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## BACK TO NORMAL ?

Russia is not the only country which (in Mr Nehru's words) is getting back to normality. Colonel Nasser seems bent on doing the same for Egypt, though he would probably like to take quieter means. That appears to be the purpose of the two interviews, which he has given in quick succession. He is at pains to imply that the upheaval which began with the refusal of the American loan for the Aswan Dam, and went on through the Suez and Jordan crises, is now over. He would like to resume normal relations with Britain and France: indeed, he is a good deal more cheerful than is the British Government about the prospect of starting up the Anglo-Egyptian economic talks once again, and of clearing out of the way the question of British property which has been sequestered in Egypt. Colonel Nasser may be aware that he can no longer trade on the disarray which Suez brought about in the West, or on Egypt's standing in Asia as an injured innocent. He has had setbacks in the Arab countries and needs time to mend his fences there. Hence the guarded or conciliatory tone of his remarks on most subjects other than Israel, and the slightly muted note struck by Egyptian propaganda in recent weeks. For the rest, little has changed. On his alleged belligerency with Israel Colonel Nasser has given nothing away; his statement that the new Russian submarines are to defend Egypt's coasts is unpromising when one recalls that Egypt insists on calling the Gulf of Aqaba a closed Arab waterway. Trouble there is as likely as ever. Finally, Colonel Nasser sticks—as might have been expected—to “non-alignment” in international affairs, and dislikes the new American policy in the Middle East as much as he opposed Britain's attempts to maintain her political influence.

In disliking the Eisenhower doctrine Colonel Nasser has an ally who agrees with him about little else—Mr Aneurin Bevan. To judge from Mr Bevan's speech to the Socialist International in Vienna, his view, strengthened as it is by his standing as shadow Foreign Secretary, may soon become the official view of the Labour party. At any rate, Mr Bevan himself, as he has been reported, implied as much. It is always tempting to imagine that Mr Bevan is contradicting his leader and may presently cause a fresh storm to blow up within the party. But it need not come to that. Mr Bevan's objection to the “doctrine” seems to be, not that it brings American influence to bear in the Middle East, but that it goes about it in the wrong way, by shoring up unpopular Governments, giving some of them arms, and trying to enlist them in anti-Communist groupings. There is much cogency in this criticism. The doctrine as a military instrument for keeping the peace may be said to have succeeded during the Jordan crisis, but only because the Sixth Fleet was not challenged to apply it. The next crisis may not spare America the final test; and meanwhile, military aid to Jordan does nothing to turn Arab nationalism towards constructive tasks. Mr Bevan's proposal is for an agreement among the Great Powers, Russia included, to neutralise the Middle East and keep the peace. That is a tall order: but it would make more sense than a scramble to buy Arab alliances. There is now no discoverable British policy in the Middle East, apart from keeping on such of our old arrangements as have not broken up. The best place for Mr Bevan to discuss his ideas may be Washington.