

In the Security Council

Mesamarat al-Gayb, 20 January 1946

The performance continues in London: speeches delivered, hands applauding, mouths bursting into cheers, hopes pinned here and there, despair spreading here and there too, committees elected with real ease at times, with real hardship and fierce contest at others, real competition over membership on these same committees — and peoples, behind all of this, reading and listening, some taking it seriously, others treating it lightly, while the world's own politics proceeds through all of this, stumbling, burdened with every variety of hardship and trial.

The Security Council was elected, among the councils and committees elected, and Egypt was granted a seat on this same council — some of us rejoiced, with real confidence and hope; some of us scoffed, with real despair and hopelessness; some of us wavered between resentment and satisfaction, between despair and hope. Egyptians may well take real pleasure in Egypt securing the confidence of a genuinely vast body of nations, in her own representatives sitting on the Security Council at its very first convening, taking their own seats alongside those representing the three great powers, and those representing the five great powers — Egypt having secured, in that same moment, something other nations, possessing independence, might, and prestige Egypt herself lacks, never managed to secure. It genuinely flatters national sentiment, genuinely caresses national pride, that Egypt should be chosen for the Security Council in this same council's very first election, and that Egypt should take up this same exalted position among the nations.

All of this is true — but is all of it genuinely good?! This is exactly the question that must be posed, and that must be answered. And to whatever degree the answer to it corresponds to actual, practical reality, rather than to this merely imagined, theoretical reality, will it be right for Egyptians to rejoice, or to grieve, to feel satisfied, or to feel resentful.

I do not believe the reader expects me to number myself among those satisfied and rejoicing — he already knows my own view of the United Nations Assembly, and of the Security Council; he already knows my own view of Egypt's own eagerness to take part in this same Assembly, and its own Council. Luxury is a genuinely desirable thing — but only once whatever is truly necessary, whatever admits of no

substitute, has already been secured. The United Nations Assembly is a genuine luxury, without any doubt; the Security Council is a genuine luxury too, without any doubt. The Assembly is a luxury, with respect to us, and people like us, since matters of real gravity rest entirely with the three great victorious powers, and matters of moderate or minor significance rest with the five great powers. As for us, and people like us, we are members of this same Assembly merely to complete its own numbers, and to lend support to this or that victor.

The Security Council is a genuine luxury too, without any doubt — since its own matters rest with the three victors, or the five victors, and we, and people like us, are members of it merely to complete its own numbers, and to lend support to this or that victor.

Our own position on the Security Council may well prove even closer to mere luxury than our own position within the United Nations Assembly itself — we shall do nothing genuinely significant on the Security Council, nor shall we be able to do anything genuinely significant on it, since the Security Council's own decisions on genuinely significant matters are never actually implemented except by the unanimous agreement of the five great powers. We may well align ourselves — and others may well align themselves alongside us — with four of these same five powers, and the decision of these same ten nations will still remain paralyzed, simply because the eleventh nation said: no!

And if a single great power can genuinely paralyze whatever the other four great powers have already agreed upon, what, then, of us, whether we agree with these same powers, or disagree with them? We, and people like us, are nothing more than a mere completion of the numbers — nothing more, nothing less... God forgive me, we, and people like us, may well amount to even less than a mere completion of the numbers. Our own participation in the Security Council, exactly like our own participation in the United Nations Assembly, imposes upon us far more in the way of obligations than it grants us in the way of rights.

Our own representative will sit on the Security Council; the Security Council may well decide something entirely unsuited to our own interests; our own representative may well reject that same decision, may well protest it — yet we shall bind ourselves to it, and submit to it, all the same, since we are participants in the Security Council, and in the United Nations Assembly, and the very least this same participation requires of us is submission to whatever decisions these same bodies issue.

It might well be said that keeping ourselves apart from these same two bodies would not spare us from submitting to their own decisions regardless. But there remains a genuinely great difference between submitting out of genuine consent and free choice, and submitting simply because you find no way of avoiding submission at all.

The reader ought not, then, expect me to number myself among those rejoicing over our own election to the Security Council. I would genuinely have rejoiced over our own participation in the United Nations Assembly, and our own election to the Security Council, had we already secured our own complete, unimpaired independence beforehand. Our own participation in both these bodies, as a fully independent nation, one holding with this or that victor none of the same disagreement we hold with our own English friends, would then have been an entirely different matter.

It would, then, have been entirely natural for us to rejoice over our own participation in this same Assembly, since isolation, in political life, is a genuinely hateful thing; entirely natural for us to rejoice over our own election to the Security Council, since those who have already secured their own necessary needs can genuinely seek out some measure of luxury, and delight in it, should it be granted them. But for us to remain unfree in our own country, exactly as we wish to be free, while taking part in determining freedom for other nations besides — that is a matter not without its own real irony, and it has been said, in the tradition: begin with yourself, then with those you support.

As for our own homeland's own soil remaining occupied, the foreigner having settled within it, while we then, or even alongside that, support other states demanding that the foreigner evacuate their own soil — that is a matter not without its own bitter irony. We ought, surely, to secure our own English friends' own evacuation from Egyptian soil first, before supporting other states in demanding evacuation, of the English or others, from their own homelands. It is only fair to say that our own Egyptian representative's own position on the Security Council will prove genuinely painful — unless his own self happens to be particularly skilled at being deceived by mere appearances, and turning a blind eye to the actual facts.

The Security Council will meet today, Thursday, and it is said the Iranian problem may well be brought before it, and perhaps the Syrian-Lebanese problem too. The Iranian problem demands the

Russians' own evacuation from northern Iran, which might require, in turn, the British own evacuation from southern Iran; discussions will proceed over this same Russian evacuation, and Egypt's own representative may well speak, in support of Iran's own demand for evacuation — or he may well remain silent. Should he choose silence, he abandons Iran, when it is only right that he support her; should he speak, Russia's own representative would be entitled to ask him: and what of the British occupation of the Egyptian homeland?! What is your own view of that?! Why do you not hasten evacuation from Egypt, exactly as you hasten evacuation from Iran? The Egyptian representative might well answer: I do indeed hasten British evacuation from Egypt, and my own government has already sent a memorandum on that very matter to the British Foreign Ministry. Whereupon the Russian comrade would answer, smiling: Iran, too, has already hastened our own evacuation from her own soil, and sent us a memorandum of her own — let the fate of both memoranda be one and the same, or genuinely similar, and let us evacuate Iran precisely when your own allies evacuate Egyptian soil.

The Egyptian representative's own position on the Syrian-Lebanese problem, should it be brought before the Security Council, will prove exactly like his own position on the Iranian problem: he will be unable to remain silent, since the bond of brotherhood between us and Syria and Lebanon compels him to speak — and, should he speak, the French Foreign Minister will answer him with exactly what the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister answered him with. It amounts to precisely the same thing: the occupied nation ought to secure her own evacuation from her own homeland first, before assisting the evacuation of her own allies' and friends' homelands afterward.

Whether the Egyptian representative speaks, or remains silent, on this problem or that, the result is exactly the same: his own words will change nothing whatsoever, one way or another. The only thing genuinely capable of changing anything, one way or another, is the agreement, or disagreement, of the five great powers themselves. Should these same powers agree on evacuating foreign armies from Iran, the Russians will evacuate the north, and the British the south. Should these same powers fail to agree, the Russians will remain exactly where they are, and the British will remain exactly where they reside — unless war itself is stirred up, to evacuate one side, or the other, or to evacuate both sides together.

The Security Council was established, it is said, to prevent war first, and to prevent injustice second — yet it can never manage to prevent injustice, so long as the veto power remains in place, and can never manage to prevent war either, so long as it remains incapable of preventing injustice. The Security Council, then, is a genuinely strange thing indeed, holding a great deal of real benefit — but for the great powers, not for the small ones.

Small nations can appeal to it, and their own representatives can ease their own hearts, and relieve some part of whatever misfortune befalls them — but matters stop right there, and the affairs of the great powers proceed exactly as the great themselves wish, not as the small wish.

Say exactly the same of the United Nations Assembly, whenever it takes up matters of politics — and this is why I have read, and shall go on reading, whatever is said of this or that problem brought before this or that body, without ever expecting any real resolution for these same problems, except through the agreement of the great three, or the great five. Everything beneath that level will change nothing whatsoever, one way or another, except in spreading propaganda, and in publicity. And who knows? Perhaps spreading propaganda, and publicity itself, count among the genuinely significant purposes for which states actually take part in the United Nations Assembly, and in the Security Council.

There is a question that occurs to me, one I can scarcely bring myself to voice except with a great deal of genuine hesitation: is there not, after all, some real disagreement between us and our own British friends? If the answer is yes, then why is this same disagreement never brought before the United Nations body, and before the Security Council, exactly as the Iranian problem, and the Syrian and Lebanese problem, are brought before them? And if there is no real disagreement whatsoever between us and our own British allies, then why do we burden our own government with invoking our own national rights, and why has our own government sent a memorandum to the British Foreign Ministry?!

Believe me, dear reader! Events have not yet disproven al-Mutanabbi, when he said:

How much there is, in Egypt, to laugh at.

And believe me, too, that it is genuinely better we laugh at ourselves, before others get the chance to laugh at us.