

CHAPTER XII

THE ARMY CRISIS: ITS ORIGIN AND GROWTH

THE year 1927 opened to all appearances quietly. Something had been achieved, but it was of course very little in comparison with the task ahead. It would have been the height of foolishness to suppose that Egypt had in so short a space acquired the full knowledge that was essential to a permanent understanding and steady progress. Even if the process of acquisition appeared to have begun, there was no justification for the hope that it would be continuous. The pendulum of political thought was bound to obey its natural laws and to swing backwards at regular intervals. The British task was—not to ignore the fact—but to face it, and strive to ensure that the recurrent backward swing should become by degrees less and less in its intensity. The immediate symptoms seemed to indicate that such a swing would very soon take place. The extreme elements of the coalition were beginning by degrees to forget the lesson of 1924, and to minimise the risks which they might run by provocative action. There was still a large section which argued that the firmness then shown by the British Government was a freak—a throw-back to an earlier age—and not to be regarded as a natural quality. Egypt would get nothing, they said, except by violent measures, and they reinforced the

assertion by reciting the history of 1919 to 1922. As a consequence, the Wafd was beginning to grow restive, and to chafe increasingly at the restraint which Zaghlul Pasha was still trying to impose. We had already seen a definite sign in the elections of Ahmed Maher and Nekrashi, and in this temper it was too much to expect that they would remain inactive during the representations which I had now to make in regard to British officials in the service of the Egyptian Government.

It will be remembered that the conclusion reached upon this question was that it was essential to the full maintenance of the policy to which we had committed ourselves in 1922, that we should insist upon the appointment of British officials to certain important posts. We had reserved to ourselves certain responsibilities in 1922, and the adequate discharge of two at least of these responsibilities would be impossible unless certain posts were in the hands of British officials, and unless appointments of non-British foreigners were made subject to our consent.

Moreover, since existing contracts were due to terminate in a few months, the matter could no longer be delayed. If we made no representations on the subject our case would go by default, we should have abandoned in one most important particular the policy of 1922, and we should have prepared the ground for intransigence in Egypt and surrender in England. I did not reach this conclusion without the gravest anxiety: I had no desire to disturb the situation if disturbance could by any means be avoided: least of all did I desire to give any colour to the charge that we were unwarrantably interfering with the independence we had granted to Egypt. But the more I considered the question, the more I became

convinced that His Majesty's Government were bound by the Declaration of 1922, and that the only honest course was to ensure that that declaration was carried out.

As to the action that was necessary to this end, it seemed to me that what we wanted was that certain posts should be secured in British hands for at least a decade ahead: that the exact functions attaching to these posts should be clearly laid down: and that they should be filled by the best men procurable. With this as our goal, it seemed to me that the best way to proceed would be to avoid a collective and sudden demand, which it would be difficult for the Ministry to accept without arousing the hostility of the extremists, but rather to take department by department. So much we could do to help those who were friendly to us: for the rest we must be firm and definite in our demands, and deal with the most essential departments first. I was prepared to see these demands arouse opposition, and possibly create a storm, for I knew how unstable were Zaghul's assurances, and how restive his followers might become; but against this possibility I could reckon upon the assurances of the Prime Minister that he would do his best to help negotiations upon these lines, and upon Zaghul's undoubted anxieties in regard to the Constitution which might lead him even to conclude that in order to avoid danger in that quarter our demands must be accepted.

In regard to the necessity of action, and to the principles governing such action, the Secretary of State was in general agreement with me; more debatable ground, however, was reached when it came to the consideration of what our detailed demands should be in each department. The method selected for the

formulation of these demands was to hold an informal representative meeting of the High Commissioner's official advisers and of British experts concerned, to examine each individual post, and to decide against the retention of any British or foreign official whose place could possibly be taken by an Egyptian without serious detriment to interests for which we had undertaken responsibility. But although it seemed to me that by this method we could hardly fail to arrive at the essential minimum which it was necessary to secure, the Foreign Office were regarding the matter from a different standpoint. Indeed, in the course of the long correspondence which followed, it was difficult to avoid the conclusion that although we were both nominally standing for the same policy, we were in reality regarding that policy from very different points of view. The figures which were advanced from Cairo as essential, London was inclined to regard with misgiving. The fact that these figures had been most carefully tested in the light of practical experience did not appear to weigh with them so much as the fact that to unenlightened or ill-informed opinion they would appear difficult to justify. For London demonstrable necessity meant a necessity which those ignorant of the special conditions of the Egyptian problem would accept; for Cairo it meant almost exactly the opposite—a necessity which was dictated by the special conditions of the Egyptian problem. The Secretary of State's advisers very clearly disliked the idea of taking up a firm attitude on this subject, and their dislike began to show itself in the tone of the despatches I received. In place of the full support tempered only by helpful suggestion which I had been receiving, there began to arrive qualified assurances of agreement, coupled with warn-

ings as to the grievances which Egyptians might entertain at the employment of Englishmen, and the dangers of pressing the Egyptian Government on this matter. It was in vain that I sought to impress upon the Secretary of State that without full reference to him no action would be taken which might alienate the Egyptian Government. It was further pointed out that since the general lines of policy were agreed, I might be trusted with a large measure of liberty in negotiation, especially as it was impossible to acquaint him with all the factors which must influence decision in regard to each individual post. The nervousness remained, and I was requested to be careful to make as full reference as possible to the Secretary of State in regard to all the points concerned.

Looking back in the light of after events, it is natural, perhaps, that I should ask myself why it was that the Foreign Office were visited with such grave anxieties on a matter which, while it presented no abnormal difficulties, was yet of extreme importance for the maintenance of our declared policy, especially in regard to the welfare of the people. The information supplied to them was very full and reached them for consideration long before action was to be taken. Moreover, it had not been suggested to His Majesty's Government that any large demand should be made upon Egypt to this end. It was only in regard to five Ministries—those of Communications, Education, Finance, War, and Justice—that I reported any necessity for action, and even in those Ministries a large number of their departments were excluded from the proposals. The basic fact with which we had to contend was that although the Milner Commission and the 1922 Declaration had assumed that an independent Egypt would not be so foolish as to con-

template any substantial reduction of European officials, yet an independent Egypt had in fact reduced the number of officials by over 50 per cent. in four years. In face of these figures it is interesting to recall the conclusion which the Milner Commission reached on this subject: "No sensible Egyptian seriously wishes to dispense with foreign aid . . . any general or rapid displacement of the British and other foreign officials is not to be anticipated." The resulting deterioration in efficiency was admitted by all observers to be marked and widespread. But however much we might deplore this, I was determined not to intervene, and did not in fact suggest intervention, unless the reservations made in 1922 absolutely demanded it. The maintenance of a reasonable standard of law, of order, and of facilities for commerce was a matter for which we had undertaken responsibility, and every proposal that was made in regard to British officials was the outcome of considered agreement among experienced advisers, and was dictated by a reasoned conviction that without British assistance the necessary maintenance would be in danger.

That there should have been any indication of a divergence of view was especially unfortunate, because at this moment a question of even greater importance and urgency thrust itself forward and demanded instant action—the question of the Wafd's policy in regard to the Egyptian Army, a policy which was drawing rapidly nearer to accomplishment. Matters were not made easier during the swift development of this problem by a sudden crisis in the Egyptian Cabinet. The immediate circumstances of this crisis were curiously trivial. In the opening discussion upon the Budget a suggestion was made that

the Ministry should be thanked for the encouragement it had extended to the Bank Misr. A motion to that effect was moved and rejected by a large majority. Leading members of the Wafd immediately spoke to the effect that this vote did not imply any lack of confidence, but the Prime Minister, Adly Pasha, who had been absent from the session, at this point arrived in the Chamber with several of his colleagues, and announced that the vote left the Ministry no alternative but to resign. The next morning, April 18, he duly tendered his resignation to the King, and adhered to it obstinately. It was clear enough that something more than this had been taking place behind the scenes, and it was not long before I was in possession of information which illuminated the whole incident. It then appeared that the Minister of War had been pressing upon the Prime Minister his projects for the final accomplishment of the Wafd's army policy, and that he had brought in to support him Ahmed Maher and Nek-rashi at the head of the extremists. Even Zaghlul, to whom the Prime Minister appealed, had taken the side of the extremists, and pronounced in favour of an aggressive policy. The result had been the resignation of Adly Pasha, rather to the consternation of Zaghlul and the more moderate Wafdists, who were not yet prepared to join battle on such an issue. So little were they inclined for internecine strife that they put forward Sarwat Pasha as an acceptable Prime Minister, and even agreed to the conditions which he laid down as essential to him. With Sarwat Pasha's acceptance of the Premiership I was relieved of all necessity for interference. It only remained for me to listen in silence to the consistent and instructive comments of His Majesty upon Zaghlul

lul, upon his new Prime Minister, and finally upon the Parliamentary system in Egypt, and the merits of the Egyptian Constitution.

But if in negotiations in regard to officials and during the Cabinet crisis I had been able to refrain from disturbing intervention, it seemed impossible that the same fortune would attend me in regard to the Army question, for here there was no doubt that Zaghul supported by the whole Wafd party would be much more inclined to fight, and it would be a difficult task to manœuvre them out of their position without firing a shot. Their policy on this matter was an instructive indication of their point of view towards us, and of the methods they thought most profitable. That we should have a voice in controlling Egyptian Army policy and also in promoting its efficiency was clearly essential under the terms of our 1922 policy. We had declared that we would take all the measures necessary to safeguard our imperial communications, that we were responsible for the protection of foreign interests, and of Egypt against foreign aggression, and that for these purposes the *status quo* must be maintained until agreement could be reached. But ever since 1923 the Wafd had been steadily pursuing a policy of undermining the *status quo*, until in 1926 we were faced with the prospect of an Egyptian Army, much increased in strength, and not only removed from any possibility of control by us, but saturated as the result of intensive propaganda with the political influence of an extreme political party. We were ourselves, as it appeared to me, largely to blame for this state of affairs, for we had never made any attempt to put a stop to the gradual but steady erosion of the position which our policy bound us to maintain. British officers in the

higher commands had been very soon replaced by Egyptians, and in 1922 the Minister of War had been busy removing minor questions from the purview of the Sirdar, and bringing them under his direct control. The next step had been direct interference with the Sirdar's disciplinary powers. In March 1924, Shahin Bey, an officer who was unpopular with the Wafd, had been placed on pension, as a political concession to the extremists, and this had had a profound effect upon the whole position. Then came the Sirdar's murder, but even thereafter we did nothing to arrest the dangerous movement. In January 1925 we allowed an Army Council to be formed which promptly arranged that the appointment and promotion of officers should no longer be submitted to the King through the Sirdar, but should be made dependent upon an Officers' Committee, and submitted by them to His Majesty through the Minister of War. In the spring of 1925 the Frontiers Administration, the Departments of Recruiting and Supplies, and the Finance Department, passed completely under political control, and the Minister of War and his partisans were doing much to suborn the allegiance of the officers and to bring them under the influence of the political caucus. The objective of the extremists was now becoming more than clear—they were pressing this campaign because they desired an anti-dynastic revolution, and they were screening this ultimate purpose behind the popular demand for complete independence. On the resumption of Constitutional Government in 1926, the campaign was renewed with vigour. Under extremist pressure and having received no warning signals from the British authorities, Kāshaba Bey, the Minister of War, was now on the point of presenting to Parliament pro-

posals for increasing the trained reserve, increasing the establishment, abolishing restrictions upon the carriage of arms, and creating a military air force; while at the same time he was more and more disregarding the British Inspector-General, refusing his recommendations, corresponding direct with his subordinate officers, inspecting units, and apportioning the duties of the Headquarters Staff without reference to him.

I had been for some considerable time very seriously impressed with the gravity of this situation. It was becoming very clear that if matters were allowed to go any further on the lines planned by the Wafd an unpleasant and perhaps a critical dilemma was reserved for His Majesty's Government. There was an inevitable temptation to avoid the prompt facing of so critical a situation, but reflection showed the alternative to be worse. There was no doubt that if once the Wafd had become satisfied that their control over the Army was complete, they would not hesitate to launch these combined forces in assault against the Monarchy. What other course would then have been open to His Majesty's Government but to support with all the military forces at their command the Monarch they themselves had assisted to the throne, and in so doing to break with their own hands the Constitution for which they had sacrificed so much? At all costs such an issue must be avoided. My own hands had been tied for some time by the necessity of securing an agreed solution of the problem of European officials. As to the Army, matters were very different: for one thing they had gone too far to be pulled back by anything short of a sharp jerk: for another, the whole campaign of the extremists was involved, and they would not easily

permit surrender. There was no need, however, to despair of a successful issue, provided the matter was prudently handled, and I proposed to the Secretary of State that I should be authorised to approach the Egyptian Government on the matter at once, and point out to them that our whole-hearted desire was to have their co-operation in safeguarding our communications, and protecting Egypt from foreign aggression. For this purpose we should like to have the Egyptian Army an efficient modern force forming an integral part of our defence scheme. These objects could not possibly be achieved if the present tendencies to turn the Army into a political machine and to do away with the authority of the Inspector-General were continued. For a friendly settlement it was essential that Egypt should reconsider the position. If she was not prepared to do so, we would be compelled to regard the Egyptian Army as a potential danger to the discharge of our responsibilities, and to take action accordingly. In response to the despatch in which I set forth the whole position for the consideration of the Secretary of State, and asked for the authority above described, I received a telegram stating that His Majesty's Government accepted my proposals. A few days before this, however, there had arrived a letter from the Egyptian Department in the Foreign Office addressed to Sir William Tyrrell¹ who was staying at the Residency and intended to be shown to me.

The question had been the subject of a long and detailed correspondence between myself and the Secretary of State for more than twelve months past. Even before the expiry of Zivar Pasha's premiership, we had reached agreement with regard

¹ Now Lord Tyrrell.

to the course to be adopted on the question of the Sirdarship, but unfortunately the fall of that Cabinet and the return of the Wafd to power had forestalled action. After further correspondence with the Government at home I had been authorised to impress on King Fuad the gravity of the situation which was developing, and to ask him whether he was in sympathy with the proposals for general increases in the strength of the Egyptian Army. I pointed out to the King that His Majesty's Government "had authorised me to ask for a gradual but "definite reduction in the strength of the Egyptian "forces, in accordance with the policy being pursued "in other countries. Could I have an assurance that "the King's influence would be exerted in this direc- "tion? His Majesty replied in the affirmative, but re- "peated that he was practically powerless in existing "political circumstances"¹ The interview described above took place on December 7, 1926, and further detailed discussion took place before I was able on March 3 of the following year to summarise in the despatch quoted in the preceding paragraph, the trend of past events and to make detailed proposals for a definite approach to the Egyptian Govern- ment. In subsequent despatches I elaborated my proposal and further explained in detail the facts and the needs which justified them. As a result, on April 13, I received the following telegram from the Secretary of State: "Egyptian Army. His Majesty's "Government accept the proposals contained in your "despatch of 28th of March."

It was thus no sudden policy upon which we were embarking, but one carefully elaborated and long

¹ F.O. Despatch: Lord Lloyd to Sir Austen Chamberlain, December 12, 1926.

considered. Moreover, Sir William Tyrrell, the Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, had been staying with me during the latter period and my final proposals had been fully discussed with and unreservedly accepted by him, so that I felt assured of the most complete support, knowing the confidence which the Secretary of State reposed in his judgment.

It was startling, therefore, to find that in the letter from the Foreign Office which Sir William Tyrrell now received there was set out a series of arguments directed against the line of action which I had proposed, and which had now just been approved by the Secretary of State.

The letter showed that there was no disposition on the part of the Foreign Office to deny the proposition that erosion of our position in regard to the Army had reached a point at which it could no longer be tolerated, or that it was essential to secure the Army from contamination. But when it went on to discuss the method to be adopted, it revealed a state of mind which caused me considerable anxiety with regard to the future. What was wanted, said the letter, was some provisional arrangement, pending the final agreement in regard to the four reserved points.

So far I was not in disagreement. But the next suggestion was that this arrangement should, if possible, be "some constructive agreement or *modus vivendi* which will fit in with the general policy of "collaboration and not compulsion". Yet from the facts as they were, what possible hope was there of securing even the introduction into Parliament of any proposal involving friendly co-operation on the basis of the 1922 Declaration? There was no Minister who would dare to sponsor it, not even a deputy who

would dare to support it. In such circumstances, agreement could only be reached by receding ourselves from the 1922 Declaration, and admitting that what we then regarded as vital, we were now prepared to abandon. The only possible result of such a step would be a large surrender of our position in Egypt; a surrender which would constitute a definite change of policy. Indeed, the gravest cause for anxiety that I found in this letter was the fact that it actually appeared to contemplate such a change. Even on the most optimistic construction, there were sentences in it which could not but create the impression that the Foreign Office were preparing to envisage a retreat from the policy of 1922. The definition of that policy which the letter propounded was as follows: "It was "to settle by agreement with Egypt the subjects which "in those stormy days were incapable of settlement "and had to be reserved in consequence." It will be seen that this definition omitted much that was of vital importance. It mentioned only the difficulties of settlement and it made no reference to our Imperial interests, to the interests of foreigners, or to the preservation of the *status quo*. This was very far removed from Mr. MacDonald's statement of 1924: "Egypt was *de jure* and *de facto* "a British Protectorate. For reasons of their own "and of their own motion, His Majesty's Government "modified that status and granted a measure of independence." And—more dangerously still—the letter went on: "Now 1922 is a good horse that has carried "us far and well, but we must not ride it to death, and "in any case it won't last indefinitely". How could these sentences fail to convey to the reader the impression that adherence to the Declaration of 1922 was no longer steadfastly contemplated, and that

official opinion in England was now inclining towards a settlement with Egypt at the expense of our responsibilities? I, at any rate, was shaken, for my whole position was based upon the determination to secure the ultimate friendly agreement upon the reserved points which our policy had always contemplated: and I was more convinced than ever that such agreement, fully safeguarding the vital interests of both countries, could only be secured by our rigid adherence to the whole of the 1922 Declaration, since only by such adherence could we hope to bring Egypt to a frame of mind in which reasonable negotiation would be possible. My conviction was that we ought to welcome and encourage any chance of working out the constructive possibilities of the Declaration, but I could not allow myself to be driven into abandoning any of the prohibitions which were implicit in it.

Although this rendered me somewhat uneasy in mind, I had the Secretary of State's full authority, and I went forward upon the lines planned with him. The Prime Minister (now Sarwat Pasha), and the King accepted my first approaches in a friendly and accommodating spirit. The French and Italian Ministers left me in no doubt that they personally and their Governments would accord me the warmest support in the attitude I was now compelled to take up. For days the matter hung in the balance. Zaghul was now wavering: at one moment there was hope that he would reject extremist counsels and listen to the words of moderation. But finally, towards the end of May, there was little doubt that the extremists were gaining the day. Once the slide had begun, it grew rapid and uncontrolled: the extremists were exultant and proclaiming their determination to resist at all hazards, and popular excitement was fer-

menting. Finally, on May 24, I received a private note from Sarwat Pasha saying that he felt it his duty to put it on record in writing that from a legal point of view the Egyptian Government held that the Egyptian Army did not fall under any of our reservations of 1922, and that consequently Egypt had complete liberty in regard to it. It was clear from this that for the moment the extremists had won the day; and that nothing further was to be gained by the present continuance of private negotiation. On May 31, therefore, I handed to Sarwat Pasha an official note embodying the views and demands of His Majesty's Government, the text of which is set forth in Appendix C.

Meanwhile excitement continued to grow, and I was compelled in view of the possibility of disturbance to request the despatch of a warship to Alexandria as a precautionary measure. That the arrival of this ship might be regarded as a threat was an inevitable consequence, but I was not prepared to risk lives in order to avoid giving that impression, nor did I believe that an indication of a firm and prepared attitude could have any unwholesome effect. For some days thereafter the question of what attitude the Egyptian Government would take hung in the balance, and I thought it best to utilise this interval in preparing our further plans against an unfavourable reply. In detailed despatches I outlined to the Secretary of State the possible developments which I foresaw, and recommended that in the event of an unsatisfactory answer we should pose to the Egyptian Government the simple and definite question: did they accept our Declaration of 1922 or not? If to this question they gave either a negative or an equivocal reply, our next step should be to secure

from the King the suspension of the Chamber, and the formation of a Cabinet of Affairs. To this Cabinet we should present a draft and comprehensive treaty, giving a time limit for acceptance and making clear that the renewal of constitutional life would depend upon acceptance. At the same time I detailed to the Secretary of State the steps which I proposed to take in the event of disorders breaking out at any stage. To all these proposals I received on June 2 the following reply from London:

Sir Austen Chamberlain to Lord Lloyd (Cairo)

(Telegraphic)

FOREIGN OFFICE, *June 2nd, 1927*

I agree with you that bilateral settlement, however we obtain it, offers the best and perhaps the only practical method of re-establishing and maintaining our position in Egypt, and I approve generally the plan proposed in your telegram if resort to it proves necessary. I take it that you have considered the danger that the persons concerned might not play the part that you have allotted to them unless at some impossible price. These risks may be unavoidable, but I should be glad to know your views. I reserve judgement as to whether one comprehensive treaty, as contemplated in your telegram, or several specific agreements would prove more convenient and effective. I also agree that circumstances may arise in which we should have no choice but to re-impose martial law and take the measures outlined in your telegram.