

ident Sadat is a deeply religious Moslem who finds Communism, with its materialistic philosophy, quite distasteful. (The same is even more true of Libya's fundamentalist Qaddafi.)

It is interesting to note that some Russian officials in Egypt are said to have voiced similar sentiments to those expressed by Lord Cromer, the British pro-consul, before his departure from Egypt in 1907, to the effect that Egypt would never make significant progress while the nation held to the Islamic faith. But Egypt is not about to abjure its faith, as anyone who walks down Cairo's thoroughfares at the hour of the Friday noon prayer will realize, when he has to direct his steps to the middle of the street in order to avoid the prayer-mats spread out to accommodate the crowds of worshippers. The Russians have been wise enough not to press openly for the acceptance of Communism; nevertheless the Arabs have remained wary. They may be forced into an alliance with the Communists, but President Sadat has confessed that he regards this as an alliance with the devil, which, when it turns out to the advantage of the devil, must be repudiated.

Second circle

The second circle in which Egypt has a role to play, in Nasser's view, was Africa. Egypt's destiny, because of its dependence upon the waters of the Nile, is inextricably bound up with the Sudan. The Sudan question was a main bone of contention between Egypt and Britain for more than half a century, until their agreement on the right of Sudanese self-determination in 1953. Egypt has developed political and economic ties with black Africa, but it is Islam that forms the most important bond between the two. Thousands of black African students flock to Cairo, especially to Azhar University, the great Islamic centre of learning.

Nasser's third circle, the Arab, was destined to become the most important of the three politically, as it had been culturally for a millennium. Much is made of the divisive factors among the Arabs (regional variations, interests and jealousies), all of which is true. The Arabic language and culture, however, do provide a powerful unifying force and, though the spoken idiom may vary markedly from one region to another, the same newspapers and books may be read anywhere. In spite of the political and economic interests which the Arab countries have in common, the loose association known as the Arab League has not been an outstanding success, to say the least.

Nevertheless, joint action would seem to be essential for the Arabs in order to protect their interests and to contain the threat of Israeli military and economic power. In a world characterized by huge political and economic blocs, they must co-ordinate their policies and action in order to exert their proper influence and make the most of their vast resources, both human and material, especially oil. Arab unity has often been called a mirage, and Arab steps in this direction may be stumbling and uncertain; but the ideal will remain, and we can expect further attempts to realize it, in economic and cultural areas as well as in the political arena.

Arab world's unity called a mirage but more attempts will be undertaken to realize goal

Element of colonialism

Egypt's experience of European colonialism over the past century is another very important determinant of Egyptian political attitudes. The door to political and military intervention was opened by the penetration of European capital through resort to ruinous loan arrangements. In order to protect these financial interests and to insure control of strategic communications through the recently-opened Suez Canal, Britain occupied Egypt in 1882. That British officials and administrators did make a contribution to Egypt's development, for instance in the field of irrigation, has to be admitted. However, Egypt cannot forget the colonial administration's neglect of education, its opposition to the development of an independent Egyptian economy and the repressive hand of foreign domination deeply impressed upon the Egyptian consciousness by such events as the vicious punishments meted out at Dinshawai in 1907.

Parliamentary democracy never had a fair trial in Egypt; it fell between three stools — the landowning gentry, the monarchy and the British residency. The last-mentioned stood somewhat in the background, but was always able to enforce its will, as it did in February 1942, when the British High Commissioner rode up to King Farouk's palace accompanied by an armoured contingent and forced the King to install a new prime minister. Having won its independence after a long and sometimes bitter struggle, Egypt, like other Arab countries, is not likely to barter away its freedom of action easily to any imperialist power, new or old. Of course the devil you don't know seems less dangerous than the devil you do know, and the Russian bear did appear on the scene in the mid-Fifties as a disinterested friend, willing to supply arms and also assistance in such projects as the Aswan High Dam when such assistance was available from