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The Speech of President Gamal Abdel Nasser to the Afro-Asian Youth Conference, Monday, 2 February [Fibrair Shbat] 1958 / 24 Rajab 1378

Citation:

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Summary:

This is an English translation of a speech originally given in Arabic in 1958 by Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918-1970) and then reprinted in a book published in Cairo.

An officer by training and profession and a participant in the 1952 coup that ended Egypt's country's monarchy, Nasser in 1954 became president of Egypt and as such the president of the United Arab Republic (UAR), which was formed with Syria in 1958 and which continued to exist for a decade after Syria left the union in 1961. Having met India's president Jawahrlal Nehru already in 1954, Nasser began playing an important political role also beyond the Middle East in the 1955 Bandung Conference in Indonesia. His star rose precipitously in 1956, when he nationalized the Suez Canal and when France and Britain had to withdraw their forces from the canal after occupying its northern part in November 1956. Given Egypt's position in the Middle East and internationally, the US administration was concerned this aggression would play into the hands of its Cold War rival, the Soviet Union. The US forced its NATO allies (and their Israeli colluders) to withdraw—a defeat that Egyptians celebrated as their own anti-imperialist success and that deepened Nasser's popularity among many Arabs and other decolonizing and postcolonial people.

It was against that background that the Egyptian government further upped its international profile. This now occurred also vis-à-vis Asia and not "only" vis-à-vis Africa, which had been an important arena for the republican regime's foreign policy from before Bandung. Thus, in 1957 Nasser's government organized the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Conference that, analyzed in Reem Abou-el-Fadl's "Building Egypt's Afro-Asian Hub" (2019), led to Cairo housing the secretariat of the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organisation. And in early 1958, it held the Afro-Asian Youth Conference. By this time and in the 1960s, Cairo became a key transnational hub for decolonization movements especially from Africa, as Eric Burton has shown in "Hubs of Decolonization. African Liberation Movements and Eastern Connections in Cairo, Accra and Dar es Salaam"

(2019).

The text printed here is Nasser's address to the Afro-Asian Youth Conference, which happened to take place a mere day after the Syrian-Egyptian UAR was formally announced.

Original Language:

Arabic

Contents:

Translation - English

The speech of President Gamal Abdel Nasser to the Afro-Asian Youth Conference, Monday, 2 February [Fibrair Shbat] 1958 / 24 Rajab 1378

In your name and in the name of the people of the United Arab Republic, I salute the youth of Africa and Asia whose conference is being held today in Cairo to give expression to the struggle of Asia and Africa .. the hopes of Asia and Africa .. and that is laying the foundations of solidarity between the peoples of Asia and Africa, working for the freedom and independence for all people ..

The conference of Asia and Africa is indeed a confirmation of the Bandung Conference in which we participated and whose principles we affirmed together—those principles in which you believe, in which the people of Asia and Africa believe, and in which believe the free people in all corners of the world—the principles that express self-determination (*taqrir al-masir*) and that express freedom and equality, and that express solidarity in working for independence, for the reassertion of independence, and for solidarity in economic development and social progress for all Asian and African peoples .. All this are the foundations declared by the Bandung Conference, which is built on respect and on each state (*dawla*) having the right to adopt for itself the political and social principles as it sees fit—those principles that were declared in Bandung and that hold that the big countries shall not use the small states and shall not determine their beliefs and policies .. those principles that were declared in Bandung, pronouncing the equality of all states, be they big or small .. those principles that were declared in Bandung, expressing peoples' hope in peaceful coexistence and in working for peace ..

And today, oh youth .. youth of the United Arab Republic .. after having fought a bitter and great battle for independence, to obtain independence, we feel that in front of us there are great responsibilities and immense responsibilities towards our homeland (*watan*) and towards the countries with which we feel connected. We feel this in all our hearts and in all our spirits .. and as we were fighting the battle for our independence and if many of us were martyred during it, we are determined to fight to the last drop of our blood and with all we have to reassert this independence and to defend this independence ..

The youth who fought year after year and day after day to achieve their country's freedom and independence .. the youth who never gave up hope, despite colonialism, despite the forces of colonialism, despite the armies of colonialism, this youth always turned out, bare-breasted and armed only with belief, to fight colonialism and to fight its oppressive force, and did not run away from death and martyrdom .. this youth tastes the sweetness of independence today, tastes the sweetness of sovereignty, tastes the sweetness of freedom, and swore to defend this independence and to defend this freedom—this youth who defend independence and who defend freedom in order to create a socialist democratic cooperative society governed by justice and freedom and equality, this youth also feels that it bears a great duty to support the economic development of the United Arab Republic and to raise the living standard of all its inhabitants .. We gave up much in past years, weighed down by colonial rule and weighed down by the occupation .. and we missed great opportunities to develop our country and to promote the economies of our homelands .. we missed great opportunities to work to increase the living standards of the inhabitants of our homeland, and to construct a society of welfare and equality. Today, having achieved freedom and having getting rid of colonialism and having getting rid of the lackeys of colonialism .. today we feel that we can act in freedom and with determination to build up this homeland—to build it up economically and socially and culturally .. until we will have compensated what had escaped and until we will have raised the living standards across the homeland.

This, oh Brothers, is your message .. the message of the youth of the United Arab Republic for the United Arab Republic: working for independence, and then working to defend this independence, and then the work, with all the strength in our forearms, for the sake of the inhabitants of our homeland, so that we can liberate the national economy and so that we can develop our economy and so that we raise across this homeland the banner of a peaceful society that feels justice and freedom and equality.

This, oh Brothers, is your message for the United Arab Republic .. today that we celebrate this festival (*'eid*), the Festival of Youth (*'eid al-shabab*), after the

establishment, for the first time, of the United Arab Republic—and we feel the sweetness of unity and the sweetness of the Arab people's victorious achievement of unity and freedom—I have always told you, oh brothers, that force (*quwwa*) is the path to unity and that unity is the path to power (*quwwa*) .. I tell you today, oh Brothers, oh Youth: unity knows its problems, just as division and disintegration have their problems .. But the problems of division and disintegration are: the foreign control of our existence and of various parts of our country .. the problems of division and the problems of disintegration are foreign control and rule and colonialism and occupation—the Arab nation has already encountered occupation and colonialism and foreign control and rule, after these divided it the Arab nation and came between its inhabitants and sowed intrigues and dissent between them, so that they the Arabs fought each other and became confused, and so that the opportunity rose for those among us who are greedy to rule us and to take control of our country and to rule the Arab nation .. But then, oh Brothers, the Arab nation felt that its weapon against this control and against colonialism and against that rule and against aggression is unity and solidarity and concord—and everywhere, Arabs believed that they have to work for unity and that they have to work for solidarity and that they have to work for concord .. and the fruit of this long effort was your republic, the United Arab Republic .. This republic, oh Brothers, which rose from within the Arab nation to raise the banner of independence, and independence is the first step we make to achieve this republic, so that it may have solidarity and so that there may be unity and so that there may be concord .. Independence is the foundation of real solidarity, for there is no solidarity if parts of the Arab nation are subject to varied administrations which resemble colonialism and resemble foreign control and resemble tyranny and resemble foreign control and resemble those who want to control of our country in order to plunder its goods and in order to control us and in order to benefit themselves from those goods.

Oh Brothers, unity was the path to independence and freedom that the Arabs everywhere saw, and solidarity was the path that the Arabs in every Arab country saw to defend independence and to protect it from those among us who are greedy and from the oppressors. The battle of Port Said,^[1] oh Youth, was the clear example and great example for the fight of the Arab people and the fight of the Arab nation .. Port Said exemplified unity and exemplified concord and exemplified solidarity .. Port Said was the living example for the whole world that the solidarity of the Arab nation is necessarily victorious and will necessarily defeat the great powers and necessarily will defeat military aggression.

O Brothers, unity was also the great example for the entire world that unity and concord is the Arab nation's path to defend independence and to repel military aggression .. That time [in 1956], the solidarity and concord of the Arab nation everywhere enabled Egypt to repel military aggression and to undo the yarn spun by the great powers that want to dominate the small states by armed force .. And, oh Brothers, the solidarity of the free Asian and African peoples around the world helped us .. Today, a year after Syria and Egypt's unification, today we achieve victories. As I told you, we know the problems of division, and we know that unity, even if it should have problems, guarantees independence and defends independence from Zionist colonialism and from the colonialism that swore to themselves to dominate us and to take control of our resources .. Oh Brothers, the problems of unity are of little importance if we compare them to the problems of division. And we all know what the problems of division are—foreign control and rule and occupation and colonialism—but the problems of unity are problems that all states encounter and that all countries encounter, no matter where they act and no matter how much they exert themselves to build up their economy and develop it and to develop their society .. Today, a year after Egypt and Syria's unification and a year after the establishment of the United Arab Republic, we feel that our determination and faith in our path to the future are stronger than ever .. The people of the United Arab Republic here in Egypt and there in Syria swore to proclaim this unity, so that it may feel its power and so that its independence may be sweet; and so that it may fulfill—for the Arab nation that is in solidarity with it everywhere—the freedom and independence and power that it is striving for; and so that it may fulfill for the people of Palestine—which was defeated by conspiracy and colonialism—all its raped rights, which they proclaimed and swore to not forget. Our rights did not become alien to us,

we did not forget our rights; the rights of the entire Arab nation did not become alien to us and we did not forget the rights of the Arab nation; and the rights of the people of Palestine did not become alien to us and we did not forget the rights of the people of Palestine ..

O Brothers, these are the goals of the United Arab Republic. And these, oh Brothers, are the principles of the United Arab Republic .. This republic which was founded to be the messenger (*rusul*) of the entire Arab nation, not to threaten it .. it was founded to unite the entire Arab nation and not to divide it .. it was founded to work for freedom and peace. Forward, always, oh Youth, to raise the banner of this dear nation. May God grant you success, and may peace and God's mercy be with you.

[\[1\]](#) The battle of Port Said was the central military engagement between Egyptian and Anglo-French troops during the attack by Britain and France, as well as Israel, on Egypt from late October to early November 1956.