History, for including me in their graduate seminars, reading groups, and mailing lists. Joel tipped me off about Avalon Yoga and got me thinking about Gramsci, two things for which I am sincerely grateful. Thanks also go to the British Studies Reading Group at Berkeley, especially the hosts, James Vernon, and Tom and Barbara Metcalf. I am humbled that, thanks to this project, I have had the opportunity to meet and exchange ideas with so many of the scholars I admire, and I remain deeply appreciative of their time and generosity; the errors and shortcomings which remain in my work are, of course, entirely my own.

A veritable army of friends and family have sustained me through the final stages of this process, as I worked nomadically, lugging around a suitcase filled with books. In Cairo, my heartfelt thanks go to my hosts, Jihene and Hisham Siblini and their children, as well as Ned Allam and his sister, Jehan Allam, of the AUC Arabic Language programme, for her guidance and generosity. In Beirut, Ali Issa put us up for weeks on end; Dominique Chouchani flung open her doors in the middle of the night; Mira Siblini fed our bellies and souls—and reminded me why I wanted to write about India and the Middle East in the first place. In Montpellier, Jenine Abboushi force-fed me gourmet food and strict professional advice, her voice ricocheting off the ancient walls of the city. In Oxford, the Blues hockey cabal came through time and again with a bed, sofa, or *something*. Thanks go to Joey Wenig and Megan Grundy, and especially to Sarah Walshaw and Jim Johnson, for opening their home, kitchen, and wine cellar to scholastic refugees, essentially on a rolling basis. Across the road in Jericho, my Soka Gakkai district leaders, Jo Lane and Tony Morris, have been a constant source of love, laughter, and sage advice over the years, the best 'spare set' of parents a Buddhist could ever hope for.

In London, I am eternally grateful to Jeanne Terrier, Isabelle De St Antoine, Mats Hausken, Lea Larsen Volay, Georgia Nichols, and Mel and Wendy Nichols, who between them have housed and cared for me over spans of weeks and months, which by now account for many years. The bulk of the research for this project would have been impossible without their incalculable generosity. Lubna Fakhry, my fellow Beirut expat, who travelled from Crystal Palace to Oxford every other weekend during my first term, deserves a medal for her loyalty and compassion. Mari Ann Larsen Volay in Copenhagen, and Juliette Massot in Amsterdam, have both provided welcome escapes and inspiring new vistas when it was all a little too much to bear. From her perch at Warwick, Liana Valerio has staved off isolation in distant lands, providing the sort of morning pep talks only women historians can give. Kristen Noges has been there every step of the way, since I was a pretentious teenager who dreamed of studying history at Oxford, and came all the way from Canada to witness me admonishing a room full of undergraduates at St Antony's.

I met my husband, Nick, in the midst of the first year of the DPhil; he has never known me absent this pet monster. In spite of which he has stuck it out, through living in an attic, unemployment, threatened deportation, forced elopement, flatsharing as newlyweds, four-to-six months of long distance each year, a Francophone social life, Buddhist, jazz-obsessed in-laws, and a Lebanese extended family. In short he is a Modern Miracle, and I can't believe I get to live (mostly) with him. I also don't know if I would ever have found the strength to stay the course at Oxford if we hadn't met. He is the real prize from my time here, and I love him to death.

This work is dedicated to my parents, David and Heather O'Halloran, who have had frequent cause, over the years, to regret their early hubris in suggesting I 'follow my dreams'. Nevertheless, they have backed their dark horse to the hilt, and I am at a loss to quantify in words what their belief in me means—has always meant. These years have marked the circuitous realisation of a childhood dream, in which my parents have, from the very beginning, been intimately involved. There was a divine elegance in returning home to Canada this past summer, for the longest stretch in over a decade, to complete the text. My parents read and re-read every word; my mother even checked the consistency between Arabic spellings in the footnotes, despite having no knowledge of the language. My father awaited each new section as if it were a serialised crime thriller. They fed me, took me for walks, consoled me when it was awful, and celebrated with me when it wasn't. And every day, no matter what else happened, we chanted Nam Myoho Renge Kyo.

This, and everything I do, is for them.

Stanford, California
December 2018

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Introduction

Cairo between Worlds

This thesis is about the city of Cairo, and its role in a triangular relationship between Britain, India, and the Middle East in the late 1930s and early '40s. The interwar years were an era of rapid technological advancement, heightened global interconnectivity, and a high-stakes battle of ideas, which ultimately gave way to the devastation of World War II. I am interested in the experience of Cairo as an emerging global metropole during these years, and the participation of British, Indian, and Arab actors in this intensely charged international moment. In particular, my thesis explores Cairo's dual identity as a strategically important metropole within the British Empire, and a cosmopolitan hub of anti-colonial agitation, as the various 'worlds' it inhabited —British, Mediterranean, Islamic, African, Arab, and Eastern—were drawn into the emerging global conflict.

By 1935, London faced a rising tide of nationalist and anti-colonial fervour across the Empire, from the Caribbean to South East Asia, and particularly in India and the Middle East. These internal challenges were coupled with an increasingly menacing international geo-strategic environment. As we will see, the Italian invasion of Abyssinia and the Arab Revolt in Palestine were both crises of exceptional significance for Egypt and its relations with both Britain and India. The signature, also in 1935, of the Anti-Comintern Pact between Germany and Japan heightened fears of a threat to British interests in the Pacific; in Europe, too, the clouds were gathering. Seizing on the strategic opportunity presented by the Abyssinian Crisis, Nazi Germany reoccupied the Rhineland in March 1936. In July of that year, a fascist coup would plunge Spain into a brutal civil war.

Against this fraught international landscape, the present study explores relations between people based in Cairo—whether British civil servants, journalists, and military attachés, or Egyptian politicians, artists, and activists—and their counterparts in London and British India. I argue that these dynamic sets of interactions, all centred on the Egyptian capital, are crucial to our understanding of British policy in the Middle East, and shed light on the rapid changes taking place within Egypt, India, and the British Empire more broadly, over the course of the 1930s. Simultaneously, a consideration of connections between politically engaged Arabs and Indians contributes to our understanding of the development—in the era immediately preceding decolonisation—of complementary and competing visions for the future of the Arab region, South Asia, and the Islamic East.

I have chosen Cairo as the focal point of my research because of its key place at the physical and conceptual intersection of imperial and anti-colonial networks. What happened in Cairo mattered—not only to Egyptians or Arabs, but to a whole host of actors in other parts of the world, from the English Channel to the Bay of Bengal, and even further afield. Long a potent symbol of Islamic civilisation, Cairo also lay at the heart of British political, military and intelligence operations in the Middle East and North Africa throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The Suez Canal made Egypt crucial to the defence of Britain's empire in India, a fact of which Raj officials found frequent cause to remind their colleagues in London. By the 1920s, Cairo moreover boasted the most developed free press and media sectors the Arab world had ever seen. Its newspapers, publishing houses, radio and recording industries catered to diverse readerships and listening audiences which spanned North Africa, the Middle East, and Central, South, and South-East Asia. The Muslim press in India, as in Singapore and Malaysia,

relied on the Cairo papers for news and commentary. Musicians from throughout the Arab-Islamic world came to Cairo to record, while students from as far away as China and Japan were enrolled in its prestigious universities. Partly for these reasons, the Egyptian capital became an epicentre of interwar anti-colonial nationalism, alongside a host of related and competing *isms*, the most salient of which for our purposes included pan-Islam, pan-Arabism, and 'Easternism'.[1]

Thus Cairo, and its role in relationships between Britain, India, and the Middle East, provides a rich seam in the international history of the 1930s: a window into the rapid changes then taking place within the British Empire—and indeed, across the globe. Between 1935 and 1942, Cairo was also among the principal theatres of a dramatic encounter between the imperial state, anti-colonial nationalism, and European fascism. The repercussions of these uncertain and challenging times continue to make themselves felt. Today it is as important as it has ever been to understand the world of the late 1930s, and the ways in which it began to change following the outbreak of war.

Historiography & Literature Review

The histories of the British Empire, the Middle East, and the Indian subcontinent are all topics of enduring academic interest. Yet few scholars have attempted to integrate our understanding of their evolution in the twentieth century. A similar (and yet more surprising) dearth of material exists on the late 1930s as an era, a phenomenon which may possibly be ascribed to the almost gravitational force of the Second World War on the historical psyche: the nearer a date is to the outbreak of war, the stronger the impulse apparently becomes to understand it teleologically. This has served to emphasise the signal importance of portents and precursors, such as the

[1] See Chapter 2 in Gershoni, Israel and James Jankowski. *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930-1945* (Cambridge, 2002).

Munich Crisis of 1938, while tending to obscure those events which fit less comfortably within the 'descent to war' narrative. The fact that anti-colonial and internationalist solidarities were actually being strengthened between Indians and Arabs well into 1939 is one salient example.

In researching these multiple levels of interaction, my intention is to bridge a number of historiographical divides. First, Britain's empires in India and the Middle East are almost always dealt with separately, despite the fact that they were seen as connected places, both by British officials, and by Indians and Arabs themselves—especially those involved in anti-colonial nationalist movements. There are several works which have begun to complicate this historiographical boundary. Historians in the emerging field of Indian Ocean World studies, such as Robert J. Blyth and James Onley, have begun writing the history of Anglo-Indian administration in the Arab region, but are primarily interested in earlier periods than my own, and centre their narratives on the countries of the Persian Gulf.[2] Meanwhile Noor Aiman I. Khan has written about the ties between Egyptian and Indian anti-colonial movements throughout the first half of the twentieth century;[3] British officials and the Indian Muslim League are, however, largely absent from her narrative.

This leads me to the second key divide I am attempting to overcome, namely the remarkably persistent barrier between imperial history on the one hand, and postcolonial and national histories on the other. It is self-evident that neither the archives of former imperial powers nor the media produced by national liberation movements can hope to furnish us with a complete picture of the complex interactions and evolving relationship between Western and Eastern

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[2] Blyth, Robert J. *The Empire of the Raj: India, Eastern Africa and the Middle East 1858-1947* (Basingstoke, 2003); Onley, James. *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers, and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf* (Oxford, 2007).

[3] Khan, Noor-Aiman I. *Egyptian-Indian Nationalist Collaboration and the British Empire* (New York, 2011).

peoples in the first half of the twentieth century. In consulting a broad range of British, Egyptian and Indian material, alongside imperial, military, and nation-specific historiographies, my goal has been to construct a more nuanced and holistic understanding of a period of intense transnational interaction, and profound global change.

The third and final historiographic divide I seek to address is between the interwar period and the Second World War. While it is undeniable that life on the European continent was altered irrevocably by the British declaration of war against Germany in September 1939, its impact was felt only gradually elsewhere. It does not make sense for my study to end with the outbreak of war in Europe; it was not until the early 1940s, with the fall of France, the entry of Italy, and the outbreak of the Pacific War, that the calculus of relations between Egypt, Britain, and India began to definitively transform. By straddling the year 1939, I hope to present a clearer and more complete account of this metamorphosis than could be offered by either a strictly 'interwar' or 'wartime' history of the same subject.

The following survey of secondary material is divided into three parts, in order to account for the variety of historical literatures which have most influenced and informed the present study. These are, namely, the history of Egypt and the Middle East; the history of India and the British Empire (two distinct historiographies which are here discussed in tandem); and global and transnational history.

i. The Middle East and Egypt

The publication of *Britain's Moment in the Middle East* by Elizabeth Monroe in 1963 was hailed at the time as a groundbreaking new perspective on the 40-year period of British pre-eminence in

the Arab region, from the 1916 Arab Revolt until the 1956 Suez crisis.[4] Monroe argued, as many have done, that "the basic motive" behind Britain's quest to control the Middle East was the need to secure the sea route to India. In this connection she acknowledged the dominant role played by British Indian officials in Britain's Arabian and Persian policies, beginning in the nineteenth century.[5] Monroe's description of the British experience in the Arab region was coloured by the prejudices and assumptions of her era, as well as her lack of access to relevant Arabic sources. Nevertheless, her book remains a valuable foundational text for discussion of Britain's brief but momentous experience of imperial dominance in the Middle East.

Elie Kedourie, a contemporary of Monroe's, offered a richly textured early portrait of the Arab figures at the heart of negotiations with the British in the First World War and immediate postwar period.[6] In at least one sense, Kedourie appears to have concurred with Monroe: he condemned interwar British policymakers in the Middle East as insufficiently imperial, bowing too readily to their perception of nationalism's inexorable rise. Kedourie viewed Arab nationalism as a foreign import; he saw no Arab nation to unite, only competing ethnic and sectarian factions. Like Monroe, he was persuaded that, had the British adopted a more hard-nosed and direct policy of control in the Arab region, the results would have been 'better'—not only for the Empire, but for the Arabs themselves.

These assertions have been contested since their publication.[7] Contemporary scholarship on the Middle East, deeply influenced by the definitive intervention of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in

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[4] Monroe, Elizabeth. *Britain's Moment in the Middle East* (Oxford, 1963).
[5] Monroe, *Britain's Moment*, pp. 12-13
[6] Kedourie, Elie. *The Chatham House Version and Other Middle-Eastern Studies* (London, 1984).
[7] Most prominently by Albert Hourani. See for example Hourani, Albert. *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Oxford, 1962).

1978,[8] has sought both to shift attention to Ottoman and Arabic primary sources, and to read Western archival sources more critically, resulting in forceful new interpretations of the period of European domination. Scholars such as James Gelvin, Michael Provence, and Eugene Rogan, though far from erasing imperial powers from the narrative, have sought to present a more accurate and detailed account of the local actors, media, ideas, and events which together shaped the political landscape of the region.[9] In these accounts, British and French imperialists have increasingly been cast in supporting roles—in the words of James Whidden, "on the margins" of sophisticated Ottoman-Arab political systems, with their own internal logic and driving force.[10]

The present study has relied on several older works, as well as more recent scholarship.[11] The background and negotiation of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty specifically have been most thoroughly covered from the Egyptian perspective by Mahmud Y. Zayid[12] and Hassan Ahmad Ibrahim,[13] writing in 1965 and 1976, respectively.[14] Meanwhile the history of Cairo itself—to say nothing of urban history and sociology as modern disciplines—has been in many ways shaped by Janet Abu Lughod, whose description of the city's evolution over the course of a millennium remains indispensable a half century after it was written—particularly, for present purposes, as

[8] Said, Edward. *Orientalism* (New York, 1978).

[9] Gelvin, James. *The Modern Middle East: A History* (Oxford, 2008); Provence, Michael. *The Last Ottoman Generation and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge, 2017); Rogan, Eugene. *The Arabs: A History* (London, 2012).

[10] Whidden, James. *Monarchy and Modernity in Egypt: Politics, Islam and Neocolonialism between the Wars* (New York, 2013), p. 11

[11] Older studies of particular relevance to the present work include Al-Sayyid-Marsot, Afaf Lutfi. *Egypt's Liberal Experiment, 1922-1936* (Berkeley, 1977); El-Bishri, Tariq. *Dirasat fy al-Dimuqratiyya al-Misriyya* (Cairo, 1987); Tripp, Charles. *'Ali Mahir Pasha and the Palace in Egyptian Politics, 1936-42: Seeking Mass Enthusiasm for Autocracy*. PhD thesis, School of Oriental & African Studies (London 1984).

[12] Zayid, Mahmud Y. *Egypt's Struggle for Independence* (Beirut, 1965).

[13] Ibrahim, Hassan Ahmad. *The 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty* (Khartoum, 1976).

[14] More recent scholarship has focused on the British side of negotiations. See for example Malcolm Yapp's historiographical essay in Yapp, Malcolm E. (Ed.) *Politics and Diplomacy in Egypt: The Diaries of Sir Miles Lampson, 1935-1937* (London, 1997); and Morewood, Steven, 'Appeasement from Strength: The Negotiation of the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of Friendship and Alliance', *Diplomacy & Statecraft,* vol. 7 no. 3 (1996).

regards the emergence, in the mid-to-late-nineteenth century, of a physical urban geography seemingly bifurcated between its modernised European and medieval Eastern halves.[15] Current scholarship on Cairo's dual experience of coloniality and national awakening in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has complicated this picture in satisfying ways, and includes contributions in business and economic history, by Nancy Reynolds;[16] the history of time, by On Barak;[17] the history of medicine and public hygiene, by Khaled Fahmy;[18] and the history of emotions, by Joseph Prestel.[19]

On Egyptian politics and society, the work of Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski—particularly *Redefining the Egyptian Nation* and *Confronting Fascism in Egypt*—is of special relevance to the present study.[20] The authors' exhaustive surveys of Egyptian print media provide an invaluable window into the diverse and sophisticated intellectual and political discourses which animated the country's educated classes during the period under consideration. Equally significant is their situation of Egypt within a transnational (as opposed to purely Middle Eastern or pan-Arab) context, albeit to a limited degree. In *Redefining the Egyptian Nation*, the authors identify, but do not fully explore, the emergence in the 1930s of an 'Easternist' political orientation, which embraced Egypt's affiliation with a broad and inclusive Eastern civilization. This is contrasted by the authors with the Western-oriented territorial nationalism which defined Egyptian politics in the 1920s, and is depicted as part of a vague yet influential cultural milieu, from which emerged

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[15] Abu-Lughod, Janet. 'Tale of Two Cities: the Origins of Modern Cairo', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 7, no. 4 (1965), pp. 429–457; *Cairo: 1001 Years of the City Victorious* (Princeton, 1971).

[16] Reynolds, Nancy Y. *A City Consumed: Urban Commerce, the Cairo Fire, and the Politics of Decolonization in Egypt* (Stanford, 2012).

[17] Barak, On. *On Time: Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt* (Berkeley, 2013).

[18] Fahmy, Khaled. 'An Olfactory Tale of Two Cities: Cairo in the Nineteenth Century', in Edwards, Jill (Ed.) *Cairo: Essays in Honour of George Scanlon* (Cairo, 2002); 'Modernizing Cairo: A Revisionist Account', in AlSayyad et al (Eds.), *Making Cairo Medieval* (Lanham MD, 2005).

[19] Prestel, Joseph Ben. *Emotional Cities: Debates on Urban Change in Berlin and Cairo, 1860–1910* (Oxford, 2017).

[20] Gershoni, Israel and James Jankowski. *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930-1945* (Cambridge, 2002); *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship vs. Democracy in the 1930s* (Stanford, 2010).

the more articulate supra-Egyptian nationalisms of pan-Arabism and pan-Islam. While there is no doubt much merit to this analysis, as I argue in Chapters Three and Four, Easternism was a concept with more political traction in 1930s Egypt than Gershoni and Jankowski have allowed.

In direct conversation with Gershoni and Jankowski's work is *Ordinary Egyptians,* by Ziad Fahmy, which challenges the prevailing academic focus on print media in national identity formation.[21] Fahmy argues that the paradigm of 'print capitalism', famously developed by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities,*[22] provides an unsatisfactory explanation for the rise of modern nationalism in Egypt (and, it is implied, other Middle Eastern countries), where literacy rates remained low throughout the nineteenth and early-to-mid-twentieth centuries. Fahmy instead draws on oral, aural, and illustrated media in Egypt between 1870 and 1919: satirical publications, popular songs, musical theatre, coffeehouse readings, and radio. Thus where Gershoni and Jankowski provide insight into elite discourses, especially among the educated classes of cities like Cairo and Alexandria, Fahmy offers a complimentary portrait of Egyptian popular culture, which transcended class and educational barriers. Especially given the exponential growth of the Egyptian radio and recording industries beginning in the 1920s, Fahmy's emphasis on aural sources is of profound relevance to the present study, and is extended in what follows by research on British and Italian efforts to reach Egyptian audiences across the airwaves.[23]

In a similar vein, this study has benefited from the contributions of scholars of Egypt's labour, feminist, and art movements, which have tended to be overlooked in general histories of interwar

[21] Fahmy, Ziad. *Ordinary Egyptians* (Stanford, 2011).
[22] Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities* (London, 2006).
[23] Cavarocchi, Francesca. *Avanguardie dello Spirito: Il fascismo e la propaganda culturale all'estero* (Rome, 2010); Marzano, Arturo. *Onde Fasciste: La propaganda araba di Radio Bari 1934-43* (Rome, 2015); Partner, Peter. *Arab Voices: The BBC Arabic Service, 1938-1988* (London, 1988); Williams, Manuela A. *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad: Subversion in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, 1935-1940* (Abingdon, 2006).

Egypt—even in those studies which have adopted a more international perspective. However, the work of scholars like Joel Beinen and Zachary Lockman, Margot Badran, and Sam Bardaouil have offered a series of vital correctives to the notion that Cairo's internationalism was the exclusive preserve of its expatriate families or affluent men.[24] In attempting to weave the findings of these authors into the fabric of a narrative primarily concerned with imperial and transnational politics, I seek to refute the notion that the history of women, workers, or artists are comparatively 'niche' interests. In what follows, it should be manifestly self-evident that these stories enhance, rather than distract from, our understanding of the broader picture.

ii. India and the British Empire

The historiographies of India and the British Empire have also made important and interconnected strides in recent decades. In the 1980s, both fields benefitted from a period of intense contestation between historians of pre-independence India, in many ways epitomised by, on the one hand, the Cambridge School, lead by John Gallagher, Anil Seal, and their students at the University of Cambridge; and on the other by the collective which published the series *Subaltern Studies*,[25] initiated by Ranajit Guha, and whose principal collaborators included Dipesh Chakrabarty, Partha Chatterjee, and Gayatri Spivak. The Cambridge School essentially embodied a British traditionalist historical methodology, focused on elite politics and rooted in the consultation of government archives, applied to the study of India's nationalist movement and its interactions with the British colonial state. In marked contrast, *Subaltern Studies* was most influenced by the work of European theorists, including Claude Levi-Strauss, Antonio Gramsci,

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[24] Badran, Margot. *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton, 1995) ; Beinen, Joel and Zachary Lockman. *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam, and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882-1954* (Cairo, 1998); Bardaouil, Sam. *Egyptian Surrealism: Modernism and the Art and Liberty Group* (London, 2017).

[25] Guha, Ranajit (Ed.) *Subaltern Studies,* 6 volumes (Delhi, 1982-1989).

and Jacques Derrida. It (initially) sought to construct a history of colonial resistance from below, rooted in the experiences of the Indian peasantry.

The Cambridge School's most provocative innovation was a reassessment of the Indian nationalist movement, which posited that its course was principally to be understood as the product of elite self-interest and inter-sectarian rivalries.[26] This was roundly criticised by the Subaltern Studies group for its cynicism and neo-colonial overtones, which denied the agency of India's millions, and the authenticity—or even the logic—of their long struggle for liberation from colonial rule. Simultaneously, however, the principled rejection of elite politics as a subject of inquiry by the Subaltern Studies group was interpreted by some as an implicit acceptance of the Cambridge School's indictment of the motives which animated this class, including as leaders of the nationalist movement. In the words of Chandra et al, their depiction of India's independence movement

> …bears a disturbing resemblance to the imperialist and neo-imperialist characterisation…[the subaltern] approach is characterised by a generally ahistorical glorification of all forms of popular militancy and consciousness and an equally ahistorical contempt for all forms of initiative and activity by the intelligentsia, organised party leadership and other 'elites'. Consequently, it too denies the legitimacy of the actual, historical anti-colonial struggle that the Indian people waged.[27]

Nevertheless, much of the most influential scholarship on the British Empire over the past twenty years owes a significant debt to the Cambridge School, the Subaltern Studies group, or both. Among them, and of particular relevance to the present study, are Chris Bayly, John Darwin, Judith Brown, and Partha Chatterjee. Since the 1990s, these inheritors have in many ways sought to transcend the dichotomies which the Cambridge and Subaltern approaches tended to represent. One exceptionally successful recent work, which is drawn on heavily in

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[26] See for example Gallagher, John, Gordon Johnson & Anil Seal (Eds.) *Locality, Province, and Nation: Essays on Indian Politics, 1870-1940* (Cambridge, 1973); and Seal, Anil. *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the later Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1968).

[27] Chandra, Bipan et al. *India's Struggle for Independence, 1857-1947* (London, 1989) p. 8

Chapter Five, is *The Raj at War*, by Yasmin Khan.[28] Khan's 'people's history' of the Second World War is an intimate and meticulously researched portrait of the experiences of ordinary Indians at an extraordinary moment of time, which nevertheless offers a sweeping and cogent socio-political analysis of the subcontinent in the era immediately preceding partition. In this sense it blends some of the most powerful elements of Subaltern Studies' emphasis on history from below with the rigorous archival assessment of elite power politics championed by the Cambridge School.

An earlier but equally important example is D. A. Low's *Britain and Indian Nationalism*, which placed the nationalist movement's coming of age between 1929 and 1942 within a transnational framework.[29] Low, a colleague of Guha's at the Australian National University during the height of the Subaltern Studies project, and later the Smuts Professor of British Commonwealth History at Cambridge, analysed the relationships between British officials and nationalists, and contrasted these with contemporaneous interactions between different European empires and anti-colonial movements in Asia, as well as nationalist movements in other parts the British Empire. He described a tension between Britain's determination to maintain its imperial prestige, and the ingrained respect for liberal, democratic values, which he argued—with reference to his case studies—played a comparatively central role in Britain's approach to anti-colonial nationalism. Low posited that a similar tension existed within the Indian nationalist movement, which was split between those attracted to the gradual process of democratic reform favoured by the British, and those like Nehru, who believed a radical break with imperialism was necessary for India's revitalisation. Elements of this thesis continue to resonate in the work of Darwin on the British Empire, and Brown on South Asian politics. They are also echoed in my presentation

[28] Khan, Yasmin. *The Raj at War: A People's History of India's Second World War* (London, 2015)
[29] Low, Donald A. *Britain and Indian Nationalism: The Imprint of Ambiguity 1929-1942* (Cambridge, 1997)

of the late 1930s as a 'collaborative' moment in nationalist-imperialist relations, articulated in greater detail below.

At almost the same moment as Low's book appeared, so too did *Tensions of Empire*, edited by Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, whose title made reference to precisely the same contradiction between the universalist values and exclusionary structures of European imperial regimes.[30] Cooper and Stoler articulated the arrival of a new wave of colonial studies, interdisciplinary and multilateral in its approach. They criticised the tendency of existing methodologies in which "European agency too often remains undifferentiated, assumed, and unexplored", and called for "metropole and colony, coloniser and colonised…to be brought into one analytic field".[31] Acknowledging their inheritance from postcolonial theory, the authors nevertheless insisted that the discipline must now transcend it:

> The continuing study of colonial regimes should be more than a neoabolitionist denunciation of a form of power now safely consigned to history. Nor should one dismiss as inherently and unchangingly hypocritical all political philosophies that smack of 'bourgeois equality' or invoke 'universalist' claims…[for] the history of colonies is not simply about implacable opposition against monolithic power; it is just as much a story of multifaceted engagement with cultures of rule as of efforts to negate them.[32]

The agenda outlined by Cooper and Stoler is of direct import to the present study, which describes a transitional moment in the history of colonial interaction: from a phase of calculated engagement between nationalists and the British Empire in Egypt and India, towards the irreparable severance of those ties amidst the crisis of war.

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[30] Cooper, Frederick & Ann Laura Stoler (Eds.) *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, 1997).
[31] Cooper & Stoler, *Tensions of Empire,* pp. 15-16
[32] Cooper & Stoler, *Tensions of Empire*, pp. 35-36

iii. Transnational History and Indian-Arab Connections

While scholars of Britain's Empire in the Middle East are bound to acknowledge the vital importance ascribed to control of the sea and land advances to India,[33] there nevertheless remain surprisingly few works that explore the various levels of interaction—whether between British officials or locals—linking India and Egypt, particularly during the interwar period.

An early connection was made by Robert Tignor, in his 1963 article for the *American Historical Review* on the 'Indianisation' of Egypt's administration, at the hands of British civil servants imported from the Raj in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[34] Roger Owen made a similar point, with specific reference to Lord Cromer, in a 1965 paper for the St Antony's series, *Middle Eastern Affairs* (apparently without awareness of Tignor's slightly earlier contribution).[35] Between 1970 and 1972, inspired, perhaps, by the global Third World movement, Sudha Rao and Zaheer Quraishi both offered Indian perspectives on Middle Eastern history, though they did not engage with comparative or transnational methodologies.[36] 1973 saw the publication of the first article on Egyptian-Indian nationalist links in the interwar period, by Miloslav Krása in the Czech journal *Archiv Orientalni*.[37] Krása's research on this subject was admirably thorough and insightful (it forms a partial basis for Chapter Four of this study); it was also possibly ahead of its time. The article would remain obscure, and no further work was published on the subject for several decades following its appearance.

[33] For example, both Monroe and Kedourie opened works ostensibly about the Middle East with discussion, not of the Arab countries, but of India. See Monroe, *Britain's Moment,* p. 1 ; Kedourie, Elie. 'Great Britain, the Other Powers, and the Middle East before and after World War I' in Dann, Uriel (Ed.) *The Great Powers in the Middle East, 1919-1939* (Tel Aviv, 1988), p. 3

[34] Tignor, Robert L. 'Indianization of the Egyptian Administration under British Rule', *American Historical Review* vol. 68 no. 3 (April, 1963) pp. 636-661

[35] Owen, Roger. 'The Influence of Lord Cromer's Indian Experience on British Policy in Egypt, 1883-1907', *Middle Eastern Affairs*, no. 4 (Oxford, 1965) pp. 109-139

[36] Quraishi, Zaheer Masood. *Liberal Nationalism in Egypt: Rise and Fall of the Wafd Party* (Allahabad, 1970); Rao, Sudha V. *The Arab-Israeli Conflict: The Indian View* (Delhi, 1972).

[37] Krása, Miloslav. 'Relations between the Indian National Congress and the Wafd Party of Egypt in the thirties', *Archiv Orientalni* 41 (1973) pp. 212-233

More recently, both Robert J. Blyth and James Onley have written groundbreaking works investigating the sub-imperial dominion exercised by the British Government in India over its Western sphere of influence, including southern Persia, the Persian Gulf, Aden and parts of East Africa.[38] These studies are representative of the emergent trend in thalassology, and a corresponding Indian Ocean 'turn' in area studies and global history.[39] Yet Egypt did not fall within the Indian sphere; in Monroe's excellent phrasing, the Middle East was long perceived by the British "as a desert with two edges, one belonging to the Mediterranean and the other to the Indian Ocean".[40] In this sense Egypt and India were opposite poles of the Arab world, whose spheres of influence often overlapped—and sometimes clashed.[41] Meanwhile, in the post-independence period, India and Egypt are linked by Gamal Abdel Nasser and Jawaharlal Nehru's joint leadership of the Third World movement.[42] Yet despite these clear linkages between the two countries—both in the early twentieth century imperial context, and later, as postcolonial nation states during the Cold War—there have been few attempts to understand how or when the transition in their relationship began, or if, to ask a more ambitious question, it may have affected the shape or timing of interwar politics, strategic planning, and, ultimately, decolonisation itself. To the extent that even the new Indian Ocean World historiography has traded a focus on London for a focus on the Ottoman Empire or the British Raj at the heart of

[38] Blyth, *The Empire of the Raj*; Onley, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj.*

[39] See for example Low, Michael Christopher (Guest Editor). 'Roundtable: The Indian Ocean and Other Middle Easts', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, vol. 34 no. 3 (2014); Vink, Markus P. M. 'Indian Ocean Studies and the "New Thalassology"', *Journal of Global History,* vol. 2, no. 1 (2007), pp. 41–62; Wick, Alexis. *The Red Sea: In Search of Lost Space* (Berkeley, 2016).

[40] Monroe, *Britain's Moment,* p. 13

[41] Much has been made, for example, of the interdepartmental squabbling between the Cairo-based Arab Bureau and the Government of India. See eg. Blyth, *Empire*; Busch, Briton Cooper. *Britain, India and the Arabs, 1914-1921* (London, 1971); Westrate, Bruce. *The Arab Bureau: British Policy in the Middle East 1916-1920* (Philadelphia, 1992).

[42] See for example, Chapter 3 in Latham, Michael. *The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development, and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present* (Ithaca, 2011).

their own centre-periphery relationships, this observation would tend to support Cooper & Stoler's charge that "colonial historiography has been so nationally bound" as to have "blinded us to those circuits of knowledge and communication that took other routes than those shaped by the metropole-colony axis alone".[43]

Happily, over the past decade, the tide has begun to turn in earnest. On anti-colonial internationalism, Erez Manela's celebrated book, *The Wilsonian Moment*,[44] has sparked renewed interest in the cross-pollination of global anti-colonial movements in the context of World War I and its aftermath.[45] With reference to the Islamic East, James Gelvin and Nile Green's important edited volume, *Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print*, both showcased and prompted an array of new research on the circulation of people, information, and ideas during the 'first' wave of globalisation between the 1860s and 1920.[46] Meanwhile John Slight's recent book on Britain's century-long administration of the Hajj, and a similar forthcoming volume on the late Ottoman period by Michael Christopher Low, offer an illuminating portrait of overlapping imperial, transnational, and Islamic networks which together conveyed pilgrims to Mecca.[47] Finally, on the Arab Eastern Mediterranean specifically, Ilham Khuri Makdisi's groundbreaking study of the emergence of radical left-wing networks between Cairo, Alexandria, and Beirut demonstrates the ways in which European ideas travelled to and between Arab cities, transforming those spaces—and *being* transformed and repurposed in the process.[48]

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[43] Cooper & Stoler, *Tensions of Empire*, p. 28

[44] Manela, Erez. *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anti-colonial Nationalism* (Oxford, 2007)

[45] See for example, Dal Lago, Enrico, Roisin Healy & Gearoid Barry (Eds.)*1916 in Global Context: An Anti-Imperial Moment* (New York, 2018).

[46] Gelvin, James, and Nile Green (Eds.) *Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print* (Berkeley, 2013)

[47] Low, Michael Christopher. *Imperial Mecca: The Ottoman Hijaz and the Indian Ocean Hajj* (New York, Forthcoming); Slight, John. *The British Empire and the Hajj, 1865-1956* (Cambridge, Mass., 2015).

[48] Khuri-Makdisi, Ilham. *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860-1914* (Berkeley, 2013).

On Egypt and India specifically, however, the literature remains remarkably sparse; even a recent and in many ways excellent study of Nehru's internationalism during the interwar years offers little on his ties to the Egyptian Wafd and its leader, Mustapha al-Nahhas, whom he considered both a personal friend and a key political ally.[49] The only exception, since Krása's 1973 article, has been *Egyptian-Indian Nationalist Collaboration and the British Empire*, by Noor-Aiman I. Khan.[50] Khan focused her study on the ways in which Egyptians in the first half of the twentieth century were influenced by the nationalist struggle in India, and in particular by the anti-imperial philosophy espoused by Gandhi and the secular-nationalist Congress Party. She moreover emphasised the significance of the years immediately preceding World War II as the high point of nationalist interaction between the two countries, arguing that, while the "transnationalist and pan-Arab tendencies" of Egyptian nationalism in the 1930s have been readily acknowledged, "the physical connections and shared projects of Egyptian activists with Indian nationalists had roots just as deep and arguably more sophisticated".[51] Much like the approach employed here, *Egyptian-Indian Nationalist Collaboration* describes the evolution of a relationship between Indians and Egyptians, and how this relationship informed the development of a nationalist, anti-imperialist conscience in Egypt.[52] However, Khan was only peripherally interested in what she termed "vertical strands"of interaction. British policy and engagement with the nationalist movements of Egypt and India were essentially a shadow, rather than a subject, of her story. Moreover, Khan's framing of her research as a refutation of the "pan-Islamic thesis" of connection between Egypt and India led her to downplay or omit examples of interactions between Indian Muslim politicians and their Egyptian counterparts, and to dismiss, to a large

[49] Louro, Michele L. *Comrades Against Imperialism: Nehru, India, and Interwar Internationalism* (Cambridge, 2018).
[50] Khan, *Egyptian-Indian Nationalist Collaboration.*
[51] Ibid, p. 132
[52] Ibid, p. 9

extent, the relevance of pan-Islamic ideology to the broader currents of anti-colonial mobilisation in the interwar era.

A partial corrective to this interpretation of Indian internationalist engagement with the Arab region is presented in the first chapter of Faisal Devji's *Muslim Zion,* which traces the emergence of the idea of Pakistan in the late 1930s, in part through the problematic encounters of Indian Muslim thinkers and politicians with both Zionism, and the secular Arab nationalism which opposed it.[53] However, as an intellectual history focused on the post-independence period, *Muslim Zion* does not pursue this intriguing narrative beyond its anecdotal utility. My Chapter Three is, in many ways, an attempt to tease out a fuller picture of the story which Devji alludes to in his Chapter One.

This thesis seeks to fill an important gap in the existing literature by presenting a transnational narrative about the renegotiation of imperial-nationalist engagement in the late 1930s, centred on Egypt and India. These two countries are widely acknowledged to have been epicentres of both British imperial and anti-colonial networks within their respective spheres, namely the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. I seek to explain how internal and external pressures altered the calculus of imperial and nationalist policy interaction, as the shadow of global war descended over Britain's Empire. To this end, I explore the intersection of multiple 'worlds' in Cairo—British, Arab, and Eastern; anti-colonial, nationalist, and pan-Islamic; Easternist and European—and consider the ways in which these cosmopolitan meetings contributed, in turn, to the character and fate of the twentieth century's greatest Arab metropolis.

[53] Devji, Faisal. *Muslim Zion: Pakistan as a Political Idea* (London, 2013).

Method and Theoretical Framing

My research is organised into four key lines of enquiry which intersect. These are, first, British policy in the Middle East. In London, the relevant organs of policymaking were the Foreign Office; the Colonial Office; the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and Cabinet. In Cairo, the High Commissioner (later Ambassador), Miles Lampson, sought to shape policy decisions in London as well as to implement them in Egypt; he and his staff at the British Residency (later Embassy) figure prominently in the narrative.

The second line of enquiry I explore is British-Indian contributions to, and interventions in, British policy in the Middle East. These include initiatives of the Indian Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow; his representative in London, the Marquess of Zetland (replaced in 1940 by Leo Amery), the Secretary of State for India; and commanding officers of the Army of India, and Indian Intelligence.

Third, I consider Egyptian politics in the late 1930s, and the ways in which it was shaped by a combination of local and international actors and events. These include Egyptian political parties and their leaderships; the Palace; the Azharites; student movements and youth militias; radio and the polyglot Egyptian press; and of course Britain, as well as other foreign actors, including Italy, Germany, Iraq, Transjordan, Saudi Arabia, and the exiled leadership of the Palestinian Arabs.

Fourth and finally, my research investigates Indian nationalist engagement with Middle Eastern politics, as initiated by the Indian National Congress and the All-India Muslim League. This included direct and indirect interventions by Indian nationalists in British policymaking in the Middle East, as well as bilateral contacts and connections between Indian and Arab nationalists.

As will become apparent in what follows, Cairo was the primary site of intersection between these four narrative threads (although London, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Rome, Alexandria, Beirut, Bombay, Tripuri, and Delhi all make important cameo appearances). For this reason, the city of Cairo is itself a protagonist in the story, and it emerged, in the interwar period, as a truly global city of the East, comparable, in its cultural and geographic contexts, to Paris or New York in theirs. This study seeks to acknowledge, if not fully account for, this process, with reference to Cairo's changing demographics; its regionally pre-eminent press, radio, and recording industries; and its internationally important art, cinema, music, and literature. I also seek to illustrate, throughout the body of the text, the city's multifaceted political relevance, as simultaneously the centre of a burgeoning Arab diplomatic bloc; the seat of a bid to revive the Islamic Caliphate; the headquarters of a powerful Arab feminist movement; and the acknowledged 'jugular vein' of British Imperial (and later Allied) defence planning, commercial transit, and communications.

It should be emphasised that the focus of this work is essentially the overlap, intersection, and at times collision of interests between actors in Egypt, India, and Great Britain. While the topics which occasioned these intersections were momentous and diverse, they were also ad hoc and sporadic. During this period, there were no direct lines of communication between British

officials in Cairo and Simla; all of their interactions were mediated through the offices of government secretaries in London. Nor was there any consistent or sustained method of consultation, whether formal or informal; evidence of Cairo-Simla communications appear sometimes in the records of the Indian External Affairs Department; sometimes in the Colonial Office records; occasionally in Cabinet papers, and on other occasions in the files of the Indian Army, or the Foreign Office. Similarly, while on some subjects or at certain moments, we find Indian and Egyptian nationalists involved in intense periods of consultation and interaction, at others the trail appears to go cold, and there are no letters or meetings between them to speak of. The chapters which follow therefore present a series of vignettes: specific moments or events between 1935 and 1942 which elicited strong responses from *both* edges of the desert.

Because the focus of this work is on interaction and shared concerns, some topics of great relevance to one or the other party are given only fleeting attention in what follows, while others, by virtue of the strong *mutual* interest they commanded, consume a large amount of time and attention. Thus British policy in Palestine—which provoked the intervention of Indian Muslim and Egyptian politicians, as well as the Government of India—plays a central role in this narrative. Meanwhile, British policy Iraq—of vital interest to the Government of India, yet essentially beyond the remit of officials in Cairo, and of little interest to Indian nationalists—is almost absent from it. Moreover, the choice of Cairo as the focal point of this study predicates a special focus on Egyptian history and politics. An Indian history of the triangular relationship, although gestured towards in what follows, still remains to be written.

On Periodisation

I follow Israel Gershoni in his adoption of Leopold von Ranke's maxim of historical analysis, "each era stands in immediate relation to God", which he elaborated in the following terms:

> …periods, events, and historical phenomena must be understood not only as links in the chain […] but also in light of their uniqueness, discreteness, and isolation. Historians must treat a historical period and the phenomenon emerging within that period, as an independent historical value, an end in itself which for that reason merits separate study as an autonomous subject of historical inquiry and interpretation. A specific period or phenomenon must not be used only as a means, a tool for understanding and explaining the subsequent periods and phenomena or those which are outside or beyond them. Rather, we must always bear in mind that 'for historical knowledge each phenomenon is a prototype in itself and must not be looked at as only a transitory phase'.[54]

The reflexive, near-inescapable caesura of the Second World War has manufactured, and endlessly reinforced, two implied truisms for the histories of Egypt and India, as indeed for the rest of the Middle East and South Asia.[55] The first such implication is that the outbreak of war in September 1939 marked a self-evident turning point in history, not only for the belligerents, or even for Europe more broadly, but for much of the world. The second, which leads on from the first, is that events and processes which took place after this date are to be understood as separate, and inherently different, from those which took place before it. In this sense, 1939 is *the* demarcation line, so defined because of the global repercussions of the outbreak of war in Europe.

I do not argue that the Second World War was of anything less than monumental importance for the trajectory of Egyptian or Indian history. The impact of the war on these countries, and many other places besides, is difficult to exaggerate. But to date these momentous transitions from the

[54] Gershoni, Israel. *The Emergence of Pan-Arabism in Egypt* (Tel Aviv, 1981), pp. 24-25
[55] By contrast, the dynamics of World War II in East Asia and the Pacific are (quite rightly) acknowledged to have been entirely distinct.

outbreak of Anglo-German hostilities in 1939 is not only eurocentric: it is essentially inaccurate. In reality, it took several years for the realities of war—including the transformation of Britain's imperial metropole—to impose themselves in meaningful ways on Egypt and India. The final chapter of this study traces the slow transformation of social, economic and political life after 1939, and zeroes in on what I argue is the war's true moment of impact, in 1942, when the imperial-nationalist relational dynamics of the later 1930s are replaced by something quite different, arising out of British perceptions of existential threat, and the final, irretrievable loss of British prestige and legitimacy in Egyptian and Indian eyes.

This is, therefore, the story of what I argue is a period unto itself: brief but distinct, and of crucial significance to the history of the Middle East and South Asia, it broaches the end of the 'interwar' years, and the first half of the Second World War. I propose here to call it the Collaborative Moment, a term I have chosen because it suggests the coming together of diverse forces, dialogue and flexibility, and the building of new things, while simultaneously referencing, with a wink, what has become a slur of national historiographies, whether European or post-colonial: 'collaboration'. The contrasting, layered connotations of this word suggests one of the reasons why the Collaborative Moment is so fascinating to me, and simultaneously such an elusive presence in the historiography: it is fluid, defined by the existence of multiple latent realities, which emerge and disappear from view as swiftly as the crest of a wave. The tendency, even within the scholarly literature, to view the events of the late 1930s teleologically, as a series of dominoes collapsing into a path towards war, has obscured this fact. Read forward—as the progression of a post-war era defined by the rise of anti-colonial movements, and competing nationalist and internationalist political-economic agendas, rather than backward—as the

inevitable precursor to an inescapable cataclysm, these years reveal themselves to have been pregnant with untold creative potential.

Within this fluid context, there were indeed tensions inherent in both the imperial and nationalist movements: instances of colonised elites compromising and cooperating with the British agents of colonial authority, and of British officials apparently siding with the nationalists against their own government in London. In many of the circumstances described here, collaboration was distinct from anti-colonial nationalist resistance, on the one hand, or imperialism, on the other, in only subtle ways, or not at all. Instead, the same nationalist leaders kissed the ring while hoping to bite the hand clean off; imperial administrators sought to force London into greater concessions to the nationalists, out of a conviction they were saving the Empire from itself. In all cases, the motives represented an orchestra of competing claims and prerogatives: patriotism, class interests, religious convictions, ideology, pragmatism, personal and political rivalries, popular will, love of power, and material gain. Depending on the conductor, the quality of music varied widely; perhaps the only constant was the complexity of composition.

Organisation

Coming to grips with the intricacies of the Collaborative Moment requires an appreciation of all that had preceded it. In Chapter One, the history of British imperial dominion in Egypt and India is briefly outlined, focusing especially on the trajectory of nationalist-imperial interactions post-World War I. A tour of the city of Cairo, the emerging global hub of the Eastern Mediterranean, and a central protagonist in our story, is also provided.

It is against the backdrop of Cairo's coffee houses and halls of power that Italy's 1935 invasion of Abyssinia unfolds in Chapter Two. This chapter offers a Cairene perspective on one of the most important international crises of the 1930s. It discusses deliberations between British officials in Whitehall, Egypt, and India over what actions to take in response to Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia, as well as the subsequent ratcheting up of Italy's propaganda campaign in Egypt—the limited success of which, it is argued, was likely owed to counter-propaganda efforts orchestrated by Mustapha al-Nahhas and the Wafd. In 1935 a new Government of India Act, which expanded the democratic franchise by many millions and provided for the devolution of powers to India's provinces, was finally passed by the British Parliament. The next spring yielded the successful negotiation of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, which owed much to the Abyssinian Crisis. It is argued that, in contrast to prevailing narratives which have assumed British initiative and primacy in the negotiations, the Wafd and its leader, Mustapha al-Nahhas, in fact used the crisis to force London to the bargaining table, and were successful in achieving their domestic political aims in the process. These two events, the passage of the India Act and the negotiation of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, were to signal the opening of the Collaborative Moment.

Chapter Three explores the connections between Indian Muslims and Egyptian advocates of the Palestinian cause—Easternists, pan-Islamists, and Arab nationalists.[56] It discusses the role of the Arab Revolt in fuelling the mobilisation of an international coalition of Arabs and Muslims opposed to Britain's policy in Palestine. This movement was centred in Cairo, and saw Egypt, for the first time, take a leading role in regional diplomacy. Until now, however, the subject has been framed as an inter-Arab event. What has not been properly understood is the important role played by Indian Muslims in the Cairo-based international activism surrounding the Palestine

[56] The phrase 'Easternist' is borrowed from Gershoni & Jankowski. See Chapter Two of *Redefining the Egyptian Nation*.

Question, nor the extent to which the All-India Muslim League was mobilised and politically invested in the Palestinian cause. Chapter Three follows Egyptians and Indian Muslims from the 'World Parliamentary Congress of Arab and Muslim Countries for the Defence of Palestine', held in Cairo in 1938, to the 1939 St James' Conference on Palestine in London, and back again. The narrative raises the largely unexplored question of political Islam's role in relations between Egyptian nationalists and their Indian Muslim counterparts, highlighting the ways in which it was as much a divisive as a uniting factor between them. It also offers a new perspective on why Anglo-Arab negotiations over the status of Palestine ultimately failed in the spring of 1939, based on Indian Muslim and British accounts of the final attempts to broker an agreement in Cairo, in the aftermath of St James'. This chapter draws on the little-known memoir of Pakistani statesman Choudhry Khaliquzzaman, *Only If They Knew It?*,[57] which to my knowledge, has never before been cited in an academic work in English. Among the revelations it contains is the journey of two senior leaders of the Muslim League to Italy in the spring of 1939, in an attempt to secure arms from the Italian Fascist government for Palestinian rebels.

An official Wafd visit to India as the guests of the All-India Congress Party occurred mere months before the outbreak of World War II, also in the spring of 1939. Chapter Four documents the evolution of a personal friendship and political alliance between Mustapha al-Nahhas and Congress Leader Jawaharlal Nehru, which culminated in the Congress Party's formal invitation to the Wafd to attend their 1939 Session at Tripuri. The chapter follows the Egyptian delegation's tour as it wends its way across the Indian subcontinent. In the process, it returns to and builds on several themes from earlier chapters: Egyptian-Indian nationalist collaboration; the complicated role of Islam and sectarian politics in relations between

[57] Khaliquzzaman, Choudhry. *Only if They Knew It?* (Karachi, 1965).

nationalists in the Arab world and India; the domestic political calculations informing external relations among anti-colonial movements; the interconnection between Indian and Middle Eastern politics in the eyes of the British; the comparative salience and significance of the Palestine question for different parties; and the fine line between ideological enmity on one hand, and practical collaboration on the other, which, as Mohandas K. Gandhi, Nehru, and the Wafd leadership all acknowledged amongst themselves, had come to characterise their relations with Britain.

Chapter Five draws the story of the Collaborative Moment from its apex in the late 1930s towards what I identify as its terminus, in mid-1942. In a departure from the methodology of the preceding chapters, the narrative here bifurcates, tracing simultaneous developments in Egyptian and Indian politics, economies, and societies, as the shadow of war descended slowly over the Nile and the Ganges. This approach underscores the similarity of many of the dynamics faced by ordinary Egyptians and Indians during the war years, while also describing moments of interaction and overlap between them, such as the presence of tens of thousands of Indian soldiers in Egypt and the Middle East—a presence which gave rise to concerns, among their commanding officers, that they might be corrupted by contact with Egyptian nationalists. Chapter Five culminates in a description of two moments of crisis: one in Egypt, and one in India, both taking place in 1942. I argue that the 'Abdin Palace incident, which resulted in the reinstatement of a Wafdist government, and the arrest and imprisonment of the leadership of the Congress Party Working Committee, both reflect a similar impulse on the part of British authorities shaken by the existential threat posed by Axis invasion. In hitting out against internal 'enemies', however, British authorities effectively repudiated years of slow and delicate work

towards progressive devolution, and unfettered themselves of the last remaining vestiges of legitimacy they might have claimed.

A Note on the Cast

The word 'cosmopolitan' has been much maligned in recent decades, because it has come to connote an exclusive focus, in a nostalgic register, on wealthy expatriate communities and westernised elites. These populations, it has been usefully pointed out, together formed no more than a tiny minority of colonial urban centres—places like Cairo, Alexandria, Singapore, or Bombay. Meanwhile, the experiences of the vast majority of these cities' inhabitants have remained, until quite recently, largely unexamined.[58]

There can be no denying the justice of this charge; the present study does not seek to refute it. It does, however, employ the term 'cosmopolitan' unironically, to describe the international networks within which many of its protagonists operated. This included feminists, like Huda Sha'arawi; pro-Palestinian activists, like Choudhry Khaliquzzaman, Muhammad 'Ali 'Alluba, and Abdulrahman Siddiqi; poets, like Allama Iqbal, Rabindranath Tagore, and Ahmad Shawqi; nationalist leaders, like Mustapha al-Nahhas and Jawaharlal Nehru; and anti-fascist artists, like Ramses Younane, Amy Nimr, and Georges Henein.

[58] See for example the 'Nationalism, Internationalism, and Cosmopolitanism' series initiated by Partha Chatterjee in CSAAMES in 2017. Chatterjee, Partha. 'Nationalism, Internationalism, and Cosmopolitanism: Some observations from modern Indian history', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East,* vol. 36 no. 2 (2017). Critiques of cosmopolitan nostalgia with specific reference to Egypt have tended to focus more on Alexandria than Cairo; see, for example, Halim, Hala, *Alexandrian Cosmopolitanism: An Archive* (New York, 2013); and Fahmy, Khaled, 'For Cavafy, with Love and Squalor: Some Critical Notes on the History and Historiography of Modern Alexandria', in Hirst, Anthony and Michael Silk (Eds.) *Alexandria Real and Imagined* (London, 2004).

Unquestionably, then, what follows is in large measure a history of elites, and of cosmopolitan elite interactions. In this sense it is the history of an unrepresentative and charmed minority. The barriers which this study has sought to transcend are national, sectarian, and political; to the extent that it is a study of interactions between the imperial state and anti-colonial movements, it is also concerned with the negotiation of unequal power relationships. But in terms of class, there is a large measure of homogeneity among the protagonists of this story. In their and my defence, I can only offer that they existed; and that they forged between them a set of international friendships, networks, and alliances, which they believed had the power to make the world a better—and more equal—place.

Without further ado, our story begins. The scene opens in nineteenth century Egypt, where the advent of an ambitious new ruling dynasty had given rise to increasingly complicated relationships with the Great Powers of Europe.

Chapter One

Cairo between the Wars:
Antecedents of the Collaborative Moment

"We confronted [the enemy] and we saw suffering and pain, though no more
Who can ever forget this experience?
O glorious one, builder of the pyramid
Christians and Muslims all volunteer to be in your service
Their unity is an enduring one, and tomorrow we will be the most civilised nation."
— from the song 'Nem ya Khufu' (Sleep, Khufu), by Egyptian composer Sayyid Darwish, 1919

"The East has awoken from its deep slumber; destiny has given it new aspirations, and loosened its age-old chains."
—Indian Muslim poet Allama Iqbal, 1936

Egypt, from Mehmet 'Ali to Zaghlul Pasha

From the beginning of the British occupation in 1882 up until the outbreak of the First World War, Egypt was formally recognised as an autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire. Its ruling family were the descendants of Mehmet 'Ali, an Albanian commander of Ottoman forces, who had seized control of the country—and much of the Eastern Mediterranean besides—beginning in 1801. Finally in 1840, facing the combined strength of a European coalition and Ottoman forces, Mehmet 'Ali withdrew from his positions in the Levant, and accepted, in exchange, hereditary rule of Egypt, within the Ottoman framework. Following 'Ali's death, his successors carried forward his vision of a modern, centrally administered Egyptian state, expanding the functions of government significantly. In addition to ministries of war, finance, justice, industry, and external affairs, nineteenth century Egyptian bureaucracy extended to public works, religious endowments, education, agriculture, and railways. As Ziad Fahmy notes,

> These large governmental institutions and bureaucracies became a permanent fixture of the Egyptian geopolitical landscape, and with time they structurally knitted together a new culturally and economically centralized Egyptian society with Cairo at its center.[59]

The cost of these ambitious and rapid statebuilding projects were monumentally increased by the predatory rates Egypt's rulers were offered by European creditors, and compounded, in particular, by the infamous extravagance of Mehmet 'Ali's grandson, Khedive Isma'il. The crowning achievements of his reign would also prove ruinous to the country's economy: The Suez Canal was completed in 1869, having been largely financed by Egypt and dug by Egyptian forced labour. Its opening that November was accompanied by celebrations to which the crowned heads of Europe were invited, and which had involved the wholesale construction, at breakneck speed, of several new quarters of downtown Cairo, reimagined as a gleaming, 'European' capital.

Combined with a failed expansionist military campaign in Ethiopia, the Canal and the renovation of Cairo bankrupted the Egyptian economy. Isma'il was forced to sell his shares in the Suez Canal Company to the British Government, and acquiesce in an Anglo-French takeover of the country's finances, to oversee the repayment of Egypt's debts to European creditors. The Caisse de la Dette, as this committee was known, was established in 1876, and deposed Isma'il three years later on the grounds of financial mismanagement.

Isma'il's successor, his son Tewfik, was perceived by many in Egypt as a European plaything, too weak to lead the country out of its bondage to foreign creditors, or to stand up to the Ottomans, who sought to reassert control over the country—in part through circumscribing the Egyptian army. A rebellion which began among disgruntled military officers, under the leadership of

[59] Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians*, p. 23

Colonel Ahmad Bey 'Urabi, quickly grew, tapping into popular resentment, and pitting the upper echelons of society against the mass of the people. 'Urabi briefly succeeded in establishing himself and his allies in government, but the reforms they proposed to the constitution and the management of the Egyptian economy were too threatening to European interests. In 1882 British warships bombed Alexandria into submission. Unable to best 'Urabi's army in the field at Qassassin, they attacked them in their beds at Tel el Kebir. What began that September as a 'temporary' occupation to re-establish the authority of the Khedive would last, in one form or another, until 1956, when the last British soldiers were finally withdrawn from the Suez Canal.

For several decades after its suppression of the 'Urabi Revolt, Britain maintained the pretence that Egypt was an autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire. But everyone, from the diplomatic corps in Cairo to the peasants of the Delta, knew that Britain was actually in charge. Moreover, the longer Britain held Egypt, the more essential it came to appear to imperial defence and communications. This was in large part due to the Suez Canal, which became the vital artery connecting Britain's fleet in the Mediterranean to its vast holdings in the East—chief among them, India. From the beginning, then, Egypt was linked to India in the British imperial imagination, as it was in terms of strategy, defence, logistics, and communications. And for 25 years, from 1883 to 1907, British rule in Egypt was embodied in the person of a former servant of the British Raj: Evelyn Baring, the First Earl of Cromer. Cromer had served on the Caisse de la Dette for several years prior to the British invasion of Egypt, and spent two significant stints in India, where he had worked at the side of the Viceroy. Tignor and Owen have both argued that Cromer's time in India was crucial in shaping his subsequent term as Consul General in Egypt, which saw him draw heavily on administrative practices and personnel from the British Raj.[60] As

[60] Owen, 'The Influence of Lord Cromer's Indian Experience on British Policy in Egypt'; Tignor, 'Indianization of the Egyptian Administration'.

part of this process, the system of local elections which had functioned in Egypt since the 1860s was abolished—on the grounds that Egyptians were too 'fanatically' religious to participate in their own governance.[61] The psychological impact of this kind of administration on the local population seems also to have been comparable to the experience of India under British rule—for it was during Cromer's tenure that an identifiably nationalist and anti-colonial movement emerged in Egypt.

The first openly anti-British publications in Egypt, among them *al-Muayyad* and *al-Liwa*, were sponsored by the young khedive, 'Abbas Hilmi, who ascended the throne at the age of eighteen in 1892, and almost immediately came up against the limitations on his rule imposed by Cromer, the real power in Egypt. The editor of *al-Liwa*, Mustapha Kamil, was a lawyer educated in France, who sought to enlist French and international support for Egypt's nascent nationalist movement. None of his advocacy, however, was as effective as were the British themselves in stoking opposition to their rule. In June 1906, a group of officers on a hunting expedition near the village of Denshawai fell into an altercation with locals who objected to the shooting of their pigeons, an important source of food. In the midst of the scuffle, the officers wounded the wife of the village imam, and the conflict escalated. One of the party, attempting to run back to the British camp, collapsed and later died, probably of heat exhaustion. Another villager, coming across him, attempted to help, but was set upon and killed by British soldiers arriving at the scene, who assumed him responsible for their comrade's death. The Occupation authorities responded hysterically: fifty-two residents of Denshawai were tried for the murder of a man who had succumbed to the violence of the midday sun. Within a fortnight, four of these unfortunate

[61] See Omar, Hussein Ahmed Hussein. *Empire, Islam, and the Invention of 'Politics' in Egypt, 1867–1914*. DPhil thesis, University of Oxford (Oxford, 2016), Chapter Three: 'The Rash of Religion'.

souls had been hanged, with a further eight sentenced to public flogging, and twelve to hard labour. News of the incident at Denshawai and the flagrant injustice of the trial provoked widespread outrage, and in the wake of the incident the cause of Egyptian nationalism as propounded by Mustafa Kamil and others—notably Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid, the attorney for the defence in the Denshawai trial—gained rapid and impassioned political momentum.

The Denshawai controversy also inflamed liberal opinion in Britain, particularly among Irish, Scottish, and socialist politicians and activists, who were increasingly plugged in to international anti-colonial networks. In parliament, the Irish MP John Dillon dogged the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, with questions about the incident, and British policy in Egypt, while George Bernard Shaw, W.B. Yeats, and J. Ramsay MacDonald drew attention to the plight of the convicted of Denshawai in a petition calling for their release and pardon. Facing anger in Egypt and censure at home, Cromer retired, and his successor, Sir Eldon Gorst, sought to placate the khedive and popular opinion through gestures toward eventual self-government. Chief among the new concessions, introduced in 1907, was the legalisation of political parties, ushering in a 'new national era' in Egypt.[62] Among the first and most important parties to be founded that year were Mustafa Kamil's *Hizb al-Watani*, or Nationalist Party, and *Hizb al-Umma*, the People's Party, in which Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid played a leading role. These two parties would represent the main currents of Egyptian nationalist politics up until the Revolution of 1919, and their influence would continue to be felt long after.

Mustafa Kamil died in 1908, just months after founding the Watani party, and his funeral was the cause of intense public mourning. His successor to the party's leadership was Muhammad Farid,

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[62] Khan, *Egyptian-Indian National Collaboration*, p. 25

a lawyer from a wealthy, land-owning family who had sacrificed his fortune in the service of the nationalist cause. The editorship of *al-Liwa,* however, passed to Sheikh 'Abd al-'Aziz Jawish, who became infamous for his attacks on Egypt's Coptic minority and anti-British vitriol. Under his direction, *al-Liwa* became increasingly affiliated with Islamist and pro-Ottoman sentiments, and it (as well as the Watani party) lost many of its more moderate supporters in the process.

The Umma party, by contrast, was drawn from Egypt's landed elite, and thus rather predictably favoured gradual, non-violent reform. Its flagship publication, edited by Lutfi al-Sayyid, was *al-Jarida*, and from the beginning (in marked contrast to *al-Liwa*) it distinguished between Egypt, the Ottoman Empire, and the Islamic world: *al-Jarida'*s loyalty was exclusively to the former, making it an early proponent of Egyptian territorial nationalism. As Khan notes, there was one other important distinction between the Watani and Umma positions:

> Lutfi al-Sayyid recognised well before the Watanists did that the demand for a constitution was not in the khedive's best interest; thus, his party and paper were more concerned with curbing khedival power than immediately expelling the British.[63]

As we will see, in the interwar period, Egyptian nationalists would continue to debate the comparative importance of Egyptian, Islamic, liberal democratic, and anti-colonial priorities, and return to the question of whether to focus their energies on the struggle against the British, or against monarchic rule.

Britain's 'veiled' protectorate in Egypt was finally formalised following the outbreak of hostilities between the allies and the Ottoman Empire in November 1914. Martial law was declared; nationalist and pro-Turkish elements were arrested and exiled, and heavy press censorship was imposed. The khedive was in Constantinople at the time, and defected to the side of the Central

[63] Khan, *Egyptian-Indian National Collaboration*, p. 28

Powers; he was summarily deposed by the British, and replaced by a cousin, Hussein Kamil, who became Sultan of Egypt—a promotion which underscored the formal break with the Ottomans. Upon his death in 1917, Hussein would be succeeded by his younger brother, Fu'ad.

Throughout the war, Cairo was to serve as a crucial military and diplomatic headquarters for the allied war effort in the Middle East and the Mediterranean. In addition to the enormous value placed on the Suez Canal, the new importance of air travel served to further underscore Egypt's vital role within what John Darwin has called Britain's 'world system'.[64] Its geostrategic position straddling Europe, Africa, and Asia, and its flat desert expanses, swiftly made it an invaluable hub of international air traffic. The experience of World War I thus only intensified the perception in Whitehall that Egypt was essential to Britain's global position: the 'jugular vein', as it was frequently described, of imperial transport and communications.

Meanwhile, however, the traumatic experience of WWI also intensified anti-imperial and nationalist sentiments in Egypt, as it did in many other parts of the colonised world. As the war dragged on, the cost of staple goods like wheat, rice, paper, cloth, and kerosene skyrocketed, and Egyptians saw their livestock confiscated for the military's use. Approximately one million *fellaheen,* members of the Egyptian rural peasantry, were recruited into army labour corps, and sent to active combat theatres in Europe and the Levant. The Egyptian economy, too, was heavily manipulated, as Britain 'borrowed' surreptitiously from the country's gold reserves[65] and depressed the price of its most important cash crop, cotton, to 56% of market value,[66] in order to meet the needs of the British war machine at cut-rate prices. By 1919, the fellaheen were starving,

[64] Darwin, John. 'Imperialism in Decline? Tendencies in British Imperial policy between the wars'. *The Historical Journal*, vol. 23 (1980), p. 668

[65] Jakes, Aaron G. *The Material Occupation: Colonial Economism and the Crises of Capitalism in Egypt* (Stanford, 2019).

[66] Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians,* p. 135

and many of Egypt's wealthiest families had been bankrupted. There was a strong sense, cutting across class and sectarian lines, that Egypt had been made to pay dearly for Britain's war—and in so doing, had surely purchased its freedom.

Seizing on the opportunity presented by United States President Woodrow Wilson's public championing of national self-determination, in 1919 Egyptian nationalists made a diplomatic bid for independence. The *Wafd*, or 'delegation', initially consisted of a handful of prominent Egyptians led by former government minister Sa'ad Zaghlul, who sought leave to travel to Paris and petition the leaders of the Peace Conference then underway. The refusal of their appeal by the British High Commissioner, Reginald Wingate, and the subsequent deportation of Zaghlul and his colleagues to Malta, sparked a popular uprising, which spread rapidly from its epicentre in Cairo to Alexandria and other Egyptian cities, and thence to the villages of the Delta and Upper Egypt. Within a matter of days, the entire country was in a state of open revolt: telegraph lines were cut, railways and roads were blocked, and Egyptians from every sector of society—Muslim, Jewish, and Copt; fellah and pasha; cleric, priest, and music hall performer; men and women—were in the streets.

The Egyptian Revolution of 1919 caught British authorities by surprise. They were forced to reverse course: Zaghlul and his colleagues were released, and returned to Egypt as national heroes. The Wafd was permitted to travel to Paris, but were stonewalled by Britain's allies at the Peace Conference. Rather than the independence negotiations they had sought, the Egyptians found themselves on the receiving end of a unilateral British declaration. Egypt was now independent, it claimed. The monarch, Fu'ad, was granted vast powers as reigning sovereign (in 1923, Fu'ad formally adopted the title King of Egypt). However, the new constitution reserved

Britain's right to control four vital spheres: imperial communications, defence, the protection of foreign interests, and the Sudan. Negotiations over these 'reserved points' opened in 1924 between the British and the Wafd, but stalled repeatedly. The Sudan was perhaps the single greatest stumbling block: Zaghlul was unwilling to accept Egyptian independence absent what he called the 'unity of the Nile Valley'.[67] The British were equally unwilling to rescind control.

Nevertheless, the Revolution ushered in a hopeful new era in Egypt. In 1924, a Wafdist government under the leadership of Zaghlul was elected with a sweeping majority, and a sense of optimism and national self-confidence pervaded society. This was evident both in the press, as the large, mainstream newspapers like *Al-Ahram* raised the nationalist banner, and new, explicitly Wafdist publications such as *Al-Balagh* emerged. The popular mood was complemented by the immense popularity of patriotic songs, and the proliferation of works of art blending contemporary nationalist and ancient pharaonic imagery.

To take only one prominent example, Mahmud Mokhtar was among the most important Egyptian artists of the interwar years. His statue *Nihdat Misr*, 'the Awakening of Egypt', was unveiled in 1927, in the presence of Zaghlul and other members of the Wafd. The sculpture depicted a mighty Sphinx rising on its haunches, as if stirring after a long nap. A peasant woman, her arm wrapped around the Sphinx, lifted the veil off her face and gazed confidently towards the horizon. This sculpture epitomised the self-perception of the Wafd and its supporters, who saw their movement as heralding the dawn of a new golden age for Egypt, comparable to the reign of the Pharaohs. While evoking this glorious past, the movement also saw itself as pushing the country forward into the 'modern world': a world which was decidedly ruled by science,

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[67] Rogan, *The Arabs,* p. 240

reason, and secularism, where education and technology would uplift Egypt's peasantry, and liberate its women. From the pyramid-imprinted pages of *Al-Ahram*, to the ancient gods who figured in the poetry of Ahmad Shawqi and the music of Sayyid Darwish, to the neo-pharaonic sculptures and artwork of Mahmud Mokhtar, the symbols of Egypt post-1919 all linked the advent of the Wafd to a specifically *Egyptian* renaissance: a new era, when the people of the Nile would once again play a leading role in the affairs of the world.

At exactly the same moment that the Egyptian people were wresting control of (parts of) their government from the British, and a new, nationalist party was taking office for the first time, a monumental discovery was made in the Valley of the Kings: British archaeologist Howard Carter and his patron, Lord Carnarvon, announced that they had located the tomb of the Amarna-era Boy King, Tutankhamun. The discovery thrust Egypt even further into the international spotlight, sparking a global craze, 'Egyptomania', and fueling a major tourism boom, as Europeans flocked to Egypt to see the pyramids, cruise the Nile, and gawk at the artefacts at the Egyptian Museum. As Donald Malcolm Reid notes, King Tut's tomb was also the source of the first major run-in between the powerful European archaeological community in Egypt, and the new, nationalist government.[68]

In the wake of the tomb's discovery, Carter, Carnarvon, and the Wafd became embroiled in a dispute over concessionary rights, in the midst of which, the Wafd forbade a tour of the site for the wives of European excavators. Enraged, Carter placed locks on the the tomb and filed a lawsuit against the Egyptian government. In response to the lawsuit, the government cancelled Carter's concession, sawed off the locks, and orchestrated a pilgrimage of Wafd politicians to the

[68] Reid, Donald Malcolm. *Contesting Antiquity in Egypt: Archaeologies, museums & the struggle for identities from World War I to Nasser* (Cairo, 2015), pp. 51-74

site, in order to celebrate the opening of Egypt's new parliament. The Wafd subsequently won the lawsuit, and the whole of the contents of the tomb were awarded to the Egyptian Museum. A celebratory poem by Ahmad Shawqi, titled 'Tutankhamun and the Parliament', included the passages:

> He travelled forty centuries, considering them until he came home, and found there…
> England, and its army, and its lord, brandishing its Indian sword, protecting its India.
> [...] Pharoah, the time of self rule is in effect, and the dynasty of arrogant lords has past.
> Now the foreign tyrants in every land must relinquish their rule over their subjects.
> [...] Tutankhamun has established Egypt's representative body, fortified its convocation, and conferred the promise [of self government] to this happy generation.
> Tutankhamun has returned his authority to our sons![69]

Global Cairo

Certainly, in the post-revolutionary period, Egyptian nationalists had much to be proud of. As Rogan notes, Egypt had

> […] achieved the highest degree of multiparty democracy in the modern history of the Arab world. The Constitution of 1923 introduced political pluralism, regular elections to a two-chamber legislature, full male suffrage, and a free press. A number of new parties emerged on the political stage. Elections attracted massive turnout at the polls. Journalists plied their trade with remarkable liberty.[70]

Moreover, and in addition to the prominence of ancient Egyptian art and motifs in London, Paris and New York, and the tourists now flooding Egypt from across the globe, Cairo in particular was also assuming an increasingly important cultural role at the heart of the Arabic-speaking world, thanks to its booming press, radio, and recording industries. As Fahmy notes, from 1919-1929 over 450 new print periodicals appeared in Cairo, which "dramatically increased the cultural influence of the capital city".[71] The freedom of expression afforded

[69] Shawqi, Ahmad. *Al-Shawqiyyat,* volume 2, pp. 159-160, as translated and cited in Reid, *Contesting Antiquity,* pp. 71-72
[70] Rogan, *The Arabs*, pp. 238-239
[71] Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians*, p. 31

Egyptian journalists under the new liberal parliamentary regime, the size and diversity of Egypt's cities, and the richness of its coffeehouse and theatre cultures, all combined to ensure that Egyptian newspapers, records, and radio broadcasts were among the most popular anywhere in the Middle East.

This 'splitscreen' of interwar Egypt—perceived, in the West, as exotic and timeless, and in the Arab East as modern and sophisticated—was to some extent reproduced in the urban geography of Cairo itself. In the words of one British visitor,

> European Cairo...is divided from Egyptian Cairo by the long street that goes from the railway station, past the big hotels to Abdin...and it is full of big shops and great houses and fine carriages and well-dressed people, and might be a western city...The real Cairo is to the east of this...and...is practically what it always was.[72]

As Janet Abu Lughod observed, this "physical duality was but a manifestation of the cultural cleavage"[73] between its native and foreign residents, its wealthy and its poor. Spread out along the bank of the Nile, extending inland perhaps a half-dozen city blocks, European Cairo was organised as a series of wide boulevards, *midans*, and public gardens, adorned by large department stores, cinemas, cafes, supper clubs, and institutions like the Egyptian Museum, the Opera House, and the American University. In the middle of the river, connected to the mainland by two large bridges, was the island of Zamalek, the south end of which was largely given over to the grounds of the Gezira Sports Club, whose swimming pools, tennis courts, and polo fields made it a favorite with British officers and administrators. From Zamalek, a short drive across Khedive Isma'il Bridge would take one past the British Residency, the Egyptian Parliament

[72] Qtd. in Abu Lughod, 'Tale of two cities', p. 430
[73] Abu Lughod, 'Tale of two cities', p. 430

buildings, and, several blocks further inland, 'Abdin Palace, the residence, since 1917, of King Fu'ad and his family.

'Old Cairo' was located, in a sense, 'behind' this European city, to the east of 'Abdin Palace, the Opera House, and Ezbekieh Gardens. Here the grand boulevards narrowed into alleyways and unpaved roads; the motor taxis and gleaming department stores of Midan Soliman Pasha gave way to public ovens, market stalls, and mule-drawn vegetable carts. But Cairo's 'native quarter', as it was often described in the early twentieth century, has been too easily reduced to a backwater of crumbling hovels. It is true that this part of the city was scandalously underserviced in comparison to the European city which stood mere blocks away—particularly in terms of water, sanitation, and gas and electric power. Nevertheless, Old Cairo was a thriving urban centre, with its own grand architecture and public institutions. The most beautiful, and among the most important buildings in this part of the city were its hundreds of mosques, churches, tombs, synagogues and shrines, many of which dated from the Fatimid period, or even earlier. While tourists and pilgrims certainly visited some of the more impressive complexes as they would the pyramids, or a museum, these centuries-old buildings also lay at the heart of everyday communal life for many residents. Another community focal point were coffeehouses, which played a vital role in the transmission of news, information, and culture. "For the price of a cup of tea or coffee," Fahmy explains,

> readers had access to many newspapers and magazines. If the clientele happened to be illiterate, their mere presence in a crowded coffee shop exposed them to an unlimited amount of oral discourse, from the reading aloud of newspapers to conversations, songs, and theatrical performances. [74]

[74] Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians*, pp. 33-34

By the 1930s, many coffeehouses boasted a radio set, further contributing to the diverse array of print and aural media which café patrons were exposed to. Whereas the European city boasted Fu'ad I and the American University, Old Cairo was the setting for Al-Azhar, the ancient and exalted seat of Islamic learning. An entrance to one of the city's oldest and largest souqs, Khan el Khalili, was located nearby the mosque-university. Time itself operated somewhat differently in Old Cairo than it did in the European city, where clocks dominated business and social life. In the alleys and souks east of Opera Square, clock time competed with the five calls to prayer in setting the rhythms of daily life.

Old Cairo and European Cairo were distinct physical spaces, but far from insulated from one another. Many residents of the city moved between the two multiple times a day: to go to work or attend classes; to pray; to do their shopping; to socialise; or simply for a change of scenery. There were points of overlap and intersection between the two cities: cafés, theatres, markets, cinemas, and public squares. Many wealthier Egyptians lived in 'European Cairo', while many 'Europeans' in Cairo had been born there, or even belonged to families who had lived in Egypt for generations, and were established in Old Cairo. These communities, the *mutamassirun*, hailed primarily from southern Europe and the Levant, and ran the gamut from lower-middle class tradesmen, waiters, maids, and shopkeepers, all the way up to the highest rungs of Cairene society. They tended to maintain distinct cultural identities and ways of life, and, at least until the 1930s, foreign legal status, which afforded them privileges and protections under the Capitulations—a hangover of Ottoman domination, which, though abolished in Istanbul in 1914, persisted under the British in Egypt. In addition to Italians, Greeks, Jews, Slavs, British, Armenians, Persians, Swedes, Chinese, Germans, French, Turks, Syrians, Cypriots, and

Maghrebins, there were a handful of Indian residents in Cairo, as in Port Said, although statistics are elusive. Most are likely to have fallen into one of two categories: students and scholars of Islam attached to Al-Azhar, or (particularly in Port Said), merchants and others involved with maritime trade. In the late 1920s, there was even an Urdu newspaper published in Cairo, *Islami Dunya,* which catered to the South Asian community.[75]

Between the 1920s and 1930s, Egypt—and its urban centres in particular—began to undergo a major societal transformation. This was primarily due to increased education and literacy rates, combined with the soaring popularity of aural media, especially radio. As more and more Egyptians from varying backgrounds and social classes were able to participate and contribute to the political life of the country, the public discourse surrounding what it meant to be Egyptian began to change. According to Gershoni and Jankowski, among the most prominent results of this transition was a shift, between the 1920s and 1930s, towards a specifically Arab and Islamic identity;[76] but it also contributed to the empowerment of women,[77] emerging class consciousness among workers,[78] and growing awareness of and identification with other Eastern countries, which were not necessarily Arab. As I argue, following Noor Khan,[79] this included a strong identification, amongst a diverse cross-section of Egyptian political thinkers and activists, with the Indian independence movement led by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

[75] Green & Gelvin, *Global Muslims*, p. 8
[76] Gershoni & Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation.*
[77] Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation.*
[78] Beinen & Lockman, *Workers on the Nile.*
[79] Khan, *Egyptian-Indian Nationalist Collaboration.*

The assassination in Cairo of Sir Lee Stack, Governor-General of the Sudan, in 1924 resulted in the temporary breakdown of negotiations between the British and the Wafd. The British pressured Zaghlul into resignation, and King Fu'ad seized on the opportunity to appoint a royalist premier in his stead. This established a pattern which would be repeated, to a greater or lesser extent, throughout the remainder of the interwar years, with Britain placing pressure on elected nationalist leaders, who, rather than losing face by bowing to Britain's will, were forced to resign. Time and again, the Palace sought to benefit from the British-Wafd stand-off to weaken parliamentary democracy in Egypt, by selecting replacement ministers from among its loyalists. Perhaps the most damaging instance of this pattern took place in 1930, following the collapse of treaty negotiations between Mustapha al-Nahhas (the leader of the Wafd since Zaghlul's death in 1927) and Labour Foreign Secretary Arthur Henderson, again over the question of Egyptian control of the Sudan. The failure of these negotiations precipitated Nahhas' dismissal by King Fu'ad, who appointed a new ministry under Isma'il Sidqi. The following three years saw the suspension of the constitution, harsh press censorship laws, the dismissal of Wafdist deputies and the jailing of party leaders, and the consolidation of Palace control, mostly with British acquiescence.

By the mid-1930s, much of the effervescence of the prior decade had evaporated. In its place, the country's economy, which had struggled to recover from the hardships of WWI, was dealt a further blow by the stock market crash of 1929. The impact of the depression on Egypt was a reflection of the extent to which the country's economy had been plugged into global trade networks by the foreign investors who controlled it. According to Sir Bertram Hornsby, Director of the National Bank of Egypt, nine-tenths of the interwar Egyptian economy was in foreign hands. As Ibrahim notes,

> By 1930 the foreign capital invested in Egypt was about £400,000,000, i.e. approximately two-thirds the total value of Egypt's cultivable land… All the important industries and public utility services, gas, electricity and trams were controlled by foreigners. In commerce and trade, they dominated almost every concern of importance.[80]

Meanwhile, the constitution had been suspended; the Wafd had responded by boycotting elections; and under the authoritarian Sidqi regime, both the press and protesters were subject to harsh governmental suppression. The Palace's vice-like grip on power was only loosened late in 1933. By this time, the leadership of the Wafd had begun to conclude that true independence in Egypt was in the first instance contingent on the return of normal constitutional life. As will be demonstrated in the next chapter, the Palace and its cronies in parliament had, in the eyes of the Wafd, temporarily replaced Britain as Public Enemy Number One.

India between the Wars

As in Egypt, the intense nationalist agitation which characterised the 1920's in India had its roots in the First World War. The efforts of the Central Powers to foment an Islamic uprising have already been alluded to; in British India, where Muslims numbered a staggering 80 million, this threat was treated with grave concern. Many Indian Muslims harboured strong sympathies for the Ottoman Empire and the Caliphate, sentiments which the British had tended to encourage in the decades preceding WWI.[81]

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[80] Ibrahim, *Anglo-Egyptian Treaty*, pp. 30 - 31

[81] In an appreciation of Indian domestic politics for the *Arab Bulletin* in 1916, an Indian political agent outlined his government's predicament for the benefit of his colleagues in the Middle East. Referring to Britain's strategic alignment during the Crimean War, he explained: "When we were pro-Turk and anti-Russian we, too, rallied Indian Moslems to the Prophet's Standard, filling their minds with novel ideas regarding the Ottoman Caliphate…Until a few years ago, Great Britain was regarded as the champion of Turkey and of the Ottoman Caliphate, but recent events outside India…rendered her suspect before ever war was contemplated". *Arab Bulletin: Bulletin of the Arab Bureau in Cairo, 1916-1919, Vol. 1* (Oxford, 1986) pp. 522-523

Several seditionist plots were uncovered in India over the course of the war. These included the Christmas Day Plot, an ambitious German attempt to smuggle arms to Indian revolutionaries across the Pacific Ocean from the United States, which was intercepted by British authorities in the summer of 1915. Another conspiracy was foiled when "three pieces of yellow silk with fine Urdu writing on them" were turned over to British authorities in August 1916; they described efforts to recruit the ruler of Afghanistan to the side of the Central Powers and incite a nationalist uprising in India.[82]

Only a few months later, in December, nearly a year of political negotiations came to fruition, as the All-India Muslim League held a joint session with the Indian National Congress. The result was the signature of the Lucknow Pact, marking the first time that India's two leading nationalist parties had united to demand self-rule.

Just as in Egypt, when the war ended, these efforts to force the issue of independence were escalated. The return of Gandhi from South Africa in 1919 and his assumption of the leadership of the Indian National Congress marked the beginning of his campaign for *swaraj*—unfettered independence—in recognition of India's sacrifices during the war. Opposition to British rule was further galvanised following the 1919 Amritsar Massacre, when British troops fired on nonviolent protesters in a municipal garden, killing hundreds and wounding over 1,000 people. In the wake of the massacre, and in opposition to the repressive measures introduced by the Rowlatt Act, Gandhi launched the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1920.

[82] O'Halloran, Erin. 'A Tempest in a British Tea Pot: The Silk Letters and the "Arab Question" in Cairo and Delhi', in Dal Lago, Healy & Barry, *1916 in Global Context,* p. 103

Gandhi's agenda dovetailed with the growing *Khilafat* (Urdu for caliphate) campaign among Indian Muslims, who were outraged by the decision of Britain and its allies to dissolve the Ottoman Caliphate, and divide the defeated empire's territory among themselves. According to Farida Zaman, the deployment of Indian sepoys to Middle Eastern theatres—where they fought against Muslims in the Ottoman Army— was "a transformative experience" for Indian Muslim politics.[83] The Khilafat movement was in part a reaction to the horror felt by many to have sided with the imperial power against coreligionists, with the catastrophic result that they had participated in the dismantling of the last great Muslim empire: "The Indian Musalmans fought for the English and shed the blood of their own co-religionists, even against their Khalifa [caliph], and it was with their assistance that Baghdad, Jerusalem, Mesopotamia and Arabia, were run over and taken", bellowed Mohamed Ali, a leading figure of the Khilafat movement, during a speech in 1919.[84]

Following the precedent set at Lucknow in 1916, Gandhi seized on this burgeoning movement as an opportunity to unite Hindus and Muslims against British rule. The resulting coalition between Congress and Indian Muslim politicians is often described as the 'high water mark' of Hindu-Muslim nationalist cooperation in India, and led to mass strikes, civil disobedience, and the boycott of British goods and institutions. The movement was successful in winning the sympathy of some British officials: then-Secretary of State for India, Edwin Montagu, ultimately resigned from government over Britain's refusal to change course on the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, so convinced was he that it spelled disaster for British rule in India. What eventually became apparent, however, was that, in its enthusiasm for pan-Islamic solidarity, the

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[83] Zaman, Faridah. *Futurity and the Political Thought of North Indian Muslims, c. 1900-1925*. DPhil thesis, University of Cambridge (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 179-180.

[84] Translation of address by Mohamed Ali, written by Extra Assistant Commissioner Mr. Abdus Subhan Khan, 30 May 1919. Qtd. in Zaman, *Futurity and the Political Thought of North Indian Muslims*, p. 180.

Khilafatists were more Catholic than the Pope. The Turkish nationalists led by Mustapha Kemal who seized control of Istanbul in the early 1920s formally dissolved the institution of the Caliphate in 1924, robbing India's Khilafatists of their raison d'être.

From the perspective of Indian-Egyptian nationalist links, there was one other important outcome of the Khilafat years, for they ushered in a new cohort of Indian Muslims from the 'Young Party' into India's nationalist 'mainstream'. These men had preexisting ties to Egyptian nationalists through their involvement with pan-Islamic networks in the years prior to WWI.[85] They included the leaders of a 1913 Indian medical mission to the Ottoman Empire—Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari, Choudhry Khaliquzzaman, and Abdulrahman Siddiqi—as well as the Ali brothers, Mohamed and Shaukat. Although their alliance with Congress would not survive the 1920s, all of these men would go on to play a pivotal role in Indian Muslim activism on the question of Palestine—the 'Khilafat issue' of the 1930s, which is explored in detail in Chapter Three.

Spearheaded by Gandhi and the Congress Party, Indian nationalist agitation would persist throughout the 1920s, finally prompting a series of Round Tables in London with the aim of redefining the constitutional relationship between the Raj and its Indian subjects. A series of three conferences were held, with varying levels of Indian participation, between 1930 and 1933. The results were frustrating, not least because of the fundamental disagreements within both the British and Indian camps. British opinion was sharply divided over whether and to what extent Indians could be trusted to govern themselves. Congress, the largest and most influential nationalist movement, was barred from participation in the first Round Table, as much of its

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[85] Khan, *Egyptian-Indian Nationalist Collaboration,* p. 90

leadership was then in prison for acts of civil disobedience. Yet even when Gandhi was invited to participate in the second conference, he found himself unable to reconcile his vision of a unified and independent India with either the Muslim League—which insisted on separate representation for India's religious minorities—or the Princes, who governed autonomous provinces and were wary of ceding the privileges they held within the British system.

Throughout this period, the Government of India struggled to regain its nineteenth century prerogative over British policy in the Arab world. This it had temporarily suspended during WWI, in favour of a unified imperial policy; but it had done so on the assumption that it might be granted a significant deal of control over Mesopotamia in particular, once the war was over. As noted by Blyth, "for officials in Delhi, [the prospect of] Iraqi Independence completely altered these circumstances and appeared to require a corresponding Indian advance" into its old Arab sphere.[86]

When the Indian Viceroy made this argument to Whitehall, however, he came up against the firm resolve of the Foreign and Colonial Offices to consolidate decision making in their own hands. Moreover, officials in London were alarmed by the growing tide of Indian nationalism, and the threat this could pose to British control in Arab lands. As Foreign Office assistant under-secretary Sir Lancelot Oliphant opined,

> I feel definitely that with 'Indianization' looming daily nearer there would be a grave risk to British interests in strengthening India's voice in Arabian affairs; and that if a stand is not taken now, it will prove impossible later on.[87]

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[86] Blyth, *Empire of the Raj,* p. 205

[87] Qtd. in Blyth, *Empire of the Raj,* p. 206

Iraq was granted independence, at least in name, in 1932, an event that Egyptians watched with envy, and Raj officials with alarm. Yet while the the Government of India's bureaucratic control over Arab territories was being steadily reigned in by Whitehall throughout the early 1930s, this did little to mute the physical, cultural and political ties that continued to bind Indian interests, and those of the British Raj, to developments in the Middle East.

What follows is an exploration of these ties, their impact on British policymaking, and their contributions to the political evolution of nationalist movements in the Arab East and South Asia.

Chapter Two

Cairo between Empires:
From the Abyssinian Crisis to the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty

"We shall open the eyes of all the Moslems throughout the world to this false, egotistical, cowardly and imperialistic policy, the British policy which holds more than three quarters of the Moslem world under its thrall."
—Radio Bari, 17 October 1935

"Ihna ta'ibna" (we are tired).
—Mustapha al-Nahhas, in a 1935 press interview, referring to the Wafd's long exile from power

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An abrupt change of plans

On 1 October 1935, the Egyptian press reported the arrival at Port Said of the British High Commissioner, Sir Miles Lampson, and his wife Lady Lampson, aboard the S.S. Viceroy of India. The Lampsons' return to Cairo from their annual holiday in England was almost a month ahead of schedule, a detail not lost on *Al-Ahram*, the country's leading Arabic newspaper:

> Sir Miles' sudden return is surrounded by suppositions and predictions, especially as his sudden return was decided upon following a meeting at the Foreign Office last Monday. In other words, it was the British Government which decided upon the High Commissioner's return and it was not he who asked that the remaining period of his holiday should be cancelled. Nor was it even expected that Sir Miles would so suggest as he was known to have been desirous of enjoying his holiday to the full.[88]

So, indeed, he had been. In his diary he recorded on 18 September:

> Was actually on the point of leaving for our round of visits…when letter came from Vansittart saying S. of S. would like me to get back to Egypt prontissimo! …It's extraordinary how no plan of mine ever works out as arranged. There is a fate about it.[89]

The reason for the abrupt (and unwelcome) end to Lampson's vacation was alluded to with a single word: *prontissimo*. The High Commissioner was sent back to Cairo in light of Italy's looming invasion of Ethiopia, then often called Abyssinia in Europe. On 1 October the papers

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[88] 'Aoudat al-mufawadh al-sami', *Al-Ahram*, 1 October 1935

[89] Yapp, Malcolm E. (Ed.) *Politics and Diplomacy in Egypt: The Diaries of Sir Miles Lampson, 1935-1937* (London, 1997) pp. 305-306

also reported that the Emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie, had ordered the general mobilisation of his troops, said to number over a million men. Selassie had appealed to the League of Nations for help in repelling the Italian advance; both Italy and Abyssinia were League members, and the aggression was expressly forbidden under Article X of its constitution. All eyes were on Britain, a champion of the League and regarded by many as the logical enforcer of its will. Popular opinion was strongly in favour of some intervention on Ethiopia's behalf; the British public was staunchly internationalist, and the Baldwin Government was campaigning for reelection on a platform which placed support for the League at the heart of British foreign policy.

This chapter offers a Cairene perspective on one of the most important international crises of the 1930s. It follows deliberations between British officials in London, Cairo, Alexandria, and Simla over what actions—military or diplomatic— to take in response to Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia, as well as the subsequent ratcheting up of Italy's propaganda campaign in Egypt. It is argued that the limited success of this campaign was likely owed to counter-propaganda efforts orchestrated by Mustapha al-Nahhas and the Egyptian Wafd. This chapter then proceeds to explain the connection between the Abyssinian crisis and the re-opening of treaty negotiations between Britain and Egypt. Diverging from most recent scholarship, it is here argued that the British, and not the Egyptians, were scared back to the negotiating table by the spectre of an Italian invasion. The Wafd, meanwhile, sought to conclude the treaty primarily for reasons of domestic politics. This was to mark the beginning of the Collaborative Moment in Egypt.

As Lampson settled back into his Cairo rhythms that autumn—golf at the club, luncheons at the residency, shooting at the weekend—the simultaneous dramas of the Italian advance in East Africa and the diplomatic wrangling at the League of Nations in Geneva unfolded in the city's

papers, followed closely by Egyptians and expatriates alike. How long would the war last, and who would emerge victorious? What sanctions, if any, would the League impose on Mussolini? Would Britain stand up to this affront to the League, not to mention its own position in the Mediterranean and Red Sea? Would it defend the rights of an independent African nation against a blatantly aggressive European power? At a time when political polarisation on the continent was increasing, and military rearmament was ramping up from Britain to Germany to Japan, the answers to these questions seemed of vital importance to the fates of smaller nations.

The debate over British intervention

Arab public opinion across the Middle East saw the crisis as a pivotal moment in determining the Mediterranean balance of power, as well as a litmus test for Britain's ability to defend its interests in the region. A British intelligence report from September 1935 described the Arab view as follows: "The League, which curiously enough is believed to be Great Britain, and no-one else, is on its supreme trial, says the popular voice, and will come to an end if it does not take…[its] courage between two hands and do something definite".[90] While the agent who wrote this report took exception to the conflation of British and League positions, many of his superiors in London shared the Arab take—and with good reason, for Britain was generally acknowledged to play a singularly important leadership role in Geneva. In a letter to Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin dated 8 September 1935, William Ormsby-Gore, the Colonial Secretary, offered his own analysis of the Abyssinian Crisis, which treated British and League interests as basically synonymous:

> I take the long view that the coexistence of the British Empire and militarist dictatorships on the make are irreconcilable…Any weakening in the face of Mussolini's derision and threats against us will only make the role of Britain more difficult in the years of struggle which lie ahead of us. Because we try to stand up for international right, order, justice, treaties and our imperial interests, we are daily insulted by this Dago dictator. We can't go

[90] Kuwait Intelligence Summary, 16-29 September 1935. IOR L/PS/12/1514

> on eating humble pie indefinitely and a victory in the field by Italy against our wishes makes it certain that our turn will come next.[91]

British military officials stationed in Egypt were also convinced that a stand should, and could, be taken. As tensions between Italy and the League mounted over the summer of 1935, the Mediterranean Fleet was moved from Malta to Alexandria to keep it out of Italy's firing range. This caution grated on servicemen like Admiral Fisher, Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet, who saw his forces as perfectly capable of standing up to the Italian menace (he later told his brother that he could have "blow[n] the Italians out of the water").[92] Docked in Alexandria, Andrew Cunningham, then Rear Admiral (Destroyers), held a similar view:

> It seemed a very simple task to stop him [Mussolini]. The mere closing of the Suez Canal to his transports…would have cut off his armies…such a drastic measure might have led to war with Italy; but the Mediterranean Fleet was in a state of high morale and efficiency, and had no fear whatsoever of the result of an encounter with the Italian Navy.[93]

Yet while the British and international public, the civil servants, and military men on the spot all called for intervention, the Joint Chiefs of Staff in London pleaded for restraint. In 1935 British defence strategy was focused on the threats posed by Imperial Japan in the Pacific, and Nazi Germany in Europe. In March of that year, Hitler boasted to the British Foreign Secretary that the Luftwaffe—whose establishment, in open defiance of the Treaty of Versailles, had only been announced the previous month—had supposedly achieved parity with the Royal Air Force. Key figures in defence policy such as the First Sea Lord, Admiral Chatfield, felt that as a result of these looming threats, and given that numerous ships and airplanes were to be taken out of commission for refurbishment as part of Britain's rearmament programme, it was imperative that Britain refrain from what was perceived as an unnecessary and avoidable confrontation in the

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[91] Ormsby-Gore to Baldwin, 8 September 1935. Cambridge University Library, Baldwin papers.

[92] Morewood, Steven. 'This Silly African Business: The Military Dimension of Britain's Response to the Abyssinian Crisis' in Strang, Bruce (Ed.) *Collision of Empires: Italy's Invasion of Ethiopia and its International Impact* (Farnham, 2013) p. 96

[93] Qtd. in Morewood, 'This Silly African Business', pp. 94-95

Mediterranean. In short, there was a sense that ships and aircraft should not be 'wasted' on an engagement with Italy when they might later be needed against Japan, or Germany.

On top of this, British policymakers were hesitant to commit to an engagement in the Mediterranean because naval defence in particular was premised on what was called the 'Main Fleet to Singapore' strategy. This plan had been drawn up in anticipation of a possible war with Japan, and committed Britain, as the name implied, to sending the main fleet of the Royal Navy to Singapore to relieve Australia and New Zealand, which could not defend themselves. The strategy was understood to be a necessary guarantee to the Pacific Dominions in order to justify requests for their increased contribution to the imperial defence budget. It was also intended to deter them from seeking alternative defence arrangements with the United States. However, this strategy meant it was crucial for Britain to avoid a military engagement that could tie up ships in the Mediterranean, or otherwise threaten their passage from Gibraltar to Suez—and thence on to Singapore.

Egypt in the crosshairs

This 'pacific' planning by the Joint Chiefs was complicated by the threat Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia could pose to Britain's position in Egypt. While it was safely assumed that Britain would triumph in any actual war with Italy, it was also agreed that Mussolini could *not* be counted on to avoid such a confrontation. After all, as British politicians and military planners kept reminding each other throughout the autumn of 1935, Mussolini was unpredictable, and even "a madman" or "rabid dog"—an impression which the Duce was well aware of and only too happy to encourage, as it made British officials skittish about challenging Italy.

"In his present mood and apparently enthusiastically backed by Italian people Mussolini appears capable of attempting anything", wrote the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Archibald Massingberd-Montgomery, in an October telegram enquiring as to the feasibility of reinforcing Egypt with two additional brigades of Indian Army troops. "Although Egypt as a whole appears anti-Italian in present crisis," the telegram noted, drawing on a political assessment provided by Lampson,[94]

> Italian propaganda is active and Italian population is large. Moreover Wafd not above using present crisis for their own ends. So long as Egyptian Army can be depended upon to assist in maintaining internal security we need have little anxiety. But if any doubt regarding dependability of Egyptian Army arises in near future reinforcements will be required.[95]

Montgomery's telegram succinctly laid out a set of complex and interconnected political-military concerns. It began with the question of Mussolini's designs on Egypt. The Duce, it would soon become clear, had every intention of adding Egypt to his North African empire, providing a land link between his colonies in Libya and Ethiopia, and ensuring Italian dominance of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Red Sea—all of this in addition to the prestige he associated with reconquering a former Roman province of such ancient civilizational importance. Next, the telegram alluded to the potential fifth column of Egypt's Italian community, and Italian propaganda. By the mid-1930s, this community numbered some 70,000,[96] concentrated in Alexandria, Cairo, Port Said and Suez. Italian schools, hospitals, newspapers, charities, and community organisations formed the scaffolding on which was built, by the time of the Abyssinian Crisis, a sophisticated and far-reaching fascist propaganda campaign targeting Egyptian Arabs. Finally, Montgomery suggested that the British position in Egypt could be under threat, in the first case from the Wafd, and in the second from the Egyptian Army, should

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[94] This emerges in a note by General J.D. Coleridge, then Military Secretary to the India Office, who was present at a War Office meeting on 2 October where Lampson's telegram was read out. See Coleridge to C in C India, 3 October 1935. IOR L/MIL/7/19496

[95] CIGS to C in C India, 3 October 1935. IOR L/MIL/7/19496

[96] Morewood, *British Defence of Egypt,* p. 27

either attempt to take advantage of Mussolini's belligerent posturing in North Africa. While in the event, these threats did not materialise, the links drawn by Montgomery between Italian propaganda, British defence policy, Egyptian domestic politics, and Anglo-Egyptian relations were very real. That this exposition appeared in a communication to the Commander in Chief of the Army of India, whose assistance was urgently being sought, is equally significant.

The literature on Mussolini's use of propaganda in the Middle East is significant;[97] but in Egypt, compared to other Arab countries, Italy's approach to information warfare was exceptionally multifaceted and expensive. Beginning in mid-1935, Italy spent 70,000 lire on propaganda in Egypt per month, roughly equivalent to £833 (£37,730 in today's money). By comparison, the budget for propaganda in Syria at the same time was roughly 5,000 lire, or £60 (£2,700 today), issued on a sporadic basis.[98] This was in addition to fascist intelligence and espionage activities which targeted Egyptian political groups, as well as formal Italian diplomatic efforts to strengthen ties with Egypt, and disrupt Anglo-Egyptian and Egyptian-Ethiopian bilateral relations.

By 1935, Egypt was home to a number of Italian language newspapers and publications, in particular the *Giornale d'Orient*, whose bureaux in Cairo and Alexandria doubled as headquarters for Italian state propaganda and intelligence.[99] Ugo Dadone, a personal friend of Mussolini, slid easily from his desk at the *Giornale*, where he served as Editor in Chief, into a new post as head

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[97] See, for example: Arielli, Nir. *Fascist Italy and the Middle East, 1933-1940* (Basingstoke, 2010); Cavarocchi, Francesca. *Avanguardie dello spirito: Il fascismo e la propaganda culturale all'estero* (Rome, 2010); MacDonald, Callum A. 'Radio Bari: Italian Wireless Propaganda in the Middle East and British Countermeasures 1934 - 38'. *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 13 No. 2 (May 1977) pp. 195-207; Marzano, Arturo. *Onde fasciste: La propaganda araba di Radio Bari 1934-43* (Rome, 2015); Williams, Manuela A. *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad: Subversion in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, 1935-1940* (Abingdon, 2006).

[98] Italian lire figures appear in Arielli, *Fascist,* p. 46 ; conversions into Pounds Sterling rely on data from 1939 & 2014 using historicalstatistics.org

[99] 'Anis Daoud Effendi', 4 September 1935. FO 141/659

of the *Agence de l'Egypte et de l'Orient*, or A.E.O., Italy's official press office in Cairo. According to a 1935 British intelligence summary, "this office issues two bulletins a day in French and Arabic [...] full of pro Italian and anti British propaganda. Its other function consists in buying up newspapers and journalists with a view to their making pro Italian propaganda."[100] Such 'subsidies' were offered to at least six Arabic, French and Greek language newspapers in Cairo and Alexandria,[101] and to at least four Arabic journalists.[102] The A.E.O. also produced political pamphlets in French and Arabic, which were distributed throughout Cairo and Alexandria by youths on bicycles. One example, preserved in the records of the Foreign Office, was entitled 'L'Abyssinie et l'Esclavage', and sought to imply that the Ethiopian regime persecuted Muslims, among its other supposed sins.[103]

Meanwhile, in the spring of 1935, Radio Bari, another outlet for Italian state propaganda, launched a daily 45 minute broadcast programme in Arabic—a significant expansion of the 15 minute bulletins it had been broadcasting three times a week since 1934. The new feature programme included popular Arab music and entertainment, news bulletins from Italy and the Arab region, and a talk show component. It rapidly gained a significant following in parts of North Africa and the Middle East. In villages and rural areas, café owners would acquire a shortwave radio to attract customers; often this one set would become the focal point of a community's evenings, and Radio Bari's mix of popular music and anti-British sentiment went down well, particularly in the British-controlled Mandates of the Levant.[104] A contemporary

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[100] Ministry of the Interior, European Department, to the Foreign Office, 19 November 1935. FO 141/659
[101] Arielli, *Fascist Italy,* p. 46
[102] Ibid.
[103] 'l'Abyssinie et l'Esclavage', undated (1935). FO 141/659
[104] Williams, *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad*, p. 83

report from Palestine remarked that Arab café patrons "sipped their coffee and swallowed Italian propaganda with every mouthful".[105]

In Egypt as elsewhere, part of Radio Bari's appeal was down to high rates of illiteracy, especially in rural areas. As noted by Manuela Williams,

> a large proportion of the Arab populations, particularly in Egypt and Palestine, would have remained oblivious to the message of the Italian propagandists if radio broadcasts had not become one of the main instruments of international propaganda in the 1930s.[106]

One indication that the Italians were fully cognizant of this fact was their decision to publish an illustrated weekly digest, also called *Radio Bari*, to capitalise on their broadcast programme's success. The captions were written in colloquial Egyptian dialect, to make them easier to read or sound out for those unfamiliar with classical Arabic.

Another component of Bari's popularity in the Arab world was its hostility to Britain and criticism of British colonial policies. This included drawing its listeners' attention to the plight of Indian Muslims. A transcript from the 15 June, 1935 Radio Bari broadcast, translated at the behest of the Foreign Office, read:

> CAIRO. *El Hilal* newspaper published in Cairo has stated that a bloody fighting took place in Calcutta between the British troops and Moslems of that town. It is said that this fighting was agitated when the British troops decided to demolish the Moslems Mosque which was alleged to be built upon a land which is not a Moslem property, so the religious excitement persisted upon them until they attacked the British troops and bloody fighting took place in which about 16 Moslems killed and 400 injured. Many people were arrested and the troops had overcome the rioters when a re-enforcement was supplied, and rioters dispersed. We are sorry to hear of such aggression from the British troops, who have not respected the religious inviolability. So the day in which the oppressors will understand what is the result of oppression is coming.[107]

[105] MacDonald, 'Radio Bari', p. 195
[106] Williams, *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad,* p. 82
[107] 'Transcript of Bari broadcast', 15 June 1935. FO 141/659

The intended message, namely, Italian solidarity with Muslims throughout the world against British imperialism, is even more explicit in a transcript from 17 October, when tensions between Italy and Britain were near their apex: "We shall open the eyes of all the Moslems throughout the world to this false, egotistical, cowardly and imperialistic policy, the British policy which holds more than three quarters of the Moslem world under its thrall".[108]

The Empire holds back

Throughout the summer and autumn of 1935, everyone from Lampson to the India Office[109] to private citizens lobbied the Foreign Office to step up its riposte to Italian propaganda in Egypt. One such petitioner was E.D. Saleh, an Egyptian from Alexandria, who in September 1935 urged Britain to open an Egyptian propaganda bureau to counter Italian efforts.[110] But the British Government and its likely accomplice, the BBC, were uncomfortable with the idea of pro-British propaganda on moral, political and financial grounds.[111] A written comment by the Oriental Secretary, Walter Smart, on the frontispiece of Saleh's letter to the High Commission was in keeping with the Foreign Office line: "We cannot begin anti-Italian propaganda as suggested: we would have to wait until we were nearer war with Italy than now. We can only try to counter Italian propaganda against us".[112] In this case, British 'counters' to Italian propaganda amounted to the lodging of official complaints with the Italian consulate in Cairo, or occasionally with ministers in Rome. The response from the Italians was invariably a bold faced denial that the fascist government had anything to do with the offence in question.[113]

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[108] Arielli, *Fascist Italy,* p. 48
[109] Partner, Peter. *Arab Voices: The BBC Arabic Service 1938-1988* (London, 1988) p. 5
[110] 'E.D. Saleh', 20 September 1935. FO 141/659
[111] Williams, *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad,* p. 148
[112] 'E.D. Saleh', 20 September 1935. FO 141/659
[113] It would take until January 1938 for the BBC to broadcast its first Arabic news bulletin, a project which had been initiated as a direct response to Radio Bari's anti-British propaganda during the Abyssinian Crisis. See Chapter Three.

Britain did, however, monitor Italian diplomats and journalists in Egypt, as well as Egyptian newsmen suspected of receiving subsidies from Italy. One such individual was Anis Da'oud Effendi, a translator at the nationalist *Kawkab al-Sharq* newspaper, and an agent for *Misr el-Fatah*, or Young Egypt, a militant nationalist party with fascist leanings. According to his intelligence profile, Da'oud saw the Abyssinian Crisis as "a golden opportunity to seize independence with Italian support, both at the League of Nations, and on the ground in a national uprising against the British".[114] To this end he was in contact both with Ugo Dadone at the A.E.O. and "hardline Egyptian nationalists"; at the time, however, the British felt confident that their network of intelligence agents and informants effectively neutralized the threat posed by Da'oud and Young Egypt.

British intelligence also toyed with blocking Radio Bari's signal off the coast of Alexandria in the autumn of 1935, but abandoned this initiative to avoid escalating tensions with Italy. London, it became increasingly apparent, still held out hope that Mussolini could be placated, and perhaps even brought on side to counter the looming threat posed by Hitler in Europe. In this sense, Callum MacDonald is correct in concluding that "the desire to avoid totally alienating Italy lay behind the decision not to jam Bari just as it lay behind the decision not to impose oil sanctions" in response to the invasion of Ethiopia.[115]

The true extent of Whitehall's (and the Elysée's) eagerness to avoid confrontation with Mussolini was made apparent to the world in early December, when the terms of an agreement reached in Paris between Samuel Hoare and the French Premier, Pierre Laval, were leaked to the press. The

[114] 'Anis Daoud Effendi', 4 September 1935. FO 141/659
[115] MacDonald, 'Radio Bari', p. 199

Hoare-Laval Pact proposed the cession of two-thirds of Ethiopian territory to Italy (more, apparently, than its army had by then managed to seize).[116] The newspapers reported that provisions were to be made for the settlement in this territory of up to 1.5 million Italian colonists.[117] The whole of the country was, moreover, to be placed 'under the aegis' of the League of Nations, although the Negus, the Ethiopian monarch, would in theory exercise a veto over the appointment of officials.[118]

The sell-out of Ethiopia implied by these terms was transparent, and particularly galling to the British public, as it came mere weeks after Hoare and Stanley Baldwin had won a General Election at least in part on the strength of a public commitment to support the League of Nations. Public outcry was swift; Minister for War Duff Cooper later remarked that

> ...during my experience of politics I have never witnessed so devastating a wave of public opinion [...] The post-bag was full and the letters I received were not written by ignorant or emotional people but by responsible citizens who had given sober thought to the matter.[119]

The wave of opprobrium extended far beyond British shores. As Susan Pedersen notes,

> Demonstrations of support and solidarity campaigns sprang up among anti-colonial intellectuals and diasporic populations from Harlem to Jamaica, Cairo to Natal...Selassi's under-supplied armies and the credibility of the 'civilizing' project alike reeled under the onslaught of Italian planes and poison gas, and then the revelation that the British and French were willing to buy a settlement by granting Italy substantial territorial concessions.[120]

In Cairo, Britain's failure to act shook public confidence, and enhanced frustration with the sorry state of the Egyptian Army. A growing sense of encirclement by Italian troops—first on their western border with Libya, and now in Ethiopia, the source of the Blue Nile—was highlighted in

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[116] Holt, Andrew. '"No more Hoares to Paris": British foreign policymaking and the Abyssinian Crisis, 1935', *Review of International Studies*, 37(3), 2011, p. 1384

[117] *The Egyptian Gazette*, 'Franco-British Peace Plan', 10 December 1935, p. 5

[118] *The Egyptian Gazette,* 'Storm of Criticism for Peace Plan', 14 December 1935, p. 7

[119] Cooper, Duff. *Old Men Forget* (London, 1953), pp. 192-193.

[120] Pedersen, Susan. *The Guardians* (Oxford, 2015), p. 297

the press, both through articles and illustrated maps. Mussolini's public assertions that the Mediterranean 'belonged' to Italy gave Egyptians every reason to suspect that their country could be next on the Duce's list of acquisitions. Given the evidence that Britain might renege on its defence commitments—particularly if faced with aggression from another European power—the argument was made that Egyptians should be prepared to defend themselves. But British intervention had retarded the development of the country's armed forces. In an interview with Dr. Hafez al-Afifi in *Al-Jihad*, published on the 6th of October, the former Egyptian Minister Plenipotentiary articulated what he called Egyptians' 'growing sense of anxiety' that the country might soon become a field of war:

> However hard statesmen may work to confine this war to the narrowest area possible, Egypt is threatened. In view of her geographical position, Egypt is an important means of communication of the British Empire and her shores constitute a considerable part of the basins of the Mediterranean and Red Sea, which may be the most important fields of war in the near future [...] the source of anxiety lies in the fact that it has become very clear to the Egyptians that their country does not enjoy complete immunity against becoming a field of war, in spite of Britain, and every Egyptian feels that the Egyptian Army is incapable of defending this country, since the defence of Egypt is left to Britain alone.[121]

Meanwhile in India, commentary focused on the hypocrisy of Britain and other European countries which feigned outrage at Mussolini's actions. In a poem by the celebrated Indian Muslim luminary, Iqbal, the Italian dictator challenged his critics:

Why does pot feel offence, if kettle has a blot?
Our culture [is the] same: I kettle and you pot
My craze for Empire makes you sneer and frown,
But walls of weak states, you too have brought down.[122]

Another poem, titled 'Abyssinia', was even more scathing in its reproach of European imperialists:

The vultures of Europe still do not know
That poison in Abyssinian corpse does flow:

[121] *'Ma yishghul intibha misr wa madha tirrid', Al-Jihad*, 6 October 1935
[122] Iqbal, Allama. *Mussolini (to his Eastern and Western adversaries).* Public domain. Translation by the International Iqbal Society.

The old corpse may with speed to fragments go.
Advance or culture, good manners can't maintain:
These days by pillage, nations themselves sustain;
All wolves would some artless lamb obtain.[123]

Regardless of the fact that it was never implemented, and even despite the removal of both Hoare and Laval from office in subsequent months, the Hoare-Laval Pact was indicative of the prevailing attitudes in the British and French administrations. Whereas in the days prior to the revelation of the pact in the press, Hoare had publicly threatened the imposition of oil sanctions against Italy, these were never actually implemented. In the absence of an oil embargo, the economic sanctions package imposed by the League of Nations—sanctions in which Egypt participated—were ineffective, beyond adding to Mussolini's sense of personal aggrievement.

Tennis with Simla

Despite London's preference for avoiding conflict with Italy over Abyssinia, precautions had, of course, to be taken. Montgomery's October telegram, cited above, was only the beginning of a somewhat convoluted negotiation for Indian Army reinforcements to be sent to Egypt. The correspondence primarily took place between Lampson in Cairo, the War Office in London, and several commanding officers of the Indian Army, all based in Simla. As was standard, communications between Cairo and Simla had to be funneled through London, where they were circulated to the relevant offices: the Foreign Office, India Office, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and the Cabinet.

[123] Iqbal, Allama. *Abyssinia (August 18 1935)*. Public domain. Translation by the International Iqbal Society.

After the initial troop estimates and time frames were cabled to him, Lampson replied to London. It is worth bearing in mind that the request for Indian Army reinforcements for Egypt had originated with the High Commissioner in Cairo.

> Secret.
> Your telegram No. 339.
>
> 1. Paragraph 1 does not indicate whether two infantry brigades from India would include any native Indian troops. Before I had received your telegram King Fu'ad had expressed to me the earnest hope that no Indian troops would be employed in Egypt and this view was independently expressed to General Spinks by the Minister of War to-day. I am convinced and General Officer Commanding and General Spinks agree that from political point of view the effect would be very unfortunate apart from any question of relative value as fighting units of Indian and British troops. I would therefore strongly recommend that two infantry brigades which I still regard as absolute minimum should be British. If any Indian troops must be included they should be Moslems not Hindus. [124]

While there is very little available by way of contemporary Egyptian source material to contextualise Lampson's remark about the 'political effect' of Indian troops being sent to reinforce Egypt, this paragraph almost certainly hints at prevailing British as well as Egyptian perceptions of racial difference. British concepts of race, and the national hobby of categorising Indians by all manner of inherited signifiers—race, tribe, creed, caste, etc—are better documented, and thus more straightforward to diagnose.[125]

It is easy to explain why Lampson viewed white British soldiers as by far the preferable type of reinforcement for Egypt. The arrival of 3,000 additional British soldiers at Port Said would have enhanced the prestige and authority of the British presence in the country, and could have been used as a deterrent against internal disorder, including student riots, or—less likely, but far more concerning—an uprising within the Egyptian Army. The High Commissioner's reservation

[124] Lampson to Govt. of India, Army Dept. 5 October 1935. IOR L/MIL/7/19496

[125] See, for example: Bates, Crispin (Ed). *Beyond Representation: Constructions of identity in colonial and postcolonial India* (New Delhi, 2005); Rand, Gavin. '"Martial Races" and "Imperial Subjects": Violence and Governance in Colonial India, 1857–1914'. *European Review of History*, 13:1, pp. 1-20; Streets, Heather. *Martial Races: The military, race and masculinity in British imperial culture, 1857-1914* (Manchester, 2010).

regarding Indian soldiers does not appear to have been that they might defect or join in an Egyptian mutiny; otherwise, Hindus, not Muslim co-religionists, would have been his preference. It is, however, entirely possible that he bought into a received wisdom that Muslims from northern India made better fighting troops than Hindus from the south. It is also important to note that these reinforcements were being sought to defend Egypt against a possible attack by another European power. This threat arose from Italy's unapologetically colonial conquest of a neighbouring African state. In these circumstances, British reliance on Indian soldiers to defend Egypt could easily have been criticised as either a lack of commitment to Egypt's defence; as cowardly, colonial hypocrisy; or both. This impression was to be avoided particularly at a time when Britain's prestige was already under scrutiny—in Egypt as elsewhere—as a result of its failure to intervene in the Abyssinian Crisis.

Regarding what Lampson characterised as King Fu'ad's and the Egyptian Minister of War's strongly held views on the subject of Indian reinforcements, the implication appears to have been that Egyptians, perhaps especially the class-conscious denizens of Cairo, would be insulted by the presence of Indian, and especially Hindu soldiers, whom they would perceive as inferior, and unworthy of the honour of defending Egypt. That Muslim soldiers would be preferable to Hindu soldiers is straightforward to interpret, in the context of Fu'ad's pretentions to broader Islamic, and even Caliphal authority, following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire;[126] why British soldiers would be preferred to Indian Muslims is less clear. There are few sources which deal directly with Egyptian conceptions of racial difference; one notable exception is the work of Eve M. Troutt Powell. In *A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the mastery of the Sudan*, Troutt Powell employs a variety of primary sources to explore Egyptian social and political

[126] Kedourie, Elie. 'Egypt and the Caliphate, 1915-1946', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 3/4 (1963), pp. 208-248

attitudes towards the Sudan and the Sudanese people in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While conceding that the long, entangled history of Egyptian-Sudanese relations, and especially Egypt's colonial domination of its neighbour during the late 1800s, marks the socio-political relationship between these places as both highly complex and uniquely intimate, nevertheless several of Troutt Powell's insights are useful to interpreting the case at hand.

Early on, Troutt Powell outlines the distinctions drawn by Egyptians between animist South Sudanese and Muslim Arab Sudanese. As late as the turn of the century, and despite slavery being technically illegal, South Sudanese were considered socially appropriate to purchase as domestic slaves in Egyptian households—including among the nationalist elite of Cairo.[127] Northern Sudanese, by virtue of their adherence to Islam, were not. In this sense, Troutt Powell argues, "polytheistic religious practices were nearly the equivalent of racial distinction" in Egyptian conceptions of social hierarchy.[128] While this insight might help account for the distinction drawn between Hindu and Muslim soldiers, however, we are no nearer an explanation for the reported preference for British soldiers over Indian Muslims.

Elsewhere, Troutt Powell analyses a variety of contemporary Egyptian literature and cultural production for clues about social attitudes towards racial difference. One of the sources included in her study is a play performed at Cairo's Majestic Theatre in 1920. The play starred comedian 'Ali al-Kassar, reprising his popular role as the Nubian, Osman 'Abd al-Basit. In *Al-Barbari fil-Jaysh*, which Troutt Powell translates as *The Nubian in the Army*, Osman is drafted into the Egyptian Army, a premise whose comedy relies on the reactions of the play's Egyptian characters

[127] Troutt Powell, Eve M. *A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the mastery of the Sudan* (Berkeley, 2003) pp. 1-2

[128] Ibid, p. 4

when they encounter a black man in uniform. Appearing in blackface (as he always did when playing Osman), al-Kassar built the action of the play around a series of misunderstandings and mistaken identities. As Troutt Powell recounts, "...all of the reversals sum up to the strangest of all: a black man being the superior of a white man"—specifically, an Egyptian named Foda, whose sarcastic incredulity affords the audience another occasion to laugh.[129]

While far from definitive, Troutt Powell's research suggests that the concern expressed by the Egyptians to their British liaisons *could* have been based on a genuine set of social prejudices, which in the first instance viewed pantheists as less civilized than monotheists, and in the second, viewed dark skinned people more generally with contempt—and even derision, when they were seen to ascend beyond their rightful station, as in the case of Osman. Thus King Fu'ad, himself proud of his Turkish ethnicity, may well have expressed concern to Lampson over the prospect of importing Indians to Egypt during a moment of instability; however, evidence as to why he may have preferred British troops to Indian Muslims specifically remains scarce and difficult to interpret; it is possible he believed British forces to be more effective than their Indian counterparts, or at least, perceived as such by Egypt's potential enemies.

So much for Fuad and Lampson's request. The reply he received from the Indian Army was at least thorough, if not entirely sympathetic:[130]

A Note regarding the Despatch of Reinforcements from India to Egypt in case of Emergency.

1. Despite possible political reactions in India the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief are prepared to send reinforcements to Egypt [...] but there is a limit to the size of these reinforcements, and this is the point I wish to draw attention to.
2. If all were peaceful in India, I think the reinforcements asked for [...] could be spared without any great anxiety, but India has her own preoccupations at present, and these must be adjusted before reinforcements can be spared.

[129] Troutt Powell, *A Different Shade of Colonialism,* pp. 190-191

[130] 'A Note regarding the Despatch of Reinforcements from India to Egypt in case of Emergency', October 1935. IOR L/MIL/7/19496

The note proceeded to list five ongoing internal security operations in India, including the suppression of the Mohmand rebellion on the North West Frontier; the need to respond to 'signs of Afridi trouble'; and confronting 'Bengal Terrorism'. It went on to outline in some detail exactly how many British battalions there were in India, where they were stationed, and why the Government could not spare two brigades—equivalent to six battalions, upwards of 3,000 men—for service in Egypt:

> In my opinion Egypt can only have mixed Brigades (1 British and 3 Indian Battalions per Brigade) from India and nothing else, to substitute 6* more British Battalions in place of the 6 Indian ones would reduce the British element in India to, in my opinion, a dangerous extent. [...]
> *Should a further 6 be asked for only 19 would remain in India, which is insufficient.
> [...] There are a few Hindu class Battalions in India, but no Mohammedan class Battalions [...] hence Indian reinforcements from India must include Hindus.

The tone of the entire document is palpably exasperated: India, it sniffs, is not an inexhaustible storehouse of men and munitions, to be raided at will. Beggars, it moreover implies, should not be so choosy.

No acknowledgement from Cairo of the receipt of this letter—or the appreciation of its contents—is preserved. Instead, it was decided in London that the First Royal Dragoons, a British regiment then returning home from a tour of duty in India, would be disembarked at Port Said, and remain in Egypt until further notice. One is left to speculate as to the effect of this announcement on the Dragoons themselves.

Broader impacts of the crisis

Ultimately, the cautious instincts of the Joint Chiefs of Staff won the day: Britain did not intervene in the Abyssinian crisis, even as Italy resorted to poisoned gas to overcome the

determined resistance of Ethiopian troops. Britain's failure to intervene decisively in the Abyssinian crisis had, in stark contrast to its intentions, several significant repercussions: it both emboldened Mussolini—who from 1937 began planning for the invasion of Egypt, on the grounds that British power was in decline—and drew Hitler and Mussolini closer together. Hitler was impressed by the Duce's victory in East Africa, which he had initially seen as a reckless provocation of Great Britain. It influenced his own military strategy in Europe—moves which would cover the period up to the outbreak of World War II, and include the remilitarization of the Rhineland and support for Franco in the Spanish civil war—because he calculated that these manoeuvres would be met with the same British indifference as had the invasion of Abyssinia.[131]

Meanwhile, the League of Nations finally settled on the imposition of economic sanctions in November 1935, which, it would soon become clear, were too mild to restrain Mussolini's campaign. The sanctions did, for the sake of public opinion and the papers, strike a note of international disapproval—and this was a consensus Egypt sought to associate itself with. It became the only non-League member to participate in sanctions against Italy, something Mussolini (and Radio Bari) bitterly attributed to British coercion. In fact the Egyptian press reflected a relatively broad consensus in favour of them.[132]

There were several reasons why Egyptians found association with the sanctions against Italy attractive. The first was the extent of popular feeling in Egypt against the invasion of Ethiopia, which will be discussed below. The second was the Egyptian government's aspiration to League of Nations membership, a status which Iraq had been granted following its formal independence from Great Britain in 1932. Egyptians had regarded Iraq's independence and its accession to the

[131] Morewood, 'Appeasement from Strength', p. 106
[132] Gershoni & Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism in Egypt,* pp. 59-61

League as the first Arab member state with envy, and viewed these achievements as the benchmark by which to measure their own success.[133] Participation in League action was naturally seen by the government as a step toward League affiliation, although contemporary political cartoons hinted that Egyptian opinion was critical of the glacial pace both of League action, and of Egypt's plod towards membership.

In one cartoon, which appeared in *Al-Mussawar* in mid-October, Miles Lampson sits with 'Egypt' at a table draped in the Union Jack. Lampson, representing British policy, is enjoying a large plate of pasta and a carafe of red wine. He encourages Egypt to join him in the meal: "Let us eat the macaroni", he says, to which Egypt replies, "—But who will pay the bill?". Published following the Italian invasion and before a sanctions package was agreed to, this cartoon is an obvious critique of Britain's selfish desire to maintain good relations with Italy, whatever the cost to Egypt.

In the second cartoon, published in *Ruz al-Yussuf* in early December (following the imposition of League sanctions), John Bull congratulates Egypt—this time embodied by the beloved Masri Effendi—on its participation in League Sanctions: "That's splendid! You can almost say you are now a member of the League of Nations". Masry Effendi sits on the floor with his arms crossed, scowling. "Yes", he agrees, "—a member by proxy". The implication is that, in matters of international affairs which concern it greatly, Egypt is still unable to speak or act for itself. The frustration of this state of affairs was echoed by Dr. Hafez Afifi in his interview with *Al-Jihad*:

> Egypt, small state that it is, wishes the Covenant of the League of Nations to be respected and also wishes that the rights of small states should be respected equally with those of the big powers. Why then should Egypt be prevented from becoming a member of the League of Nations? And why should Egypt be prevented from starting to raise an army fit to defend her?[134]

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[133] Rogan, *The Arabs,* p. 238

[134] *'Ma yishghul intibha misr wa madha tirrid', Al-Jihad*, 6 October 1935

The Egyptian consensus

And yet, despite Egyptian frustration over the foot-dragging and equivocating on the part of the British defence establishment, and the glacial pace of diplomatic negotiations in Geneva; and despite, too, the popularity of Radio Bari in other parts of the Arab region, and the significant human and financial resources devoted by Italy to its Egyptian propaganda campaign,[135] Mussolini's attempts to win Egyptian support for Italy's war in Ethiopia ultimately met with near total failure. The Egyptian people were remarkably united in their hostility towards the Italian invasion, as has been exhaustively documented by Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski.[136] Egyptians rejected what they accurately diagnosed as the racist imperial impulse guiding the Italian invasion. Egyptian Copts and Levantine Christians in particular expressed their horror at the attack on a fellow Eastern Christian community. Among Egyptian Muslims, too, there was an instinctive sense of solidarity with Ethiopia, the last independent kingdom in Africa, as it faced onslaught from a European imperial power. In the words of Nir Arielli,

> The majority of the leading intellectuals in Egypt and practically all the major newspapers in the country denounced Italy's venture in Ethiopia as colonialist, expansionist and an unwarranted attack on the last independent African state [...] The invasion of Ethiopia created a consensus between people as far apart politically as Hasan al-Banna, the leader of the religious Muslim Brotherhood, and the radical socialist intellectual, Salama Musa, who was appalled by the way the Italians had bombed civilians.[137]

Egyptians moreover perceived that what was happening in Ethiopia was not only a threat to their country, but to small nations generally; the impotence of the League in the face of such flagrant

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[135] Williams, *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad,* pp. 122-132
[136] Gershoni & Jankowski, *Fascism in Egypt.*
[137] Arielli, *Fascist Italy*, p. 57

violation of its charter dispelled any illusion that small powers could rely on Geneva to defend their interests or protect them from aggression.[138]

The literature on Mussolini's propaganda in the Arab world all acknowledges his singular failure to make any real headway in Egypt,[139] perhaps the most consistently and heavily targeted country of his campaign. But why exactly was this the case? Certainly, neither Egyptian loyalty to Britain, nor a British-orchestrated response to Italy's sophisticated propaganda offensive provide a credible explanation. Some degree of media consensus is understandable; but during this period, Egypt could boast the most vibrant and politically diverse free press the Arab world had ever seen. Moreover, as has been discussed, Britain failed to mount a credible challenge to Italy's sophisticated propaganda campaign. Instead, Britain appeared to treat the 'battle for hearts and minds' in 1935 Egypt as a kind of spectator sport. The question remains: what was responsible for the failure of Mussolini's propaganda campaign in Egypt, even as it made gains elsewhere in the British-controlled Arab East?

Part of the answer is a counter-propaganda campaign, skillfully orchestrated by Mustapha al-Nahhas and the Wafd. Nahhas appears to have grasped early on that the threat posed by the invasion of Ethiopia to British interests created an opportunity to force concessions from London. These included, first, the restoration of the Egyptian constitution, which would result in new elections and bring the Wafd back into government. Second, the reopening of treaty negotiations between Britain and Egypt, enabling Nahhas and the Wafd to score several long-overdue victories for their movement: Egyptian independence, an end to the Capitulations,

[138] Gershoni & Jankowski, *Fascism in Egypt*, pp. 60-62
[139] See for example Arielli, *Fascist Italy*; MacDonald, 'Radio Bari'; Marzano, *Onde fasciste*; Williams, *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad*.

and membership of the League of Nations. In the summer and autumn of 1935, and especially beginning in January 1936, newspapers and periodicals affiliated with the Wafd—among them *Al-Jihad, Kawkab al-Sharq,* and *al-Musawwar*—began to publish increasingly alarmist accounts of Italy's designs on Egypt, and increasingly moderate—even positive—coverage of Egypt's relationship with Great Britain. In addition to this, British intelligence reports suggest that Nahhas was intervening in the coverage even of papers not affiliated with the Wafd, seeking to prevent the publication of pro-Italian press and propaganda. As Hassan Ahmad Ibrahim has suggested,[140] it is possible to interpret this as a coordinated effort to convince Egyptians of the danger posed by Italy, and soften Egyptian perceptions of Great Britain, in an effort to mentally prepare them for the difficult concessions that would inevitably be involved in achieving a new Anglo-Egyptian treaty.

Re-evaluating the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty

Despite passing reference to the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty and its negotiation in most studies of the period, and several more detailed accounts (particularly in the context of British military history), there still appears to be widespread confusion and inconsistency on the question of how the negotiations were initiated, by whom, and for what purpose.[141] An essay by Steven Morewood marks the most comprehensive recent attempt to come to grips with the negotiation of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty.[142] While it is exhaustive in its survey of the British archival collections—especially the relevant armed services papers—the author missed the mark when, excusing himself from the obligation of addressing the Egyptian dimension of his subject, he

[140] See Ibrahim, *Treaty*, pp. 52-56

[141] Kolinsky, Martin. *Britain's War in the Middle East: Strategy and Diplomacy, 1936-1942* (London, 1999); Morewood, 'Appeasement from Strength'; Pratt, Lawrence R. *East of Malta, West of Suez: Britain's Mediterranean Crisis 1936-1939* (Cambridge, 1975). John Darwin is a notable exception. See Darwin, John. *The Empire Project* (Cambridge, 2010).

[142] Morewood, Steven. 'Appeasement from Strength'.

suggested that it had been satisfactorily dealt with elsewhere.[143] Malcolm Yapp's observation from the mid-1990s is still essentially accurate: there are very few accounts of the treaty negotiations from an Egyptian perspective, and many of the existing Arabic primary sources are unreliable.[144] This has made the reconstruction of Egyptian involvement in the negotiations daunting, and much work remains to be done.

While both Morewood and Kolinsky, another military historian, acknowledge the important link between the Abyssinian Crisis and the reopening of Anglo-Egyptian treaty talks, they tend to misunderstand the nature of that link. Each author states as fact that the Italian menace was responsible for bringing a recalcitrant Egyptian nationalist movement to the negotiating table, cap in hand. Benefiting from this weakness in the Egyptian position, Britain, it is implied, was finally able to begin a process which its agents had long desired—and lo, they were successful in achieving a settlement entirely in Britain's interest. Meanwhile the Egyptians were forced (again, it is presumed, by their fear of Italy) into unprecedented concessions.[145]

This is precisely the version of events offered by much of the contemporary documentation held in the British National Archives; Kolinsky and Morewood have faithfully reproduced the contents of these files. But on closer inspection, the accounts given by Miles Lampson, the Foreign Office, and the Cabinet Papers bear a rather striking resemblance to those of a man who, having had his course of action suddenly reversed through the nimble persuasion of his spouse, thinks the decision had always been his, and congratulates himself on his wisdom. In other

[143] Morewood, 'Appeasement from Strength', p. 532

[144] Yapp, 'Introduction', *Politics and Diplomacy in Egypt*. These include the 'memoirs' attributed to Mustapha al-Nahhas, in fact based on the notes of his personal secretary, Mohammad Kamil al-Banna, and containing multiple problematic inconsistencies. 'Izz al-Din, Ahmad (ed.), *Mudhakkirat Mustafa al-Nahhas*. Two volumes (Cairo, 2000).

[145] This is a summary of implicit interpretations present in Kolinsky, *Britain's War in the Middle East*; and Morewood, 'Appeasement from Strength'.

words, there is ample evidence that, if anything, the situation was rather the opposite of what the British negotiators subsequently told themselves: it was *they* who were driven to a host of new compromises—of which the Treaty was only the most visible—by Italy's invasion of Abyssinia. Meanwhile the Wafd, having waited years for such a weakening in Britain's position, seized on its opportunity with barely contained enthusiasm.

The confusion in the English historiography has apparently resulted, at least in part, from the tendency to isolate research on the treaty negotiations from their broader Egyptian political context. Reconstructing this context in turn facilitates a more nuanced reading of the relevant British archival records, on which we are still largely reliant.

As previously discussed, multiple attempts by the British Government to negotiate a treaty with the Wafd had indeed taken place during the 1920s, and it is true that, particularly in the years immediately following the Revolution, the nationalist party had resisted concessions, especially on the question of Egyptian control of the Sudan. Nevertheless, as senior Egyptian political advisor Mustapha el-Feki explained, "it was the accepted practice that every new Egyptian Prime Minister, particularly in the period from 1919-1936, should begin his term of office by seeking to negotiate a treaty with Great Britain".[146]

As the thirties wore on, however, there was every indication that the Wafd was becoming increasingly serious in pursuit of a new basis for Egypt's relationship with Britain, whether this amounted to 'full' independence or not. The principle cause of this shift in attitude was the cyclical frustration of the party's ambitions at the hands of the Palace: between 1923 and 1930,

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[146] El-Feki, Mustapha. 'Makram Ebeid: politician of the majority party', in Tripp, Charles (Ed.) *Contemporary Egypt: Through Egyptian Eyes* (London, 1993) pp. 23-24

King Fu'ad dissolved one Wafd ministry after another, often on the flimsiest of pretenses, undermining the basis of Egypt's parliamentary democracy in the process. This erosion of the Wafd's (and parliament's) power tended to suit British interests; it also temporarily lessened Britain's impetus for the conclusion of a formal treaty with an elected government.[147] In 1930, an agreement with a Wafdist ministry was very nearly concluded, but foundered once again on the issue of the Sudan. At the time, Makram Ebeid, among the Wafd's chief negotiators, suggested to his British counterparts that it was London, and not the Wafd, who was responsible for the breakdown:

> Ebeid said that there was a very strong feeling in Wafdist circles that if the British government's desire to keep the door open for a treaty had been genuine they would have found some way of averting the present crisis.[148]

The failure of the 1930 negotiations and the subsequent resignation of the Wafd from government precipitated a very dark period for the party, and indeed for Egypt. The pro-Palace government of Isma'il Sidqi which was appointed in its stead repealed the 1923 Constitution and dismissed hundreds of pro-Wafd government officials; imprisoned the party's leaders; violently suppressed popular demonstrations; and muzzled Egypt's vibrant free press. Yet it was not only Sidqi and King Fu'ad who contributed to the Wafd's bleak political fortunes between 1930 and 1935: the party also suffered internal divisions, and a host of new political challengers began to emerge, emanating from both the Right and Left. Most notable among these were the Islamist *Gama'at al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin,* the Muslim Brotherhood, and the fascist-leaning *Misr al-Fatah*, both of which boasted growing popularity among Egyptian students. There was also the Federation of Labour Unions, under the patronage of Prince 'Abbas Halim, which threatened the Wafd's base among the working class.

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[147] A 1933 attempt to conclude a treaty with Sidqi proved abortive; this was partly due to Britain's acknowledgement that any agreement reached with him would be viewed as illegitimate by the Egyptian public, and was likely to be rescinded by a future (Wafdist) government.

[148] Lorraine to Henderson, 21 June 1930, FO 371/14615

In this context, Nahhas' comment, in a 1935 press interview, that the Wafd was "tired" of political exile, appears as something of an understatement. The preceding years had had a dramatic effect, not only on the Wafd, but on Egyptian society as a whole. Whereas in the early 1920s the focus of the nationalists' efforts had been liberation from British tutelage, by the mid-1930s, the Palace, and in particular the suspension of normal parliamentary life, appeared to many to have become the greater immediate obstacles. In the words of the Egyptian scholar and diplomat Alaa al-Din al-Hadidy,

> The main immediate objective of the liberal groups was to secure the Constitution [of 1923], since it was thought that an elected government (presumably Wafdist) would win office and would conduct the negotiations with the British. The fight for the Constitution replaced the fight for independence between 1930 and 1936.[149]

This was by no means a secret. Acting High Commissioner Maurice Peterson, filling in for Miles Lampson in October 1934—a full year before the Italian invasion of Abyssinia—held an audience with Ebeid in which the latter stated in no uncertain terms that "the restoration of the Constitution of 1923 and the achievement of an Anglo-Egyptian Treaty are paramount aims of Wafdist policy".[150]

On 4 October 1935, as the Italian invasion of Abyssinia began, *Al-Muqattam*, the most pro-British of the major Arabic dailies, politely underscored this point:

> We would be echoing public opinion if we say that those who are in favour of agreement with England and who are keen that matters should take their normal course expect the British Government to receive Egypt's outstretched hand. In other words, they expect England to seize the opportunity presented by the current circumstances to realise the desired understanding by means of the conclusion of a treaty of alliance between the two countries as the basis of future relations between [them].[151]

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[149] Al-Hadidy, Alaa al-Din. 'Mustapha al-Nahhas and political leadership' in Tripp, *Contemporary Egypt,* pp. 80-81
[150] Peterson to Simon, 5 October 1934, FO 371/17980
[151] 'Misr wa Ingiltra', *Al-Muqattam*, 4 October 1935

Thus it is relatively clear that the Wafd were not 'scared into' treaty negotiations with Britain; they had sought them out for years. But during the same period, and despite mounting evidence of the Egyptian public's restlessness, the British Residency was more or less content with the Palace-dominated status quo in Egypt, and had no desire to reinstate the awkwardly liberal Constitution of 1923—let alone negotiate with the Wafd. In the inimitable phrasing of Miles Lampson,

> The real essence of the matter was…not so much the question of which particular constitution was in force…as that there should be an Egyptian Government which was capable not only of governing the country well but of realising that they must work in harmony and friendship with Great Britain. That was much more important than the particular type of constitution under which they were elected.[152]

David Kelly, a diplomat at the Residency, put it more bluntly in a September communication to Hoare:

> While we are, of course, anxious to keep the Wafd in good humour...it is extremely difficult to go far on this road in view of the fact that we frankly do not wish the Wafd to return to power...We have, therefore, very few crumbs to throw to them.[153]

In October, under pressure from Nahhas and the Wafd, the Egyptian Prime Minister, Tawfiq Nassim, delivered a note to Lampson calling for the restoration of parliamentary life, declaring Egypt's right to defend its own territory, and stating that "the present moment was most opportune for the conclusion of a treaty, the solution of the question of the Capitulations, and the entry of Egypt into the League of Nations".[154] This summarised neatly Nahhas and Ebeid's principal political goals.

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[152] Lampson Diaries, 13 November 1935.
[153] Mr. Kelly to Sir Samuel Hoare, 13 September 1935. FO 141/659
[154] Qtd. in Zayid, *Egypt's Struggle for Independence,* p. 150

Lampson was as opposed to what he called "this ridiculous clamour for a treaty"[155] as to the Wafd's return to government. His personal relationships with several correspondents and editors at *The Times* of London resulted in Egyptian disappointment when a leader appeared in that paper on 30 October, retorting that the timing was in fact "far from suitable" for negotiations between the two countries.[156]

Hoare attempted to clarify his government's position in a speech at the Guildhall on 9 November: "when we have been consulted, we have advised against the re-enactments of the constitutions of 1923 and 1930, since the one was proved unworkable and the other universally unpopular".[157] Widely reported in the Egyptian press, this speech—much to the surprise of Lampson and the Foreign Office, who had hoped it would tamp down Egyptian enthusiasm—sparked widespread protests, particularly on November 13th, *Yawm el-Jihad* (the Day of Struggle), commemorating the founding of the Wafd and the beginning of the national independence movement. Naguib Mahfouz captured the public reaction to Hoare's speech in his novel, *al-Sukkariyya* (Sugar Street), as a character travelled to the Wafd's rally in Cairo that day:

> The streetcar was packed. There was not even room left for riders to stand.
> [...] Buoyed by their common destination and mutual Wafdist allegiance, strangers discussed the political situation with each other. One said, "Commemoration of our past struggle is a struggle in every sense of the word this year. Or it ought to be."
> Another observed, "It should provide a response to Foreign Secretary Hoare and his sinister declaration."
> Aroused by the reference to the British official, a third shouted, "The son of a bitch said, '. . . we have advised against the re-enactment of the Constitutions of 1923 and 1930.' Why is our constitution any business of his?"
> A fourth reminded the crowd, "Don't forget what he said before that: 'When, however, we have been consulted we have advised . . .' and so on."
> —"Yes. Who asked for his advice?"
> —"Ask this government of pimps about that".[158]

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[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid, p. 152
[157] 'The Egyptian Problem', *The Spectator*, 22 November 1935
[158] Mahfouz, Naguib. (translation William Maynard Hutchins) *The Cairo Trilogy. Book I: Sugar Street* (New York, 1992) pp. 28-29

The sense of outrage Egyptians felt, faced with the Foreign Minister's patronising tone, and their exasperation with the fealty of the Egyptian Prime Minister, Tewfiq Nassim, towards both the Palace and the British, propelled Egyptians, and especially students, out into the streets. The mounting pressure on Britain—both from Italy and this internal unrest—played into the Wafd's hands. As a contemporary observer noted, its leadership had for years been saying:

> We are powerless to force Great Britain to accept our claims until some other more powerful factor than our agitation brings influence to bear on the British Government. But once let Great Britain become involved in a European situation that will make security for British communications in Egypt a paramount consideration, and we will use that situation to exact compliance with our demands.[159]

As Lampson and the Foreign Office scrambled to clarify their position and stave off the growing calls for negotiations, Hoare issued another statement on 5 December, this time in the House of Commons, which read in part:

> His Majesty's Government have no intention of letting the matter drift, but it is obviously impossible for them, in the midst of the preoccupations caused by the war in Abyssinia, simultaneously to engage in negotiations on a matter of such importance.[160]

This only served to heighten the intensity of student demonstrations in Cairo. Even Nahhas was caught off guard by their fervour, which he found himself unable to control. Heeding the demands of students and intellectuals, the Wafd joined politicians from other parties to form a United Front, which approached both King Fu'ad and Lampson with demands for the restoration of the constitution, and the opening of negotiations with the British towards a new treaty. Simultaneously, Nassim and his cabinet resigned.

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[159] Qtd. in Zayid, *Egypt's Struggle for Independence,* pp. 149-150

[160] Parliamentary Debates, 5th Series, col. 339, vol. 307

Confronted with something approaching a student-led revolt in Cairo, coupled with a political power vacuum, Lampson was forced to concede the restoration of the 1923 Constitution, signalling new elections—and in turn, the inevitability of the Wafd's return to power. Hoare was meanwhile forced to resign over the publication of the Hoare-Laval Pact, and was replaced by Anthony Eden, who indicated his willingness to enter into negotiations with the United Front "at an early date".[161]

Nahhas and Ebeid had their constitution—and now they would have their treaty negotiations, too.

Spring in Cairo

While talks between the British and Egyptian delegations were not formally opened until March 1936, by January 'confidential conversations' between the two sides were underway. The Egyptian delegation, led by Mustapha al-Nahhas, sought to pick up where negotiations between the Wafd and the British had left off in 1930—particularly with regards to the military clauses, which had conceded the removal of British troops from Cairo and Alexandria. This London, including Anthony Eden, the new Foreign Secretary, and in particular Montgomery, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, now adamantly refused, on the grounds of the emergence, in the intervening years, of a credible threat of attack from Italy. Lampson initially concurred with their assessment:

> It stood out at arms length that the whole problem was now different to what it was before the Italian threat. Earlier the question of the continued occupation of the two cities had been in the nature of a debating point, but no sane man could maintain that now. It was no longer merely a question of defending the Suez Canal. It was a much bigger question, namely, the problem of defending Egypt from invasion from the West.[162]

[161] Zayid, *Egypt's Struggle for Independence,* p. 157
[162] Lampson Diaries, 12 December 1935

The Egyptians rejected this assessment. When formal talks opened, they submitted a nine-page rebuttal, stating that the Italian threat to Egypt had been exaggerated; Italy, they insisted, would never dare attack Egypt, precisely because it was such a vital British strategic interest. It is worth underscoring that, here again, we find the Egyptians less concerned by the Italian menace than was Great Britain. Instead, the Egyptians sought to extract concessions: limiting British troops in Egypt exclusively to the Canal Zone, and placing a cap on their numbers during peacetime. The withdrawal of British troops from their barracks in Cairo and Alexandria in particular would, Nahhas believed, be a highly symbolic victory for the Wafd, even if Britain was to remain in *de facto* control of the country. Nahhas summed up his position to Lampson as follows:

> He recapitulated all the advances he had made to meet us [Britain]: increased numbers in the Zone; facilities improved to our hearts content; a British Military Mission to see that everything was in order; no need for us to move during the present crisis, or until accommodation had been arranged in the Zone; - but beyond that he simply could not go. He couldn't put his hand to anything which sanctioned the continued presence of troops elsewhere than in the Canal Zone: that would amount to the perpetuation of British occupation and the Egyptian people would not stand for that.[163]

Lampson and his service advisers, Commander-in-Chief of British Troops Sir George Weir, and Air Commander-in-Chief, Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, found themselves impressed by Nahhas' offers, particularly regarding the improvement of facilities and communications within and linking to the Canal Zone. After several days of private deliberation, the British delegation had agreed amongst themselves that

> ...we are offered all that we reasonably require - with the notable exception of Alexandria on which [...] we must continue to insist. In other words, the local Service Advisers would not now hold out for Abbassia or Helmieh [in Cairo].[164]

[163] Lampson Diaries, 25 March 1936
[164] Lampson Diaries, 29 March 1936

Lampson, who three months prior had felt that "no sane man" could accept the withdrawal of British troops from Cairo, was now eager to endorse just that; however, Weir and Brooke-Popham acknowledged to him that their position was "a little difficult, seeing that they each of them had their Departments at home to think of who would not necessarily agree"—in particular, of course, they had in mind Montgomery.[165] At the end of March, they caught a lucky break: with Montgomery's term as Chief of the Imperial General Staff set to expire, his replacement, Sir Cyril Deverell, visited Cairo to consult with the commanding officers stationed there. So marked was the contrast between the attitudes of the incoming and outgoing Chiefs of Staff that Weir asked Lampson to delay the War Office's receipt of his and Brooke-Popham's joint appreciation of the treaty negotiations until after Deverell had taken office. Thus the same documents were transmitted to the Foreign Office via telegraph on 29 March, as were sent to the War Office by the next week's post, arriving on Monday, 6 April—Deverell's first day on the job.[166]

Meanwhile, and within a week of advising London to accept a British withdrawal from Cairo, Lampson's delegation had been convinced by the Egyptians that they should not, in fact, hold out for Alexandria, and instead accept a scheduled withdrawal from British naval positions there. Lampson, his staff and advisers were agreed that, in light of the Egyptian delegation's willingness to accept (and pay for) the improvement of roads and railway connections between the Canal Zone, the major cities, and the Western Desert, it was better to work with their proposals

> [...] than come down with a net demand for Alexandria resulting in all probability in the withdrawal by Nahas of the offers he has so far made to us. They [the British service advisers and senior Residency staff] all agreed that the improved communications promised are worth much more to us than the retention, even for an indefinite period of years, of one British battalion in Alexandria.[167]

[165] Lampson Diaries, 25 March 1936
[166] Lampson Diaries, 29 March 1936
[167] Lampson Diaries, 1 April 1936

In London, Eden was inclined to accept the negotiators' assessment; the Admiralty, however, and in particular Samuel Hoare, now First Lord of the Admiralty, were adamantly opposed. In Cairo, British negotiators were frustrated: "I find, oddly enough", remarked Lampson at the end of May, "that all three Service Advisers [in Cairo] feel even more strongly than I do that a favourable opportunity is being sacrificed in our chase after legalistic perfection".[168] And while, in 1930, and again in 1933, the Government of India had strongly objected to any risk being taken with Britain's position in Egypt, in 1936 Lord Zetland, the Secretary of State for India, took a more flexible line. In a letter to the Viceroy detailing Cabinet discussions of the Anglo-Egyptian negotiations, he observed,

> For some time we have been trying to evolve a formula by which Egypt will accept to secure our position *indefinitely* on the Suez Canal. The dialecticious have been in their element since here was one of those occasions on which it was sought to devise phrases which would create one impression on the minds of one set of people and an entirely different impression on the minds of another set of people.[169]

Much like Lampson, the Foreign Office, and the military commanders on the spot in Egypt, by May 1936 Lord Zetland appears to have accepted that a treaty with Egypt was in Britain's best interest, and that some concessions would be necessary to achieve this. Malcolm Yapp has ascribed Zetland's support for the treaty to "Muslim trouble in the Punjab";[170] as we will see in the next chapter, it is certainly true that Zetland and his Viceroy, Linlithgow, viewed Arab and Indian Muslim politics as intimately linked.

Cabinet ministers were moreover aware that the failure to arrive at a treaty would leave Britain with no firm legal basis for its continued presence in Egypt. It was feared that Italy or, eventually,

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[168] Lampson Diaries, 25 May 1936
[169] Zetland to Linlithgow, 23 May 1936. IOR D609/6
[170] Yapp, *Politics & Diplomacy in Egypt*, p. 593 (footnote).

another member country might raise this issue at the League of Nations, in which circumstance, it was acknowledged, Britain's position would be untenable.[171] Consequently, the more diplomatically minded elements of the British government, alongside the advisers in Cairo—alive to the risks of disorder attendant on a breakdown of negotiations—perceived the conclusion of a treaty as both a safeguard of Britain's right to remain in Egypt, and as a necessary concession to popular feeling. This, they felt, was particularly crucial, given the increasingly explosive international and Arab political climate.

The spring of 1936 was tumultuous and fast-moving in Cairo. In April, King Fu'ad passed away, and his teenaged son, Faruq, was recalled from England, where he had been at school. Elections were held in May, and, as anticipated, the Wafd was swept back into office in a landslide victory. Faruq ascended the Egyptian throne the same month; within days of reporting on the festivities, Cairo's newspapers carried headlines announcing Italy's formal annexation of Abyssinia. Nextdoor to Egypt, in Mandate Palestine, a rebellion had broken out over British immigration policy in mid-April; the violent intensity of the Arab Revolt, as it would come to be known, required the diversion of large numbers of British troops from Egypt. Meanwhile on the broader international stage, the signature the previous year of the Anti-Comintern Pact between Germany and Japan had heightened concerns about a potential threat to British interests in the Pacific, of direct relevance to the ongoing treaty negotiations in Cairo, because of the vital role played by the Suez Canal in connecting the western and eastern halves of the British Empire. In Europe, too, the clouds were gathering. Seizing on the strategic opportunity presented by the Abyssinian Crisis, Hitler had reoccupied the Rhineland in March 1936; Spain would soon be plunged into a brutal civil war. For the first time, British planners were faced with the

[171] Morewood, 'Appeasement from Strength', pp. 542-543

unthinkable scenario of a war on three fronts, against Italy in the Mediterranean, Germany in Europe, and Japan in the Pacific. The same month that the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty was ultimately signed, in August, Britain's First Sea Lord, Admiral Chatfield, confided in a memorandum that it was "open to debate" whether the British Empire "[was] in reality strategically defensible".[172]

This context helps to explain the anxiety of British negotiators to finally hammer out a treaty, even with a Wafd government (a prospect they had long resisted)—and even if it required significant concessions to Egypt. The extent of Lampson's disquiet is particularly telling, given the High Commissioner's habitual confidence and optimism. By late May, he was warning his government that the consequences of failure could be dire:

> With Italy on our shoulders, Palestine in an uproar next door, and general unrest in the Arab world I should personally have thought that a genuinely friendly Egypt should have been worth a good deal […] I was afraid that if there were trouble, for example in the streets, we should find the morale of the police had been badly shaken as the result of the student riots [the previous winter] […] Furthermore, if we did have to come in it would not necessarily end with tidying up disorders in the streets. We might find ourselves in deeper water than that.[173]

It was, therefore, with an urgent desire to salvage the negotiations that the High Commissioner and his RAF adviser, Brooke-Popham, travelled to London in June, in order to consult with their government. In Cairo, their departure was perceived by many as an attempt by the High Commissioner to win his government over to the terms of a treaty that would, it was hoped, be favourable to Egypt. In the middle of June, *Al-Musawwar,* a popular Wafdist illustrated daily, hailed him as *Rasul al-Istiqlal li-Misr*:[174] the Apostle of Independence for Egypt. Hopes were high that, in addition to a popular, fresh-faced monarch, and a newly elected Wafd government, Nahhas and Lampson were about to make a real breakthrough in Egypt's relationship with Great Britain.

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[172] Qtd. in Pratt, *East of Malta,* p. 3
[173] Lampson Diaries, 26 May 1936
[174] *Al Musawwar*, 17 June 1936. Cited in Ibrahim, *Anglo-Egyptian Treaty*, p. 58

For his part, Nahhas was looking to score a major publicity victory for the Wafd over its political rivals. An ardent believer in parliamentary democracy and a staunch anti-fascist, Nahhas was to an extent understanding of the need to defend Egypt militarily from Italy, and to this end he sought both to facilitate British requirements in the Canal Zone, and to extract guarantees from his British counterparts for the expansion and modernization of the Egyptian Army. But Nahhas perceived the threat posed by homegrown varieties of authoritarianism—such as the Palace, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Misr el-Fatah—as by far the greater menace, and he believed that a major victory for the Wafd, such as the successful negotiation of a treaty of independence, would serve as a bulwark against their growing influence. In the midst of negotiations, Prince Regent Muhammad 'Ali, Faruq's pro-British uncle, provided a shrewd analysis of the precarity of Nahhas' position:

> Zaghloul could have put anything over without cavil. Nahas could not. [...] The moment Nahas agreed to anything which his critics inside or outside his party could lay hands on as betrayal of the country's rights Nahas would be for it. The moral was that wise British policy would be not to press for things which obviously Nahas could not grant without undermining his authority and position.[175]

Winning London over

Upon their arrival in London, Lampson and Brooke-Popham ('Brookham', as Lampson called him) met with the Chiefs of Staff, and found them—particularly Chatfield—unimpressed by Egyptian proposals, which, they felt, posed unacceptable risks to British defence requirements. Two days after their meeting, an editorial in *The Times* lambasted the inflexible and unrealistic posture of the British government vis-a-vis negotiations with Egypt, contrasting this with the open and reasonable attitude of the Egyptian side, and suggesting that the lack of movement towards a treaty was down to "the excessive demands of the British government for precision in

[175] Lampson Diaries, 27 May 1936

providing for a distant future".[176] In his diary, Lampson acknowledged having dined with the Editor and Egyptian correspondent for *The Times*, and confessed having let slip some of his views on the negotiations, although he professed (somewhat unconvincing) shock that his colourfully expressed opinions had found their way into print. Whatever Lampson's role, the article was not ineffective, and the High Commissioner's next meeting, with the Cabinet Committee, was more promising. "It emerged", he recorded,

> that whatever objection as to detail the Cabinet might feel there was unanimity that it was essential that at this time of crisis in the Middle East we should get a treaty with Egypt. At the end the Prime Minister summed up by giving a clear lead that the thing would have to be put through.[177]

The following week, Lampson was invited to attend a closed door meeting of Cabinet Ministers, which was, he confided, "the most interesting experience I have ever had… one for the family archives". The (slightly starstruck) High Commissioner was thrilled by the reception his proposals received, including from Ormsby-Gore, the Colonial Secretary, who was concerned about the impact failure might have on the revolt already underway in neighbouring Palestine. Zetland, worried that disturbances in Egypt might require reinforcements which the Indian Army could ill afford to provide, was similarly in favour. Duff Cooper, representing the War Office, signalled Deverell's willingness to go along with the concessions recommended by Weir and Brooke-Popham. The only hold-out was Hoare, from the Admiralty, who was still opposed to ceding Alexandria, but, as Lampson wrote approvingly, Neville Chamberlain "squashed him effectively", and discussion moved on to the relocation of the Mediterranean fleet from Egypt to Cyprus.[178]

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[176] Qtd. in Morewood, 'Appeasement from Strength', p. 546
[177] Lampson Diaries, 15 June 1936
[178] Lampson Diaries, 23 June 1936

When the High Commissioner returned to Cairo at the beginning of July, he bore proposals based—as the Egyptian delegation had initially sought—on the military clauses of the 1930 draft treaty.[179] Nahhas pressed Lampson over the time limit for a British withdrawal from Alexandria, talking him down from ten years to eight (the Foreign Office had authorised Lampson to agree to as little as seven years). Meanwhile Cairo was to be evacuated as soon as new barracks were ready in the Canal Zone. While the British draft envisioned the redeployment of troops throughout the country and use of all facilities and installations 'in case of emergency', Nahhas successfully insisted on inserting the phrase 'apprehended international emergency', denying the British legal cover for any military response to internal unrest. Egyptian forces were, moreover, permitted to return to the Sudan for the first time since 1924, and Egyptian citizens were granted unrestricted immigration rights there. However, the two most important concessions in the Treaty from the Wafd's perspective were Britain's commitment to ending the Capitulations, and facilitating Egyptian entry to the League of Nations as a full member state. These two developments were intended, from the Wafd's perspective, to herald, at long last, the advent of a sovereign Egypt—internally, through the unchallenged primacy of its laws and institutions, and externally, through the expression of an independent foreign policy.

The signature of the Treaty was planned for the end of August in London, where much pomp and circumstance attended the proceedings. The Egyptian delegation stayed at the Dorchester in Mayfair, among the capital's most stylish hotels, and the ceremony took place in a suitably grand chamber of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, attended by an impressive array of British Cabinet Ministers. Lampson signed on behalf of the British delegation; Nahhas insisted the entire Egyptian delegation add their signatures to the page, which, though appearing generous, also

[179] Morewood, 'Appeasement from Strength', p. 549

ensured that they could not feign innocence should the Treaty prove politically unpopular at home. This was a wise move, for in fact, the Treaty was greeted with dismay in many quarters, despite the Wafd's attempts to sell it as a victory for Egyptian nationalism.

Reactions to the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, from 1936 until the present day, have almost universally focused on how far short it fell of delivering true independence for Egypt (whether in a disparaging register, as with the feminist Huda Sha'arawi's acerbic contemporary critiques; or more admiringly, as in the recent appraisals of British military historians). This assessment cannot be denied; but it is also rather beside the point. Whatever the slogans circulated by the Wafd, Nahhas and his delegation had no illusions, in 1936, that full Egyptian independence was a realistic goal up for negotiation with the British government. If the severance of Egypt's imperial relationship with Britain had been their aim, they would have had to pursue a far more radical strategy, beyond the halls of Zafaran Palace. The simple fact is that the Egyptian street, where the ouster of Great Britain might have been (and later was) more fruitfully pursued, was at that moment slipping beyond the grasp of the Wafd, as was amply demonstrated by the student riots of the previous winter, when Nahhas had found himself incapable of controlling the vitriol of Egypt's youth. In 1936 the Wafd was not seeking to eject British troops from the country; instead, the movement's leadership seized, quite skillfully, on a moment of British weakness and insecurity, in order to re-establish itself, with British backing, as the party of government, and the leading force in Egyptian politics. In achieving this more limited objective, they momentarily succeeded.

Conclusion...or, Introducing the Collaborative Moment

Between the autumn of 1935 and the spring of 1936, the British government went from opposing the 1923 Constitution, to reinstating it; from refusing to enter into negotiations over Egypt's status, to seeking to conclude a treaty at all costs; from opposing the return of the Wafd to power, to acknowledging the Wafd as the party of government and their formal negotiating partner; from rejecting out of hand a British withdrawal from Cairo and Alexandria, to accepting evacuation from both cities on timelines largely dictated by the Egyptian government. Finally, Britain went from enjoying unfettered control over the reserved points—defence, imperial communications, protection of foreign interests, and the Sudan—to ceding ground in favour of Egypt in three domains, in order to protect their prerogative in what was perceived as the most vital of the four: imperial communications. A declaration of independence, the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty was not; but it was more than the British government had dreamed of conceding just six months prior to the opening of negotiations. Meanwhile for the Wafd's leadership, especially Nahhas and Ebeid, the Treaty was understood as a major step towards consolidating Egypt's democratic institutions, establishing sovereign legitimacy at home and abroad, and building military self-sufficiency. From their liberal, gradualist perspective, independence would be achieved piecemeal, through the maturation of these three processes. Their hopes in this regard were to be frustrated, however, by the new monarch and his coterie; the emergence of serious divisions within the party; and the rising tide of social, economic, and political upheavals, which would come to define the decade ahead.

Meanwhile, following years of agonized debate and deliberation, the Government of India Act had finally been passed on the floor of the House of Commons exactly one year prior, in August 1935. The reforms introduced by the Act included the devolution of considerable power to the

provinces; the introduction of direct elections (thus expanding the electorate from 7 to 35 million voters); the extension of provincial assembly membership to include more Indians, who would now be able to form a majority government; and the establishment of a Federal Court system. The Act, said to be the longest in the history of the British parliament, pleased no one. Conservative 'die-hards', lead by Winston Churchill, viewed it as nothing short of a capitulation to native demands—the beginning of the end for the British world system. As a result, the drawn-out parliamentary debate over the Act had nearly cleaved the Conservative government in two. In India itself, Jawaharlal Nehru and many of his fellow Congressmen rejected the Act as no more than the latest imperialist attempt to refuse Indians *swaraj* through delay, distraction and limited reform.[180] Debate within the Congress Party was essentially focused on how far it was acceptable to negotiate or compromise with the British. Gandhi and his disciples, chief among them Nehru, were generally determined to see through non-violent resistance or *satyagraha* (literally 'truth-force') to the bitter end, frequently resulting in the imprisonment of party officials. Time and again, the Gandhians demonstrated that they considered accommodation with the British morally beneath them.[181] But as the decade wore on, a new split emerged within the party, between an older generation—centred on Gandhi—which saw parliamentary politics and a process of gradual reform as the best means available to realise lasting change, and a youthful, more radical element rallied behind Nehru, which utterly rejected any compromise that fell short of full independence. The division was dangerous enough to threaten to split the party over the terms of the India Act, much as it had within the Conservative Party in Britain. Ultimately it was Gandhi who brokered a deal between the competing factions of his own party and the British Government.[182] As a result, and despite his personal opposition to the Act,

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[180] Low, D.A. *Britain and Indian Nationalism,* p. 246
[181] Ibid, p. 241
[182] Brown, Judith M. *Modern India: The Origins of an Asian Democracy* (Oxford 1994). p. 296

Nehru, who assumed the Congress presidency in early 1936, was obliged to confirm in his inauguration speech that the party would contest the first provincial elections to be held under its terms.

Thus in the spring of 1936, as election campaigns got underway across the length and breadth of India, Congress—much like the Egyptian Wafd—found itself (however reluctantly) drawn into participation in a 'reformed' imperial framework. I argue that between the passage of the India Act in August 1935, and the signature of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty twelve months later, British relations with Egyptian and Indian nationalists entered a new phase, which saw all parties drawn into a short-lived experiment: the Collaborative Moment. Over the next few years, nationalists in Egypt and India would increasingly collaborate with one another on shared projects, while in both countries, nationalists entered a new phase of participation and investment in British-backed government institutions.

Throughout the late 1930s, the various organs of the British imperial state would continue to struggle to reconcile competing priorities and policy objectives amongst themselves, much as had been the case during the negotiation of the India Act and Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. These priorities were broadly shaped along departmentmental and geographic lines, which in turn gave rise to dramatically different visions of the Empire, its core interests, and the policies it ought to pursue. This lack of consensus created space, flexibility, and opportunities for individuals to influence the direction of British policy in a given region to a significant degree. From the perspective of the Wafd, the Muslim League, or Congress, meanwhile, the principal motives for participation in collaborative government were domestic: as was the case during the negotiation of the India Act and Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, party leaders were focused on holding their political

coalitions together, protecting their leadership, and fending off challenges from rival movements. As we shall see, domestic partisan politics would continue to play a central role in the calculations of the Wafd, Congress, and Muslim League as they negotiated, and renegotiated, their relations with the British government after 1936.

The next two chapters focus largely on relationships between Egyptian and Indian nationalists during their shared experience of the Collaborative Moment, ushered in by the passage of the Government of India Act, and the signature of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty.

Chapter Three

Caught between Worlds:
India, the Egyptians, and Britain's problem in Palestine

"It is not only useless, but quite extraordinarily dangerous, to deal with the Palestine question in isolation."
— George Rendel, head of the Eastern Department at the Foreign Office, 1937

"Should the issue in the Palestine question be decided in such a manner which the Arabs and the Muslim world might consider to be inconsistent with the principles of international justice … the repercussions on Muslim feelings in India would be serious and it is not unlikely that they might tell upon the Muslim sense of loyalty and devotion to the British power affecting the prospects of assistance from that community in case of a future war."
—Petition from the Governor of Bengal to the Viceroy of India during the Munich Crisis, October 1938

Al-akhbar min filistin: **The Birth of BBC Arabic**

Among the most significant, if belated, outcomes of the Abyssinian Crisis for Britain was the establishment of a British Broadcasting Corporation service in Arabic. Inaugurated in January 1938, with a one-hour transmission from a studio in Daventry to radio sets across the Levant and the Arab Gulf, BBC Arabic was the Corporation's first broadcast in a foreign language—and the beginning of what would swiftly become the World Service. Within three years of that first Arabic news bulletin, the BBC would offer programming in 34 different languages, including Hindi, Bengali, Farsi, Gujarati, and Marathi.

The need for British-sponsored programming in Arabic resulted directly from the anti-British propaganda of Radio Bari, which, as described in Chapter One, emerged from the diplomatic stand-off over Abyssinia in the summer and autumn of 1935. And yet it took until mid-1937 for the British Cabinet to sanction the creation of BBC Arabic. There was a second catalyst: the Arab Revolt, which broke out in April 1936, had begun providing Italian propagandists with a veritable goldmine of fresh material. "In Muslim eyes", notes Peter Partner, in his history of the

BBC Arabic Service, "the ferocity of British tactics in suppressing the revolt in Palestine had consequences all over the Muslim world: not only the Foreign Office but the India Office were interested in some kind of shield against the exploitation of these events by Bari".[183]

Alongside technical and logistical considerations, the Committee on Arabic Broadcasting was determined that the language used by the BBC should be superior to that of Radio Bari, having received reports that its announcer was the subject of ridicule for his ungrammatical and heavily accented Arabic. The opinions of British diplomats and Arabists working in the region were solicited, and it was ultimately the advice of Robert Furness, then a Press Censor in Mandate Palestine, which carried the day. Furness had worked for decades in the Egyptian Civil Service, and lately served as Deputy Director of the Egyptian Broadcasting Corporation. He recommended that the new BBC broadcaster speak what he termed 'Egyptian *Nahwy*'—a compromise between classical Arabic and Egyptian dialect, which would be respectable to the educated ear, while still readily comprehensible to the average café patron. Furness argued for the Egyptian accent on the grounds that Egypt was "the largest and most advanced of the countries affected, and the centre of Islamic education. A broadcaster will be best understood by the most of the listeners, and least criticised, if he uses Egyptian Nahwy...it is the nearest approach to a common language".[184] The BBC promptly hired Ahmad Kamal Surour, a former Egyptian Radio presenter, for its new programme, further contributing to the growing pre-eminence of the Egyptian accent in Arabic broadcast media.

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[183] Partner, Peter. *Arab Voices: The BBC Arabic Service, 1938-1988* (London, 1988), p. 5. In the absence of access to the private archival collections Partner utilised for his study, much of the description offered here of the first BBC Arabic broadcast is adapted from his account.

[184] Allday, Louis. 'The Establishment of BBC Arabic & Egyptian Nahwy'. *British Library Asian and African Studies Blog*, 4th October 2017.

BBC Arabic went on the air on January 3rd, 1938. Its maiden transmission was fêted in parliament by both benches, and British embassies and outposts throughout the Arab East received congratulatory messages from local rulers and elites. The broadcast was scheduled for 17.15 Greenwich Mean Time, or 19.15 in Egypt and the Levant; an hour later in the countries of the Arab Gulf. Across the region, listening parties assembled. In Saudi Arabia, British diplomats were invited to join King Ibn Saud in his tent, alongside members of his côterie.

> An introductory announcement in Arabic was followed by a brief recital by a group of Cairo musicians led by a zither player. There were messages from one of the sons of the Imam of Yemen, and from the Egyptian Chargé d'Affaires and from the Saudi and Iraqi Legations [in London]. At six o'clock Big Ben sounded, and [BBC Director General] Sir John Reith spoke in English.[185]

Then came Surour with the news bulletin.

> Another Arab from Palestine was executed by hanging at Acre this morning by order of a military court. He was arrested during recent riots in the Hebron mountains and was found to possess a rifle and some ammunition...A small battle took place yesterday between a police force and an armed band at Safad...A train travelling in the hills near Jerusalem was fired at, but there were no casualties.[186]

The announcer moved on to other subjects, but the same could not be said for many of the listeners. Sir Reader Bullard, British Minister to King Ibn Saud, later recounted the event in his memoirs:

> There was silence in the tent and our party broke up without any talk. When I saw Ibn Saud the next day he spoke of the broadcast. For months, he said, he had refused to listen to the Arabic broadcasts from Jerusalem, because he found them so painful, but he had looked forward to the inaugural Arabic broadcast from London, and had filled his tent with his followers so that they might listen too. 'When the announcer spoke of the execution of that Arab in Palestine', he said, 'I wept and I wept,' and as he spoke a tear rolled down his cheek and he scrubbed it off with his kerchief.[187]

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[185] Partner, *Arab Voices*, p. 17
[186] Qtd. in Ibid.
[187] Bullard, Reader. *The Camels Must Go: An Autobiography* (London, 1961) p. 206

At the Colonial Office and within the Government of Palestine, what had heretofore been a quiet resentment of the BBC project—on the grounds that it amounted to "poaching on the part of the Foreign Office in respect of Palestine"[188]—now boiled over into open hostility. The entire point of these broadcasts had supposedly been to counter Italian propaganda; now it appeared that the BBC was intent on doing Bari's job for it. Mocking the Foreign Office's desire to promote 'friendly relations' using the Arabic Service, one Palestine Government official asked to provide feedback on local reactions to the radio programme wrote acidly that Arab opinion could be summarised as: "Let England settle the Palestine problem satisfactorily if they want Arab friendship, and until they do that, England can go to hell!".[189]

The BBC, for its part, hit back at its critics. J.B. Clark, then head of the Empire Service (and soon to become the Director of the Overseas Service), insisted that in keeping with the BBC's tradition of journalistic credibility and independence, the news in Arabic would be kept as close as possible to the English language bulletins transmitted daily across the globe: "The omission of unwelcome facts of news and the consequent suppression of truth runs counter to the Corporation's policy laid down by appropriate authority".[190]

In British outposts throughout the Arab region, the sense of dismay was widespread; but many diplomats—including Bullard in Arabia, and Miles Lampson in Egypt—tended to blame the Colonial Office's policy in Palestine, rather than the BBC, for the bitterness of Arab feeling on the subject. In the wake of the broadcast, Lampson wrote to the Foreign Office: "As long...as our policy in Palestine remains unacceptable to the Arab world, the Italians must continue to have a

[188] Partner, *Arab Voices*, p. 21
[189] Qtd. in Partner, *Arab Voices*, p. 21
[190] Ibid, p. 22

very great advantage over us in propaganda. Palestine will remain a thorn in the flesh until our line is changed: it is in fact a veritable millstone round our neck".[191]

The story of the BBC's first foreign language broadcast highlights several key points which will be further developed below. The choice for BBC Arabic of Egyptian *Nahwy*, and of musicians and an announcer from Cairo, attest to Egypt's growing prominence within the Arab region during this period, and the emergence of Cairo in particular as regional capital. The reaction of the Saudi King to a report on the execution of a Palestinian rebel, and the role of the Arab Revolt in pushing the British Cabinet to fund foreign language broadcasting, illustrate the immense international importance of the Palestine crisis, in turn forcing significant policy developments in London. It also demonstrates how these policies, initially intended to address the Arab East, were ultimately of consequence for the entire British Empire. Finally, the vehement disagreements described here between the BBC; the Foreign Office; British diplomats in the Middle East; and the Colonial Office, gives some indication of the extreme interdepartmental discord occasioned by the problem of Palestine. As will be demonstrated in what follows, the debate over policy in Britain's most troubled mandate extended from Whitehall, to Cairo—to Simla and Bengal. As Indian Muslims took an increasingly activist and anti-colonial stance on developments in Jerusalem, the Viceroy and the Secretary of State for India began to weigh in, and insist on the participation of Indian voices in the formulation of Mandate policy.

This chapter discusses the salience of the Palestine question for relations between London, Egypt, and British India between 1936 and 1939. It explores the issue both from the perspective of British officials within these three localities, and from that of Indian and Egyptian activists

[191] Lampson to Rendel, January 1938, FO 395/557

who were brought together by the Palestinian cause. The international activist networks forged in support of the Palestinian Arabs form an important part of the story of Global Cairo, just as the question of Palestine is central to understanding the connections between Britain, India, and the Middle East in the later 1930s. This is due to the multifaceted nature of the Arab Revolt between 1936 and 1939, which both mirrored and contributed to the formation of Cairo's identity during these years, as well as its relationship to Britain and India.

The Arab Revolt was, firstly, a crisis of the colonial state. It placed British policy in one part of the Middle East, which it controlled outright, at odds with its interests in other parts of the Middle East, which it did not. It raised uncomfortable ethical questions, and seemingly unanswerable practical questions, about the legitimacy, correct policy, and material cost of Britain's Mandate in Palestine. The initial failure to contain the revolt made Britain look weak in the eyes of its enemies, while the escalation of violence, and oppressive government measures intended to contain that violence, provided easy headlines for Italian and German propaganda targeting Muslim audiences in the Middle East and Asia. The stakes of the crisis were thus intensified by the gathering clouds in Europe, as the prospect of a new war between Britain, France, and the fascist powers loomed ever more ominously into view.

The Revolt was, secondly, a regional, Arab crisis—in many ways, the defining event of Arab politics in the interwar years. It drew much of the Arabic-speaking world, from North Africa to the Gulf, together around a shared political concern, and provided enormous momentum to a wave of grassroots political movements, ranging from conservative Islamist, to militant nationalist, to progressive feminist. Among the most important of these was the emergence of a pan-Arab bloc, centred on Cairo, incorporating the leading politicians and heads of state of much

of the Arabic speaking world, and defined by its commitment to the 'Defence of Palestine'. It was these men who would participate in a series of conferences in 1939 which sought, unsuccessfully, to negotiate a settlement to the Palestine crisis on Arab terms, in collaboration with the British government and, as we will see, with the participation of several politicians from British India.

For the crisis in Palestine was also, thirdly, perceived as a crisis of the entire Muslim *umma*. In Egypt this was reflected in the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Young Men's Muslim Association in pro-Palestinian protests and fundraising campaigns. In India, the reaction to developments in Palestine constituted the most significant Muslim political campaign focused on an external issue since the Khilafat movement of the early 1920s, which had opposed the dissolution of the Ottoman Caliphate. And, especially in its early years, pro-Palestinian activism in India featured many of the same prominent Muslim individuals: men like Hasrat Mohani, Ahmed Ansari, Muhammad Ali Jauhar, and his brother, Shawkat Ali. Beginning in 1937, following the announcement of the British Government's new policy of partition in Palestine, this movement gained momentum. The All-India Muslim League passed resolution after resolution concerning the situation in Palestine, convened regional and national conferences on the issue, and petitioned the Viceroy, the Indian Secretary, the Colonial Secretary, and the British Prime Minister on behalf of their Arab brethren. Dissatisfied with the limited impact of these efforts, they resolved to send a delegation on a tour of the Middle East and Europe, to make their case in person. But influencing policy in the Mandate was an excessively complicated task, given that the British Government was at times almost paralysed by internal divisions on the issue.

Although several authors have discussed the strong differences of opinion on Palestine within the British Government—primarily between the Foreign and Colonial Offices[192]—there has been scant attention paid to the role of the Government of India or the India Office in this debate. And yet throughout the 1930s, and especially following the outbreak of the Arab Revolt in 1936, the Viceroy and his government took a very particular interest in developments in Jerusalem. The reason for this was simple: the conflict in Palestine was gaining political traction in India, both within the Muslim community, and also with Congress politicians eager to appeal to newly enfranchised Muslim voters. In London, the Marquess of Zetland, Secretary of State for India, sought to insert these concerns into Cabinet meetings, and to ensure that Indian voices on the subject were heard. The foremost concern of the Government of India and the India Office was, understandably, to avoid inflaming Muslim opinion on the subcontinent, and on numerous occasions they intervened to prevent harsh tactics being employed in Palestine, for fear of the backlash in India. As we will see, this enraged those at the Colonial Office who were ostensibly responsible for policy in Britain's mandates.

While the inhabitants and rulers of British India began taking an increased interest in Palestinian affairs by the late 1930s, so too did the Egyptians—and the British Embassy in Cairo. The outbreak of the Arab Revolt in April 1936 sparked widespread protest, mass demonstrations, and pro-Palestinian fundraising campaigns in Egypt. The public outcry only intensified following the publication, in mid-1937, of the Peel Report, which recommended the partition of Palestine into Arab and Jewish states. Miles Lampson, now Ambassador to Egypt, joined many British

[192] See, for example: Kedourie, Elie. 'Great Britain and Palestine: Turning Point', *Islam in the Modern World and Other Studies* (London, 1980); Klieman, Aaron S. 'The Divisiveness of Palestine: Foreign Office versus Colonial Office on the issue of Partition, 1937', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 22 no. 2 (June, 1979); Kolinsky, Martin. 'Palestine 1936-8: The Reshaping of British Policy', *Britain's War in the Middle East: Strategy and Diplomacy, 1936-1942* (New York, 1999).

diplomats (and the Foreign Office) in deploring the policy of partition as sure to poison Britain's relations with the Arab states. Meanwhile, the Egyptian Government, which had long taken a backseat on matters of regional politics, was moved to action by the sheer scale of popular feeling on the Palestine issue, and began a quest—first under Nahhas, and then under his successor to the premiership, Muhammad Mahmoud—to position Egypt as the leading regional player in efforts to resolve the conflict. Thus Foreign Minister Wasif Butrus Ghali, in Egypt's first official address to the annual League of Nations Assembly meeting in September 1937, used his time in part to condemn the policy of partition, on the basis of "right and justice", and called for Palestine to "remain for the Palestinians", effectively distancing Egypt's new mission to the League from its erstwhile colonial master.[193]

By 1938, the locus of Arab and Islamic efforts to alter the course of British policy in Palestine was indisputably Cairo, where the 'World Inter-Parliamentary Congress of Arab and Muslim States for the Defence of Palestine' was held in October of that year, attracting delegates from over a dozen countries. It was complemented by an international Conference of Eastern Women on the same issue; a further two Palestine conferences, this time between high-level diplomats from across the Arab region, were held in the Egyptian capital in the first half of 1939. The impetus for much of this activity was the 1939 St James' Conference in London, which brought together the Arab Palestinian and Zionist leaderships, alongside the Arab governments, in a fruitless—but nevertheless fateful—attempt to resolve the conflict. It is rarely acknowledged that the leadership of the All-India Muslim League sought to participate in the St James' Conference, and that its delegates in fact remained in London for the duration of its proceedings, holding meetings on its sidelines, circulating pamphlets, and hosting dinners for the Arab delegations.

[193] Gershoni & Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation,* p. 178

They knew the Arab leaders, and were friendly with many of them, as a result of their participation in the Inter-Parliamentary Congress in Cairo several months prior. It was to Cairo that these Indian envoys returned, alongside their Arab and Palestinian colleagues, in the spring of 1939, to regroup following the failure of the St James' Conference.

In what follows, the Palestine crisis is traced from the outbreak of the Arab Revolt in the spring of 1936 up to that meeting of Arab and Indian delegates in Cairo three years later. It stresses the role of the crisis, both in configuring relations between Britain, India and Egypt in the immediate pre-war period, and in the emergence of Cairo as epicentre of the Arab and Muslim worlds.

Reactions to the Arab Revolt in Egypt and India

The revolt in Palestine, which broke out in April 1936, made front-page headlines throughout the Arab region. There was instinctive sympathy for the Arab rebels, whose struggle against British rule naturally struck a familiar chord. The specific problem of mass Jewish immigration into the mandate only served to heighten the sense of injustice felt by Arab observers, from North Africa to the Gulf. But in Egypt the revolt was of particular significance, because the strife in neighbouring Palestine had material consequences for its political and economic stability. Until 1936 successive Egyptian governments had tended to remain aloof of regional politics, preferring to focus on domestic concerns and avoid foreign entanglements. All of this changed with the outbreak of the Arab Revolt: for a number of reasons, the Wafd government which swept to power in May 1936 began to wade into the regional crisis.

The first reason was the death of King Fu'ad in April, just as the Revolt got underway. The popularity of his heir, Faruq, created an opening for the Palace to shift the balance of power in

its favour. This opportunity was seized on by several of the King's advisors, notably 'Ali Maher, as well as Sheikh Maraghi, the Rector of Al-Azhar when Faruq ascended to the throne. Maraghi, who served as Faruq's tutor, sought to cultivate and capitalise on the youthful monarch's reputation for religiosity. Faruq's regular attendance at Friday prayers and close relationship with Maraghi helped to earn him sobriquets like *al-Malek al-Salih*—the Pious King. The emergence of an alliance between the Palace and Al-Azhar was to have several important consequences for Egyptian political life in the later 1930s, including a campaign to promote Faruq as the new Caliph. It also signalled a shift in Egypt's centre of political gravity away from the Wafd, at precisely the moment when the party's electoral victory and successful conclusion of a treaty with Britain was meant to have bolstered its position.

The death of Fu'ad also resulted in the mending of Egypt's relations with Saudi Arabia, which had been suspended in 1926, and resisted earlier resolution largely as a result of the personal animosity between the Egyptian and Saudi monarchs. This rapprochement between two of the largest and most powerful Arab countries lifted an important barrier to regional cooperation, which would become significant within the context of the crisis in Palestine.

Second, as noted by Gershoni and Jankowski, the domestic political scene in Egypt had evolved considerably by 1936, with several new parties, including Young Egypt, the Sa'adists, and the Muslim Brotherhood gaining traction, particularly among the country's urban and educated youth.[194] The Arab Revolt was seized on by the Muslim Brotherhood and the Young Men's Muslim Association as a cause célèbre, and their leadership in protests, strikes and fundraising campaigns contributed to the expansion of their membership throughout the 1936-1939 period.

[194] Gershoni & Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation,* p. 170

[195] The Egyptian Feminist's Union, lead by Huda Sha'rawi, also threw itself headlong into campaigning and fundraising on behalf of the Palestinians, after Sha'rawi received a formal appeal for help from the Palestinian Arab Women's Committee in Jerusalem.[196] As a result of the EFU's membership in several international bodies focused on feminism and world peace, it became among the first Egyptian organisations to advocate on behalf of the Palestinian cause in international fora, including at the 1936 Universal Peace Congress, held in Brussels.[197] The activism of the EFU, the Muslim Brotherhood, the YMMA, and other local organisations in some ways forced the hand of the Wafd, which was still, in the spring and summer of 1936, in the midst of negotiations for what would become the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty—and thus wary of upsetting relations with the British Government. Yet despite this, and in spite also of their landslide electoral victory in May, the Wafd could not afford to ignore a cause with such passionate and widespread support among the Egyptian people.[198] Moreover, the conclusion of the treaty in August cleared the way for an 'independent' Egyptian foreign policy and membership at the League of Nations—providing the government with a new lease to express its views on foreign affairs, and a platform for those views on the world stage.

The other major factor which drove Nahhas and the Wafd towards involvement in the Palestinian cause was the regional political landscape, as Arab leaders began jockeying for influence over the crisis and its resolution. Iraqi Foreign Minister Nuri al-Sa'id contacted the British Government to offer his assistance, as did Ibn Saud; meanwhile, King 'Abdallah of Transjordan saw the crisis in neighbouring Palestine as an opportunity to expand his own kingdom to the shores of the Mediterranean. The treaty with Britain may have given Nahhas and

[195] Ibid, p. 180
[196] Badran, Margot. *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton, 1995), p. 225
[197] Ibid, p. 226
[198] Gershoni & Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation,* p. 170

the Egyptian Government the *opportunity* to pursue, for the first time, an independent Egyptian foreign policy; but it was this unsubtle maneuvering on the part of Egypt's brother Arab states which created much of the impetus.

To avoid scuttling months of painstaking diplomacy with Britain, Nahhas took a cautious and calculated approach to his ministry's early involvement in the Palestine crisis, while the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty was still under negotiation. The public statements he and other Wafd deputies made in 1936 were sympathetic to the Palestinians, but measured in tone. A joint declaration by the lower and upper houses of the Egyptian Parliament in July hoped that the current "crisis will be resolved in accordance with principles of justice and fairness"—and left it at that.[199] Similarly, on a regional level, Egypt held back from formal diplomacy, and did not affiliate itself with a joint Arab declaration issued by the leaders of Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Transjordan in October, which called for a ceasefire. In conversation with a British diplomat, Nahhas explained his sense that it would be "better in the circumstances for the King of Egypt not to join in declaration to [*sic*] Arab rulers. This will leave Egypt as a card to be played later in case that declaration proves fruitless".[200] It was a deft move. While the declaration of the Arab heads of state did result in the temporary halting of the Revolt, the Palestinian people felt betrayed by their leaders' acquiescence to the declaration, which had asked the Palestinians to place their faith "in the good intentions of your friend Great Britain, who has declared that she will do justice".[201] The fact that Egypt avoided association with the joint declaration no doubt helped its credibility when it entered the diplomatic fray in earnest the following year.

[199] Qtd. in Ibid*,* p. 171
[200] Gershoni & Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation,* p. 171
[201] Qtd. in Rogan, *The Arabs*, p. 255

Meanwhile, throughout the spring and summer of 1936, Nahhas worked behind the scenes in Cairo to crack down on violent public demonstrations, temper the vitriol of Arabic newspaper editors, and keep the subject of Palestine out of Friday prayer sermons. This won him praise from Lampson, who wrote approvingly that he and the Wafd had "definitely tried—and with considerable success—to control manifestations of Egyptian feeling against British policy in Palestine".[202] But while working to maintain public order for the sake of the negotiations, Nahhas brought his own, private, protests repeatedly before British officials. According to Gershoni and Jankowski, in June 1936 alone, he spoke "at length" with Lampson on at least four separate occasions about "the situation in the Mandate and its potential repercussions in Egypt":

> ...The substance of [Nahhas'] remarks consisted of several interrelated points: admonitions that the unrest in Palestine was due to solid Arab grievances; recommendations that the British temporarily suspend Jewish immigration in order to ease the tension; warnings that his own government was sitting on an 'oven' because of the situation in Palestine, with violent agitation and anti-Jewish violence inside Egypt being distinct possibilities; and pointed reminders that 'we [Egyptians] also are Arabs' and thus should not be expected to remain aloof from the problem.[203]

The joint Arab declaration in October was accompanied by an announcement that a Royal Commission would be sent out to assess the situation in Palestine and advise on the best course of government action. The uneasy truce which resulted held until the publication of the Commission's report the following July, which recommended that the Mandate territory be partitioned into separate Arab and Jewish states. With the adoption of this recommendation as official British policy, the violence in Palestine resumed—as did the solidarity movements throughout the Arab region, now inflected with a greater sense of urgency and outrage. They benefited from a crescendo of pro-Palestinian activism in India, spearheaded by the All-India Muslim League.

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[202] Lampson to Eden, 12 August 1936. FO 371/20023

[203] Gershoni & Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation,* pp. 171-172

While British records indicate that Indian Muslims had been paying attention to developments in Palestine since at least the early 1930s, the declaration of the British government's policy of partition and the concomitant resumption of violence in Palestine prompted far more serious and concerted political action by the All-India Muslim League, under the leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah. This is apparent, for example, in Jinnah's public statements and correspondence, as the volume of material on Palestine increases exponentially beginning in October 1937.[204] That month, Jinnah devoted a significant portion of his address at the Muslim League's 25th Session in Lucknow to denouncing Britain's Palestine policy, calling it a "betrayal of the Arabs", and affirming that the crisis in that country had "moved the Musalmans all over India most deeply". Jinnah concluded by promising that "the Muslims of India will stand solid and will help the Arabs in every way they can in the brave and just struggle that they are carrying on against all odds".[205] The Session passed a lengthy resolution demanding that the policy of partition be rescinded, and called for the Government of India and its representatives to move in favour of the annulment of Britain's Mandate in Palestine at the League of Nations.[206]

The following summer, the League passed a resolution calling for Palestine Day, August 26th, to be observed with meetings and protests across India. The resolution also appointed a committee "to consider the question of sending a delegation abroad, specially to Palestine and England", and to "advise the Council with regard to the question of the boycott of British goods".[207] As will become clear in what follows, this was still only the beginning of the League's mobilisation in aid of the Palestinians.

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[204] In one representative collection of Jinnah's writings on foreign affairs, there is a single entry on Palestine between 1908 and 1937, and 30 entries between 1937 and 1948. See Ali, Mehrunnisa (Ed.) *Jinnah on World Affairs: Select Documents, 1908-1948* (Karachi, 2007)

[205] Jinnah, M.A. Presidential Address at the twenty-fifth session of All India Muslim League, Lucknow. Extracted in Ali, *Jinnah on World Affairs* pp. 125-126

[206] Ibid, p. 127

[207] Ibid, p. 129

While the Muslim League's increasing activism with regards to Palestine between 1937 and 1939 has been largely overlooked by historians—presumably on the assumption that it amounted to little more than lip service—it is in fact key to understanding both the stance of the Government of India and the India Office with regards to developments in the Middle East, as well as relations between Indian Muslims and Egyptian and Arab nationalists during this period. Moreover, it sheds light on the role of foreign relations in India's domestic politics, and contributes to our understanding of the Muslim League's adoption, between the late 1930s and early 1940s, of the Pakistan policy. While the two latter points fall beyond the scope of the current study, I mention them here to underscore the extent of the gap which has resulted from the lack of research on this subject.

The India Office and the Palestine Debate in Whitehall

We will return to the Muslim League shortly. What is important for the moment is the impact of this upswing in political activity in India on British policy in London. While the disagreement on Palestine between the Colonial Office and the Foreign Office is generally acknowledged in the scholarship,[208] the role of the India Office in this policy debate is rarely taken into account. In order to make sense of British India's position, the contours of the better-known interdepartmental dispute will be briefly laid out.

Up until the adoption of partition as official policy, British diplomats serving in the independent states of the Middle East might occasionally have allowed themselves to grumble in private about the questionable wisdom of Britain's support for Jewish immigration to Palestine, and the

[208] See note 176

awkward position this placed them in in their dealings with local governments and rulers. But in late 1937, with tensions mounting throughout the Arab region, and with the prospect of international war seeming increasingly likely, these same diplomats and their colleagues in the Foreign Office began to object formally to Britain's Palestine policy as formulated by the Colonial Office.

The case against partition put forward by the FO had several key arguments: First, that the partition of Palestine was a subject on which the people of the Arab countries stood unanimous in their opposition; second, that the forced partition of Palestine would result in a perpetual state of conflict and regional instability; and third, that Arab hostility to partition threatened Britain's relations with the Arab countries—in particular, the willingness of Arab governments to cooperate with Britain in the event of war.[209] As Lampson lamented to his (sympathetic) Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax:

> I have myself pointed out, with wearisome repetition, that unless the Arabs get satisfaction over immigration [to Palestine], we must face the fact that, if war comes, we shall have to take on the Arabs as well as the Italians and Germans. What would our position then be in the Near East? I shudder to think.[210]

Bureaucrats at the Colonial Office bristled at the Foreign Office's objections to their stated policy, and the implicit challenge to their authority. Was it not, enquired the Colonial Office, the job of British diplomats to promote British policies in foreign countries? —"There has never been any evidence," complained a disgruntled J.M. Martin in a Colonial Office internal minute, "that the F.O. have made the least effort to commend Partition to the representatives of the Arab States, though complaints against the proposals have been given a ready hearing".[211] Britain

[209] Klieman, 'The Divisiveness of Palestine'.
[210] Lampson to Halifax, 6 December 1938, CAB 24/281
[211] Internal Minute, 19 November 1937. CO 733/354/75730

would look weak in the eyes of its enemies if it were seen to waver in its resolve to enforce partition, "whatever we might now think its consequences likely to be", argued Permanent Undersecretary to the Colonial Office, John Shuckburgh, in a Cabinet meeting. George Rendel, head of the Eastern Department at the Foreign Office, shot back that it would look worse for Britain to stick to a policy "after it had been proved unworkable merely for the sake of appearing firm".[212]

Later, acknowledging his own disagreement with the Colonial Office on the policy of partition, Lord Zetland, then Secretary of State for India, observed that,

> To those able to regard the problem as a purely local one, the recommendation of the Royal Commission made a strong appeal; and that broadly speaking seemed to be the view taken by the Colonial Office.
> My own view of the problem was determined by my previous experience of the solidarity of Islam and by the reports reaching me from India as to the growing concern of the Muslims there at the way things were shaping in the Holy Land. I felt strongly that the problem could not be treated as a purely local one and that any attempt to impose partition on the Arabs in their present mood would give rise to wide-spread repercussions far beyond the borders of Palestine; and I had no doubt that this view was also held by the Foreign Office.[213]

Zetland's own interventions on the question of Palestine had begun modestly enough in the summer of 1936, when Cabinet met in a series of special sessions to determine the response to the outbreak of the Arab Revolt. It having been agreed that a Commission of Inquiry would be sent out to conduct interviews and make recommendations, "The main bone of contention," wrote the Indian Secretary to the Viceroy,

> was whether a statement should be made that there would be a temporary stoppage of Jewish immigration while the Royal Commission was at work. With my eye on your Muslims I urged that such a statement should be made, for I do not believe that the Palestine Arabs will alter their present attitude without it. Others thought that this would look too much like giving way to agitation [...] Result: the point in dispute was left open pending further consultation with the High Commissioner [for Palestine].[214]

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212 Qtd. in Klieman, 'The Divisiveness of Palestine', p. 433
213 Zetland. *'Essayez': The Memoirs of Lawrence, 2nd Marquess of Zetland* (London, 1956) p. 233
214 Zetland, *'Essayez',* p. 211

Several weeks later, Zetland was recalled from holiday for another meeting, with the purpose of determining whether the Arabs of Palestine were to be appeased with a concession, along the lines of the Indian Secretary's earlier suggestion, or if the authorities should instead "endeavour to cow the recalcitrant Arabs into submission"—airstrikes, he noted, were proposed.[215] "With my past experience of Muslim sensitiveness gained in Bengal, I did not like to contemplate what the effect of our adopting the latter alternative would be upon Muslim India", Zetland wrote in his memoirs. In the contemporary account of the meeting he sent to India, he elaborated:

> I shudder to think of the repercussions throughout the world of Islam if this policy is adopted [...] A sullen and embittered population would seize every chance of disturbing it with the result that we should have to employ drastic methods on an increasing scale to obtain final success, which could only be by creating a desert and calling it peace.

Ultimately, it was decided in that meeting that the Arab Revolt would not be 'dealt with' from the air, but instead through the dispatch of a fresh division of ground troops. Zetland was by no means pleased, but ended his account of the meeting with an almost audible sigh: "Well, let us send the troops and have done with it".[216] His remarks at that time provide valuable context for his response to a later crisis in Palestine, when the objections he raised proved decisive.

Given the resumption of widespread violence in the mandate following the release of the Peel Commission's report in July 1937, the Colonial Office became determined to clamp down on the principle agitators. Following a spate of murders—most significantly the assassination of Lewis Yelland Andrews, a District Commissioner—the decision was taken to arrest the Mufti of Jerusalem and deport him and the entire Palestinian Arab Higher Committee to the Seychelles. On 1 October 1937, Lord Zetland relayed to the Viceroy the proceedings of a Cabinet meeting

[215] Ibid.
[216] Ibid, p. 212

which discussed the measures to be taken against Arab rebels in Palestine, and more particularly the Mufti, Haj Amin al-Husseini.

Lord Zetland noted that he and Lord Halifax, now head of the Foreign Office, had once again urged a more conciliatory policy towards the Arabs, but found themselves (also again) in the minority. On this issue the view of the Colonial Office prevailed; it also managed to quash a proposal floated by the Foreign Office for mediation with the Palestinians, which had been put forward by the Iraqi Ambassador in London, Nuri al-Sa'id.

But when it came to the Colonial Office's plan to arrest the Mufti, a major stumbling block emerged with the revelation that al-Husseini had taken refuge in the Haram precinct of Jerusalem, site of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, among the holiest sites of Islam. Here, the Indian Secretary put his foot down. The Government of India had a clearly articulated commitment to its Muslim subjects, dating from the outbreak of hostilities with the Ottoman Empire in World War I—and repeated at frequent intervals ever since—to respect the integrity of the Muslim holy places. This commitment was seen as a crucial red line for Britain's relationship with its Indian Muslim subjects. Thus, Lord Zetland wrote the Viceroy, "I urged that no action should be taken which could be described in India as desecration of Holy Places. It was agreed therefore that sanctuary of Haram should not be violated".[217] As a result, the Mufti remained at large, escaping later that year to Lebanon, where he swiftly reprised his role as principal thorn in the colonial government's side.

Again in 1938, Zetland intervened to protect Indian sensibilities, this time from an apparent

[217] Zetland to Linlithgow, 1st October 1937, IOR/L/PO/5/34

slight by Lampson and the Foreign Office. The ongoing Arab Revolt had resulted in two divisions of the British Army normally stationed in Egypt being transferred to Palestine. However, the Munich Crisis, like the Abyssinian Crisis before it, created an urgent need for the reinforcement of Egypt. As we have already seen, troop requirements for the Middle East would under most circumstances, and certainly in emergencies, be met by the Indian Army. And yet Lampson and the Foreign Office remained, in 1938, as blissfully ignorant of military realities as they had been in 1935. Thus in the midst of the Munich Conference, Halifax wrote to Thomas Inskip, the Minister for Coordination of Defence:

> I have made enquiries of the Department here in regard to the proposed despatch to Egypt of reinforcements, which I understand will consist of British and Indian troops, from India. The Department feel that the Egyptians would not appreciate the arrival in Egypt of Indian troops in peace time. It is not thought, however, that the Egyptians would have the same objections in time of war when, it is expected, they would be only too glad to see the arrival of any kind of reinforcements. In these circumstances, therefore, I feel that the proposal to despatch the reinforcements from India to Egypt should be proceeded with, subject to the proviso that if the present emergency has ceased to exist before the Indian troops actually reach Egypt, the latter should be sent back to India at once.[218]

Inskip forwarded Halifax's letter to Zetland, who replied on 5th October 1938, after the Munich Accord had been announced, and the danger of the moment had seemingly passed. He referred

to

> the view held by the Foreign Office of the attitude which the Egyptians would be likely to adopt towards the arrival of Indian troops in Egypt. Briefly, their view seems to be that, while in time of war they would be welcomed, in times of peace their presence would be resented. I am bound to say that I could not regard such an attitude as anything but highly unsatisfactory. It is really asking too much of India that she should be expected to acquiesce in the view that her troops would be hailed as heroes rushing to the help of Egypt one day, and stigmatised as untouchables the next. But apart from this the number of British troops in India, as I recently reminded the Cabinet, has been heavily reduced during the past year, and we simply could not spare an all-British contingent on the scale required.[219]

[218] Halifax to Inskip, 29 September 1938. IOR/L/PO/7/(i)
[219] Zetland to Inskip, 5 October 1938. IOR/L/PO/7/(i)

These various interventions by the Indian Secretary provide useful context to an exchange which appears in the records of the Colonial Office. It begins with a telegram sent from the External Affairs Department of the Government of India to the office of the High Commissioner for Palestine, in November 1937.

The telegram reported that a deputation of the All-India Muslim League was intending to travel to a number Arab and European capitals, including Cairo, the following year, in order to present the Indian Muslim view of the Palestine Question.[220] The delegates were among the Muslim League's leading lights: they included Choudhry Khaliquzzaman, Hasrat Mohani, Raja Ali Ahmad Khan and Abdurrahman Siddiqi. It was reported in *Palestine & Trans-jordan*, a weekly journal published in Jerusalem, that their mission was "to seek the annulment of the scheme of [Palestine's] partition".[221]

The question put to Jerusalem and London was whether the Government of India should allow these Muslim gentlemen to obtain visas for their journey. The telegram noted, "there are no personal grounds to justify refusal of endorsements or visas to any member of the deputation. Please telegraph whether there is any objection from your point of view to grant to them endorsements or visas for Palestine, Syria and Hejaz".[222]

Reluctantly, the reply came back from the Colonial Office: "It was felt that there were no legitimate grounds upon which objection could be raised, but the High Commissioner for

[220] 'Government of India, External Affairs Dept., to High Commissioner, Palestine', 17 November 1937. CO 733/333/13
[221] 'Extract from "Palestine & Transjordan"', 16 October 1937. CO 733/333/13
[222] 'Government of India, External Affairs Dept., to High Commissioner, Palestine', 17 November 1937. CO 733/333/13

Palestine would greatly prefer that these persons should not visit that territory if they are likely to indulge in anti-Government propaganda".[223]

The Government of India telegraphed back:

> On the strength of reply received from the High Commissioner the grant of a passport to Khaliquzzaman has already been authorised and we feel that we cannot refuse such passports, endorsements, etc, as may be required by other members of the deputation... In any case it would be impossible for us to attach any conditions about propaganda to the grant of passports. We also consider that it would create a deplorable political impression among Moslems if we refuse passports, etc., in the absence of any personal grounds.[224]

This back-and-forth did not escape comment within the Colonial Office. The scribbles in the margins of the telegram correspondence broadly concurred with the unfortunate necessity of ensuring the right of free passage, even for Muslim political activists:

> —"This visit may be embarrassing; but passport facilities cannot be reasonably withheld; particularly as we emphasise that the 'firm hand' policy is directed against terrorism and not against political opposition".

> —" 'Anti-Government propaganda' is not terrorism, so the decision taken...was no doubt the correct one".

> —"These Indians will be a nuisance; but any attempt to stop them would probably land us in even greater difficulties".

As was often the case in Colonial Office files of this period, the retort came swiftly from deputy undersecretary, John Evelyn Shuckburgh:

> Yes; but note that it is always "deplorable", in the view of the Government of India and the India Office, that any steps should ever be taken to counteract anti-British intrigue or agitation in the Middle East. The Government of India must be regarded, for these purposes, as no less of an Enemy Government than Hitler or Mussolini.[225]

There can be little doubt that the events of a recent Cabinet Meeting, when the Indian Secretary

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[223] 'Secretary of State to Government of India, External Affairs Dept.', 4 December 1937. CO 733/333/13

[224] 'Government of India, External Affairs Dept., to Secretary of State for India', 24 December 1937. CO 733/333/13

[225] 'Situation in Palestine: Reactions in India', marginal notes, CO 733/333/13

had prevailed upon Shuckburgh's department to respect the sanctity of the Haram—then harbouring Palestine's most wanted criminal—were not far from the undersecretary's mind, as he punched out these lines on his typewriter.

The Cairo Conferences, October 1938

The announcement of a World Parliamentary Congress of Arab and Muslim Countries for the Defence of Palestine, to be held in Cairo in October, 1938, appears to have altered the agenda of the proposed Muslim League delegation. Rather than a tour of multiple Arab and European capitals, Muhammad Ali Jinnah now announced that his party's delegates would travel directly to Egypt, to participate in the Congress. As we will see in the next chapter, this announcement perturbed Nehru, who was in London at the time, and who perceived the Cairo Congress as an attack on the Wafd, and secular nationalist politics in both Egypt and India. He was dismayed, though unsurprised, to find that the Muslim League planned to send a delegation.

The origins of the World Parliamentary Congress are to be found in a Pan-Arab conference on Palestine which was held in Bludan, Syria, in September 1937, shortly after the announcement of the policy of partition. At that time, the conference had invited official Egyptian Government participation; Nahhas had refused, still apparently holding out in the belief that Egypt could play its hand separately from the other Arab states. He told the conference organizers that "he preferred to work independently and in his own way towards a solution of the Palestine problem".[226] The same month that the Bludan Conference took place, the Wafdist Foreign Minister, Wassif Butrus Ghali, made a forceful plea on behalf of the Palestinians during Egypt's inaugural address to the League of Nations General Assembly in Geneva. There is certainly the

[226] Gershoni & Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation*, p. 177

sense, as Gershoni and Jankowski argue, that Nahhas sought Egyptian control over the crisis on its Eastern border, rather than a solution founded on Arab unity. His strategy was cut short by King Faruq, who dismissed Nahhas from the premiership in December 1937, under the influence of his most trusted advisors, Sheikh Mustapha al-Maraghi (the rector of Al-Azhar), and the politician 'Ali Maher.

Grooming Faruq to lead a bid for a new Egyptian Caliphate, Maraghi had sought to arrange a religious coronation ceremony for the new monarch in the summer of 1937. This was an almost unheard-of innovation for a Muslim ruler, but one calculated to garner international attention, and boost Faruq's prestige as well as his Islamic credentials. Nahhas' Wafd government shot down Maraghi's coronation proposal, on the grounds that it would undermine the secular and democratic character of the Egyptian state. This Maraghi and his allies labeled 'Coptism', and the rift between the Wafd and Al-Azhar grew wider. Then in the fall, Faruq sought to appoint his ally, 'Ali Maher, Chief of the Royal Cabinet. The Wafd resisted Faruq's nominee, on the grounds that the government had the right to appoint a candidate of its own choosing to the post. The result was Nahhas' summary dismissal; in his place, Faruq appointed Muhammad Mahmud to form a new government.

Meanwhile, however, the Bludan Conference took place. Among the Egyptians who attended the conference as a private citizen was Muhammad 'Ali 'Alluba Pasha. A lawyer by training and until 1934 a leading figure of the Liberal Constitutionalist party, 'Alluba Pasha was a passionate supporter of the Palestinian cause. He had previously been elected Vice President of the World Islamic Congress, held in Jerusalem in 1931, and had been sent as part of a Congress delegation

which traveled to India in 1933 to discuss the conflict in Palestine.[227] In Bludan, 'Alluba Pasha was again elected a Vice President of the proceedings. His experience at Bludan and the contacts he made there pushed him to further activism once back in Egypt; the following May, he headed the group of parliamentarians who began to organise an international conference on Palestine, to be held in Cairo. The invitations were sent out—to Iraq, Morocco, Iran, Transjordan, Palestine, Yugoslavia, Syria, the United States, Yemen, and, yes, India—that August.

'Alluba Pasha was not the only Egyptian inspired by the meeting in Bludan. Huda Sha'rawi had initially planned to hold a women's congress on Palestine in parallel with the Bludan Conference. According to Margot Badran,

> The British intercepted a letter from Sha'rawi to [leader of the Women's Committee for the Defence of Palestine, Bahirah] al-Azmah suggesting that representatives be invited from women's associations throughout the East, especially from Iran and India.[228]

Most intriguingly, while the men's Pan-Arab Conference in Bludan went ahead, the British prevailed upon the authorities in Syria to put a stop to the women's conference—perhaps in response to the prospect of Indian participation.[229] In July, the British consul in Damascus reported with evident satisfaction that "The Syrian Prime Minister has forbidden the holding of a Women's Congress in Syria to discuss Palestine and has taken steps to ensure that negotiations for it cease".[230]

Never easily dissuaded, Sha'rawi changed tack, and began planning instead for a women's conference on Palestine in Cairo. 'Alluba Pasha, who had initially encouraged her plans for a

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227 Rossi, Ettore. 'Il Congresso Interparlamentare Arabo e Musulmano Pro Palestina al Cairo, 7-11 Ottobre'. *Oriente Moderno*, anno 18 no. 11 (Novembre 1938), p. 588

228 Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation,* pp. 227-228

229 Ibid*,* p. 228

230 MacKereth to Halifax, 2nd July, 1938. FO 371/E4049

meeting in Bludan, now coordinated with her for the holding of an inter-Arab women's conference, in parallel with his own World Parliamentary Congress. Like its male-dominated counterpart, the women's conference attracted delegates from the Arab region and beyond.

So it was that in the first half of October, 1938, roughly 200 male and female delegates from over a dozen countries descended on the Egyptian capital, to discuss the crisis in Palestine. They were not official representatives of their governments, although many were parliamentarians or prominent political figures in their own right. In addition to representatives of the Arab countries, there were delegations from Iran, China, Spanish Morocco, Yugoslavia, Turkey, the United States, and India. Among the Indian delegation was Choudhry Khaliquzzaman, a leading figure in the All-India Muslim League, and later a founding father of Pakistan. He recounted the journey from Allahabad to Cairo to attend the Congress in his autobiography, *Pathway to Pakistan*:

> [My family] all arrived in time to see me off, this being my first experience of an airplane flight. With night stops at Jodhpur and Baghdad we reached Alexandria and travelled from there to Cairo by train. [...] The main question before the Arab world at the time was to save Palestine from partition, in which we all agreed.[231]

The British-owned *Egyptian Gazette* reported on the opening of the conference in much the same tone as it might have covered the colonial pavilions at a World Expo:

> Variegated dress and headgear, from the turbans of the Azharites to the Tarbooshes of the Egyptian Senators and Deputies to the Kafia and Agal of the Palestinians, the queer black Iraqui caps and their even queerer grey glengarries, and a salmon coloured shapeless tarboosh of an Indian Moslem delegate, gave a colourful air to the scene inside the somewhat ornate but dilapidated Casino.[232]

An editorial from the same day, headlined 'Sabean Odours', remarked,

> There has been so much speculation as to the political results of this gathering of the clans that it is pleasant for a little at least to see these Arab visitors—or rather these Moslems from other

[231] Khaliquzzaman, Choudhry. *Pathway to Pakistan* (London, 1961), p. 198
[232] *Egyptian Gazette*, 'Arab Congress in Cairo', 8 October 1938

> lands—as picturesque strangers borne upon some Sabean breeze, rather than as participants in the international hurly-burly.[233]

And yet consequential players in an international political process was indeed how these delegates saw themselves—the women as much as the men. During the women's conference proceedings, a Palestinian activist, Sadhij Nassar, exhorted her sisters to prove that "Arab women are just as capable as men and can accomplish great acts".[234] Delegates were, moreover, acutely conscious of the crisis brewing in Europe, and of their own strategic importance, as an Arab-Muslim bloc, in any coming international conflict. In his opening remarks to the Interparliamentary Congress, Muslim League delegate Abdurrahman Siddiqi claimed to speak "on behalf of the eighty million Indian Mulims" and

> ...exhorted Great Britain to learn the lesson of the recent meeting in Munich, to revise its policy in Palestine accordingly, and choose between the Arabs and the Jews. He warned that, if the Palestine question was not resolved in conformity with the decisions of the present Congress, the Muslims of the entire world would refuse their support to British imperialism.[235]

A telegram sent to Neville Chamberlain by Huda Sha'rawi on behalf of the Eastern Women's committees also made the connection between developments in Palestine and Munich, albeit in an entirely more optimistic tone:

> Hearty congratulations extended from Oriental Women Societies on success of your magnanimous efforts to save Europe from war devastations. Confident this same humane spirit will urge you to do justice to Palestine Arabs to safeguard peace in Orient also. Representing Societies - Hoda Charaoui.[236]

The vast majority of the Egyptian delegates at the Interparliamentary Congress were drawn from the Sa'adist and Ittihad parties, which then formed the government; their opposition rivals in the Wafd were pointedly excluded. At the opening session, the ranks of the Egyptian delegates were

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[233] *Egyptian Gazette*, 'Sabean Odours', 8 October 1938
[234] Weber, Charlotte E. *Making Common Cause? Western and Middle Eastern Women in the International Feminist Movement, 1911-1948* (PhD Diss., Ohio State University, 2003) p. 206
[235] Rossi, 'Il Congresso', p. 590.
[236] Charaoui to Chamberlain, 30 September 1938. FO 371/22008

swelled by many hundreds of attendees from the Muslim Brotherhood and the YMMA; in total, the *Egyptian Gazette* estimated there were 2,500 participants.[237] The Palace, Al-Azhar, and their youthful supporters sought to take advantage of the presence of so many foreign Muslim delegates in Egypt to promote King Faruq's claim to to the Caliphate. Khaliquzzaman recalled that "some young Egyptians actually asked us what would be the reaction of Muslims in India if Egypt agreed to make him the Khalifa [Caliph]".[238] Through subsequent enquiry with friends in Cairo, the Indian delegates discovered that Sheikh al-Maraghi had already approached the Aga Khan in an attempt to win Indian support for Faruq's elevation to Caliph. Wrote Khaliquzzaman,

> We were greatly disillusioned. Next day we met Sheikh Maraghi to talk over the matter with him. I had my own views on this question and told the Sheikh that King Farooq did not enjoy the confidence of the Muslim world and would not therefore, so far as I could see, be acceptable to the Muslims of India. The Sheikh then asked me whether he might have the title *Amirul Mominin* [tr: 'Commander of the Faithful'] in the Muslim world. I replied that this word had invariably been associated with the Khilafat and as such it would create great confusion in the Muslim mind if this title were given to him. Our talk thus ended.[239]

Prime Minister Mahmud was apparently less than enthusiastic about the Interparliamentary Congress, in part because of what he saw as this "increasingly religious aspect" to pro-Palestinian activism.[240] This was undoubtedly a concern shared by Nahhas, whatever his other political differences with Mahmud, because of the opportunity it provided for precisely the sort of (albeit, in this case, unsuccessful) overtures to foreign Muslims described by Khaliquzzaman, and the concomitant boost to the Palace's prestige and authority. Yet despite their qualms, and despite the glaring absence of the Wafd from the proceedings, both Mahmud and Nahhas found it politically impossible to oppose the Congress, given the immense popular support for the Palestinian cause among Egyptians. Indeed, they each felt obliged to host receptions for the

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[237] *Egyptian Gazette*, 'Arab Congress in Cairo', 8 October 1938
[238] Khaliquzzaman, *Pathway to Pakistan*, p. 199
[239] Ibid, pp. 199-200
[240] Gershoni & Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation*, pp. 184-185

delegates, Nahhas presiding over his event in a traditional Palestinian *kuffiyah*.[241] There, he found himself in a somewhat heated confrontation with Khaliquzzaman, who later remarked:

> I found that Nahas Pasha was singularly ill-informed about the history of the Muslims in India or their differences with the Congress and applied his experience of life in Egypt to India so literally as to make the Muslim problem of India exactly as the Jewish or Christian problem which Saad Zaghlol Pasha had to face in Egypt, thus completely ignoring the difference in the size of the two countries...I implored him to leave us to our fate if he found himself unable to sympathize with us.[242]

In his book on the ideological foundations of Pakistan, *Muslim Zion,* Faisal Devji cites this anecdote as illustrative of the complex and in some ways contradictory thinking within the Muslim League regarding relations between minorities and the state within the context of decolonisation.[243] As we will see, the Muslim League was to remain deeply hostile to the partition of Palestine in order to create a Jewish state, while simultaneously becoming increasingly wed to the demand for a Muslim Pakistan, necessitating the partition of India. We will have the opportunity to explore the rationale and consequences of this position further, as the narrative unfolds.

The resolutions which the Interparliamentary Congress passed at its closing session, on 11 October, reiterated what had by then become familiar Arab refrains: there was an unequivocal rejection of the partition plan, and calls for a halt to Jewish immigration in Palestine, as well as the ending of the British mandate and establishment of a sovereign Arab state in its place. Despite the aspirations of participants, however, the Congress had a negligible impact on British (or Arab) policy. The Palestinian participants were said to be disappointed, while the British were relieved, deeming the Congress "less venomous and anglophobe" than anticipated.[244] The

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[241] Ibid, p. 185
[242] Khaliquzzaman, *Pathway to Pakistan*, pp. 198-199
[243] Devji, Faisal. *Muslim Zion* (London, 2013) p. 17
[244] Qtd. in Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, p. 231

Congress was, in any event, swiftly eclipsed by the high-level Arab leaders' meeting arranged by Mahmud Pasha in Cairo in January 1939, itself a prelude to the St James' Conference in London.

The Eastern Women's Conference had somewhat more of a lasting political impact than its male counterpart. In its wake, new women's committees for the defence of Palestine were established in Palestine, Egypt, Iraq and Lebanon; within two months, a Cairo-based subcommittee focused on charitable contributions had raised two thousand Egyptian pounds for Palestine relief.[245] Huda Sha'rawi's EFU headquarters in Cairo became a veritable clearinghouse for information and communications on the situation in Palestine, and not only between women. In the months after the Women's Conference, the Arab Society of Damascus and a group of Jerusalem ulama also wrote to Sha'rawi repeatedly, to ask for her help in promoting awareness of the Palestinians' plight.[246] As Lampson observed ruefully in a telegram to the Foreign Office, shortly after the close of the Women's Conference, "the power of the women in the East, as in France, is far greater than their legal disabilities indicate".[247]

Despite its muted impact, however, the Interparliamentary Congress, alongside the Women's Conference, was indicative of Cairo's new place at the heart of inter-Arab mobilisation in defence of Palestine. The Egyptian capital's claim to preeminence would be further strengthened by the conference of Arab leaders held there in January 1939. The Interparliamentary Congress had another important outcome, in that it served to strengthen the connections between several of the Muslim League delegates and their Egyptian and Arab counterparts. Following the completion of the Congress' work, Choudhry Khaliquzzaman and Abdurrahman Siddiqi were

[245] Ibid.
[246] Ibid.
[247] Lampson to F.O., 24 October 1938. FO/371/E6432

nominated by the Indian delegation to travel with ‘Alluba Pasha to London to make representations to the British Government on the Congress’ behalf.

Indians and Arabs in London: The St James’ Conference, 1939

Meanwhile, in the middle of September 1938, the Viceroy had telegraphed the Secretary of State for India to sound him out on an idea he hoped might kill two birds with one stone.

> ...in view of growing concern with which Moslems viewed developments in Palestine, it might be useful if H.M.G. would agree to receive a deputation of Indian Moslems [...] It occurs to me that, in the present position of things in Palestine and in view of the European situation, it is going to be impossible to implement policy of partition within any reasonable lapse of time. A representation from Indian Moslems might provide H.M.G. with an opportunity to make a declaration modifying present policy.[248]

Zetland’s private secretary, M.J. Clauson, dutifully wrote on the Indian Secretary’s behalf to the Colonial Office, attaching the Viceroy’s telegram for the consideration of the Colonial Secretary. A rather chilly response came back from Gerald Creasy, private secretary to Malcolm MacDonald:

> Mr. MacDonald has asked me to say in reply that [...] there can be no question of any modification of the policy of His Majesty’s Government as regards Palestine, and that in any case he does not feel that it would be appropriate to make the first announcement of any change of policy to a deputation of Indian Moslems. If he were to receive such a deputation, he could only defend the policy of partition and emphasize the advantages which that solution offers to the Arabs of Palestine.[249]

Within weeks, however, the Indian Secretary was writing to inform the Viceroy of the impending change in government policy:

[248] Telegram from Viceroy, 11 September 1938. IOR/L/I/1/604
[249] Creasy to Clauson, 21 September 1938. IOR/L/I/1/604

> Most Secret. Palestine [...] Government statement will probably be published on 8th, 9th or 10th November [...] following is provisional forecast for your very confidential information of main points which statement is likely to include:
>
> (1) Partition is impracticable;
> (2) H.M.G. will continue their responsibility for government of whole of Palestine;
> (3) Understanding between Arabs and Jews is fundamental to permanent peace and progress in Palestine. H.M.G. therefore propose to hold conference in London to which would be invited representatives (a) of Jewish Agency (b) of Arabs of Palestine, other than active rebel leaders or deportees (c) of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Transjordan.
> (4) If conference in London is unable to reach conclusions within reasonable period, H.M.G. will make own announcement of policy.
>
> [...] Balance of opinion is against inviting Mufti to conference.[250]

Linlithgow replied to Zetland expressing his relief that the policy of partition was to be abandoned, although he could not help but register his opinion, "though it is none of my business", that the government might reconsider its exclusion of the Mufti, "on the basis of his proving much more of a nuisance outside than in". He continued:

> I recognise that basis at present contemplated for round table conference is essentially the representation of Arab or Arab-speaking countries adjacent to Palestine, but given the great imperial importance of Moslem reactions here to this question and very marked growth of Indian interest in it in these last few months, I would like to suggest [...] that case for adding a representative of India is a very strong one.[251]

The man whom the Viceroy had in mind was Sultan Muhammad Shah, the Aga Khan: spiritual leader of the worldwide Ismaili Muslim sect; founder and first president of the All-India Muslim League; legendary collector of thoroughbred racehorses; and India's representative to the League of Nations. Linlithgow proposed that, even if it was deemed inappropriate for an Indian to actually participate in the Palestine conference, the Aga Khan could arrange to be in London during its proceedings with a "listening brief": "I am sure that the inclusion of a representative

[250] Zetland to Linlithgow, 31 October 1938. IOR/L/I/1/604
[251] Linlithgow to Zetland, 4 November 1938. IOR/L/I/1/604

of India would give keen satisfaction here and would much ease my difficulties and those of the Governors, and I rather apprehend that we may apart from that anticipate criticism and difficulty if India in fact goes unrepresented".[252]

Zetland agreed to do his best, and wrote to MacDonald. Their correspondence shows that they also spoke about the matter in person several times. Following these discussions, the Indian Secretary acknowledged to the Viceroy that the barriers to Indian representation at the upcoming conference were considerable:

> One can draw a logical line at the rulers of the adjacent Arab countries, but if you were once to go beyond such a line, it would be difficult to know where to stop. Moreover, the Jews would undoubtedly complain that the dice were being loaded heavily against them, and would almost certainly demand increased representation for themselves.[253]

Nevertheless, the lines of communication between the Indian and Colonial Secretaries remained open. In late November, the Aga Khan flew to London from France in order to attend a meeting with Zetland and MacDonald to discuss the upcoming conference. He shared the Viceroy's opinion that it was important for India to be represented, and suggested that Jinnah be invited; the Colonial Secretary explained why he felt this was impossible. At the conclusion of their meeting, the Aga Khan agreed to return to London during the conference, if Zetland and MacDonald thought it useful.[254]

On the same day, in a different part of London, MacDonald's private secretary, Creasy, received a letter from Abdurrahman Siddiqi. Having just arrived from Cairo, he introduced himself and Khaliquzzaman, and requested a meeting with the Colonial Secretary "to acquaint him with the

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[252] Ibid.
[253] Zetland to Linlithgow, 15 November 1938. IOR/L/I/1/604
[254] Zetland to Linlithgow, 29 November 1938. IOR/L/I/1/604

state of Muslim feeling in India on the question of Palestine and its repercussions on the situation in India".[255]

Creasy was immediately suspicious. He wrote to a colleague in the Colonial Office, Mr. Downie, attaching the letter and suggesting that the supplicants were "two professional agitators who are in this country with a view to making trouble over Palestine and the forthcoming discussions". Downie responded: "I don't see why the S of S's time should be wasted in discussing Palestine with Indian Moslems. The Palestine problem is only secondarily a matter of Moslem, and in no respect a matter of Indian, concern". Predictably, John Shuckburgh chimed in:

> I should like to record my strong view (1) that the S. of S., with all his other preoccupations, ought not to be troubled with these tiresome people; and (2) that it is altogether wrong that Indian politicians should obtain direct access to the Colonial Office on matters of Colonial policy that do not affect Indian interests. They have their own S. of S., and ought to go to him if they want to make representations to H.M.G.[256]

But MacDonald, now alive to India's interest in Palestine through his discussions with Zetland and the Aga Khan, was more open than his staff to Siddiqi's request—especially after ascertaining from the India Office that the two 'MLAs' were prominent leaders of the Muslim League, and that Zetland was in favour of the meeting. In December, MacDonald wrote to Zetland detailing his conversation with Siddiqi and Khaliquzzaman. Unsurprisingly, they too were keen for India to be represented at the upcoming conference:

> One argument which my visitors used, which impressed me, was that the Congress Party in India are ready to exploit the Palestine situation not only to the disadvantage of Britain but also to the disadvantage of the Moslem League in India. This was put forward as an additional reason why we should make a point of bringing Indian Moslems into the London discussions, so that their followers in India would realise that Great Britain was heeding Indian Moslem opinion and not be taken in by the Congress propaganda.[257]

[255] Siddiqi to Creasy, 29 November 1938. CO 733/372/15

[256] Representation of A.R. Siddiqi (marginalia), November - December 1938. CO 733/372/15

[257] Indeed, this line of thinking was among the Viceroy's primary concerns, and of central importance to Jinnah. MacDonald to Zetland, 23 December 1939. CO 733/372/15

Indeed, there was something to this allegation. Gandhi and in particular Nehru were also taking an interest in the Palestinian cause, which they understood as an anti-colonial cause similar to that of India. Domestically, support for Palestinian Arabs was also useful for demonstrating Congress' support of causes important to Muslims. This will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. For now it is enough to note that MacDonald seems to have appreciated the potential gravity of a Muslim swing to Congress, as had occurred only once before, during the Khilafat crisis of the 1920s. The consolidation of the Muslim and Hindu nationalist movements in opposition to British rule was a deeply unappealing prospect for the British Government, particularly in a delicate international climate. Thus MacDonald proposed a compromise to Zetland: Perhaps, if Siddiqi and Khaliquzzaman were to remain in London during the conference, they could be kept abreast of the progress of discussions, with the Colonial Secretary and the Indian Secretary meeting with them several times, for the sake of public opinion in India. MacDonald asked Zetland to think it over, clarifying that he had not mentioned his idea to his guests. "Needless to say," he signed off, "I would do anything I could to help, short of complicating the discussions themselves".[258]

For Siddiqi and Khaliquzzaman, however, there now seemed little hope their bid for representation would succeed. "Naturally", wrote Khaliquzzaman, "we were greatly disappointed and informed Allouba Pasha of our desire to go back to India as our stay in England was unnecessary."[259] But their Egyptian friend apparently insisted that they stay on for the sake of the Palestinians, who would be "greatly encouraged" by their presence in London. At 'Alluba's behest, they agreed to remain and await the arrival of the Arab delegates in January, but "it was a

[258] Ibid.
[259] Khaliquzzaman, Choudhry. *Only if They Knew It?* (Karachi, 1965) p. 16

great trial on our nerves to stay for months together doing nothing but walking on the streets of London".[260]

When they were sick of walking, Siddiqi and Khaliquzzaman wrote. One particularly long and detailed treatise they co-authored at the behest of the Colonial and India Offices detailed the situation in Palestine was reprinted as an attractive pamphlet by the Arab Centre in Central London. This pamphlet, called 'Statement of Indian Muslim Views on Palestine', underscored the ways in which Britain's promises to Indian Muslims during and after the First World War created obligations for the mandate power in the Middle East. Like other Muslim League petitions and resolutions of the same era, it began with a detailed exposition of Britain's entry into the war against the Ottoman Empire in 1914, and the promises then made to Indian Muslims regarding the inviolability of the Muslim Holy Places. It did not fail to allude to the spectre of a second Khilafat movement, and emphasized the traditional importance of Indian Muslim opinion in formulating Britain's policies in the Middle East. Drawing on this heritage of Indian Muslim involvement in Britain's Arab policy, the pamphlet argued forcefully in favour of the Palestinian cause on political, economic, legal, and moral grounds. It warned that the failure to achieve a just settlement in Palestine would result in a perpetual state of conflict involving the entire Muslim World—including India.[261] These essays were read carefully at the India Office and the Colonial Office in the lead-up to St James', as evidenced by their reproduction in Colonial and India Office files, and the circulation and marking up of these copies by officials.

Meanwhile, the Arab delegates invited to participate in the London roundtable gathered in Cairo in January 1939 to devise a joint strategy. The presence of so many government officials from

[260] Ibid.
[261] 'Statement of Indian Muslim Views on Palestine', CO 733/408/13

Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Transjordan, along with the Palestinian delegates, confirmed Cairo as "the diplomatic center of the Arab world".[262] It is worth clarifying that, while Gershoni & Jankowski state that Transjordan did not participate in the Cairo conference,[263] this is a simplification: Transjordan sent Taufiq Abu al-Huda, the Prime Minister, to London, while a separate delegation traveled to Cairo, in order to report on its proceedings to him. Sheikh Fu'ad al-Khatib, the head of the Transjordanian delegation sent to Cairo, also filed a report to King 'Abdallah, which subsequently fell into the hands of British intelligence agents.[264] This report is perhaps the fullest insider's account available of the January 1939 Cairo conference. It contains a number of important insights.

Al-Khatib noted that one of the key reasons for the conference was to promote Egypt as the leading country of the Arab and Muslim world, and that it had "left an impression among the delegates and in the Arab and Moslem circles that the time has now come to lay the foundation stone for the establishment of an Arab and Eastern League of Nations".[265] He cited several existing treaties between Arab and Eastern countries—notably the 1937 Saadabad Pact between Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and Saudi Arabia's bilateral Treaties of Brotherhood and Friendship with Iraq (1936) and Yemen (1934)—as logical precursors to a more general Near Eastern union:

> Whereas Egypt is the only [independent] country outside this agreement there is nothing preventing it from joining this International Bloc. Egypt's call to Arab countries to join and cooperate in the solution of the Palestine Case is an acknowledgement that she considers herself to be an Arab country. It is expected that Egypt will join the Eastern [Saadabad] Pact and Treaties of Brotherhood and Friendship [with Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Yemen]. The Near East would then have seven confederate powers, namely, Turkey, Afghanistan, Yemen, Egypt, Saoudi-Arabia, Iraq, and Iran.[266]

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[262] Gershoni & Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation*, p. 186
[263] Ibid.
[264] MacMichael to MacDonald, 2nd February 1939. CO 733/410/2
[265] Ibid.
[266] MacMichael to MacDonald, 2 February 1939. CO 733/410/2

This thinking was also apparent in Prime Minister Mahmud's welcome address to the delegates, in which he made reference to "the unbroken friendship between [Egypt] and the Arab countries throughout history", and Egypt's desire to strengthen the bonds between the Arab states.[267] His speech prompted Lampson to remark that

> The presence in Cairo of all these representatives from the Arab world has afforded a heaven-sent opportunity for the propagation of an idea long dear to the heart of the Egyptian monarchy, namely the idea of a great future of the Arab peoples under the leadership of the King of Egypt.[268]

But Lampson seems to have lacked the imagination to follow the Egyptians' political rhetoric through to its logical—if ambitious—conclusion. The Sheikhs of Al-Azhar were, after all, pushing for King Faruq's recognition as a new Caliph, whose sphere of influence would in theory have extended far beyond the confines of the Arab Middle East. While India was never mentioned by name in al-Khatib's report, the Jordanian envoy made repeated and deliberate reference to 'Muslim' and 'Eastern', as opposed to 'Arab' countries, and cited the Saadabad Pact between Arab and non-Arab states as the most prominent existing model on which regional unity could be based. These features of al-Khatib's report, which he claimed reflected the general trend in thinking among the delegates in Cairo, indicate that, within what Lampson and the Foreign Office tended to characterise as 'pan-Arabism', there was in fact space for a much broader regional alliance. This could easily have been conceived as incorporating a future Indian state, alongside a future Palestinian or Syrian one.

As regards the stated purpose of the conference, namely, to determine a joint Arab strategy for the upcoming talks in London, the Arab delegates agreed to the proposal of Iraqi Prime Minister

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[267] Gershoni & Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation*, p. 186
[268] Ibid.

Nuri al-Said to focus on the international status of Palestine, rather than contesting Jewish immigration, or protesting British violence. They adopted this strategy on the assumption that movement towards Palestinian independence, along the lines of Britain's treaty relationship with Iraq, would itself resolve the other issues: an independent, Arab government in Palestine could itself legislate to control Jewish immigration; 'the normal protections' afforded minorities would be granted Palestine's Jewish community. The withdrawal of British troops and police would also, of course, follow independence, putting an end to the violence. In many ways it was not an unreasonable bargaining strategy, but it was based on one fatally flawed assumption: that the British Government could be persuaded to publicly abandon their commitments to the Zionists, in favour of an independent, majority Arab state. With a perhaps undue sense of optimism, then, the Arab delegates embarked together for London, continuing their talks on board a steamer. They were greeted in the British capital by Khaliquzzaman and Siddiqi, who had by now been awaiting their arrival for two months.

As the opening day of the St James' conference approached, the Muslim League rallied in a final bid to win Indian representation. On the 25th of January, the two MLAs had a second interview with the Colonial Secretary, who now informed them definitively that they would not be able to participate in the conference—not even as observers. MacDonald's reasoning was based on his characterisation of the conflict, as 'political' rather than 'religious': "the admission of Indian Moslem representatives to the discussions might have the effect of introducing the religious factor, and was open to serious objection on that ground".[269] MacDonald suggested that, in lieu of participating in the talks, Siddiqi and Khaliquzzaman submit (another) memorandum on Indian Muslim views, and promised them that he would study it carefully.

[269] Note on meeting of MacDonald with Siddiqi and Khaliquzzaman, 25 January 1939. CO 733/372/15

Several days after this disappointing meeting, presumably once Jinnah had received word of its outcome, a telegram arrived for MacDonald. Its tone was urgent and beseeching:

> The All-India Muslim League urges upon His Majesty's Government give representation Muslim League Palestine Conference and concede Palestine National Arab Demands. Muslim India awaiting most anxiously results. I cannot by means telegram express adequately and impress intensity feeling throughout India. Failure Conference will be most disastrous throughout Muslim world, resulting grave consequences. Trusting this earnest appeal will receive your serious consideration. Jinnah[270]

This telegram received a very cordial reply from the Viceroy, explaining the delicacy of the situation, expressing regret, and offering assurances that Indian Muslim opinion would be taken into account by the Government. Jinnah wrote again:

> Deeply disappointed His Majesty's Government not inclined extend representation Muslim India at Palestine Conference. No analogy comparison Muslim India other parties in view of solemn promises assurances given to the Mussalmans India during war. Palestine their first Qibla[271] Muslims deeply and vitally concerned their Holy Places. Earnestly urge His Majesty's Government meet request.[272]

Siddiqi also submitted another memorandum, as instructed, on behalf of 'the All-India Muslim League Palestine Delegation', as he and Khaliquzzaman now styled themselves. In his covering letter, Siddiqi spoke quite plainly of the delegates' disappointment at being excluded from the conference, and of the potential negative repercussions in India:

> We are constrained to remark that the intensity of the feeling in India is, perhaps, not yet realised fully in London, for the reasons that public opinion had not found expression in any violence of language or in unconstitutional activities, due mainly to the influence of moderate opinion which has been holding out hopes of a satisfactory settlement in consonance with the promises made to Indian Muslims.[273] […] We may also be permitted to question the wisdom, or even the efficacy, of circumscribing the international character of the problem so vitally touching the deep rooted sentiments of the Muslim World and restricting it to almost parochial dimensions, especially when no such restrictions are likely to be applied to the representatives of the Zionists.[274]

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[270] Jinnah to Macdonald, 30 January 1939. CO 733/408/13

[271] The phrase 'first Qiblah' alludes to the Haram el-Sharif in Jerusalem, which, according to tradition, was the original point of orientation for Muslim prayer, before the Prophet Muhammad received divine guidance to face Mecca instead.

[272] Transcribed in Clauson to Creasy, 8 February 1939. CO 733/408/13

[273] By this Siddiqi intended, like Jinnah, to evoke Britain's commitment to protect the Muslim Holy Places

[274] Siddiqi to Zetland, 29 January 1939. CO 733/408/13

This was a bitter allusion to the comparatively global composition of the Jewish Agency's delegation to the conference. The Agency sought to bolster its claim to represent 'all Jews' by including delegates from the United States, Europe, Britain, and South Africa, as well as Palestine. To Siddiqi and Khaliquzzaman, the participation of international Jewry stood in baldfaced contradiction to the stated rationale behind their own exclusion: that the conflict in Palestine was political, not religious, in character.

Nevertheless, the MLAs stuck it out in London throughout the conference. They even hosted a dinner for the Arab delegates at Claridge's. Khaliquzzaman recalled being encouraged by the initial stages of negotiations, only to be disappointed by Britain's eventual offer to the Arabs, which limited Jewish immigration, but set no fixed date for the transfer of power to an independent government in Palestine—although privately, the time frame was indicated as ten years. His account, published when he was in his mid-eighties, may hopefully be forgiven its idiosyncrasies:

> When this new proposal came to light we ran up to Dorchester Hotel where the Palestine delegates were staying. All of them were furious and every one of them was shouting reject! reject! we shall never accept it and to my great surprise Mr. Abdul Rahman Siddiqi also joined them in their demand. The writer, however, took courage in both of his hands due to such a serious situation and said to his Palestine friends. "My friends, I am just as much shocked as you are but I would not advise you to reject the offer outright. The British people are strange creatures. They first create an institution and then they begin to worship their own creation. I have the experience of British people in India before me. They have created provincial governments in most areas dominated by Hindus and having created them they are now slavishly following their unjust and unfair policies toward muslims due to majority rule. Let them create a Palestine Government in which you will be in majority and they will slavishly follow you not caring for the minorities view as we find it in India. If you are a government, the Clandestine immigration of Jews from all the world over will at once stop and your majority will be secured. Therefore, for God's sake do not throw it over and do not take any hasty step. If I had the least hope that our Mujahids in Palestine will be able to throw over the British Forces in the Mediterranean, I would agree to your views." But no one was prepared to accept the writer's views. I knew that Egyptian, Iraqi and Saudi delegations were also not in favour of rejection but

> due to the unanimous opinion of the Palestine delegate they all agreed [to reject the British proposal] so as not to give embrace [*embarrassment?*] to the Palestine delegates.[275]

While this may appear to be a self-serving account, benefiting greatly from several decades worth of hindsight, there is reason to believe that the views Khaliquzzaman claims to have expressed to the Palestinians, and his assertion that these reflected the consensus among the delegates from the Arab states, were basically accurate. For, as we will see, this was not the last moment in 1939 that the Indian and Arab supporters of the Palestinians attempted, without success, to encourage their friends to accept the British offer.

Among the chorus was the Aga Khan. In a report to the Viceroy, he recounted how he had been summoned to London by Lord Zetland at the end of the St James' Conference, and had there conferred with him and MacDonald, before arranging to meet with representatives of the Arab delegations:

> On 23rd [March] morning had a long conference with the Egyptian Minister, the Iraqi representative, the Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia and Mr. George Antonius (the Secretary of the Palestine Delegation). With great difficulty, and after much argument, they agreed to approach the position taken by His Majesty's Government on the two most important points, namely they agreed to the British emigration figures and also to the fact that after the period of ten years (when Palestine is to be made an independent country) Great Britain will reserve the right, if she finds it necessary, to retard this declaration [...] In their talks with me the Arabs went even further - but later in the day they backed out of some of the concessions, Your Excellency knows well that this sort of thing happens rather often, unfortunately, in conference work. The final draft seemed practically to meet the British position.
> [...] I have submitted to the Foreign Office, the Colonial Office and the Secretary of State for India a plan which, if immediately accepted and carried out, will lead to the present agitation being called off, finally bringing peace to Palestine. This, however, will not be possible till May or June because the essential part of it will be to get the Egyptian Government to send their Prime Minister (or one of their most important statesmen) to see the Mufti and other leaders to call off the rebellion.[276]

[275] Khaliquzzaman, *Only if They Knew It?,* pp. 17-18
[276] Aga Khan to Viceroy, 3 April 1939. IOR/L/I/1/604

Like Khaliquzzaman, then, the Aga Khan counselled acceptance of the British offer, and was apparently able to bring the representatives of the Arab states, including George Antonius, on board. However, and again in keeping with the objections raised by the Muslim League and the Viceroy prior to the Conference, the acquiescence of the Mufti of Jerusalem was seen as crucial to any accord. In the final analysis, there could be no calling off of the Revolt without his agreement, as all had tried without success to explain to the Colonial Office. That the job of convincing the Mufti was to fall on Egyptian shoulders is further indication of the leading role that country now played in regional diplomacy. The Aga Khan made plans to travel to Cairo later that month, in order to hold further discussions with the Egyptian and Arab delegates.

Thus it was left, at the end of the British Government's keystone conference on Palestine, to an Indian Muslim to negotiate with the Arab representatives, in a bid to secure the willingness of the Egyptian Prime Minister to intervene with the Mufti of Jerusalem, who had himself been purposely sidelined from the proceedings. With so many proxies involved in the negotiations, it was perhaps inevitable that the resulting agreement would be fraught with misunderstanding, and ineffective at achieving its stated purposes: namely, an end to the violence in Palestine, and a devolution of powers towards self-government within ten years.

Ports of Last Resort: Geneva, Milan, Rome

Although they were disappointed by the outcome of the St James' conference, Siddiqi and Khaliquzzaman were not yet ready to give up. They decided to travel to Geneva, in the hopes of convincing the League of Nations to take official action on the Palestinians' behalf. As Khaliquzzaman recounted,

> The Secretary General of the League of Nations looked sympathetic but expressed his inability to interfere in the Palestine affairs. From his talk we could see the League of Nations was a

> dwindling organization and was completely effete to save any nation from the clutches of powerful governments.[277]

Frustrated by the apparent impotence of these formal channels, the two men decided that the time had come for drastic action. "Taking a very great risk to our lives", Khaliquzzaman relates how he and Siddiqi then resolved

> […] to go to Italy to meet Mussolini to request him to send arms to the Mujahids of Palestine to fight the British. We did suspect that we were being followed by British C.I.D. but we did take the risk.
> We first went to Milan where through Mr. Shedai,[278] an Indian Muslim from Punjab, who somehow had great influence with the Italian big bosses, got a date for an interview with Count Ciano.[279] Entertaining great hopes we went to Rome but as ill-luck would have it, Italy attacked Albania a Muslim state and our interview did not come off.[280]

This account is confirmed by the research of Italian historian Renzo de Felice, who included a footnote on the incident in his 1988 study of fascist relations with Arabs, Indians, and Zionists.[281] De Felice describes a reference in the Italian Foreign Ministry Archives to meetings in the spring of 1939 in Geneva, organised by Shedai, between Siddiqi, Khaliquzzaman and R. Bova Scoppa, who was then serving as Italian Observer to the League of Nations (Italy having withdrawn from the League in 1938). According to de Felice, the archives indicate that Siddiqi was also in touch with Arnaldo Mussolini, the brother of the Italian dictator, at this time: "The two [Siddiqi and Khaliquzzaman] were in Rome during the first days of April, where Bova Scoppa and [Carlo Arturo] Enderle wished for them to be received by Ciano. We could not establish, however, if he saw them".[282]

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[277] Khaliquzzaman, *Only if They Knew It?,* p. 18.

[278] Muhammad Iqbal Shedai, an Indian revolutionary and anti-imperialist, became a consultant on Indian and Middle Eastern affairs for Mussolini's government. During WWII, he served as a propagandist for Italy's *Radio Himalaya* and was appointed 'Commissar' of the *Battaglione Azad Hindoustan*, comprised of Indian POWs.

[279] Gian Galeazzo Ciano was Foreign Minister of Fascist Italy from 1936-1943.

[280] Khaliquzzaman, *Only if They Knew It?,* p. 18.

[281] De Felice, Renzo. *Il Fascismo e l'Oriente: Arabi, Ebrei e Indiani nella Politica di Mussolini* (Bologna, 1988).

[282] De Felice, *Il Fascismo,* pp. 203-204 (footnote). Translation by the author.

Nor could de Felice determine from the Italian records the purpose of the meetings. However, the fact that Enderle—the Foreign Ministry official responsible for maintaining contacts with Syrian Palestinian nationalists—was involved, tends to confirm Khaliquzzaman's explanation: that the meetings were about military aid for the Palestinians. Surprisingly, and despite the existence of three separate files on Siddiqi and Khaliquzzaman in the archives of the Colonial Office, the British appear to have been unaware of the specific aims of the two men's travels in Europe. It seems they need not have feared so very much for their lives, after all.

Although Siddiqi and Khaliquzzaman's attempt to procure fascist arms to fight the British in Palestine was no doubt rather amateur, and in any event abortive, it is nevertheless significant, because it challenges the assumption that the Muslim League's level of ideological and practical commitment to the Palestinian Cause was minimal. Up until now, it has perhaps been easy for historians to disregard the Muslim League's statements and resolutions on Palestine throughout the 1930s, on the grounds that professions of Indian Muslim solidarity with the Palestinians were never translated into action. But the activities of Siddiqi and Khaliquzzaman in Cairo, London, Geneva, and Rome suggest that this is at least a partial mischaracterisation, and cast the impressive volume of League telegrams, letters, personal petitions, and resolutions on Palestine in something of a different light.

The Return to Cairo, March 1939

With their Italian adventure thus cut short, Khaliquzzaman and Siddiqi travelled to Beirut to meet with the Mufti of Jerusalem. Khaliquzzaman recounts this momentous encounter perfunctorily: "The writer explained to him his view on the break up of the Palestine Conference

and was convinced that the Grand Mufti was inclined to agree with him".[283] The lack of supporting documentation makes it impossible, of course, to assess the accuracy of his impression.

From Beirut the MLAs returned to Cairo in late April, where the Arab and Palestinian leaderships now reconvened for a post-mortem. A report of the meeting by the *Daily Telegraph*'s Cairo correspondent described "a conference of Palestinian Arabs and representatives of the Arab States, joined for the first time by Indian Moslems"[284]—but of course it was far from being the first time. The Arab and Indian Muslim delegates in Cairo that spring were, by now, quite used to one another's company.[285] Among the fullest accounts of the talks, which began on 29 April, are the minutes which were provided by 'Ali Maher to the Oriental Secretary, Walter Smart. They indicate that, during these talks—consistent with Khaliquzzaman's description of his and the Arab delegations' attitudes in London—the Egyptians sought to convince the Palestinians to accept the terms of the British proposals.

> The Palestinian Arab delegates represented that the proposed scheme does not carry independence to Palestine, which is what they have been fighting for. Maher Pasha replied it was independence within limits - he asked how many European states, independent in principle, are now really living under the protection of the Greater Powers? Has not Great Britain herself been forced to introduce obligatory Military Service under French pressure? Independence is a relative word.
> [...] He advised them to accept what is now offered. The mobs in Palestine have suffered tremendously from their rising, and its continuation meant the weakening of Arabs and strengthening and increasing of Jews—at any rate the present scheme is by far better than the present miserable situation.
> [...] Independence does not consist only in signing an independence agreement; it requires moral power, training in administration and readiness for defence. The present scheme will relieve Palestine from extermination and ruin; will revive it morally and financially; and will give the Arabs chances to be trained in administration. When the time for complete independence comes, they would be more fit and adapted to it. They are not called upon to sign any document, but simply to accept it—some of them would become Ministers.

[283] Khaliquzzaman, *Only if They Knew It?,* p. 18.
[284] Transcribed in Lampson to F.O., 1 May 1939. CO 733/410/16
[285] Having planned to attend, the Aga Khan was absent from the proceedings due to illness. IOR/L/I/1/604, Aga Khan to Zetland, May 18, 1938.

> […] Palestinian Arab delegates: If we accept, the Revolution will end.
>
> Aly Maher Pasha: Do you believe that Great Britain is unable to crush your revolution, with all modern satanic war implements and inventions? —Is it not better for you to come nearer the British authorities and get them to forsake the Jews? You would be in a position to carefully control immigration.
>
> […] Palestinian Arab delegates: The scheme proves the evil intentions of the British Government.
>
> Aly Maher Pasha: If you believe so, you have to convince us, Arab Governments, of your statement. The scheme is a declaration by one party and as such it is not expected that all the Palestinian demands are acceded to. However, it provides for Arab Ministers to join Government, for a constitution to be laid down in due course, and then the Ministry will become responsible to Parliament—all that is required of you now is to co-operate.
>
> Suedi Bey: As soon as peace and order are re-established, a Palestinian front would be formed; and in a number of years all the Ministers would be Palestinian—and there will be Parliament. All these are privileges which should not be ignored.
>
> Mohammed Mahmoud Pasha: The decision is now left to the Palestinians—but they should remember that in case of war (which is coming), and if the present scheme is not accepted by them, the situation in Palestine will be deplorable. The country will be at the mercy of military men who know of no mercy or clemency, whilst the Arab fronts will be too busy in their own internal affairs.[286]

What is perhaps most interesting about these minutes is what they indicate, only slightly indirectly, about the attitude of these Egyptian politicians regarding their own country's relationship with the British. At the time of the meeting, Mahmud was still Prime Minister; he would be replaced in August of that year by 'Ali Maher, the close confidant of King Faruq—and, as is apparent by his secret transmission of the meeting's proceedings to the British Embassy, a man eager to curry Britain's favour. Yet both Maher *and* Mahmud appear in the context of these talks as brutal pragmatists. They brush aside the revolutionary idealism and moral objections of the Palestinians, advocating instead cooperation with the British in Palestine's government. They appeal to the Palestinians to place their faith in the gradual transition of power through democratic institutions, and to welcome the opportunity to gain 'training in administration' under

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[286] 'Summary of proces-verbaux of meeting in Cairo of Arab and Egyptian delegates, etc., regarding Palestine', 17 May 1939. CO 733/4102

British tutelage. They suggest that, in this way, the scales will gradually be tilted in the Palestinians' favour. All of this resonates with the earlier speech of Khaliquzzaman in London, indicating something approaching a consensus in their assessment of Britain's habits and tendencies of colonial government. While from the perspective of the Muslim League, the 'tyranny' of democratic rule had placed the numerically inferior Indian Muslim communities in a position of perpetual disadvantage, Khaliquzzaman could see that the same logic applied to Palestine would have the opposite outcome, giving primacy to his coreligionists. He advocated cooperation on that basis. Similarly, Maher and Mahmud saw the creation of a parliament in Palestine as a vouchsafe of Palestine's future independence, under majority Arab rule. They appear to have agreed with Khaliquzzaman that, having created an institution, the British "then begin to worship their own creation".[287] As will be explored in the next chapter, this consensus extended beyond Mahmud, Maher, and Khaliquzzaman. The politicians of the Wafd, and Gandhi himself, also seem to have shared a version of this outlook, when they met in Delhi that same spring, and compared notes on their strategies for renegotiating British rule.

In the case of Palestine, however, the Egyptians and the Indians were ultimately to be disappointed by the inflexibility of the Colonial Office, which still refused to recognise the importance of the Mufti of Jerusalem to Palestinian and Arab acceptance of their new policy. In May, both Maher and Mahmud—the Egyptians spearheading the regional diplomatic effort to bring the Palestinians onside—petitioned the British Government to pardon the Mufti and allow him and the Arab Higher Committee to return from exile, as a gesture of goodwill. While Miles Lampson and the Foreign Office were open to the proposal, the Colonial Office rejected it outright.

[287] Khaliquzzaman, *Only if They Knew It?,* pp. 17-18

At the beginning of June 1939, an interview with Mahmud was published in *Al Jezireh*, a Syrian newspaper, in which the Egyptian Prime Minister poured scorn on the Colonial Office's intransigence and mismanagement of affairs in Palestine:

> He complained bitterly against the mentality of the British Colonial Office and said that its atmosphere differs greatly from that of the Foreign Office. He added that had matters depended on Lord Halifax the problem [of Palestine] would have been settled.
>
> Two weeks ago Mohamed Mahmoud Pasha was certain that the problem was on the way to being settled. His meetings with Sir Miles Lampson had made him very optimistic.
>
> […] Thus the Prime Minister has received with amazement and disgust the British Government's decision to follow the advice of the Secretary of State for the Colonies in preventing the Mufti from returning to Palestine.
>
> […] He [Mahmud] summoned journalists to his office and asked them to report on his behalf that he will not be able to advise the Arab governments or the Palestinian leaders to accept the British plan.
>
> […] He said that the policy of the Colonial Office will certainly be met with antagonism on the part of the Arabs.[288]

The reaction in the Muslim Indian press was remarkably similar. The Muslim-owned *Eastern Times,* for example, also zeroed in on the exclusion of the Mufti as a principal grievance in its editorial of 26 May:

> Has it not struck anybody as strange that the [Palestinian] Arabs—after all, it is their country whose fate is being decided—have not only had no hand in the framing of the scheme, but have even been not allowed to express an opinion on it? Moreover, whose accredited leader is to remain for ever in exile from his beloved country under that scheme? The Palestinian attitude to the British scheme may, however, be judged by its categorical and emphatic rejection on the part of Arabs of other countries like Egypt, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia, whose Governments were naturally and rightly expected to be on the side of moderation, and by the Indian Muslims, whose two representatives at the Cairo Palestine Conference on behalf of the All-India Muslim League have expressed their condemnation [of the White Paper] in no uncertain terms.[289]

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[288] CO 733/408/12, 'Extract from Damascus paper Al Jezireh', June 1, 1939. That this article was forwarded by the staff of the FO, without comment, to their CO colleagues, may indicate that the interdepartmental feud over policy in Palestine had not been entirely put to bed by the death of the partition plan.

[289] CO 733/408/13, 'Palestine: Comment in the printed press in India', May 26, 1939.

As it happened, they were not alone in their virulent condemnation of the British—more specifically, the Colonial Office—position. Lampson found himself equally wound up, following a conversation with Prince Faisal of Saudi Arabia at Shepherd's Hotel, shortly before the latter departed Cairo at the end of the final round of Palestine talks. The Prince was guarded and diplomatic with Lampson; when the British Ambassador expressed his hope that the Arab Delegates might find their way to supporting the White Paper, he "smiled rather wanly and said he hoped so too". But in his diary, Lampson attributed to Faisal what he imagined to be his true feelings, before revealing, in an uncharacteristically violent rant, that they were in fact his own:

> ...there is no doubt that he [Faisal] is bitterly disappointed and feels strongly and bitterly that the British Government have behaved very short-sightedly over the whole affair.
> Personally I agree with him, and I think it is a classic example of how totally unfitted the Colonial Office are to run a show having any bearing on foreign politics or world policy. Take, for example, their telegram on which I acted yesterday with the Prime Minister [Mahmud]. Just when the poor man was doing his hardest to win the Palestinians round to tacit acquiescence in our policy, in comes a huge hammer-blow from London saying that that is not at all what we want; that the British Government is determined to have no truck with the Palestinian Arabs and that they do not care a damn whether they agree to our policy or not. My immediate reaction on reading our telegram was: God help the British people if they are run in that way. For, what have we been working for over Palestine during the last years and months? Surely to get a settlement of an amicable kind and to get this festering sore healed up and disposed of once and for all? Whereas at the Colonial Office at home what preoccupies them is that they should have a 'case' with which to go to Parliament to show that they have not taken sides against the Jews. It strikes me as all too peurile and foolish.[290]

Conclusion: All for nought

The sources here described indicate that the Muslim League's political investment in the Palestinian cause was significant. The reasons for this had partly to do with a pan-Islamic ideology, and partly to do with domestic political competition with the Congress Party. In addition to warning the British government that the crisis in Palestine could result in a 'second Khilafat', the Muslim League also threatened that failure to resolve the crisis on terms favourable

[290] Lampson Diaries, 27 April 1939

to the Arabs could undermine Muslim loyalty to the British crown—a dire prospect given the mounting crisis in Europe.

Out of concern over this possible backlash in India, the Government of India and Indian Secretary sought to moderate the Colonial Office's response to the Arab Revolt, and insert Indian Muslim voices into the negotiations surrounding St James'. On the policy of partition, the position of British India in 1937 was thus aligned with that of the Foreign Office. In Cabinet meetings, Zetland and Halifax both opposed what they viewed as the more excessive tactics proposed for suppression of the Revolt, including airstrikes, and argued in favour of concessions to the Arabs, particularly a freeze on Jewish immigration pending the completion of a new commissioned study. Zetland also sought to ensure that the sanctity of the Haram precinct was preserved, resulting, in October 1937, in the failure to arrest the Mufti of Jerusalem, and his subsequent escape to Lebanon. Colonial Office bureaucrats, like Shuckburgh, Creasy and Downie, did not forget these perceived betrayals; but the new Colonial Secretary, MacDonald—appointed in May 1938, after the worst of the partition dispute was over—was less hostile to the India Office's position, and accepted to meet with Muslim League delegates, as well as the Aga Khan, on several occasions in the context of the St James' conference.

In their letters and meetings, the Viceroy, the Indian Secretary, and the Muslim League all tried to warn the Colonial Office that the exclusion of the Mufti of Jerusalem from the conference was inadvisable, on the grounds that his acceptance of the terms of any negotiated settlement would be vital to its implementation. This rationale was echoed by the Aga Khan, when he emphasised that his plan—to which the Arab Delegations had apparently agreed in London—hinged on the Egyptian leadership being able to bring the Mufti on side. In London in March, Khaliquzzaman

had sought to convince the Palestinians to accept Britain's offer; in Cairo the following month, Maher and Mahmud did the same. But by the beginning of June, having found the Colonial Office unwilling to concede the Mufti's return from exile, Mahmud was publicly declaring his 'disgust' for Britain's policy, and his inability to advise the Palestinians to accept the White Paper. This sentiment was apparently shared by Siddiqi and Khaliquzzaman, as well as the other Arab governments, and indeed by the British Ambassador to Egypt.

The Colonial Office's failure to include the Mufti of Jerusalem in the St James' Conference was an avoidable tactical error in Britain's attempt to resolve the conflict in Palestine in 1939. However, the efforts of Arab and Indian Muslim leaders to salvage the proceedings might still have succeeded, if not for the Colonial Office's determined refusal to countenance the return of the Mufti and the Arab Higher Committee from exile in Lebanon. What remains unclear, and perhaps impossible to know, is whether Palestinian and Arab acceptance of the terms of the 1939 White Paper could have significantly altered the trajectory of subsequent events in Palestine, given the devastating and transformative nature of the war which was, by June 1939, hurtling inexorably into view.

Chapter Four

Reaching between Worlds:
Nehru, Nahhas, and their movements

"I expect India's freedom to lead to Egypt's as well...to achieve this through nonviolence would have a profound impact on all Eastern nations."
—Mohanda K. Gandhi interviewed in Al-Ahram, *September 1931*

"...it would be to the great advantage of both of us to cooperate with each other as much as we can."
—letter from Jawaharlal Nehru to Mustapha al-Nahhas, September 1938

Welcome(s) to Bombay

On 8 March 1939, just as the St James' Conference was winding down in London, the RMS *Strathnaver* put into port at Bombay, en route from Tilbury to Brisbane.[291] Among the passengers who there disembarked were several members of the Wafd leadership, who had come aboard at Suez: Mahmoud al-Bassiouni, Ahmad Hamza, Ahmad Qasim Gouda, and Mahmud Abul-Fatḥ. Awaiting them on the pier was quite the welcome committee—two committees, to be exact.

The Congress Party, who had issued a formal invitation to the Wafd the previous autumn to attend its Session in Tripuri, had erected a large marquee, and assembled a crowd of party notables and volunteers to greet their honoured guests. Nearby, a smaller party of Muslim League representatives had also gathered to welcome the Egyptians. They were invited, and declined, to join the Congress members in their tent.[292] For the Egyptians, it was the beginning of what would be, at times, an awkward month-long tour of the subcontinent, being, as they were, the

[291] The same ship had been chartered the previous October to transport 1,000 British troops from India to Palestine, to suppress the ongoing rebellion.
[292] Gouda, Ahmad Qasim. *Marid min al-sharq* (Cairo, 1950) pp. 9-10

official guests of Nehru and the INC, but co-religionists of the rival Muslim League. During their time in India, the Wafd envoys met with Nehru, Gandhi, Jinnah, and many other national and regional Indian politicians from both parties. Throughout, they were also trailed by Indian intelligence agents, and officers of the Cairo city police.

Because of the coincidence in timing, and being somewhat out of both the Indian and Colonial Office loops, the Foreign Office interpreted the Palestine Conference and the Wafd visit as linked events. When word reached London of the departure of the Egyptian delegates aboard the *Strathnaver*, Vansittart commented, rather naively, that "if a settlement of the Palestine problem, satisfactory to the Arabs, is reached before this Congress opens, these Egyptians will not have much material for speeches".[293] He overestimated the importance of Palestine in relations between Congress and the Wafd, perhaps extrapolating from what he knew or had heard of Indian Muslim activists in London. Nevertheless, Vansittart was to be disappointed on both counts: the Palestine problem was not resolved to the satisfaction of the Arabs, and the Egyptians had no trouble filling their allotted speaking time in India—though Palestine was relatively low on their agenda.

This chapter focuses on the personal relationship between Mustapha al-Nahhas and Jawaharlal Nehru, beginning with a meeting at Alexandria in the summer of 1938, and traces the subsequent strengthening of ties between their respective parties. The Wafd visit to India the following spring was intended by both men to mark the beginning of closer collaboration and exchange between the leading nationalist movements of Egypt and India. As a result of the outbreak of

[293] 'Egyptian Delegation to Indian National Congress', marginal notes, 27 February 1939. FO 371/23363/758

war in Europe, this dream remained unfulfilled until much later, when Nehru rekindled ties with republican Egypt under the banner of the Third World movement in the mid-1950s.

Origins of Egyptian-Indian ties

Egyptian-Indian nationalist interactions dated to the first decade of the twentieth century, when students, journalists, and political activists from both countries began encountering one another in European capitals.[294] Mutual admiration between the Wafd and Congress originated in the early 1920s, as international press coverage of the 1919 Egyptian Revolution, and the *satyagraha* and Khilafat movements in India, ensured that Zaghlul and Gandhi were made aware of one another. A popular 1923 book, edited by Mohi al-Din Rida, and celebrating *Abtal al-Wataniyya,* 'nationalist heroes', included a chapter on Gandhi, as well as figures like Zaghlul; the only other non-Egyptian featured was Mustapha Kemal, later known as Ataturk.[295] In the the introductory essay by celebrated writer 'Abbas Mahmoud al-'Aqqad, Kemal was compared to Gandhi: "one is a hero, the other is a Prophet (*nabi*)".[296] This is demonstrative of the recognition and respect many Egyptians had for the Indian nationalist leader's devout religiosity, regardless of the fact that the Hindu faith could be regarded, within Islam, as a form paganism. In a 1934 biography of *al-ruh al-azeem* (the Arabic translation of Mahatma, or 'Great Soul'), by Fathi Radwan, the co-founder of Young Egypt, the author praised his subject as worthy of emulation by every Egyptian: "He fasted and gave up eating, his wife, clothing and a peaceful life to free his soul from his body".[297] The perceived authenticity, both of this 'Eastern' spirituality, and the way it informed Gandhi's struggle against British imperialism, was deemed more salient than the

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[294] Khan, *Egyptian-Indian Nationalist Collaboration,* pp. 29-30

[295] Rida, Mohi al-Din. *Abtal al-Wataniyya: Mustapha Kamil, Sa'ad Zaghlul, Mustapha Kemal, Mahatma Ghandi, Mudabbaja bi-Aqlam Uzuma Munshi Hadha al-'Asr* (Cairo, 1923)

[296] Qtd. in Khan, *Egyptian-Indian Nationalist Collaboration,* p. 113

[297] Radwan, Fathi. *Al-Mahatma Ghandi: Hayatahu wa Jihadhu* (Cairo, 1934). Qtd. in Khan, *Egyptian,* p. 120

theological differences between Hinduism and Islam. If this was the case for Radwan, it was equally or more true for secular, cosmopolitan Cairenes, like the Wafd's leadership and partisans among the *effendiyya*. Indeed, it is likely that some among them relished the exotic irony of a dark-skinned, 'half-naked fakir' forcing concessions from the British Raj. In Khan's words, "no Indian excited the Egyptian imagination more than Gandhi".[298]

A milestone of sorts occurred in 1931, when Gandhi traversed the Suez Canal aboard the steamer *Rajputana*, bound for the Round Table discussions then being held in London. On his journey to England, the British ensured that his ship spent as little time as possible in Egyptian waters, in the hopes of discouraging the famous passenger from disembarking and meeting his Egyptian admirers. Nevertheless, the Mahatma's short passage through the canal was met with front-page headlines in every major Egyptian daily. Nahhas sent him a formal invitation to visit Egypt, which was delivered to him onboard, and subsequently reprinted in the press. Among the articles published was a leader by Mahmud Abul Fath, of *Al-Ahram*, who boarded the *Rajputana* at Suez and conducted an interview with Gandhi on board. Asked to impart some wisdom to the Egyptian nation,

> Gandhi replied that true freedom did not come just from imitating the West. Noting that the Egyptians were also an ancient race, he said that he expected India's freedom to lead to Egypt's as well, and that achieving this through nonviolence would have a great effect on all 'Eastern nations'".[299]

While in London, Gandhi encountered another Egyptian admirer. Amine Youssef, a diplomat, had just received a summons from his government in Cairo, but was determined that on no account would he miss the opportunity to meet the Indian leader:

> After I had received the telegram recalling me [to Egypt] ...I ventured so far to disobey orders as to stay a few days for what I regarded as a very important purpose. Gandhi and the Indian

[298] Khan, *Egyptian-Indian Nationalist Collaboration,* p. 112
[299] Khan, *Egyptian-Indian Nationalist Collaboration,* p. 115

> Nationalist leaders were in London and I was anxious for many reasons to establish contacts with them. I saw Gandhi and had a very interesting talk with him for two hours... He spoke very highly of the late Zaghloul Pasha whom he considered the father of all Nationalist movements in the East, including India.[300]

Youssef also invited Gandhi to a reception at which he was to give a speech. Although the elderly statesman did not personally attend, he sent his son as an envoy. According to Youssef, the reception was attended by "a number of influential members of both the Indian and the Egyptian Nationalist Movements",[301] although he does not provide any details.

The excitement generated by media attention during Gandhi's outward journey, as well as ongoing press coverage of the Round Table discussions, likely had something to do with the much larger reception which awaited Gandhi on his return journey from London, aboard the *Pilsna*. While Nahhas was forbidden by the government from hosting a welcome tea at the home of Sa'ad Zaghlul, 'carloads' of Wafd supporters and officials, as well as members of the Egyptian Feminist's Union, travelled to Port Said to greet Gandhi and meet with him on board his ship. The Mahatma was said to have stayed up all night receiving his Egyptian admirers;[302] sadly, the leader of the Wafd was not permitted to be among them.

When Nahhas finally met Nehru in Alexandria in 1938, he began their encounter by describing how he had sought in vain to meet the Congress President's mentor years earlier. Nehru recorded their encounter in a letter to the Congress Central Committee:

> He [Nahhas] reminded me of the attempts he had made in 1931 to meet and do honour to Gandhiji as the great leader of the fight for Indian independence. He had arranged a great party in his honour at Heliopolis, near Cairo, and issued invitations for five hundred guests to it, but the then government would not permit it. He had then tried to meet him at Port Said. Again, the government would not allow him to go on board or Gandhiji to set foot on Egyptian soil. In this way all his attempts to meet Gandhiji had been frustrated and he could not convey personally, as

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[300] Youssef, Amine, *Independent Egypt* (London, 1940) p. 199
[301] Ibid.
[302] Khan, *Egyptian-Indian Nationalist Collaboration,* p. 116

> he desired, the greetings and the admiration of the Egyptian people to the people of India, through their great leader.[303]

Gandhi's 'visit' to Egypt in 1931 inspired a host of Egyptian journalists, politicians, and activists. Ahmed Shawqi, Egypt's most celebrated poet, wrote a long tribute in his honour. Three biographies of the Great Soul, all admiring, appeared in Egypt in the year 1934 alone.[304] Several Egyptian authors, including Mohi al-Din Rida, drew parallels between the Mahatma and Sa'ad Zaghlul.[305] The Wafd naturally sought to promote this perceived connection between their movement and that of Gandhi, the famed father-figure of Indian nationalism.

The first meeting: Alexandria, 1938

As the Wafd's political star began to fade following the signature of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, there was initially a turn inwards: a focus on internal problems, and an attempt to shore up support for the party among its urban constituencies. Ultimately, however, these efforts were no match for King Faruq and the coalition surrounding the Palace. As the Wafd was banished into the 'political wilderness' at the end of 1937, the Party's options and horizons expanded, as is often the case with political opposition movements. Freed from the constraints of the institutions of government it had until recently represented, the Wafd now became more vocal in its support for the Palestinians; for inter-Arab cooperation; and for alliances with other anti-colonial movements—especially the Indian National Congress. The Congress, which had been compared to the Wafd and perceived, in both Egypt and India, as an allied movement since the days of Zaghlul, had seen its fortunes improve dramatically, just as those of its Egyptian counterpart had nosedived, in the latter half of 1937. Congress had won a landslide victory in the

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[303] Gopal, S. (Series Ed.) *Selected works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, volume IX (New Delhi, 1972) pp. 11-12

[304] Mazhar, Ismail (tr.) *Mahatma Ghandi, Siratahu kama Katabaha bi-Qalamihi* (Cairo, 1934); Musa, Salama. *Ghandi wa al-Haraka al-Hindiyya* (Cairo, 1934); Radwan, Fathi. *Al-Mahatma Ghandi: Hayatahu wa Jihadhu* (Cairo, 1934).

[305] Rida, *Abtal al-Wataniyya.*

first elections held under the expanded franchise of the new India Act, and its members now controlled ministries in a majority of British India's provincial governments. Moreover, the party's central leadership—especially Gandhi and Nehru—were celebrated international figures on a scale Nahhas and his colleagues could only dream of.

It is therefore hardly surprising that, when news reached the Wafd of Nehru's impending arrival in Egyptian waters in June 1938, they leapt at the opportunity to host him. A private airplane was even chartered on short notice to transport him to Alexandria, where the political class had by then migrated for the summer months.

From Nehru's own description, it is apparent that the meeting was unforeseen and hastily arranged. Indeed, the Congress President had decided against disembarking from his ship at Suez (as was common), and intended to remain on board during the passage through the Canal:

> But three hours before reaching Suez, I received a marconigram from Cairo conveying to me the welcome of the Wafd Party and requesting me to get off at Suez and proceed from there by private aeroplane [...] to Alexandria, to meet Nahas Pasha. I decided to accept this invitation and cabled accordingly. But the time was short and my cable reached too late. So when I disembarked at Suez there was no one to meet me.[306]

Nehru managed to arrange for a car to take him to Cairo, where, late at night, he was finally tracked down by a representative of the Wafd, who booked him on a plane to Alexandria for the following morning. There he would meet Nahhas and several other party leaders, before flying on to Port Said to rejoin his ship. In the brief hours between midnight and dawn, Nehru managed to pay a moonlit visit to the pyramids, before departing the Egyptian capital.

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[306] Nehru, Jawaharlal. 'A Letter from the Mediterranean', in Gopal, S. (Series Ed.) *Selected works of Jawaharlal Nehru Volume IX*, pp. 10-11

His meeting with the Wafd the following morning was held at the San Stefano, a luxury hotel. Alongside Nahhas, the welcome committee included Makram Ebeid, party Secretary-General and former Minister of Finance; Mahmoud Bassiouni, former President of the Senate; Naguib Hilali Bey, former Minister of Education; and 'Abdul Fatḥa Tawil Bey, the former Minister of Health. As Nehru recounted, the formal meeting lasted for two hours, following which—in grand Egyptian tradition (and rather different from the more ascetic habits of Gandhi and his disciples)—they "had to consume an enormous and magnificent lunch for another hour". While it is nowhere indicated in Nehru's description, the conversation probably took place in French, which was also the language of Nehru and Nahhas' subsequent correspondence. Nehru did not speak Arabic, and Nahhas, like many of his contemporaries among Egypt's elite, was far more comfortable in French than in English. "I began," recalled Nehru,

> by conveying the greetings of the Congress and of the Indian people to Nahas Pasha and to the Wafd Party which had carried on for many years the struggle for Egyptian freedom. I told them how deeply we were interested in this and how we had followed it, as far as we could, for we looked upon it as part of the great world struggle for freedom. Between Egypt and us there were many other bonds also and our opponent was the same imperialism. Nahas Pasha reciprocated these sentiments and said that they had looked upon the Indian struggle and its leaders with admiration.[307]

In his letter, Nehru recorded Nahhas' description of the Egyptian political scene at the time, which was estimated as "very bad" for the Wafd, citing the Palace's dominance, supported by the British. He insisted that the Wafd maintained its overwhelming popularity among the *fellaheen*, but had been foiled at the polls by voter intimidation and the falsification of results (claims which Nehru took the time to verify with British and French sources). At the same moment, in India, developments were more promising for Congress: they had entered government in a majority of British India's provinces in 1937, following a sizeable victory in the first elections held under the new India Act, which expanded the franchise by many millions. Nehru was thus in a position to

[307] Nehru, 'A Letter from the Mediterranean', pp. 11-12

compare his movement and its successes favourably with those of the Wafd. His analysis of the Wafd's weaknesses and the causes of its present crisis were deeply perceptive, and worth quoting at length:

> I put it to Nahas that such tactics [as electoral fraud] had always to be faced by a nationalist or socialist movement struggling for freedom. Every device and method of oppression was employed by imperialism and reactionary cliques and vested interests. Unless the movement itself had sufficient strength, it could not cope with such tactics. Strength only could come from organised mass support. It therefore seemed to me that the Wafd did not have this organised mass support, for otherwise it would not weaken so rapidly because of Palace intrigues. He admitted that there was some truth in this although the Wafd was still very popular with the masses.[308]

Nahhas proceeded to explain his and his party's predicament to Nehru, vis-a-vis the British. There has been much speculation, both at the time and subsequently, over the nature of Nahhas' relationship with the imperial power in the post-Treaty period. However, the fact that Nahhas' private papers have not been made available, nor did he ever publish a memoir, mean that Nehru's account of his conversation with the Egyptian Prime Minister is among the few credible sources we have which sheds light on the latter's own perceptions of the relationship at this time. Nahhas depicted it as follows:

> The Wafd leaders had thought that with their treaty with Britain, the independence struggle had practically ended in their success, and they had thrown themselves enthusiastically into the task of preaching Anglo-Egyptian friendship. As a government, they became absorbed in the work of the government and neglected their organisation and agitational work. This ultimately weakened the Wafd and when the time for a trial of strength came, they were unable to rise to the occasion. They had been over-confident, too full of faith in the bona fides of the British Government, not in sufficient touch with the masses.[309]

Being "too full of faith in the bona fides of the British Government" was, of course, a regret soon to be shared by the Arab and Indian negotiators involved in the Palestine Question. But Nehru was more interested in the second aspect of the Wafd's miscalculation. Himself involved

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[308] Nehru, 'A Letter from the Mediterranean', p. 12
[309] Ibid.

with the political mobilisation of India's workers and rural peasantry, he understood the Wafd's natural alignment with Egyptian landowners and merchant classes as perhaps its fatal flaw:

> As a matter of fact it is quite clear that the Wafd Party, while it was in power, did little or nothing for the peasantry. They were afraid of alienating the big landlords as well as the palace… These big landlords put a brake on the Wafd's activities and at the same time organised themselves under the shelter of the palace, to oppose the Wafd. The palace succeeded in creating a split in the Wafd. One group started criticising the main party on the ground that it was not advanced enough and was too friendly to the British. As a matter of fact this was a ruse, for this dissentient group consisted chiefly of the big landlord elements and it has subsequently cooperated fully with the palace group and even, to some extent, with the British.
>
> The Wafd would not have been much affected by this if it had a powerful organisation behind it. But it had neglected this and thought of itself more as a government...other causes led to the defeat of the Wafd. But the real reason is the inherent weakness of the party. It is definitely an upper middle class party with a certain mass support but with no roots among the masses. Even the middle classes in Egypt have not grown sufficiently (less than in India); and such as exist are largely tied up with foreign interests. There is no real agrarian movement, no labour movement at all (trade unions are not permitted by law), and the whole outlook of the Wafd has been moderate and somewhat primitive.[310]

Nehru's assessment was largely accurate: the Wafd was, essentially, a liberal capitalist movement in terms of its leadership, outlook, and principal loyalties. Within Congress, Nehru—despite his bourgeois background and education—had been much more connected to and influenced by socialist movements and ideology. Thanks in part to his participation in Soviet-sponsored conferences (notably the Second Anti-Imperial World Congress, held in Frankfurt in 1929, where he met representatives from several Arab states, including Egypt), Nehru also came to perceive a deep interdependence between the Congress movement in India and struggles for independence occurring elsewhere.[311] In his autobiography, he described the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, in 1936, as a turning point in his consciousness: "in my mind, the problem of India was tied up with other world problems. More and more I came to think that these separate problems,

[310] Nehru, 'A Letter from the Mediterranean', pp. 12-13
[311] Krasa, *Relations,* pp. 215-216; 225

political or economic, in China, Abyssinia, Spain, Central Europe, India, or elsewhere, were facets of one and the same world problem".[312]

Summer of Internationalism

This internationalism was reflected in Nehru's 1938 travel itinerary. From Egypt he went to Italy (where he politely refused an audience with Mussolini) and on to Spain, then still in the throes of civil war. There, he met with Republican leaders and volunteers, and bore witness to the bombardment of Barcelona, expressing deep admiration and respect for the courage of the residents of that city and their resolute resistance to fascist terror.[313] Following a brief stop in Paris to record a radio broadcast, he then proceeded to London, where he remained for a month, taking meetings with—among others—a delegation of Palestinians.

For Nehru, and in the 1930s increasingly for his party, the struggle between the British, Jews, and Arabs in Palestine was important because it was an anti-imperial struggle; but it was only as important as all the other similar struggles then underway. This stood in contrast to the view of the Muslim League, which, as we saw in the last chapter, considered Palestine as secondary in importance, perhaps, only to the cause of India's Muslims themselves. But Nehru's comments on Palestine from this time make clear that, whatever the extent of his commitment to Palestine, talking about the crisis in the British Mandate was, for him—as indeed it was for Siddiqi and Khaliquzzaman—another way of talking about domestic politics in India. Thus while the Muslim League had insisted, in its treatise submitted to the Colonial Secretary, that Palestine was a matter of *Muslim* as well as Jewish concern, Nehru was adamant that the matter at stake was *not* religion, but the universal struggle against imperialism, and for national emancipation. To this end, his

[312] Nehru, Jawaharlal. *An Autobiography* (Delhi, 1985), p. 601
[313] Nehru, Jawaharlal. 'On the Morale of Spain', *The Hindustan Times*, 19 June 1938

speeches and letters from this period called again and again for Jews and Arabs in Palestine to come together to oust the British.[314] In this way, both parties reproduced their position on the political struggle for India, by interpreting the violent struggle for Palestine as, in one way or another, its extension.

Throughout the summer of 1938, Nehru and Nahhas wrote letters to one another. In this correspondence, we see Nehru's influence on the older man, and on the shifting political orientation of the Wafd movement. Thus the Wafd annual meeting, scheduled for November 1938, was envisioned by Nahhas, in his description to Nehru, as having "a wider Oriental stamp over and above its local character", with invitations issued to representatives from India, Palestine, and other "oppressed people of the Near East".[315] This was a clear break with the almost isolationist Egyptian territorial nationalism which had characterised the movement from the late 1920s until the mid-1930s.[316] Evidently, and in tandem with the changes taking place in Egyptian domestic and international politics, Nehru's frank criticism during their meeting in Alexandria, and his friendly advice since, had made some impression.

A second meeting between the two men took place in France that September, at which time they drafted an agreement for increased communication and collaboration between their political movements. Nehru wrote to Nahhas at the time that "there was so much in common between us and our respective national movements that it would be to the great advantage of both of us to cooperate with each other as much as we can". In practical terms, this cooperation was articulated by him as follows:

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[314] Krasa, *Relations*, p. 225
[315] Nehru, *Bunch of Old Letters* (Delhi, 1988), p. 292
[316] Gershoni & Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation*, p. 145

- The exchange of a weekly newsletter tracking political developments in Egypt and India, as well as economic, social and cultural news
- The exchange of party-affiliated publications
- The occasional exchange of delegations of party representatives (eg. to conferences and meetings)
- Participation by both parties in the same international organisations, so as to maintain high-level contacts and possibly influence current events
- Co-operation between each party's affiliated youth wing, and membership in international youth organisations such as the World Youth Congress
- The Wafd was to undertake to inform the Congress Party on developments in Palestine
- The Wafd was to support Congress in achieving the 'unity of the Indian liberation movement', both by serving as an example of anti-sectarian nationalism, and by its affiliation, as the principle nationalist movement in a Muslim-majority country, with the Congress party
- ...All of the above were to be underwritten by the maintenance of Nehru and Nahhas' personal correspondence.[317]

Certainly, it was an impressive programme for bringing the two parties into close communication, and synchronising their involvement in international fora. Perhaps most intriguing was the suggestion that the Wafd could serve as a model of Muslim anti-sectarianism for Indian consumption. The potential of this theory was to be tested the following spring.

Shortly after their meeting in France, Nehru, who was then back in London, heard news of the assassination attempt on Nahhas' life, and sent his condolences to the Wafd leader and his injured colleague, Makram Ebeid. He also received word of the Interparliamentary Congress on Palestine, which was about to open in Cairo. Concerned that the event appeared to be anti-Wafdist and pan-Islamic, he wrote to the Congress Party's leading Muslim figure, Abul Kalam, in India, seeking to warn him of the danger posed by the Interparliamentary Congress to the Wafd—a movement now firmly allied with their own. He also predicted, correctly, that the Congress Party's domestic rival, the Muslim League, would seize on the opportunity to send a delegation of their own to Cairo. However, Nehru drew too direct a parallel between his

[317] Krasa, *Relations,* p. 227

experience of Indian politics and the situation in Egypt, presuming that, as a result of its Islamic character and exclusion of the Wafd, the Interparliamentary Congress must, *ipso facto*, be promoted, however discretely, by the British. This was an exaggeration of the Embassy's wary tolerance of the event (though Lampson later wrote, with legible relief, that it had proved less vitriolic in its criticism of Britain than he had been braced to expect).[318]

At the same time, Nehru began making arrangements for a Congress delegation to visit Egypt in November, to attend the Wafd's annual meeting. When it became clear that this event would be banned by the Egyptian government, Nehru determined to visit Egypt of his own accord. He and his daughter, Indira, arrived in Cairo in early November, and remained there for about a week. By this point, Nehru and Nahhas were becoming personal friends; this was clear in a letter Nehru wrote to his daughter in the spring of 1939, when Indira made the journey from England to India alone. Nehru worried that war might break out in Europe while she was en route, and advised her that in case of such an emergency, she was to disembark in Egypt, and seek the protection of Mustapha Nahhas.[319]

'Wafd to India'

Meanwhile, Congress President Subhas Chandra Bose followed up on Nehru and Nahhas' correspondence with a telegram, formally inviting Nahhas to send a delegation to the Session of Congress scheduled for March 10, 1939 in Tripuri: "As leader of Egyptian people your visit will serve to strengthen solidarity between our two nations and will also be an inspiration to our countrymen. India will give you warmest welcome".[320]

[318] Qtd. in Badran, *Feminists, Islam and Nation*, p. 231
[319] Gandhi, Sonia (Ed.) *Freedom's Daughter: Letters between Indira Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru* (London, 1989) pp. 408-9
[320] Bose, S. K. & Sugata Bose (Eds.), *Netaji: Collected Works. Volume 9: Congress President* (Delhi, 1995) p. 284

"This invitation expressed the hope that Nahas himself would proceed to India", noted Oriental Secretary, Walter Smart, in a contemporary report from Cairo to the Director of the Indian Intelligence Bureau. "Incidentally", Smart continued, one senses, with an eyebrow raised incredulously, "Nahas considers that his prestige has received a 'fillip' by reason of the invitation being addressed to him as 'Leader of the Egyptian people'".[321]

Fillip or no, Nahhas did not ultimately travel to India. The Wafd representatives sent in his place were not particularly high-profile figures, a fact which did not escape the notice of either British officials or the Egyptian press. Bassiouni was President of the Senate at the time, but a relatively modest figure within the Wafd when compared to either Nahhas or Makram Ebeid, both of whom had originally been slated to attend. The official reason given for Nahhas' change in schedule was ill health; his detractors in Cairo speculated that he was in fact attempting to avoid upsetting the British. And indeed officials at the Foreign Office were not displeased with the amended guest list, noting it was "perhaps fortunate" that Ebeid's name in particular had been "dropped".[322]

There was, however, no denying that Bose was true to his promise that India would afford its Egyptian guests its "warmest welcome": the Foreign Office was forced to concede that "in spite of their personal insignificance the Wafd delegation seem to have been given a magnificent reception";[323] Congress rolled out the red carpet for their Egyptian guests. As they set foot on the pier in Bombay on 8 March, they were greeted by the secretaries of the Congress Party and

[321] Smart to Ewart, 15 February 1938. FO 371/23363/758
[322] 'Egyptian Delegation to Indian National Congress', marginal notes, 27 February 1939. FO 371/23363/758
[323] 'Wafd Delegation's visit to India', 8 May 1939. FO 371/23363/758

Congress volunteers; by pro-Congress Muslim notables; and by the wife of Bombay's Minister of the Interior. There was a large marquee erected near the port in order to receive these honoured guests, who, the Indian Government suspected, had been invited in the hopes of bolstering Congress' appeal among Muslim voters—a suspicion which Nehru's earlier letter to Nahhas seems to confirm. The delegation toured India for several weeks, under the watchful eyes of the Cairo City Police and the Indian Intelligence Bureau.

The tour first proceeded from the port in Bombay to Tripuri, where the delegation was met at the station by Nehru, and billeted in the Government Rest House. In the evening, the Wafd members were the guests of honour at the first sitting of the Congress Session, presided over by Jawaharlal Nehru. In his presidential address, Subhas Chandra Bose introduced Congress' honoured Egyptian guests:

> We are extremely happy that they found it possible to accept our invitation and make the voyage to India. We are only sorry that political exigencies in Egypt did not permit the President of the Wafd, Mustapha El Nahas Pasha, to personally lead this Delegation. Having had the privilege of knowing the President and leading members of the Wafdist Party, my joy today is all the greater. Once again, I offer them on behalf of my countrymen a most hearty and cordial welcome.[324]

The Cairo City Police detectives assigned to shadow the delegation described their reception at Tripuri in a dispatch to the Foreign Office:

> They were received with clapping and cheers for Egypt, the Wafd, Nahas Pasha and the Mission […] [Nehru] explained the significance of sending this Mission, which is the beginning of a close and continual cooperation between the two countries in the future, saying that the chief of the ties between the two countries was that they fight one enemy, Great Britain.[325]

In this connection, one particular irony of the tour was not lost on British observers: on the covering sheet of the police report, Foreign Undersecretary, P. L. Rose, noted with amusement

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[324] Bose & Bose (Eds.), *Netaji* p. 91. The author has so far been unable to determine whether Bose had met Nahhas in person, and if so when this took place.

[325] 'Cairo City Police Report on the Wafd Delegation's recent visit to India', 19 April 1939. FO 371/23363/758

"that in order to make themselves understood to each other Indians and Egyptians should have to speak the language of their common enemy and oppressor—English".[326]

Reports on the Congress Session vary widely between three contemporary sources: one from the Indian Intelligence Bureau, one, cited above, from the Cairo City Police, and one by delegation member Abul Fath. For example, Indian Intelligence claimed that at Tripuri, the Wafd witnessed Congress "rent by internal dissensions and, on occasion, in a state of uncontrolled uproar".[327] By this, they referred to the division at Tripuri between Bose, the sitting President of Congress who delivered the welcome address, and loyalists of Gandhi (including Nehru), who saw his approach to the British as unnecessarily confrontational. However, it may be closer to the truth to say that Indian Intelligence agents, well versed in the acrimonious character of Indian politics and always quick to give importance to divisions between local communities, *themselves* saw Congress "rent by dissension" and presumed that the effect on their Egyptian guests would be unfavourable. Quite the opposite would appear to have been the case, judging by Abul Fath's own account of the meeting. He waxed poetic about the 'two currents' of political thinking within Congress, and the ultimate victory of Gandhi's moderates over Bose's extremists. This outcome, which Abul Fath undoubtedly considered as positive and hopeful, was of much greater interest to him than the existence of these 'internal divisions'—a reality of political life with which the Wafd was only too familiar, and appears to have taken somewhat for granted:

> Gandhi's great popularity and influence delivered his victory over Subhas Bose, who had to step down and cede his place to another president. [This new president], designated by Gandhi, is at the same time his great friend and disciple: Babu Rajendra Prasad, who has contributed to the creation and strengthening of the soul of Gandhi's movement in Bihar.[328]

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[326] 'Wafd Delegation's visit to India', 8 May 1939. FO 371/23363/758

[327] 'Indian Intelligence Bureau report on visit of Egyptian Wafd representatives to Egypt', in Lampson to Halifax, 15 May 1939. FO 371/23363/758

[328] 'Memorandum by Abul Fath reporting his conversation with leading personalities in India', 14 August 1939. FO 371/23363/758. Translation by the author.

As for the Cairo City Police, their own description of the Congress Session dwelled on the sheer scale of the event, which clearly made an impression on law enforcement officials from a country with only a fraction of India's population:

> The number attending the Congress was estimated at 150,000. They covered the plain and the neighbouring hills and were all of the Congress Party. Loud speakers were used […] The audience did not sit on chairs but on mats, etc., laid down on the ground, as it was impossible to provide chairs for such a number.[329]

In a telegram to Lord Halifax, Lampson noted that he had been informed that "a secret meeting took place at Tripuri between the Egyptian delegates and some Congress leaders…it was decided that the All-India Congress Committee should henceforth be linked up with the Wafd Party of Egypt in connection with their political movements".[330] In the context of the letter sent by Nehru to Nahhas the previous September, this meeting may have represented a formal adoption of the steps Nehru had earlier discussed with the Wafd leader for closer coordination between the two parties.

The Egyptian delegation next moved from Tripuri to Allahabad, and then on to Lucknow, Delhi, Lahore and Peshawar—all northern Indian cities with large Muslim populations. Calcutta and Benares were also included in the original itinerary, but were eventually cut, apparently due to the "ill health of the members".[331] The stops on the tour all followed a similar format: large rallies or meetings, consisting of tens of thousands of Congress supporters, included speeches by leading Congress figures and the Wafd delegates, whose contributions were translated from Arabic or English into local languages. Inevitably, one or several teas or banquets were given in honour of the Egyptian guests, attended by large numbers of local notables and party officials. Throughout,

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[329] 'Cairo City Police Report on the Wafd Delegation's recent visit to India', 19 April 1939. FO 371/23363/758
[330] Lampson to Halifax, 15 May 1939. FO 371/23363/758
[331] 'Indian Intelligence Bureau report on visit of Egyptian Wafd representatives to Egypt', in Lampson to Halifax, 15 May 1939. FO 371/23363/758

the Wafd members were housed in palatial settings, where possible at a Governor's or notable's private residence. Letters between Nehru, Bose, and provincial party officials reveal that all of the expenses related to the fortnight-long tour—from first class train fares to luxury hotels[332]—were covered by the Congress Party, out of both provincial and national party budgets. In a letter from Bose to the party's General Secretary, he clarified that, when conveying news of the impending visit to Provincial Committees, "you will have to ask them to provide for their maximum comfort".[333] While this reflects conventions of diplomatic hospitality, it is also indicative of the importance placed by the Indian nationalists on this visit from their allies; this, and the fact that the itinerary focused on areas of the country which were predominantly Muslim, gives further credence to Indian Intelligence's claim that the tour was an effort to shore up Congress' support among Muslims.

Meeting Gandhi...and Jinnah

In Delhi, the Wafd was gratified by an hour-long audience with Gandhi. It was reported that "they spoke about their visit and the necessity of cooperation between Egypt and India, to fight their adversary and obtain independence". But the tone of the visit was in fact not very anti-British, beyond a few references to this common 'enemy,' for the benefit of the Congress masses. This was admitted even by the normally suspicious agents of Indian Intelligence:

> There is no reason to believe that the members of the Delegation indulged in any anti-British talk while in India, indeed it is on record that on one occasion at least they said that Egypt was on very good terms with England, and depended on England for military protection until she had built up her own defence forces.[334]

[332] Nehru to Bose, March 1 1939. Bose & Bose (Eds.), *Netaji* p. 190

[333] Bose to Ag. General Secretary 28 February 1939. Bose & Bose (Eds.), *Netaji* p. 285

[334] 'Indian Intelligence Bureau report on visit of Egyptian Wafd representatives to Egypt', in Lampson to Halifax, 15 May 1939. FO 371/23363/758

It was not only the visitors who spoke this way: Abul Fath later revealed that Gandhi had told him and his Wafd colleagues that in the event of war, Congress would remain loyal to the British Crown, in the expectation that Britain would reciprocate by granting India greater autonomy after the war:

> They do not ask for a very large measure of independence immediately; rather for the moment they aspire to a larger role [in governance], with promises that as soon as the global crisis has dissipated, they will be granted a greater independence.[335]

Nehru may well have disagreed with his aging mentor on this point of strategy; nevertheless, it did not fail to impress his Egyptian guests.[336] The exchange of views is also significant, for in it we see clearly that both the Wafd and the Gandhian current within Congress, in the spring of 1939, regarded their relationship with Great Britain in similar terms, as they contemplated the near-inevitability of a second global conflict. Neither party viewed that relationship as hostile or zero-sum; rather, these nationalist leaders viewed London as a partner in ongoing negotiations; the slow devolution of powers from Britain to Cairo and Delhi was perceived as tolerable, and perhaps about to accelerate—once the international situation had been stabilised. There was potential, too, in the coming war, insofar as Egyptian defences might thus be "built up", and India, with its vast Army, given the opportunity to purchase its freedom through service to the Empire.

While in the Indian capital, the delegates also met with Muhammad Ali Jinnah, leader of the Muslim League. The meeting did not take place behind their host's back: on the contrary, Nehru wrote during the tour that "we are trying to give them full opportunities of meeting the

[335] 'Memorandum by Abul Fath', 14 August 1939. FO 371/23363/758. Translation by the author.

[336] Abul Fath reportedly told the British Press Officer in Cairo that Nahhas had been "very impressed" by Gandhi's statement of loyalty to Britain in the event of war. Smart to Ewart, 5 May 1939. FO 371/23363/758.

non-Congress elements like the Muslim League".[337] The League, apparently, was less than enthusiastic: Indian Intelligence reported that Jinnah took the meeting "against his will [...] and did not mince matters in the expression of his opinion" regarding the Wafd's acceptance of an invitation from Congress.[338] Jinnah was far from alone in his "opinion", according to the same report: "generally Muslims recognised the Delegation for what it was, an instrument of Congress, and ignored it, or noticed only to sneer".[339]

While the Wafd was apparently unfazed by political infighting within Congress, at least some among the delegation were repelled by this deep sectarian rift between Hindus and Muslims, and the delegation had early on determined that, as guests of the Congress Party, they would not accept Muslim League invitations until all their official engagements had taken place. Much like Nehru himself, they placed the blame on British imperialism, which Nehru had observed had had much more time to settle in India than in Egypt, where British rule was a comparatively recent development. In *Marid min al-Sharq* (Giant from the East), a memoir published in 1950, Ahmad Qasim Gouda compared his two voyages to India: the Wafd tour in 1939, and a second trip in 1949, shortly after India achieved its independence, at the cost of the country's partition and the creation of Pakistan.[340] Possibly as a result of this context, and the unprecedented violent strife which had accompanied it, Gouda describes the communalism he witnessed in 1939 with particular scorn. He remembered the two separate tents awaiting his party in Bombay—one Congress, and one Muslim—and the dilemma faced by the Wafd, as guests of one party to this internal struggle, which "benefited the British in everything". "Because of it," lamented Gouda,

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[337] Nehru to Bose, 16 March, 1939. Bose & Bose (Eds.), *Netaji* p. 192

[338] 'Indian Intelligence Bureau report on visit of Egyptian Wafd representatives to Egypt', in Lampson to Halifax, 15 May 1939. FO 371/23363/758

[339] 'Indian Intelligence Bureau report on visit of Egyptian Wafd representatives to Egypt', in Lampson to Halifax, 15 May 1939. FO 371/23363/758

[340] Gouda, *Marid min al-Sharq*.

"Indians were delayed in achieving the most dear thing that nations seek, which is freedom and independence".[341]

In Lahore, meanwhile, the Indian Intelligence Bureau reported that Wafd members met with the Muslim Premier of the Punjab and his ministers, and surmised that "what was said [by the Indian politicians] was not to the benefit of Congress":

> One cannot help but wonder if the effect of Northern India was really responsible for the pruning of the further programme, and if the rather lame excuse [of illness] put forward was adopted because none better was available.[342]

It is difficult to comment on the merit of this supposition. However, the Egyptians do appear to have been faithful to their hosts, and evidently took their duty as 'model' anti-sectarian nationalists quite seriously:

> Press publicity, for which the delegation was responsible, was cautiously worded. Praise for Congress was constant and stress was usually laid on the claim that in Egypt there neither was, nor is, any minority problem, and that there, religion was not allowed to make National politics difficult.[343]

Phrased, as this passage was, almost as a direct retort to the Muslim League, it seems fitting to return to Khaliquzzaman, who was still bitter about the Wafd's tour of India decades later—despite having been, himself, in Beirut and Cairo at the time. In his autobiography, published in 1961, he claimed that, when they had met in Cairo during the Interparliamentary Congress in October 1938, Nahhas had promised to consult with him again, before deciding whether or not to accept the Congress invitation. Then, in his 1965 memoir, the Pakistani

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[341] While his anti-sectarianism was no doubt sincere, Gouda failed to acknowledge that his own country, supposedly absent the communal discord which had so horrified him in India, had yet, in 1950, to dislodge the British Army from their bases on the Suez Canal. Gouda, *Marid*, pp. 9-10

[342] 'Indian Intelligence Bureau report on visit of Egyptian Wafd representatives to Egypt', in Lampson to Halifax, 15 May 1939. FO 371/23363/758

[343] 'Indian Intelligence Bureau report on visit of Egyptian Wafd representatives to Egypt', in Lampson to Halifax, 15 May 1939. FO 371/23363/758

statesman complained that the next he heard of it, Nahhas had gone back on his word and agreed to the visit:

> After some more discussion [Nahhas] Pasha promised me not to send any delegation before my return to Egypt on my way back home. Inspite of it he sent a delegation…to advise the Muslims of India to surrender to the Congress.
> This unfortunate attempt on the part of Nahas Pasha gave the muslims a great shock and muslim India felt that they were let down by a prominent Egyptian Ex-Prime Minister.[344]

One may well imagine the elderly statesman's disillusionment, had he realised the full extent of the planned cooperation between his rivals in Congress and the Egyptian Wafd. At the end of their time in India, and despite the slight curtailing of their itinerary, the delegation sailed home, carrying a personal letter from Nehru to his friend, Nahhas. In line with the plan laid out between the two leaders, a Congress delegation was scheduled to travel to Egypt for a reciprocal visit in 1940.[345] But it was not to be. Within months, Britain, France, and Germany were at war, and, though at varying paces, the world would soon follow.

Conclusion: Competing visions of a post-colonial future

This chapter has re-examined the personal relationship between Nehru and Nahhas, as well as the Wafd's 1939 visit to India, expanding on earlier accounts of the ties between the leading Indian and Egyptian nationalist parties. In so doing, it has sought to elucidate points of convergence and distinction between the two movements and their leaderships, notably their shared commitment to anti-sectarianism, as well as the distance between their socio-economic visions and programmes. I have also sought to more fully account for the Muslim League's challenge to Congress, and the role this played in drawing the latter into closer collaboration with the Wafd, a nationalist movement from a 'Muslim' country, which nevertheless rejected

[344] Khaliquzzaman, *Only if they knew it?*, p. 30
[345] Khan, *Egyptian-Indian Nationalist Collaboration*, p. 127

sectarianism and boasted many prominent Copts within its ranks. This Congress hoped to present to Indian Muslim voters as an alternative to the vision propounded by Jinnah, Khaliquzzaman, and other Muslim League leaders, who deeply resented the Wafd's public alliance with Congress, and its perceived 'meddling' in Indian affairs. Finally, I have argued that Nehru's interview with the Wafd leadership in 1938, during which he critiqued the Egyptians' failure to organise themselves as a party of the peasantry and working classes, as well as his subsequent correspondence with Nahhas, made a tangible impact on the policies of the Wafd. This argument will be further developed in the next chapter.

Chapter Five

War between Worlds:
Demise of the Collaborative Moment

"This event, this blow, has put life into some. It has taught them there is something called dignity which has to be defended."
—Gamal Abdel Nasser, describing reactions among Egyptian soldiers to the 'Abdin Palace incident, 1942

"We suffered in the war but you didn't...we bore with this that we might be free."
—a Pathan veteran of the North Africa campaign to a British Indian interviewer, 1946

***"The East is working for the defence of Western culture"*: Cairo's anti-fascist artists**

In December 1938, a political manifesto made the rounds among Cairo's intellectual and artistic cadres. Opposite a large print of Picasso's *Guernica,* a slogan was emblazoned in bold print, in Arabic and French: '*Yehya al-Fann al-Munhatt / Vive l'Art Dégénéré* '. The text was an impassioned condemnation of fascist and totalitarian attempts to restrict artistic expression, in many ways epitomised by the 1937 Munich exhibition organised by the Nazi regime, entitled 'Entarte Kunst'—degenerate art. It read in part:

> [...] We consider absurd and worthy of the most perfect contempt the religious, racist and nationalist prejudices, under the tyranny of which certain individuals, drunk on their provisional omnipotence, claim to enslave the fate of works of art.
>
> [...] In Vienna, delivered to the barbarians, Renoir's paintings are lacerated; Freud's works are burned in public squares ... in Rome a so-called Commission of "Literary Improvement" has just completed its own dark work, concluding that it is necessary to remove from circulation "everything that is anti-Italian, anti-racist, immoral, and depressing".
>
> Intellectuals—writers—artists! Let us take up this challenge together. With this degenerate art, we are in absolute solidarity. In it resides all our hopes for the future. Let us work for its victory over this new Medieval Era, rising in the very heart of the West.[346]

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[346] Art et Liberté, *Vive l'Art Dégénéré : Manifesto du 22 Décembre 1938*. Exhibited as part of 'Art et Liberté: Rupture, War and Surrealism in Egypt (1938-1948)', at Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, 15 February - 28 May 2017.

Art et Liberté—al-Fann wal-Hurriya in Arabic—was no regular political organisation, and this was no standard call to arms. Centred on an intimate group of surrealist artists, writers, and intellectuals, the collective sought to contest fascism and imperialism, at home and abroad. In this sense it was both profoundly influenced by and connected to European surrealism, and distinct from it. *Art et Liberté* believed that Surrealism was, at its core, a call for social and moral revolution as well as an artistic movement. Writing in 1938, one of its leaders, Ramses Younane, called European surrealism 'a movement in crisis'. He criticised the work of Dali and Magritte as excessively premeditated, leaving no room for the uncontrolled imagination. At the other extreme, Younane saw surrealist automatic writing and drawing as too self-centered, and insufficiently focused on collective empowerment.

Younane and his Cairo collective called for what they termed Subjective Realism, in which artists deliberately incorporated recognisable symbols into works which were initially driven by subconscious impulses. One example of this technique was the depiction, particularly by some of the collective's leading female artists, of the prostitute—employed by generations of painters as an aesthetic subject. In the context of World War II, when British and ANZAC soldiers flooded Cairo, this normally romantic figure was subverted. The broken and deformed body of the 'woman of the city' became a symbol of feminist, anti-colonial, and social justice themes.[347]

Through the activism of its members, *Art et Liberté* was plugged into a transnational network of artists and intellectuals, spanning San Francisco, Santiago, Moscow, Paris, Buenos Aires, Tunis, Copenhagen, Beirut, Tokyo, Mexico City, and Martinique, where the *Négritude* movement lead by Aimé César was emerging around the same time, and similarly harnessed Surrealism to contest

[347] 'Art et Liberté' Exhibition

European hegemony.[348] Nor were its political convictions in any way abstract; the fascism, nationalism, and imperialism *Art et Liberté* sought to combat were all manifest forces in late-1930s Egypt. In May 1939, members of the collective protested a lecture in Cairo by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, a leading Italian Futurist. Georges Henein, one of *Art et Liberté's* founders and leading members,

> [...] disagreed with Marinetti and attacked the political endorsement that the Futurists gave to Fascism. Henein declared that such a position was not welcome in Egypt, especially just a few years after the Ethiopian invasion in 1935 [...] Henein criticized the nationalist, imperialist nature of Futurism, while celebrating the freedom of Surrealism and its status as an independent cultural movement.[349]

The altercation devolved into a street fight between anti-fascist and Futurist artists.[350]
The work of *Art et Liberté* was an early and powerful articulation of the dilemma which would be faced by many nationalists and political activists of the East during the Second World War. For leftists, socialists, and nationalists in the colonised world, the war between fascists and imperialists was counterintuitive, and the choices it presented them with were false: like "asking a fish whether he wished to be fried in butter or margarine", as the London councillor and Indian Independence activist, Krishna Menon, told a British audience in 1942.[351]

Throughout the war, in its journals, public events, and exhibitions, *Art et Liberté* fought against the dichotomies imposed by the war and the hardening of partisan attitudes it occasioned. Rejecting fascism, Soviet totalitarianism, European imperialism, and the narrow Egyptian and

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[348] 'Art et Liberté' Exhibition; Bardaouil, *Egyptian Surrealism,* p. 15

[349] Paniconi, Maria Elena. 'Italian Futurism in Cairo: The Language(s) of Nelson Morpurgo Across the Mediterranean', *Philological Encounters*, vol. 2 no. 1-2 (2017) pp. 174-175

[350] Bardaouil, *Egyptian Surrealism,* p. 22

[351] Qtd. in Khan, *Raj at War*, p. 176. This chapter makes significant use of Khan's 'people's history', which draws on an exceptional range of primary material in multiple languages. Khan's description of Indian labour organisation and urban industrial transformation during the war maps closely onto Zachary Lockman and Joel Beinen's account of contemporaneous processes in Egypt in *Workers on the Nile*. Her treatment of British and Indian elite experiences also bears a close resemblance to the Cairene high society depicted in Artemis Cooper's *Cairo in the War*.

Islamic nationalisms they witnessed cropping up around them, the artists, writers and intellectuals of Cairo's surrealist vanguard sought instead to promote internationalism, social justice, humanism—and other increasingly unpopular ideals.

Until now, this work has concerned itself primarily with documenting connections and interaction between Britain, India, and the Middle East. During the war years, however, due to the restrictions placed on movement, the censorship of mail and the press, and the increased scrutiny and suppression of nationalist activities, information about these relationships—and even whether they were maintained—becomes more difficult to ascertain. That being said (and in contrast to the late 1930s), the Second World War is among the most heavily researched subjects of the modern era; this chapter has benefitted from an exceptionally rich body of secondary literature. What these sources together make clear is that the war had profoundly important and comparable impacts on Egypt and India, specifically on the trajectory of relations between Britain and anti-colonial nationalist movements in both places. Thus, in addition to documenting those instances of Indian-Egyptian interaction for which primary evidence exists, this chapter also discusses the evolution of the war in Egypt and India in comparative perspective. In so doing, it nevertheless follows the narrative threads which have been developed in the preceding chapters toward a common 'terminus', in 1942. This chapter argues for the central importance of that year, as both signalling the end of the Collaborative Moment, and as the key to understanding the dramatic transformations which India, Egypt, the broader Middle East, and the British Empire itself, all underwent in the post-war period.

Diplomacy & declarations

As we have seen in preceding chapters, the multiplicity of international crises beginning in 1935 gave Britain ample cause to consider, and then reconsider, defensive arrangements for its empire. Updated plans to put Egypt on a war footing were drawn up in reaction to the 1935 Abyssinian Crisis, which in turn instigated the negotiation of the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, which then required the deliberation and elaboration of British strategic and defence requirements in near unprecedented detail. The implementation of these new defensive arrangements was then accelerated by the 1938 Munich Crisis and subsequent mounting tensions. Each of these events had the effect of exposing a potential weakness or blindspot in British planning, which Lampson and his service chiefs in Cairo then sought to address, often by appealing for additional men (from India) and materiel (from London). This had the effect of making Lampson, over time, among the most loathed of His Majesty's Ambassadors in the estimation of both Simla and Whitehall.[352]

Notwithstanding his unpopularity, however, Lampson might have been forgiven a moment of personal vindication when, on the eve of war in early September, the political and military apparatus he had fought so hard to engineer clicked, for the most part, smoothly into gear. Already by late summer, the Mediterranean Fleet was battle ready; Air Force squadrons were at their war stations; two battalions of reinforcements had arrived from Palestine; and the fixed defences at Suez had been manned. Air patrols and mine-sweeping had begun around Alexandria harbour, and the majority of British forces, with Egyptian support, had been moved to their forward position at Mersa Matruh, with the remainder concentrated in the Delta and Canal

[352] In the blunt appraisal of Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Pownall of the War Office, writing in the spring of 1939, Lampson's incessant requests for more troops rendered him 'a great fat useless beggar who would be better employed in doing his own job of keeping up British prestige in Egypt'. Meanwhile, in the comparatively genteel formulation of the Indian Viceroy, it was deemed 'quite evident that Miles Lampson has been very unnecessarily hot and bothered over his position in Egypt'. Morewood, *British Defence of Egypt*, p. 124; Linlithgow to Zetland, 21 October 1935, IOR Mss Eur D609/7.

Zone.[353] Upon the outbreak of hostilities, the government of 'Ali Maher acknowledged that, in the words of the Treaty, a state of 'apprehended international emergency' now existed, pledged to cooperate fully with its ally, Great Britain, severed ties with Germany, and moved immediately to sequester German property and intern adult males. Nazi party members were rounded up and interned in Alexandria, at the Italian School, while non-Nazis were held at the German school in the Bulaq neighbourhood of Cairo.[354] Martial Law was declared under the aegis of the Egyptian prime minister, enabling the censorship of the press, post, radio and telegraph, and Egypt's railways were placed at the disposal of the British army. A more orderly and complete transition to war could scarcely have been dreamt of in the ambassadorial bedchamber…with one rather jarring exception. 'Ali Maher, while professing himself eager—in fact determined—to accomplish it, spent the month of September avoiding, by increasingly acrobatic feats, an Egyptian declaration of war on Germany.

By the 2nd of September, according to Lampson's diary, Maher had already committed Egypt to a declaration of war, then retracted his commitment, then re-committed, once. Upon the receipt of a telegram from London containing the formal declaration of war, Lampson sought in vain to inform him and secure a synchronised Egyptian declaration, complaining to King Faruq that "I had been searching for his Prime Minister all over the town with complete lack of success, and he said so had he, and that he would chaff the Pasha unmercifully for getting lost at such a time".[355] When he did finally catch up with Maher, he was reassured that Egypt's declaration was to be forthcoming at the end of a Cabinet meeting to be held later that day. However, upon the conclusion of the Cabinet meeting, Maher came to see Lampson, looking "bedraggled and

[353] Morewood, *British Defence of Egypt*, p. 134
[354] Cooper, *Cairo in the War*, p. 45
[355] Lampson Diaries, 3 September 1939

harried".[356] He claimed that, despite having debated his colleagues 'hotly' for an hour and a half, he had been unable to persuade a minority of them to approve the declaration; and, he felt strongly, it was imperative that such a grave decision as a declaration of war be arrived at unanimously:

> Some of them were arguing that it was unnecessary seeing that Egypt was doing everything that we wanted and would continue so to do. A formal declaration, on the other hand, might invite German air attack when the whole country would round on the Government for having laid the country open unnecessarily to such destruction.[357]

Shortly thereafter, under increasing pressure from Lampson, Maher specified that the 'obstructionist' in his Cabinet was 'Abd al-Rahman 'Azzam, Minister of Awqaf (religious endowments), and suggested that the British attempt to reason with him.[358] Maher's account to the British may be usefully compared to 'Azzam's own recollection of the Cabinet meeting in question. In his memoirs, he claimed that Maher had not argued with his ministers at all; instead, he had himself declined to cast a vote, or even to give any inkling of his stance on the matter. For his part, 'Azzam had urged the Cabinet to hold out on a declaration of war in the hopes of winning concessions from the British. After the vote, he claimed that Maher had come over to him to register approval of his views, and had asked him to approach the British with his demands.[359]

It seems that 'Azzam's powers of persuasion were not insignificant. Unaware of Maher's aims in proposing the meeting, Lampson sent his deputy, Charles Bateman, to speak with 'Azzam, and admitted to being

> perhaps mischievously amused when, as the result, Bateman arrived shortly before lunch and showed me a record of his talk, backed with a draft telegram to the F.O. in which he has made a

[356] Lampson Diaries, 3 September 1939
[357] Ibid.
[358] Lampson Diaries, 2 [sic: 4] September, 1939
[359] 'Azaam, 'Abd al-Rahman. *Mudhakkirat* (Cairo, 1977), pp. 252-5

> complete volte face and is now practically arguing that we should more or less meet the Egyptian point of view .[360]

As it turned out, 'Azzam's principal condition for Egyptian entry into the war was a British undertaking for the revision of the Treaty upon its conclusion. This, he argued, would allow the government to present Egypt's entry into the war as the arrival of "a new era in Egypt". Maher, 'Azzam, and their Palace-backed administration were locked in competition with the Wafd for the mantle of Egyptian patriotism; the revision of the Treaty, or even a British promise to that effect, would have bolstered their claim to be the 'true' champions of Egyptian independence.

Despite Bateman's conversion, however, Lampson and the Foreign Office remained unmoved by 'Azzam's ultimatum. London went so far as to accuse the Egyptian government of tactics "savouring of blackmail".[361] The matter escalated; Maher requested a written communication from the British government clarifying that a declaration of war was, in its view, required by the terms of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. What he sought was a legal ultimatum, absolving him of responsibility for the country's entry into war, and pinning the blame instead on the architects of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty—i.e. the Wafd. Nevertheless, by the time the Foreign Office provided the letter in precisely the formula he had specified, Maher had found yet more reasons to delay an Egyptian declaration of war. There was, for example, no reason for his government to declare war on Germany, which posed no immediate threat to Egypt, he argued. If Italy came in, then Egypt would quickly follow. In the meantime, Egypt would cooperate fully with Great Britain.[362]

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[360] Ibid.
[361] Lampson Diaries, 6 September 1939
[362] Lampson Diaries, 8 September 1939, and Tripp, Ali Maher, p. 327

In this first of several stand-offs, Maher's strategy of empty promises, prevarication, and above all delay, was basically effective. By prolonging the period of time between the outbreak of war and a prospective Egyptian entry, it became increasingly apparent to Lampson and the Foreign Office that the symbolic value of the gesture had been lost; it would be clear that the Egyptians had been dragged in against their will. This being the case, there was deemed to be no obvious practical benefit to a declaration, as the terms of the Treaty were sufficient to meet Britain's defensive requirements. Thus, following a tense period of several weeks, British efforts to browbeat Maher into a declaration of war were dropped. Maher's manoeuvring on the question of Egyptian neutrality scored a coup for his government and the Palace, whose credentials as defenders of national honour were thus enhanced. However, by the same token, Lampson's confidence in him had been eroded. From the end of September, he was treated by the Embassy with growing mistrust.[363]

Most recent historical accounts have followed Lampson in attributing Maher's intransigence in the fall of 1939 to an affinity with the Axis powers[364]—or, as he then put it to the prime minister, of "keeping a foot in both camps".[365] More convincing, however, is Charles Tripp's argument, that Maher's refusal to declare war on Germany in 1939 formed part of his broader campaign to wrest mass popular support from the Wafd for his own Palace-backed government:

> No one yet knew what demands Great Britain would make of Egypt in the war [...] Nor did anyone yet know the physical destruction which war might inflict on the population of Egypt, but Axis propaganda and the fears of aerial bombardment had convinced many, not only in Egypt, that it would be devastating. It was 'Ali Mahir's intention, therefore, to avoid the responsibility for the hardship which war would inevitably cause, and to maintain the King's image as a champion of national rights, by granting the British only that to which Egypt was demonstrably committed

363 Tripp, Charles. '*Ali Mahir Pasha and the Palace in Egyptian politics, 1936-42: Seeking mass enthusiasm for autocracy*. PhD thesis, School of Oriental & African Studies (London 1984), p. 328

364 See for example, Cooper, *Cairo in the war*; Moorewood, *British Defence of Egypt*; Kolinsky, *Britain's War in the Middle East*.

365 Lampson Diaries, 16 September 1939

> under the terms of a Treaty drawn up largely at the initiative of the Wafd. In this Treaty there was no specific commitment to declare war.[366]

Credence is leant to this argument by, among other things, the repeated requests made by both the King and his prime minister for increased British reinforcements and arms throughout the early phases of the crisis.[367] Had they wished for an Axis invasion to oust the British, this persistent (and relatively effective) lobbying would have been counterproductive. It seems clear that Maher's desire, at this early stage in the conflict, was for the maintenance of internal stability and the robust defence of Egypt from attack; any other eventuality threatened his own grasp on power. It was only later, as relations with Lampson and the British government came under increased strain, and as an Axis victory over the Allies began to appear inevitable, that 'Ali Maher and his patron, Faruq, would seek to reinsure with the German and Italian governments.

Meanwhile in India that September, Britain's control of the central government meant there was little, if any, doubt that a declaration of war would be forthcoming once the British ultimatum to Germany had expired. But nationalist leaders, and Congress in particular, had anticipated some form of consultation with the central authorities, providing the opportunity for the country to be seen to enter the war of its own volition. The fact that the Viceroy, Linlithgow, brought India into the war immediately following Britain's formal declaration, without consulting any of the institutions of government in which Indian nationalists had, with some reluctance, been persuaded to participate, dealt a serious blow to the spirit of tentative collaboration which had developed since the implementation of the India Act in 1936. Much as 'Azaam had advocated for in Egypt, Congress pushed back against the declaration, in a written demand to the Viceroy that

[366] Tripp, '*Ali Mahir* , p. 327
[367] See for example Lampson Diaries, 30 August, 2 September, and 4 September, 1939; Morewood, *British Defence of Egypt*, pp. 166-167

participation in the war be contingent on a British commitment to Indian independence at war's end. "India," it argued, "cannot associate itself in a war said to be for democratic freedom when that very freedom is denied her".[368] The Viceroy would go no further than a vague commitment to establish a consultative group, and a suggestion that the India Act might be modified following the conclusion of the war. The Congress Working Committee issued a statement calling the Viceroy's reply "wholly unsatisfactory", and during the next fortnight the Congress-dominated provincial governments of Madras, Bombay, Bihar, the United Provinces, Orissa, and the Central Provinces all resigned in protest. Linlithgow suggested that these Congress administrations could be replaced by the Muslim League. It was a cynical threat, but it spoke volumes about the approach the Government of India would now adopt, which sought actively to stoke hostility between Congress and the League. As Linlithgow observed to Leo Amery, his new Secretary of State, "it is desirable if possible to keep the Muslim League together because of the post-war discussions, because it represents the only organised opposition to Congress [...] Nor do I want to risk a combination against us of Congress and the Muslim League."[369]

The outbreak of war did not so much stall the gradual democratisation of Indian politics, as trigger a retraction. In the new climate, it was announced, the adoption of the federal scheme of government laid out by the India Act, with its democratic reforms and devolution of powers, were to be suspended. In place of this governing legislation, the new Defence of India Act turned the formidable political, military, and intelligence resources of the state in on itself; press censorship, the seizure of property, and control over the distribution of food were all sanctioned,

[368] Gwyer, Maurice & Angadipuram Apadorai (Eds.) *Speeches and documents on the Indian Constitution 1921-1947*, Vol. II (London, 1957) pp. 504-505

[369] Qtd. in Low, Donald A. 'The Mediator's moment: Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and the antecedents to the Cripps Mission to India, 1940-1942', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 2 no. 2 (1984), pp. 148

as was any and all other action deemed "necessary or expedient for securing the Defence of British India, the public safety, the maintenance of public order, or the efficient prosecution of the war".[370] As in Egypt, it would take time—years—for this hardening of the state's arteries to run its course; nevertheless, within weeks, the outbreak of war had exercised a chilling effect on India's fledgling democratic institutions.

The Phoney War

Despite this fact, initially, in both countries, the declaration of war and several weeks of nervous suspense were followed, for many people, by a return to relative normalcy. In Egypt, this was largely the result of the fact that Mussolini hedged, and did not come in, inventing the category of 'non-belligerent' to save Italy the shame of neutrality—not unlike Maher, who settled on declaring Egypt 'en État de Siège.' The fleet, the troops, and all of Egypt's defences had been in a state of full preparedness in September 1939, but they were not immediately needed—and their status was soon downgraded, as men and munitions were called up for duty on active fronts in Europe. In Cairo, after a spell of terrible, collective attention to the radio news bulletins, the coffeehouse patrons returned to their backgammon, and switched the receiver back to Umm Kulthum.

As food rationing came into effect in Britain, Egypt and India remained, for a time, less affected; local produce was plentiful, and Britain continued to export some goods it rationed at home, in order to shore up trade deficits. One particularly bizarre, yet telling, example of the new disparity between colony and metropole was the costly odyssey reportedly undertaken by jars of orange marmalade. Oranges from the Middle East were shipped to Britain, where they were made into

[370] Defence of India Act, 1939, p. 10

marmalade, which was then exported for resale. But British soldiers in the Middle East and India were receiving letters from home describing the hardships of rationing, including the difficulty of procuring marmalade. Marmalade was readily available for paying customers in Cairo and Bombay; and so well-meaning soldiers sent the jars back to their loved ones in Britain, bringing the tally to three long distance wartime sea voyages on which space was taken up in the name of citrus jam.

According to Artemis Cooper, even after the fall of France and the onset of the Blitz in 1940—as Britain escalated the rationing of basic foodstuffs, cloth, and paper— European Cairo remained innocent of the war's privations:

> In the large department stores like Cicurel's, Chemla's or Le Salon Vert, business carried on as usual with lavish displays of glass, crockery, fabrics and cosmetics. Groppi's, the most famous cafe in Cairo, was fragrant with the smell of roasting coffee and fresh pastry cooked in clarified butter. In Shepherd's Hotel, the stocks of decent hock and champagne did not run out till 1943.[371]

For India's European community and elite populations, the picture was much the same. The residents of Buckingham Palace had been issued with ration books, but in Orissa, an Indian Civil Servant, Ian Hay Macdonald, was confessing to his family that he felt himself as "cut off" from the war as a spectator in the stands at a stadium, "watching some game or another": "we get as much butter and bacon as we want etc. and there is no shortage of British goods, all sent out presumably to keep up the export trade...I must say I have had bad attacks of conscience at the easy life we lead".[372]

Of course, the reality for the majority of Egyptians and Indians was rather different. The disruption caused to shipping and loss of foreign markets did make themselves felt, as did a spike

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[371] Cooper, *Cairo in the War*, pp. 4-5

[372] Qtd. in Khan, *Raj at War*, pp. 2-3

in prices; Beinen & Lockman note that a wave of layoffs in late 1939 were particularly hard on labourers in Egypt's ports, printing, and textile industries.[373] But for many in the working and middle classes, the war also signalled economic opportunity. The precise dislocation of trade which was initially damaging to some local industries provided an opening for others, and in both Egypt and India, large scale industrial manufacturing would mushroom during the war years. The presence of large numbers of foreign troops, beginning in 1940, expanded the market for these goods temporarily—but drastically. This process was encouraged by the British military bureaucracy, which was in dire need of supplies that could be obtained far more cheaply and efficiently through local manufacturing than importation. In Cairo, the Middle East Supply Centre was established to coordinate the local production and procurement of goods required by troops throughout North Africa, the Levant, and Mediterranean theatres.[374] These efforts drew heavily on Indian manufacturers, which were also pressed into service to supply the Indian Army, causing lucrative government contracts to multiply—and with them, jobs. By 1943, India was producing the equivalent quantity of war materiel as Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa combined; manufacturing employment increased by one third.[375]

The transformation of Egypt and India into increasingly industrialised economies as a response to the onset of war also resulted in the emergence of complex new dynamics within their respective nationalist movements. Particularly in Egypt, and aided by the abolition of the Capitulations under the terms of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, capital which had been concentrated in foreign hands for over a century now began to flow into native coffers. At the forefront of this trend were the Misr, 'Abbud, and Yahya groups, and these names became

[373] Beinen & Lockman, *Workers on the Nile*, p. 237
[374] Ibid. p. 258
[375] Khan, *Raj at War*, p. 84; 86

synonymous with patriotic Egyptian industry, "manifestations of Egypt's struggle for economic independence".[376] At the same time, their close economic interdependence with the imperial power and the allied war effort would have been difficult for many nationalists to ignore. In India, too, leaders of industry allied with Congress found themselves in an increasingly precarious position, as they sought to reconcile support for (and profit from) the British war effort with loyalty to the nationalist cause. As positions hardened on both sides, the search for common ground between the Empire and the nationalists grew bleak. Ghanshyam Das Birla, a leading Indian industrialist, Congress supporter, and longtime friend of Gandhi, was horrified in 1940 by the announcement of a satyagraha campaign against India's involvement in the war, protesting to Gandhi that their beloved movement was "going the wrong way".[377]

Enter the Army of India

But whatever Congress' direction in 1940, Indian soldiers were headed west. The first reinforcements to reach Cairo, in August 1939, were from Force Heron. Ironically, given all that had come before, in the months prior to its departure, the Indian Army proposed, for purely logistical reasons, to substitute several British battalions in Force Heron for its Indian battalions.[378] This would have had the effect of transforming Heron from a 'mixed' force, comprising British and Indian troops, into a purely British one—just as Lampson had long desired. The War Office balked at this suggestion, as it would have significantly increased the cost of financing Force Heron's stay in Egypt:

> Ancillary units in Egypt are inadequate to maintain the purely British force which you propose nor can we provide the necessary increases. It is therefore most important that Force Heron should remain mixed and contain its own ancillary units for Indian portion as already arranged.[379]

[376] Beinen & Lockman, *Workers on the Nile*, pp. 258-259
[377] Khan, *Raj at War*, p. 85
[378] Commander in Chief, India, to War Office, 11 January 1939. WO186/2018A
[379] War Office to Commander in Chief India, 13 January 1939. WO186/2018A

The return cipher from India was dutiful: “In accordance with your wishes we will cancel plan to send all-British force and proceed (?forthwith) with arrangements for despatching Force Heron composed as in scheme dated 5th September”.[380] A summary of the force composition followed, indicating that out of 6,000 men, roughly two-thirds of the troops and one quarter of the officers were to be Indian. Given that these arrangements were hashed out directly between the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army and the Director of Military Operations & Intelligence in London, it is unlikely that Lampson ever knew how close he had come to obtaining the “exclusively British” force he had so persistently requested. But with war looming ever more prominently on the horizon, by the time of Heron’s despatch, the British Ambassador was more than willing to welcome reinforcements of any description whatever.[381]

While initial planning had Force Heron and its equipment travelling to Egypt by maritime convoy, in the lead-up to war Italy’s presence in East Africa created uncertainty about the safety of British shipping in the Red Sea, and it was deemed “undesirable” to literally test the waters using boatloads of British troops.[382] Thus Heron set out from Bombay to Basra, and then travelled overland via the ‘desert road’ between Baghdad and Haifa;[383] further reinforcements followed in October. Ultimately, some 31,000 Indian soldiers would serve in the Middle East and North Africa during World War II. In contrast to their Australian fellows—who were initially refused billeting by the Egyptian government, on account of their infamous hooliganism during World War I[384]—many if not most of these Indian soldiers spent at least some of the war based

[380] Commander in Chief, India, to War Office, 19 January 1939. WO186/2018A
[381] Morewood, *British Defence of Egypt*, pp. 124-125
[382] Commander in Chief, India, to War Office, 7 January 1939. WO186/2018A
[383] Chiefs of the Imperial General Staff Tour of Egypt & Palestine. WO186/2018A
[384] Cooper, *Cairo in the War,* p. 46

in and around Allied Headquarters in Cairo; the 4th and 5th Indian Infantry divisions were to become famous for their celebrated roles in the East Africa campaign, and the Desert War.[385]

In March of 1940, the Indian and Commonwealth troops in Cairo were joined by top military brass from Indian Army Headquarters in Simla; commanders of the British army, navy, and air force; and liaison officers from M.I.6. and Indian Military Intelligence. The Cairo Conference was called to coordinate a major joint operation between General Headquarters Middle East, and the Army of India, to secure the oil refinery at Abadan in southern Iran. The Persian oil fields and their refinery, which belonged to the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, were thought to be a major target of German war planners. They certainly deserved to have been: in 1940, Abadan produced 8 million tonnes of oil, on which the Allied forces in the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean were almost exclusively reliant. Moreover, the 'Battle of the Atlantic' meant that, were the oilfields captured by Germany, the fuel could not be substituted with American supplies.[386]

The scope of the operation as drawn up in Cairo that spring gives some indication of how vitally important Abadan was considered to be by Allied commanders. A joint India-Middle East reconnaissance mission was ordered to Basra, just across the border from Abadan in south-eastern Iraq, to prepare for the arrival of Force Herring, consisting of three divisions, or 75,000 men. The advance force establishing camp was ordered to ensure that the base and provisions were sufficient to accommodate double that number.[387] Intelligence units from Middle East H.Q. in Cairo and Indian Intelligence were to play a crucial role in the operation, as Iran, a neutral country, was thought to be a hotbed of German intrigue. M.I.6. had previously delineated

[385] Khan, *Raj at War*, pp. 35-36
[386] Kolinsky, *Britain's War*, p. 182
[387] Cairo Conference : Agreed instructions to the reconnaissance party. IOR QWS/1/442

its sphere of operational responsibility with Indian Intelligence along a north-south axis running through Tehran; but at the conference, it was suggested that these perimeters might be altered, to account for the fact that Force Herring, though consisting of Indian Army troops, and operating east of Tehran, was to be under the command of Middle East H.Q.[388]

However, before Force Herring could be operationalised in any meaningful way, planning in Cairo and Simla was overtaken by events in Europe. Between May and June, Hitler's lightning invasion of western Europe, followed by the dramatic Allied evacuation at Dunkirk and the surrender of France, shocked the world—and utterly transformed the nature of the war.

Exit France / Enter Italy

The fall of France was greeted with stunned incredulity in Cairo, where French language and culture, not to mention social and familial links, remained pervasive among the upper echelons of society up until the 1950s. As depicted by one of their own, the academic and government minister, Magdy Wahba, francophone Cairo was "a complex diversity of people, cutting through race, community, nationality, and religion", which embraced a cross-section of Egypt's elite and aspirational classes:

> ...the banks and cotton houses, the vast majority of foreign schools [...] the department stores, the Suez Canal Company, the majority of the press (including the editors of Arabic papers), the eligible young girls of all communities who expected brilliant marriages, the habitués of the tea-rooms and restaurants, the young cinema industry, the legal profession, the better-class brothels, the hotels, the tram and metro inspectors, the learned societies, the Antiquities Service, and naturally the French community itself—all were French speaking.[389]

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[388] Minutes of the Final Middle East-Indian Conference held in Cairo, 5 March 1940. IOR QWS/1/442

[389] Wahba, Magdi. 'Cairo Memories', *Encounter* (May 1984) p. 76

To be part of this world, Wahba felt, "was to think of Cairo as home, but to believe that Paris was the navel of the world".[390] For many in the Egyptian capital, news of the evacuation at Dunkirk hit like a bombshell. Military defences, which had been relaxed after the initial excitement of the previous summer, were once again placed on high alert. Thousands of children began to be evacuated from Alexandria, as the threat of aerial bombardment loomed.

For those at Allied Headquarters in Cairo, as for their superiors in London, the surrender of France was an unmitigated disaster. The loss of access to French naval and air bases in Tunisia, Algeria, and Syria scuppered operational arrangements in the Mediterranean and months of planning. Worse, the terms of the French surrender left the door open for these positions, and the ships, airplanes, and troops that went along with them, to fall into German hands. To prevent this, on 3 July the British launched an international effort to either take over or destroy ships of the French fleet. In Britain itself, submarines and ships were boarded without warning. At Mers el Kebir in Algeria, negotiations between British and French naval officers failed, resulting in a massive British attack on the harbour, sinking one French battleship, damaging five others, and killing almost 1,300 French servicemen.

In Alexandria, excellent relations between Admiral Godfroy, commander of the French ships known as Force X, and his British counterpart, Admiral Cunningham, initially yielded an amicable internment. But news of the attack at Mers el Kebir drained Godfroy's goodwill. His ships were ordered to ready for departure, and he renounced his commitments to Cunningham. In a desperate attempt to avoid a naval engagement in Alexandria harbour, Cunningham had large placards drawn up listing the terms of a generous offer, and floated them out on boats

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[390] Ibid.

around Godfroy's ships. The men and officers were in favour of the terms, and Godfroy relented. For the next two years, until Godfroy defected to the Free French in May 1943, the men of Force X were paid by the British to stay out of the fighting, and were treated with special consideration.[391] This became a source of considerable tension as, in the months following the French surrender, Egypt became a magnet for French soldiers wishing to fight on under De Gaulle. That summer, after a harrowing trek through the desert, roughly 1,000 deserters of the French Army of the Levant arrived in Cairo to fight for the Allies. General Georges Catroux, the first French commander to pledge allegiance to De Gaulle, arrived in the city in October with his wife, and moved into a flat in Zamalek. The French of Egypt were among the first expatriate communities to rally to De Gaulle, although senior diplomats towed the Vichy line. The hostility between Vichy and Free French elements in Egypt was explosive; there were street fights between the men of Force X and supporters of De Gaulle in Alexandria.[392]

Within a week of Dunkirk, Mussolini had entered the war on the side of the Axis, eager to claim a portion of the spoils of war. For years, Mussolini's principal geostrategic aim had been to provide Italy with access to the oceans, which was, in his estimation, the only way to ensure Italian status as a great power. But France's capitulation to the Nazis in June protected her territorial integrity and her empire abroad, essentially removing those morsels from the table. This was a disappointment for the Duce, who had drawn up armistice terms stipulating the cession of Corsica, Nice, and Tunisia to Italy. Following the French surrender, Arielli observes, "the only prizes Mussolini could still gain, which would ensure Italy's path to the oceans, had to

[391] Godfroy, Robert E. *L'aventure de la Force X à Alexandrie 1940-1943* (Paris, 1953).
[392] Cooper, *Cairo in the War*, pp. 50-51

come at the expense of the British Empire, or the independent states of the Middle East, or both".[393] Now, the sense of threat to Egypt itself became palpable.

For Egypt, a British war with Germany was one thing; war with Italy was quite another. To begin with, there had been fewer than 1,000 Germans in Egypt in 1939; by contrast, there were at least 58,000 Italians, of whom 15,000 had been born in Egypt. While this large community, concentrated in Cairo and Alexandria, were not all card-carrying fascists, a contemporary British intelligence assessment noted that it was "unhealthy" for Italians in Egypt to express anti-fascist views.[394] In terms of physical geography, Germany had no colonies or known territorial objectives in the vicinity of the Eastern Mediterranean; Mussolini's forces were on Egypt's door in Libya, and could control access to the Red Sea, as well as the headwaters of the Blue Nile in Ethiopia, on which Egypt's fresh water supply depended. Finally, Mussolini and his supporters had made little effort to disguise their goal of reconstituting the Roman Empire in North Africa, with Egypt at its heart.

By the time of Italian entry into the war in June 1940, the political sands in Egypt were beginning to shift. The fall of France appeared to spell disaster for the Allies, and many believed that British defeat was imminent. In this context, 'Ali Maher sought to signal to the Italians that his government was only fulfilling its commitments to the British under duress, and bore the Axis no ill will. This was the message passed on from the Egyptian Minister in Rome to Ciano, the Fascist foreign minister, that spring, when he hinted at Egyptian neutrality in the event of Italian entry.[395] Following the Italian declaration of war, Maher dragged his feet on internments. A week

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[393] Arielli, *Fascist Italy*, pp. 164-165
[394] 'Situation regarding Italian nationals in Egypt and steps for their control in Emergency', January 1939. WO186/2018A
[395] Tripp, *'Ali Maher*, p. 335

after the outbreak of hostilities, the staff of the Italian legation were still at liberty in Cairo;[396] following the bombardment of Egyptian Army positions in the Western Desert by Italian war planes, Maher stated that he viewed the attacks as "border incidents which can be settled by diplomatic means".[397]

The predicament of Cairo in the spring of 1940 is perhaps most starkly illustrated by Maher's attempt to declare it, in the midst of the German invasion of France and the Low Countries, an Open City.[398] This legal category of war implies that a metropolis has abandoned all defensive efforts. It is intended to rescue built up areas, with large civilian populations, public works, and important material culture, from being destroyed at the hands of an advancing army. That the Egyptian Prime Minister sought to issue a proclamation to this effect is in many ways understandable, given the well-publicised devastation then being wrought on Europe by the German Luftwaffe. In parliament, during a heated debate, Maher shot back at a critic—his brother, Ahmad—that, given the negligible impact the Egyptian Army would have on the outcome, a declaration of war would be purely symbolic, but "bring ruin on the 16 million inhabitants" of the country.[399] The problem, of course, was that Cairo, far from having abandoned its defences, was serving as the military headquarters of Allied operations in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Eastern Mediterranean. From the perspective of Middle East HQ, there could be no question of an Open City in Egypt. As the British in Cairo watched with horror the collapse of Western Europe's defences, the mounting evidence of Maher's intransigence and overtures to the enemy became intolerable. On 17 June, a week after Italy's declaration of war, Lampson visited King Faruq and demanded the removal of the prime

[396] Kolinsky, *Britain's War in the Middle East,* p. 127
[397] Tripp, *'Ali Maher*, pp. 336-337
[398] Cooper, *Cairo in the War*, p. 47
[399] Tripp, *'Ali Maher*, p. 336 (footnote).

minister. Failure to comply, he intimated, would require that the matter be taken up with General Wavell, the Commander in Chief of Middle East Forces[400]—the threat was only 'implicit' in a very technical sense.

Caught off guard by such an unvarnished ultimatum, Faruq and 'Ali Maher played for time. The King, who had received a cordial letter from the British monarch at the outset of the war, now wrote back complaining of Lampson's interference. Maher, for his part, sought on the one hand to placate the British, by finally giving orders for the internment of the Italian Legation and Fascist party members. On the other hand, he attempted to balance this show of compliance with a threat of his own: that, in an imagined echo, perhaps, of the 1919 Revolution, the ouster of his government would have the effect of uniting the Egyptian people behind him, in staunch opposition to the British. To this end, he orchestrated a popular demonstration in his own honour.

These moves backfired. King George VI replied to King Faruq expressing full confidence in his Ambassador, and support for his demand. Lampson had seen enough from Maher and was supremely uninterested in any last-minute peace offerings. Most damning, however, was the meager support the prime minister was able to muster even from his own colleagues, let alone the Egyptian street. He discovered himself to have been more dispensable to the political process than he had believed; and was forced to resign on 22 June.[401]

Recognising the need for a government with authentic popular support which could also be relied upon to resist the Axis' propaganda, Lampson had called for the reinstatement of the Wafd

[400] Kolinsky, *Britain's War in the Middle East,* p. 127
[401] Tripp, *'Ali Maher*, p. 342

under Nahhas. At this, Faruq balked; he was well aware that the return of Nahhas would also usher in renewed attempts to curb his prerogative as sovereign. He proposed instead Hassan Sabri, an Independent, whom he viewed as relatively harmless. As it happened, his days were also numbered: in November he died of a heart attack on the floor of the Egyptian parliament, while reading the Speech from the Throne. Faruq's attempts to have 'Ali Maher reinstated failed; Sabri's replacement was Hussein Sirri, another independent, who, though not enjoying much popular following, would prove exceptionally cooperative from the British perspective.

In India, the fall of France was perceived as a critical opening wherein the nationalists might finally force the issue of the country's post-war status. Congress now demanded the immediate formation of a representative national government; in response, Linlithgow (in concert with Churchill) issued what became known as the August Offer. The proposal allowed for Indian politicians to be appointed to the Viceroy's Executive Council (though not for any of the key portfolios of finance, defence, or internal affairs); it held out the promise that, at the end of the war, "a body representative of the principal elements in India's national life" would be formed "with the least possible delay". As Low states frankly, the Offer was of little substance—"scarcely worth the paper it was written on"—and contained nothing about Congress' central demand: independence.[402] It did, however, register for the first time the government's acknowledgement of the Muslim' League's March 1940 Lahore Resolution, calling for separate governance for India's Muslims, when it stated:

> It goes without saying that they [His Majesty's Government] could not contemplate the transfer of their present responsibilities for the peace and welfare of India to any system of government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life. Nor could they be parties to the coercion of such elements into submission to such a Government.[403]

[402] Low, 'Mediator's moment', p. 149
[403] Gwyer & Apadorai, S*peeches and documents,* p. 485

Jinnah seized on this support for his position; his relations with Congress rapidly deteriorated. And, in a formulation seemingly lifted from the text of the 1939 White Paper on Palestine, the Viceroy and the Indian Secretary became fond of saying that until Hindus and Muslims in India learned to cooperate, Britain could not in good conscience move the country towards self-government.

Economic crisis

By the middle of 1941, war was beginning to sink its teeth into Egyptian and Indian society. In addition to the barrage of bad news over the wireless, the fretting over loved ones who were far from home and in harm's way, and the sense of fear and uncertainty pervading daily life, the rising cost of living had become a public menace. Initially, the industrial booms brought on by the outbreak of war had allowed wages in Egypt and India to keep pace with rising prices. But by 1941 inflation was beginning to outstrip increased earnings; as the war dragged on, the situation of the peasantry and urban labourers became desperate. In Egypt, daily industrial wages increased by 113 per cent between 1939 and 1945, but the cost of living increased by 193 per cent, resulting in a substantial decline in real wages.[404] In India, the spike in rates of inflation which began in 1941 particularly impacted the cost and availability of staple foodstuffs such as grain. This would contribute to a nightmarish confluence of factors which together resulted in the Bengal Famine of 1943.

By the summer of 1941, the Egyptian economy was in crisis, partially due to the disruption to shipping, which had resulted, for the second year in a row, in a failure to export the Egyptian cotton crop. As in 1940, Britain was forced to buy the crop in its entirety; but Lampson noted

[404] Beinen & Lockman, *Workers on the Nile*, p. 268

with obvious resentment that the problem was exacerbated by the vested interests of Egypt's landowners, many of whom were also Members of the Egyptian Parliament. They had declined to legislate quotas for cotton acreage, having "hoped to make more money on cotton, which was not wanted, than on wheat, which was essential for the feeding of the people".[405] In Cairo, the Joint Transport Federation (JTF), whose member unions represented the city's tram and bus operators, called for a strike in September, to protest the stagnation of wages, as the cost of living continued to soar. Although trade unions remained legally unrecognised in Egypt until 1942, on the cusp of war a high-profile campaign by labour activists had brought the issue briefly to national prominence. In May 1939 the General Federation, a coalition of labour unions from a variety of sectors, cited the failure of successive Egyptian administrations to take their cause seriously, and announced that they would go on hunger strike until parliament granted full legal recognition to trade unions. Should the government fail to meet their demands, they claimed "the honor of martyrdom in the cause of serving the workers of the Kingdom of Egypt".[406]

As Lockman and Beinen note, at the time, hunger strikes were almost without precedent in Egypt as a form of political action. The trade unionists had been inspired by the example of *al-Ruh al-Kabir,* the Mahatma, and his resort to fasting in the service of India's independence struggle.[407] One prominent Egyptian labour activist, Mahmud al-'Askari, referred to labour activists as "the successors of Gandhi in Egypt".[408] The strike was well-organised and effective at garnering widespread press coverage and sympathy for the trade unionists cause.[409] Activists broke their fast when it was announced that a bill on the legalisation of unions would be debated

[405] 'Egypt: Review of political situation between October 1941 & March 1942', FO 371/31570
[406] Qtd. in Beinen & Lockman, *Workers on the Nile*, p. 235
[407] Ibid.
[408] Qtd. in Ibid.
[409] Ibid, p. 236

in the Chamber of Deputies; however, the replacement of Muhammad Mahmud (who had been relatively sympathetic to the worker's plight) by 'Ali Maher as prime minister, and the onset of war in September, conspired to prevent the bill's passage. Nevertheless, by 1941 unions were re-organising and re-mobilising to address the crisis of inflation, and thanks to the hunger strike, their platform and legitimacy were enhanced.

As the date of the Cairo transport strike approached, workers in other sectors watched closely, and agents at the Cairo Police worried that, given widespread reports of worker discontent, they might decide to join in. With no settlement forthcoming, Cairo's tram and bus drivers went on strike on the morning of 16 September. That night, Cairo experienced its first major air raid, in the north-eastern district of Abbasia, which hosted British barracks and an aerodrome. Thirty-nine people were killed, and another 93 injured. The next morning, the Egyptian Cabinet committed to addressing the workers' grievances, but also warned them that continued strike action would be dealt with severely, as it was illegal under the war measures decree issued the previous July.[410] Partially in response to the traumatic events of the previous night, workers agreed to a two week grace period, but threatened to resume striking on 1 October if the government failed to act. There were reports from Cairo Police that workers in numerous other essential sectors, from the railways to the water and electricity companies, now considered joining the transport workers unless wages were increased. Faced with the prospect of a generalised strike just as Allied forces scrambled to recover from reverses in the Western Desert, Lampson met with the Egyptian prime minister, and impressed upon him the necessity of action—if not for the sake of "justice and humanity", then in the interest of "stability and security".[411] The result, a mere 48 hours prior to the strike deadline, was a legislated 10 per cent increase to wages

[410] Ibid, p. 248
[411] Beinen & Lockman, *Workers on the Nile*, p. 249

for all workers. It was not enough, but it was a breakthrough for organised labour in Egypt nonetheless.

Just as Egyptian workers were threatened with a crackdown on strike action under the July 1940 Decree, in India, where unions were legal, the Defence of India Act suspended normal mechanisms of dispute resolution and allowed the state to force strikers back to work.[412] Across the subcontinent, grain, kerosene, cloth, and other basic goods grew scarcer, as the military snapped up an increasing share of what was available, and the cost of what remained drifted ever further out of reach for ordinary people. Though a state of famine did not crystallize in India until 1943, already in 1941 the warning signs were apparent.[413] As the situation grew dire, Khan notes, among the first to sound the alarm about the rising toll of inflation and economic insecurity in Indian villages weren't even physically there: they were soldiers of the Indian Army, serving in the Middle East. By 1943, the steady trickle of worrying letters these men had begun to receive—describing high prices, hunger, and shortages of essential goods—had turned into a flood of despair. A representative letter from Bengal described how "many people can hardly get one meal a day and are almost half clad. If the war goes on for another few months many will die of starvation".[414] Another was yet more dire: "people are dying of hunger and if this goes on for another two or three months then you won't find a single soul alive in our village. God knows when this wretched war will end".[415] Military censors, infamous for their cold attitude towards the emotional pleas of families seeking remittances, were finally so overwhelmed by the sheer volume of desperate reports and the profound impact they were having on the men that they recommended a pay increase for Indian soldiers, less than a year after a similar raise had been

[412] Khan, *Raj at War*, p. 87
[413] Ibid, p. 90
[414] Qtd in Ibid, p. 203
[415] Ibid, p. 204

granted.[416] Of course, this could do but little to assuage the rising tide of misery across the subcontinent, most tragically in Bengal.

Sepoys in Cairo

Military authorities in Cairo had other concerns regarding the Indian troops now stationed there. For one thing, they were the targets of relentless Axis propaganda, in the form of leaflets dropped from airplanes and radio broadcasts in various Indian languages. On the model of Radio Bari, both Italy and Germany established radio stations targeting Indians: Radio Himalaya and Azad Radio Hind, respectively. The 15,000-17,000 Indian soldiers captured by the Axis in North Africa and the Mediterranean were well treated, because they were seen as potential recruits:[417] the Indian Legion, founded by Subhas Chandra Bose in Germany in 1941, was the largest Axis unit formed by Indian Prisoners of War, while the *Battaglione Azad Hindoustan* was lead by Muhammad Iqbal Shedai—the same Punjabi who had arranged meetings for Siddiqi and Khaliquzzaman in Milan in 1939.

But in addition to monitoring broadcasts and other Axis propaganda, British authorities in Cairo were also worried about the unhealthy influence Egyptian nationalists might have on their officers. In an intelligence meeting held between liaisons from Middle East H.Q. and the Indian Intelligence Service, the two sides agreed that a detachment of security police should be sent out from India and stationed in Cairo, in order to keep an eye on sepoys, and monitor the sorts of friends they were making:

> The Indian population in Egypt present a problem and contacts of Indian troops with Egyptians of the effendi class rendered a Field Security police unit very desirable. Information from Censorship confirmed this view. The general conclusion was that the proposed establishment might have to be increased [...] Egypt emphasised the necessity of avoiding having to co-operate

[416] Ibid.
[417] Ibid, p. 77

> direct with the Egyptian Police. Co-operation, as may be necessary, will be done through Defence Security Office, Egypt.[418]

Given that the concern was over contacts between young, armed, educated men who might be susceptible to nationalist conversion, the desire to avoid unnecessary involvement by the Egyptian Police was perhaps understandable.

I have so far failed to discover more about the activities of the Indian security police unit sent to Cairo, beyond a letter written by its Commanding Officer at the end of the war, applying for his men to receive the Africa Star for their service in Egypt. From this letter, it can be confirmed that the unit arrived in Cairo between July and August 1940, and consisted of a staff of eight: two British officers, Major W.H.A. Richard and Captain P.J. Wilkinson; two sub-inspectors, Naurang Singh and Rashid Ahmed Khan; three foot constables, Khuda Baksh, Kartar Singh, and Mohammad Yunus; and a clerk, Kundan Singh Mall. With the exception of Singh Mall, who hailed from the United Provinces, all were officers of the Punjabi Police. Richard, their Commanding Officer, was Assistant to the Deputy Inspector General of Police in the Criminal Investigations Department. The Punjabis remained in Egypt until the end of November, 1941; it is unclear if another unit replaced them when they departed.[419]

As it happened, authorities should perhaps have been worried, not only about the corrupting influence of Egyptian effendiya on Indian soldiers, but also the corrupting influence of Indian soldiers on their comrades from Britain and the Commonwealth. As one sergeant wrote home to his family in Britain,

[418] 'Provision of a section of Indian Security Police', WO 106/2050
[419] W.H.A. Rich to the Inspector General of Police, Punjab, 2 January 1945. IOR Mss Eur F 161/213

> I have met scores of these Indian troops in Cairo and have had drinks with many of them and would do so again. If India was composed chiefly of these kind of blokes I would say they deserve Home Rule and be glad to see them get it.[420]

Ideas at war

The course of the war had a profound impact on the evolution of nationalist politics, both in India and across the Arab region. As discussed at the outset of this chapter, war between fascists and imperialists presented a conundrum for many on the anti-imperial left. Nehru felt torn between the impulse to throw his support behind the anti-fascist struggle, and the opportunity presented by the crisis of war to finally force the issue of India's national liberation.[421] In this painful ambiguity, he was far from alone. Following the launch of Operation Barbarossa against the Soviet Union, Marxists and communists joined with anti-fascists in openly supporting the Allied war effort; some attempted to enlist. They were scorned by nationalist friends and comrades, and classified as traitors, or British stooges. B.P. Jain, a member of the Radical Democratic Party, later recalled the soul searching that animated his own decision:

> On this issue of war we discussed and discussed and discussed to reach the conclusion that the war had to be anti-fascist [...] I would not have been a revolutionary had I not stood up against the masses even at the cost of my prestige, to fight fascism.[422]

Gandhi's straightforward rejection of violence appears to have insulated him, to some extent, from the moral agonies suffered by his more equivocal disciples; yet as he witnessed the brutalizing impact of the war on India's people and landscape—the slaughtering of cows for military rations, the destitution caused by famine, the drunkenness and promiscuity of foreign troops stationed in the cities—he grew disgusted, and spoke with uncharacteristic venom about the British presence in his country.[423]

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[420] Qtd. in Khan, *Raj at War*, p. 72
[421] Louro, *Comrades against Imperialism*, p. 257
[422] Qtd. in Khan, *Raj at War*, p. 91
[423] Ibid, pp. 177-178

Yet even Gandhi's stance was less hostile to the British than that of his former Congress rival, Subhas Chandra Bose, the former Congress President, who had grown estranged from the party Working Committee following his forced resignation (before the eyes of the visiting Wafd delegates) at the Tripuri Session in the the spring of 1939. Bose was briefly imprisoned in 1940; upon his release he escaped, travelling to Afghanistan in disguise with the aid of German agents. In 1941 he arrived in Berlin, from where he began orchestrating pro-Axis propaganda and recruiting POWs to the Indian Legion.

In Egypt, the Wafd's opposition to Nazism and Italian fascism predated the war and was rooted both in its principled rejection of racism, sectarianism, and authoritarian rule, and in the alignment of many of its rivals (especially the Palace and Young Egypt) with the Germans and Italians. Like Nehru, the communists, and the radical left in India, Nahhas—although himself a liberal capitalist—found himself unable to countenance an Axis victory, any more than he could countenance the dismantling of parliamentary democracy in Egypt under Faruq, or the rise of proto-fascists such as Young Egypt. Thus, as Beinen and Lockman observe, "despite its historic opposition to British domination, in the particular conjuncture of the Second World War the Wafd became the most pro-British force in Egypt".[424]

Yet, as with Bose in India, there were many in Egypt and throughout the broader Middle East who found the Axis' vow to cast off the British yoke irresistible. Among them was the Mufti of Jerusalem, who had left Beirut for Baghdad as war broke out in 1939. There he forged a close relationship with Rashid Ali Al-Kaylani, a former prime minister, and Iraqi nationalist officers

[424] Beinen & Lockman, *Workers on the Nile*, p. 286

who were, like him, interested in the prospects of an alliance with Germany. Shortly after his arrival, in February 1940, the Mufti wrote to Jinnah, whom he did not know personally, although he had of course met envoys of the Muslim League in Beirut the previous spring. The letter was not particularly personal; it outlined Palestinian grievances since the outbreak of the war, and claimed that 'hundreds' of men had been executed by the British authorities since the ending of the Revolt.[425] The letter was most likely part of a broader attempt by the Mufti to rally continued support for the Palestinian resistance to British rule from known sympathisers and supporters. Evidently, the efforts of the Muslim League the previous spring had not been forgotten. In the event, it appears Jinnah took no further action than to forward the letter to the Governor General at Simla.

Pre-emptive strikes: Iraq & Iran

The following year, in April, the Iraqi officers, calling themselves the Golden Square, orchestrated a coup which brought al-Kaylani (more commonly known by his first names, Rashid Ali) to power. In Cairo, Wavell, the Commander-in-Chief of Middle East forces, was facing an onslaught in the Western Desert and preparing a major attack on Crete. He had no men to spare and less interest in becoming embroiled in Iraq, and instead expressed the view that the crisis should be dealt with by diplomatic means. The Viceroy and his Commander-in-Chief in India, General Sir Claude Auchinleck, were horrified. They immediately cabled the Indian Secretary, Leo Amery (who had replaced Zetland the previous year). In words that would have seemed warmly familiar to their predecessors during the Great War and the Mandate era, they complained that Britain's man in Cairo had "quite failed to grasp politico-strategic significance of Iraq in existing Middle East complex or to grasp that India operating through [Persian] Gulf is

[425] Governor General to Secretary of State for India, 11 June 1940. CO 733/426/8

natural base...for operations in that most important area".[426] As Wavell remained unmoved, Amery enlisted Winston Churchill's support to approve the dispatch of an Indian Army division to Basra.[427]

By the time these forces arrived, Rashid Ali had reached out to Italy and Germany for military assistance. Joachim Ribbentrop, Hitler's foreign minister, put it to the Führer in the following terms: from Iraq, he suggested, Germany could expand its network of agents throughout the Middle East—"the whole Arab world shall then be aroused into rebellion against England from our centre in Iraq". This "constantly expanding insurrection of the Arab world could be of the greatest help in the preparation of our decisive advance towards Egypt".[428] Hitler was in favour, and directives were given to prepare a German and Italian squadron for duty in Iraq. Money, arms, tanks and artillery, and strong signal radio transmitters were also ordered.[429] This last item was intended for use in broadcasting propaganda to Arab countries, and underscores how vital a weapon of war radio had by then become.

Hitler sent his former Minister in Iraq, Fritz Grobba, back to Baghdad to make contact with Rashid Ali and the Mufti. Grobba reported that the Mufti was planning a major action in Palestine in the near future, and requested more funds on his behalf, which were swiftly approved in Berlin. Ironically, as the Nazis prepared to send major aid and reinforcements to the Mufti and his allies in Baghdad in anticipation of a renewed Palestinian uprising, General Wavell resisted the transfer of two relief units from Palestine to Iraq, on the grounds they would leave the Mandate exposed. Wavell was adamant that a British war against the Iraqis would foment

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[426] Qtd. in Kolinsky, *Britain's War*, p. 156
[427] Ibid.
[428] Qtd. in Kolinsky, *Britain's War in the Middle East*, pp.157-158
[429] Ibid, p. 158

anger and resentment in Egypt, and carried the risk of re-igniting the Revolt: "The political repercussions will be incalculable, and may result in what I have spent nearly two years trying to avoid, namely, serious internal trouble in our bases".[430] Extraordinarily, he was overruled by London. Iraq was reinforced before the Axis air squadrons could arrive. Within a month, Baghdad had surrendered, and Rashid Ali, the Mufti, and their supporters had fled the country. Shortly thereafter, Auchinleck and Wavell traded places, with Auchinleck moving into Wavell's office in Cairo, while the latter was sent to Simla, where he assumed command of the Army of India.

The entry of the Soviet Union into the war on the side of the Allies following the launch of Operation Barbarossa brought Iran back to the top of the list of priorities for General Headquarters in Cairo and Simla. With the German push East, Iran became exposed to invasion from the north; and, in addition to the oilfields and refinery at Abadan, the country's railway system became crucial to the transport of war materials to and from the Soviet Union. In this context, the plans drawn up in Cairo the previous spring were operationalised—the invasion would not be limited to Iran's south-west; Soviet forces would invade simultaneously from the north, and the whole of Iran was to be occupied by the Allies.

In 1947, a cache of seized Nazi documents revealed that weeks before the British invasion, King Faruq sent a telegram to his father-in-law, Youssef Zulficar Pasha, who was then serving as Egyptian Ambassador in Tehran. In it, Faruq shared details of the planned invasion and requested that Zulficar pass the information along to the German Minister, Erwin Ettel, as well as Reza, the Shah of Iran. In his meeting with Ettel, Zulficar also asked him to express to the

[430] Qtd. in Ibid, p. 159

German Ministry of Foreign Affairs King Faruq's "desire for open and loyal relations with Germany".[431]

Despite Faruq's efforts, however, the Allies successfully invaded Iran, interning all Germans, Italians, and their sympathisers, as well as those known to have supported Rashid Ali's coup in Iraq. The Shah was forced to abdicate in favour of his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who also happened to be the husband of Faruq's sister, Fawzia. According to Lampson, who had no knowledge of Faruq's telegram to Zulficar, the abdication made a strong impression on Egypt's young monarch, who appeared skittish and placating in its aftermath: "fear of his throne is the card to play", he concluded, "if we are faced with further backslidings, which I fear we may".[432]

Catastrophe, and refugees

Between the spring of 1941 and the autumn of 1942, the British Empire underwent a possibly unprecedented streak of disaster and misfortune. It was during this period that the collaborative moment was decisively ended, and a new trajectory of imperial-nationalist interaction took root in Egypt and India.

In February of 1941, General Erwin Rommel took command of the German army in North Africa, signalling the onset of a new and, for the Allies, terrifying chapter in the Desert War. Within three weeks of his first offensive action in March, Rommel had pushed the Allied forces 650 kilometres back, from El Agheila in Libya to the Egyptian border. Establishing air superiority from their bases in Libya and Sicily, the Luftwaffe and Regia Aeronautica ruled the skies, attacking British shipping, and bombarding Malta relentlessly—15,000 tonnes of bombs

[431] Qtd. in Cooper, *Cairo in the War*, p. 140
[432] Lampson Diaries, 4 October 1941.

were dropped on the island, a figure comparable to the London Blitz. As convoys of food, fuel, and reinforcements to Malta were exposed to relentless aerial attack, it remained under siege for over two years.[433]

Rommel's arrival in the Western Desert was particularly ill-timed for the Allies, as a significant portion of their troops had just been recalled from forward positions in Libya, and sent instead to south-eastern Europe, in an effort to stave off the Axis advance there. By the middle of April, however, Allied positions on both sides of the Mediterranean were collapsing. Rommel had reached Sollum (as-Saloum), inside the Egyptian frontier; Yugoslavia had surrendered to the Nazis; and the Greek government was evacuated from Athens to Crete in the teeth of the German advance. They were not the only ones fleeing. As mainland Greece's defences were overrun, many people sought to escape by the only route still open to them: the sea. In a Mediterranean sequel to Dunkirk, tugboats, cargo vessels, small steamers, and traditional fishing boats were all pressed into service as a makeshift evacuation fleet.[434] At least 5,000 refugees from Greece began arriving on the shores of Egypt in late April.[435] Initially there was nowhere to put them other than in tents on the beaches. As most schools were already in use, whether for interned Germans and Italians, or as hospitals, the British and Egyptian authorities requisitioned brothels in Cairo to house at least some of the newcomers—the British author, Olivia Manning, and her husband were among them.[436] Manning wrote both a fictionalised account of their escape from Athens in her novel, *The Danger Tree*, and a first person account for *The Sunday Times*. In the novel, the characters based on her and her husband meet an acquaintance in Cairo shortly

[433] Holland, James. *Fortress Malta: An Island Under Siege, 1940–1943* (London, 2003).
[434] Cooper, *Cairo in the War*, p. 79
[435] Lampson Diaries, 21 April & 23 April, 1941. According to Yasmin Khan, significant numbers of these refugees also made their way to India, including 600 Maltese who travelled overland through Turkey; Greek and Maltese refugees were housed in dormitories on the grounds of a college in Coimbatore. Khan, *Raj at War,* p. 123
[436] Manning, Olivia. 'Cairo: Back from the blue', *The Sunday Times*, 17 September 1967

after their ordeal. "Pulling themselves together, they described their escape, making humour out of the hungry voyage, the vermin, the lice in the cabins, the passages boarded up because the freighters had been prison transports, the useless lifeboats, with rusted in davits".[437] In her first-person description, Manning described how, by the time of their departure, food had run out in Athens, and they made the three-day voyage to Egypt on empty stomachs. Arriving, then, in Alexandria,

> We saw British soldiers on the quay and someone shouted down 'got anything to eat?'
> 'To eat?' The soldiers were surprised at such a simple request. They went behind the cases of ammunition and came back with a bunch of bananas. They made a game of throwing the bananas up in ones and twos, but we jumped and scrambled in earnest.[438]

Manning went on to say that their first meal in Alexandria, at an army canteen, had brought her and her companions to tears.

Adding to the spectacle of hungry and bedraggled Europeans, the refugees from Greece were joined at the end of May by the 18,000 survivors of the Allies' disastrous last stand on Crete (the remaining 12,000 were taken prisoner by the Germans). They were exhausted and traumatised by their ordeal, but there was no time for recuperation. A major offensive was scheduled for July in the Western Desert, in an effort to force Rommel back. The operation, codenamed Battleaxe, was a near total defeat, with heavy British casualties. By December, with Rommel's forces fanned out across the desert from Tunisia to the Egyptian border, the siege of Malta ongoing, and all of Europe under Axis occupation, the walls appeared to be closing in on Britain's position in Egypt.

It was at this moment that Japan attacked Pearl Harbour, and launched a lightning campaign of offensive actions across South East Asia. Within 24 hours of the attack on the American fleet in

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[437] Manning, Olivia. *The Danger Tree* (London, 1977). Reprinted in *The Levant Trilogy* (London, 2003) pp. 58-59
[438] Qtd. in Cooper, *Cairo in the War*, p. 80

Hawaii, Japan invaded Thailand and British Malaya, and began aerial bombardment of Hong Kong, the Philippines, Shanghai, Singapore, Guam, and the Wake Islands. Within a week, Japan had also invaded Burma, on British India's north-eastern frontier.

The fall of Singapore to the Japanese on February 15, 1942 was the largest surrender in British military history. Eighty thousand Allied troops—primarily Indians, Australians, and British—were taken prisoner. Another 50,000 were captured in British Malaya. Like Pearl Harbour itself, the speed and devastation of the Japanese advance came as a bolt from the blue. Once again, the very nature of the war had been utterly transformed, seemingly overnight. Within 48 hours of the fall of Singapore, the order had been given to evacuate Rangoon, as Japanese forces continued their relentless drive through Burma, towards the Indian frontier. The Desert War and campaigns in the Eastern Mediterranean and Persian Gulf were to some degree responsible for the failure of British defences in Burma, as many of the Indian Army units which had stayed at home had been stripped of their best men and officers, shipped off to Cairo and Basra. The remaining troops were pared down, and inexperienced.[439]

As George Orwell observed that February, it was among the darkest hours in the history of the British Empire:

> With the Japanese army in the Indian Ocean and the German armies in the Middle East, India becomes the centre of the war—it is hardly an exaggeration to say, the centre of the world. For a long time to come, possibly for years, it may have to act as a supply base from which men and munitions can be poured out in two directions, east and west.[440]

Yet even this analysis was, in a way, optimistic, assuming as it did that India would hold, despite British positions across Asia having been overrun in a matter of weeks. According to the British

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[439] Khan, *Raj at War*, p. 99

[440] Orwell, George. 'India Next', *The Observer,* 22 February 1942

General Bill Slim, who was stationed in Calcutta in mid-1942, "there were nights when scares of invasion called us from our beds".[441]After the fall of Singapore, Bose took to the airwaves on Azad Hind Radio from Berlin, to announce the impending collapse of "Anglo-American imperialism" and the coming liberation of India at the hands of Germany, Italy, and Japan.[442] Even among those who did not fancy the Axis as liberators, there were many who believed he was right.

Then, in the north of the country, hundreds of thousands of refugees began to arrive from Burma. The refugees were Indian and European residents, and retreating Allied soldiers. Many arrived at the end of a 900 mile overland journey from Rangoon, on foot, through jungle and mountainous terrain. Those who managed to survive arrived in India exhausted and emaciated from the treacherous journey, made nightmarish by the arrival of the monsoon in May. From the border they had to travel by rail into the country, where they made a strong impression on all they encountered. In Khan's phrasing,

> Villagers, who watched these soldiers coming back from the front looking bedraggled and sick, drew their own conclusions about the progress of the war [...] Onlookers talked to each other about what they had seen, and rumours spread.[443]

Wealthier residents of Burma were, in some cases, able to purchase a more comfortable journey for themselves and their families, either by sea or airplane. But as the influx of refugees into India soared—ultimately over 500,000 would arrive—they brought with them stories of something more disturbing: a two-tiered evacuation policy, where Europeans and Anglo-Indians were given first priority, whether onboard vessels or on the roads—where police would allow some through,

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[441] Ibid, pp. 97-98

[442] Bose, S. K. & Sugata Bose (Eds.) *Azad Hind: Subhas Chandra Bose Writings and Speeches, 1941-1943* (London, 2004) p. 74

[443] Khan, *Raj at War*, p. 104

but block the path to others. As one Indian escapee from Rangoon later recounted, his father had managed to purchase tickets for a steamer headed to Madras, as the Japanese approached the outskirts of the city. But on the date they were set to depart, they were refused permission to board: "[...] the then British government thought that only the lives of the British and Anglo-Indians were worth saving and allowed only them to board the steamer. The rest of us were thrown out to fend for ourselves".[444] These reports were confirmed by other observers, including an American consular official in Rangoon. They caused outrage in India, and a government inquiry was promised, although it failed to materialise, once it had occurred to Linlithgow that the findings were unlikely to paint the British administration in a favourable light.[445]

Khan argues convincingly for the overwhelming importance of the Burmese refugee crisis in contributing to a loss of faith in the British Raj among the Indian public. It both confirmed, in the eyes of many, that the Empire was coming apart at the seams, and undermined any remaining sense of legitimacy or trustworthiness the British regime could claim to possess:

> Even if the Raj had never been actively *liked* in the past, at least it could be relied upon as a coherent administration, one that would keep it inhabitants reasonably secure from military incursion and underwrite the validity of currency and savings. Now, there was a widespread loss of faith in even the most basic functions of the imperial state.[446]

Gandhi, in particular, was appalled by the suffering of the refugees, and enraged by their treatment at the hands of the authorities, who, it was revealed, paid for a higher rate of welfare care for non-Indian refugees in displaced persons camps:

> Hundreds, if not thousands, on their way from Burma perished without food and drink, and the wretched discrimination stared even these miserable people in the face. One route for the whites, another for the blacks! Provision of food and shelter for the whites, none for the blacks! And discrimination even on their arrival in India! [...] India is being ground down to dust and

[444] Qtd. in Khan, *Raj at War*, p. 120
[445] Ibid.
[446] Ibid, p. 121

> humiliated [...] And so one fine morning I came to the decision to make this honest demand: for Heaven's sake leave India alone.[447]

Gloves off

As Rommel crushed Britain's offensive efforts in the Western Desert—capturing 163 British tanks and the port of Benghazi in the process—and as Singapore's defences collapsed under the Japanese onslaught, Lampson found himself on the receiving end of some disturbing information from a source inside the Palace. 'Ali Maher, it seemed, had alerted the King to a perceived slight of the royal prerogative, and was winding him up to force the resignation of Sirri's government.

At the beginning of January, Lampson had asked Sirri to sever Egyptian relations with Vichy France, as it had been found to be assisting the Axis in North Africa through its colony in Tunisia. Sirri had complied promptly with the British request; the Cabinet had voted to cut ties with the Vichy government in early January. This provoked Faruq's displeasure, particularly as he had not been consulted prior to the Cabinet's decision. According to Lampson, the Prime Minister had resisted the King's demand for Sami's resignation:

> [...] he [Sirri] had had a most stormy interview with H.M. whom he had beaten into withdrawing his intervention in this matter. P.M. added 'the boy is an absolute coward: he has to be frightened from time to time—and saved from himself'... the prospect did not seem encouraging: must we go on having to frighten the boy at periodical intervals? If so, I felt myself that our patience might very easily give out. Persia should surely serve as a reminder to King Farouk of what happened if it was overstrained...we did not want to meet trouble half way: but if trouble deliberately came out to meet us I personally had no shadow of doubt what advice I should give my Government as to meeting it.[448]

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[447] Khan, *Raj at War*, p. 107
[448] Lampson Diaries, 20 January 1942

Sirri, like Lampson, tended to place blame for the King's Axis sympathies on his entourage and advisors, in particular 'Abdel Wahab Talaat and 'Ali Maher. This impression was subsequently confirmed by Lampson's source inside the Palace, who reported that

> Aly Maher is behind this Palace intrigue, and that he is pushing King F. not only to sack the Minister of Foreign Affairs, but to dismiss the Sirry Govt. as sacrificing the rights of the country to Great Britain. The action of the Government in breaking with Vichy at our request was quoted as an example of this weakness and, the report continued, great pressure was being brought to bear upon King F. to replace the present Government by another controlled by Aly Maher behind the scenes whose motto would be 'strict execution of the Treaty but no complacency towards the British'.[449]

Whereas for much of the 1920s and 1930s, the Palace and the British had shared an authoritarian impulse to reign in the liberal democratic forces of parliament, the signature of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty and the coming of war had conspired to alter the calculus of Egypt's balance of power. Britain found itself bound by the Treaty to work with and through the Egyptian parliament to a greater degree, while liberal nationalists, including the Wafd but also many independents, saw in Nazi Germany and its allies, as well as in their local admirers like Young Egypt, a far more sinister threat to the country than that represented by Great Britain. Meanwhile Faruq, who turned 22 that February, found himself confronted both by resistance from the politicians who ostensibly governed in his name, and by increasingly reflexive intervention from the British Ambassador, whose tolerance for the royal prerogative evaporated as the Axis advance drew nearer.

In this new constellation, Lampson and the Foreign Office found themselves regretting the limitations of partnership with Sirri's independent Cabinet, which, though wonderfully compliant, enjoyed little popular support.[450] This stands in sharp contrast to the attitude of the

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[449] Lampson Diaries, 21 January 1942

[450] Lampson to Eden, 23 September 1941, FO 371/27433; Lampson Diaries, 6 January 1942. See also Kolinsky, *Britain's War in the Middle East*, p. 177

1930s, when compliant minority governments were easily preferrable, from the British perspective, to a popular Wafdist administration. But now, bound by the Treaty to relations funneled through Egypt's elected government, with the war going badly, and the popular young monarch and his côterie leaning ever further into the enemy camp, the British found that they needed a strong Egyptian 'partner' government, with authentic support among the populace, in order to hold the country onside. As it turned out, they were not alone in this assessment.

By the end of January, the situation was drawing to a head. Ali Maher, in a move reminiscent of his last-ditch efforts to hold onto the premiership in 1940, sought, in concert with his ally, Sheikh Maraghi of Al-Azhar, to foment civil disorder. Their intention was, first, to force Sirri and his government from office, and second, to create a political context in which it would be difficult for the British to replace Sirri with a man of their choosing, by targeting Sirri's government as an instrument of British policy. Accordingly, at the very end of January there were anti-British demonstrations and processions originating at Al-Azhar. In order for this strategy to work, the demonstrations would have had to achieve some sort of critical mass; but within 24 hours, and before the riots could gather any momentum, Sirri resigned. In an interview with Lampson, the departing Prime Minister told the Ambassador bluntly to "send for the Wafd".[451] Lampson, who several weeks prior had dismissed the possibility of engineering a return of the Wafd as "of very doubtful practical wisdom",[452] had undergone a conversion in light of recent developments: "I said this was an instance of great minds thinking alike, for before coming to see him I had come to precisely the same conclusion but it gained in force through having been volunteered by His Excellency".[453]

[451] Lampson Diaries, 1 February 1942
[452] Lampson Diaries, 6 January 1942
[453] Lampson Diaries, 1 February 1942

Predictably, Faruq was opposed to the return of the Wafd and sought to pre-empt the British Embassy by appointing an interim government, as a preliminary step towards an all-parties coalition. Lampson was opposed to an interim government, which would in all likelihood be easily manipulated by the Palace. He insisted that Nahhas be consulted by Faruq on the nature of the government to be formed, and set a time limit within which the Wafd leader should be summoned to meet with the King to this end. Nahhas, for his part, communicated to the Embassy his unwillingness to head a coalition, for several reasons, alongside his terms for accepting the premiership:

> Earlier Nahas had favoured a Neutral Government but he was against it now for various reasons [...] He would refuse Coalition definitely. His reasons which he wished me [Lampson] to know were these. The state of the country was very bad; Palace intrigues were going on even under Hussein Sirry [...] Some members of the coalition were sure to be the King's men and Nahas would be unable 'to deliver the goods to us'. As to working wholeheartedly with us, Nahas had always done so and would always do so even if there were no Treaty. The spirit of the Treaty meant mutual cooperation on both sides in every sense. If Hussein Sirry had been of use to us Nahas would be of even more use. If Nahas had worked well with us in peacetime he would work tenfold as well in war time. *But he must have a free hand especially with the Palace* [emphasis added]. What he wanted was real democracy and real cooperation with us, and the King stood against both. If we backed him with the King he would see it through. At the same time he did not wish to be considered vindictive towards the King; and mayhap it would work out that Nahas and I would hold each other back from time to time. For the above reasons Nahas could not accept coalition which would be fair neither to us nor to himself. He would be ready if it helped us to have other party leaders as some form of consultative body, but he alone must govern. He would take a neutral government if I wished but it would not work, he was sure.[454]

This passage illustrates in stark language the transformation of the Wafd's priorities, which had been apparent, though more tentative and less articulate, by the time of the Abyssinian Crisis in 1935. Nahhas had hedged for the first several years of the war—at one point in 1940 submitting an ultimatum which called for the revision of the Treaty and full Egyptian independence at war's end. However, his impatience with the Wafd's long exile from government, alarm at the advance of fascism both on the battlefield and in Egypt, and above all his grave concerns over the

[454] Lampson Diaries, 3 February 1942

authoritarian tendencies of Faruq and 'Ali Maher, had slowly resulted in a change of heart. By 1942, Nahhas was convinced that backing Great Britain, and even coming to power under the cover of a British ultimatum to Faruq, was justifiable—perhaps even necessary—for the sake of Egypt's liberal democracy. The total novelty of the situation from both Lampson's and Nahhas' perspective is attested by the frequent instances of both parties seeking verification and reassurance from one other, in the lead-up to Lampson's fateful meeting with Faruq. In one interview the day before the British ultimatum expired, Lampson told Nahhas' close ally and advisor, Amin Osman, that he "hoped there was no question of Nahas wriggling out? —Amin said none whatever. Nahas had been asking the same question about us and Amin had assured him that we were in grim earnest".[455] The next day, mere hours before he was scheduled to leave for the Palace, Lampson took Osman aside in an empty room. "Was I still safe in relying completely on Nahhas if I carried on? Amin said he would bet his bottom dollar on Nahhas being firm".[456]

What then transpired is among the better-known episodes of the Second World War in Egypt. Having consulted with both the Service Chiefs in Cairo and the Foreign Office, Lampson instructed his staff to prepare contingencies for a military stand-off with the Egyptian monarch. Faruq's abdication letter was drafted by, in Lampson's estimation, the ideal man for the job: Walter Monckton, the recently arrived Director of Propaganda and Information Services, who had been advisor to Edward VIII in 1936, and crafted *his* renunciation of the throne.[457] The British ultimatum to Faruq having expired, Lampson and General Oliver Stone made the short drive from the Embassy to 'Abdin Palace, accompanied by an escort of British officer cadets and

[455] Lampson Diaries, 3 February 1942
[456] Lampson Diaries, 4 February 1942
[457] Lampson Diaries, 4 February 1942

armoured vehicles. Approximately 600 British troops surrounded Midan 'Abdin and sealed off all routes in and out of the Palace.

The King & I

In Lampson's detailed (and at times romantic) account of his nocturnal audience with the King of Egypt, he refers several times to the presence of British tanks outside the Palace. Ian Weston Smith, an officer of the Scots Guard who participated in the action that evening, has disputed this claim, suggesting that Lampson mistook armoured cars for tanks, of which there may have been—at a maximum—only one or two.[458] This being as it may, Lampson's excitement caused him to imagine himself and the scene around him in epic terms, as is clear from the uncharacteristic lyricism of his report to the Foreign Office:

> I arrived at the Palace accompanied by General Stone and an impressive array of specially picked stalwart military officers armed to the teeth. On the way we passed through lines of military transport looming up through the darkened streets...whilst we waited upstairs I could hear the rumble of tanks and armoured cars taking up their positions round the Palace...this caused no little stir and added to the growing anticipation of coming events.

Entering the King's room, Lampson found Faruq still attempting to stall over the British ultimatum regarding Nahhas. Lampson interrupted, and read him "with full emphasis and increasing anger" a prepared statement, which read,

> It has for long past been evident that Your Majesty has been influenced by advisers who were not only unfaithful to the Alliance with Great Britain but were actually working against it and thereby assisting the enemy. The general attitude and associations of Your Majesty have constituted a breach of Article 5 of the Treaty of Alliance by which each of the High Contracting Parties undertakes not to adopt in relation to foreign countries an attitude inconsistent with the Alliance. Your Majesty has moreover wantonly and unnecessarily provoked a crisis over a decision taken by the late Egyptian Government in response to a request by the Ally which was entirely justified by Article 5 of the Treaty.
> Finally, having failed to secure a Coalition Government, *Your Majesty has refused to entrust the Government to the leader of the political party which, by commanding the general support of the country, is thus alone in a position to ensure the continued execution of the Treaty in the spirit of friendship in which it was conceived* [emphasis added].

[458] Timpson, Alastair and Andrew Gibbson-Watt. *In Rommel's Backyard: A memoir of the long-range desert group* (Barnsley, 2000) p. 170

> Such recklessness and irresponsibility on the part of the Sovereign endanger the security of Egypt and of the Allied Forces. They make it clear that Your Majesty is no longer fit to occupy the Throne.

Lampson then served the King with the instrument of Abdication, which had been scribbled out by hand on a piece of British Embassy stationary. As an afterthought, the letterhead had been torn off.[459] Lampson, who clearly relished his formulation, told Faruq "that he must sign it at once or I should have something else and more unpleasant with which to confront him".[460] At this point the Royal Chamberlain, Hassanein Pasha, who had been with Faruq when the British 'visitors' were announced and had remained in the room throughout the proceedings, intervened. Hassanein had, at one time, been the monarch's tutor, and he spoke to him now, briefly and urgently, in Arabic. While Lampson could not understand what was said, its effect was immediately apparent: "after a tense pause King Farouk, who was by this time completely cowed, looked up and asked almost pathetically and with none of his previous bravado if I would not give him one more chance".[461]

As is apparent from his diary, Lampson was terribly disappointed by this folding of the King's hand. He had been eager to see the thing through; a ship was on standby to whisk Faruq to the Seychelles, and for days afterward the Ambassador would ruminate on this turning point in the interview, when he might have, in his own evocative phrasing, "turf[ed] the boy out"[462] once and for all. But at dinner earlier that evening, Lampson had been forced to agree with the Minister of State, Oliver Lyttleton, that if Faruq was finally willing to concede the appointment of a Wafd government, it would be difficult to insist on his removal. Thus Lampson found himself

[459] Cooper, *Cairo in the War,* p. 175
[460] Lampson Diaries, 4 February 1942
[461] Ibid.
[462] Lampson Diaries, 5 February 1942

constrained to withdraw the Abdication letter, and accept the King's undertaking to call on Nahhas immediately to form a government.

As he turned to leave, thus having been denied his ultimate satisfaction, Lampson comforted himself with the impressiveness of the British martial display: the entire Palace was

> filled with military officers...grim armed British soldiers in their steel helmets with their rifles and Tommy guns at the ready...As we drove out of the Courtyard we passed dim shapes of tanks and armoured cars, drawn up and ready for action.[463]

After months of nothing but bad news from the front, the projected strength and competence of these men and their machines appear to have acted as a soothing balm on the diplomat's frayed nerves. 'Abdin was a deeply personal event—not only for Faruq, whose humiliation would poison the rest of his reign; and indeed not just for the Egyptian people, whose shock and resentment would be of even more profound consequence for the British presence in Egypt. It was also personal for Lampson, who, briefly glimpsed himself within reach of a momentous role in history—the protagonist in a great drama. After all, as he recorded in his diary that night, "...it doesn't often come one's way to be pushing a Monarch off the Throne".[464]

Returning to the Embassy, the spell was broken by a phone call from Hassanein:
Might the troops now be called off, to allow Nahhas' car to reach the Palace...?

Reactions to Lampson's actions within the British administration were intensely mixed. Many shared the Ambassador's sense of breathlessness. Duff Cooper recalled that he and his wife, who were staying with the Lampsons, "found most of the principal actors in the hall of the Embassy

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[463] Lampson Diaries, 4 February 1942
[464] Ibid.

discussing the evening as people discuss the first night of the play, when nobody is sure whether it has been a success or a failure".[465] Mrs. Cooper remarked that later in the evening Lampson emerged from his den, "arm in arm with Nahas Pasha, both grinning themselves in two".[466] This must surely have been the apotheosis of the Collaborative Moment; but contained within it (as seems so often the case in such circumstances) was the poison which would spell ruin for the Wafd, as for the British presence in Egypt.

Despite his presence at 'Abdin that night, General Stone was deeply uneasy with the course of action Lampson and the Foreign Office had decided to pursue, as was Claude Auchinleck, the Commander-in-Chief at Middle East HQ. Similarly, Russell Pasha, the Chief of the Cairo Police, was aghast when he discovered what had been done without any thought to consult him; his son later wrote that he had viewed the abdication crisis as undoing the work of he, his colleagues, and their predecessors in Egypt.[467] Military men all, they perceived the surrounding of the Palace as an unconscionable intervention by the army into politics in a sensitive and strategically vital region, where the goodwill of the populace was equal parts crucial and tenuous. In undermining their forces' claim to political neutrality *vis* internal affairs, the incident of 4 February had the potential to make their jobs in Egypt infinitely more difficult, and dangerous, than they already were.

Among the greatest miscalculations appears to have been the belief, if not on the part of Lampson, then certainly on the part of Nahhas, that the proceedings of the evening could remain a secret—or at least, be somehow de-linked from his own accession to the premiership. Within

[465] Cooper, *Old Men Forget,* p. 308
[466] Qtd. in Cooper, *Cairo in the War*, pp. 176-177
[467] Ibid.

days, however, "...it was being generally said that Nahas had come in supported by British bayonets".[468] This was, of course, perfectly true, and thus difficult to refute, although the Wafd and the Embassy certainly tried. As word leaked out, Egyptians reacted with shock, dismay—and anger. In his memoirs, one prominent Egyptian trade unionist recalled the slow trickle of rumours and reports which first alerted the Egyptian people to the compromised nature of Nahhas' new government:

> When the incident of February 4, 1942 occurred we didn't know that it was the English who returned al-Nahhas and we went out in demonstrations to support al-Nahhas Pasha. Afterwards we learned that what happened was an act of aggression against us and the King. Not the corrupt King, the King simply as a symbol of Egypt.[469]

Muhammad Neguib, later a member of the Free Officers and the first President of post-revolutionary Egypt, attempted to resign his post as Lieutenant-Colonel in the Egyptian Army in 1942, so humiliated was he by its failure to defend the King against the British threat of force. From where his unit was stationed in the Sudan, another soldier, Gamal Abdel Nasser, wrote: "until now the officers only talked of how to enjoy themselves; now they are speaking of sacrificing their lives for their honour...This event—this blow, has put life into some. It has taught them there is something called dignity which has to be defended".[470]

'Abdin was, arguably, the loudest shot never fired. While the King remained on the throne and the Wafd returned to power, both were forever stained by the incident: the King for his cowardice in caving to British demands, and the Wafd for their complicity in the nation's humiliation. When the Free Officers seized control of the country in 1952, they appointed as

[468] Lampson Diaries, 5 February 1942
[469] Qtd. in Beinen & Lockman, *Workers on the Nile*, p. 288
[470] Qtd. in Mansfield, Peter. *Nasser* (London, 1969) p. 35

their prime minister 'Ali Maher—the royal favorite whose "evil influence" on the King had precipitated the abdication crisis. As Tripp notes, in 1942 Maher

> ...went down as a martyr in the nationalist myth he had sought to exploit, leaving the field clear for those who saw in the events of February 1942 justification for the belief that the political method endorsed by 'Ali Maher [i.e. authoritarian rule] represented the only valid course if Egypt's national aspirations were finally to be realised.[471]

However, the Revolution of 1952 was still ten years away. In the more immediate future, the Wafd had once again found its way back into office after a long political exile. This moment is deeply instructive for our purposes, because in it, we can perceive for the first time the influence of Nehru and the Congress Party on the Wafd as a governing party. This influence is particularly evident in two noted policy shifts which have until now been less than satisfactorily accounted for. The first of these was in the area of external affairs, and the second was in labour policy.

Reinterpreting Wafdist policy

In *Redefining the Egyptian Nation*, Gershoni and Jankowski note the important "international repercussions of the Wafdist ministry of 1942-1944", namely that it was during its brief tenure in office during the war that "Egypt's leading political party committed the country to an institutionalised role in the political life of the surrounding Arab world", ultimately resulting in the founding of the Arab League under Egyptian auspices, with Cairo as its headquarters.[472] They suggest that this pivot outward, from its more insular, territorial nationalist stance of the 1920s and '30s, was a spontaneous reaction to the difficult new domestic political situation which the Wafd inherited in 1942:

> Compromised by its coming to power with the assistance of the British and devoid of an internal reformist message capable of appealing to a changing Egyptian public, the Wafd needed a new popular initiative through which it could rehabilitate its image, restore its prestige, and regain its

[471] Tripp, *'Ali Mahir,* p. 376
[472] Gershoni & Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation,* p. 192; 196

> position as the central force in Egyptian public life. It eventually found that initiative in its new policy toward the Arab world.[473]

Gershoni and Jankowski cite, as an example of this 'new turn' in the Wafd's orientation, a speech by Nahhas on 13 November 1942, in which he spoke of "the need for 'Arab and Eastern' countries to band together to form 'a strong and cohesive block' in the postwar world".[474] Another benchmark the authors identify took place one year later, in November 1943, when the Wafd hosted a party conference for the first time since 1935, the tone of which was overtly internationalist and pan-Arab in outlook.[475]

There can be little doubt that Gershoni & Jankowski's interpretation of events holds merit, insofar as seizing on a regional leadership agenda was moderately successful in shoring up the Wafd's prestige in the face of internal and external threats, and was certainly intended by the party's leadership to help restore its central role in Egyptian public life. But it is impossible to accept that this outward-facing orientation, which placed Egypt in a leading role within an 'Arab and Eastern' community of nations, was a new idea for Nahhas, stumbled upon in response to the changed circumstances of 1942. The evidence that, by 1938, Nahhas had already adopted this vision, lies in his correspondence with Nehru, and in particular the plans he divulged to the Congress President for a Wafd party conference. It will be recalled that this conference, scheduled for November 1938, was intended to have "a wider Oriental stamp over and above its local character", with invitations issued to representatives from India, Palestine, and other "oppressed people of the Near East".[476] The 1938 conference was banned by Faruq's allies in government; but in this context, the overtly internationalist, pan-Arab tone of the 1943 meeting

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[473] Ibid, p. 196
[474] Paraphrase. Gershoni & Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation,* pp. 196-197
[475] Ibid, p. 199
[476] Nehru, *Bunch of Old Letters* (Delhi, 1988), p. 292

was not a new departure for Nahhas; rather, it was the realisation of a long-cherished dream, which had in part been inspired by his contacts with Nehru in the 1930s.

The second notable shift in Wafd policy in 1942 was its promotion of labour legislation, and in particular the legalisation of trade unions. Lockman and Beinen have ascribed this shift to changes in British attitudes to labour rights over the course of the war:

> As part of the effort to ensure internal security before the impending conflict, British colonial policy makers began to experiment with influencing and co-opting labor movements rather than opposing or repressing them. […] By the middle of the war labor departments had been established in the governments of many colonies and dependencies, and British colonial policy makers began to encourage the enactment of labor legislation, including the legalisation of trade unions. Since Egypt was not formally a British colony, such measure could not be unilaterally undertaken there. Although there is no direct evidence available indicating a preponderant British role in the formulation and development of the Egyptian government's labor policy during World War II, there can be no doubt that the Wafd's approach to this question was substantively influenced by the new British attitude toward colonial labor movements.[477]

Again, there is unquestionably some truth in this analysis; but surely Nehru may also be cited as an influence, given his long interview with the leadership of the Wafd, touching on precisely this issue, in 1938, when he provided Congress as an example of a nationalist movement based on connections with workers and rural peasantry. As discussed in Chapter IV, at the time of his interview with Nahhas and other senior Wafd officials, Nehru zeroed in on the illegality of trade unions specifically, and the party's lack of mass popular organisation more broadly, as its greatest weakness:

> ...It is definitely an upper middle class party with a certain mass support but with no roots among the masses. Even the middle classes in Egypt have not grown sufficiently (less than in India); and such as exist are largely tied up with foreign interests. There is no real agrarian movement, no labour movement at all (trade unions are not permitted by law), and the whole outlook of the Wafd has been moderate and somewhat primitive.[478]

[477] Lockman & Beinen, *Workers on the Nile*, p. 287
[478] Nehru, 'A Letter from the Mediterranean', pp. 12-13

In his subsequent correspondence with Nahhas, Nehru sought to address this shortcoming, which he perceived as emanating from the Wafd's political backwardness and lack of international exposure. For example, he sought to steer Nahhas towards international conferences and organised people's movements, like the socialist-leaning Rassemblement Universel pour la Paix.[479] While we do not know how far Nahhas was affected by Nehru's criticism and suggestions in this direction, there is certainly as much evidence that he may have been, as there is for Lockman and Beinen's suggestion of British influence. And of course, the 1939 labour strike which called public attention to the issue of trade union legalization was, in its own way, also influenced by Gandhi. Thus we can perceive the echoes of Indian-Egyptian ties in the policies of the wartime Wafd ministry, well after the records of direct interaction have dried up.

A belated gesture

1942 was also a year of uncommon importance in India. The opening of the war in the Pacific and the relentless advance of the Japanese; the collapse of British defences in Hong Kong, Malaya, Burma, and above all Singapore; and the Burmese refugee crisis, with its attendant revelations of systematic discrimination, together shook the foundations of British authority in India to their core. In this context, Churchill—the infamous diehard—found himself backed into a corner by Indian petitions, parliamentary questions, and British public opinion.[480] In March, he announced that a political mission, headed by Sir Stafford Cripps, the Lord Privy Seal, was to travel to India in order to consult with national political leaders, with a view to drafting a declaration on future British policy. The offer was said to 'reiterate' (although it was in fact a very new innovation) the British government's commitment to dominion status for India "as soon as

[479] Krasa, *Relations,* p. 228 (footnote).
[480] For a fuller account of Churchill's conversion on this point see Low, 'Mediator's Moment'.

possible after the war".[481] It had finally been conceded in London that—with disaster bearing down from all directions—*something* had to be done about Indian demands.

Cripps, the consummate diplomat, a well-travelled and thoughtful man whose political star was on the ascendant (he had recently been made Leader of the House of Commons), was both enthusiastic and genuine in pursuit of his aim; but he lacked support from either Churchill, who hoped the mission would fail, or Linlithgow, who remained studiously aloof from the proceedings. Both Congress and the Muslim League also hedged; in private, Nehru had already concluded by January that, after years of wartime arrogance and intransigence, it was "much too late for any real compromise" with the British.[482]

Cripps came to India armed with a proposal which transferred most ministerial portfolios—including Home and Finance—into Indian hands. The sole exception was responsibility for Defence. This was to remain under British control; some Indian moderates sought to achieve a compromise, where the portfolio would be shared between Wavell, the British Commander-in-Chief, and an Indian counterpart. Negotiations along these lines were inconclusive; the details could not be agreed. At this point, the Congress leadership stated publicly that they did not believe Britain was, in fact, willing to countenance the reality of an Indian national government. Particularly in the context of 1942, they had a point, for, as Khan observes, "the legal, economic, and social structure of the Raj was at that moment completely dominated and geared to defence"; indeed, "under the Defence of India Act, defence and power had become synonymous".[483] Nor had this necessarily been the case even a year prior, when

[481] Qtd. in Low, 'Mediator's Moment', p. 158
[482] Qtd. in Ibid, p. 157
[483] Khan, *Raj at War*, p. 134

Auchinleck, still serving as Commander-in-Chief, India, had been open to the transfer of the Defence portfolio; the shift in position had come with the arrival of Japanese airplanes over Indian skies.[484] Thus, as Khan and Low concur, both the sending of the Cripps mission and its failure were events which could only have happened, not simply in the circumstances of the war, but in the particular context of existential threat which hung over India in the first half of 1942.

Gloves off —part two

The mission's collapse would be a turning point, both for British-Indian wartime relations, and for Indian domestic and inter-communal politics. They signalled the death of the last vestiges of goodwill between the Imperial state and Indian nationalists. From this point forward, British officials in India spoke with increasing frequency and detail about the extradition of Gandhi and other senior Congress figures. Amery, the Secretary of State, said with apparent relief that after Cripps' departure, "we can now go ahead with the war with a clear conscience";[485] there would be no further conciliatory gestures to local sensitivities. Years of progressive devolution in India were now swept aside in favour of more straightforward, extractive colonial praxis. In the face of the simultaneous Japanese and German advances, the subcontinent was to be squeezed for all she was worth in the name of defending the Empire; and any further voices of dissent were to be crushed.

Nationalist positions also hardened in the aftermath of the Cripps mission. For one thing, the obvious lack of buy-in on the part of key players like Churchill, Amery, and Linlithgow made the entire process seem like an empty gesture—a publicity stunt, which no one had intended to succeed. On 14 July, after long and agonised debate, the Congress Working Committee

[484] Low, 'Mediator's Moment', p. 158
[485] Qtd. in Khan, *Raj at War*, p. 135

hammered out a resolution calling for a voluntary British withdrawal and complete independence for India, and acknowledging Gandhi's leadership of a non-violent mass movement towards this end. The resolution was slated for adoption the following month, at the All-India Congress Meeting in Bombay. At that meeting, on 7 August, the Quit India Movement was formally launched.

The following morning, police and plainclothes CID officers knocked on doors across the length and breadth of the country. Members of the Congress Working Committee were arrested; trains had been requisitioned to transport them to prison, where they would remain for the duration of the war.

As word of the arrests spread, India's masses took to the streets. They were led by the youth—students, urban workers, the sons and daughters of elite households, villagers. Cut off from the Congress' older, more statesmanlike leadership, as well as Gandhi's strictly nonviolent influence, these young people took on the mantle of the popular movement, and shaped Quit India according to their own more radical ethics and beliefs.

The imprisonment of Congress leaders in August 1942 also removed the final remaining hurdle to Jinnah's political ascendancy. Since 1940, he had been consolidating his position within Muslim political circles, silencing rivals and gaining support among northern tribesmen and university students alike. His promotion by Britain, and particularly Churchill—who relished in the growing acrimony between India's Muslims and Hindus—as their acknowledged Muslim interlocutor further burnished his reputation. But it was the silencing of his opponents in Congress in 1942 which created a political vacuum in India, and Jinnah moved swiftly to fill it.

As in Egypt, the breakdown of diplomacy and reversion to 'hard' imperial power had been occasioned by the British perception of existential threat; unlike in Egypt, the source of concern—in this case, the nationalists—chose exile over capitulation. Their imprisonment sparked a national uprising over which, the British authorities soon discovered, they were prevented from exercising a moderating influence. Subhas Chandra Bose's voice blared across Indian radio waves; communal tensions rose steadily, stoked by the rise of the Muslim League and the demand for Pakistan. All went uncontested by the silenced Gandhi and Nehru.

In Egypt, the false start of 'Abdin resulted in no immediate eruption; the people's bitterness and resentment would simmer beneath the surface for a decade before boiling over in July 1952. Just as in India, however, by the time Egypt's youth were confronting the British in the streets, the traditional forces of nationalism—the statesmanlike *effendis* of the Wafd—were in no position to contain their revolutionary zeal.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to trace the evolution of Indian and Egyptian politics, economics, and society from the outbreak of war in 1939 up until the middle of 1942. I have argued that this year marked a fundamentally important turning point in both countries' relations with the British Empire, characterised by a hardening of attitudes on both sides. This resulted in the final and irreparable loss of British legitimacy in the eyes of the Egyptian and Indian people, and the erosion of the mainstream nationalist leaders' control over the movements they had helped to found and guide throughout the interwar period. This transition signalled the end of the Collaborative Moment, in that its latent potential was destroyed. After 1942, a younger

generation of nationalist activists, who had been nurtured by the promise of the interwar nationalist movements, only to be dismayed by their weaknesses and failures, would emerge to steer their countries towards a far more intransigent and violent confrontation with the British Empire. In this manner, they would succeed in wresting freedom for India and Egypt within a relatively short time frame; but the costs of independence would prove far higher than many of the older nationalist generation had been prepared to countenance.

Conclusion
The Collaborative Moment in and beyond Cairo

This thesis has sought to demonstrate the multiple layers of connections and interaction between India and the Middle East, both from the perspective of British imperial administrators and military commanders, and within the leadership of leading Indian and Arab nationalist movements, between 1935 and 1942. It has argued that these years bracketed a unique, 'collaborative' moment in nationalist-imperial interactions. The narrative has focused on the city of Cairo as a nexus of both British imperial and anti-colonial activity during the period in question, and as an emerging global metropole.

Cairo is representative, in a broader sense, of many of the social and cultural changes, and competing ideological and political currents, which then animated public life and discourse throughout the colonised East. These included educational reforms which put more young people of both genders into more classrooms for longer, making students, by the 1930s, among the most socially important and politically active segments of society. They also included the marked expansion and diversification of indigenous press and other media, and the emergence of radio in particular as a purveyor of mass culture with profound social and political implications. They furthermore comprised a renovation of religious institutions which responded, in various ways, to the ethics and ideals of a new nationalist generation.

These developments in the fields of education, media, and religion—the scaffolding of civil society—had, by the late 1930s, contributed to a unique and in many senses unprecedented moment of stalemate, between a British Empire in decline, and nationalist movements which had

evolved into the political and cultural mainstream. Having become the political status quo as 'big tent' parties, the Egyptian Wafd and the Indian National Congress were increasingly confronted by threats, emanating both from within their movements, in the form of dissenting voices and splinter groups, and from rival parties, which sought to seize the mantle of nationalism for themselves. As a result, for a brief but important moment in time, British officials and Indian and Egyptian nationalist leaders found themselves unable to achieve their aims in the absence of some form of cooperation. While this sometimes took the form of nationalist politicians working alongside their British counterparts, it was not uncommon for Indian and Arab nationalists to look to each other for support, whether against the common British enemy, or against domestic political rivals. Each chapter has drawn on original archival material and a diverse cross-section of secondary literature to explore instances of this collaborative dynamic, and in so doing provide new insights and interpretations of key historical developments of the period in question.

In Chapter One, the early history of Egypt's relationship with Britain and the evolution of its nationalist movement after World War I was woven together with a portrait of interwar Cairo. The history of India's independence movement was also discussed, tracing the development of the Congress Party and the Muslim League. It was during the post-World War I era that the rise of Zaghlul and the Wafd, Gandhi's satyagrahis, and Indian pan-Islamists began to alter the societal landscapes of Egypt and India, establishing mainstream nationalist cultures which permeated most layers of society, and articulated values and ideals which would be adopted and reproduced through channels of formal and informal education, mass media, and religious institutions.

In Chapter Two, a contest between competing political ideologies played out in Egyptian newspapers and on radio airwaves, as Italy's invasion of Abyssinia, and Britain's struggle to respond to it, grabbed international headlines. The chapter explored Italy's Arabic language propaganda, in particular Radio Bari, and drew attention to the differing reactions it received in various parts of the Middle East. While popular in Palestine and Iraq, Radio Bari and other Italian propaganda was less effective in winning Egyptian support for Mussolini, despite the fact that the Italian government spent far more money on propaganda efforts in Egypt than in other Arab countries. I have argued that this was in part the result of a concerted counter-propaganda campaign, orchestrated, not by Britain, but by Mustapha al-Nahhas and the Wafd party. This was only one aspect of a larger push by the Wafd to reposition itself as the party of government and the centre of national life. The anti-Italian and anti-fascist thrust of Wafdist media, and the party's efforts to muzzle pro-Italian journalists, were intended both as a defence of the liberal constitutionalist tradition the party upheld, and as an attack on the emergent proto-fascist elements within Egyptian politics. In criticising Italy's attack on Abyssinia in the Egyptian press, the Wafd moreover sought to win support among the populace for its renewed efforts to negotiate a treaty with Britain, the devil Egyptians knew, to defend it from Italy—the devil they didn't. As the chapter demonstrated, however, Egyptian politicians were, on the whole, far less concerned about the threat posed by Italy than were British diplomats, military advisers, and Cabinet ministers. The Wafd seized on British insecurity during the Abyssinian crisis to force the restoration of the 1923 constitution, new elections which brought to power a Wafd majority government, and the reopening of treaty negotiations. While the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936 did not deliver full independence to Egypt, it *did* result in the abolition of the Capitulations, set time limits for the evacuation of British troops from Cairo and Alexandria, and secure Egyptian membership in the League of Nations. These were prizes Nahhas had long coveted, and was, by

1936, willing to compromise with the British in order to achieve. In India that same year, Congress began campaigning for the first general elections to be held under the new India Act, despite the party leaderships' many criticisms of a system in which Indians were still denied control of the central government. Swept into office in a majority of India's provinces, Congress quickly found itself, like the Wafd, implicated in a formal power-sharing arrangement with British authorities. These twin developments marked the beginning of the Collaborative Moment in Egypt and India. Both nationalist parties here compromised some of their ideals in order to ensure their domestic pre-eminence, while from the British perspective, co-opting the leading nationalist parties into government was deemed less risky than allowing them to be overtaken—or taken over—by the more radical nationalist currents within and external to them, which had begun to gain ground.

Chapter Three opened by tracing the origins of the BBC's first Arabic broadcast from the Abyssinian Crisis to the Arab Revolt in Palestine, emphasizing the emergence of Egypt, and Cairo in particular, as the cultural and political core of the Arabic-speaking world. The theme of Cairo's growing centrality to Arab and regional affairs was subsequently elaborated as the narrative moved to the intervention of Indian Muslims and the Government of India in intergovernmental and diplomatic negotiations over the status of Palestine. These included the participation of the Muslim League in the 1938 World Parliamentary Congress for the Defence of Palestine in Cairo; the 1939 St James' Conference in London; and a final, last-ditch effort by Arab and Indian delegates to reconcile the Palestinians to the 1939 White Paper, for which purpose they reconvened in Cairo in April 1939. The details of these Indian-Arab interactions served to underscore a belief they shared, that the British government favoured, and was committed to, a gradual, constitutional process of devolution of powers. Both Indian Muslim and

Egyptian politicians advised the Palestinians to accept the White Paper's promise of constitutional government as a way of slowly, but surely, wresting control of their country from both the Zionists and the British. At the same time, however, Indian Muslims' commitment to the Palestinian cause on pan-Islamic grounds led them to pursue a far more drastic course of action—soliciting arms from Mussolini—when the Palestinians rejected Britain's offer. In this chapter, the Palestinians present perhaps the closest approximation of an ideologically revolutionary movement, unwilling to compromise its ideals for short-term gains. Against this, the Egyptians and Indian Muslims represent the advocates of a more gradualist 'liberal' approach, which hoped to make incremental progress towards independence, within the framework of the established order.

In Chapter Four, the connections between leading figures of the Wafd and Congress parties were explored, in particular the burgeoning personal relationship between Nahhas and Nehru beginning in 1938. Over the course of the subsequent year, both men worked to align their movements and bring them into closer contact, most significantly through a planned exchange of delegations. Leaders of the Wafd travelled to India in the spring of 1939 to participate in Congress' Session in Tripuri and then toured the subcontinent in relative luxury, on the Congress Party's tab. For Nehru and other leaders of Congress, the goal of this visit had much to do with appealing to Indian Muslim voters, by showing off the party's 'Muslim friends' from Egypt. During the Tripuri session, Gandhi and his loyalists faced off against the recently elected Congress President, Subhas Chandra Bose, who was forced to step down in favour of Rajendra Prasad. While Indian Intelligence assumed these internal divisions would make a negative impression on the Congress Party's Egyptian guests, this does not appear to have been the case; after all, the Wafd was familiar with the difficulties involved in holding a 'big tent' party together.

By 1939 the leaderships of both movements were struggling to maintain control of the centre, and encountering increasing hostility from internal and external factions dissatisfied with the limited gains of political moderation and gradualism. Nevertheless, the mainstream popular appeal of Congress and the Wafd, Gandhi and Nahhas, remained in a category of their own. Chapter Five documents the gradual erosion of Britain's position in Egypt and India following the outbreak of World War II, as social and economic realities began to change, and the allies came under siege from the Axis powers in both the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean. I argue that British perceptions of existential threat in 1942 resulted in what Antonio Gramsci referred to as a "crisis of authority". The 'Abdin Palace incident and the arrest and imprisonment of the Congress Working Committee that year were both instances where, after years of cultivating collaborative relationships with Egyptian and Indian partners, Britain momentarily allowed the "masks of consent" to slip away, revealing the naked force which had always underwritten British control.[486] Far from intimidating the population into submission, however, these actions only served to stoke nationalist resentment and shatter what little grudging forbearance the people had left for Britain's presence. In the wake of 1942, the broad, liberal, moderate coalitions which had dominated Egyptian and Indian political life since 1919 rapidly ceded ground to more radical movements led by a younger, more militant generation. Khan's description of this shift in India's nationalist culture is particularly striking:

> At the start of the war, nobody would have anticipated in Mahatma Gandhi's India that it would be military men who would soon be in the vanguard of nationalism. But six years of war had changed the political language. By 1946 Gandhi was barely heeded by a new generation of protesters who were angry, strident and determined to achieve Independence. Their hero was Subhas Chandra Bose and their battle cry was 'Blood is calling to blood'.[487]

[486] Gramsci, Antonio (translation Quinton Hoare & Geoffery Nowell Smith). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York, 1971).
[487] Khan, *Raj at War*, p. xi

This crystallization of a radical nationalist opposition would have been unthinkable without the social and cultural transformation of India and Egypt during the interwar years, through the combined impact of increased education and literacy rates; the emergence of mainstream national movements; and the mass dissemination of a new nationalist culture, via print media and the radio.

The crises of 1942 effectively drew a line under the mainstream nationalist leaderships of the 1920s and '30s—who were all Western educated elites—and cast them in stark contrast to the generation which had grown up in their eminent shadows. The Egyptian and Indian youth who came of age in the 1940s had been raised in an environment where critiques of British rule had taken root; they were taught from birth to aspire to national independence, and freedom from imperial domination. They had been educated, both formally and informally, to critique Western imperialism, and to uphold nationalist ideals. The moderate, liberal constitutionalists whom the British had sought, by turns, to crush, co-opt, or de-fang were finally revealed to have been the final screen between the British Empire and the righteous anger of this new, revolutionary youth, who had seen all they cared to of the paltry rewards for patience, compromise, and non-violence. In the years after 1942, it would be these forces who would largely determine the contours of nationalist politics, whether in the Middle East, South Asia, or other parts of the rapidly decolonising globe. From the turmoil of the post-war years would emerge the Non-Aligned and Afro-Asian Solidarity movements, which ushered Arab-Indian cooperation into a new era.

Because I chose to situate the narrative around the city of Cairo, this thesis has primarily been concerned with Egyptian politics and the Arab region. South Asian history and source materials have been employed to the extent that they pertain to, or shed light on Egyptian and Middle

Eastern themes; domestic Indian politics have been touched on lightly, and instrumentally. This represents, of course, only one possible angle from which to approach and interpret the nexus of British-Middle Eastern-Indian interactions during the period in question. Whether in my approach to Arab or Indian protagonists, however, I have sought to illustrate the extent to which colonial subjects were active and influential participants in interwar international society, beyond the binary of colony-metropole relations. As such, this work is intended as a corrective to the tendency, in historical scholarship as elsewhere, to confuse lack of power with lack of agency.

I have also tried to gesture more broadly towards the dynamics and trends of a crucial and understudied period of international history. In highlighting the global relevance of Egypt's capital city, and the dense transnational networks within which it was embedded, I sought to complicate existing narratives about the 1930s as a period of isolationism, nationalism, autarkic economic policies, and fascist-totalitarian ideologies. This is, from my perspective, far too convenient a portrayal; in streamlining the historical narrative surrounding the rise of Hitler, Franco, and Mussolini, we easily lose sight of the countless manifestations of a dynamic, progressive, 'globalising' international society which persisted, even as the political crises in Europe grew increasingly frequent, and grave. The emphasis I place on this point is neither aesthetic nor nostalgic. In presenting the 1930s as a moment of intense transnational contact and communication, cultural and artistic flourishing, economic instability and uneven development, religious revival, heightened political and ideological engagement (whether with fascism, communism, pacifism, feminism, anti-racism, or workers' rights), and above all, mounting tensions between fundamentally conflicting visions of the world, it is my hope to have depicted a world immediately recognisable in its complexity, contradictions, and terribly high stakes.

Finally, this thesis is not only about the individual instances of contact and engagement it documents between British, Indian, and Arab political actors; those are merely threads in a broader tapestry. My point has been to interrogate what this tapestry, cumulatively, can tell us about modes of thought and behaviour between Egyptians, Indians, and agents of the British Empire in the late 1930s, and in what ways those patterns began to change following the outbreak of war. I argue that 1942 was the year in which one culture of interaction—the collaborative culture of the late 1930s—was eclipsed by another, very different one, premised, for the British, on the imperative of the empire's survival, and concomitantly, for the nationalists, on the severance of imperial ties at almost any cost.

The preceding has been my effort to document how and why this happened.

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