

Peace in Middle East Hangs by Thread Held in Hands of Egyptian Premier

Cairo — (U.P.) — Peace in the Middle East today hangs by a slender thread held in the hands of one man.

He is 37-year-old Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser, Egypt's premier, a career soldier turned political revolutionary. With a single word of command, Nasser could throw Egypt's 100,000-man army, now equipped with Communist weapons, into war against Israel.

Most Western observers here believe he won't do it—unless circumstances force him.

He already has had two opportunities to trigger a second Arab-Jewish war. The first was

last November when Israeli forces attacked Egyptian positions inside the El Auja demilitarized zone south of the Gaza Strip causing heavy casualties and again last week when Israeli artillery shelled Samonson's town of Gaza, killing 63 civilians and soldiers.

In each case Nasser held his forces back, showing considerable diplomatic skill in avoiding a showdown by use of limited retaliation and promptly agreeing this week to proposals put forward by visiting United Nations Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold for a cease fire along the stormy Egypt-Israel

border. But each border incident pushes him closer to the wall by jeopardizing his prestige as self-appointed head of the Arab bloc whose members look to Egypt for leadership against Israel.

There have been discontented rumblings already among some of Nasser's Arab partners, pressing for sterner measures against Israel attacks.

There are signs, however, that Nasser is not ready for all-out war. Communist arms still are arriving from Czechoslovakia; pilots, tankmen, and submarine crews still are being trained

behind the Iron Curtain. Some military experts here believe that it may be as much as 18 months before all training and supply problems are ironed out while others cite late autumn as the earliest operational date.

But all these considerations would be thrown overboard if the border situation gets out of hand. Then Nasser would have to fight whether he liked it or not.

Allied diplomats here are openly worried about Nasser's Communist alignments which have opened the door to Soviet penetration of the oil rich Middle East.

Nasser himself certainly is no Communist. But he believes he can play the East against the West in order to further creation of a powerful Arab bloc headed by Egypt which would act as a "third force" in the strategic Middle East.

This concept of Arab nationalism which has been germinating in Nasser's mind following his ouster of the British from the Suez Canal Zone and the Sudan was given added impetus at last year's Bandung conference. There he met India's neutralist Jawaharlal Nehru and Red China's Chou En Lai. It was crystallized by the

signing of the Baghdad Pact which links Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Pakistan in a "northern tier" defense line along Russia's southern border. Nasser thinks this pact threatens to isolate Egypt and its Arab allies in the struggle against Israel and perpetuates "outdated" Western influence.

As a result, he turned to the Communist bloc. To pay for the arms imports, Egypt now sends one-third of her cotton crop, her principal export, behind the Iron Curtain in barter deals. Russian tankers are nosing through the Suez from Black Sea ports delivering crude oil

and kerosene once supplied by Anglo-American oil companies. Red China's scarlet and gold flag flies side by side with Egypt's green-starred crescent on Cairo's Kasrel Nil Bridge to mark the opening of the Chinese commercial exhibition.

All this has thrown the Western policymakers into considerable confusion and exposed dangerous rifts between Britain and America.

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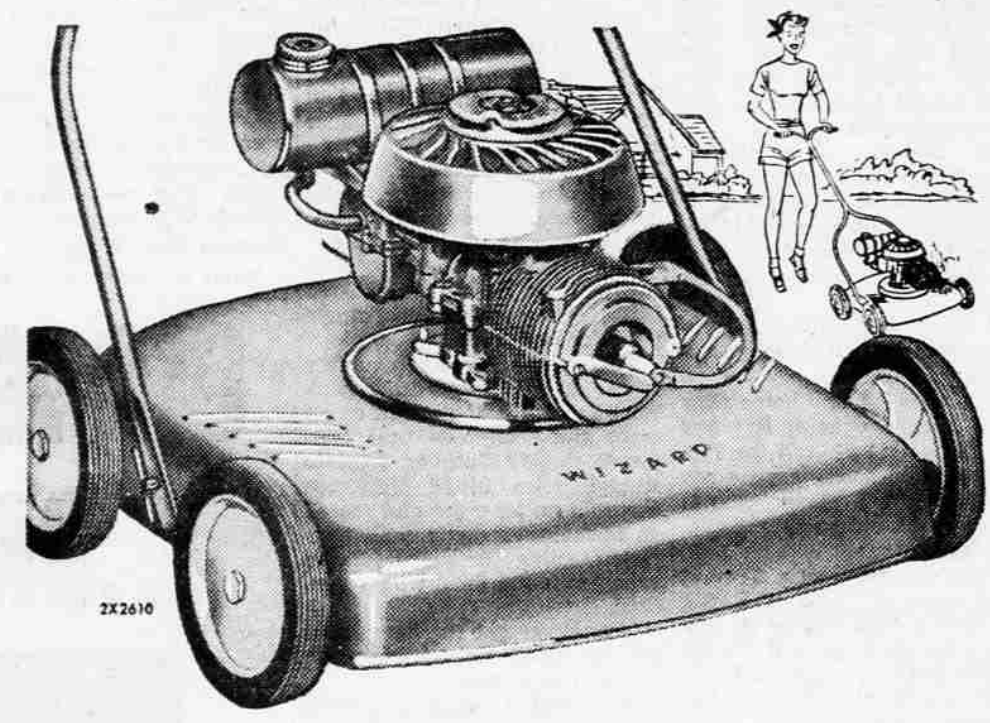
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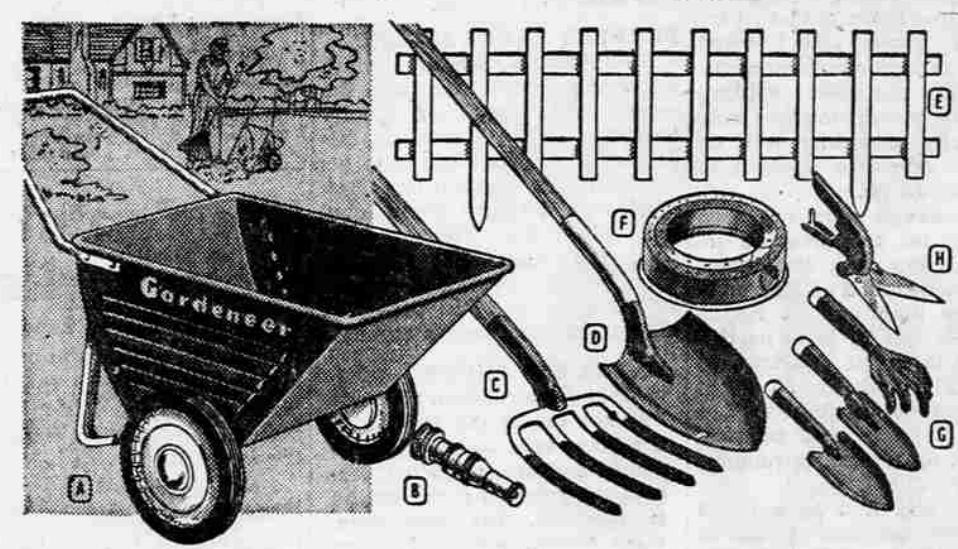
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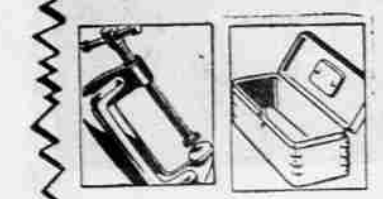
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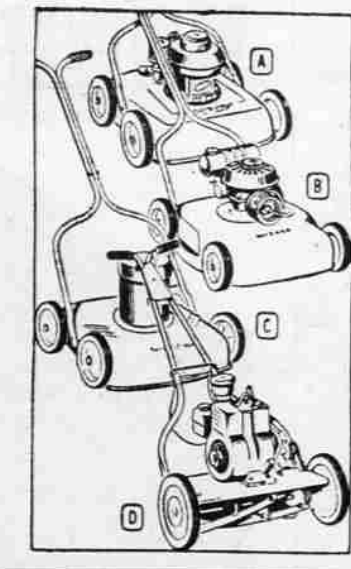
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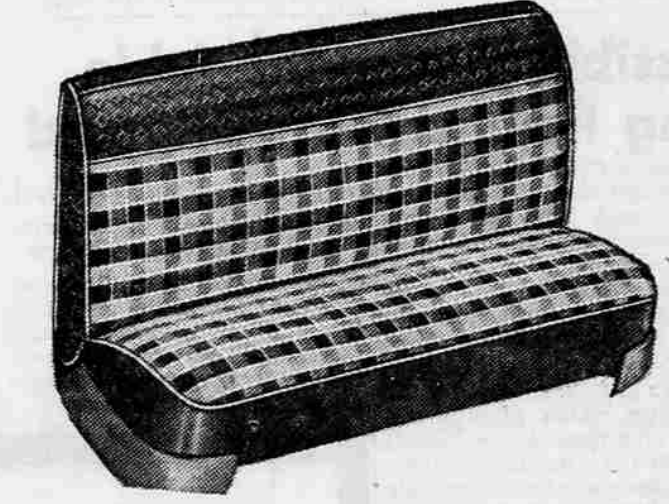
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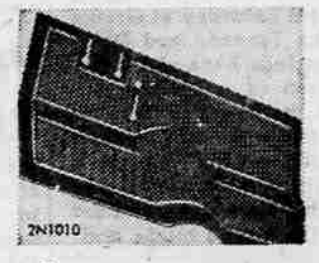
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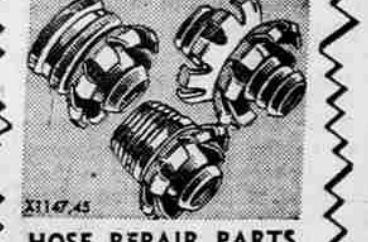
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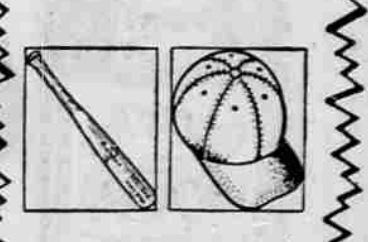
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