

The Will of a People

Al-Jumhuriya, 5 March 1956.

In less than a week, the world learned that two Arab, Muslim peoples had managed to impose their will upon two great powers, among the strongest nations on earth in might, the most formidable in power, the farthest-reaching in voice, and the widest in dominion.

The Moroccan people imposed their will upon France, compelling her by sheer necessity to recognize their independence and sovereignty, and forcing her to negotiate with the Sultan whom she had deposed from his throne two years before, and exiled to a remote island in the farthest reaches of the ocean, reckoning that she would make of him an example to deter the rebellious and the insubordinate against her. But her exalted standing, her far-reaching voice, her formidable might, and her vast dominion availed her nothing; the Moroccan people pressed on in their revolt, adding violence to violence, until, through the effort she expended, the hardship she endured, and the money and blood she spent, she was compelled to seek the goodwill of the deposed and exiled Sultan, and to send to him, on his remote island, one of her most senior commanders, to court him gently, to deal with him tactfully, and to offer him peace and a truce for a while, and then a return to his homeland and his throne, secure and triumphant, and then negotiation to reach an outcome satisfactory to him, to his homeland, and to his people, and to salvage what could be salvaged of her own reputation and interests in that country.

And now she is announcing to him that his homeland has become independent, enjoying its sovereignty and managing its own affairs, and then she has gone on to negotiate with his government over the protection of her interests by whatever means she can find to protect them. She had wished the deposing and exile of the Sultan to be an example to deter the rebellious and insubordinate against her; it accomplished nothing of the sort, and the deposing and exile of the Sultan became instead an example against herself, a harsh lesson she has learned how to make use of in Tunisia and how to make use of in Morocco, and will learn tomorrow or the day after, without a doubt, how to make use of in Algeria as well; for the deposing and exile of the Sultan and the violence done to the Moroccan people did not frighten anyone in all of North Africa — rather, it spread revolt throughout it and added

flame to its blaze, so that the Tunisians rose up until they won a measure of their independence, and are now negotiating to add victory to victory, to broaden the independence France had conceded to them not long before, and to make of it a realized independence rather than mere words spoken. And the Moroccans rose up until they recovered their sultan and wrested back their independence by force, and the Algerians have risen up, and I do not think their revolt will subside until France recognizes the right of theirs she denies, restores to them what she has monopolized of their interests, and erases from herself this absurd legend by which she justified herself for a century and a bit more, when she claimed that Algeria was part of the French homeland — claiming this for herself while refusing to recognize for the people of Algeria the rights of Frenchmen, so that she made of Algeria French soil worked by millions of slaves to serve their French masters; and she is now learning, through hardship upon hardship, and effort upon effort, and sacrifice of money and men, that the Algerians were once free, and wish to recover their freedom, to possess their own country, and to manage their own affairs as they themselves wish, not as other, intruding powers wish for them.

And so too the Arab Muslim peoples struggle in the path of their freedom and independence, some of them attaining victory, others still striving until they attain the victory that is their due, so as to become once more free and noble, as they were, free and noble, in their past. And France will never be able, however much effort she expends, however much money she spends, however many soldiers she sends to Algeria, to turn the Algerians away from what they demand of a free and noble life.

France will never be able to turn back the clock in Tunisia and Morocco, nor will Algeria settle until her people attain the like of what the Tunisians and Moroccans have attained.

That is the nature of things, and this is the logic of history, and France will reap nothing from her delay in acknowledging the right, and her stubbornness in matters where she ought not to be stubborn, nothing from this but the sacrifice of money and men to no avail; and yet it should be acknowledged of France that she has profited from the harsh lessons dealt to her, and has not persisted in a resistance that avails nothing, as in Tunisia and Morocco. And all we sincerely and well-meaningly wish for her is that she return to good sense and right purpose with respect to Algeria, just as she has returned to them with respect to her two neighbors in the east and the west.

And in the Near East, a people small in number, small in material strength, and small in the extent of the land it inhabits — the people of Jordan — learned to impose its will upon a state that had so often imposed its will upon peoples, had so often subjugated many lands on earth to its ambitions and whims, had so often toyed with thrones and crowns, and had so often exalted itself over the whole world through its mastery of the seas and its command over lands. And it is now receiving from this small-yet-great Jordanian people a lesson at which it will at first be astonished, and which it will then ponder and reflect upon once its astonishment has cleared, and will come in the end to believe — if it has not come to believe it already — that the will of peoples, once they know their right and feel their dignity, stands above every force, above every wealth, and above every tyranny that relies upon force and wealth.

Great Britain wished to compel the Jordanian people to join her Baghdad alliance; so the Jordanian people taught her that it had attained such faith in itself and its right as enabled it to say to her: no. And she wished to make of the Jordanian army a pliant instrument, subservient to her whims and ambitions, imposing upon it a cunning commander from among her own sons; so the Jordanian people, having come to believe in itself and its right, taught her that it could say to her: no, and could send her cunning commander back to her within a few hours of a single day.

And I said more than three years ago, when our Revolution first blazed up, that it would have upon the peoples of the Arab East the very same effects that the French Revolution had upon the peoples of Europe more than a century and a half ago, and these events now prove, clearly and plainly, that I was neither exaggerating nor mistaken in my estimate. Consider, if you wish, the peoples who have risen against their colonizers and triumphed over them and won the whole or part of their rights since I published that article in Al-Ahram when our Revolution first blazed up.

Consider the Sudan: how it was when the Egyptian Revolution first blazed up, and how it is now. And consider Tunisia and Morocco: how they were three years ago, and how they are now. And consider Algeria: how she was swallowing torment and humiliation, and how she now rises up to free herself from torment, to be absolved of humiliation, and to resume, tomorrow or the day after, a free and noble life founded on honor and pride. And consider, last of all, Jordan: how it managed to impose its will upon the English twice in less than three months. The struggle of the Arab peoples for their independence and dignity has not ended, but it will only grow in strength and in sting until these peoples attain what they

wish of their hopes; for they look to Egypt, and follow the path Egypt follows, seriously, not playfully, because they see in Egypt earnestness, not play. And we ought not to deceive ourselves about the facts, nor let ourselves be deceived about the logic of history; for the Baghdad Pact, which is being arranged — so it is said — as a precaution against Soviet Russia, was conceived by Nuri al-Said and those who inspired it in him for no other reason than, first, a precaution against Egypt, second, against the contagion of her revolution, against her influence upon the weak and oppressed peoples, and against her broadcasting the idea of resistance to colonizers on the one hand, and her gentle but resolute pursuit of social justice on the other.

Exactly as the Holy Alliance was formed to resist the French Revolution and the events that arose from it, yet the Holy Alliance availed its members nothing; for France achieved her revolution and spread democracy throughout Europe, and the final word belonged to liberty, fraternity, and equality. And the Baghdad Pact will avail its members nothing either; for Egypt will complete her revolution, and the Arab peoples, the Iraqi people among them, will follow in her wake, and the final word will belong to the abolition of colonialism and the realization of equality between peoples on the one hand, and between individuals within those peoples on the other.

All of this, God Almighty has decreed, when He said, after mentioning Pharaoh's tyranny: "And We desired to show favor unto those who were oppressed in the land, and to make them leaders, and to make them the inheritors."