**The Egyptian President**
Gamal Abdel Nasser
*New York Times (1857-Current file);* Jun 7, 1967; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2002)
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# The Egyptian President

## Gamal Abdel Nasser

"THIS is not the Nasser we know," a State Department official said last month shortly after the President of the United Arab Republic demanded withdrawal of the United Nations peacekeeping force from his country and ordered a blockade of the Gulf of Aqaba. Until he took those steps, most officials in Washington believed that Gamal Abdel Nasser did not want war with Israel and would not risk pushing the Middle East toward the brink.

**Man in the News**

Today, with warfare engulfing the area, many experts who thought they knew the Egyptian leader are reassessing his character and motives, for suddenly just who he is and what he wants have become crucial questions.

On Monday, he said the Arabs were fighting to "eliminate the shadow of Zionism from Palestine and to restore its Arabism." Yesterday, he closed the Suez Canal to all shipping and broke off relations with the United States and Britain.

Some who have had a chance to observe him at close quarters believe President Nasser is a mixture of caution and impulsiveness, reason and irresponsibility, calculation and turbulence.

### A Catalogue of Trouble

They believe his actions of recent weeks reflect the situation in which he found himself — his economy at home crumbling, his troops tied down in an inconclusive war in Yemen, his dream of Arab unity showing new cracks, his own prestige in the Arab world so low that the Syrians taunted him for "hiding behind" the United Nations peace-keeping force.

Whatever other consequences the war may eventually have for him, these observers say that at least for the time being it has re-established his leadership of the Arab world—and a militant, relatively united Arab world at that.

Whatever doubts had begun to erode his image at home were, at least temporarily, wiped away by a new wave of patriotic enthusiasm. Thousands of young men surged through Cairo's streets yesterday shouting "Nasser! Nasser!"

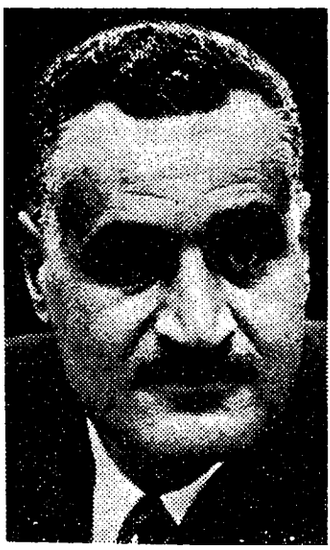
His personal magnetism is evident whenever he appears in public. It is not uncommon to see women faint when he makes an entrance. Sometimes even some men do so.

At 49, Mr. Nasser carries his large frame—6 feet 2 inches, 220 pounds—with the square-shouldered military bearing of a much younger man. His gray-blue eyes burn with electric conviction.

However, the President, whose close-cropped hair is beginning to gray, is not a flamboyant man. He has forsaken the lieutenant colonel's uniform he wore when he helped lead the 1952 revolution against King Farouk and now appears in conservative business suits.

He shuns medals and flamboyant titles like "The Redeemer" or "The Savior" favored by many African and Asian leaders.

He also shuns the pomp and luxury that he criticized when he was a young officer. Both his home and his office are housed in a modest villa at Heliopolis, a Cairo suburb.



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*His actions are puzzling the experts.*

Although he is entitled to four wives under Moslem law, he has only one—Tahia. They have kept their private lives and those of their five children out of the limelight.

The President is austere in his personal life. Apparently his only departure from this is chain-smoking of American filtertip cigarettes.

Mr. Nasser's childhood was a humble one. He was born Jan. 15, 1918, in an Alexandria suburb to which his father, a postal clerk, had only a short time before been transferred from their ancestral village of Beni Mer.

Young Nasser went to school in Alexandria and Cairo, but every summer he went home to Beni Mer, a hot dusty little town of mud huts.

At 20, he was graduated from the Royal Military Academy.

### A Hero of the 1948 War

In the Arab-Israeli war of 1948, he was one of the few heroes on the Arab side. He distinguished himself in the battle of Faluja in Palestine, where an Egyptian force was trapped. There he earned the nickname "Tiger of the Faluja."

Humiliated and infuriated by the Arab defeat at the hands of the smaller Israeli forces, he returned home in a bitter mood, and soon his bitterness focused on the corrupt government of King Farouk.

With a group of similarly inclined young officers, he formed the Committee of Free Officers to overthrow the Government.

Their plot was carried out at dawn on July 23, 1952, when Egyptian troops surrounded the King's palace and demanded that he renounce the throne.

Maj. Gen. Mohammed Naguib, a dignified but uninspiring leader, was made Premier. But Mr. Nasser was the real power, and by 1954 he had taken full power.

Two years later he boldly announced the nationalization of the Suez Canal, touching off the crisis culminating in the French-British-Israeli attack on Egypt.

The Israeli humiliation of Egypt during that strikingly successful assault deepened the psychological wounds inflicted in 1948—wounds that President Nasser and the other Arabs have been seeking to repair.

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