

## Nasser's Educators and Agitators across *al-Watan al-'Arabi*: Tracing the Foreign Policy Importance of Egyptian Regional Migration, 1952-1967

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### ABSTRACT

The Egyptian state's policy of dispatching trained Egyptian professionals, primarily educational staff, across the Arab world rarely features in analyses of Egypt's foreign policy under Gamal Abdel Nasser. This article relies primarily on newly declassified material from the British Foreign Office archives, unpublished reports from the Egyptian Ministry of Education, and an analysis of related articles in three main Egyptian newspapers (*al-Ahram*, *al-Akhbar*, *al-Jumhuriya*) in order to provide a detailed reconstruction of regional migration's importance for Egyptian foreign policy. It debunks the conventional wisdom that Egyptian migration became a socio-political issue only in the post-1973 era, arguing that the Nasserite regime developed a governmental policy that allowed, and encouraged, Egyptians' political activism in Libya, Syria, Yemen, and the Persian Gulf according to state foreign policy priorities in the 1952-1967 period. By presenting a cache of archival material in analytical and critical context, this article offers concrete evidence of how migration buttressed Egypt's regional ambitions under Gamal Abdel Nasser.

### I. Introduction

Because we had a common religion and for the most part, a common language, we felt we were dealing with friends not foes. In the case of our neighbors, we shared the same Arab perspective on life and the world. Or so we believed. Unfortunately, we found to our dismay that it took more than such commonalities to build a solid foundation for trustworthy relationships.<sup>1</sup>

In June 1965, alarmed by frequent reports of Egyptian teachers inciting political activism among Libyan students, King Idris arranged for secret police to be dispatched to secondary schools across the country. Since the mid-1950s, Egyptian professionals dispatched throughout the Arab world by the Nasserite regime were frequently accused of acting as political agents, but never had a host country gone through such an extreme step to verify these

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<sup>1</sup>Mohammed Al-Fahim, *From Rags to Riches: A Story of Abu Dhabi* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998), p. 160.

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claims. Planted among young secondary school students, members of the Libyan secret police soon reported back that the Egyptians were, indeed, engaged in disseminating revolutionary ideas through their teachings. By early July 1965, 80 Egyptian teachers seconded to Libya were deported, and their contracts duly terminated. Yet Cairo remained nonchalant: despite harsh warnings from British diplomats in Benghazi, more than 600 Egyptians continued to be employed across Libya, while more teachers were later recruited from Cairo. In a phenomenon commonly repeated across the Middle East at the time, Arab authorities were unable to find adequate numbers of replacement non-Egyptian staff, local or foreign. At the same time, the manpower needs of the region's newer states buttressed the position of Nasser's Egypt as supplier of highly trained, albeit deeply politicised, professionals.

More than 40 years after Nasser's death, the logistics behind Egypt's pre-1967 migration policy have not been the subject of extensive research. Most studies on Egyptian population movements tend to skim the Nasserite period, on which little official migration-related data exist and which is overshadowed by the later migration *en masse* to the oil-rich countries. Hints of the strategic value that the Egyptian state attached to professionals' temporary migration through its secondment programme (*niḡām al-i'āra li-l-khārij*) exist in research ranging from broad overviews on Egypt's Nasserite era,<sup>2</sup> to works published on the history of Arab states' development,<sup>3</sup> and from studies on Middle Eastern migration movements<sup>4</sup> to international organisations' policy reports.<sup>5</sup> Yet, little of substance is known about seconded Egyptians' actions abroad save from references to either 'Egypt's pioneering emigrants [who] first offered their skills to the nascent development of neighboring Arab countries'<sup>6</sup> or, in more critical accounts, to seconded Egyptians' role in 'the revolutionary, Arab nationalist tide which inundated the Gulf and Arabian peninsula region in the 1950s'.<sup>7</sup> In fact, by failing to examine this form of migration in depth and to properly contextualise it within Nasserite Egypt's political agenda, such studies underestimate the extent to which the policy of secondment, the sole notable exception to an overall restrictive state emigration policy, constituted a key component of Egypt's foreign policy.

This article aims to present in analytical and critical context a cache of archival material on Egyptian migration from this period, and argue that Egyptian teachers' regional migration through the state secondment programme was employed by the regime in furthering its foreign policy agenda across specific countries in the Arab world. The English-language documents employed are British consular and diplomatic reports, many of which were previously inaccessible and recently acquired through the Freedom of Information Act. While very little archival material is available in Egypt, statistical data were also obtained from the Department of Secondment in the Ministry of Education. Furthermore, research has been conducted at the Middle East Centre Archive at the University of Oxford, while details on the rationale and development of the policy are derived from the three main Egyptian newspapers of the time

<sup>2</sup>A.I. Dawisha, *Egypt in the Arab World: The Elements of Foreign Policy* (New York: Wiley, 1976); Anthony Nutting, *Nasser* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1972); Robert Henry Stephens, *Nasser: A political biography* (London: Allen Lane, 1971).

<sup>3</sup>Ian J. Seccombe and R. I. Lawless, 'Foreign worker dependence in the Gulf, and the international oil companies: 1910-50 pp. 548-574', *International Migration Review* (1986); Robert Vitalis, *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007); Enid Hill, *Takhdith al-Amal wa qwaninhu fi al-Halij al-Arabi* (Cairo: The American University of Cairo Press, 1979).

<sup>4</sup>Ralph R. Sell, *Hijra ila 'l-abad? Harakat al-hijra al-masriyya fi al-'alam al-'arabi* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1987).

<sup>5</sup>International Organization for Migration, *al-Mu'tamar al-Iqlimi 'an al-Hijra al-'Arabiyya fi Zall al-'Awlama* (Geneva: IOM, 2004).

<sup>6</sup>Robert LaTowsky, 'Egyptian Labor Abroad: Mass Participation and Modest Returns', *MERIP Reports* 14(4) (1984).

<sup>7</sup>Khaldun Hasan Naqib, *Society and State in the Gulf and Arab Peninsula: a Different Perspective* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 101.

(*al-Ahram*, *al-Akhbar*, *al-Jumhuriya*). Finally, the article critically employs state publications as well as secondary sources on Arab states' 1954-1967 development, and Western media reports on Egyptians' activity abroad. The reversal of the Egyptian state's emigration policy in the post-1967 period towards gradual liberalisation of population movements (formalised in the 1971 Constitution) prevents the period's inclusion in this analysis. At the same time, in light of space limitations, this article does not expand upon Nasser's secondment policy towards African states, nor does it expand its discussion beyond the activities of Egyptian teachers, who, by virtue of their profession, were the most able to influence local populations (in contrast to, for instance, Egyptian engineers or doctors abroad).

In tying Egyptian migration to Nasser's foreign policy objectives, the article aims to further disprove the conventional wisdom that Egyptian migration became a socio-political issue only in the post-1970 era, or the view in part of the literature that, 'until the events of 1973, the strong political differences among the countries in the region [...] created [...] political barriers to population mobility'.<sup>8</sup> In fact, simultaneously with the development of a pro-active regional policy in 1955-1956, Nasser implemented a gradual expansion and politicisation of Egypt's secondment policy, reformulating its key aspects in order to align it closely with Egypt's foreign policy objectives across the Arab world. This article examines, in particular, how Egyptian teachers' actions in Libya, Syria, Yemen and the Persian Gulf corresponded to the regime's foreign policy priorities in each case, respectively, in an attempt to underline the determination and consistency with which the Egyptian state, over the 16 years of Nasser's rule, dispatched thousands of teaching staff across the Arab world, and lend credence to how migration buttressed Egypt's regional ambitions.

## II. The Pre-1952 Origins of Egypt's Secondment Policy

Broadly, Egypt's policy of secondment traces its roots to Muhammad Ali's attempts at modernisation and state reform, which allowed the country to develop an extensive bureaucratic capacity early on, and the continuation of process of reform and educational advances under Khedive Ismail. Despite the fact that illiteracy continued to be a major problem throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the obstructionist policy of the Earl of Cromer in Egypt during the 1878-1907 period,<sup>9</sup> educational facilities catered to an increasing number of students. At the same time, the 1871 founding of *Dar al-Ulum*, a Training College for Teachers of Arabic, and a separate Teachers' Training College in 1886 substantially increased the number of trained teaching staff within Egypt.<sup>10</sup> By 1949, in their landmark study of Arab educational systems, Matthews and Akrawi argue:

Egypt's educational system has a considerably longer history than that of [the rest of the Arab world]. Whereas the other Arab countries [...] started afresh after World War I, the Egyptian educational system in general dates back more than a century.<sup>11</sup>

Egyptian secondment becomes prominent in the post-1922 era when, as Arab nationalist intellectual trends came to dominate political discourse in Cairo, the state extended various forms of educational assistance to its Arab neighbours, from welcoming non-Egyptian Arab

<sup>8</sup>Nazli Choukri & Peter Brecke. "Migration in the Middle East: Transformation and Change" *Middle East Review*; Vol. XVI, No. 2; Winter. 1983/1984.

<sup>9</sup>P. J. Vatikiotis, *The History of Modern Egypt*, 4th ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), pp. 467-71.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 476.

<sup>11</sup>Roderic D. Matthews and Matta Akrawi, *al-Tarbiyah fi al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ al-'Arabi: Miṣr, al-'Irāq, Filastin, Sharq al-Urdun, Suriyā, Lubnān* (Cairo: al-Maṭba'ah al-Miṣriyah, 1949).

students from those countries into *al-Azhar* and the newly-established Cairo University to providing funding for the construction of schools abroad.<sup>12</sup> In particular, Arab shortages in educational staff were to be overcome through Egypt's policy of secondment, which earned it the affectionate name *al-Shaqīqa al-Kubrā*. This early dispatch of small numbers of Egyptians abroad supplanted a growing sense of distinction amongst Egyptian elites on the country's place within the Arab world. Echoing a common sentiment in terms of the domestic perception of Egypt's educational role in the region, Egyptian historian Hussein Fawzi al Najjar writes:

It was no coincidence that Egypt should outpace its brethren Arab states in civilization, for when Mohamed Ali embarked on the building of the modern state in Egypt and sent out academic missions to Europe, the Middle East had not yet awakened from their slumber. When those countries at last started their own civilization at last and began liberating themselves rapidly from the yoke of the Middle Ages, they found only Egypt to supply their needs of schoolteachers and higher education professors.<sup>13</sup>

In the mid-1930s, 'strengthened by the establishment of the British-conceived Arab League and by King Faruq's pro-Arab and Pan-Islamic policies,' Egypt began dispatching small numbers of trained professionals in neighbouring countries.<sup>14</sup> Administrators and legal scholars were also sent abroad: one notable example is 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Sanhūrī, who drafted the Egyptian Civil Code. Al-Sanhūrī travelled to Baghdad to found the city's School of Law in the mid-1930s, and drafted the Iraqi Civil Code in 1943.<sup>15</sup> More than any other professions, however, teachers were commonly dispatched to countries that were developing their national educational systems: Egyptians were recruited to work in Kuwait's first two public schools, *al-Mubārakiyya* and *al-Aḥmadiyya*, from the mid-1930s onwards and in Iraqi schools from 1936 onwards.<sup>16</sup> In fact, in the pre-1956 period, secondary school students across the Arab world would receive the *Tawjihīyya*, the Egyptian Secondary School Certificate, upon graduation.<sup>17</sup>

In the Gulf, while the reign of Sheikh Abdullah Qasim al-Thani in Qatar prevented the dispatch of Egyptian teachers given his lack of support for modern education and the use of oil revenue solely within the ruling family, Kuwait was able to use profits from oil, which increased massively from 1946 onwards, to found a number of boys' schools, as did Bahrain.<sup>18</sup> Eventually, the dispatch of teachers helped pave the way for the conforming of most school curricula across the Arab world to the Egyptian system, aided by local aspirations that Egyptian-style education would enable graduates to continue higher education in Egypt,<sup>19</sup> and by the fact that Egyptian textbooks were acknowledged as the only quality ones available in the Arab world. A 1940 British report from Kuwait on the textbooks used in schools around the Gulf notes how 'most of them [are] produced in Egypt.'<sup>20</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Aside from secondary schools, Egypt established a model secondary school in Rabat in 1956; Alexandria University opened a branch in Beirut, in 1961. See: Fahim Issa Qubain, *Education and Science in the Arab World* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1966).

<sup>13</sup>*al-Ahram*, 17 July 1976.

<sup>14</sup>The details of the 1922–1952 period fall beyond the scope of this article. See R.H. Dekmejian, *Egypt Under Nasir: A Study in Political Dynamics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1971); Michael Scott Doran, *Pan-Arabism before Nasser: Egyptian Power Politics and the Palestine Question* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>15</sup>Nabil Saleh, 'Civil Codes of Arab Countries: The Sanhuri Codes', *Arab Law Quarterly* 8(2) (1993).

<sup>16</sup>FO 141/660/12-1937.

<sup>17</sup>Sheikha Misnad, *The Development of Modern Education in the Gulf* (London: Ithaca Press, 1985), p. 91.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>19</sup>Zaynab al-Najjar, 'Enrolment in the Division of Public Service and Emigration: Is There a Conflict of Organisational Objectives?' (Ph.D. Thesis, American University of Cairo, 1972), pp. 18–9.

<sup>20</sup>R/15/5/196.

Overall, the long history of Egypt's educational system endowed the state with the capacity to cater to its Arab neighbours' educational needs through the dispatch of teachers. This was also derived from the perception of the state's position as 'the intellectual and cultural center of the Arab world. In a certain sense', Qubain argued, 'whatever happens in Egypt in the field of education affects the entire Arab world, for it is emulated and looked to for guidance and its educational influence radiates into every corner of the area.'<sup>21</sup> At the same time, the policy of secondment reinforced this belief, through the promotion of Egyptian textbooks, the spreading of Egyptian-style educational system, and the admission of Arab students trained by Egyptians into Egyptian universities. Yet, the largely sporadic nature by which the Egyptian state responded to these needs implies that secondment did not yet constitute a state 'policy' in the sense of a well-defined set of state actions. It was only following the 1952 Revolution and Nasser's rise to power that the expansion and politicisation of educational missions abroad occurred, within a distinct foreign policy agenda.

### III. Gamal Abdel Nasser and the Expansion of Egyptian Secondment

The 1952 Free Officers' Revolution coincided with a time of massive developmental needs across the Arab world, as the process of decolonisation and the 'triumph of nationalism,' evident in the Levant, the Persian Gulf, and North Africa highlighted the need for an educated, trained bureaucracy.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, new elites, some empowered with increasing oil revenues, now aimed to provide education for the people: 'mass popular education was one of the first tasks which the new governments set themselves, and to which they devoted a high proportion of their revenues', argues Hourani: 'Almost everywhere schools were opened on a large scale, in poor quarters of the towns and in some villages.'<sup>23</sup> Britain's post-World War II 'exhaustion in the economic field' and impeding withdrawal from the Middle East did not allow London to satisfy these countries' need for trained manpower,<sup>24</sup> while the British were traditionally suspect of expanding access to education across the Arab world.<sup>25</sup>

This lacuna was filled by Nasserite Egypt, particularly after the Free Officers' regime abandoned its early ambiguous ideological framework, and focused its attention to developments across the Arab world. 'Only after the signing of the Suez Agreement our people began thinking in strategic terms', Nasser told the *Sunday Times*, 'Until then we had concentrated only on Egypt.'<sup>26</sup> By 1955, the Egyptian regime experienced a 'shift in revolutionary action from the domestic to the international stage [that] was accompanied by a parallel redirection of ideological development whereby Egyptian nationalism evolved into Pan-Arabism.'<sup>27</sup> Following this shift, Egypt's educational and secondment policies became a central component of ensuring the country's aspiration as *primus inter pares* within the Arab world.

Domestically, efforts were taken to rewrite school and university textbooks and adapt them to fit Egypt's novel perceived geopolitical position and foreign policy interests,<sup>28</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Qubain, *Education and Science*, p. 197.

<sup>22</sup>Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (London: Faber & Faber, 2013), p. 381.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 389.

<sup>24</sup>Glen Balfour-Paul, *The End of Empire in the Middle East: Britain's Relinquishment of Power in Her Last Three Arab Dependencies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 8.

<sup>25</sup>Donald M. Reid, *Cairo University and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>26</sup>*Sunday Times*, 1 August 1954.

<sup>27</sup>Dekmejian, *Egypt under Nasir*, p. 405.

<sup>28</sup>United Arab Republic, *Al-Talim al-Ali*, 1963. There is a voluminous literature examining the educational reforms of the Free Officers' Movement in Egypt. Most recently, see Laurie Brand, *Official Stories: Politics and National Narratives in Egypt and Algeria* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

located within the Arab nation, the African continent, and the Muslim world.<sup>29</sup> Law 213 of 1956 made education free for all Egyptians, while the regime also began changing the syllabi and curricula in order to make education 'relevant to national goals and aspiration'.<sup>30</sup> In 1956, for instance, it was decided that, by the fifth grade, 'the Egyptian child begins to study politics and reads about "The Arab World," "The New Army," "The Games of Workers," "The Dam," and "The Arab Hero"'.<sup>31</sup> Louis Awad's 1964 critique of the Nasserite educational system in *al-Ahram* (who had been forced to resign from the position of chairman of the Faculty of Letters at Cairo University in 1954) highlights a poem that primary school students were expected to memorise:

I am an Arab, I love the Arabs.

My father is an Arab, he loves the Arabs.

My brother is an Arab, he loves the Arabs.

Long live the Arabs. Long live the Arabs.<sup>32</sup>

The need to provide for the developmental needs of its Arab neighbours in the process of decolonisation should be seen in this light. While Nasser rarely acknowledged Egyptians' regional migration and the policy of secondment in his speeches, by 1954, as Cairo became 'the base and capital of the Arab struggle from Oman to Algeria',<sup>33</sup> formal rules on secondment policy were established, and the Egyptian Ministry of Education was re-designated as the Ministry of Education and Public Instruction. Aspiring Egyptians were required to have at least three years' experience, appropriate letters of reference, and to have completed their military service (if they were men). In later years, as the secondment programme gained in popularity, successful applicants were also expected to be under 50 years of age, and to possess a degree qualifying them to serve as schoolteachers. The Ministry of Education would then decide who to select, and where they should be sent.<sup>34</sup> The final step involved obtaining a work permit to leave the country, which was granted for a period of three years, renewable for a total of five. In order to obtain one, prospective Egyptians needed not to have a criminal record, and to indicate that they would 'not work with an agency openly hostile to Egypt or its national interest [or] undermine the development goals of Egypt'.<sup>35</sup>

The desire to tie Egyptians' employment abroad with state foreign policy priorities was also evident among those who were employed abroad on individual contracts. A separate process was introduced for the latter (they had apply for a non-paid leave of absence from their place of work after obtaining a contract to work abroad for a specific time period, usually granted for two years renewable, for a maximum of four), but at the personal request of the minister, such time periods could be extended to six years, in cases where the minister believed that national interest was involved.<sup>36</sup> While statistics exist on officially seconded Egyptians, there can only be estimates of those employed on individual contracts (who

<sup>29</sup>This refers to the well-known 'Three Circles Theory' in Nasser's 1953–54 manifesto, *Falsafat al-Thawra*, drafted by regime stalwart (and later *al-Ahram's* Chief Editor) Mohamed Hassanein Heikal.

<sup>30</sup>Vatikiotis, *The History*, p. 399.

<sup>31</sup>Quoted in Joseph Szyliowicz, *Education and Modernization in the Middle East* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973), p. 280; cf. Vatikiotis, *The History*, p. 478–79.

<sup>32</sup>Quoted in Szyliowicz, *Education and Modernization*, p. 280; cf. Vatikiotis, *The History*, p. 478–79.

<sup>33</sup>Charles Davis Cremeans, *The Arabs and the World: Nasser's Arab Nationalist Policy* (New York: Praeger, 1963), p. 44.

<sup>34</sup>For more details, see: *al-Ahram al-Iqtisadi*, No. 296, 15 December 1967.

<sup>35</sup>Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, 'The Shift in Egypt's Migration Policy: 1952–1978', *Middle Eastern Studies* 18(1) (1982) pp. 53–68.

<sup>36</sup>Amr Mohie-Eldin and Ahmed Omar, 'The Emigration of Universities' Academic Staff', (Unpublished Paper, MIT/Cairo University Technology Planning Program, 1978).

frequently exceeded the number of seconded staff). In the 1956-1957 year, for instance, 500 teachers were officially seconded to Saudi Arabia, but more than 600 teachers were estimated to be employed on an individual contract with the Saudis.<sup>37</sup>

Under Nasser, it was the Egyptian authorities who enjoyed a central role in coordinating the secondment process, particularly since the lack of administrative resources in host countries prevented them from having any say in the types of teachers they would receive. This was mainly the Ministry of Education's Department of Secondment, but the process by which host countries were to receive seconded Egyptians, however, was frequently opaque, and filtered through a variety of Free Officers' channels. A British diplomatic report explains how Egyptian authorities approached neighbouring countries, in this case Sharjah's Sheikh Saqr:

[The Sheikh] had received a letter from a member of the Egyptian Council of the Revolution offering to send a number of school teachers and doctors to Sharjah at the Egyptian Government's expense [...] It turned out that the letter, which he showed me, was a private one, in manuscript and without any official heading, from a Colonel Abdel Hamid, whom Saqr had apparently met during his visit to Egypt last year, and who now wrote offering to show him the sights of Alexandria if he paid a further visit this year, and going on to suggest that the Egyptian Government should send to Sharjah six school teachers for the primary school there, and in addition, three engineers who would train students in mechanical and electrical engineering, also a doctor and a lady doctor. He said that the Egyptian Government would pay all expenses except accommodation.<sup>38</sup>

Saqr's experience was not unique, for the Ministry of Education typically provided for the salary and relocation expenses for these seconded Egyptian teachers. The Egyptian state agreed to finance the employment of its emigrants abroad, a fact that further points to their instrumentalisation by the Egyptian state: implied in such arrangements is that emigrants reported directly to Egypt, rather than the authorities of their host countries, and that host states had little choice but to accept the teachers that the Egyptian state chose to second, a process that favoured politically-minded teachers, as British reports and other first-hand accounts indicate. Charles Cremeans, who worked as a teacher in the Arab world, reported that Egyptian teachers 'are indoctrinated before going to their foreign posts and are instructed to act as representatives of their country and its policies'.<sup>39</sup> Details of this indoctrination remain unknown, but according to official channels, 'the Ministry prepares training seminars' to selected teachers, in order to 'acquaint them with the countries that they will be serving at' and 'to enlighten them'.<sup>40</sup> In Iraq, the *New York Times* somewhat alarmingly reported that Egyptian teachers 'had received special training in propaganda and sabotage in Egypt',<sup>41</sup> while the *Times* identified that teachers employed in Libya had been 'seconded from the Egyptian army'.<sup>42</sup>

It can be argued that the harsh living and working conditions for Egyptians in the Arab world in the mid-1950s led to the recruitment of those teachers eager to undertake secondment appointments, and to 'take with them the flame of Nasser-type nationalism'.<sup>43</sup> In an effort to strengthen the identification of seconded Egyptians with the Egyptian state, Egyptians' participation in the secondment programme was valorised through the publication of annual

<sup>37</sup>*al-Jumhuriya*, 8 June 1957.

<sup>38</sup>Egypt's Campaign to Spread its Influence by Dispatch of Egyptian Teachers Abroad, *Elizabeth Monroe Collection*, Middle East Centre Archive, St Anthony's College, Oxford.

<sup>39</sup>Cremeans, *The Arabs*, p. 41.

<sup>40</sup>*Al-Ta'lim al-'āli*: Mushkilātuh wa-usus takhtitih (book). Cairo: Wizārat al-Ta'lim al-'Āli, 1964, p. 12.

<sup>41</sup>*The New York Times*, 17 May 1957.

<sup>42</sup>*The Times*, 25 November 1958.

<sup>43</sup>Wilton Wynn, *Nasser of Egypt: The Search for Dignity* (Clinton, MA: Colonial Press, 1959), p. 137.

lists of seconded teachers across the main state newspapers.<sup>44</sup> In fact, the degree to which these professionals represented foreign policy interests of the Egyptian state cannot be underestimated. This is further evident from the fact that the policy of secondment was pursued at the expense of Egypt's own educational development at a time when the state was suffering from a lack of qualified teaching staff: 'the export of teachers was a sacrifice to Egyptians', writes Wynn: 'Up and down the Nile valley, it is common sight to see Egyptian schoolrooms empty for lack of teachers.'<sup>45</sup> Yet, the official state line remained that 'Egypt believes that it is her duty to help her sister Arab states to develop their education and learning', according to an *al-Jumhuriya* report, 'and that this development will not be achieved unless Egypt supplies these states with their needs for teachers at any cost.'<sup>46</sup>

Egypt's secondment programme gradually became a main component of the Nasserite propaganda machine across the Arab world, together with a variety of other elements, from radio broadcasts of the *Voice of the Arabs*, to the distribution of Egyptian newspapers abroad, as will be detailed below, within the context of the 'Arab Cold War'.<sup>47</sup> A British report on Sudan details how 'Egypt's cultural leadership in the Arab world is unrivalled and her present Government exploits it to the full in pursuit of political aims. Egyptian teachers are sent to the Sudan; Sudanese teachers are trained in Egypt.'<sup>48</sup> But, if these accusations stand, why did Arab governments continue to employ Egyptian teachers?

First, there was an overall lack of trained, local manpower: countries like Iraq, Jordan, and Libya simply did not have enough manpower to meet their needs, and Egyptians, as native speakers of Arabic, were the main alternative solution.<sup>49</sup> For instance, the Saudi Arabian Bureau of Experts, created by the Saudi Council of Ministers in 1954 in order to advise King Saud, had to be staffed almost exclusively by Egyptians, as there were no Saudi lawyers.<sup>50</sup> In fact, it was estimated that the entire country had no more than 20 doctors throughout the 1950s,<sup>51</sup> while a 1960 United Nations' survey estimated that 95 per cent of Saudi civil servants only had elementary school education.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, the discovery of oil lured local graduates away from teaching positions towards more lucrative ones. This was particularly true in Saudi Arabia: 'the trouble remains that Egyptian teachers are available and that local young men have no reason to enter teaching as a career', argues a British report, 'These young men feel that they can do better by staying in Jiddah, Mecca, or Riyadh where the pay may be smaller but the opportunities are greater [...]'.<sup>53</sup> Even before Saudi Arabia was unified as a state, the Saud regime was dependent on foreign workers: Ibn Saud's advisers, as well as the area's doctors and teachers in the few existing schools came from Syria and Egypt.<sup>54</sup>

Second, Egyptian teachers were affordable, frequently provided for free by the Egyptian state, while Great Britain was financially unable to subsidise the costs of seconded British teachers in

<sup>44</sup>*Al-Ahram*, 11 July 1956.

<sup>45</sup>Wynn, *Nasser*, p. 136.

<sup>46</sup>*al-Jumhuriya*, 8 June 1957.

<sup>47</sup>See Laura James, *Nasser at War: Arab Images of the Enemy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Malcolm Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958-1970*, 3d ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

<sup>48</sup>FO 407/237, 1957.

<sup>49</sup>Wynn, *Nasser*, p. 136.

<sup>50</sup>Judith Marie Barsalou, 'Foreign Labor in Sa'udi Arabia: The Creation of a Plural Society' (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Columbia University, 1985), p. 134.

<sup>51</sup>Helen Lackner, *A House Built on Sand: A Political Economy of Saudi Arabia* (London: Ithaca Press, 1978), p. 81.

<sup>52</sup>Summer Scott Huyette, 'Political Adaptation in Sa'udi Arabia: A Study of the Council of Ministers' (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Columbia University, 1983), p. 197.

<sup>53</sup>'Egypt's Campaign', *Monroe Collection*.

<sup>54</sup>Lackner, *A House*, p. 191.



the Middle East. As a result, the latter invariably had their contracts terminated as too costly, and replaced by Egyptians,<sup>55</sup> despite frequent, disquieting warnings from British diplomats against this. At the twilight of 'Britain's moment in the Middle East', the British were financially unable to provide alternatives: 'we cannot ask the Persian Gulf Rulers to give up employing Egyptian teachers' reads a British report, 'because they cannot obtain a sufficient number of qualified Arabic-speaking teachers from any other source.'<sup>56</sup> Similar economic considerations made Egyptian teachers more attractive to Palestinian expatriate teachers, who had been forced to resettle in the thousands across the Arab world in the post-1948 era. While Palestinian professionals contributed significantly to the economic and cultural life of the Levant and the Gulf,<sup>57</sup> the Egyptian state's unique capacity to train, organise, and finance its educational staff's stay abroad increased Egyptians' attractiveness in the eyes of Arab host states.

In Yemen, for instance, Egypt covered all its teachers' expenses. In Lebanon, which had little demand for teachers of Arabic, 'the Egyptian government paid salaries of Egyptian teachers supplied to private Muslim schools which otherwise would have been unable to support a teaching staff.'<sup>58</sup> Saudi Arabia only provided an allowance to seconded Egyptian teachers, whose salary was still provided for by the Egyptian state, but paid all teachers working through individual contracts.<sup>59</sup> Libya traditionally relied on Egypt for teachers' expenses during this period: 'I've never been so rich in my life,' one seconded Egyptian administrator said to a *Sunday Times* reporter in Tripoli. 'I'm seconded by the Egyptian Government, who pay my salary at home in addition to my salary here; they fly me home free for my annual leave.'<sup>60</sup>

Third, the recruitment of seconded Egyptian teachers often served as a signal of a pro-Egyptian stance.<sup>61</sup> For instance, shortly after Sudanese independence the new government was accused by opposition forces of 'encouraging Egyptian infiltration and propaganda' because of its recruitment of Egyptian doctors and teachers. In Yemen, the tense relations between the ruling Imam and Nasser during 1956 translated in 'Egyptian offers of irrigation engineers, who would be extremely useful in the coastal plan, [being] refused', as the British reported: 'Egyptian teachers went on leave from Sana'a several months ago and are not being encouraged to return [...]'.<sup>62</sup> In Iraq, as the 1958 Revolution ousted King Faisal II and allowed for the two states' gradual *rapprochement* once Abd al-Karim Qasim withdrew Iraq from the pro-Western Baghdad Pact, Egypt would be providing Iraq with additional teachers by 1961, including a number of professors for the Basra medical college.<sup>63</sup>

Last but not least, some Arab governments perceived the dangers of the politicised nature of Egyptian professionals to be outweighed by the benefits of development. Indicatively, the Kuwaiti Minister of Education rebuffed British criticism of seconded Egyptian teachers' political activism in Kuwait by arguing for the importance of education:

Suppose that we want to follow the logic of the writer, what conclusions will his premises lead us to? He says that schools should not be built in, say, Kuwait unless there are enough Kuwaiti teachers to staff them and adds that the Kuwaitis are not keen on the profession of teaching and that the numbers of the Kuwaiti teachers are on the decrease. Does it not follow, then, according

<sup>55</sup>*The Sunday Times*, 28 March 1954.

<sup>56</sup>BW 114/3, 1956.

<sup>57</sup>For more details, see Laurie Brand, *Palestinians in the Arab World* (New York: Columbia University Press 1991).

<sup>58</sup>Wynn, *Nasser*, p. 136.

<sup>59</sup>'Egypt's Campaign', *Monroe Collection*.

<sup>60</sup>*Sunday Times*, 28 March 1958.

<sup>61</sup>See for instance, Abdel Razzaq Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution: Republicans, Sultans, and Empires in Oman, 1965-1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>62</sup>FO 464/12.

<sup>63</sup>*al-Jumhuriya*, 27 May 1961.

**Table 1.** Total Number of Egyptian Teachers in Arab and Other Countries, (1953 – 1964).<sup>1</sup>

Year	Teachers in Arab States
1953 – 54	580
1955 – 56	1,198
1958 – 59	2,696
1961 – 62	2,948
1962 – 63	3,512
1963 – 64	4,615

United Arab Republic, 1965. Unfortunately, the report does not specify particular host countries.

**Table 2.** Egyptian Teachers Seconded to Arab States by Destination, (1953–1962)<sup>1</sup>

Country	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961
Saudi Arabia	206	293	401	500	454	551	727	866	1027
Jordan	-	8	20	31	56	-	-	-	-
Lebanon	25	25	39	36	75	111	251	131	104
Kuwait	114	180	262	326	395	435	490	480	411
Bahrain	15	15	18	25	25	25	26	28	36
Morocco	-	-	-	20	75	81	175	210	334
Sudan	-	-	-	-	580	632	673	658	653
Qatar	-	1	3	5	8	14	17	18	24
Libya	55	114	180	219	217	232	228	391	231
Yemen	-	12	11	8	17	17	17	14	0
Iraq	76	112	121	136	63	449	-	-	-
Palestine	13	32	34	37	46	120	166	175	165
Somalia	-	-	25	23	57	69	90	109	213

Arab Republic of Egypt, Ministry of Education, *Department of Secondment*.

to this remarkable piece of reasoning, that a state like Kuwait should indefinitely stop building schools out of her tremendous income from the oil which has revolutionised all aspects of life in the country? How can we ever get out of this vicious circle except by inviting teachers from the Arab countries to start the process of supplying the country with her need of professional men?<sup>64</sup>

#### IV. Gamal Abdel Nasser and the Politicisation of Egyptian Secondment

The expansion of Egypt's secondment policy was accompanied, as the British warned, with its politicisation. In an attempt to understand the nature of seconded Egyptians' politicisation, we examine their activities in Libya, Syria, Yemen, and the Persian Gulf countries.

It is far from accidental that the Egyptian regime dispatched educational providers across these areas, for complex linguistic and urban networks existed across the region as a result of both historic and imperial networks. These structures upon the Free Officers' regime was able to develop flows of human resources, what Ann Laura Stoker terms 'imperial debris', predated Nasser and allowed such flows to occur more seamlessly and incur less resistance.<sup>65</sup>

The Libyan case underlines the main reasons why Nasser's policy of secondment was a success across the Arab world, complementing the Egyptian regime's wish to undermine the pro-Western monarchy and to spread pan-Arab ideas in the neighbouring state.<sup>66</sup> Sir Alec Kirkbride, Britain's ambassador to Libya, reported:

<sup>64</sup>Egypt's Campaign, *Monroe Collection*.

<sup>65</sup>Ann Laura Stoker, *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruinations* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013). I am grateful to an anonymous BJMES reviewer for pointing out this aspect.

<sup>66</sup>For an in-depth analysis of Egyptians' political activity in Libya see Gerasimos Tsourapas, 'The Politics of Egyptian Migration to Libya', March 2015, *Middle East Research and Information Project*, available at: [www.merip.org/mero/mero031715](http://www.merip.org/mero/mero031715).

The most important means by which Egyptian influence is spread is through the activities of the numerous Egyptian officials who are employed by the Libyan authorities. It is not unnatural that, in the absence of trained Libyan candidates for a vacancy, resort should be had to the engagement of Egyptians. Egypt is the nearest source of supply for Arab officials, many part of the Libyan administration are modelled on the Egyptian pattern and lastly the Egyptian Government continues to pay the salaries of Egyptian civil servants seconded to Libya and allows them to draw, in addition, the Libyan salaries attached to their posts. These Egyptians are, therefore, less costly to the Libyan Government than British personnel or than unsubsidised Arabs from other Middle Eastern countries. The most damage to British interests is being done by the considerable number of Egyptian teachers who are employed in the Libyan schools. These people are in a position to poison the mind of the rising generation of Libyans against the Western Powers in general and against Great Britain in particular.<sup>67</sup>

Egyptians' involvement in Libya extended beyond administering classes: seconded professionals drafted the Libyan Labour Code (essentially the Egyptian Labour Code, with minor alterations), while the Libyan University, established in 1955, was initially staffed solely by Egyptian professors.<sup>68</sup> By 1956, the *New York Times* reported that Libya hosted 'large contingents of Egyptian teachers, advisers, and government administrators [whose] penetration into almost every field of Libyan life has become a matter of Western alarm. For these Egyptians are also helping carry on Premier Nasser's anti-Western campaign. There are almost 500 Egyptian teachers in Libyan secondary schools.' Within schools, seconded Egyptians taught a distinct, pro-Nasserite version of history:

The presence of Egyptian teachers explains why so many classrooms show the influence of Egyptian propaganda. Pupils do crayon drawings of Egyptian troops winning victories over Israel or Britain. In Benghazi, Libya, a complete course in Egyptian history is given to secondary school students. A display in a high school art exhibit showed pictures of the leading rulers of Egypt; on one side were the "bad" rulers, on the other the "good" rulers. The bad rulers began with the Pharaoh Cheops, who enslaved his people to build the pyramids, and ended with Farouk. The good rulers began with the idealistic Pharaoh Ikhnaton and ended with, of course, Gamal Abdel Nasser.<sup>69</sup>

Teachers' work in Libya was aided by the fact that the textbooks used were printed and imported from Egypt, heavy on ideas of Arab unity and the struggle against imperialism. A seventh grade reading book contained 'the elements that make the Arab student feel that a new spirit exists in him, and create in his character the pride in language, Arab nationalism and the Arab Nation'. A chapter under the title 'I am an Arab' states: 'I am an Arab. Yes, I say it with all pride and happiness. I am not alone. Every Arab is my brother in language, religion, feeling and nationhood... Yes, I am an Arab from Libya.'<sup>70</sup>

The broader effects of Egyptian presence in Libya were arguably predictable: 'the people, particularly the schoolchildren, are always ready to applaud Nasser.'<sup>71</sup> Seconded Egyptians' political activism was widely known to the Libyan regime. British diplomatic reports detail how, in July 1965, the Libyan secret police was planted in secondary school classrooms to detect Egyptian teachers who were disseminating Nasserite ideas: 80 Egyptians were sent back to Cairo, and were replaced by Tunisian teachers.<sup>72</sup> According to British reports:

<sup>67</sup>FO 371/108687, 1954.

<sup>68</sup>Middle East Record, Volume 2, 1961, p. 150. Published in Jerusalem by Tel Aviv University.

<sup>69</sup>Wynn, *Nasser*, p. 137.

<sup>70</sup>Amal Obeidi, *Political Culture in Libya* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2013), p. 37.

<sup>71</sup>FO 407/236, 1957.

<sup>72</sup>FO 371/97338, 1952.

The planting of secret police in class-rooms in secondary schools may seem grotesque, but it is to be remembered that many of the twenty-one and twenty-two year old pupils are very grown up in appearance. Outwitted in the schools, the Egyptians have apparently turned to the mosques. Many Egyptian, Azhar-trained, sheikhs are now in Libya and use the pulpit (*minbar*) as a political forum.<sup>73</sup>

In fact, expulsions of politically active Egyptian teachers occurred regularly across the Arab world—from Kuwait in the mid-1960s,<sup>74</sup> to Lebanon, where Egyptians were charged with ‘inciting the Lebanese to revolt and paying money to foment revolution.’<sup>75</sup> Saudi Arabia also expelled Egyptian teachers multiple times in the 1960s due to their political activism.<sup>76</sup> Yet, Arab regimes’ inability to find adequate numbers of replacement teachers meant that such expulsions were only temporary. In Libya, King Idris had stated ‘very emphatically’ how he aimed to terminate the contracts of all Egyptians, and replace them by having ‘all students do a period of schoolteaching before they were able to obtain employment, e.g. in government offices’ as a type of ‘national service,’<sup>77</sup> a plan that never materialised. ‘Time and again, they have been expelled by various Arab governments for political agitation [...] in the end they are taken back. Arabs must become literate, and to do so they must accept Egyptian teachers.’<sup>78</sup>

A notable exception is Syria, with which Egypt formed the short-lived *al-Jumhūriya al-‘Arabiyya al-Mutaḥḥida* (UAR, 1958–1962) at a time when Nasser’s ‘influence in the Arab world was at its height.’<sup>79</sup> A year before the creation of the UAR, on 25 March 1957, the two states’ ministers of education signed an agreement to unify their school curricula.<sup>80</sup> Egypt proceeded to nominate Egyptian Minister of Education Kamal al-Din Husayn as UAR Education Minister and the head of a United Teachers Council. Nasser began the process of transferring Egyptian professionals and army personnel to Syria, and vice versa.<sup>81</sup> In Damascus, seconded Egyptian teachers were expected to join the Syro-Egyptian Club, which had been established under the auspices of the Egyptian Embassy.<sup>82</sup> According to Canadian archives, 300 Egyptians served in the Education and Agriculture Ministries, while 130 were employed in the Public Works Ministry.<sup>83</sup> In the March–August 1960 time alone, Americans estimated that 325 teachers, 29 doctors, 35 judges, and 150 engineers arrived in Damascus from Egypt.<sup>84</sup> The report argued that every Syrian ministry included a top Egyptian official who ran its affairs. In addition to seconded professionals, some 10,000 to 20,000 other Egyptians working independently in Syria.<sup>85</sup>

Seconded Egyptians’ reported wish to spread Nasserite ideals created an array of problems in Syria. Syrians equated Egyptian presence with Ottoman, French, and British colonialism, and secondees’ activities with Egyptian *domination* (*tasallut*). A common Syrian perception was that

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<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup>Marwan Rateb Asmar, ‘The State and Politics of Migrant Labour in Kuwait’ (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, The University of Leeds, 1990), p. 158.

<sup>75</sup>*The New York Times*, 5 July 1958.

<sup>76</sup>‘Egypt’s Campaign’, *Monroe Collection*; Lackner, *A House*, p. 100.

<sup>77</sup>FO 371/97338, 1952.

<sup>78</sup>Wynn, 1959, p. 137.

<sup>79</sup>James, *Nasser at War*, p. 47; Elie Podeh, *The Decline of Arab Unity: The Rise and Fall of the United Arab Republic* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1999).

<sup>80</sup>The Jordanian Minister of Education was a third signatory.

<sup>81</sup>Podeh, *The Decline*. By mid-June 1958, 16,000 to 20,000 Egyptian soldiers had been relocated to Syria. The Syrian army force, on the other hand, was reduced to 55,000 men. *Al-Hayat*, 13 June 1958.

<sup>82</sup>‘Egypt’s Campaign’, *Monroe Collection*.

<sup>83</sup>Quoted in Podeh, *The Decline*, p. 112.

<sup>84</sup>FO 371/134385, 1958. The Beirut paper ‘*Commerce du Levant*’ estimated about 60,000 Egyptian farmers to have also moved to Syria, although these figures appeared exaggerated to the British.

<sup>85</sup>Dan Hofstadter, *Egypt & Nasser* (New York: Facts on File, 1973), p. 87.

Egypt aimed to lower domestic unemployment by exporting Egyptians *en masse* to Syria.<sup>86</sup> Egyptian policy in this matter was deemed to be one of 'Egyptianization instead of unification'.<sup>87</sup> As Mahmud Riad, Nasser's adviser on Syrian affairs, noted: 'the term Egyptian hegemony (*haymana*) was often used when an Egyptian [...] was found in a Syrian working place', while Riad himself was often characterised as a 'high commissioner' and a 'viceroy'. Mustafa al-Barudi, the Syrian Minister of Propaganda, complained that 'the smallest member of the (Egyptian) retinue thought that he had inherited our country. [Egyptians] spread "like octopuses" everywhere'.<sup>88</sup>

The disintegration of the UAR, due to a number of issues, signalled the return of Egyptians from Syria. In fact, the repatriation of Egyptians started within a day of the coup—Kamal Rif'at, the Minister of Labour, and Tharwat Ukashah, the Minister of Education, were reported on their way back to Egypt, accompanied by 85 Egyptians. The exodus via Lebanon started on 1 October, by 4 October, 7,000 Egyptian civilians had reportedly been repatriated.<sup>89</sup> 'Who were the Egyptians in Syria?' Mohamed Hassanein Heikal asked, 'They were not in Damascus [and] they were not in Aleppo. They were engineers who went to supplement the Syrian engineers. They were doctors in the villages'. Attempting to ward off criticism of Egyptian secondees' conduct in Syria, Heikal—a close associate of President Nasser—argued that it was 'the voluntary, pioneering work of Egyptian technicians in Syria [that] gave rise to the charge that Egypt was unloading her unemployed on Syria'.<sup>90</sup>

The abundant presence of trained local staff in Syria created problems for Egypt's secondment policy that were not encountered elsewhere: already by 1956, the British reported that, 'the Egyptians have a definite policy which can be fairly easily defined [as] virulent and hostile propaganda' across the countries of the Persian Gulf.<sup>91</sup> In Bahrain, Egyptians and other Arabs 'played a major role in the development of the political and cultural consciousness of [Arab] nationalism in Bahraini society', spreading Nasserite ideas and advocating for a constitution and representative institutions.<sup>92</sup> In Dubai, Egyptian intelligence officers were reported to have infiltrated groups of incoming teachers in order to incite students and spread Nasserite ideas.<sup>93</sup> Donald Hawley, a British diplomat stationed in the United Arab Emirates in the late 1950s, describes in his published memoirs how pictures of Nasser decorated Dubai's school walls.<sup>94</sup> He details how celebrations supporting Egyptian policies were held at a school event in 1961, while school sports days were usually employed for Nasserite speeches.<sup>95</sup> Hawley also recalls young boys shouting out to him, 'Down with colonization and long live Gamal!'.<sup>96</sup> According to interviewees' recollections of events in Dubai:

... many young boys were encouraged by senior students and expatriate staff to demonstrate in the streets while carrying banners and photos of Jamal Abdel Nasser. Most worryingly, Sheikh

<sup>86</sup>*al-Ahram*, 10 November 1961.

<sup>87</sup>The decrease of Syrian officers and subsequent introduction of Egyptians in the country's armed forces caused clashes between Syrian and Egyptian army personnel, resulting in the death of seven Egyptian officers in Aleppo. See FO 371/134374.

<sup>88</sup>*Middle East Report*, 1961, p. 619.

<sup>89</sup>*al-Ahram*, 30 September 1961; *Middle East Report*, 1961, p. 620.

<sup>90</sup>*al-Ahram*, 10 November 1961.

<sup>91</sup>BW 114/3-1956.

<sup>92</sup>Al-Mdairis, F. A., 2004. *Al-Harakat wa-l-Jama'at al-Siyasiyya fi-l-Bahrain 1938–2002/Political Organizations and Movements in Bahrain 1938–2002*. Beirut: Dar al-Kunuz al-Adabiyya. It is located within John Chalcraft, "Monarchy, Migration and Hegemony in the Arabian Peninsula" 2010, Research Paper, Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalization in the Gulf States, No. 12, London.

<sup>93</sup>Christopher M. Davidson, *Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), p. 41.

<sup>94</sup>Donald Hawley, *The Emirates: Witness to a Metamorphosis* (Norwich: Michael Russell, 2007), pp. 128–9.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 295.

<sup>96</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 116.

Rashid's guards had to be called in to disperse the students, as it seemed that they were heading towards the only school in Dubai that was not participating in the agitation.<sup>97</sup>

By 1957, Kuwait was 'heavily infiltrated with Egyptian influence,' according to the *New York Times*: There were reportedly 400 Egyptians working within the Kuwaiti government, while only 97 out of the 1100 teachers in the country were Kuwaiti citizens. Teachers were also reported to incite the nationalist movement against the Sabah regime, which was not able to expel them because of strong popular sympathy for Egypt, particularly in the aftermath of the 1956 War. The Suez crisis led to a series of long strikes across Kuwait in October and November 1956, while some four thousand Kuwaiti youths had officially volunteered to fight in Egypt, despite Sheikh Abdullah's strong disapproval. A countrywide boycott of British and French goods was organised by the Ministry of Education, and enforced by groups of seconded teachers. Abdul Aziz Husayn, the Ministry's director, was educated in Cairo, and 'naturally leans towards Egyptian educational methods and the employment of Egyptian teachers in Kuwaiti schools.'<sup>98</sup> According to British reports, the boycott's enforcement was organised by:

... young women patrols (mostly Egyptian teachers) who started going round in twos and threes visiting shops and preaching to the shopkeepers the sin of selling to the foreigner. Their methods are 'highly abusive' and large and small merchants are warned by the patrols that they are being watched and that any slackness on their part, or if one English woman was seen in their shops, a report would straightaway be sent to the 'Cultural Club,' whence orders would at once go out to have their shop windows broken. These young women patrols have been seen at work ... but it would appear that all are Egyptians.<sup>99</sup>

Overall, 'the education system and the social clubs [were] completely Egyptian influenced,' while Egyptians pressured for sharing of the oil profits across all Arabs: 'Egyptians have said that Kuwait's oil is Arab oil and that in the interests of the Arab people all Arab resources should be shared among all the Arabs.'<sup>100</sup> A particularly striking display of Egyptian teachers' influence in Kuwait was the Sports Gala of Kuwaiti Secondary Schools in Shuwaikh, held in May 1957 and featuring 2100 student-participants from 26 schools across the country. According to an eye-witness report of the event:

1. The tune which welcomed spectators just before the gala began was that of the favourite song of 'Voice of the Arabs.' It was entitled, 'Woe to the Colonisers.'
2. The historical tableaux which appeared in the program included: a representation of the battle of Port Said, which took the form of a float bearing a boat with sailors and an effigy of a descending parachutist. The sailors in the boat were shooting down the parachutist. Written in large letters on the side of the float was: 'Get out of my Canal!'
3. A physical training display which was the last event in the programme, consisted of exercises performed to the tune of a song specially composed for the occasion by an Egyptian inspector of education. Each verse of this song recalled one of the Arab states: Egypt was represented as the champion of Arab freedom and the repeller of the aggressors; Yemen as the protector of Aden who was called upon to liberate her; Syria was described as the home of true nationalism, while Iraqis were the subject of sarcastic praise for their skill in picking dates with their finger-tips.'

<sup>97</sup>Davidson, *Dubai*, p. 41.

<sup>98</sup>Until 1950, the Director of Education in Kuwait was, in fact, Egyptian. See, FO 464/12, 1956.

<sup>99</sup>FO 371/120558, 1956.

<sup>100</sup>*The New York Times*, 15 March 1957.

These points together with the lengthy displays in which hundreds of small boys took part with air-rifles, made this gala nearer in character to a military rally than to a sporting event.<sup>101</sup>

Similarly, Egyptian teachers were welcomed in Qatar, which did not develop an educational system until the mid-1950s, because Sheikh Ali Abdullah al-Thani 'did not accept the idea of modern education until 1956'.<sup>102</sup> The Iraqi monarchy, on the other hand, was less amenable to seconded Egyptians' political activism: in early 1957, the *New York Times* reported that the Iraqi government:

... "As a result, according to the newspaper, 25 Egyptian teachers were a potent factor in the spread of Nasser propoganda and that they helped incite youths to demonstrations that resulted in eleven deaths [in November 1956], mostly in Mosul. [Teachers were found to] have agitated against the regime by encouraging students to howl on streets for severance of relations with Britain and France.

As a result, the *New York Times* reported how 25 Egyptian teachers were expelled, albeit in an operation that was 'carried out with restraint', and which spared university professors, 'who are still needed'.<sup>103</sup> The animosity between Egypt and Iraq subsided in the immediate aftermath of the 1958 Iraqi Revolution: 'co-operation with the U.A.R. is being steadily pursued in the educational field', the British reported, 'both in matters of syllabus and in the recruitment of Egyptian teachers, and Egyptian experts have been accepted in the Codification Department of the Ministry of Justice, in the Oil Affairs Department of the Ministry of Economics, and in the Government Oil Refineries Administration [...]'.<sup>104</sup>

Beyond the Persian Gulf, it was in the context of the 1962-1970 Civil War in North Yemen that Nasser's secondment policy was most extensively employed for political purposes. While Nasser's increasing engagement in the conflict and the travails of more than 60,000 Egyptian soldiers in Yemen is well known,<sup>105</sup> little research has been conducted in seconded Egyptians' involvement in Yemen throughout this period. Nasser, eager to promote a nationalist uprising in Yemen since the mid-1950s, was initially supposed to send teachers and other professionals to Yemen at the request of Crown Prince Muhammad al-Badr, the oldest son of Imam Ahmed bin Yahya, in 1959. This request was formally cancelled by the Imam himself, who was aware of Egyptians' political activism in Yemen: earlier, on 20 March 1958, a 'crowd of roughly five hundred led by Egyptian teachers, marched with flares to the [Yemeni] Palace', while, a few days later, 'all Egyptian teachers' in Sana'a marched 'together with 2,000 demonstrators' towards the Saudi Arabia Delegation in Sana'a, where they 'broke into the courtyard and smashed all the windows'. The Yemeni Imam apologised to King Saud in a cable, noting 'we are Arab brothers and must accept sorrow with good heart'.<sup>106</sup>

Cairo continued dispatching Egyptian teachers and other professionals across Yemen with the Imam's tacit permission, as their presence was necessary for the country's process of modernisation, despite the fact that they were known to engage in political activism: 'to the pervading influence of Cairo radio among the common people and intellectuals', a 1958 British report adds, 'should be added the disproportionate influence of the Egyptian teachers in Sana'a and Ta'izz'.<sup>107</sup> In 1959, seconded Egyptians began arriving with their families

<sup>101</sup>FO 371/126899, 1957.

<sup>102</sup>Misnad, *The Development*, p. 35.

<sup>103</sup>*The New York Times*, 17 May 1957.

<sup>104</sup>FO 481/12-1958.

<sup>105</sup>A.I. Dawisha, 'Intervention in the Yemen: An Analysis of Egyptian Perceptions and Policies', *Middle East Journal* 29(1) (1975) pp. 47-63.

<sup>106</sup>CO 1015/1267-1959.

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*

in Hodeida, where the Imam 'welcomed' them declaring that Yemen was 'waiting for UAR experts to start building the first Yemeni spinning and textile factory'.<sup>108</sup> O'Ballance explains:

Partly because there was no alternative, Egyptians working in the country as military instructors, school teachers and doctors, all subtly and insidiously aided the spread of Nasser's views. Under the Crown Prince's urging, Imam Ahmed had allowed some Egyptian school teachers into the Yemen to start a few secular schools and to give advanced education to sons of richer families, and their number had been increased during the Imam's absence in Italy. All this had a profound effect on young, restless, impressionable minds in the Yemen [resulting in August 1962] demonstrations in some of the secular schools against alleged approval by the Imam of the American bases in Saudi Arabia.<sup>109</sup>

In particular, the arrival of Sayed Abdul Ghani Mabrouk, Mahmoud Mohamed Mahmoud, and Hindawi Yaseen Hindi three teachers Egypt seconded to the Ta'izz School in Yemen in January 1959, led the British to report that 'the school in Ta'izz [was] now controlled by the Egyptians'. British reports argued that:

All three are believed to have been especially selected by the Egyptian government. Their teaching of course follows the usual line of the unity of the Arabs and the infallibility of Nasser. The leader is Abdel Ghani Mabrouk, an athletic type and a boxer who has the admiration of the students. He played a leading role in the Accession and Port Said celebrations in November and December. We also learn that he was active earlier in his career in Libya, where he is alleged to have been imprisoned for political activities and indecency.<sup>110</sup>

A few months later a number of different pamphlets, originating from Egypt, were intercepted by the British in Ta'izz. One read:

Oh sons of Yemen, the army and the people! Your brothers in the United Arab Republic and the Republic of Iraq know everything about you. All of them wish to rid themselves of the cheating gang which adopt guile and lies [...] All the Arabs are with us if, in the first place, we can prove that we are with each other. We must march to the battle lines and those free rebels who toppled Farouk and Faisal would not abandon us.<sup>111</sup>

Another intercepted pamphlet that was being distributed in Yemen read:

Do not clap for Gamal. O sons of Yemen whose hearts are shaken whenever Gamal is mentioned and whose tongues constantly speak of him. Gamal Abdel Nasser does not need your applause nor does he require your admiration. [...] Your biggest compliment to Gamal would be when you united together and organise yourselves, eliminating the monarchy and declaring the birth of the new Yemeni People's Republic, as your brothers have done in Iraq [...] The nation is above all and under no rule but that of the people.<sup>112</sup>

Once Iman bin Yahya died in September 1962, Abdullah al-Sallal challenged the legitimacy of Mohamad al-Badr by declaring the Yemen Arab Republic. Effectively, the royalists, headed by al-Badr, now the new Imam, and backed by Saudi Arabia, were pitted against the republicans, headed by al-Sallal and supported by Egypt. Confidential archival documents report how al-Sallal 'appealed to Egypt primarily for support against potential foreign intervention, from Saudi Arabia or the British in Aden, and for Egyptian technical and administrative help. Consequently, Egypt moved into Yemen, not only with tanks, jets and soldiers, but also with

<sup>108</sup>BBC, 19 January 1959.

<sup>109</sup>Edgar O'Ballance, *The War in the Yemen* (London: Faber, 1971), p. 63.

<sup>110</sup>CO 1015/1267-1959.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid.



almost 300 primary and secondary school teachers, administrative advisors, doctors for the new hospitals [...],<sup>113</sup> in a pattern reminiscent of the 1798 Napoleonic invasion of Egypt.

By 1964, the *Arab Observer*, a mouthpiece for the Egyptian regime, was reporting that Egypt had helped establish 14 hospitals staffed by 30 Egyptian doctors, a mental hospital in Sana'a, a veterinary administration, and two agricultural institutes. According to Abdel Rahman al-Attar, an Egyptian engineer serving as the Director of the Technical Aid Office for Yemen:

The UAR took great care to send to Yemen the best teams and experts in spite of their being badly needed in the UAR [...] Experts from the UAR Ministry of Scientific Research and the Ministry of Agriculture were sent to Yemen [...] Economists and finance experts were also seconded to Yemen and the result was the emergence of a State Budget covering the expenses and revenues for a whole year; the first of its kind in the history of Yemen.<sup>114</sup>

Egyptians' presence in Yemen was instrumental in developing the country's infrastructure. According to the *New York Times*' correspondent's account:

I was impressed also by the extent of the Egyptians' "hearts and minds" campaign among the Yemenis [such as] installing water pumps, school-teaching and providing all kinds of professional services and advice – agricultural, engineering and medical. These were all ways of introducing the Yemenis to modern life, ways in which the Egyptians could do things for the Yemeni people which their traditional leaders could not. The Egyptians had also brought 100 Egyptian ulema into the country, in the hopes of persuading the Yemenis that there were really no important differences between the Sunnis and the Shia in general, and the Shaffei and Zeidi sects in particular. They may even have tried to persuade the Zeidis that they did not really need an Imam.<sup>115</sup>

## V. Conclusion

[Under Nasser] an Egyptian was looked upon as the man with the 'ugly face' throughout the Arab world. For twenty years, every Egyptian had seemed to turn into a spy or saboteur. Every Egyptian teacher was thought to have come to overthrow the standing rule and to distribute subversive literature. Every Egyptian doctor was considered a spy acting for Egyptian Intelligence Service to set one class against another.<sup>116</sup>

This analysis of Egypt's secondment policy in the aftermath of the Free Officers' Revolution aimed to provide novel insights into Arab politics in the 1952-1967 period, by focusing on how the Nasserite regime expanded upon, and politicised, Egyptian teachers' regional migration processes. By highlighting the conduct of seconded Egyptians in Libya, Syria, the Persian Gulf countries, and Yemen, the article painted a more accurate picture of the politics of regional migration in the Middle East. It argued that this phenomenon constituted a key aspect of the decolonisation process in the Middle East, and a central instrument in Nasser's foreign policy towards other Arab states. British diplomatic and consular reports further highlight these aspects while also projecting the disquietude of an Empire in retreat. This allowed for a better understanding of Egyptian migration under Nasser away from essentialist accounts of population immobility and restrictive state policies.

At the same time, the analysis highlights two themes that merit deeper analysis: first, a discussion on how the Egyptian regime viewed its regional migration policy as an instrument

<sup>113</sup>Ali Abdel Rahman Rahmy, *The Egyptian Policy in the Arab World - Intervention in Yemen, 1962-1967: Case Study* (Washington DC: University Press of America, 1983), p. 143.

<sup>114</sup>*The Sunday Times*, 5 October 1964.

<sup>115</sup>Dana Adams Schmidt, *Yemen: The Unknown War* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, 1968), p. 208.

<sup>116</sup>*Al-Akhbar*, 13 March 1974. Quoted in Gerasimos Tsourapas, 'Why Do States Develop Multi-Tier Emigrant Policies? Evidence from Egypt', *Journal of Ethnic & Migration Studies*, p. 8. DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2015.1049940.

of power. Little is known about how effective Nasser himself considered this instrument, but the continuing financing of Egypt's secondment policy, even at times of economic hardship in the 1960s, points to its importance for the regime. The inherent contradictions of this policy, however, were not lost on him. Referring to the dispatch of Egyptian professionals to Syria, Nasser commented: 'we are at a loss. If we send people to Syria, it is said that they have come to rule. If we do not send them, it is said that Egypt does not care.'<sup>117</sup> This analysis allows for a better understanding of the Egyptian regime's evaluation of its own regional migration policy, which occurred after Nasser's death in 1970. Convinced of the need for cooperation, rather than antagonism, with Egypt's Arab counterparts, Anwar Sadat included the de-politicisation of Egyptian migration in the regime's broader process of 'de-Nasserisation,' as the section's opening quote indicates.<sup>118</sup>

Second, this analysis leads to a more accurate contextualisation of the politics of Egyptian migration within key events across the Arab world—from the rising nationalist sentiment in North Africa that resulted in the 1969 overthrow of King Idris, to the reasons for the disintegration of the United Arab Republic, and from the struggle between monarchical and revolutionary regimes in the Persian Gulf, to the bloody Yemeni Civil War—and paves the way for future research into the impact of Egyptian regional migration upon Middle East politics of the era and upon the mind-set of future Arab elites, in particular. Colonel Qaddafi's deep admiration of Nasser, for instance, stemmed partly from his exposure to Egyptian teachers and newspapers in Sabha during the 1950s. Egyptian activism had an opposite effect upon Saudi elites, which only overcame their distrust of Egyptian migrants once Sadat came to power, when the latter were given preferential treatment over Palestinians and Yemenis. Such broader questions about the role of Egyptian teachers or, indeed, other seconded professionals, in the Arab region point to the need to reconceptualise migration in the Nasserite years away from notions of restrictive measures or population immobility towards a more accurate understanding of how it buttress the regime's regional vision, and intra-Arab politics overall.

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## Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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<sup>117</sup>FO 371/134385, 1958.

<sup>118</sup>For a broader discussion on how regional migration enabled regime cooperation, see Gerasimos Tsourapas, 'Population Mobility & Autocratic Cooperation: Egyptian Migration in the Arab World, 1970-1989', forthcoming.