

**Non-Alignment as Modernity:
U.S.-Egyptian Relations in the Context of Arab Development Debates**

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Introduction

Khalid al-'Azm, the Syrian foreign minister, traveled an indirect route from Damascus to the meeting of Afro-Asian states held at Bandung, Indonesia in April 1955. After refueling at Abadan, Iran, and Karachi, Pakistan, al-'Azm's plane touched down in Calcutta, India in the middle of a sweltering night. There, the foreign minister and his group of Syrian party officials and journalists were guests of the governor-general of Bengal, who housed al-'Azm in a luxurious room that had once belonged to Lord Curzon. The governor even treated his Syrian guests to a tour of his botanical gardens, where the Indian agriculture ministry scientifically cultivated some ten thousand square meters of tropical plants. It was Calcutta's poor, however, who left the most profound impression. The wretched thousands whom al-'Azm observed from the back of a rickshaw reminded him of the sheep found in Syria's villages. Borrowing the words of an Arab poet, he described them as human beings made of "flesh and blood," except that their flesh was "desiccated" and their bodies all but drained of blood. After this unsettling encounter with the staggering challenge of postcolonial development, al-'Azm flew on to Bandung and his talks with the luminaries of the emerging non-aligned movement: Egyptian Prime Minister Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir, Chinese Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai, and Indian Premier Jawaharlal Nehru.¹

This paper re-examines the non-aligned movement in the light of my research on U.S.-Arab relations during the cold war. It argues that 'Abd al-Nasir's diplomacy, typically the focus of those who study non-alignment in the Arab Middle East,² is inseparable from and inexplicable

¹ Khalid al-'Azm, *Mudhakkirat Khalid al-'Azm*, 3 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Mattahida li-I Nashr, 1973), 2:366-69. On Khalid al-'Azm and his family, see Jane Hathaway with Karl Barbir, *The Arab Lands under Ottoman Rule, 1516-1800* (Harlow, England: Pearson/Longman, 2008), 87-90.

² See H.W. Brands, *The Specter of Neutralism: The United States and the Emergence of the Third World, 1947-1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 223-303; and Salim Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina

without the wider context of Arabs' postwar debates regarding development. Above all, it portrays non-alignment not simply as the absence of a military alliance with either superpower, but more significantly as part of the struggle to identify an independent path to modernization in an ideologically fraught, decolonizing world.³

Just as al-'Azm had slept in Curzon's chamber and surveyed Calcutta's squalor from a rickshaw, Arab elites claimed a position during the cold war that European colonialists had occupied in earlier generations: they judged societies' levels of development comparatively from a place of detachment and superiority. While Arab travel literature and "Occidental" critiques of the west were nothing new,⁴ the cold war conflict and decolonization made the problem of development universal. Missions to Moscow and Washington, proliferating contacts between Arab and other "Third World" elites, and expanding global aviation all reinforced this way of thinking. Once the privilege of imperial administrators and western social scientists, comparison provided the logic by which "Third World" elites evaluated different modernizing prescriptions and worked out the meaning of their hard-won sovereignty. For their part, Arabs became critics and connoisseurs of competing ideologies, which in the Arab world included not only American liberalism and Soviet communism, but also iterations of secular Arab nationalism and political Islam. In such a framework, Arab elites staked out their respective positions on foreign policy and economic development – in effect defining modernization – by drawing comparisons and

Press, 2004), 32. See also Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria: A Study of Post-War Arab Politics, 1945-1958*, Rev. ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 101-5, 195-99, 231-37, 295-306.

On U.S.-Egyptian relations, see Peter L. Hahn, *The United States, Great Britain, and Egypt: Strategy and Diplomacy in the Early Cold War, 1945-1956* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Jon Alterman, *Egypt and American Foreign Assistance, 1952-1956: Hopes Dashed* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); and Nigel John Ashton, *Eisenhower, Macmillan and the Problem of Nasser: Anglo-American Relations and Arab Nationalism, 1955-59* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996).

³ On the centrality of modernization to the cold war in the "Third World," see Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁴ See Bernard Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1982); Carter V. Findley, "An Ottoman Occidental in Europe: Ahmed Midhat Meets Madame Gulnar," *American Historical Review* 103 (February 1998): 15-49; Rasheed El-Enany, *Arab Representations of the Occident: East-West Encounters in Arabic Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2006); and *America in an Arab Mirror: Images of America in Arabic Travel Literature, An Anthology, 1895-1995*, ed. Kamal Abdel-Malek (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

contrasts. Borrowing Edward Said's characterization of philology helps to evoke their worldly, analytical posture: "a way of historically setting oneself off, as great artists do, from one's time and an immediate past even as, paradoxically and anatomically, one actually characterizes one's modernity by so doing."⁵ Rather than a simple refusal to be co-opted by the superpowers' agendas, non-alignment was for many educated Arabs the cold-war era way of being modern.⁶

In a reversal of the colonial gaze, travel to the Soviet Union and the United States, encouraged by both superpowers,⁷ enabled Arab writers to test the modernizing claims of cold war ideologies against the realities of each society. Al-'Azm sojourned both in the U.S. and in the U.S.S.R., appraising each country and portraying the latter as superior in terms of its cultural and material achievements. Though al-'Azm personally rejected Soviet communism, his verdict validated Syria's policy of accepting aid from Moscow while refusing to sign a Point IV agreement with Washington.⁸ Even Arab communists defined their ideological commitments in a comparative, global context. During the 1950s, the Communist Information Bureau's propaganda organ *For a Lasting Peace* featured articles by authors from across the postcolonial world. It served as an international forum in which Arab communists addressed issues, such as land reform and opposition to U.S. development policies, also faced by communists from other regions. Like other "Third World" communists, Syrian deputy Khalid Bakdash employed Marxist terminology to relate his country's struggles to those in other newly-independent states.⁹ As Sino-Soviet tensions deepened, the communist powers vied for influence in the Arab world and

⁵ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 132.

⁶ Kevin Gaines similarly associates non-alignment with black intellectuals' pursuit of modernity in the cold war context. See Kevin Gaines, "E. Franklin Frazier's Revenge: Anticolonialism, Nonalignment, and Black Intellectuals' Critiques of Western Cultures," *American Literary History* 17 (Fall 2005): 506-29.

⁷ See Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006); and Robert Rook, "Race, Water, and Foreign Policy: The Tennessee Valley Authority's Global Agenda Meets 'Jim Crow,'" *Diplomatic History* 28 (January 2004): 55-81.

⁸ See al-'Azm, *Mudhakkirat*, 2:420-37, 3:13-23. On Point IV, see *ibid.*, 2:433, 3:379.

⁹ See Khaled Bagdache, "Some Aspects of Development of Syria's Agriculture," *For a Lasting Peace, for a People's Democracy!* 20 (20 May 1955): 6; and "The October Revolution and the Arab East," *ibid.*, 46 (18 November 1955): 3.

sponsored missions to Beijing, Moscow, and other cities in which Arab communists participated alongside their “Third World” comrades.¹⁰

For many Arab writers, exhibiting first-hand knowledge of American society, or at least second-hand familiarity through the study of its history, was one important basis for establishing authority in debates about modernization. As we will see, invocations of the United States as exemplifying a certain brand of modernity had implications for U.S.-Arab relations, and the symbolic use of America as a foil for different modernizing visions was one way that non-alignment came to take on positive meanings in Arab political discourse. In the following pages, I describe how different Arab intellectuals invoked America in this manner and then consider why such discussions mattered for U.S. policy toward Egypt.

Before concluding this introductory section, however, two additional points are in order. The first is historiographical. My analysis builds on a growing literature about the late Ottoman empire and Arab successor states that examines the advent of modernity in the context of European imperialism. Some of these works consider how middle class and intellectual elites cultivated a modern way of living that took the west as its point of reference while seeking to preserve political independence and cultural authenticity.¹¹ Other scholars, rejecting an older “crisis” narrative about Egyptian modernist intellectuals, have focused on modernists’ attempts to exert their authority over mass political movements.¹² Another body of work studies how communist labor organizations, nationalist parties, and Islamist groups competed to recruit

¹⁰ For an Iraqi communist’s account of trips to Moscow and Beijing, as well as to Pakistan and Burma, see Salih Mahdi Daklah, *Min al-Dhakira (sira hayah)* (Beirut: Dar li-l Thaqafa wa al-Nashr, 2000).

¹¹ See Keith David Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Ussama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008); and Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

¹² See Israel Gershoni, “The Theory of Crisis and the Crisis in a Theory: Intellectual History in Twentieth-Century Middle Eastern Studies,” in *Middle East Historiographies: Narrating the Twentieth Century*, ed. Israel Gershoni, Amy Singer, and Y. Hakan Erdem (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 131-82; and Charles D. Smith, *Islam and the Search for Modern Order in Egypt: A Biography of Muhammad Husayn Haykal* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983).

working-class Arabs during the first half of the twentieth century.¹³ Finally, I benefit from scholarship that analyzes the role of the state in schemes to modernize Egypt's economy, landscape, and people.¹⁴ The cold war and decolonization therefore shifted the international context for Arab elites' evolving debates over modernization, but this shift also created new opportunities for them to formulate and advance particular agendas.

A second point, one perhaps more significant given the theme of our workshop, is to acknowledge the limitations of trying to understand the non-aligned movement on the basis of bilateral policy studies. Indeed, to study cold war non-alignment is to appreciate the degree to which states' policies became entangled in multiple webs of postcolonial identity. In Egypt, popular nationalism whose geographic scope had once been limited to the Nile valley merged by the 1950s with a rising pan-Arab sensibility fueled by the conflict with Israel, ongoing anticolonial struggles, and the superpowers' efforts to recruit regional allies. Pan-Arab nationalism led to 'Abd al-Nasir's temporary alliance with the Syrian Ba'th party and to a formal, but short-lived, political union with Syria in the United Arab Republic (a union that Khalid al-'Azam criticized bitterly).¹⁵ Nasir himself, in his manifesto *Philosophy of the Revolution*, situated Egypt within overlapping Arab, Islamic, and African circles.¹⁶ As this workshop focuses on the non-aligned movement in the Mediterranean, it is also worthwhile to consider how, across North Africa, the cold war ideological struggle overlaid local rivalries to define political and economic rights in decolonizing societies.¹⁷ My research highlights Egyptian politicians' and intellectuals' participation in a postwar Arabic republic of letters in which theirs was the major, but by no means exclusive,

¹³ See Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam, and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882-1954* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1998); Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); and the series of books by Tareq Ismael on Arab communist movements.

¹⁴ See Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); and Omnia El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).

¹⁵ On the shift of Egyptian identity from territorial to Arab-Islamic nationalism, see Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930-1945* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1995). See also James P. Jankowski, *Nasser's Egypt, Arab Nationalism, and the United Arab Republic* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002).

¹⁶ Gamal Abdel Nasser, *The Philosophy of the Revolution* (Buffalo, NY: Smith, Keynes & Marshall, 1959).

influence. By featuring this Arab context, I hope to demonstrate one way in which diplomatic studies of non-alignment might take transnational considerations into account.

Rhetorical Non-Alignment

Before non-alignment became Egypt's foreign policy, as reflected in Nasir's opposition to the Baghdad Pact, his prominence at Bandung, his acceptance of Czech arms, persecution of domestic communists, nationalization of the Suez canal, and rejection of the Eisenhower Doctrine – indeed, even before the Free Officers' 1952 revolution that eventually brought Nasir to power – it was the rhetorical strategy of writers seeking to map out an agenda for Egypt's postwar economic and social development. Their manner of defining their positions through negation arose out of long-standing competition for new recruits among nationalists, communists, and the Muslim Brotherhood, but this approach took on new meanings with the emergence of the cold war. One example comes from the Egyptian Islamist al-Bahi al-Khuli, whose book *Al-Islam: La shuyu'iya wa la ra'smaliya* [Islam: Neither communism nor capitalism] presents both as false idols. Al-Khuli defends Islam as a socio-economic system to youth facing the “crush [*zahma*]” of other ideologies and theories. Refusing to accommodate Islam either to communism or capitalism, al-Khuli describes it as a universal guide to human fulfillment that prefigured and transcended both cold war ideologies. Relying on the metaphor of God's creation as a great table to which all are invited, al-Khuli establishes Islamic law as the basis for policies on labor and economic rights.¹⁸

Sayyid Qutb (1903-1966), the famed Islamist and later Muslim Brotherhood leader whom Nasir had executed, likewise rejected the “ready-made models [*al-qawalib al-jahiza*]” imported from abroad and identified Islam as a potential third bloc in world politics. In *Ma'arakat al-Islam wa*

¹⁷ On political battles over family law, see Mounira M. Charrad, *States and Women's Rights: The Making of Postcolonial Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). See also [British Consul General in Algiers] Andrews to Morrison, 6 August 1951, in *Arab Dissident Movements, 1905-1955*, vol. 4, 1947-1955, ed. A.L.P. Burdett (Cambridge, England: Archive Editions, 1996), 453-54.

¹⁸ Al-Bahi al-Khuli, *Al-Islam: La shuyu'iya wa la ra'smaliya* (Kuwait: Maktaba al-Falah, 1981 [1947]), 14. See also Joel Beinin, “Islamic Responses to the Capitalist Penetration of the Middle East,” in *The Islamic Impulse*, ed. Barbara Freyer Stowasser (London: Croom Helm, 1987), 87-105.

al-ra'smaliya [The conflict of Islam and capitalism], he contrasts the universal potential of Islam to satisfy all human needs both with communist materialism and with the unnatural division between spiritual and temporal spheres in the west. Point IV, he explains, was no more than the misleading campaign by capitalists to couch their agenda in terms of fighting global poverty.¹⁹

Qutb derived great authority from the personal experience he had in the United States during his nearly two-year educational mission (1948-1950), and his writings about American society repeatedly remind readers that he heard it with his own ears and saw it with his own eyes. The story of his revulsion at the sight of boys and girls dancing immodestly to the song “Baby, It’s Cold Outside” following services at a church in Greeley, Colorado, has achieved the status of a fable, retold by Americans and Islamists alike to illustrate the supposedly unbridgeable divide separating western and Islamic values.²⁰ Yet, in making observations about the U.S. during the early postwar phase of his career, Qutb uses America to criticize his own society and as the foil for his modernizing vision. Contemporary secularists, as well as Islamists, employed this same device. Contrasting himself both with earlier generations of Arab travelers who were dazzled by the west and with those who had come by their knowledge of America second-hand, Qutb establishes Americans’ “savagery [*wahshiya*]” by citing their rates of venereal disease, teen pregnancy, and drunkenness.²¹ Qutb could admire America as a mass society characterized by a broad prosperity. He notes in *‘Adalah al-ijtima’iyah fi al-Islam* [Social justice in Islam], the first edition of which he completed before setting sail for New York, that an American worker could own “a radio set and his own automobile and his income permits him and his family a weekly

¹⁹ Sayyid Qutb, *Ma’rakat al-Islam wa al-ra’smaliya* (Beirut: Dar al-Sharuq, 1975 [1951]), 36, 119.

²⁰ See, for instance, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1253796&sc=emaf>, accessed 6 January 2009; Mike Peters, “Greeley’s al-Qaeda Connections Make Headlines Around the World,” *Greeley Tribune*, 19 August 2006, <http://www.greeleytribune.com/article/20060819/NEWS/108190102/-1/rss02>, accessed 6 January 2009; Yusuf al-‘Azam, *Shahid Sayyid Qutb: hayatuhu wa madrasatuhu wa atharuh* (Damascus: Dar al-Qalam, 1980), 35; and Salah ‘Abd al-Fattah al-Khalidi, *Amrika min al-dakhil bi-minzar Sayyid Qutb* (Jidda: Dar al-Manarah, 1986), 31, 60. On Qutb’s observations regarding Americans’ sexuality, see Joseph Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 123-28.

²¹ See al-Khalidi, *Amrika min al-dakhil bi-minzar Sayyid Qutb*, 77, 157, 161, 166-67, 185.

excursion or a visit to the cinema.”²² This “vast workshop” successfully mobilized its people to achieve “material goals,” but it failed to value “the spirit [*al-ruh*].” And while Egyptians possessed extraordinary genius compared to the Americans, these treasures were squandered in “a wretched ignorance, illiteracy, and poverty so that a handful of ‘pashas’ and ‘pot-bellies’ could enjoy a luxury unknown in the Middle Ages.”²³

Qutb explicitly rejected cold war claims that the U.S. could serve as the model for developing countries. Using a kind of comparison deployed by other modernizers, he contrasted the universality of Islam with the supposedly parochial and bigoted nature of rival modernizing systems. Qutb argued that communism merely served the interests of the Russian state, and if the rest of the world became like America, he wrote, it would be a “human catastrophe without doubt.”²⁴ In the case of the U.S., racism belied Americans’ pretensions to offer a universal example:

Islam became free of tribal and racial partisanship – besides being free of partisanship based on family and lineage, so that it attained a level which Western ‘civilization’ has not reached even in our day. For this is the civilization which permits the American conscience to engage in an organized extermination of the Red Indian race while the rest of the world looks on, just as it permits that miserable discrimination between white and black, a loathsome savagery, and it is the civilization which permits the government of South Africa to make open racial laws against the colored and permits the governments of Russia, China, India, Ethiopia, Yugoslavia and others to exterminate all their Muslims.²⁵

²² Quoted in William E. Shepard, *Sayyid Qutb and Islamic Activism: A Translation and Critical Analysis of Social Justice in Islam* (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1996), 180.

²³ Quoted in al-Khalidi, *Amrika min al-dakhil bi-minzar Sayyid Qutb*, 153, 155.

²⁴ Qutb, *Ma'rakat al-Islam wa al-ra'smaliya*, 111; Quoted in al-Khalidi, *Amrika min al-dakhil bi-minzar Sayyid Qutb*, 156.

²⁵ Quoted in Shepard, *Sayyid Qutb and Islamic Activism*, 59-60.

Qutb drives the point home with his graphic description of an incident that he claims personally to have witnessed in which a group of whites stomped and kicked “a lone Negro youth” until the belated arrival of police caused the “barbarous crowd” to scatter like “jungle beasts.”²⁶

Americans’ racism had foreign policy implications, as the Turkish troops who served in Korea allegedly discovered. According to Qutb, the Americans found Turks acceptable non-western allies only because they had white skin, but even so deprived them of air support and of adequate food and ammunition during combat.²⁷

Other Egyptians similarly criticized America’s materialism and social inequalities but to advance a modernizing vision based on secular, Arab values. Such a vision drove the career of Hassan Fathy (1900-1989), an architect and development intellectual who was born just three years before Qutb and who was, like the Islamist, the western-educated scion of an elite rural family. Fathy advocated sanitary, culturally-appropriate housing for Egypt’s rural masses, and his model village at New Gourna, designed and constructed opposite Luxor in the late 1940s with government support, employed local materials of mud brick and aesthetically-pleasing domed roofs built by Nubian craftsmen. He hoped that New Gourna would serve as the basis for rural reconstruction on the scale of some 4,000 villages in the Nile valley.²⁸ Fathy explicitly contrasted the economy of his approach with village construction projects financed by Point IV, which spent precious currency reserves on imported building materials.²⁹ By giving residents a role in designing and constructing their own dwellings, Fathy also sought to incorporate individuality and community into modern, mass society. Such human values, he felt, were absent from the visions promoted by both east and west:

²⁶ Quoted in al-Khalidi, *Amrika min al-dakhil bi-minzar Sayyid Qutb*, 182.

²⁷ Qutb, *Ma’rakat al-Islam wa al-ra’smaliyah*, 33; and al-Khalidi, *Amrika min al-dakhil bi-minzar Sayyid Qutb*, 178.

²⁸ See Hassan Fathy, *Architecture for the Poor: An Experiment in Rural Egypt*, Rev. ed. (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2000); and undated report, “Qaryat al-Jurna al-Namudhajiyya al-Jadida,” binder I, number 13, Hassan Fathy Archive [HFA], Rare Books and Special Collections Library, American University in Cairo, Egypt.

²⁹ “Agrarian Reform and Rural Housing in Iraq,” 3 November 1958, pp. 7-8, binder II, number 30, HFA.

Inexorably and largely unchallenged, the promoters of sameness have prevailed and have eliminated from modern life the tradition of individuality. Mass communications, mass production, mass education are the marks of our modern societies, which, whether communist or capitalist, are in these respects indistinguishable.³⁰

In the late 1950s, Fathy joined the Athens development firm Doxiadis Associates whose architects, among other projects, designed the new Pakistani capital of Islamabad. While employed with Doxiadis, Fathy participated in a global, comparative study of human settlements during which he visited and described the urban centers of West Africa. Other researchers contributed reports on Soviet and American cities, and Fathy came to regard the growing suburban communities of the United States as the antithesis of his plan for housing the world's poor. Like Qutb, Fathy rejected the idea that American society provided a model for developing countries. The U.S. had become an "industrially overdeveloped country," he declared, where "man has been subordinated to the machine, and the cities designed for cars."³¹ Judging from his note written on a Doxiadis report about vehicle density in the U.S., Fathy was appalled that "Now the second family car is already advertised!"³² Such material abundance actually made the U.S. "the most backward country on earth."³³ Suburban communities were also segregated on the basis of race and class in order to keep up home values, reducing the family dwelling to a mere consumer product and precluding by design the sort of wide human interactions that Fathy cherished. Exaggerating these characteristics of American society provided the architect with a useful dystopia against which to define his own, more humane vision:

³⁰ Fathy, *Architecture for the Poor*, 27.

³¹ "Dwelling in Developing Countries," 22 June 1963, handwritten draft, box: "11 Dox," HFA.

³² See Fathy's note on pp. 9-10 of J. Piperoglou, "Some Aggregate Long Term Economic Forces Affecting the City of the Future," R-ERES 19, 20 June 1961, HFA.

³³ "Dwelling in Developing Countries," 22 June 1963, handwritten draft.

It reduces life to a meaningless and featureless cycle of production and consumption, and turns man into a creature that accepts, that simply exists, with no chance nor even wish to transcend the routine of keeping alive.³⁴

Fathy defended his modernizing approach, as did Qutb, on the basis of its cultural authenticity while simultaneously proclaiming its superiority to both superpowers' supposedly universal development models. In Fathy's case, Arab cultural values reconfigured for the modern era provided the basis for mass society on a human scale. His description of the Arab courtyard house, as "a microcosm that parallels the order of the universe itself," illustrates his belief that modern settlements required reinterpreting, rather than overcoming, tradition.³⁵ Fathy wrote to Nasir that developing countries would have to let go of the colonial presumption that "there is no city but the city of the west [*la madina illa madinat al-gharb*]."³⁶ Over his career, Fathy portrayed the approach that he developed from the practices of the Nile valley as having increasingly universal applications. He applied his ideas to the problems of settlement in the Arab Middle East outside of Egypt, to his study of decolonizing African cities, and, in the 1970s, even to an urban renewal project in inner-city Chicago.³⁷

As Arab nationalism emerged as the dominant regional ideology, some Arab intellectuals invoked the United States in arguments about the nature of Arab identity, as well as in battles infused with partisan interests over pan-Arabism's optimum political expression. An early example came from Antun Sa'adah (1904-1949), head of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, whose prewar treatise *The Genesis of Nations* made the case for a geographically and culturally delimited pan-Syrian nationalism. Sa'adah criticized racial nationalism by noting the arbitrary manner in which Chinese, Japanese, and Arabs were subject to color restrictions in the Jim Crow

³⁴ "Dwelling in Developing Countries," typed version, 22 June 1963, binder III, number 69, HFA.

³⁵ Fathy, *Architecture for the Poor*, 57.

³⁶ Fathy to 'Abd al-Nasir, 23 March 1963, binder IV, number 106, HFA.

³⁷ See Nathan Citino, "Suburbia and Modernization: Community Building and America's Post-World War II Encounter with the Arab Middle East," *Arab Studies Journal* 13-14 (Fall 2005/Spring 2006): 39-64.

South. The fact that it took Europeans with agricultural skills to unlock North America's bounty, however, demonstrated the sort of relationship between a people and their environment that was central to his conception of Syria. Also, the way in which immigrants adopted American culture indicated for Sa'adah the importance of a common social life to national identity.³⁸

His rival Abu Khaldun Sati' al-Husri (1881-1968), born in San'a' to an Ottoman official from Aleppo, presented a wide array of historical examples to enshrine language as the basis of Arab identity and to argue for a pan-Arab state.³⁹ While al-Husri drew much of his evidence from Europe, he emphasized the multiethnic, immigrant character of America to draw an absolute contrast with the Arab world that highlighted the latter's cultural homogeneity. Challenging Sa'adah's argument that America's separation from Britain invalidated linguistic nationalism, al-Husri cited the ratio of nine-to-one non-English- to English-speaking immigrants entering the U.S. between the years 1820-1940 to portray the United States as a polyglot society.⁴⁰ In this sense, there was a "tremendous difference [*ikhtilafan kabiran*]" between Arab countries and the United States.⁴¹ His *Difa' 'an al-'Aruba* [Defense of Arabism] mentions the two million "Negroes" imported into the country, whose black population had reached ten million. The book also features a U.S. map indicating the diverse influences incorporated into the union by way of various territorial cessions, conquests, and purchases.⁴² In a separate line of argument with cold war implications, al-Husri includes examples from American history in refuting Josef Stalin's "Marxism and the National Question," which identified a common economic life as the material basis for national identity. Al-Husri notes that sharp disagreements over such economic matters as the tariff and railroad rates bedeviled America's early national life, and he cites Luddite attacks on Robert Fulton's steamboats as illustrating divergent economic interests.⁴³ Ultimately, however,

³⁸ See Antoun Sa'ade, *The Genesis of Nations* (Beirut: Syrian Social Nationalist Party, 2004[1938]), 46-47, 76-77, 242-43.

³⁹ See William L. Cleveland, *The Making of an Arab Nationalist: Ottomanism and Arabism in the Life and Thought of Sati' al-Husri* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971).

⁴⁰ Abu Khaldun Sati' al-Husri, *Ma hiya al-qawmiyya? Abhath wa dirasat 'ala daw' al-ahdath wa al-nazariyyat* (Beirut: Markaz dirasat al-wadda al-'Arabiyya, 1985[1959]), 92-94

⁴¹ Abu Khaldun Sati' al-Husri, *Difa' 'an al-'uruba*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Ilm li-Malayin, 1961[1956]), 164.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 158-159, 161.

⁴³ See al-Husri, *Ma hiya al-qawmiyya*, 131-58.

al-Husri borrows American manifest destiny – the vision of a country stretching from sea to shining sea, unifying diverse peoples and territories under one flag – as “the most compelling evidence for the benefits of unity.”⁴⁴

While throughout much of his long career, al-Husri advocated a pan-Arab state with Egyptian participation, the Iraqi academic and diplomat ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Bazzaz (1913-1973) explicitly identified the United Arab Republic (UAR) under Nasir’s leadership as the basis for a larger Arab polity.⁴⁵ Al-Bazzaz invoked the U.S. example to define his institutional vision for pan-Arabism, and his ideas developed in the context of cold war and inter-Arab rivalries. Dismissed from his position at Baghdad University by the western-allied prime minister Nuri al-Sa’id, al-Bazzaz advocated Iraqi adherence to the UAR following the July 1958 revolution that brought ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim to power. In the aftermath of a failed coup in Mosul backed by Nasir the following year, al-Bazzaz was persecuted by the communist-aligned military court run by Qasim’s cousin, Fadl ‘Abbas al-Mahdawi. After he fled to the UAR, al-Bazzaz directed many of his arguments against the Iraqi Communists’ proposal for a loose Arab “federal union,” which, according to him, was no more than a smoke screen concealing their subservience to the Soviet Union and contempt for Arab nationalism *per se*.⁴⁶

Al-Bazzaz called for a muscular Arab federalism similar to that in the United States, with centralized foreign and defense policies, and with strong executive departments of the interior, agriculture, and labor. His penchant for invoking diverse historical examples and anthropological observations, and for defining his own position by way of stark contrasts, typifies the rhetorical non-alignment of cold war Arab intellectuals. On the one hand, he wrote, the Soviet Union’s constitution provided for an authoritarian, unitary state while maintaining the fiction of being a federation of sovereign republics. On the other hand, the more desirable form of American

⁴⁴ Al-Husri, *Difa’ an al-‘uruba*, 165.

⁴⁵ ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Bazzaz, *Al-dawlah al-muwahhida wa-al-dawlah al-ittihadiya*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Qalam, 1960), 66-67.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 16. On al-Bazzaz’s career, see the introduction, *ibid.*, 9-14. On the Mahdawi court, see *ibid.*, 138. Note the comparisons he makes between the constitutional arrangements he envisions for Arabs and those prevailing among other non-aligned countries such as India and Yugoslavia, *ibid.*, 137.

federalism emerged only through a historical process that overcame the emphasis on states' rights and their tendency to regard themselves as states in the international [*duwa*] rather than the federal [*wilayat*] sense. Aside from the "color problem [*mushkila al-malunin*]" and residual animosity from the Civil War, federalism had helped to foster a homogeneity across most states, leaving only minor regional differences. Al-Bazzaz took pains to note that these observations came "from experience [*'an tajriba*]" during a five-month tour of the U.S., his second, about which he planned to write a subsequent book.⁴⁷ In terms of development and political economy, however, al-Bazzaz later argued that Arabs should follow the global trend toward a socialist model. The United States' "individualism [*fardiya*]" was the product of greed in the exploitation of its prodigious natural resources, which made it exceptional as opposed to exemplary – an historical cul-de-sac. Al-Bazzaz cited Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and John Kennedy's economic policies as embodying this principle.⁴⁸

Indeed, the meaning of non-alignment in Arab development debates shifted perceptibly in the early 1960s with the advent of Nasir's Arab socialism and the intensification of inter-Arab conflicts leading to Syria's September 1961 secession from the UAR.⁴⁹ Previously, non-alignment had corresponded to winning independence from the colonial powers and avoiding restrictions attached to American and Soviet aid.⁵⁰ Escalating strife between Nasir and his erstwhile Ba'thist allies, however, raised the stakes in discussions of development. Political battles to lay claim to Arab leadership led some partisans to invoke universal language in describing Arab socialism, effectively boosting its status to that of a third cold war ideology.

In this context, it was 'Abdullah al-Rimawi, a pro-Nasir Ba'thist from Ramallah, who discussed Arab socialism in the most sublime terms. Al-Rimawi had sided with Nasir against the main Ba'th organization, and his breakaway Arab Ba'th Revolutionary Socialist Party, sponsored

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 68-9, 86-8.

⁴⁸ 'Abd al-Rahman al-Bazzaz, *Hadhahi qawmiyatuna* (Cairo: Dar al-Qalam, 1963), 285.

⁴⁹ See Joel Gordon, *Nasser: Hero of the Arab Nation* (Oxford, England: Oneworld, 2006), 69-93.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Salah al-Din al-Bitar, *Al-siyasa al-'Arabiya bayn al-mabda' wa al-tatbiq* (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'ah lil-Tiba'ah wa-al-Nashr, 1960), 108-9.

by Cairo, associated Nasir's leadership with the historical progress of Arab nationalism.⁵¹ Al-Rimawi's book *Al-mantiq al-thawri* [Revolutionary logic], published a few months before Nasir nationalized the UAR's most important economic sectors in July 1961, is a work of historical philosophy rather than of development policy. Al-Rimawi's goal, as he describes it, is to elevate Arab nationalism from a "viewpoint [*al-nazra*]" to the level of a "theory [*al-nazariya*]."⁵² Only in the bipolar postwar world, he explains, did the Arab nationalist movement crystallize and present Afro-Asian countries with an alternative to the superpowers' with-us-or-against-us ultimatums.⁵³ According to al-Rimawi, Arab socialism is not simply a means toward securing Arabs' economic independence from western imperialism, nor is it a step on the way to communism. Rather, it involves the fundamental reinterpretation of freedom and democracy in the modern world. It is "the most prominent principle of this historical stage [*abraz mabda' fi hadhihi al-marhala al-ta'rikhiya*]," he writes, and it encompasses "the whole of humanity [*shamila insaniya*]." Al-Rimawi likewise saw cold war neutralism not simply as a strategy for safeguarding Arab sovereignty but as a global movement reflected in growing protests against the American military presence in Japan, Turkey, and South Korea.⁵⁴

For his part, Nasir sold his economic program on the basis of its cultural authenticity but also portrayed the Egyptian example as having global implications. "Arab socialism," he declared, was not an "imported ideology."⁵⁵ At the same time, his National Charter laying out the goals of Arab socialism proclaimed that Egypt's "new pioneering experiment" has already had "far-reaching effects on the liberation movement in Africa, Asia and Latin America."⁵⁶ Nasir's initiatives emerged out of the peripatetic lifestyle and comparative outlook of postwar Arab intellectuals. One important influence on Arab socialism, Egyptian leftist Lutfi al-Khuli (1928-1999), led delegations in the late 1950s and early '60s to Communist-sponsored "Peace and

⁵¹ See John Devlin, *The Ba'th Party: A History from Its Origins to 1966* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1976), 169-86.

⁵² 'Abdullah al-Rimawi, *Al-Mantiq al-thawri* (Cairo: Dar al-ma'arifa, 1961), 263.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 240.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 275, 279.

⁵⁵ Quoted in "Nasser Defines 'Arab' Socialism," *New York Times*, 27 May 1962, p. E6.

⁵⁶ Gamal Abdel Nasser, *The Charter* (Cairo: U.A.R. Information Department, 1962), 10.

Disarmament” conferences held in Vienna, Beijing, Moscow, and Stockholm. Al-Khuli associated Arab socialism with cold war non-alignment. He retrospectively acknowledged the Yugoslav influence on Egypt’s policies and characterized the Egyptian experiment by distinguishing it from the American and Soviet examples:

Egypt could not follow either the capitalist or the Soviet-communist models of society since it could not build a capitalist society, because we had no accumulation of capital and the West headed by the USA was against us. Soviet Communism was out of the question as Nasser and the majority of active forces within Egyptian society, especially the influential Islamic forces, were against the idea. *In contrast to the above*, there was a small group of intellectuals, representing independent Marxist thought, who were not affiliated with foreign elements. This group presented some revolutionary theories on the building of a new modern society and rejected the Soviet model because democracy was of utmost importance to it unlike in the case of the USSR which was ruled by a dictatorship regime.⁵⁷

In the era of Nasir’s Arab socialism, criticism of American prescriptions for development often took the form of an explicit riposte to modernization theory, the idea that societies could be located at different stages of progress toward the prototype represented by the United States.⁵⁸ As Fathy, the architect, wrote:

There is a tendency to take for granted that the type of civilization seen in the USA today – which is indeed the fullest development yet seen of a particular social and technological trend – represents the future for all societies that have not yet reached

⁵⁷ Rami Ginat, *Egypt’s Incomplete Revolution: Lutfi al-Khuli and Nasser’s Socialism in the 1960s* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), 52, 155-56, 192. The italics in the quotation are mine.

⁵⁸See Michael Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and ‘Nation Building’ in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); and Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

the USA level. Even those who look beyond the present scene in the U.S.A. tend to believe that it is at least a necessary stage in the evolution of societies, and that the countries that today are called underdeveloped must pass through a stage in which their society and urban scene will resemble that of the USA today. This view is surely far too simplistic.⁵⁹

Nasir's confidant and editor of *al-Ahram* Muhammad Hasanayn Haykal would go even further, pointing out that America's history had "its own unique peculiarities [*khusa'isiha al-dhatiya al-farida*]," including a vast continent protected by an oceanic barrier during its formative century, features which no developing country could hope to replicate in the present. Haykal also noted that Washington's interests frequently required retarding rather than advancing development abroad, and he dismissed Walt Rostow, author of *The Stages of Economic Growth*, as a purveyor of C.I.A. dirty tricks.⁶⁰

Haykal's book, *Nahnu . . . wa Amrika* [We . . . and America], reflects the dismal state of U.S.-Egyptian relations prior to the June 1967 war, but it also illustrates how Egypt's non-alignment in its relations with Washington developed on two, related levels. On the one hand, Nasir's non-aligned foreign policy took a diplomatic and strategic form that precluded Egypt's participation in American plans for regional defense. On the other, non-alignment was a symbolic relationship with the United States, in which Egyptian and other Arab writers invoked America as a foil for their modernizing visions. In the twenty years after World War Two, the nature of these invocations evolved from criticizing the American example to portraying it as an historical dead end.

U.S.-Egyptian Relations and the Meaning of Non-Alignment

John F. Kennedy's overture to 'Abd al-Nasir in 1962-63 provides one opportunity for thinking about how non-alignment in its symbolic sense affected the U.S.-Egyptian diplomatic

⁵⁹ Fathy, "Dwelling in Developing Countries," handwritten draft.

⁶⁰ Muhammad Hasanayn Haykal, *Nahnu . . . wa Amrika*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dar al-'asr al-hadith, 1967), 27, 29.

relationship. The comparative disposition fostered by the cold war, in which Arab intellectuals defined their visions for development through contrasts and frequently in degrees of difference from America, posed an insuperable and hitherto unappreciated obstacle to the Kennedy initiative. The president offered Nasir economic incentives including a multiyear deal of P.L. 480 food aid, which Dwight Eisenhower's administration had provided annually. As Fawaz Gerges and Douglas Little have shown, Kennedy believed that he could come to a working relationship with Nasir and other neutral leaders on the basis of a shared commitment to modernization. Previous scholarship portrays Kennedy's failure to pull off this rapprochement with Cairo largely as the consequence of polarization within the Arab world, best illustrated by the Egyptian-Saudi proxy war in Yemen, and of Kennedy's inability to bridge the chasm separating revolutionary and monarchical Arab regimes.⁶¹

In light of the previous discussion, however, the Kennedy administration's initiative appears to have rested on two false dichotomies: one assumed that Nasir faced a choice between internal development and regional activism; and a second assessed Egyptian development policy in terms of its inclination toward cooperating with either the U.S. or the U.S.S.R. "Our aim," wrote National Security Council Staff member Robert Komer, "would be to encourage [a] UAR turn inward toward economic development as its primary goal, and to provide Nasser with more of a Western alternative to excessive dependence on the [Soviet] Bloc."⁶² JFK's envoy to Nasir, Chester Bowles, was more blunt: "if Nasser can gradually be led to forsake the microphone for the bulldozer, he may assume a key role in bringing the Middle East peacefully into our modern world."⁶³ Administration thinking didn't account for the fact that Nasir

⁶¹ See Fawaz Gerges, "The Kennedy Administration and the Egyptian-Saudi Conflict in Yemen: Co-opting Arab Nationalism," *Middle East Journal* 49 (Spring 1995): 292-311; and Douglas Little, "The New Frontier on the Nile: JFK, Nasser, and Arab Nationalism," *Journal of American History* 75 (September 1988): 501-27. See also Warren Bass, *Support Any Friend: Kennedy's Middle East and the Making of the U.S.-Israel Alliance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 64-143.

⁶² Komer to Kennedy, 15 January 1962, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Near East, 1961-1962*, vol. 17, doc 163. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/kennedyjfxvii/index.htm>, accessed 21 January 2009.

⁶³ Airgram From the Embassy in Ethiopia to the Department of State, 21 February 1962, *ibid.*, doc 195.

had to present modernization in the Arab political context as a departure from both American and Soviet models. Nor did it appreciate the degree to which proponents legitimized Arab socialism on the basis of external referents and as an alternative to the superpowers' prescriptions for developing countries in the Arab world and beyond.

The weight of these presumptions was apparent from officials' disappointment with Nasir after he met Bowles in February 1962. Rattled by Nasir's "intemperate" speech marking the fourth anniversary of the UAR's founding, delivered days after receiving Bowles, Secretary of State Dean Rusk urged Kennedy to put off plans for inviting Nasir to the U.S. The speech sought to distinguish the historical juggernaut of Arab socialism represented by the UAR from both exploitative capitalism and Syrian feudalism. In the climax of his two-hour address, Nasir identified Syrian secessionists with the U.S. by accusing them of accepting American bribes. Rusk explained that officials at the State Department "now believe it unrealistic" that a visit by Nasir would be worthwhile. For "reasons best known to Nasser," Rusk wrote, "he has higher priorities at present than the improvement in the atmosphere for United States-UAR relations."⁶⁴

Nasir spoke not merely out of a reflexive anti-westernism or a desire to establish his own nationalist credentials by denigrating those of others. Rather, he defined his approach to development within an Arab political context that used America symbolically as the foil for an array of modernizing visions. This context imposed limits on the degree to which economic cooperation could serve as a basis for closer U.S.-Egyptian relations. Administration officials wrongly interpreted Nasir's non-alignment to mean that he could curb rhetorical attacks on the U.S. and other enemies while focusing his attention on "internal" improvements. Such a scenario was incompatible with the idiom of Arab development. Arab socialism's meaning and success could only be expressed as part of the ongoing postwar debate over modernization that Arab writers conducted in comparative and universal terms.

⁶⁴ Rusk to Kennedy, 2 March 1962, *ibid.*, doc 205. See Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir, "Al-wahdah al-'Arabiya laysat milk tajriba wahida wa innama hiya milk ta'rikh tawil," 22 February 1962, *Majmu'at khutab wa tasrihat wa bayanat al-ra'is Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir*, Part Four, *Fabrair 1962 ila Yuniu 1964* (Cairo: maslahat al-isti'lamat, n.d.), 4-24.

This interpretation of non-alignment holds significance beyond U.S.-Egyptian relations. First, it shows how a bilateral diplomatic relationship might be embedded within a transnational intellectual and political context. Second, it attempts to see the cold war from the perspective of elites in the postcolonial world. Such elites posed options for developing their societies by maintaining rhetorical distance from the two superpowers, not simply as a choice between them. Intellectual detachment, as much as ideological commitment, characterized the cold war in the “Third World.” Reinterpreting colonial-era antecedents in an ideologically polarized environment, the elites of newly independent countries assumed the comparative habit of mind that had once been the privilege of Europeans. They practiced non-alignment as modernity.