

# 1 *Iran, Egypt and the Spectre of Nasserism*

During the 1950s and 1960s, Iran's regional security outlook, as well as its relations with the United States and the Soviet Union, was, to a large degree, shaped by events in North Africa, particularly in Egypt. Egypt, like Iran, had long aspired to play a leading role in regional and global politics. The marriage of the Pahlavi crown prince, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, to Princess Fawzia Faud of Egypt in 1939 reflected both of these aspirations in different ways. For Reza Shah, who had founded his new dynasty in 1925, linking the Pahlavi royal house to an older, venerable Islamic monarchy would enhance his dynasty's legitimacy, and at the same time, against the backdrop of the Treaty of Sa'dābād, strengthen regional cooperation. For the Egyptian King Farouk, the alliance would help to validate his credentials as an important leader in the Islamic world.

While Iran had enjoyed relatively cordial relations with Egypt under King Farouk, the coup of 1952 saw the demise of the Egyptian monarchy and its replacement with a regime hostile to Iran, headed by Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser. In the years that followed, Nasser emerged as a powerful voice within the Afro-Asian bloc, and a rallying point for revolutionary, anti-imperial movements across the Global South. This was particularly the case in the Arab world, where Nasser became the champion of the Arab cause and, to a certain extent, Islamic unity. As this chapter will show, the shah perceived Nasser as a threat not only to Iran's territorial integrity but also to Iran's internal security and to the very survival of the Pahlavi monarchy. During the Suez crisis in 1956, Iran voiced its public support for Egypt's sovereign right to nationalise the canal, partly to placate those who sympathised with the Egyptian struggle against imperialism. At the same time, however, to American and British diplomats and politicians, the shah and his ministers warned of the dangers of an Egyptian victory and encouraged their Western partners to use force if necessary. Nasser's policy of positive neutralism, which essentially meant non-alignment in, but

not indifference to, world affairs, can be contrasted to the shah's policy of positive nationalism, conceived as a response to Mohammad Mosaddeq's negative or irresponsible nationalism during his premiership from 1951 to 1953. Positive nationalism, a precursor to the shah's independent national policy of the 1960s and 1970s, essentially meant that Iran pursued a nationalist agenda, but without damaging relations with the major powers.<sup>1</sup> Iran's relationship with Egypt perfectly captures the evolution of Iran's foreign policy during this period.

### Egypt and Iran under King Farouk

On 24 February 1939, the crown prince of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, left Tehran for Baghdad. He was accompanied by a cohort of important officials, including the speaker of the Majles, Mirzā Hasan Esfandi-yāri; the minister of foreign affairs, Mozaffar A'lam; the minister of justice, Matin Daftari; his personal chamberlain, Dr Mo'adab Nafisi; the director general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mohammad 'Ali Moqaddam; the Majles representative, Dr Qāsem Ghani; the head of *Ettelā'āt* newspaper, 'Abbās Mas'udi; along with an Imperial Court minister and several adjutants.<sup>2</sup> This royal delegation arrived in Baghdad on 26 February, where they stayed for two nights at Zuhur Palace as guests of King Ghāzi I.<sup>3</sup> They then travelled onwards via Damascus to Beirut, where they boarded a ship to their final destination, Egypt. There the crown prince was to wed the sister of King Farouk, Princess Fawzia Faud.

Egypt and Iran had been allies for some time. Iran had been the first country to recognise Egypt after it achieved independence on 28 February 1922, and soon thereafter it upgraded its consulate in Cairo to an embassy. Egypt followed suit and opened an embassy in Tehran in 1925.<sup>4</sup> In 1928, a treaty of amity and friendship (*qarārdād-e mavaddat va dusti*) was agreed upon between Iran and Egypt – the first

<sup>1</sup> On the independent national policy, see *Decade of the Revolution*, 171–174.

<sup>2</sup> Sergei Barseghian, 'Malakeh-ye Mesri-ye Darbār-e Irān: Ezdevāj va Talāgh-e Mohammad Rezā Pahlavi va Fawziyeh', *Tarikh-e Irani*, 30 Esfand 1389. Available online: <http://tarikhirani.ir/fa/news/7102/ملکه-مصری-در-بار-ایران-از-دواج-و-طلاق-محمدرضا-پهلوی-و-غوزیه>.

<sup>3</sup> King Ghāzi died in a car accident little over a month later on 4 April 1939, aged just twenty-seven. He was succeeded by his son, Faisal II.

<sup>4</sup> Ahmad Bakhshi, 'Barresi-ye Tārikhi-ye Ravābet-e Khāreji-ye Irān va Qāreh-ye Afriqā', *Tārikh-e Ravābet-e Khāreji*, vol. 35 (1387/2008), 44.

such treaty that independent Egypt had signed with an Islamic country.<sup>5</sup> This was followed two years later by a trade agreement, along with the establishment of an Iranian chamber of commerce in Egypt.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time as Iran's relations with Egypt were improving steadily, the governments of Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq and Turkey signed a treaty of non-aggression at Sa'dābād Palace in Tehran on 8 July 1937. Under the Sa'dābād Pact, the signatory governments pledged to refrain from interfering in one another's internal affairs, respect common borders, refrain from aggression towards one another and refrain from pursuing policies designed to disturb the peace between neighbouring countries.<sup>7</sup> Iran had sought to convince Egypt to join the pact and the Egyptian cabinet appeared keen to do so, but ultimately it refused.<sup>8</sup> In spite of Egypt's absence from the Sa'dābād Pact, the marriage of the two royal houses reaffirmed both Iran and Egypt's commitment to regional cooperation.<sup>9</sup>

Like his siblings, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi must have accepted that he would have little say in the selection of his spouse.<sup>10</sup> His two sisters, Shams and Ashraf, had been married in September 1936 to husbands chosen by their father. Reza Shah had decided that his son must be married to a woman of 'a great and well established line' to help legitimise the fledgling Pahlavi Dynasty as part of the global monarchical order.<sup>11</sup> He had considered foreign princesses, including Princess Ingrid of Sweden, as well as Iranian, such as the daughter of Ahmad Shah, the last king of the Qajar dynasty.<sup>12</sup> It has been

<sup>5</sup> Barseghian, 'Malakeh-ye Mesri-ye Darbār-e Irān'.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. See also, Shahrough Akhavi, 'EGYPT vii. Political and Religious Relations with Persia in the Modern Period', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, VIII/3 (1998), 257–262. Available online: [www.iranicaonline.org/articles/egypt-vii](http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/egypt-vii).

<sup>7</sup> Laurence P. Elwell-Sutton, *Modern Iran* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1941), 225–228.

<sup>8</sup> Barseghian, 'Malakeh-ye Mesri-ye Darbār-e Irān'.

<sup>9</sup> Also important in the context of this drive for regional cooperation is the state visit of Reza Shah to Turkey in 1934. See Afshin Marashi, 'Performing the Nation: The Shah's Official State Visit to Kemalist Turkey, June to July 1934', in *The Making of Modern Iran: State and Society under Riza Shah, 1921–1941*, ed. Stephanie Cronin (London: Routledge, 2003), 99–119.

<sup>10</sup> Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, *Mission for My Country* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1961), 218.

<sup>11</sup> Gholam Reza Afkhami, *The Life and Times of the Shah* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 40.

<sup>12</sup> Though the constitution stipulated that a king of Iran may not be of Qajar blood.

suggested that the idea to marry the Iranian crown prince to an Egyptian princess came from the Turkish president, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who relayed a message to Iran's ambassador to Iraq, Mozaffar A'lam, through his foreign minister, Rushdi Aras, that 'such a marriage would be in the interests of all countries in the region, especially Iran and Egypt'.<sup>13</sup> Iran's ambassador in Cairo, Javād Sinki, met with Princess Fawzia and sent a telegram to Reza Shah to propose a marriage between her and the crown prince.<sup>14</sup> Reza Shah was apparently warm to the idea, particularly as it would help to strengthen Iran's ties to the most powerful Arab state.<sup>15</sup>

Before this fundamentally political marriage could be agreed, it had to be debated by both the Egyptian cabinet and the Iranian Majles. The cabinet of Mostafa el-Nahas Pasha, leader of the Wadf Party, decided that it would support the marriage not only because it would strengthen the bilateral relationship with Iran but because it could play a crucial role in establishing Egypt's role in the Islamic world as the seat of a renewed Islamic caliphate.<sup>16</sup> At the time of the wedding, the English press reported, 'The purpose of this marriage is to revive the Islamic caliphate and choose King Farouk as the Muslim caliph.'<sup>17</sup>

With the approval of both governments, the engagement was announced in Cairo and Tehran on 26 May 1938 (5 Khordād 1317). This was the first time that the Iranian crown prince heard the news. In Iran, although Reza Shah had agreed to the marriage, the constitution stipulated that the parents of a shah should both be Iranian. To overcome this, Reza Shah instructed his minister of justice, Matin Daftari, to come up with a solution.<sup>18</sup> Daftari thus proposed a bill to

<sup>13</sup> Afkhami, *The Life and Times of the Shah*, 41.

<sup>14</sup> Barseghian, 'Malakeh-ye Mesri-ye Darbār-e Irān'.

<sup>15</sup> It has been suggested that it was during Reza Shah's trip to Turkey in 1934 that Atatürk first suggested to him that he marry his crown prince to the Egyptian royal family. See Barseghian, 'Malakeh-ye Mesri-ye Darbār-e Irān'.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> 'Egyptian Princess Fawzia: How Her Marriage to Iran's Pahlavi Ended in Divorce', *Alarabiya*, 15 January 2019. Available online: <https://english.alarabiya.net/features/2019/01/15/Egyptian-Princess-Fawzia-How-her-marriage-to-Iran-s-Pahlavi-ended-in-divorce>. Just six years later, as Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet observes, some in Iran interpreted the creation of the Arab League in March 1945 as 'a modernist attempt to recast the caliphate with Egypt at its center', Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, 'Iran on Shaky Ground: Iran between Israel and Pan-Arabism, 1930–1970s', *Middle East Studies*, vol. 59, no. 6 (2023), 953.

<sup>18</sup> Barseghian, 'Malakeh-ye Mesri-ye Darbār-e Irān'.

the Majles on 31 October 1938 (9 Ābān 1317), proposing that the term ‘Iranian origin’ in the article be interpreted to include a person who is, in the national interest, declared by imperial decree to be Iranian.<sup>19</sup> The bill passed on 3 November (14 Ābān).<sup>20</sup> In a country where the monarch traditionally married women from his own country, the significance of the future shah wedding a foreign princess was noted by foreign diplomats.<sup>21</sup>

The first time Mohammad Reza Pahlavi met his wife-to-be was at a banquet prepared in his honour by Princess Fawzia’s mother, Queen Nazli, on 4 March 1939. The wedding was originally due to take place on 16 March but was brought forward to coincide with the birthday of Reza Shah and Egyptian Constitution Day.<sup>22</sup> The wedding ceremony itself was simple, according to Islamic tradition, but efforts were made to turn the marriage into a national celebration. As Qāsem Ghani recalled, ‘The earth and sky were celebrating. All of Cairo was covered in flowers. The whole country participated in the celebration.’<sup>23</sup> One month later, on 14 April 1939, the crown prince and his bride arrived in Iran for a second wedding ceremony at Golestān Palace in Tehran.<sup>24</sup> The wedding triggered what Asef Bayat and Bahman Baktiari refer to as ‘an outpouring of panegyric on the warm relations between Egypt and Iran’.<sup>25</sup> Poetry in particular referred to Iran and Egypt as ‘civilisations’, which were ‘shining examples of an awakening East’.<sup>26</sup> As a result of the closer cultural ties that were forged by the union, Al-Azhar University in Cairo began to offer Persian language courses.<sup>27</sup>

The Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran in August 1941 resulted in the forced abdication of Reza Shah, and his succession by Mohammad

<sup>19</sup> Afkhami, *The Life and Times of the Shah*, 41.

<sup>20</sup> Mozākerāt-e Majles-e Showrā-ye Melli, 14 Ābān 1317, Jalaseh-ye 46.

<sup>21</sup> Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Conceiving Citizens: Women and the Politics of Motherhood in Iran* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 71.

<sup>22</sup> *The Palestine Post*, 5 March 1939, 2.

<sup>23</sup> Qāsem Ghani cited in Barseghian, ‘Malakeh-ye Mesri-ye Darbār-e Irān’.

<sup>24</sup> Barseghian, ‘Malakeh-ye Mesri-ye Darbār-e Irān’. Princess Fawzia brought her mother, Queen Nazli, with her, along with three sisters. Apparently, they were extremely critical of the inferior jewels the Pahlavi royal family wore during the reception, which led to a dispute between her and Reza Shah.

<sup>25</sup> Asef Bayat and Bahman Baktiari, ‘Revolutionary Iran and Egypt: Exporting Inspirations and Anxieties’, in *Iran and the Surrounding World: Interactions in Culture and Cultural Politics*, ed. Nikki R. Keddie and Rudi Matthee (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 306.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

Reza Pahlavi. The invasion of Iran was met with anger in some circles in Egypt, and several Egyptian government officials resigned in disgust at the failure of their government to offer even moral support to Tehran.<sup>28</sup> After the death of Reza Pahlavi from a heart attack on 26 July 1944, due to the difficulties in transferring the body back to Iran at this time, it was decided to mummify the body and take it to Egypt to be transferred to Iran at a later date. The Egyptian government was helpful in issuing visas to those who would transport the body from South Africa to Egypt.<sup>29</sup> A funeral ceremony was held in Cairo for Reza Shah, and his body was temporarily interned at the Rifa'i Mosque to be transferred to Iran after the completion of a mausoleum.<sup>30</sup>

The divorce of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, then shah, and Princess Fawzia in 1948 caused a strain in relations between the two royal houses. Indeed, it took some diplomatic skill on behalf of Iran's ambassador in Cairo, 'Ali Dashti, to convince the Egyptians in 1950 to allow the transfer of the body of Reza Shah to Iran in an appropriately regal manner.<sup>31</sup> Reza Shah might have hoped that the union between the Iranian and Egyptian royal houses would lead to a closer political union, but even though relations remained warm, it is unclear whether it had the desired effect. Indeed, the marriage between Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and Princess Fawzia was ultimately an unhappy one, and the two royal families never really got along; if anything, one might conclude that the union had complicated the bilateral relationship.

### **Iran and Egypt under Mosaddeq and Nasser**

Iran and Egypt had similar experiences with imperialism, particularly British imperialism. Although Iran had not been formally colonised by the British Empire, Britain had complete control of Iran's oil industry, just as it exercised control of the Suez Canal. While there were no attempts by Iran's political elite to challenge Britain's influence in Egypt in the nineteenth century – indeed, Naser al-Din Shah had sent a delegation to Egypt to observe the opening ceremony of the Suez

<sup>28</sup> Nikolay A. Kozhanov, 'The Pretexts and Reasons for the Allied Invasion of Iran in 1941', *Iranian Studies*, vol. 45, no. 4 (2012), 487.

<sup>29</sup> Barseghian, 'Malakeh-ye Mesri-ye Darbār-e Irān'.

<sup>30</sup> Afkhami, *The Life and Times of the Shah*, 84. <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 84–85.

Canal in 1869 – some Iranian intellectuals were involved in anti-colonial networks in Cairo.<sup>32</sup> For example, the famed Iranian anti-imperialist intellectual Jamāl al-Din Afghāni (1838–1897) spent some years in Egypt on a stipend provided by the Egyptian government and inspired generations of Egyptian anti-imperial intellectuals and revolutionaries, such as Mohammad Abduh.<sup>33</sup>

In the early 1950s, it appeared as though Egypt and Iran were following similar trajectories. The prime minister of Iran, Mohammad Mosaddeq, nationalised Iran's oil industry in March 1951. Just months later, in October, the Wadfi government announced that it was abrogating the Anglo-Egyptian treaty of 1936, which allowed for the continued presence of British troops in Egypt. Throughout 1951, the process of Iran's oil nationalisation and Britain's humiliating retreat were followed closely in the Egyptian press.<sup>34</sup> One month later, Mosaddeq stopped in Egypt for a four-day visit on his return from New York, where he had defended Iran's case in front of the UN Security Council. Mosaddeq was received in Cairo, in the words of Lior Sternfeld, 'as a victorious leader who fearlessly faced Britain and, to British dismay, had expelled them from Iran'.<sup>35</sup> The Egyptian prime minister, Mostafa el-Nahas Pasha, may have hoped that by inviting Mosaddeq to Egypt at this time, he could increase popular support for his government's own struggle against British imperialism. Two years later, Mosaddeq was ousted in a coup sponsored by the British and American secret services, and the Consortium Agreement of 1954 finally settled the Iranian oil crisis.

The Free Officers' coup in July 1952 overthrew the Egyptian monarchy and precipitated the establishment of a revolutionary regime headed by Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser. However, the coup did not

<sup>32</sup> Bakhshi, 'Barresi-ye Tārikhi-ye Ravābet-e Khāreji-ye Irān va Qāreh-ye Āfriqā', 44.

<sup>33</sup> See Rudi Matthee, 'Jamal al-Din Afghani and the Egyptian National Debate', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2 (1989), 151–169. For a biography of Jamāl al-Din Afghāni, see Nikki R. Keddie, *Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn "al-Afghānī": A Political Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

<sup>34</sup> On the press reaction in Egypt, see Lior Sternfeld, 'Iran Days in Egypt: Mosaddeq's Visit to Cairo in 1951', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 43, no. 1 (2016), 6–10.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 4–5.

immediately cause fundamental changes to Egypt's foreign policy. Egypt still gravitated towards the West and its primary goal was to achieve the complete withdrawal of British forces.<sup>36</sup> The shah was nervous about events in Egypt, as it had brought about the downfall of a regional monarchy. However, Nasser did not yet present a threat to Iran, and until the summer of 1955, the shah was evidently hopeful of developing a relationship with the Egyptian president. In April 1955, both Iran and Egypt were officially represented at the Asian–African conference in Bandung, Indonesia. Although the shah used the occasion to attempt to reach out to Nasser, in retrospect the event perfectly illustrates the different trajectories the two states took in politics of the Global South in this post–Second World War era of decolonisation. While Iran sought to take a moderate role and balance its relations with its Western allies with platitudes of solidarity with anti-colonial leaders from Asia and Africa, Nasser became ever more enticed by the possibilities of Afro-Asian solidarity. Just two and a half years after Bandung, Nasser hosted the first Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Conference in Cairo.

### **The Bandung Conference**

From 18 to 24 April 1955, representatives of twenty-nine countries attended the Asian–African Conference in Bandung, the most important gathering in the Asian–African internationalism that developed in the years following the Second World War, championed by the Indian prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru.<sup>37</sup> The conference was conceived in April 1954 at a meeting of the prime ministers of Burma, Ceylon, India, Indonesia and Pakistan in Ceylon's capital, Colombo, with the goal of fostering common understanding and solidarity among members of the Afro-Asian nations, helping them to prosper as independent states.<sup>38</sup> Although Iran attended the conference, it was something of a reluctant participant. Indeed, until weeks before, it was not

<sup>36</sup> Elie Podeh, 'The Drift towards Neutrality: Egyptian Foreign Policy during the Early Nasserist Era, 1952–55', *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 32, no. 1 (1996), 159.

<sup>37</sup> On the historical background to Bandung, see Lüthi, *Cold Wars*, 266–278.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 275–276.



clear to foreign diplomats in Tehran whether Iran would agree to send a delegation at all.<sup>39</sup>

Iran did, ultimately, send a delegation. This delegation was led by Jalāl 'Abdoh, the director-general of the Political Affairs Section of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and an experienced diplomat, having been a member of Iran's delegation to the founding conference of the United Nations in San Francisco in 1945 and having held several positions in the United Nations in the years since.<sup>40</sup> He was accompanied by several colleagues from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including Amir Aslān Afshār, who had previously spent time at the Iranian legation in The Hague. Afshār was considered by the Dutch government to be very pro-Dutch. He spoke Dutch fluently, had written a book about the Netherlands and had been granted the Officer's Cross of the Order of Orange-Nassau (Officierskruis van de Orde van Oranje-Nassau) by the Dutch government.<sup>41</sup> The Dutch government was concerned that the Indonesian government might use the Bandung Conference to build support for the annexation of New Guinea. Its position was that New Guinea should be able to choose its own fate and that 'the Netherlands are better equipped to fulfil the task of civilizing New Guinea and its people than Indonesia is'.<sup>42</sup>

In the weeks leading up to the Bandung Conference, the Dutch Foreign Ministry summoned the ambassadors to the Netherlands of Iran, Turkey, Egypt and Pakistan to implore them not to cooperate with any Indonesian initiative to discuss New Guinea.<sup>43</sup> Diplomats in Tehran felt that because Afshār had pro-Dutch inclinations, he 'can be

<sup>39</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Dutch Embassy Tehran, 22 March 1955, NA 2.05.191/470.

<sup>40</sup> Press Release PM/3417, 17 September 1957, UN Secretariat archive: S-0876-0001-07-00001. 'Ali Amini was originally selected to head the delegation, but he decided not to attend because of the formation of the cabinet of the new prime minister, Hoseyn 'Alā, in which he was given the position of minister of justice. Dutch ambassador in Tehran to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Iraanse delegatie ter Afro-Aziatische Conferentie', 12 April 1955, NA 2.05.191/470. Amini also decided to stay because of an upcoming visit by a representative of the oil consortium, which 'was considered more important'. Dutch ambassador in Tehran to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 20 April 1955, NA 2.05.191/470.

<sup>41</sup> Dutch ambassador in Tehran to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 12 April 1955, NA 2.05.191/470.

<sup>42</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs to ambassador in Tehran, 22 March 1955, NA 2.05.191/470.

<sup>43</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs to ambassador in Tehran, 12 April 1955, NA 2.05.191/470.

in a certain sense a “team mate” (*medespeler*).<sup>44</sup> Afshār was a keen amateur photographer, so the Dutch ambassador gave him a packet of empty colour films so that he could record his trip.<sup>45</sup> The day before the Iranian delegation left Iran for Bandung, the Dutch ambassador and his secretary dined with Afshār.<sup>46</sup> The Dutch felt convinced that the Iranian delegation would ‘definitely try to have a moderating effect’, however ‘if push comes to shove, it will have to consider the viewpoints of other Muslim countries’.<sup>47</sup>

Other countries’ ambassadors also briefed the Iranian delegation before it left, including those of the United States, Britain and France. The French were clearly concerned that the situation in Algeria could come under scrutiny, and the British felt that Iran, Turkey and Iraq, which would shortly after become members of the Baghdad Pact, along with Britain, would be important voices of moderation.<sup>48</sup> Before leaving for Bandung, ‘Abdoh had an audience with the shah, in which the shah doubted that the conference would have a positive impact, but had nonetheless decided that it was ‘in the interest’ of Iran to attend. ‘Of course, we will refrain from taking an extreme position’, he added.<sup>49</sup>

In his speech to the congress, ‘Abdoh articulated Iran’s position of moderation. He encouraged delegates to ‘avoid subjects that would bring out differences between countries’, and not use the event to ‘promote political ideologies’.<sup>50</sup> Consistent with Iran’s policy not to interfere in disputes between newly independent states and their former colonisers, Iran ‘expressed understanding’ for the French position in North Africa, ‘while recognising the legitimate aspirations of the peoples’ there.<sup>51</sup> Upon his return to Iran, ‘Abdoh spoke positively to a small group of civil servants and foreign diplomats about the ‘sense

<sup>44</sup> J. P. B. de Graan to Willem Gevers (Dutch ambassador in Tehran), 4 April 1955, NA 2.05.191/470.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. <sup>46</sup> Gevers to de Graan, 27 April 1955, NA 2.05.191/470.

<sup>47</sup> Gevers to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 20 April 1955, NA 2.05.191/470.

<sup>48</sup> Bédrière, ‘Iran’s Foreign Policy and the Algerian War of Independence, 1954–1962’, fn. 14, 169.

<sup>49</sup> Jalāl ‘Abdoh, *Chehel Sāl dar Sabneh-ye Qazā’i, Siyāsi, Diplomāsi-ye Irān va Jahān: Khāterāt-e Doktor Jalāl ‘Abdoh*, vol. 1 (Tehran: Mo’assaseh-ye Khadmāt-e Farhangi-ye Rasā, 1368 [1989]), 443.

<sup>50</sup> ‘Abdoh quoted in Bédrière, ‘Iran’s Foreign Policy and the Algerian War of Independence 1954–1962’, 169.

<sup>51</sup> Letter from General Ely to Antoine Pinay, Saigon, 28 April 1955. Available online: [www.cvce.eu/en/obj/letter\\_from\\_general\\_ely\\_to\\_antoine\\_pinay\\_on\\_the\\_](http://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/letter_from_general_ely_to_antoine_pinay_on_the_)

of unity and interdependence between countries in spite of economic and political differences' and even claimed to have 'preferred the atmosphere and tone at Bandung over that at the assemblies of the United Nations'.<sup>52</sup> In the delicate diplomatic balancing act, not everyone would be pleased. In a conversation with the Dutch ambassador, 'Abdoh expressed discomfort at having been forced to join a vote on New Guinea, against the wishes of the Netherlands.

While the Bandung Conference underlined the shah's commitment to the Western Bloc, Nasser was convinced to adopt a policy of positive neutrality and non-alignment. After returning from the conference, as Elie Podeh argues, Nasser became 'more confident in his dealings with the West', from which he had sought weapons and development aid.<sup>53</sup> A year before the meeting in Bandung, in April 1954, Turkey and Pakistan had signed a cooperation agreement, encouraged by the United States which intended for it to form the basis of a broader regional defence pact. Egypt feared that such a pact, if it included other Arab states such as Iraq, would undermine its negotiating position vis-à-vis the British.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, Nasser was concerned that 'a pact under Iraqi leadership would shift the centre of gravity in the Arab world from Cairo to Baghdad and would lead to Egypt's isolation.'<sup>55</sup> In February 1955, Iraq and Turkey signed the Baghdad Pact, which Nasser viewed as part of a broader Western plot to weaken Egypt's role in the region.

The presence of Egypt at the Bandung Conference two months later, represented an opportunity for Iran and Egypt to engage. At Bandung, Jalāl 'Abdoh extended to Nasser an invitation on behalf of the shah to visit Iran. Nasser accepted the invitation in principle and even expressed a wish to spend more time in Iran in the future, since his wife, Tahia Kazem, came from an Iranian family.<sup>56</sup> However, the geopolitical situation changed just months later and Nasser would not build on the diplomacy started at Bandung. In September 1955, to the shock and anger of Britain, Egypt announced an arms deal with

[bandung\\_conference\\_saigon\\_28\\_april\\_1955-en-f71582f5-0631-4b0d-a1a9-4d7a75eeffdb.html%5D%20](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009473132.004).

<sup>52</sup> Gevers to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 10 May 1955, NA 2.05.191/470.

<sup>53</sup> Podeh, 'The Drift towards Neutrality', 172. <sup>54</sup> Ibid., 163. <sup>55</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>56</sup> 'Abdoh, *Chebel Sāl dar Sahneh-ye Qazā'i, Siyāsi, Diplomāsi-ye Irān va Jahān*, vol. 1, 475. 'Abdoh recalls that Nasser referred to himself as a compatriot (*ham vatan*) of his.

the Soviets through Czechoslovakia. Nasser had been infuriated by the West's reluctance to supply him the arms that he wanted. During Nasser's trip to Bandung in April, he had met with the Chinese premier Chou En-Lai, who suggested that Nasser seek military aid from the Eastern Bloc.<sup>57</sup> Earlier in June, Nasser had warned the US ambassador, Henry Byroade, that the Soviets had offered to provide Egypt with all the arms it needed.<sup>58</sup> Then, in October 1955, apparently with some encouragement from the United States and Britain, the shah decided that Iran would also be joining the Baghdad Pact.<sup>59</sup> The shah reasoned that membership of the pact would bring guarantees of the Eisenhower administration's commitment to Iran's security.<sup>60</sup> Nonetheless, Nasser denounced the pact as a 'Zionist plot', perceived that Iran was backing Iraq in the battle for leadership of the Arab world, and relations between Iran and Egypt soured.<sup>61</sup>

### The Suez Crisis

On 26 July 1956, Nasser announced the nationalisation of the Suez Canal, which had been owned and operated by the British and French since 1869. Immediately, the British and French began to draw up military plans to bring about the downfall of the Egyptian president.<sup>62</sup> They cooperated in these plans with Israel, which viewed Nasser as a serious threat, particularly given his acquisition of Soviet weapons. At the same time, the Eisenhower administration attempted to negotiate a peaceful settlement of the crisis. Iran's policy, according to the shah 'was thoroughly in line with that of [the] US, namely that while recognizing [the] right of Egypt to "nationalize" a purely Egyptian company, some means must be found for guaranteeing free and secure use of [the] Suez Canal as [an] international waterway'.<sup>63</sup> To achieve

<sup>57</sup> Poteh, 'The Drift towards Neutrality', 171.

<sup>58</sup> Keith Kyle, *Suez: Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 72.

<sup>59</sup> Ali Rahnama, *The Rise of Modern Despotism in Iran: The Shah, the Opposition, and the US, 1953–1968* (London: Oneworld Academic, 2021), 75.

<sup>60</sup> Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah*, 18–21.

<sup>61</sup> Ramazani, *Iran's Foreign Policy*, 397.

<sup>62</sup> Nasser had been elected the second president of Egypt in June 1956.

<sup>63</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, Tehran, 9 August 1956, *FRUS, 1955–1957, Near East Region; Iran; Iraq, Volume XII*, doc. 362.

this, Iran ostensibly supported US-led initiatives to solve the crisis diplomatically and sent a delegation to the first Suez Canal Conference in London, held from 16 to 23 August 1956. As head of this delegation, the minister of foreign affairs, 'Aliqoli Ardalān, was 'instructed to support the American Delegation' in finding a solution.<sup>64</sup> Prior to the conference, President Eisenhower's secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, sent a personal message to the shah, which read: 'Your Government can, I am confident, exert an important and constructive influence, and I trust you will do so.'<sup>65</sup>

Iran relied heavily on the Suez Canal for the import and export of goods. In his speech to the London Conference, Ardalān told delegates that 73 per cent of Iranian exports and 76 per cent of imports were transported through the Suez Canal and that 'no less than five thousand tons of Iranian oil were transported to the western world through this waterway'.<sup>66</sup> The political situation in Iran was still unstable following the August 1953 coup – indeed, the prime minister, Hoseyn 'Alā, had survived an assassination attempt just months earlier, in November 1955. Thus, a prolongation of the crisis, or a disruption in the production or delivery of Iranian oil could severely damage the Iranian economy and would, according to a US projection, 'gravely weaken the [Iranian] Government'.<sup>67</sup>

The Iranian position was set out by Ardalān in his speech. Iran essentially had two arguments. The first was in support of nationalisation. Ardalān said, 'It is a legal fact that the Suez Canal is an integral part of Egypt ... we believe that the action of the Egyptian Government is in conformity with her sovereign rights.' Given Iran's recent experience of oil nationalisation, public opinion was naturally sympathetic to the nationalisation of the canal, so this was as much a

<sup>64</sup> Memorandum of a Conversation between the Iranian Ambassador (Amini) and the Under Secretary of State (Hoover), Department of State, Washington, 13 August 1956, *FRUS, 1955–1957, Near East Region; Iran; Iraq, Volume XII*, doc. 363.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, fn. 2.

<sup>66</sup> United States Department of State, *The Suez Canal Problem, July 26–September 22, 1956: A Documentary Publication* (Washington, DC: The Department of State, 1956).

<sup>67</sup> Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs (Rountree) to the Secretary of State, Washington, 26 September 1956, *FRUS, 1955–1957, Near East Region; Iran; Iraq, Volume XII*, doc. 365.

political position as a principled one. Second, given the ‘vital importance’ of the Suez Canal to Iranian trade, Iran wanted continued undisturbed access to the canal. ‘This is why the Government of Iran will support a form of solution or an international system that is compatible with the legitimate rights of Egypt and the guaranteed permanent freedom of navigation of the Suez’, Ardalān said. ‘We shall spare no effort in the achievement of this aim.’<sup>68</sup> Ultimately, Secretary Dulles’ proposal to end the crisis, which included the provision for an international board to replace Franco-British management of the canal, received the support of eighteen out of the twenty-two nations that attended the conference.

Iran, along with Pakistan, Ethiopia and Turkey, attempted to take a leading role, by proposing, as a bloc, amendments to the proposal, which then became known as the ‘Five Nation Proposal’.<sup>69</sup> Dulles considered the support of these nations for the proposal particularly significant, and Iran was selected by the participants of the conference as one of five nations, along with Australia, Ethiopia, Sweden and the United States, that would send representatives to Egypt to present the proposal to Nasser in person and investigate whether he would be prepared to negotiate.<sup>70</sup> Iran was presumably selected not only because of its enthusiastic support of the US position, but because it had experienced a similar crisis just a few years earlier, and its presence served to remind Nasser of the folly of inflexibility.

Egypt was one of the largest and most developed regional powers, with a large military, significant regional influence and historic ambitions to play a leading role in the Arab world, so Iran naturally followed events there closely. This was particularly important in light of Nasser’s recent arms deal with the Soviets and his criticism of the Western-backed regional alliance, of which Iran was a member. A French report concluded that:

Giving in to Colonel Nasser and relinquishing control of the canal to him means giving Egypt and its Arab partners an increase in influence and power such that the entire balance of power in the Middle and Near East would be

<sup>68</sup> Department of State, *The Suez Canal Problem*, 129.

<sup>69</sup> Editorial Note, *FRUS, 1955–1957, Suez Crisis, July 26–December 31, 1956, Volume XVI*, doc. 110.

<sup>70</sup> Memorandum of Discussion at the 295th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, 30 August 1956, *FRUS, 1955–1957, Suez Crisis, July 26–December 31, 1956, Volume XVI*, doc. 149; and Kyle, *Suez*, 198.

upset; this would play into the hands of the Soviets who have ties with Egypt, and finally bring about a very serious weakening of western influence. Placed between the Russians and the Arabs, Iran would be isolated and unable to maintain its current position. An Egyptian hegemony in the Middle East would deal a fatal blow to the Baghdad Pact, from which Iraq could be led to withdraw and which Great Britain and the United States would have great difficulty in supporting.<sup>71</sup>

Moreover, Iran had gone through a similar nationalisation movement in 1951–1953, which had provoked a surge in anti-imperial, nationalist sentiment. A Nasser victory would represent the victory of a Muslim country in the Middle East over the colonial powers, and could potentially embolden the nationalists in Iran and weaken the authority of the shah.

Iran was keen to participate because it perceived the crisis – and Nasser – as an existential threat, and the closer the shah aligned with the West, the better he could influence their perception of the crisis. Thus, although Ardālān claimed that Iran's participation in the London conference 'was motivated by sincere conviction that international disputes can be settled by peaceful means', throughout the crisis Iran played a double game, presenting itself to the Americans as an advocate of diplomacy, while also pledging support to Britain's more hard-line approach.<sup>72</sup> The British secretary of state for foreign affairs, Selwyn Lloyd, argued in August 1956 that Iran would support its Security Council resolution 'because Nasser's continued success would inevitably lead to an undermining of the pro-Western Iran Government and its collapse'.<sup>73</sup> While the shah told the US ambassador, Selden Chapin, that he was opposed to a military solution to the Suez crisis, he also expressed his opinion that Nasser was a 'mad man', against whom he hoped the West would take a 'strong stand', and that eventually force may be necessary. The shah recognised the broader implications of the crisis, and warned the United States that 'every effort should be made to prevent [the] consolidation of "Arab

<sup>71</sup> Imbert de Laurens-Castelet to French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 11 August 1956, Centre des Archives diplomatiques du ministère des Affaires étrangères, la Courneuve (henceforth CADC), 213QO/126.

<sup>72</sup> United States Department of State, *The Suez Canal Problem*, 127.

<sup>73</sup> Memorandum of a Conversation, Department of State, Washington, 30 August 1956, *FRUS, 1955–1957, Suez Crisis, July 26–December 31, 1956, Volume XVI*, doc. 152.

imperialism”'.<sup>74</sup> At the same time, to the British, the shah was a little more blunt, telling them that he considered 'getting rid of Nasser a very high priority'.<sup>75</sup>

### The Break in Diplomatic Ties

In October 1956, British, French and Israeli forces invaded Egypt. The Eisenhower administration was furious and threatened severe economic sanctions should they not withdraw. Khrushchev threatened to use nuclear weapons against the belligerents. Iran, despite its distrust of Nasser, being 'bound by a certain Muslim solidarity as well as the spirit of Bandung' and fearful of an escalation of the crisis, pushed for a withdrawal.<sup>76</sup> The local members of the Baghdad Pact met in Tehran to coordinate their response to the crisis, and in a speech to the UN General Assembly, the Iranian diplomat Nasrollāh Entezām criticised 'the violation of Egypt's sovereignty' by Britain and France.<sup>77</sup> This Iranian support was noted by Nasser, who sent a note of thanks to the shah, which was read out to the Iranian parliament by Ardālān.<sup>78</sup>

The invaders eventually bowed to the pressure and withdrew in humiliation. The invasion became a disaster for the West, and almost led to the breakup of the NATO alliance. For Nasser it was ultimately a success, for he had, as John Lewis Gaddis writes, 'kept the canal, humiliated the colonialists, and balanced Cold War superpowers against one another, while securing his position as the undisputed leader of Arab nationalism'.<sup>79</sup> The implications of this were perceived with concern not only by Iran, but also other regional powers such as Iraq, Libya and Saudi Arabia. King Saud, for instance, worried that 'Nasser's ambition was to become the Napoleon of the Arabs and if he

<sup>74</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, Tehran, 9 August 1956, *FRUS, 1955–1957, Near East Region; Iran; Iraq, Volume XII*, doc. 362.

<sup>75</sup> Message from Prime Minister Eden to President Eisenhower, London, 6 September 1956, *FRUS, 1955–1957, Suez Crisis, July 26–December 31, 1956, Volume XVI*, doc. 181.

<sup>76</sup> De Laurens-Castelet to French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 11 August 1956, CADC 213QO/126.

<sup>77</sup> Vincent Broustra to French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 30 October 1956, CADC 213QO/132.

<sup>78</sup> Jacques-Emile Paris to French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 17 November 1956, CADC 213QO/132.

<sup>79</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 128.



succeeded the regimes in Iraq and Saudi Arabia would be swept away'.<sup>80</sup> This premonition appeared to come true just two years later, when in February 1958, Egypt and Syria entered into a formal union, the United Arab Republic (UAR), which, in the words of Amin Saikal, 'was meant to increase the strength of Nasserism against the conservative forces of the region, including the Shah's regime'.<sup>81</sup> From the inception of the UAR, as Fawaz Gerges writes, 'Nasser inscribed pan-Arab unity as an important goal of his political discourse and action and pressured other Arab leaders to join the United Arab Republic'.<sup>82</sup> The shah expressed 'deep concern' at this development, which he considered to have been inspired by Moscow.<sup>83</sup>

Shortly after, a civil war broke out in Lebanon, which pitted pro-Nasserite against pro-Western forces. In meetings with foreign leaders, the shah continued to stress the danger that Nasser presented to regional stability and urged the United States to intervene. 'If Lebanon should fall', the shah said to President Eisenhower in a meeting on 1 July 1958, 'other states in the area would do likewise.' In this meeting, Eisenhower suggested that Nasser might not be lost to the West and could be brought 'back into the fold'. The shah gave a pessimistic assessment.

At what price, he [the shah] asked, should Nasser be accepted as a 'new Prophet of the Arab world'? Egypt represented nothing but a few million unhappy and impoverished beggars. Nasser's ambition was to gain control of large areas in the Middle East. What would be his price for cooperating with the West? If he could be brought back with some small sacrifice, that would be all right, but not at a high price.<sup>84</sup>

The shah added that Nasser 'was trying to follow in the footsteps of Hitler' and was 'essentially a conspirator ... motivated by "wrong

<sup>80</sup> Message from Prime Minister Eden to President Eisenhower, London, 6 September 1956.

<sup>81</sup> Amin Saikal, *The Rise and Fall of the Shah: Iran from Autocracy to Religious Rule* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 66–67.

<sup>82</sup> Fawaz A. Gerges, *Making the Arab World: Nasser, Qutb, and the Clash that Shaped the Middle East* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 190.

<sup>83</sup> Henri Roux to French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 6 February 1958, CADC 379QO/7.

<sup>84</sup> Memorandum of Conversation between the shah and President Eisenhower, Washington, 1 July 1958, *FRUS, 1958–1960, Near East Region; Iraq; Iran; Arabian Peninsula, Volume XII*, doc. 242.

doing”'.<sup>85</sup> Given the danger Nasser posed, the shah told Eisenhower that it was ‘essential that other countries be convinced by proof that Iran’s policies were the correct policies for them to follow’. ‘If they achieved good for Iran’, he added, ‘they would be compared favorably with the disruptive nature of communism and Nasserism in the Middle East, and would demonstrate that what happened in Syria was a poor substitute for what can happen to nations pursuing a policy of constructive nationalism, associated with other free world countries’.<sup>86</sup>

The shah was most concerned with the situation across the border in Iraq, where he felt ‘there seemed to be even more popular support for Nasser’. He was right to be worried. On 14 July 1958, the shah’s friend King Faisal II was murdered in a bloody coup and the British-backed Hashemite monarchy was abolished. Iran had lost a Baghdad Pact ally and, as Ramazani has written, ‘the balance of power seemed to be tilting in favor of anti-Western Arab states’.<sup>87</sup> The coup left the shah ‘depressed and even somewhat frightened’, not only at the creation of a hostile regime on his doorstep, but also the prospect of officers in his army gaining inspiration from the Iraqi revolution and attempting a similarly bloody coup against him.<sup>88</sup> The shah clearly considered the new regime in Iraq to be little more than an extension of Nasserism to Iran’s borders. As he said to the a US diplomat in Iran, Iraq ‘means Nasser and we consider him worse than the communists’.<sup>89</sup> Against this backdrop, the shah signed a military pact with the United States in

<sup>85</sup> Comparing Nasser with Hitler had become common amongst politicians in Europe and the United States. Many examples are cited throughout Keith Kyle’s *Suez: Britain’s End of Empire in the Middle East*.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. <sup>87</sup> Ramazani, *Iran’s Foreign Policy*, 400.

<sup>88</sup> Telegram from the embassy in Iran to the department of state, 14 August 1958, *FRUS, 1958–1960, Near East Region; Iraq; Iran; Arabian Peninsula, Volume XII*, doc. 247; and Ramazani, *Iran’s Foreign Policy*, 400. The shah was already aware of the dangers from within his military. In February 1958, a plot led by the commander of the Iranian army’s intelligence staff, General Mohammad-Vali Qarani, was foiled and the conspirators arrested. Apparently when Qarani was arrested, officers discovered a considerable amount of literature on Nasser and the plot itself resembled the Free Officers Coup. Mark J. Gasiorowski, ‘The Qarani Affair and Iranian Politics’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 25, no. 4 (1993), fn. 16, 641.

<sup>89</sup> Telegram from the department of state to the embassy in Iran, 19 July 1958, *FRUS, 1958–1960, Near East Region; Iraq; Iran; Arabian Peninsula, Volume XII*, doc. 247, fn. 1.

March 1959, much to the anger of the Soviets.<sup>90</sup> This pact was very much in the spirit of the Eisenhower Doctrine and contained a pledge from the United States that 'In case of aggression against Iran', it would 'take such appropriate action, including the use of armed forces ... in order to assist the Government of Iran at its request'.<sup>91</sup>

As Iran became more firmly entrenched in the Western camp, Nasser moved closer to the Soviets. On 26 July 1960, Egypt severed ties with Iran suddenly. In a fiery speech delivered to an audience that included Raul Castro, who was visiting Cairo to participate in the celebrations marking the fourth anniversary of the nationalisation of the Suez Canal, Nasser branded the shah's regime an opponent of the Arabs in their struggle against colonialism and Zionism, denounced Iran's membership of the Baghdad Pact and its relationship with the United States, and even called for the overthrow of the Pahlavi regime.<sup>92</sup> Nasser had broken off relations ostensibly because of the shah's public recognition of Israel, expressed in a press conference just three days earlier on 23 July, but the shah suspected that the break had more to do with Iran's expansion of ties with the Gulf sheikhdoms and Egyptian ambitions in the Persian Gulf.<sup>93</sup>

Despite the shah's insistence that there was no change in Iran's position, since it had afforded Israel *de facto* recognition since 1950, the press in Cairo and Damascus continued to lambast the shah over his relationship with Israel.<sup>94</sup> The shah was criticised for not showing solidarity with the Islamic world. As the proxy war in Yemen between Egypt and Saudi Arabia intensified during the 1960s, the shah became more critical of Nasser's credentials as a Muslim leader. Addressing the British press during a trip to the United Kingdom in March 1965, the

<sup>90</sup> For the shah's negotiations with the United States and Russia, see Ray Takeyh, *The Last Shah: America, Iran, and the Fall of the Pahlavi Dynasty* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2021), 136–140.

<sup>91</sup> George Lenczowski, 'United States' Support for Iran's Independence and Integrity, 1945–1959', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 401 (1972), 55.

<sup>92</sup> Saikal, *The Rise and Fall of the Shah*, 68.

<sup>93</sup> Ramazani, *Iran's Foreign Policy*, 321. On Raul Castro's visit, see 'Report of the Czechoslovak Politburo Regarding Military Assistance to the Cuban Government, 16 May 1960, and CPCz Politburo Resolution, 17 May 1960', 17 May 1960, National Archives, Prague, Czech Republic. Accessed through the Wilson Centre, Digital Archive: <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115140>.

<sup>94</sup> Kashani-Sabet, 'Iran on Shaky Ground', 6.

shah, referring to the civil war in North Yemen, said that Nasser was ‘pretending to be a Moslem, defender of the faith, but killing every day hundreds of people, innocent people, in that poor country, by throwing on them napalm bombs, incendiary bombs, strafing them with jet planes’.<sup>95</sup> In response, the Soviet-sponsored *Radio Iran Courier* (Peyk-e Irān), which was based in the Caucasus and broadcast in Persian, pledged support for Nasser’s war against the regime in Yemen, which it argued was ‘one of the most backward, most despotic, and most corrupt of any in the world’. The shah, ‘this shameful imperialist puppet’, was said to be ‘shedding tears for such a shameful, criminal, and rotten regime, and [merely] expressing unhappiness for having lost such a companion’.<sup>96</sup>

### Iran and the Algerian War of Independence

Another country that became firmly entrenched in the Nasser camp during this period was Algeria. Of the three French territories in North Africa, Morocco and Tunisia had achieved independence through peaceful means in March 1956. However, Algeria had a sizeable French population, of around one and a half million, and the three regions of Algiers, Oran and Constantine, in which the majority of these French citizens lived, were not merely colonial possessions, but were considered to be legally part of France. In November 1954, an armed rebellion of the majority Arab population broke out, led by the Front de libération nationale (FLN). This was the beginning of an eight-year civil war.<sup>97</sup> During the war, the FLN was backed by Nasser’s Egypt, which supplied arms, training and propaganda support to the revolutionary cause.<sup>98</sup>

Throughout this conflict, Iran attempted to reconcile its support for the independence-seeking Muslim people of Algeria with its important relationship with France. Iran repeatedly voted in solidarity with the Afro-Asian group at the United Nations in favour of resolutions concerning Algeria, but ensured through diplomatic channels that these

<sup>95</sup> Telegram from Foreign Office to Cairo, 3 March 1965, FO 371/183895.

<sup>96</sup> ‘Comment on the shah’s Interview with ITN’, 3 March 1965, FO 371/183895.

<sup>97</sup> On the beginning of the conflict, see Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954–1962* (New York: New York Review Books, 2006), 83–104.

<sup>98</sup> Kyle, *Suez*, 112.

actions would not affect Franco-Iranian relations.<sup>99</sup> For example, after voting in favour of a motion to put the Algerian case on the agenda in 1955, the Iranian prime minister, Hoseyn 'Alā, assured the French ambassador in Tehran 'with warmth that Iran's attitude had no unfriendly intention towards France'.<sup>100</sup> 'Alā expressed concerns that the French would retaliate against Iran and assured the ambassador that because Iran was under pressure from its co-religionists, it had no option but to vote against France on this matter. This was a line that Iran maintained throughout the conflict, and which the French understood and reluctantly accepted, despite their frustration.

Due to Egyptian support, the shah refused to recognise the *Gouvernement provisoire de la République algérienne* (GPRA), which had been set up in Cairo in 1958. Iran recognised the independent state of Algeria on 3 July 1962, shortly after the resolution of the war, though it did not establish political relations until after the defeat of the GPRA by Ahmed Ben Bella's Political Bureau later that year.<sup>101</sup> An Iranian embassy opened in Algiers on 23 September 1964.<sup>102</sup> But relations never really improved between Iran and Algeria until the 1970s. Algeria was in the Nasser camp, and its nationalists resented the shah's lukewarm support during their war of independence, which had extended little further than statements and votes in the United Nations. Apparently, anger against the shah for his lack of support was such that the first president of independent Algeria, Ben Bella, once said that some young Algerian revolutionaries had at one point asked for his permission to assassinate the shah on one of his trips to Europe. As much as Ben Bella resented the shah, he refused to approve this plan.<sup>103</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

During the reign of King Farouk, although Iran and Egypt both harboured ambitions to play leading roles in the region, relations between the two countries were amicable. Relations also remained relatively

<sup>99</sup> On this see Bédrière, 'Iran's Foreign Policy and the Algerian War of Independence, 1954–1962'.

<sup>100</sup> French report cited *ibid.*, 171. <sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>102</sup> Bakhshi, 'Barresi-ye Tārikhi-ye Ravābet-e Khāreji-ye Irān va Qāreh-ye Āfriqā', 52.

<sup>103</sup> Bédrière, 'Iran's Foreign Policy and the Algerian War of Independence, 1954–1962', 193.

friendly in the early years after the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 – the shah even invited Nasser to visit Iran in this period. However, in 1955, divergent Cold War allegiances caused a fracture in relations, exacerbated by the Suez crisis in 1956, and led ultimately to Nasser formally severing diplomatic ties with Iran in 1960. Nasser would remain the shah's main rival until shortly before his death in 1970. During this period, the shah had to play a careful diplomatic game; balancing support for the issues affecting the newly decolonised Global South, with the maintenance of positive relations with his Western allies. This delicate balancing act was evident not only at Bandung in 1955, but also Suez in 1956.

The Algerian civil war demonstrated to Iran the fragility of regional peace in the era of decolonisation, as well as the potential of Nasser to exacerbate crises. In his attempt to stop the spread of Nasserism, the shah sought to build relations not only with the imperial powers, but also the more conservative states in the Arab world, who were similarly threatened by Nasser's brand of Arab nationalism. These included not only Middle Eastern powers, such as Iraq (before the revolution of 1958), Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, but also states in North Africa, most importantly Morocco and Tunisia, with which Iran developed close relationships. By nurturing these alliances, the shah sought to build a separate grouping of Muslim states in the Arab world and beyond, that were not only opposed to Nasser, but which were also anti-Soviet and pro-American. One of the ways the shah and his North African allies, particularly Hassan II of Morocco, would challenge Nasser's Arab solidarity movement, was by advocating for an Islamic solidarity conference, which was eventually held in Rabat in 1969.