

**Egypt's 'Autumn of Fury': The Construction of
Opposition to the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Process between
1973 and 1981**

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Trinity Term 2003

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the degree of
Masters of Philosophy in Modern Middle Eastern
Studies

Faculty of Oriental Studies
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Acknowledgements

In the course of preparing this thesis, I have incurred debts which I cannot possibly hope to repay. Nevertheless, I would like to thank all those who have contributed— each in their own way— to making this project possible.

I would first like to express my gratitude to the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Carr Fund at St Antony's College, the Mew Fund, and the Sub-faculty for Near and Middle Eastern Studies at the Oriental Institute for providing the financial means which allowed me to undertake this research— both in Oxford and in Cairo.

In the 'field', I benefited from the support of many dedicated people last summer. I am especially thankful to Abir Haidar, whose punitive levels of homework have allowed my Arabic to progress in ways that I am only able to appreciate now with hindsight.

I am also very grateful to Mahdiyya at the archives of *Al-Ahali* for elaborating the intricacies of Egyptian politics while spoiling me with hot mint tea. Her vivid descriptions of the seventies have made the 'Autumn of Fury' come alive to me as no amount of reading could have done.

At the Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo, I was fortunate to be taken under the wings of Anita Khizers who helped me locate missing copies of *Al-Da'wa*.

I would also like to thank Claudia and Manon for providing a roof over my head and much-needed comic relief during the weeks that I was 'homeless' in Cairo.

In Oxford, Najah Shamaa helped me decipher the more difficult bits of translation in tutorials that ended up swallowing several precious Friday afternoons.

Above anything else though, this project has benefited from the input of two model supervisors, Walter Armbrust and James Piscatori. Despite the excessive number of his commitments, James always made room and provided stimulating feedback. Consistently critical, Walter's suggestions improved my arguments immeasurably. It is difficult to find the right kind of words to thank him for the extraordinary level of personal and academic support he displayed this year. I will always remain indebted to him.

On the non-academic side of things, I am especially grateful to Nikita. For being there every single step of the way. And making me smile at times when that was the last thing on my mind.

Finally, I would like to thank my mother for the invaluable amount of emotional comfort she provided. It was not easy putting up with my long absences from home, but she has been patient and supportive throughout.

While I have incurred many debts in the course of writing this paper, any errors and mistakes of judgement are of course entirely my own.

Oxford,

May 2003

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The people of Egypt could be easily manipulated by Sadat and their beliefs and attitudes could be shaped by their leader.”

Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin at Camp David after being told that the Egyptian public would tolerate no further concessions.
From Telhami. *Power and Leadership in International Bargaining*.

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Isn't power a sort of generalised war which assumes at particular moments the forms of peace and the state? Peace would then be a form of war, and the state a means of waging it.

Michel Foucault in Rabinow,
Paul (Ed). *The Foucault Reader*.
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1. Introduction

In the small hours of 3 September 1981, Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat ordered the arrest of 1,536 opposition figures. As the feminist Nawal al-Sa‘dawi later said, those who shared a prison cell had nothing in common other than their opposition to the Egyptian peace treaty with Israel. The president planned to release the detainees on 26 April 1982- the day on which Israeli forces were scheduled to complete their withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula occupied in the June War of 1967. But as Sadat confessed to his daughter, he had a strong premonition that he would not live to see the day.¹ On 6 October 1981, Khalid al-Islambuli- a lieutenant in the Egyptian Army- gunned Sadat down at a military parade commemorating the October War of 1973 in which Egyptian troops had launched a successful assault against Israeli forces occupying the Sinai. The President’s fate appeared to be tragically intertwined with the dynamics of Egyptian-Israeli relations. His widow was “one hundred per cent certain” that her “husband was killed because he made peace with Israel.”²

Sadat’s untimely death presents a paradox. Reflecting on Egypt’s defeat in 1967, Mohamed Heikal wrote that former President Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasir “failed in one of the fundamental duties of any ruler- he failed to defend the borders of his country. By that failure the legitimacy of his régime was flawed.”³ Yet when Sadat launched the October War six years later, he appeared to retrieve much of the legitimacy his predecessor had lost. By signing the Camp David Peace Accords in March 1979, Sadat freed the Sinai from Israeli occupation and insulated Egypt’s eastern borders from future attack. Yet two years later, the country became engulfed in what Heikal has dubbed Egypt’s ‘Autumn of Fury’. What went wrong?

¹ Beattie, Kirk J. *Egypt During the Sadat Years*. Palgrave: New York, 2000. 274

² Finklestone, Joseph. *Anwar Sadat: Visionary who dared*. Frank Cass: London, 1996. xiv

The present study will try to address this question by exploring the ideational milieu within which Sadat conducted his rapprochement with Israel. Drawing on the print media, the following chapters will argue that the discursive construction of opposition to the peace process following the October War contributed to the gradual increase in political tension. Following the October War, the left-wing media helped mould three overlapping forms of identification- Egyptian nationalism, Islam and Arabism. These identities not only shaped the way in which Egyptians interpreted the unfolding of the peace process, but also created policy preferences that were directly at odds with Sadat's belief in Egypt's need to make peace with Israel. Thus, the October War fed into the articulation of a 'national interest' at variance with Sadat's vision of it. The conceptual disparity provided the discursive soil for the subsequent emergence of political dissent.

The gradual emergence of political discontent after 1973 owed much to the way in which Sadat's pursuit of peace seemed to violate these shared normative constructs. Insofar as the October War was a boon to Arabism, Egyptian media were inclined to interpret any Israeli threat to the security of another Arab country as a threat to Egypt herself. Since Cairo's phased retreat from the Arabs' war-time coalition after 1973 appeared to facilitate Israel's increased belligerence, it generated dissatisfaction with the peace process. Yet as Sadat's reliance on US mediation could still secure the return of occupied Egyptian land in keeping with Egypt's improved military position in the wake of the war, Sadat's pursuit of an Egyptian-Israeli settlement did not yet appear to conflict significantly with the policy preferences formulated by Egyptians.

Following the Sinai II Disengagement Treaty in September 1975, however, Egypt experienced a growing mobilisation of opposition to the peace process. Political, demographic and social transformations provided the backdrop for the dissemination of an 'Islamic' discourse that dovetailed considerably with policy preferences earlier enunciated by the left.

While Israel's apparent military resurgence raised anxieties over Egypt's security, the peace process now also resulted in the erosion of the limited democratic liberties Egyptians had secured after the October War. The increasing radicalisation of political opposition after 1975 thus stemmed from concern over the way in which increasing authoritarianism at home accompanied Israel's growing military might abroad.

When the ink dried on the Camp David Accords, the resilience of a pan-Arabist outlook ensured that Israel's increased military activities in the region continued to be perceived as an attack on Egypt itself. Sadat's decision to respond to the mounting discontent with growing authoritarianism meant that opposition to the peace treaty was equated with a defence of democratisation. The result was to erode the legitimacy of Sadat's régime and usher into Egypt's 'Autumn of Fury'. Whereas the October War had been identified with national liberation, Arab unity and democratisation, by the end of the decade 'peace' had become a by-word for authoritarianism and military surrender. Insofar as the Egyptian media called attention to the ways in which the peace process clashed with the identities and policy preferences they had helped articulate after the October War, they contributed to the growth of opposition to the régime.

The present focus on the discursive milieu within which Sadat conducted the peace process is not to suggest that Cairo's relations with Tel Aviv constituted the only factor fuelling opposition in the 1970s. Many writers have pointed to the country's economic decline to explain the growth of political protest.⁴ The subsequent discussion will, therefore, refrain from trying to advance any mono-causal explanations. It will, however, concentrate on the manner in which the peace process alienated a growing segment of the Egyptian population because this aspect has received insufficient attention. As the following chapter will argue,

⁴ See Tomita, Hiroshi. "The Decline of Legitimacy in Sadat's Egypt: 1979-1981." *BRISMES Proceedings of the 1986 International Conference on Middle Eastern Studies*. British Society for Middle East Studies: Oxford,

the reason for this oversight owes much to the assumptions of rational-choice theory that inform a substantial body of literature on the period.

2. Toward a Constructivist Approach

Most of Sadat's biographers have explicitly portrayed the late Egyptian President as a rational decision-maker. Raphael Israeli believes that Sadat's overtures to US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger after the October War prove that he was behaving in a "realistic, reasonable and logical" manner.⁵ Sadat had adopted "a more rational and pragmatic approach" to the Arab-Israeli conflict when he decided to bury the hatchet with Israel. Felipe Fernández-Armesto similarly writes that "pragmatism was one among several important ingredients of the President's policy."⁶ The obvious implication is that those who disagreed with Sadat's policies were 'irrational'. Thus, Joseph Finklestone writes that Sadat's concessions to Israel illustrate his "realism, essential in any modern leader, and his critics' lack of it." When Egypt's Foreign Minister Muhammad Ibrahim Kamil protested Sadat's willingness to accept Israel's continued control of the Occupied Territories at Camp David, Finklestone labels him an "extremist." Since Israeli PM Menachem Begin "saw the West Bank as the eternal portion of Israel," the proposed administrative autonomy for the Occupied Territories constituted an "extraordinary concession." Finklestone does not explain that Kamil's 'extremist' insistence on Israel's withdrawal from all land occupied in 1967 in fact represents the standard interpretation of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 242 and that Begin's 'extraordinary concession' therefore still fell short of Israel's obligations under international law.

Having denied Kamil any legitimate reason to oppose Camp David, Finklestone can only interpret the vast increase in domestic opposition to Camp David as the machinations of

⁵ Israeli, Raphael. *Man of Defiance: A Political Biography of Anwar Sadat*. Weidenfeld & Nicholson: London, 1985. 140-1

a small group of “fanatical fundamentalists” who wanted Sadat “to abandon the path of peace for the traditional Muslim conflict with the Jews.” Finklestone partly bases his conclusion that resistance to Camp David was limited on the absence of any serious revolutionary upheaval following Sadat’s assassination. He is certain that “peace with Israel was the wish of the Egyptian people. They would insist that the peace should continue even when the chief architect was no longer on the scene.”⁷ Thus, the emphasis on Sadat’s ‘pragmatism’ has not only de-legitimised the views of Sadat’s critics, but has also downplayed the magnitude of an opposition movement which according to Egyptian observers encompassed “the mainstream in Egyptian society.”⁸

Given the significant historiographical implications of depicting Sadat as a ‘rational’ decision-maker, any effort to examine the growth of domestic opposition to Camp David must therefore engage with the assumptions of rational-choice theory on which writers like Finklestone implicitly draw. The following section will critique two common strands of mainstream International Relations (IR) theory before presenting Constructivism as an alternative approach for conceptualising Sadat’s foreign policy shift.

A. The Case for Neorealism

Writing from a Neorealist perspective, Shibley Telhami argues that Sadat’s decision to sign a peace treaty with Israel constituted a pragmatic response to a steady decline in Egypt’s military and economic power. Moscow’s unwillingness to continue supplying Egypt with the quantities of military hardware she required after the October War meant that Cairo could only protect her security in alliance with Washington. A strategic partnership with America, however, meant that Sadat could no longer fight Israel. Camp David was the next best thing.

⁷ Finklestone, xxviii, 140, 250, 261, 279-80

By reducing Egypt's astronomical levels of military expenditure, peace would pave the way for an economic recovery. By competing with Israel for American favours, Cairo could erode Washington's strategic support for Israel. Although Sadat's concessions on Palestinian autonomy represented a 'sub-optimal bargaining outcome', Sadat's separate peace treaty was nonetheless a 'rational' decision that met Egypt's 'material' needs.⁹

The problem with this line of argumentation is that it is highly teleological. Rational choice theory commonly produces non-falsifiable hypotheses that specify a set of constraints; ascribe certain interests to a set of actors; and then relate the observed behaviour of these actors, with their presumed interests, to the constraints they confront.¹⁰ Paradoxically, rational choice theory thus defines rationality "in instrumental terms as nothing more than having consistent desires and beliefs, and choice involves nothing more profound than their enactment in behaviour that maximises expected utility."¹¹ By assuming that material factors 'dictated' a specific foreign policy outcome, Telhami reads history backward and assumes that only one historical outcome was possible. But as Nazih Ayubi put it, "global shifts are rarely presented to any state in the form of an unambiguous 'stimulus' that demands an invariant policy 'response'." Thus, Camp David was not "a determined inevitability."¹² Yet provided one were to discard a teleological view, does there not still seem to be a compelling case that arms shortages gave Sadat little leeway other than to make peace with Israel?

The problem is that 'material' constraints may favour multiple policy outcomes. While Telhami contends that Egypt received inadequate supplies of Soviet arms, the volume of Soviet weapons exports to the Third World doubled between the early 1970s and the early 1980s. As the most important non-European recipient of Soviet arms, Cairo stood to benefit

⁹ Telhami, Shibley. *Power and Leadership in International Bargaining: The Path to Camp David*. Columbia University Press: New York, 1990. 46-7, 95-106

¹⁰ Katzenstein, Peter J. "Alternative Perspectives on National Security" in Katzenstein, Peter J (Ed). *The Culture of National Security*. Columbia University Press: New York, 1996. 14

¹¹ Wendt, Alexander. *Social Theory of International Politics*: Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1999.

immensely from this trend.¹³ Since the US Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean could strike urban and industrial centres deep inside Soviet territory, Cairo served a crucial defensive function for Moscow. Soviet airfields in Egypt offered shore-based cover for Moscow's fleet in the Mediterranean. Given such considerations, Moscow agreed to supply sophisticated weapons Sadat had requested after May 1974. Whereas the Soviet Union invested \$3 billion in military aid to Cairo between 1955 and 1973, it poured more than \$2.3 billion into Egypt between 1973 until 1981 alone. Thanks to Soviet support, Egypt was better armed by the mid-1970s than she had been before the October War. Yet while Moscow agreed to resupply the Egyptian army, the Kremlin was only prepared to narrow the growing technological gap with Israel if Sadat agreed to limit US influence in the region.¹⁴

From a military standpoint, there was ample reason for Cairo to maintain Moscow's goodwill. According to one estimate, the Soviet Union was able to supply relatively secondary clients overseas with almost ten times the total US annual production of tanks at short notice.¹⁵ Moreover, the Soviet emphasis on large quantities of weapons and simplicity of operation suited the needs of Egypt's army with its high number of conscripts and comparatively low levels of technical training. Not only did Moscow price weapons at 50-60 per cent of their cost in the West, but the logistical changes accompanying a comprehensive shift to Western weapons systems also risked paralysing wide sections of Egypt's armed forces for years to come.¹⁶ Thus, Sadat's decision to switch arms suppliers "was not the outcome of a rational assessment of the merits and demerits of Western technology, but rather a reflection of a political choice."¹⁷

¹³ Brozka, Michael and Thomas Ohlson. *Arms Transfers to the Third World, 1971-1985*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1987. 38, 19

¹⁴ Sella, Amnon. *Soviet Political and Military Conduct in the Middle East*. Macmillan: Basingstoke, 1981. 105-137

¹⁵ Brozka and Ohlson. 38-40

¹⁶ Ra'anan, Uri and Robert L Pfaltzgraff, Jr (Eds). *Arms Transfers to the Third World: the Military Buildup in Less Industrial Countries*. Westview: Boulder, 1978. 141

¹⁷ James Everett. *Arms Production in Developing Countries: An Analysis of Decision Making*. Lexington

B. The Case for Liberalism

The Realist argument that military constraints compelled Sadat to sign a peace treaty with Israel therefore is inconclusive. Liberals have avoided such difficulties by arguing that economic factors alone required Sadat to make peace with Israel. Like Realism, the Liberal analysis thus privileges ‘material’ factors in depicting the Camp David Treaty as a rational choice.¹⁸ According to Janice Stein, Egypt’s economic crisis threatened to grow more intractable in the absence of a peace treaty. The only way to obtain foreign aid on reliable terms was to resolve the security crisis. A peace treaty would allow Cairo to reduce military expenditure hovering at 52 per cent of the GDP.¹⁹ Thus, Sadat acted in a ‘rational’ manner when he decided to make concessions on Palestinian autonomy at Camp David.²⁰

Yet if the economic benefits of signing peace treaties with Israel were self-evident, then it is unclear why other Arab states have not rushed to join Egypt after 1979.²¹ The majority in Sadat’s entourage felt that the President could have retrieved the Sinai by making fewer concessions to Israel at the time of negotiations.²² Most importantly, Sadat was assassinated two years after he signed Camp David. The Liberal tendency to juxtapose Sadat’s economic concerns with ‘rationalism’ is problematic not least because it assumes that Egypt’s ‘national interest’ was exhausted by a consideration of ‘material’ factors. Even

¹⁸ Karawan, Ibrahim A. “Identity and Foreign Policy: The Case of Egypt” in Telhami, Shibley and Michael Barnett (Eds). *Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East*. Cornell University Press: London, 2002. 161-2

¹⁹ Stein in Evans, Peter B, Harold K Jacobson, and Robert D Putnam (Eds). *Double-edged Diplomacy: International Bargaining and Domestic Politics*. University of California Press: London, 1993. 78-89

²⁰ Moravcsik in Evans et al., 16

²¹ Saideman, Stephen. “Thinking theoretically about Identity and Foreign Policy” in Telhami, Shibley and Michael Barnett (Eds). *Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East*. Cornell University Press: London, 2002.

Liberals admit that the analytical preference for ‘material’ factors is essentially arbitrary.²³ As Peter Katzenstein points out, “the cost calculations that states make when they weigh ideological solidarity against security concerns are not exogenous to their ideological affinities.” Hence, the supposedly ‘objective’ material standards by which Liberals classify Sadat’s choices as ‘rational’ are normative constructs. Yet if this is the case, then Egypt’s ‘national interests’ need to be investigated rather than presumed to be exogenously given.²⁴ This is something Constructivists have begun to do.

C. The Case for Constructivism

Since the rationalist claim that ‘material’ interests unequivocally compel a certain conduct of foreign policy cannot be established conclusively, Constructivists have argued that the decisive factor influencing decisions in foreign policy are ‘ideational’ rather than ‘material’. According to Alexander Wendt, it is necessary to demonstrate that technological artifacts and the physical environment themselves determine state behaviour independently of ideas if one wants to prove that the causal effects of ‘ideational’ forces are secondary to ‘material’ ones.²⁵ Yet this is virtually impossible. Even a dye-in-the-wool Realist like Telhami admits that Egypt’s rapprochement with America “was a result of the *perception* that after the 1973 War the conflict with Israel would be largely political.”²⁶ In other words, Sadat’s decision to court Washington required an act of mental interpretation, indicating that ideas crucially affect “the interests of actors and the way in which they connect their preferences to policy choices.”²⁷

²³ Moravcsikin Evans et al. 23, 30

²⁴ Katzenstein, 26-8

²⁵ Wendt, 94-5

²⁶ Telhami, 68-9 (emphasis added)

²⁷ Kowert, Paul and Jeffrey Legro. “Norms, Identity, and Their Limits: A Theoretical Reprise” in Katzenstein,

For the purposes of the present analysis, Constructivism's emphasis on ideas helps explain why competing versions of a 'national interest' may emerge. According to Michael Barnett, identity influences policy choices decisively. Just as an understanding of how a "double-helix DNA molecule is constituted ... makes possible causal arguments about ... biological processes," so too does an understanding of the way in which a nation's identity is constructed suggest possible courses of action for the conduct of foreign policy.²⁸ Yet as Edward Said has emphasised, identities are never monolithic because "a continuous contest between adherents of different ideas about what constitutes the national identity" takes place in every society.²⁹ By situating the emergence of 'national identity' in a contestatory process of social interaction, Constructivism provides for the possibility that multiple—and possibly even conflicting—versions of 'national interest' may emerge. Rather than being predetermined, the 'national interest' is therefore "shaped by a continuous political process that generates publicly understood standards for action."³⁰ Insofar as it emphasises the socially contested nature of a state's 'national interest', Constructivism helps account for the fact that many Egyptians did not agree with Sadat's pursuit of a separate peace.

In keeping with such an approach, Chapters two and four will argue that domestic debates constructed Egypt's 'national interest'. The experience of the October War in 1973 fed directly into the articulation of three prominent forms of national identity: Egyptian nationalism, Arabism, and Islam. While Sadat's decision to sign a peace treaty with Israel has often been portrayed as the logical outcome of an 'Egypt-first' policy, chapter two will contend that the particular manner in which Egyptian nationalism was re-constructed in the post-war period cannot be taken for granted. While Sadat viewed Egyptian nationalism as a vehicle for extricating Egypt from her pan-Arab commitment to the Palestinian cause, many Egyptians did not view Egyptian nationalism as though it were antithetical to Arabism.

²⁸ Telhami and Barnett, 18

²⁹ Edward Said, quoted in Telhami and Barnett, 6

Chapter four will argue that the way in which Islamists re-constructed an Islamic identity in the post-war period overlapped with Egyptian nationalism and Arabism. Since all three forms of identification favoured Cairo's continued defence of the Palestinian cause, they helped foment opposition to the course Sadat pursued.

Yet the existence of attitudinal cleavages alone does not necessarily explain the rise in political tension. The analytical advantage of Constructivism consists not just in its ability to account for multiple conceptions of the 'national interest'. By transcending the structuralist notion that 'material' forces alone constitute the moving force of history, Constructivism can also explain why discursive constructs such as identity were capable of inducing concerted opposition to a separate peace treaty with Israel. In that respect, Constructivists have drawn on Michel Foucault's notion of the 'materiality of discourse'.³¹ According to Foucault, discourse "is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it."³² Because discourse includes not only language, but also what is represented by language, it is 'material'. The 'materiality of discourse' then refers to "the conditions of the emergence of statements, their correlation with other previous or simultaneous events, discursive or otherwise."³³

Foucault's conception of the 'materiality of discourse' has allowed Constructivists to suggest that ideas confront actors as an 'objective' social fact.³⁴ If this is the case, then action originates in thought. As Foucault put it, "thought is understood ... as action insofar as it implies the play of true and false, the acceptance or refusal of rules, the relation to oneself and others."³⁵ The portrayal- in chapters three, five and six- of the rise of opposition to the peace process rests on the assumption that a 'discourse' perceived as 'material' and 'objective' is

³⁰ Katzenstein, 21

³¹ See Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality. Volume I: An Introduction*. Vintage Books: New York, 1990 and Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*. London: Penguin Books: London, 1991.

³² Michel Foucault in Rabinow, Paul (Ed). *The Foucault Reader*. Penguin: London, 1991.74

³³ Foucault, Michel. 'Politics and the Study of Discourse' in Burchell, G., Gordon, C. and Miller, P. (Eds) *The Foucault Effect. Studies in Governmentality*. Harvester Wheatsheaf: London, 1991. 53-72

³⁴ ---

capable of generating political action. Sadat's rapprochement with Israel confronted Egyptians with perceptions of a growing number of existential threats to their identities and notions of 'national interest'. Before fleshing out the manner in which Egyptian discourse on the peace process helped construct political dissent, the following section will briefly discuss the manner in which the print media have been used for the purpose of the present study.

D. Methodology

The approach that informs the present study departs significantly from rationalists conceptualisations of the media. For Realists and Liberals, the media may only provide fresh information allowing actors to revise their cost-benefit calculations.³⁶ There is, however, a revealing ambiguity in the way that rationalists have addressed the Egyptian case. Ibrahim Karawan, for instance, argues that Sadat was able to deploy the media "as a transmission belt" which deflected opposition to the peace treaty.³⁷ Similarly, Telhami claims that the likelihood of massive popular risings in response to Camp David was negligible because "the Egyptian government controlled the opinion-shaping media."³⁸ The argument that the media did not influence the people because they were in the hands of the state, however, implies that they might have had an impact in the absence of government censorship. The emphasis on Sadat's ability to control the media thus ends up vitiating the rationalists' own assumption that the media are incapable of influencing people other than by supplying 'raw facts'. This logical inconsistency, however, serves to make the larger point that the 'Autumn of Fury' did not occur. Methodological conceptualisations of the media's influence thus go to the very heart of historiographical debates.

³⁵ Foucault in Rabinow, 335.

³⁶ Saideman, 189-90

³⁷ Karawan, 164-6

³⁸

Rationalist assumptions about the negligibility of the media, however, rest on flawed premises. While it is true that the government retained control of the broadcast media throughout the 1970s, this does not mean that Egyptians necessarily imbibed its propaganda as though they were unreflexive subjects. As Douglas Boyd has suggested, Egypt's military defeat in 1967 was closely identified with the censorship of broadcasts in the state-owned radio and television stations under 'Abd al-Nasir.³⁹ Although Israel wiped out Egypt's entire airforce within the first few hours of fighting, Cairo's radio reported that Egyptian troops were advancing to Tel Aviv. Political cartoons from the period suggest that the radio's transmission of false information was partly to blame for the defeat in 1967 [Illustration 1].

By contrast, newspapers gained a new sense of credibility after 1973 thanks to the régime's deliberate association of the October War with political liberalisation. The military success was depicted as a factor fuelling post-war democratisation [Illustration 5]. Egyptian papers emphasised that Sadat's decision to lift newspaper censorship and release political prisoners in 1974 stemmed directly from Egypt's success in the war.⁴⁰ The prestige attached to the print media can be gleaned from several caricatures. Educated and informed, the newspaper reader is depicted as capable of gauging the enemy's real strength [Illustration 2]. While radio broadcasts were associated with a passive political attitude that prevented Egypt from winning war, the newspaper reader is identified with a pro-active attitude leading to military success [Illustrations 3 and 4].

The freedom with which different opinions were now articulated in print meant that the newspapers' coverage of the war ultimately fed into a growth of political awareness [Illustrations 6 and 7]. Contrary to what rationalists claim, Egyptians thus possessed the means to collect information other than through state-owned broadcast media. However, it was not just a case of gathering 'raw facts'. Constructivists have argued that the media can

³⁹ Boyd, Douglas. *Broadcasting in the Arab World: a Survey of Radio and Television in the Middle East*. Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1982.

also shape identities and persuade individuals of the value- rather than simply the costs and benefits- of specific courses of action. As a result, the media can legitimise or de-legitimise certain policies.⁴¹

The methodological focus on newspapers as a means of explaining the rise in political opposition to the peace process, nonetheless, carries certain limitations. First, a narrow focus on newspapers alone cannot claim to provide an exhaustive portrayal of the ideational milieu framing Sadat's foreign policy. Even so, the analytical advantage of relying on print journalism is that it engages more explicitly in political debates than other forms of cultural production.

Second, the fact that more than 65 per cent of Egypt's population was still illiterate in 1976 suggests that the mobilisational capacity of print journalism was confined to an educated élite.⁴² Yet while there were inherent limits to the reach of papers, debates in newspapers do not occur in a societal vacuum either. The views aired by journalists often reflected the cultural environment in which they are embedded. This was especially the case with the Islamists- as chapter four will show. The opinions expounded in publications by the Muslim Brotherhood often corresponded to the themes enunciated in the sermons preachers delivered to largely illiterate listeners in mosques or sold on popular audio-tapes.

Moreover, while it is impossible to establish an irrefutable causal connection between the discourse articulated in print and the ensuing social unrest, obviously no social analysis can ever replicate the mathematical precision of the 'real' sciences. As Foucault put it, the "problem does not consist in drawing the line between ... a discourse which falls under the category of scientificity or truth, and that which comes under some other category but in seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves

⁴⁰ *RY*, (11/2/1974)

⁴¹ Saideman, 189-90

⁴²

are neither true nor false.”⁴³ The methodological appeal of relying on the print media for the present case study ultimately lies in their ability to provide one way of accounting for an historical event in a way that rationalist claims to scientificity are unable to do.

3. The Lessons of October

This chapter will explore the formation of Egyptian policy preferences in the wake of the October War, which set the stage for the emergence of opposition to the peace process. While the war was crucial in shaping Egyptian objectives, it did not lend itself to any single interpretation. Sadat concluded that America's massive support for Israel and the risk of igniting a nuclear confrontation between the superpowers required an end to military conflict. Sadat tried to legitimise his pursuit of a separate peace by invoking Egyptian nationalism. Yet while the conflict fed into a resurgence of Egyptian nationalism, many Egyptians interpreted this identity in a manner that was compatible with Egypt's larger pan-Arab commitments and a resolution of the Palestinian problem. Insofar as the war undermined Israel's security, it also seemed to pave the way for a full-scale de-construction of Zionism and the assimilation of Israeli Jews. After analysing the articulation of these foreign policy objectives, the second half of this chapter will try to explore the manner in which the war affected the formulation of strategies in pursuit of these ends. It will argue that the war was interpreted as evidence that America's support for Israel and superpower rivalry did not preclude Egypt's resort to armed force. Given the widespread perception that Israel was unwilling to meet Egyptian demands, commentators argued that while Cairo should seek a negotiated political settlement, she should retain the military option as leverage. The way in which this strategy differed from Sadat's contained the seeds of later differences with his régime. Before turning to the construction of policy preferences, the next section will briefly introduce the sources that have been used.

The following two chapters will rely mainly on newspapers affiliated with the Egyptian left. While the October War also fuelled the resurgence of political Islam, the next two chapters will bracket a full discussion of this phenomenon. This is not to suggest that

political Islam was irrelevant in the period under consideration. However, the government did not permit the Muslim Brotherhood to resume publication until 1976. Moreover, Islamist candidates dominated student council elections at Egyptian Universities only after 1975.⁴⁴ Thus, although the omission of Islamist discourse in the present chapter may appear arbitrary, it is nonetheless consistent with the Islamists' growing— but still limited— public visibility from the middle of the decade. The following two chapters will concentrate on the output of two other publications instead. The first is *Al-Tali'a* ('The Vanguard'), a monthly magazine edited by Lutfi al-Khuli. Though *Al-Tali'a*'s "impact on public opinion" was "much more limited than that of the daily and weekly press," the journal enjoyed considerable prestige among progressive intellectuals throughout the Arab world.⁴⁵ Published by the state-owned *Al-Ahram* press, *Al-Tali'a* nonetheless enjoyed complete freedom of expression from its inception in 1965 because Mohamed Heikal, *Al-Ahram*'s long-time editor-in-chief, shielded the journal from government intervention.⁴⁶ Since *Al-Tali'a* metamorphosed into a fierce critic of the peace process after Heikal's dismissal by Sadat, it was forced to shut shop in 1977.

The second publication is *Ruz al-Yusuf*, a leftish weekly edited by the Egyptian novelist 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sharqawi. While *Al-Tali'a* tended to be theoretical and academic, *Ruz al-Yusuf* catered to a more diverse readership. Sharqawi's philosophy was to turn *Ruz al-Yusuf* into "a platform for the entire national left," addressing both "followers of millenarian prophets" and "enlightened men of religion." Publication figures testify to the success of this inclusivism. When Sharqawi assumed the editorship in 1971, *Ruz al-Yusuf* sold 10,000 copies a week. When he resigned in April 1977, the magazine sold 150,000 copies. The increase did not mean, as editor Salah Hafiz emphasised, that all readers had been converted to the cause

⁴⁴ Beattie, 202

⁴⁵ Shoukri, Ghali. *Egypt: Portrait of a President, 1970-1981. Sadat's Road to Jerusalem: The Counter-Revolution in Egypt*. Zed Books: London. 1981. 111

of the left. Hafiz maintained that Egyptians were above all nationalists; and *Ruz al-Yusuf*'s success lay in the fact that it “embodied national unity in a country thirsting for it.”⁴⁷

Sharqawi's editorial praise of Sadat may have been part of this attempt to project unity. Sadat had appointed Sharqawi as a reward for the writer's decision to support the President in the ‘Corrective Revolution’ of May 1971. Thus, while *Ruz al-Yusuf*'s eclecticism was appealing, *Al-Tali'a* enjoyed much greater editorial leeway.

Even so, *Ruz al-Yusuf*'s average reader “was not very interested to see the President described as ‘Hero of Democracy in the World’; he was more interested to learn the cultural, social and economic secrets that were the cause of the grave degeneration of the country.”⁴⁸

Although Sharqawi's editorials faithfully toed the government's line, *Ruz al-Yusuf* nonetheless published articles containing thinly veiled criticism of the régime. Thus, while the journal did not openly object to Sadat's foreign policy, it still helped undermine support for the peace process. The impact of the left-wing press was considerable given that writers of *Al-Tali'a* and *Ruz al-Yusuf* often contributed articles to the mainstream daily press.⁴⁹ The remainder of this chapter will explore the ways in which the two magazines helped construct policy preferences that were directly at odds with Sadat's reliance on Henry Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy in the wake of the October War. It will begin by calibrating the extent to which post-war identity formation impacted on the construction of Egyptian identities.

A. Identity Construction

On the one hand, the October War was a boon for Egyptian nationalism. As Benedict Anderson has suggested, “the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal

⁴⁶ T: (3/1974)

⁴⁷ RY: 25/4/1977; and Shoukri, 371

⁴⁸ Shoukri, 371

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comradeship.”⁵⁰ The importance of the October War lay in the fact that Egyptian papers presented it as a vehicle for integrating hitherto marginalised elements of society into the nation. Consider the following article filed by *Ruz al-Yusuf*'s correspondent from Upper Egypt- the *Sa'id*. In the industrialised urban centres further north, the *Sa'id* traditionally enjoys a reputation for breeding factional vendettas and lawlessness. Given the strong contrast between Upper and Lower Egypt, the region's participation in the national struggle constituted a litmus test of Egyptian unity. Not surprisingly, the journalist heads south expecting the war only to have affected people tangentially. After all, not a single Israeli missile struck the southern Nile Valley. However, he soon discovers that the *Sa'id* dispatched a number of soldiers to the front, and was following developments in the Sinai with bated breath. The article opens with a description of a gang of bandits.

The East bank of Asyut... The mountains stretch, wrathfully, all the way to Suhag and [from their midst] the germ of death rises incessantly... the scent of rifles mixes with clouds of dust [...] into a phantasmagoric myth that the people inhale, with trepidation, as they down hot cups of black tea every night. No one believes what happened.... The 'Outcasts' left the safety of the mountains ... they raised the white flag ... and handed their automated rifles over to the police. And their leader said, "We will declare a truce with the police as long as the war lasts. It is forbidden for us to kill, while the Jews are in the Sinai..." And the 'Outcasts' vanished once more into the safety of the mountains [...]

The peaceful denouement contrasts markedly with the next paragraph. The reporter alludes to the hasty flight of Egypt's army from the Sinai in 1967, during which soldiers abandoned their arms in the trenches.

The same place ... but the time is July 1967... Large sailing boats approach the edge of the hills [along the Nile] carrying... hundreds of rifles, machine guns, and hand grenades, [which] have reached the Outcasts from the front in the Sinai ... [and] depressed the price of weaponry ... Everyone big and small has a rifle slung around his shoulder. The price of a machine gun used to be L.E. 300, but after these deliveries, it dropped to L.E. 10, and the rifle which used to cost L.E. 150 became a simple gift to be presented on the right occasion...⁵¹

The meaning of the juxtaposition is clear. Whereas the defeat of 1967 caused social disintegration and violence, the October War rallied previously liminal figures to the national

⁵⁰ Anderson 6-7

cause. By presenting war as a centripetal force that re-inserted the marginalised into the nation, newspapers projected what Joshua Fishman has called the “sentimental uniformities” associated with nationalism.⁵² Social homogenisation, in turn, became a jumping board for a much larger regional integration. Thus, “the war has rendered the features of people similar and cancelled out distinctions between one city and another. ...The behaviour of the people in Alexandria does not differ from that in Tanta, Bani Suwaif or Aswan.”⁵³ Insofar as it integrated estranged elements of society, the war allowed Egyptians to conceive of themselves as a single entity.

However, the way in which the war generated ‘sentimental uniformities’ alone does not adequately explain why Egyptians should have identified with their nation. A nation like Egypt may boast a grand pharaonic history, but her economic decline in the 1960s would appear an unlikely source of national pride. As Walter Armbrust suggests, while nations require a glorious past for reasons of legitimation, they also need to avoid being seen as backward to serve as a source of pride in the present age. Hence, “there is a built-in dialectic within nationalism ... between the requirements of modernisation and those of authentication.”⁵⁴ Egypt’s military defeat in 1967, however, threatened to render modernity unattainable. Israel explained her astonishing military success through an evolutionist discourse which attributed Egypt’s military defeat to the Arabs’ supposed civilisational backwardness. Although Egyptian recruits possessed sophisticated Soviet weapons, their lack of education rendered them incapable of using modern firepower to their advantage.⁵⁵

As the novelist Fathi Ghanim put it, Israel suggested that “the caravan of civilisation” had moved to Asia leaving “those Arabs staggering under the weight of their defeat” by the

⁵¹ RY: 5/11/1973

⁵² Fishman, Joshua quoted in Armbrust, Walter. *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1996. 8

⁵³ RY: 29/10/1973

⁵⁴ Armbrust, 47

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wayside.⁵⁶ The significance of the October War lay in the way in which it proved Egypt's modernity, Ghanim said. Yusuf Sabri's discussion of the novel *Behold Zion* authored by Burt Hirschfeld after the Arab defeat in 1967 is equally revealing. Hirschfeld's narrative unfolds in 1948 with an Israeli officer telling another that "these Arabs can't accomplish anything, they cannot even put a bullet in someone's stomach..." A colleague replies, "the war has ended and there won't be another one." But as Sabri emphasised, "unfortunately, the story did not end the way Hirschfeld would have liked," because in October 1973 "Egyptian forces crossed the Bar Lev Line."⁵⁷ By producing military facts that literally refuted Zionist fiction, the war "disproved the argument that the sons of peasants and workers have difficulty mastering modern weapons systems."⁵⁸ Cleansed of the stigma of defeat in 1967 [Illustration 8], Egypt's ability to undermine Zionist pretensions in the war thus paved the way for a rebirth of the Egyptian nation [Illustrations 9 and 10].

Khuli similarly argued that Egypt's military recovery owed much to modernisation. While the sheer volume of Soviets arms contributed to Cairo's military victory, they could not explain Egypt's military comeback adequately. Cairo had received vital Soviet weapons through the Czech arms deal in 1955, but had performed poorly in the Suez War of 1956. Throughout the 1960s, Egypt and Syria secured vast amounts of matériel from Moscow, but suffered defeat in 1967. Nor were Soviet weapons technologically inferior to American ones, Khuli argued. The types of arms used in 1967 were the same as those that facilitated the Crossing in 1973. Since neither the quantity nor the quality of Soviet weapons could adequately explain Egypt's military resurgence, he considered two alternative variables: Egypt's industrial base and her human resources.

The October War demonstrated that Egypt had developed an industry capable of filling material and technical shortcomings, Khuli maintained. Her public sector had built the

⁵⁶ RY: 15/10/1973

⁵⁷ TL: 1

sturdy hangars that protected the country's airforce from aerial bombardment by Israeli planes. It constructed a network of anti-aircraft missile batteries throughout the country. Public sector plants manufactured fifty per cent of the matériel used for the 'Crossing'. The public sector enterprise that had built the Aswan Dam supplied the water turbines that allowed Egyptian soldiers to dissolve the sanded fortifications of the Bar Lev Line- 20 metres high- in less than six hours. But the war also revealed the presence of a more educated base of citizens possessing the technical skills required to handle modern weaponry. Thus, it was not so much the weapons that had changed than the people using them. 'Abd al-Nasir's decision to provide free education in 1960 helped develop a base of skilled labour in Egypt. The sons of peasants and workers were now able to enter university. After 1967, Cairo recruited 182,000 university graduates as ordinary infantry, rather than officers, into the Egyptian Army.⁵⁹ Insofar as it reflected the success of economic modernisation and the spread of education, the October War dispelled the myth of the retrograde Egyptian. In so doing, it paved the way for restoring a sense of national pride [Illustration 11].

What rendered Egyptian nationalism so attractive was the way in which the war suggested a means of harmonising heritage and progress. Consider the following passage filed by *Ruz al-Yusuf's* correspondent from Upper Egypt:

Tens of young men and women were training at the time of the ceasefire. All of them were wearing khaki military fatigues- except for one... He was wearing the *galabiyya* of Upper Egypt and a turban on his head... The *Sa'idi* trainer was a well-known criminal... The mountains were his abode ... and the rifle his source of daily bread... his son is a student in the Faculty of Engineering ... the young man climbed the mountains and returned [later] to announce his father's repentance and readiness to instruct the young men and women in the art of fighting. I would not have believed the story if I had seen it in the cinema ... but this is what happened. Everyone is saying: 'A miracle' ... And the learned and the cultured are saying, "It is the war ... the war of liberation!"⁶⁰

The sartorial contrast between the elderly bandit in traditional garb and the young cadets in uniform suggests two distinct realms of 'tradition' and 'modernity'. As the passage above

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ *R. 2/1074*

shows, the war could synthesise these into a socially integrative display of Egypt's military might. Also note the role of education. According to Armbrust, Egyptian nationalism has traditionally depicted education as a means of effecting the transition to modernity.⁶¹ In the passage above, it is the university student who persuades his father to contribute to the national cause. And rather than thank providence, the educated élite attributes this fusion of 'tradition' and 'modernity' to Egypt's liberation from Israeli occupation. The war thus allowed Egypt to construct a victory of 'Pharaonic' proportions. One soldier typically suggested the government preserve remnants of Israeli fortifications dotting the Bar Lev line "to show coming generations that Egypt's willpower is indomitable." Egypt's military resurgence, he asserted, was no less an symbol of national pride than the ancient pyramids of Gizah.⁶² To the degree that the war highlighted Egypt's ability to merge tradition and modern military might, it inspired national pride.

Yet while the October War gave a fillip to Egyptian nationalism, it also spurred a renaissance of Arabism. Ghada Talhami has argued that Egyptians viewed the October War "an Egyptian war fought for the liberation of Egyptian soil" rather than an Arab one.⁶³ Since Sadat later invoked an Egypt-first policy to justify a separate peace with Israel, the requirements of Arabism and Egyptian nationalism seem to conflict. The meaning of Egyptian nationalism, however, was neither predetermined nor monolithic. Many Egyptians contested the view that their attachment to Egyptian nationalism was incompatible with larger Arab affiliations. According to Khuli, Israel's denial of a special Palestinian identity distinct from that of other Arabs ironically resulted in the "birth of Palestine in a real Arab dimension."⁶⁴ Moreover, the collective Arab defeat in 1967 produced a situation in which all Arabs "lost a subjective and national sense of security" and became threatened with the same

⁶⁰ RY: 5/11/1973

⁶¹ Armbrust, 43 RY: 5/11/1973

⁶² RY: 12/11/1973

⁶³ Talhami, Ghada Hashem. *Palestine and Egyptian National Identity*. Praeger: London, 1992. 107

fate as the Palestinians. Insofar as it menaced all Arabs with expulsion and annihilation, Israel's mushrooming occupation produced a "guilt complex" among Egyptians over their failure to help the Palestinian people repel the Zionist danger in 1948, Khuli said. Thus, "Palestine was only the starting point, as Israeli expansionism devoured the rest of the Arab homeland piece by piece."⁶⁵ According to Sharqawi, Egyptians entered the October War to "protect the entire homeland and all of Arabism. They understood that their freedom is the freedom of all Arab land, and that their rights are the rights of the Palestinian people."⁶⁶

Given the perceived symmetry of Arab and Egyptian interests, the October War was viewed as a victory for Arab nationalism. *Ruz al-Yusuf* emphasised that differences between Arab states melted away in the heat of the battle [Illustration 12]. Not "since the days of Salah al-Din" had the Arabs "witnessed such a degree of unity."⁶⁷ Libya agreed to resupply and finance the war effort. Iraq followed suit by nationalising two American oil companies. Algeria announced it would devote all its resources to the war.⁶⁸ Whereas previous Arab-Israeli wars had been fought "in isolation from the masses," the October War produced "an unprecedented solidarity between the masses and the governments," Ahmad Abd al-Mu'ti al-Higazi wrote.⁶⁹ The unification of Arab ranks, however, also suggested a corresponding decline in the power of territorial Arab states to resist pan-Arab fervour at a grassroots level. As a result, the resurgence of Arabism became associated with pressures for greater democratisation at a pan-Arab level. *Ruz al-Yusuf* stressed that even the otherwise pro-American Gulf states could not withstand popular calls for imposing an oil embargo on the West. Bahrain had to ask Washington to shut down its naval base in Manama for the duration of the war.⁷⁰ According to Sayyid al-Maghribi, the will of rulers had superseded the will of

⁶⁴ T: 7/1974

⁶⁵ T: 11/1973

⁶⁶ RY: 10/6/1974

⁶⁷ RY: 15/10/1973

⁶⁸ RY: 29/10/1973

⁶⁹ RY: 22/10/1973; 12/11/1973

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the people over the past twenty years. But after October, the “will of rulers stems from the will of the people.” And this was the first step to making “the will of the people supersede that of the rulers.”⁷¹ Hence, history would look upon the October War “as the crucible of the true national and revolutionary struggle, in which the revolution’s ... forces in every Arab country turned into a comprehensive Arab national liberation movement and a gigantic national campaign [clamouring] for unification.”⁷²

Insofar as the war raised the prospect of pan-Arab democratisation, it produced grassroots pressure for the compliance by Arab governments with the norms of Arabism. If Arab governments were now accountable to their peoples, they could no longer put off genuine unification. More importantly, an Arabist orientation required a solution of the Palestinian problem. Once the Arab states had demonstrated their ability to liberate their own territories by force, it was “logical that Arab objectives [should] change from ... a mere effacement of the traces of [defeat in 1967] to a solution of the Palestinian problem.”⁷³ The perceived symmetry of Egyptian and Palestinian interests meant that “any weakening of the PLO” was perceived as “weakening the national liberation movement as a whole.” To the extent that the PLO constituted the “backbone of the Arab national liberation movement,” Khuli suggested that Egypt’s interests were synonymous with her pursuit of a larger pan-Arab role on behalf of Palestine.⁷⁴ Rather than conceive the resurgence of Egyptian nationalism in opposition to Arabism, “support for national unity in Egypt on the basis of overcoming the main contradictions with the Zionist enemy” was “part of the unification of Arab ranks.”⁷⁵ The apparent symbiosis between Egyptian and Arab nationalism largely stemmed from strategic calculations. *Ruz al-Yusuf* argued that Egypt’s defence was synonymous with that of

⁷¹ T: 2/1974

⁷² RY: 5/11/1973

⁷³ RY: 30/12/1974

⁷⁴ T: 10/1974

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Palestine. Even the Pharaohs had established military outposts in Palestine to pre-empt hostile incursions into the Nile Valley.⁷⁶

The implications were profound. If Egypt's fate was strategically tied to that of the other Arabs, then her transition to modernity had to serve the interests of the entire Arab nation. Thus, Ahmad 'Abd al-Mu'ti Higazi argued that Egypt's modernity would allow the Arabs to solve the Palestinian problem after the war. According to Higazi, the world imagined the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as if it were "a struggle between right and right- an Israeli right to remain on the land and an Arab right to return to it." Western discourse not only established a false symmetry between the rights of Arab refugees and those of the Israeli occupiers. Rather, it sympathised openly with the Israeli position. The reason, he said, lay in Israel's tendency to couch the conflict in terms of a struggle between Arab backwardness and Israeli modernity. Higazi therefore believed that the importance of the October War lay not so much in the amount of land Arab troops had liberated, but in the Arabs' ability to handle sophisticated weaponry and their success "in destroying the world's illusion of our backwardness and Israel's superiority." Because it demonstrated their ability to handle technologically sophisticated arms, the October War strengthened the Arabs' claim to their occupied land. And this would give them leverage in upcoming peace negotiations.⁷⁷

As the preceding discussion has shown, the October War allowed Egyptian media to re-construct two overlapping forms of identification: Egyptian nationalism and Arabism. To the extent that the war generated social and regional integration, it enabled Egyptians to imagine themselves as a cohesive unit. Insofar as it offered a vehicle for merging tradition and modernity, the war inspired national pride. And inasmuch as it responded to a collective Arab desire for liberation, the war raised the profile of Arab unity. The renaissance of Arabism, in turn, produced considerable pressure for resolving the Palestinian problem- a goal consistent

⁷⁶ T: 10/1974
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with Egyptian nationalism. Thus, the process of identity construction fed directly into the articulation of policy preferences. Yet what did such a solution of the Palestinian problem entail? The following section will examine the type of regional peace settlement many Egyptians envisioned.

B. Anti-Zionism, not Anti-Semitism

Officially, Egypt considered an Israeli withdrawal to the borders of 1967 in accordance with UNSCR 242 and the establishment of a Palestinian state in the Occupied Territories the minimum requirement for a regional peace. Yet the memory of six years of Israeli occupation meant that any genuine peace would have to contain safeguards against future Israeli attacks. According to most observers, the problem was structural: Zionism was intimately connected with territorial expansionism. Confronted with the rise of anti-Semitism in Europe, Theodor Herzl had argued that Jews could not escape discrimination unless they possessed a viable state of their own. From its very inception, the Zionist project of nation-building, therefore, hinged on Israel's ability to provide a 'safe haven' for the world's persecuted Jewry. Israeli strategists contended that since Israel controlled only a small amount of territory in the Middle East, she could not afford to lose any war. Unlike her Arab neighbours, Israel possessed neither a large population with which to defend the state, nor sufficient geographical depth to repel hostile incursions. Since the Arabs could mobilise fifty times more soldiers than Israel, the smallest military defeat threatened Israel's survival altogether.⁷⁸

This argument ostensibly justified a policy of carrying war into the enemy's territory and carving territorial buffers out of contiguous Arab states.⁷⁹ Israel's ability to maintain such

⁷⁸ T: 10/1974
⁷⁹

‘security zones’, however, required her to discharge the role of “Prussia in the Middle East.”⁸⁰ Thus, Israel could only compensate for her geographical and numerical disadvantages by building a technologically superior army capable of inflicting a crushing defeat on any combination of Arab forces.⁸¹ By occupying adjacent Arab land, Israel’s Defence Forces (IDF) would provide the nascent Jewish state with ‘secure borders’. Egyptian observers, however, felt that Israel’s declared need for ‘security zones’ was only a pretext for Israeli expansionism. According to Mahmud ‘Azmi, security zones only benefit countries with large populations. If a small country like Israel is attacked, she is forced to mobilise all her manpower in the first battle to maintain a favourable balance of power against a quantitatively superior enemy. Given the small size of Israel’s population, “secure borders lose their power to absorb enemy’s strikes.”⁸² From an Egyptian perspective, the ‘security’ argument therefore only concealed a belligerent militarism. As a result, many Egyptians felt that there could be no regional peace short of surrender as long as Zionism held sway over Israelis.⁸³

By discrediting Israel’s ‘security doctrine’, however, the October War now raised the prospect of a full-scale de-Zionisation of the Israeli state. The Arabs’ military success undermined the claim that Israel’s security depended on the occupation of Arab territory. The October War proved that an Arab victory would not mean the end of Israel, ‘Azmi believed.⁸⁴ “The Arab soldier did not fight for the annihilation of Jews [for] no one denies Jews the right to live in a safe society,” Fahmi Husain wrote.⁸⁵ The Arab armies had not entered the October War to destroy Israel, but in order to enforce her withdrawal from all Arab land captured in 1967, Muhammad Sid Ahmad contended. Thus “the question confronting Israel today is not whether or not she will exist, but whether she can continue pursuing expansionist policies.”

⁸⁰ RY: 29/10/1973

⁸¹ T: 10/1974

⁸² RY: 25/4/1977

⁸³ RY: 24/12/1973

⁸⁴ RY: 25/4/1977

Thus, the war also discredited the Zionist ‘security doctrine’ by demonstrating that Israel could not continue occupying Arab land without incurring significant losses. It proved that the Arabs’ quantitative advantage of a large population “has qualitative effects, and that the quality of Israel’s weapons has limits.”⁸⁶ Three million Israelis did not possess the necessary degree of technological sophistication to inflict permanent defeat on 100 million Arabs.⁸⁷ Expansionism could not guarantee ‘secure’ and ‘defensible’ boundaries [Illustration 13]. However, if conquest could not provide protection, then Israel’s claim to act as a ‘safe haven’ for the world’s persecuted Jewry was severely compromised [Illustration 14].⁸⁸ The October War showed that Israel had failed “to create a safe national homeland for Jews.”⁸⁹ Khalid Muhi al-Din, one of Egypt’s Free Officers argued, the defeat of Israeli expansionism in the October War “defeated the view of Israel as the national homeland of all Jews.”⁹⁰

By showing that the Israeli state could not protect Jews, the October War opened the ‘Jewish question’ for serious re-consideration. Zionism had argued that Jews could only escape persecution by emigrating to Israel. The fact that only 20 per cent of the world’s Jews had settled in Israel by 1970, however, suggested that the argument had not been very convincing, *Ruz al-Yusuf* wrote.⁹¹ Since the war now prompted a reverse migration of Jews out of Israel, it prompted debates about the re-assimilation of Jews into predominantly non-Jewish societies. According to the UNHCR, more than 67,000 Jews left Israel between October 1973 and March 1974 alone.⁹² Polls revealed that more than 20 per cent of Israeli youth wanted to emigrate from Israel after the war.⁹³ Thus, Jewish emigration from Israel paved the way for the assimilation of Jews and Arabs within the borders of Mandate Palestine. This position reflected the PLO’s proposal to create a secular, democratic and bi-

⁸⁶ T: 10/1974

⁸⁷ RY: 16/4/1974

⁸⁸ T: 10/1974

⁸⁹ RY: 5/11/1973

⁹⁰ RY: 7/10/1974

⁹¹ RY: 24/12/1973

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national state, in which Jews, Christians and Muslims would enjoy equal rights. Stripped of its expansionist tendencies, Egyptian commentators believed that Israel could become the state of its citizens rather than an exclusivist 'Jewish' state.⁹⁴ The sixth of October signalled "the liberation of Jews themselves so that they can co-exist with their Palestinian co-citizens."⁹⁵ It introduced "the political assimilation of Jews with non-Jews."⁹⁶ To the extent that it undermined Israeli expansionism, the October War thus raised the prospect of a complete de-Zionisation of the Israeli state.

Assimilation, in turn, required Egyptian writers to disqualify the Zionist notion that Jews constituted a nation distinct from all others. Mustafa al-Husaini, for instance, refuted David Ben-Gurion's argument that the struggle over Palestine was one between two nations vying for the same piece of land. Ben-Gurion had contended that without his arrival in Palestine there would not have been an Arab problem. Rather, there would have been a Jewish problem. According to Husaini, Ben-Gurion's statement was problematic because it suggested that the struggle between Arabs and Jews was primordial and irresolvable. Given the choice, the Arabs would always choose the Jewish problem, and the Jews would always choose the Arab problem. The view that there was a struggle between two objectively identifiable nations- Palestinian and Israeli- over the same land, however, was dubious. Husaini did not deny that a 'new human reality' had begun to take shape on Palestinian soil since 1948. The *sabra* born in Israel obviously had never known another 'material homeland'. Even so, Husaini argued, that they knew other 'spiritual homelands'. These included the cultural identities which Jewish parents of European origin had passed on to their children. Hence, the notion of a monolithic 'Jewish nation' was fictitious.

⁹³ RY: 16/9/1974

⁹⁴ RY: 7/10/1974

⁹⁵ RY: 5/11/1973

Husaini emphasised that he did not wish “to deny the *sabra*’s affiliation with Palestine, nor their right to live there.” The victims of the Holocaust obviously “have no refuge other than Palestine.” He simply wished “to put this affiliation on proper foundations.” After all, “we do not call for the destruction of Israel, but rather for the eradication of Zionism.” While the Arabs needed to recognise ‘new realities’, there was no need “to confer [on these realities] an objective quality they do not possess.” The Jewish civilisation to which Zionists claimed to be ‘returning’ had not existed for over nineteen centuries. The Zionists’ historical claim to Palestine rested “on a distortion of history,” Hussaini argued, because it imagined an essentialised Jewish civilisation outside of time while disregarding the Palestinians’ attachment to the land. The struggle over Palestine, therefore, was not one between two competing versions of nationalism. At best, it was a struggle between a Palestinian Arab nationalism that had “not realised its national presence yet” and the “new human reality” represented by the *sabra* “whose roots or recent past do not belong to the region,” but who may attain “full membership in the future.” The advantage of defining the contest between the two parties in this manner was that “it does not render the struggle between them perennial or primordial.”⁹⁷

Western pundits have often claimed that Egyptian newspapers are “replete with anti-Semitism.”⁹⁸ But for Egyptians, anti-Zionism presupposed the eradication of anti-Semitism. Zionism’s justification for the occupation of Palestine was that Jews required their own state to protect them from discrimination. Thus, the Arabs needed to fight the oppression of Jewish minorities itself. “We need to struggle against Anti-Semitism,” Hussaini argued, because whenever “anti-Semitism oppresses Jews ... we pay the price.” The fact that Israel had engineered anti-Jewish pogroms in the Middle East to encourage Jewish immigration to Palestine revealed the paradoxical manner in which Zionism could feed off anti-Semitism,

⁹⁷ RY: 17/12/1973; T: 2/1975

Hussaini maintained.⁹⁹ Prior to World War II, the vast majority of East European Jews had embraced Socialism rather than Zionism. It was only with Hitler's rise that Zionism became a force to be reckoned with.¹⁰⁰ In order to fight Zionism, *Ruz al-Yusuf* and *Al-Tali'a* therefore both advocated the re-integration of Jews into Arab societies. This issue assumed added importance following the UN's General Assembly resolution which declared Zionism a form of racism and racial discrimination in November 1975. The resolution meant that "the protection of Jews is an Arab responsibility."¹⁰¹ The following year, Tripoli and Baghdad hosted week-long Conferences gathering more than 200 intellectuals from 48 countries debating means of re-patriating Jews that had left Arab countries in 1948. Morocco, Sudan, and Iraq amended their laws explicitly allowing a Jewish return to their Arab countries of origin. More than 230,000 Jews of Moroccan origin subsequently returned home. Under the headline 'Bring the Jews back to Egypt!', Ahmad Hamrush, called on the Egyptian government to pass similar legislation.¹⁰²

In order to facilitate the re-assimilation of Egyptian Jews who had emigrated to Israel in 1948, *Ruz al-Yusuf* reported on the life of several Egyptian Jews. Shahato Haron, a well-known Jewish Egyptian lawyer, explained that being Jewish and anti-Zionist was "no stranger than being Muslim and rejecting the Muslim Brotherhood, or white American and rejecting racial discrimination against blacks." Haron repudiated Zionism because he believed that it professed the same ideas as Nazism or white supremacism in America. The Zionist claim that Jews were God's chosen people smacked of racial supremacism, and Haron did not believe in the superiority of any nation. He also gave short shrift to the Zionist claim that Jews should emigrate to Israel because they were vulnerable in the diaspora. In the Middle East, "Jews have lived in the shade of the Islamic state on the basis of equality with others" for centuries.

⁹⁹ For a detailed discussion see Hirst, David. *The Gun and the Olive Branch: The Roots of Violence in the Middle East*. Faber and Faber: London, 1977.

¹⁰⁰ RY: 24/12/1973; 5/11/1973

¹⁰¹ RY: 29/12/1975

This was not to say that the period since 1948 had been plain-sailing. But Haron felt it necessary to distinguish between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism. While Egypt had witnessed anti-Jewish sentiments, this was largely a result of Israeli aggression and hence, “completely different from anti-Semitism in Europe.” In Europe, Jews were persecuted because they were Jews, whereas any change in the attitudes of Egyptians towards their Jewish co-citizens came in response to the “belligerent orientations” of Tel Aviv. “The barriers of hatred, religion and racism” Haron contended, “are always constructed.” The existence of occasional anti-Jewish sentiment, therefore, did not raise any doubts about Haron’s loyalties. “Every human being possesses more than one identity,” he insisted. “I am an Egyptian when Egyptians are oppressed; a black when blacks are oppressed; and a Jew when Jews are oppressed.” At the moment, he felt neither Jewish nor black because neither Jews nor blacks were oppressed in Egypt. But he felt Egyptian “because Egypt’s land is still under occupation.”¹⁰³

The preceding discussion traced the discursive articulation of Egyptian objectives in the wake of the war. It argued that the post-war resurgence of Egyptian nationalism and Arabism favoured Egypt’s increased efforts to secure a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict along the lines of an Israeli withdrawal to the boundaries of 1967 and the establishment of a Palestinian state on the West Bank and the Gaza strip. Yet insofar as the October War undermined Israel’s security doctrine, the conflict in 1973 raised the prospect of de-constructing the Zionist state and assimilating Jews into Arab societies in keeping with the PLO’s objective of creating a secular, democratic and bi-national state in Palestine. Only by de-fanging a predatory government in Tel Aviv could a ‘just’, ‘comprehensive’ and ‘lasting’ peace be established in the Middle East. The remainder of this chapter will analyse the articulation of means which Egyptians deemed suitable for realising these objectives. It will

¹⁰² RY: 29/11/1976
¹⁰³

first discuss the way in which the war raised the possibility of using military force as a political instrument. It will then look at the way in which Egyptians assessed Israeli intentions.

C. Military Possibilities

Realists have traditionally attached little importance to the October War. Though the Arabs performed better than expected, they could not break Israel's military might. According to Telhami, "The fact remained that Egypt was unable to regain its occupied territories through the war." As Sadat himself acknowledged, the massive influx of American arms during the War meant that even if the Arabs stood a fair chance of winning against Israel, they could not possibly fight the United States by proxy. The encirclement of Egypt's Third Army on the West Bank of the Suez Canal at the close of the war seemed to illustrate the superiority of Israel's forces. As a result, the October War essentially corroborated the lessons gleaned in 1967. Egypt had to make peace with Israel in order to pursue economic recovery.¹⁰⁴

The argument that military constraints unequivocally forced Egypt to seek peace, however, is not conclusive. It is true that Israel ended the battle in a favourable position. But this owed much to the way in which political considerations affected Egypt's military strategy in the first place. Sadat decided to fight a 'limited war' in order to break a political stalemate that locked Egypt and Israel in a perpetual state of 'no war and no peace'. By demonstrating that the occupation of Arab land could not guarantee Israel any permanent security, Sadat hoped to convince Israel of the need to end her occupation of the Sinai. Sadat's decision to deploy war as a political tool explains why the Egyptian army halted the pursuit of retreating Israeli forces on October 1973. Sadat's decision, ultimately, allowed Israel to repel the Syrian

assault on the northern front first before turning around and hitting Egyptian forces later.¹⁰⁵

Thus, Israel benefited militarily from Sadat's political calculations. Nor is the argument that America's decision to airlift unprecedented amounts of military hardware to Israel conclusive evidence that the balance of military power effectively ruled out the recourse to armed force for Egypt. After all, superpower support cut both ways. During the War of Attrition, Israel's Defence Minister Moshe Dayan said that while Israel could fight Egypt, she could not possibly hope to take on the Soviet Union. Thus, the military situation after the October War did not unequivocally point in Israel's favour.

Although Israel ended the war in a position of strength, Egyptians argued that she had achieved a Pyrrhic victory. An Israeli general had boasted that not even a nuclear bomb could destroy the Bar Lev Line.¹⁰⁶ Yet within only six hours Egyptian forces overran the sanded fortifications and turned the battle into the 'Six Hour War'.¹⁰⁷ While Israel argued that Egyptian forces had exploited the element of surprise, Egypt's General Ahmad Isma'il argued "even if we had taken the enemy completely by surprise on the first day of fighting, where was the fabled Israeli army on the second day?" Egypt's success, he maintained, was not simply a product of Israeli forces being caught offguard. Rather, Cairo successfully applied new principles of warfare.¹⁰⁸ In 1948, Israel decided the battle in her favour thanks to inter-Arab rivalries and the decision by most Arab commanders to avoid extended clashes with a militarily superior enemy. In 1956, the Egyptian army received orders to withdraw from the battlefield once France and Britain parachuted troops into the Sinai. Israeli forces thus reached the Suez Canal without encountering any opposition. Similarly, the Egyptian army received orders to retreat from the peninsula once Israel's aerial bombardment wiped out Egypt's airforce in 1967. The total number of Arab troops mobilised on all fronts that year

¹⁰⁵ Heikal, Mohamed. *The Road to Ramadan*. Collins: London, 1975.

¹⁰⁶ RY: 15/10/1973

¹⁰⁷ RY: 12/11/1973

was 160,000. These confronted 330,000 Israeli troops.¹⁰⁹ Prior to 1973, therefore, Israel had not faced any comprehensive battles with tanks, infantry, and aerial bombardment on two fronts.¹¹⁰

Using advanced Soviet surface-to-air missiles, Egypt now thwarted Israel's ability to conduct a pre-emptive bombing of Israel's airforce as in 1967. The paralysis of Israel's airforce changed the balance of power decisively on the ground. The October War witnessed the largest tank battles since World War II, and these constituted "a thumping victory for the Egyptian Army."¹¹¹ Contrary to conventional military doctrine, Cairo fielded loose formations of infantry against Israeli tank units in the open spaces of the Sinai desert. This enabled Egyptian troops to lay mines in the path of advancing Israeli tanks. It also allowed soldiers to wreck the enemy's armoured vehicles by firing portable Soviet anti-tank missiles from the rear.¹¹² As a result, Israel lost a third of her airforce and half of her tank force in the course the war. By the time America launched an airlift of military supplies, the IDF barely possessed enough artillery to last for another twenty-four hours.¹¹³ After three weeks of fighting, Israel had lost two and a half times as many soldiers as a share of the population as America had in Vietnam.¹¹⁴ A study by the Royal Institute of Strategic Studies in London concluded that "the Arabs have won the first war against Israel this time."¹¹⁵ US intelligence reports at the time confirmed that the IDF withdrew from the west bank of the Suez Canal fully aware that "if Egypt fought another round, ... the situation would not be in Israel's favour."¹¹⁶ For the first time ever, the Arabs rolled back Israeli expansionism. Thus, the October War was the first war the Arabs had not lost and the first war Israel had not won.

¹⁰⁹ RY: 25/4/1977

¹¹⁰ T: 11/1973 5/1974

¹¹¹ RY: 15/10/1973

¹¹² RY: 19/11/1973

¹¹³ RY: 27/5/1974

¹¹⁴ RY: 3/12/1973

¹¹⁵ RY: 3/6/1974

¹¹⁶

The decline of Israel's military capabilities appeared to dovetail with a general ebb in the power of Israel's patron, the United States. Domestically, the US faced a crippling economic crisis. The energy crisis after the October War meant that the US had to import 60 per cent of her fuel needs from abroad.¹¹⁷ To make matters worse, Washington suffered a string of foreign policy setbacks. Moscow's strategic parity with Washington had become a *fait accompli*.¹¹⁸ In Vietnam, the US military suffered a bruising defeat at the hands of a peasant army. In Cambodia, America continued to face stiff resistance from the Khmer Rouge. In January 1974, the pro-American regime of Haile Sellasie in Ethiopia was toppled. Left-wing liberation movements tightened their grip over Mozambique and Angola. The right-wing *junta* in Portugal- the only régime to have permitted American planes to refuel on their way to Israel during the October War- was toppled. Once the Greek dictatorship fell in July 1974, Athens withdrew from NATO. After the October War, the Algiers Arab Summit showed that "the financial centre of the world has moved to the oil-producing states."¹¹⁹ Whereas the success of a Third World liberation movement against the US army in Vietnam once appeared as an aberration, the October War confirmed that "imperialism [was] suffering an historic defeat" across the globe.¹²⁰ America appeared to be standing on her last legs.

The global deterioration of American influence thus combined with the Arabs' unprecedented military success in the October War to suggest that a reliance on military force could help Egypt realise her regional objectives. This assessment of the situation was diametrically opposed to Sadat's. According to Raphael Israeli, "it was wise" for Sadat "to come to terms with reality, to recognise how things stood in the Middle East and to try to make the best of the situation." To have insisted on an "attitude of confrontation" with Israel

¹¹⁷ RY: 22/10/1973

¹¹⁸ T: 11/1973

¹¹⁹ RY: 16/9/1974

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would have been “pointless.”¹²¹ As the preceding discussion has shown, Egyptian commentators drew just the opposite conclusion from the war. The generosity of Soviet arms shipments suggested that *détente* between the superpowers did not prevent the Socialist bloc from supporting Arab governments from fighting regional wars of liberation.¹²² While Sadat argued that the risk of provoking a nuclear confrontation between the superpowers effectively rendered the outbreak of any future war suicidal, Egyptian commentators drew just the opposite conclusion. Despite the risk of a nuclear fall-out, Egypt had been able to fight successfully.¹²³

The favourable outcome of the war thus appeared to have provided Egypt with the military means to enforce a ‘comprehensive’, ‘just’ and ‘lasting’ settlement of the Palestinian problem. To say that a certain course of action appeared feasible, however, obviously does not adequately explain why it should be pursued. To a large degree, an assessment of Israeli intentions also conditioned the formulation of foreign policy preferences after the war. The following section will portray the way in which Egyptians regarded different political forces within Israel as potential partners for peace. It will argue that the apparent absence of a credible partner for the implementation of UNSCR 242, let alone a full-scale de-Zionisation and assimilation of Jews, favoured a policy of political negotiations backed, if necessary, by a renewed resort to force. As subsequent chapters will show, this differed markedly from the policy Sadat ultimately pursued.

D. No one to talk to

The preceding discussion has shown that insofar as it questioned Israel’s viability, the October War rendered the de-construction of Zionism and Jewish assimilation key objectives for Egyptian policy in the immediate post-war period. These demands also helped define the

¹²¹ Israeli, 140-1

range of acceptable negotiating partners for Egypt. Many Arabs had been intrigued by the emergence of Uri Avineri's movement 'New Force' (*Ha'alom Hazeh*) in Israel at the time. Avineri urged the Israeli government to make peace with the Arabs, arguing that Israel could only assimilate into the Middle East by abandoning Zionism. Despite the superficial appeal of his views, however, Egyptian commentators believed Avineri did not constitute a credible partner for peace. According to Husaini, being 'non-Zionist' like Avineri was not the same as being 'anti-Zionist' like most Arabs. While Avineri submitted that diasporic Jews did not constitute a nation, he maintained that a 'new nation' had been born in Palestine with the *sabra*. According to Avineri, a nation comprises "a community of people who believe they are a nation and who wish to live as a nation." The criteria were so elastic, Hussaini objected, that members of the Sicilian mafia could call themselves a 'nation' too. Since Avineri's definition of a 'nation' depended on subjective ideational constructs like 'belief' and 'wish', the *sabra*'s links to the land on which they had erected their state possessed no 'objective' reality even by Avineri's own standards, Hussaini contended. Avineri had met this potential objection by arguing that the *sabra* would forge close ties to their land over time, just like American and Australian settlers had. Yet although Avineri argued that the 'new nation' of Israeli *sabra* was distinct from diasporic Jews, he did not advocate cutting Israel's links to the diaspora "because the religious link with global Jewry is a source of security." The *sabra* would regard the diaspora just as Australia looked upon Britain as its 'spiritual homeland'.

But here was the rub: Australia had been founded on the decimation of the island's original inhabitants. The problem, according to Husaini, was that Avineri tried "to justify Zionism historically." For instance, Avineri held that Zionism arose as a corollary of nineteenth-century European nationalism- "the dominant spirit of the age." But according to Husaini, the secular nature of nineteenth century nationalism required the Jews' assimilation

within European nation-states rather than their secession from them. Nor was nationalism the only ideological influence available. The late nineteenth century also witnessed the rise of Socialist thought in Europe, Gandhi's struggle against British colonialism in South Africa, and Ahmad 'Urabi's peasant revolt against British Imperialism in Egypt. Why did Zionism have to ally itself "with the dark side of the age" instead of forging ties "with the enlightened side," Husaini wondered? While Avineri tried to distance himself from Zionism in its present manifestations, he still tried to justify its historical genesis. The reason, according to Hussaini, was to find a pretext for the continued existence of the Israeli state once the October War undermined the ideological appeal of Zionism. And this, argued Husaini, required the adoption of policies that were completely at odds with the assimilation of Jews, let alone peace. When members of Avineri's *Ha'alom Hazeh* proposed an Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories in 1969, Avineri threatened to expel them from the party. As recently as 1974, he opposed the dissolution of the Israeli state and a return to the boundaries of 1967.¹²⁴ The irony was that during the war Avineri had said that the Arabs' military adventures would not accomplish anything. Afterwards, he pressured Israel's government to sign peace. As Philippe Jalab remarked sarcastically, Avineri "wants to crush the Arabs first, and then offer them some peace."¹²⁵

If the prospects of finding an accommodation with a non-Zionist like Avineri were bleak, those for finding a compromise with Israel's ruling Labour Party were beyond reach. Even if the Arabs were to drop their insistence on dismantling Zionism, Israeli PM Yitzhak Rabin categorically rejected any return to the borders of 1967, let alone the creation of a Palestinian state. The problem, according to 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Masiri, was that Labour Zionism's ideological attachment to retaining Arab land was a matter of principle. Masiri greatly influenced debates about Zionism in the post-war period through his *Encyclopaedia of*

¹²⁴ RY: 28/1/1974
¹²⁵

Zionism, parts of which were serialised by *Al-Tali'a* before its publication in September 1974.

According to Masiri, the central flaw of Labour Zionism was its belief that the social and cultural structures in which Jews were embedded rendered them intrinsically different from non-Jews. In this context, Masiri discussed the ideology of the Labour Zionist thinker Dov Ber Borochoy (1881-1917), who had tried to wed Socialism with Zionism.

Borochoy had argued that people were divided into nations and classes. The presence of nations historically preceded that of classes. Though nations were exposed to vicissitudes, their cultural base did not change. The assimilation of Jews, Borochoy maintained, constituted a deviation from the 'real Jewish self' because Jews formed an 'inverted productive pyramid' in the diaspora. Whereas most societies featured a large productive base of peasants and workers, the fact that European Jews had been forced into trades like money-lending meant that they were disproportionately non-productive. Only by cultivating land in Palestine could they lead a 'normal' existence.

According to Masiri, Borochoy's argument was flawed because it posited the nation as a reified and unchanging entity outside of time. This 'reactionary' assumption was incompatible with Borochoy's 'materialist' analysis of class structure. It led him to ignore the fact that the 'inverted productive pyramid' constituted the outcome of a particular historical process rather than any inherent incompatibility between Jews and Gentiles.¹²⁶ According to Husaini, Borochoy's fault was to overlook the possibility that a Socialist revolution could transcend the inverted pyramid by ushering into a classless society.¹²⁷ The oversight was tragic because it justified the Jews' 'right' to Palestinian land in complete disregard for those of its original inhabitants. According to Masiri, the Labour Party's settlement construction in the Occupied Territories since 1967 seemed to reveal the party's adherence to Borochoy's theories. While polls revealed that more than 90 per cent of Israelis were in favour of

¹²⁶ T: 9/1974
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returning the Occupied Territories- either partially or totally- in exchange for peace, Israeli PM Rabin resolutely dismissed any return to the boundaries of 1967.¹²⁸ And Rabin's refusal, in turn, had important consequences for the construction of Egyptian policy preferences.

The only acceptable Israeli partner for Egyptians was Israel's Communist Party *Rakakh*, which supported the creation of a secular, bi-national state in all of Mandate Palestine preceded by an Israeli withdrawal to the borders of 1967.¹²⁹ Yet although the party gained four seats in the Knesset elections of December 1973, there was little prospect that the party's fortunes would perk significantly in the near future: its constituency comprised Israeli Arabs in the main.¹³⁰ [Illustration 14] highlights the pervasive pessimism Egyptians felt toward the ability of Israel's electoral system to bridle militarism. Israelis, it seemed, confused peace talks with military maneuvers [Illustration 15]. The belief in the absence of a credible negotiating partner in Israel partly explains why Egyptians felt the need to retain the military option after the October War. It was clear that Israel would not pay the price for peace unless forced to do so [Illustration 16].¹³¹ This did not mean that Egyptians favoured a new war.¹³² Rather, the maintenance of "a state of serious preparedness for the battle, raises the significance of the Arab negotiator and increases [the weight of] his words" in peace talks.¹³³ Use of the oil weapon and support for Palestinian guerilla operations were to contribute to the same end [Illustration 17].¹³⁴

The militarily favourable outcome of the October War thus played a crucial role in constructing Egyptian policy preferences in the post-war period. Insofar as the war fed into a renaissance of Egyptian nationalism and Arabism, it placed renewed emphasis on the need to solve the Palestinian problem. To the extent that it undermined Israel's sense of security, the

¹²⁸ T: 10/1974

¹²⁹ T: 12/1973; 3/1974

¹³⁰ RY: 4/2/1974

¹³¹ T: 3/1974

¹³² RY: 5/11/1973

¹³³ RY: 3/12/1973

war raised the prospect of 'disarming' Zionism. Inasmuch as the war proved Egypt's ability to launch a limited war of liberation despite *détente* and the risk of nuclear fall-out, it illustrated the benefits of using military force to extract political concessions. Given Israel's apparent unwillingness to meet minimal Egyptian demands, it seemed sensible for Egypt to seek a negotiated political settlement without sacrificing the military option as leverage. Yet while Sadat appeared to comply with this policy at an official level, he pursued a very different course in his private discussions with US officials. The disparity between public expectations and actual diplomacy helped sow the seeds for the emergence of active dissent to the peace process in the post-war period. However, since frustrated ambitions alone do not adequately explain the formation of opposition, the following chapter will explore the reasons for the growing alienation of the Egyptian public in the wake of the October War.

4. Engagements and Disengagements: October 1973- September 1975

The previous chapter has argued that the experience of the October War fed into a resurgence of Egyptian nationalism in a manner that was consistent with the post-war renaissance of Arab nationalism. The overlap between these two forms of identification had significant implications for the way in which Egyptians viewed the subsequent development of regional politics. Perceived threats to the security of another Arab country were likely to be understood as an actual or potential assault on Egypt's safety as well. In this context, Sadat accepted US mediation. Yet while Cairo tried to use American mediation to pressure Israel into withdrawing from occupied territory, Rabin confessed that his government aimed to neutralise Egypt by drawing out the negotiating process. Since procrastination would allow Israel to absorb an increased volume of US military assistance, it would rectify the unfavourable military post-war balance and thus shield Israel from Egypt's military pressure to effect further withdrawals.¹³⁵ The ambivalent nature of Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy, in turn, produced a continuous contestation over the meaning of the peace process in Egypt. To the extent that step-by-step diplomacy could be interpreted in line with the liberation of occupied territory effected in the October War, Sadat could count on domestic support. However, to the degree that it threatened to preclude further liberation, it produced the first murmurings of dissent. The growth of external threats to the Arab world fed into this discontent. By the autumn of 1975, Egyptians were engaged in heated debates about the course of Sadat's foreign policy.

Initially, the situation was more ambiguous though. America's war-time support for Israel meant that pundits greeted Kissinger's mediation with scepticism for "people do not suddenly turn into your friend over and above their sympathy and interests which link them to

Israel” [Illustration 19].¹³⁶ America’s decision to grant Israel a staggering \$2.2 billion after the war– more than twice the amount of all US aid to Israel since her creation in 1948– revealed that “American imperialism still supports aggression.”¹³⁷ However, this did not preclude a role for US mediation.¹³⁸ If America could secure Israeli withdrawals, this was acceptable. Yet since Kissinger was not “a magician who could pull miracles out of a hat,” it was necessary to maintain the military momentum. Otherwise, the Arabs would soon be in the same position as Israel had been in 1973.¹³⁹ Egyptian approval of Kissinger’s step-by-step diplomacy thus hinged on its ability to secure Arab land.

Initially, this appeared to be the case. The Sinai I Disengagement Treaty between Israeli and Egyptian forces was favourable because the alternative of “freezing the positions as they now stand” would have given Israel “every opportunity” to postpone further negotiations.¹⁴⁰ For the first time ever, Israel had withdrawn from conquered Arab land. However, “steps to disengage forces alone- be it on the Egyptian front, or on all three fronts- are not the key to solving the problem.” Even with the Disengagement Treaty, the vast majority of the Sinai remained under the boot of Israeli occupation. By March 1974, it was clear that the disengagement of forces had “not led to a noticeable decrease in regional tension.”¹⁴¹ In February 1974, *Ruz al-Yusuf* reported that Israel planned to occupy parts of Lebanon up to the Laitani River and to provoke clashes between Lebanese authorities and the Palestinian resistance.¹⁴² A month later, fresh fighting broke out between Syrian and Israeli forces on the Golan Heights. Meanwhile, reports surfaced that Israel was planning to draw out the disengagement of forces artificially to gain more time for re-armament [Illustration 20].¹⁴³

¹³⁵ RY: 23/12/1974

¹³⁶ RY: 19/11/1973

¹³⁷ RY: 22/10/1973; T: 11/1973

¹³⁸ T: 12/1973

¹³⁹ RY: 21/1/1974

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ RY: 10/3/1975

¹⁴² RY: 25/2/1974; 26/8/1974

These developments suggested that “the situation has returned to its *status quo ante*.” Despite her military success in the October War, Egypt now found herself in a stalemate that resembled the state of “no peace and no war” during Egypt’s War of Attrition, Ahmad Hamrush argued.¹⁴⁴

Given this perception of Egyptian vulnerability, how is it possible to account for the rapturous reception that greeted Richard Nixon’s arrival in Cairo in June 1974? According to Sadat’s biographers, the warm welcome demonstrated that Egyptians were eager to embrace a *pax Americana*. *Ruz al-Yusuf*, however, commented that it would be “puzzling” if Egyptians cheered a man who had supplied Israel with the weapons that killed their fellow citizens only months earlier. The warmth of the popular reception only made sense insofar as the ordinary Egyptian viewed the visit as an American recognition of Egypt’s victory in the October War, *Ruz al-Yusuf* emphasised. Had Egypt still been a defeated nation, it was inconceivable that an American President would have launched his tour of the region from Cairo. The “masses” who turned out to catch a glimpse of Nixon proudly repeated that “Sadat has brought Nixon all the way over here.” The enthusiastic reception, therefore, “reflected the feeling of the masses that they were welcoming a man who has begun to understand their right to liberation, and the Palestinian right to justice and land.” The claim that they were ready to sacrifice Palestinian rights was patently false. Banners carried slogans like “Don’t forget Palestine!”, “We want a just peace!”, or “There can be no peace without complete withdrawal!”¹⁴⁵ Nixon’s visit, therefore, confirmed the wisdom of using military facts to extract concessions from America. Washington had changed her policy toward the Arabs because “like Vietnam and China, the Arabs have become a reality America cannot ignore.”¹⁴⁶

Sadat’s reliance on US mediation also received diplomatic cover from the way in which his approach overlapped with the strategies pursued by other Arabs. In July 1974, the

¹⁴⁴ RY: 8/4/1974

¹⁴⁵ RY: 17/6/1974

Palestinian National Council agreed to establish a state on any piece of liberated Palestinian land. Although the PLO's adherence to guerilla warfare contradicted Sadat's reluctance to use armed force after the war, the two approaches were not entirely inconsistent. Sadat had not publicly repudiated military force as a means of compelling Israel to further retreats. Conversely, the PLO's acceptance of a piece-meal formula for recovering territory, in principle, was not incompatible with Sadat's reliance on Kissinger's step-by-step diplomacy.¹⁴⁷ Most importantly, however, the PLO's decision to focus on liberating the Occupied Territories raised the prospect that it might accept Israel's existence within the pre-June 1967 boundaries in line with UNSCR 242. Cairo and the PLO's positions thus appeared to converge.

Moreover, Syria's signature of a Disengagement Treaty for the Golan Heights in May 1974 and signed a Disengagement Treaty with Israel for the Golan Heights appeared to vindicate Sadat's reliance on US mediation. [Illustration 21] suggest the importance Cairo attached to Israeli withdrawals from the Golan as a means of legitimising Sadat's pursuit of a *pax Americana*. Even so, the renewed Syro-Egyptian *entente* in the summer of 1974 camouflaged deeper differences over strategy. While Sadat put all his eggs in Kissinger's basket, Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad argued that Israel's retreat from the Golan came in response to the protracted War of Attrition that Damascus fought from March 1974.¹⁴⁸ Syria and the PLO's continued reliance on military pressure, therefore, constituted a foil to the policies Sadat pursued to retrieve the Sinai.

Sadat's endorsement of the PLO, however, ensured that the contradiction between these two approaches did not become immediately apparent. Thanks to Egyptian lobbying, the PLO first secured recognition as the 'sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people'

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ RY: 24/6/1974

¹⁴⁸

at the Arab Summit of Rabat in September 1974.¹⁴⁹ The formula was a double-edged sword. By supporting the PLO's bid for recognition over initial objections from Jordan, Sadat seemed to emphasise the symmetry between Egyptian and Palestinian interests. Yet insofar as it freed Cairo from political responsibility for protecting Palestinian rights, the formula also legitimised Egypt's pursuit of a separate peace with Israel leaving the PLO out in the cold.¹⁵⁰ Yet, the irony of this situation was not apparent in 1974. Like the October War, Cairo's papers perceived Rabat as a successful closure of Arab ranks on the Palestinian question.¹⁵¹ Once the UN General Assembly accepted the PLO as an unofficial observer a month later, the world community seemed to have accepted the PLO's new status. Whereas Sadat interpreted the PLO's political emancipation as a cue for Cairo's pursuit of a separate peace, the Egyptian press billed Egypt's support for the PLO an indication that the Palestinian revolution had become "an indivisible part of the Arab liberation movement" spearheaded by Cairo and Damascus.¹⁵² The PLO's recognition thus became the logical extension of the Arabs' victory over Israel in October 1973 [Illustration 22]. 1974 constituted the 'Year of the Arabs'.¹⁵³

Even so, some observers detected the disjunction between Sadat's abandonment of the military option and the PLO's pursuit of it. According to Khuli, the PLO's international recognition reflected the success of her guerrilla operations. The UN vote illustrated that "the gap between political and military activity" was "artificial" in popular liberation struggles. It was impossible to reap political success if one was not in a position of military strength to begin with, as the Vietnam War showed.¹⁵⁴ The PLO's diplomatic recognition thus suggested the potential rewards Sadat could reap by using a complementary strategy of coercion and negotiation.

¹⁴⁹ RY: 30/12/1974

¹⁵⁰ Stein, 19, 171

¹⁵¹ RY: 11/11/1974

¹⁵² RY: 7/10/1974

¹⁵³ RY: 30/12/1974

Reliance on Washington still appeared as a dubious strategy for retrieving land. When US President Gerald Ford met Brezhnev in Vladivostok in November 1974, the two leaders pledged to return to the Geneva Conference and recognise ‘the legitimate interests of the Palestinian people’. Back in Washington, however, Ford said he preferred step-by-step diplomacy and negotiations between ‘states’ – a formula that excluded the stateless Palestinians. Shortly thereafter, Rabin declared another two or three more years had to elapse before any settlement could be reached. Israel would then negotiate with Jordan about the West Bank. The real danger of these declarations, argued Hussaini, lay in their linkage. Ford’s retreat from the Vladivostok Communiqué suited Rabin’s desire to postpone the Geneva Conference. And Ford’s denial of any Palestinian role in a future settlement met Rabin’s desire to negotiate with Jordan.¹⁵⁵ America’s claim to act as an honest broker thus seemed worthless. If Egypt hoped to extract concessions like Syria had following her War of Attrition on the Golan Heights in the spring, Ahmad Hamrushi concluded that Cairo needed to apply military pressure.¹⁵⁶

Meanwhile, the war games Washington conducted raised the sense of Egyptian vulnerability. From the autumn of 1974 onward, reports suggesting Pentagon officials were planning to occupy Saudi oil wells proliferated.¹⁵⁷ According to military plans obtained by the press, Israel was supposed to contribute to the operation by attacking southern Lebanon, Jordan and Syria relying on America’s Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean for cover. With Arab attention riveted in the Levant, US forces could land troops along the littoral of the Persian Gulf.¹⁵⁸ Somali officials meanwhile reported increased activity on the US naval base of Diego García. US aircraft carriers had moved into the Bab al-Mandab Straits to conduct

¹⁵⁵ RY: 16/12/1974

¹⁵⁶ RY: 25/11/1974

¹⁵⁷ RY: 11/11/1974

reconnaissance operations.¹⁵⁹ Developments in the Indian Ocean dovetailed ominously with Israel's apparent mobilisation. According to *Ruz al-Yusuf*, there were "clear signs" that Israel was conducting "preparations for war." From January 1975, Israel's Army Radio started broadcasting 24 hours a day "in order to be able to call up reservists at any given moment." Throughout the country, military recruitment councils formed. The duration of military service was raised.¹⁶⁰ Israel was already deploying troops along the northern border.¹⁶¹ Thus, by the spring of 1975 America and Israel appeared to be co-ordinating an all-out war against the Arabs to rectify Israel's strategic defeat in 1973.¹⁶²

How did these events resonate in Egypt? Gamal Hamdan, a military strategist, argued that if the Arabs did not act on the assumption that Israel was preparing a new war, "they will find themselves facing an early defeat." The present situation required working "for a political settlement as if it would never see the light of day, and a military solution as if it were required tomorrow."¹⁶³ When Sadat asked Kissinger to negotiate a second Disengagement Treaty for Egypt in March 1975, Husaini felt that "Israel wants to conduct peace negotiations under the threat of war."¹⁶⁴ Even "the average man on the Arab street" had grown "more doubtful about Kissinger" at that stage, *Ruz al-Yusuf* asserted.¹⁶⁵ Thus, the failure of Kissinger's mission was greeted with open relief. While Khuli did not reject the principle of US mediation to secure further Israeli withdrawals, the problem was that Israel's reasons for welcoming an agreement would have been the very opposite of Egypt's motivations for accepting one, Khuli asserted. While Egypt wanted to reclaim her occupied land, Israel wanted to drive a wedge between Arab states in order to fragment the coalition of the October War. Rather than acquiesce in "Egypt's surrender, while Israel continues occupying Egyptian

¹⁵⁹ RY: 20/1/1975; 10/2/1975

¹⁶⁰ RY: 3/3/1975

¹⁶¹ T: 10/1974

¹⁶² RY: 17/2/1975

¹⁶³ RY: 14/10/1974

¹⁶⁴ RY: 3/3/1975

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land,” Khuli felt that Sadat’s “rejection, in the name of Egyptian nationalism” of Israel’s designs constituted “a gain for Arab nationalism as a whole.”¹⁶⁶ Thus Egyptian nationalism continued to be viewed as requiring Arab solidarity. By rejecting a further disengagement, Sadat had rescued the Arab unity bequeathed by the October War.

Even so, Israel’s perceived mobilisation for another round of fighting, put Sadat under mounting pressure to prove that the changed military balance created by the October War could still recover Egyptian territory and revive a slumping economy. America’s plans for an attack on Saudi Arabia coincided with the first labour protests in the course of which demonstrators chanted ‘Nasir, Nasir!’ Defying Israeli and American objections, Sadat re-opened the Suez Canal for international navigation on 5 June 1975. Since the day marked the eighth anniversary of the outbreak of the Six Day War, Sadat tried to portray his move as one more return on Cairo’s military gamble in 1973, showing that “the battle for reconstruction goes hand in hand with the battle for liberation.”¹⁶⁷ Thus, Egypt’s economic recovery did not conflict with the reclamation of occupied territory through American mediation, as critics of the peace process alleged. The press also baptised Sadat’s decision the ‘re-nationalisation of the Suez Canal’. Not only did it thereby position Sadat as an heir to ‘Abd al-Nasir’s popular welfare policies, but it also evoked the latter’s defiance of Western imperialism in 1956. *Ruz al-Yusuf* persistently stressed that “re-opening the Canal is not just an economic process, but also part of our military and political battle.” Since the War of Attrition between 1969 and 1970 had illustrated that Israel could exploit her control of the waterway to bomb Egypt’s heartland into submission, the Canal was “equivalent to Egypt as a whole.” Possession of the channel was “a matter of life and death” for Egypt. Insofar as the Canal’s re-opening erased the defeat of 1967, it constituted “the second Crossing.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ T: 4/1975

¹⁶⁷ RY: 21/4/1975

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Ruz al-Yusuf stretched the analogy even further. Like its historical precursor, the second Crossing heralded an increase in Arab power. “The Canal will open at a time that is inauspicious for America,” *Ruz al-Yusuf* trumpeted. Prior to the June War, America’s Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean had “constituted a firm and mobile base for Israel” since there had been no Soviet competition. But after the war, Moscow dispatched its own fleet to the Mediterranean. The recent victories of revolutionary movements in Somalia and Ethiopia blocked America’s ambitions to increase her naval presence in the Indian Ocean *Ruz al-Yusuf* argued. Thus, “the Red Sea has been converted into an Arab lake, on whose shores no power hostile to the Arabs can set up camp.” The “presence of the Soviet fleet in the Indian Ocean will make America think twice about her threats to occupy the oil wells,” *Ruz al-Yusuf* wrote. Soviet protection would allow the Arabs to impose a new oil embargo on the West. As a result, “the Canal will become a weapon for Egypt and the Arabs.” Thus, “the second Crossing in the battle of liberation [will] certainly not [be] the last crossing. Ahead of us, there are still more Crossings, until the final liberation of our homeland in Egypt, Syria, and Palestine is complete.”¹⁶⁹ The fact that Sadat needed to portray the re-opening as a step toward the liberation of Palestine suggests the depth of domestic discomfort that Cairo’s unconditional reliance on American mediation had caused by the summer of 1975. It also illustrated the continued resonance of the Palestinian cause in Egypt.

The Palestinian carrot, however, was not as convincing as Sadat may have hoped. Critics argued that rather than recover more land, the decision to open the Canal for civilian use rendered liberation more unlikely because it signalled that Egypt had buried the military option for good.¹⁷⁰ The outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War in the spring of 1975 appeared to vindicate those arguing that Sadat’s abandonment of the military option in the Sinai would allow Israel to resume her expansionism elsewhere. The fact that the Phalangists’ weapons-

¹⁶⁹ RY: 28/4/1975
¹⁷⁰

superior in quality and quantity to those possessed by the Lebanese Army- turned out to be of Israeli manufacture suggested that Israel's invasion of Lebanon had begun, Fahmi Husain contended.¹⁷¹ Tellingly enough, Israeli Defence Minister Shimon Peres had said that Israel herself would not assume the burden of striking Palestinian *fada'iy_n* in Beirut, but that "there were those who would carry out the task for her."¹⁷² Rabin similarly revealed that Israel planned to "stir up sectarian conflict in Lebanon, leading to a civil war" as a means of paralysing the Palestinian resistance.¹⁷³ The plot thickened when Kissinger commented that the situation resembled that in September 1970. Back then, he had given Israel tacit assurances that America would look the other way if Tel Aviv intervened in Jordan to liquidate the Palestinian presence. Kissinger's comparison thus presaged Israel's renewed occupation of Arab land, Hussaini contended.¹⁷⁴ From Cairo's perspective, the Lebanese Civil War was another nail in the coffin of the October War. The "Jordanisation of Lebanon" suggested "that the fifth war has practically begun."¹⁷⁵ By hitting the Palestinians through the Phalangists, Israel appeared to prepare a more widespread conflict between Muslims and Christians, which "might spill over Lebanon's boundaries and encompass the Arab world as a whole, weakening Arab solidarity in the confrontation with Israel."¹⁷⁶ Thus, Egyptians had reason to fear for their own security.

In the light of these developments, Ford's promise to re-evaluate US policy in the Middle East appeared like an exercise in pouring old wine into new bottles. The US President announced that Washington would not protect Israel if she engaged in military action outside her borders. Ford's formulation skirted the crucial question whether America would protect Israel within the boundaries of June 1967 or within the present ceasefire lines. Egyptian

¹⁷¹ RY: 9/6/1975

¹⁷² RY: 2/6/1975

¹⁷³ T: 5/1975

¹⁷⁴ RY: 2/6/1975

¹⁷⁵ T: 2/1975

¹⁷⁶

commentators noted wryly that his assurances were worthless because Israel was the only country in the world that had never defined its boundaries in the first place [Illustration 23]. A petition by 76 pro-Israeli Senators in the summer of 1975 restricted the President's freedom of manoeuvre considerably when he met Sadat in Salzburg in June 1975.¹⁷⁷ Meanwhile, Peres secured military aid worth \$1.8 billion from Washington in September. At the same time, Washington froze Nixon's earlier promise to supply Egypt with nuclear reactors pending Ford's re-assessment of policy. Thus, "whatever benefits the Arabs in America's 'new policy' is postponed one way or another, while everything that benefits Israel is implemented ahead of time."¹⁷⁸ Despite Washington's reluctance to change her policies, negotiations for a second Disengagement Treaty in the Sinai continued. However, as *Ruz al-Yusuf* emphasised, "the most important thing that we anticipate from America's re-evaluation of policy toward the Middle East is not a new disengagement of forces, because this is a matter which, in its essence, does not solve the problem." At heart, the issue remained "an Arab problem, the essence of which is the rights of the Palestinian people." Commentators warned that a new Disengagement Treaty would not only sidestep the core of the Arab-Israeli dispute, but would postpone a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict for years to come. In the meantime, Israel could lick her wounds and re-establish military supremacy over the Arabs, Unsi Kamil contended.¹⁷⁹ The nature of partial agreements thus foreshadowed Israel's future occupation of Egyptian land [Illustration 24].

Egyptian evaluations of regional politics, in turn, fed directly into domestic debates over Cairo's policy toward Israel and the United States. In July 1975, the Egyptian Assembly for Peace hosted a delegation of American activists at a roundtable conference debating the issue of peace. *Ruz al-Yusuf* stressed that the dialogue was a positive development. Whereas Arabs used to shun those who aired pro-Israeli views for fear of condoning the occupation,

¹⁷⁷ RY: 16/6/1975

¹⁷⁸ RY: 18/10/1975

the Arab victory in the October War had created a climate in which it was possible to debate one's ideological opponents without appearing to renege on the principle of liberating occupied territory. Ahmad Hamrush hoped that "these unofficial meetings would become the beginning of a vigorous and open political peace movement." Yet the discussions revealed that fundamental differences remained. Egyptian participants regretted that American delegates talked about 'peace' in the abstract rather than defining the *kind* of peace they envisaged. In Egyptian eyes, discussions on the role of war in generating peace revealed America's double standards. Although American peace activists supported Vietnam's use of armed insurgency to compel an American retreat, they asserted that the October War was contrary to the spirit of peace. By contrast, Egyptian participants felt the war had jumpstarted the search for a peace settlement in the first place. Whereas the Americans were optimistic about the prospects of achieving peace in the Middle East, Egyptians noted bitterly that in the two years that had passed since the October War, the situation had returned to a state of 'no war and no peace' as in 1967, "and the natural result of this will be a new eruption of conflict." While American participants wondered why Egypt should burden herself with the Palestinian problem, the Egyptians argued that the cause of national liberation was indivisible and that "the issue for the Egyptian people is exclusively one of Arab Palestine."¹⁸⁰ The Egyptians' willingness to talk to Israeli sympathisers therefore did not signal any grassroots approval of a separate peace. The reference to the state of 'no war and no peace' also revealed that Egypt appeared to have returned to *status quo ante* the October War.

Even so, the publication of Muhammad Sid Ahmad's book *After the Guns fall silent* in the summer of 1975 contested the public consensus that any genuine peace in the Middle East had to be preceded by a de-Zionisation of the Israeli state. A respected columnist at *Al-Ahram*, Ahmad argued that Israel was likely to ignite a fifth war soon, possibly in tandem

¹⁷⁹ RY: 22/9/1975
¹⁸⁰

with an American attempt to occupy Saudi oil wells. On the other hand, Ahmad asked whether it was not also possible to imagine a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict given that no war could be won by military means alone in an age of nuclear warfare. In that case, Israel's technological and economic capabilities might also support, rather than merely retard economic development in the Arab world. Ahmad's thesis was revolutionary in that it departed from the domestic consensus outlined in the previous chapter that there could be no genuine peace without a prior de-Zionisation of the Israeli state. Lebanese papers denounced Ahmad's thesis as "material evidence" of Egypt's "betrayal of Arabism."¹⁸¹ Although the domestic response was more muted, Ahmad's essay, nonetheless, produced divisions within the left over the peace process. Controversy broke out when Ahmad elaborated his views in a panel discussion hosted by *Newsweek*, which included Butrus Ghali, then editor-in-chief of the monthly journal *Al-Siyasa al-Dawliya*.¹⁸² Ghali argued that eventually Egypt and Israel would not only enjoy 'peaceful co-existence' but also 'peaceful co-operation'. In the future, he envisioned a common market between Israel and her Arab neighbours on the European model, which would create a 'cultural belt' connecting Israel and the Arab world.¹⁸³

In a devastating critique, Hamid Rabi'a, a professor of political theory at Cairo University, argued that Ghali's proposal for a common market dovetailed neatly with Israel's neo-colonial designs. Following the June War, Interior Minister Yigal Allon had proposed the creation of a 'Hebraic Commonwealth' with Israel surrounded by a ring of statelets like the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the Sinai. These would depend on the Israeli metropolis for their defence. They would export cheap labour to Israel and serve as a captive market for Israeli goods. Similarly, Peres had argued that economic expansion in the region would allow Israel to extend her present boundaries. The notion of a common market thus appeared

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² *Newsweek*, 18/8/1975

invariably as a stalking horse for Israeli irredentism.¹⁸⁴ As Khuli put it, acceptance of Ghali's proposals in essence meant that "we become our own enemies ... instead of being the opponents of Zionism." Egypt would now accomplish Zionist objectives. Even if Ghali argued that he was trying to win the West over to the Arab side, this was pie in the sky. Before the October War, America had coldshouldered Egyptian demands for Israeli withdrawal. After the war, Kissinger implored the Arabs for their co-operation. "Action, and not merely words, is what convinces and produces change," Khuli maintained.

This did not mean that he opposed peace. Rather, "the perennial question is: what kind of peace do we want?" Peace on Israeli terms would expose Egypt to military aggression "which recurs in cycles, as the progression of history has shown, every eight or ten years." The only possible form of co-existence was "co-existence with Israelis as people and citizens in a secular, democratic ... and non-racist state." Only after a complete de-Zionisation could Israel "objectively become an indivisible part of the region and her economic market." Even if the prospects for de-Zionisation were bleak, there were grounds for hope. Only ten years earlier, Palestinian resistance appeared doomed to failure. But by 1975, the PLO had become the first guerilla organisation in the history of international law to gain a seat as an observer at the UN. Eight years earlier, the October War would have been inconceivable. In 1975, it was an historical fact. Given the availability of alternative policies, Khuli called on the *Newsweek* panelists to repudiate their statements publically.¹⁸⁵

Ghali beat a hasty retreat. Though he still insisted that economic co-operation with Israel was desirable, he admitted that this could only take place after the full de-Zionisation of Israel and the creation of a Palestinian state.¹⁸⁶ Thus, he re-affirmed the consensus established after the October War. Similarly, Ahmad insisted that any Arab-Israeli settlement had to include the establishment of a secular and democratic state in Palestine. Nor did his

¹⁸⁴ T: 10/1975

¹⁸⁵ T: 0/1975

suggestions preclude the continuation of a struggle between Arabs and Israel. A settlement with Israel would 'freeze' rather than 'resolve' the conflict. However, he insisted that the struggle be conducted by means that were mutually beneficial rather than mutually destructive. The logic of his argument had been grasped by one of three Israelis who participated in the corresponding *Newsweek* discussion in Tel Aviv, Ahmad said. The Israeli panelist had suggested that if Arab civilisation one day proved technologically superior to Jewish culture, then Israel would lose any justification for continuing to exist as a Jewish state. And because the Arabs could not hope to achieve cultural superiority so long as armed conflict continued, Ahmad favoured peace.

On the other hand, it was "precisely for this reason" that Ahmad rejected "the notion of partial and phased agreements" which "carry the danger of redounding to the benefit of one party to the conflict only." In a direct reference to current proposals for another disengagement in the Sinai, Ahmad faulted Israel and America for presenting Egypt with a lopsided agreement that did not recognise the PLO. Present drafts showed that "the principle of mutual benefit instead of mutual harm is not assured by partial agreements."¹⁸⁷ Acceptance by one Arab party of a partial settlement, argued Ahmad, negated the principle of a comprehensive settlement and harmed the Arab cause as a whole.¹⁸⁸ Thus, while Ghali backpedalled on his suggestion that peace with a Zionist state was possible, Ahmad and Khuli registered their disapproval of partial solutions even before Sadat signed the second Disengagement Treaty in September 1975.

The first Arab-Israeli understanding not negotiated at the close of a war, the Treaty sparked heated debates across the Arab world. Israel secured lavish promises of US arms shipments, financial aid and oil deliveries. By contrast, Egypt committed herself to refrain from using military force against Israel in the future. Thus, the agreement essentially took

¹⁸⁶ T: 9/1975

¹⁸⁷ T: 9/1975

Egypt out of the battle in exchange for cosmetic Israeli withdrawals. Insofar as it ruled out the military option for the near future, the Treaty negated the principle established by the October War of securing Israeli withdrawals through use of armed force.¹⁸⁹ The momentous implications of this were not immediately apparent. Sharqawi defended the Treaty by denying that Egypt had signed away her military trump card. If Israel did not withdraw from all occupied Arab land and grant the Palestinian people the right to self-determination, “then war is inevitable.”¹⁹⁰ Thus, Sharqawi’s defence of the agreement hinged on the degree to which it could be made to appear consonant with the October War. Egypt, he asserted, would not have retrieved her oil fields merely by making concessions to Israel as Sadat’s critics alleged. Prior to 1973, Israel had not countenanced any withdrawals. So “if today we are able to reclaim some land by political means, then why reject them?” Sharqawi asked, “for these political means are the fruits of the war” rather than the result of any bargaining.¹⁹¹

Sharqawi’s arguments cut no ice with his critics. According to Khuli, the Treaty negated the achievements of the October War. Rather than rely on Henry Kissinger’s step-by-step diplomacy, Cairo ought to have insisted on reconvening the Geneva Conference—allowing Egypt to align her demands with those of other Arab states and the Soviet Union. The logic of Kissinger’s step-by-step diplomacy was “not in our interest” because the present disengagement reversed the Arabs’ favourable balance of power after the October War.¹⁹² Once Egypt agreed not to attack Israel, Cairo possessed no leverage to prevent Israel from postponing a final settlement for good, Khuli contended. Nor did the Treaty contain any guarantees that America would pressure Israel into signing a final settlement that was to

¹⁸⁸ RY: 7/7/1975

¹⁸⁹ Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy: Sadat, Kissinger, Carter, Begin and the Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace*. Routledge: London, 1999. 78-181

¹⁹⁰ RY: 2/9/1975

¹⁹¹ RY: 8/9/1975

Egypt's advantage.¹⁹³ Worse still, the additional military hardware Israel received freed Tel Aviv "from the tremendous pressure represented by movements of Egyptian forces."¹⁹⁴

The period between the October War of 1973 and the second Disengagement Treaty in September 1975 thus witnessed a series of significant engagements and disengagements. Sadat tried to engage the United States in order to secure disengagements of Israeli and Arab forces. With every separation of Egyptian and Israeli troops, however, Cairo also appeared to be disengaging from the united Arab coalition of the October War. And to the degree that Egypt withdrew from the 'battle', she seemed to empower Israel to engage in renewed confrontation throughout the region. Yet the picture was not clear-cut. To the extent that Nixon's visit, the PLO's diplomatic success, and the re-opening of the Suez Canal could be interpreted as a reflection of Egypt's increased military stature after the October War, they worked against the formation of active dissent to the peace process. However, insofar as the non-committal nature of US diplomacy, Kissinger's threats to occupy oil wells, Israel's sabre-rattling in Lebanon all appeared to erode the legacy of the October War, they undermined support for the regime. The years following signature of the Sinai II Disengagement Treaty appeared to vindicate the objections of its critics. As the next chapter will show, this fed into a growing mobilisation against the separate peace Egypt appeared to be pursuing.

¹⁹³ RY: 15/9/1975
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5. 'Peace' and Authoritarianism: September 1975 – March 1979

The following chapter will investigate the reasons behind the growing mobilisation of opposition to a separate peace treaty after 1975. The growing visibility of the Muslim Brotherhood (*Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*) meant that opposition to the peace process grew vastly in the period under investigation. At the same time, cleavages between the secular and religious constituencies hampered the co-ordination of concerted opposition, and allowed Sadat's resort to repression to subdue the rising tension. The consequence, however, was to establish a symmetry between 'peace' and 'authoritarianism'. While Israel's military resurgence after 1975 continued to cause anxieties, the erosion of the limited democratic liberties Egyptians had gained after the October War now vastly increased opposition to a separate peace. Before analysing the implications of this development, the first half of this chapter will chart the social and political trends underlying the increasing politicisation of opposition to the peace process in the late 1970s. It will then explore the way in which the construction of 'Islamic' identities moulded the Brotherhood's policy preferences. The remainder of this chapter will examine the interaction of these phenomena with domestic and regional politics in the run-up to Camp David.

A. 'Democratisation' and the Politicisation of Dissent

The pacification of Egypt's eastern front in September 1975 initially allowed the régime to accelerate the political liberalisation promised in the wake of the October War. As chapter two noted, the official media had associated the military victory with democratisation. *Ruz al-Yusuf* emphasised that Sadat's decision to lift newspaper censorship in 1974 stemmed directly from Egypt's 'victory' in the October War. Yet while the official press maintained that Sadat "desired democracy," the meaning of such 'democracy' was contested. According

to Sadat, the October War had “increased national unity” and created “complete confidence” in “the political leadership.” This was a prerequisite for introducing a ‘democracy’ in which the “popular will” decided “to leave the reins of power in the hands of the President of the Republic.”¹⁹⁵ The introduction of a multi-party system in 1976, however, highlighted the contradictions inherent in Sadat’s tendency to equate ‘democracy’ with enlightened despotism.

In 1976, Sadat replaced the Arab Socialist Union (ASU) with three official parties. On the left, Khalid Muhi al-Din— one of Egypt’s Free Officers in the 1952 Revolution— headed the National Progressive Unionist Party (NPUP), or *Tagammu’*. While all parties could run for parliament and propose legislation, Sadat retained full law-making powers. In the summer of 1976, the centrist party won a predictable landslide. By contrast, the NPUP bagged eight per cent of the popular ballot. Yet as Raymond Hinnebusch has suggested, the party’s showing did not necessarily reflect the strength of the left. Not only had the government’s vast patronage network interfered in the polls, but given the “widespread belief that no opposition party would ever be allowed to translate popular support into power,” the NPUP’s ability to mobilise a disenchanting electorate was severely limited. Even so, the party’s weekly newspaper *Al-Ahali* soon became an assertive mouthpiece for Egypt’s public sector workers and peasants.¹⁹⁶ Launched in February 1978, *Al-Ahali*’s high visibility stemmed partly from the fact that it constituted the only independent forum for the left after Sadat shut down *Al-Tali’a* and appointed a score of ‘loyal pens’ to *Ruz al-Yusuf* in 1977. Whereas the latter two publications had not been linked to any particular political organisation, *Al-Ahali* was. Sadat’s idiosyncratic definition of ‘democracy’ thus fuelled the gradual identification of opposition to the peace process with the activities of organised opposition parties.

¹⁹⁵ RY: 11/2/1974

¹⁹⁶ Hinnebusch, Raymond. *Egyptian Politics under Sadat: the post-populist Development of the*

The same held true for the nascent Islamist movements. According to Hinnebusch, “the emergence of Islamic opposition increasingly at odds with the régime ... added a depth to the opposition of which neither the left nor the liberal right was capable.” The distinctly ‘Islamic’ brand of politics in the 1970s arose partly in response to uneven social change. Rapid urbanisation uprooted many farmers, who could not easily be absorbed into an urban economy, from their village communities. Detached from the security of rural kinship networks, their aspirations were increasingly frustrated. Searching for “a wider identity and solidarity, yet barely removed from traditional life and values,” these migrants “were especially susceptible to recruitment by nativist social protest movements.” The proliferation of universities churning out increasing numbers of graduates “far in excess of the absorptive capacity of the economy” exacerbated the predicament.¹⁹⁷

The unbalanced nature of urbanisation combined with the advent of new technologies to produce a more multi-vocal ‘Islamic’ discourse in the 1970s. The mushrooming number of mosques beyond the government’s financial control provided a forum for independent preachers. ‘Abd al-Nasir’s purge of the *Azhar* a decade earlier had eroded the prestige attached to its younger graduates. Popular preachers like ‘Abd al-Hamid Kishk— a trenchant critic of the peace process— began to enjoy wide-spread popularity. Banned from state-controlled broadcast media, Kishk became “by far the best known preacher in Egypt” thanks to the proliferation of cassette technologies.¹⁹⁸ The fact that ordinary Egyptians began listening to taped oratory in their spare time meant that the religious message became “connected to forms of pleasure and consumption not previously integral” to the Friday sermon. Thus, the popularity of certain preachers spread far beyond the mosques with which

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 198-200

¹⁹⁸ Gaffney, Patrick D. *The Prophet’s Pulpit: Islamic Preaching in Contemporary Egypt*. University of California

they were affiliated.¹⁹⁹ Because cassettes could be used at the owner's convenience, they could defy the discursive homogenisation of 'Islam' associated with other media. Unlike the radio or the press, the ownership of tapes is de-centralised. Every receiver can become a potential transmitter.²⁰⁰ Thanks to the ease with which tapes could be replicated, Kishk was able to "define the cassette sermon as a contestatory media form ... of an Islamist social critique."²⁰¹ Social change thus coincided with the advent of cassette technology to facilitate the emergence of an increasingly de-centered and polyphonic Islamic discourse in the 1970s.

The result was to bedevil Sadat's attempts to monopolise Islam as a means of legitimation.²⁰² Not only did Sadat release many Islamists from prison, but it also built up Islamic Groups (*Gama'at Islamiyya*) as a counterweight to the influential left-wing student movement on university campuses. By the end of the decade, they boasted 100,000 members and the loyalty of one-third of the country's entire student body. Yet while the *Gama'at* welcomed Sadat's hailed Sadat's rapprochement with Saudi Arabia, they frowned on the moral laxity that appeared to accompany *Infitah*. While the students formed a strident pressure group, the most prominent force in the resurgence of political Islam was the Brotherhood led by 'Amr Tilmisani. As part of his political liberalisation, Sadat permitted Tilmisani to publish the monthly journal *Al-Da'wa*. Given the Brotherhood's centrality in the Islamist revival, the ideas articulated by the journal "give a representative view of the programme of the mainstream Islamic movement." As letters to the editor suggest, *Al-Da'wa*'s readership consisted mainly of low-ranking civil servants, provincial teachers and university students. Circulation figures fluctuated between 80,000 and 150,000 copies.²⁰³ As with the NPUP, Sadat soon discovered that political liberalisation produced demands for the

¹⁹⁹ Hirschkind, Charles. *Technologies of Islamic Piety: Cassette Sermons and the Ethics of Listening*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. The Johns Hopkins University, 2000. 92

²⁰⁰ Manuel, Peter. *Cassette Culture: Popular Music and Technology in North India*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1993. 2-5

²⁰¹ Hirschkind, 84-5

²⁰² Gaffney, 115-6

²⁰³

re-orientation of foreign policy. After 1975, these began to be articulated by increasingly well-organised political parties.

The pluralisation of politics after the Disengagement Treaty thus helped amplify public criticism of the peace process, highlighting the contradictions of Sadat's 'democratic despotism'. The MB and NPUP's opposition, however, also invited increasing repression. Whereas the October War had held out the promise of democratisation, the peace process dovetailed with increasing authoritarianism. This issue linkage had the effect of galvanising opposition to Sadat's peace initiative. Before exploring the implications of this tension in more detail, the following section will first analyse the discursive construction of an 'Islamic' identity. As chapter two argued, the October War contributed to a resurgence of Egyptian nationalism and Arabism. The following section will show that the war also fed into the construction of an Islamic identity at odds with the régime's definition of it.

B. Constructing an 'Islamic' Identity

In the 1930s, the founder of the Brotherhood, Hasan al-Banna, argued that the reason for the weakness of Islamic civilisation lay in the decline of religious spiritualism and the embrace of Western materialism. The influential theoretician Sayyid Qutb fleshed out these ideas after World War II. Islamists argued that the Arab defeat of 1967 vindicated Qutb's arguments. Launched under the banner of secular Arab Socialism, the June War suggested that reliance on 'materialism' alone could not protect Egypt from Israeli encroachments. Israel won the war because her soldiers bore an *Uzi* in one hand and copies of the Torah in the other.²⁰⁴ Conversely, the Arabs secured military success in 1973, because they had returned to their faith. Egypt launched the October War during the Muslim holy month of *Ramadan*.

Egyptian soldiers reportedly shouted “God is great!” before crossing the Suez Canal.²⁰⁵ National radio even reported that angels had been spotted fighting on Egypt’s side.²⁰⁶ Thus, it appeared that God rewarded Egypt’s return to spiritualism with victory. [Illustration 25] shows how religion appeared to be implicated in the downing of Israeli aircraft. The perception that God rewarded believers with victory also owed much to the stiff resistance put up by the inhabitants of Suez.

Shaikh Hafiz Salama, a popular preacher, helped the town organise a civil militia that repelled an Israeli assault two days after Tel Aviv had agreed to a ceasefire. Israeli troops had cut off Suez and called on the inhabitants to surrender.²⁰⁷ According to Salama, “human nature (*fitra*)” compelled the inhabitants of the town to seek refuge inside the mosque for “everyone knew there there is no victory other than through God and no protection other than through Him.” Salama’s interpretation was vintage Qutb. The latter had argued that mere mortals were unable to grasp truth because only “God has knowledge of everything” (33:40). According to Qutb, Islam is nonetheless in conformity with an innate human constitution (*fitra*) that corresponds to the natural order of creation. Even if reason fails them, humans possess an instinctive ability to apprehend divine knowledge through revelation.²⁰⁸ In Salama’s narrative, the people’s intuitive understanding of religion thus allowed them to converge on the mosque and turn it into “the axis of the battle.” It was here that army officers conferred with ordinary citizens and decided to build the trenches that halted the Israeli entry into the city. It was here that ordinary citizens agreed to refuse Israeli calls to surrender. According to Salama “had it not been for the adherence of the people of Suez to Islam as a method of life, the town would definitely have fallen and Egypt would have been afflicted with a military catastrophe.” Thus, “the battle of Suez was a victory for the idea of Islam

²⁰⁵ D: 2/1978

²⁰⁶ Gaffney, 85

²⁰⁷ RY: 4/2/1974

itself.”²⁰⁹ [Illustration 26] highlights the importance Suez played in national consciousness after the October War.

Islam’s triumph in Suez produced pressures for an Islamisation of society at large. According to Banna, a nation could only regain its strength once individuals returned to spiritualism, for “verily, God does not change what is in a people until they change what is in themselves” (13:12).²¹⁰ The theme of a spiritual awakening accompanied reports of Egypt’s military resurgence in the press.²¹¹ A famous belly-dancer in Alexandria discarded her revealing costume and donned a more modest nurse’s outfit to help the wounded, saying, “God does not change a people unless they want to change.”²¹² Once the people appeared to have undergone a spiritual transformation, the Brotherhood argued that it was high time to eliminate what it considered an artificial distinction between religion and statecraft. According to *Al-Da‘wa*, the enemies of Islam had tried to confine religion to the sphere of personal worship. However, Islam was a comprehensive principle for organising the affairs of quotidian life. The battle of Suez “proved that Islam is the religion of life. It is not only a religion, but also a state.”²¹³ Thus, the war appeared to vindicate the Islamisation of politics. Egypt needed to pursue an Islamic foreign policy, the *Ikhwan* argued.²¹⁴

The articulation of precise foreign policy preferences was largely conditioned by the way in which religious identity was constructed in opposition to an ‘other’. Many observers have noted that the Brotherhood projected reified images of ‘Jews’. However, few have investigated the actual process of constructing essentialised representations of the Jewish ‘other’. The following section will argue that the Brotherhood’s reification of ‘Jews’ in the post-war period owed much the way in which Zionism conceptualised a primordial Jewish

²⁰⁸ Qur’an quoted in Moussalli. *Radical Islamic Fundamentalism: The Ideological and Political Discourse of Sayyid Qutb*. American University in Beirut Press: Beirut, 1992. 80-89

²⁰⁹ D: 11/1977

²¹⁰ Mitchell, Richard P. *The Society of Muslim Brothers*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1993. 234

²¹¹ RY: 22/10/1973

²¹² RY: 29/10/1973

²¹³ — — — — —

identity as a means of justifying a Jewish ‘return’ to Palestine. As chapter three submitted, the Egyptian left tried to undermine the Zionist claim to Arab land by de-constructing the assumption of an innate Jewish identity on which Zionism is conceptually based. The Muslim Brotherhood took a different approach. If Zionists believed that Jews should ‘return’ to resurrect their Biblical empire, then the best way to contest their claim to Arab land was by confronting them on their own, culturalist turf. According to *Al-Da‘wa*, the Arabs could not hope to liberate Palestine from an occupier who had erected a state ostensibly “based on a ... religious foundation,” if they continued advancing “futile slogans devoid of religion.”²¹⁵ Since Zionism invoked the Jews’ religio-cultural ancestry to justify the occupation of Palestine, the Arabs needed to consider religion and culture as well in order to confront this claim.

To a large extent, the Brotherhood’s evocation of ‘Jews’ in the post-war period thus fed off Zionist primordialism. As chapter three suggested, the Egyptian left believed that the emphasis on a separate Jewish identity in Labour Zionism constituted a deviation from the ideological tenets of Socialism. Hence, the Arabs needed to collapse the artificial barriers which Zionism had erected between ‘Jews’ and ‘Arabs’. *Al-Da‘wa* agreed that the supposedly ‘progressive’ character of Labour Zionism was a fiction. According to ‘Abd al-Muna‘im Salim, the Israeli left was just as attached to retaining Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories as the Likud Party was. However, the Brotherhood drew radically different conclusions from this assessment. For if ‘Socialism’ was just epiphenomenal to Labour Zionism, then the real link between Labour and Likud was the underlying attachment to the ‘Jewish’ values Zionism propagated. Thus, “the roots to which all Jews belong are one, and the slogans raised by Socialism are just a cover.”²¹⁶

²¹⁴ D: 5/1977

²¹⁵ D: 4/1977

²¹⁶

The Brotherhood's reification of 'Jewish identity' in the post-war period, in turn, hinged on Zionist representations of a primordial Jewish character. Did not the founder of the World Jewish Congress, Nahum Goldmann argue that because Jews were the only people who constituted both a nation and a religious community, they were intrinsically different from any other people? Had not the German Socialist Moses Hess (1812-1875) claimed that there was a 'special Jewish genius'?²¹⁷ Did not US President Jimmy Carter similarly maintain that Israel had a "civilisational role" to play in the Middle East?²¹⁸ Thus, the Zionist emphasis on an inherent Jewish identity distinct from that of all other nations shaped the Brotherhood's view of an essential Jewish-ness. According to Salim, the nature of the Jewish people was inherently expansionist. Begin claimed that 'Greater Israel' needed to include the regions once controlled by King David and King Solomon. Similarly, Moshe Dayan had said that "if we possess the Holy Book and if we consider ourselves to be the people of the Holy Book, then we need to possess the land of the Holy Book as well."²¹⁹ In keeping with this philosophy, Rabin had suggested establishing two kinds of boundaries for Israel: international ones and 'secure' ones. As 'Ala' Zaidan noted, "no other state in human history has ever demanded something like this before." The reason, he said was that no other state in history had ever drawn boundaries on the basis of maps plotted two millenia earlier.²²⁰

The only way to block Jewish irredentism was to rely on 'Islam'. Not only did the October War prove the efficiency of 'Islam' in rolling back Israel's occupation, but Israeli leaders themselves identified 'Islam' as the greatest threat to Zionism. Had not Ben-Gurion said that he feared neither socialism, revolution or democracy in the Middle East, but that Israel dreaded that "demon Islam"? Had not Peres said that it was impossible to achieve a *pax Israeliana* so long as 'Islam' brandished its sword, and that 'Islam' kept the 'Jewish question'

²¹⁷ D: 3/1977

²¹⁸ D: 9/1978

²¹⁹ D: 1/1978

²²⁰

alive today? “These hateful words,” *Al-Da‘wa* contended, “confirm our view that the battle with the Jews is a battle of creeds.”²²¹ According to Salim, it was clear that “the struggle between the Arabs and Israel is a cultural one.”²²² The Brotherhood thus took Zionists’ reified dichotomisation between ‘Islam’ and ‘Jews’ at face value in order to invoke ‘Islam’ as a viable antithesis to Israeli expansionism. Did not the *Qur’_n* stipulate that Muslims should “fight in the path of God those who fight you” (5)? Hence, it was legitimate for Muslims to conduct armed resistance against the Israeli occupation in Palestine in order to liberate all of Mandate Palestine.²²³

The fact that the Brotherhood advocated armed resistance against an essentialised Jewish ‘other’ has led many writers to conclude that the movement was rabidly anti-Semitic. According to Barry Rubin, the Brotherhood adheres to “a doctrine of anti-Semitism which would be quite familiar to the ideologists of the Tsarist pogroms or the Nazi party.”²²⁴ Yet whereas European anti-Semitism tried to purge society of Jews, the Brotherhood’s proposals for resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict reveal that the Islamists were prepared to welcome Jews in their midst. *Al-Da‘wa* emphasised that it was wrong to attack Jews without a just cause “because God does not like aggressors”(5).²²⁵ The magazine stressed that Muhammad’s campaign against the Jews in Madina had not been aimed against the Jewish people *per se* because the source of its “religion is divine.” Not only had Jews enjoyed complete freedom of worship under Muhammad’s suzerainty, but they also possessed the same rights of citizenship as Muslims. The Prophet only decided to fight the Jews after they tried to assassinate him. His struggle, therefore, constituted “a defensive war.”²²⁶ Moreover, despite the Brotherhood’s embrace of a maximalist solution for liberating all of Palestine and converting it into an

²²¹ D: 7/1978; 1/1977; 9/1978; 10/1976

²²² D: 9/1978

²²³ D: 8/1976

²²⁴ Rubin, Barry. *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics*. Macmillan: London, 1990. 107

²²⁵ D: 8/1976

²²⁶

Islamic state in the future, Tilmisani emphasised that “the Jews in Palestine ... may live there as citizens just like their Muslim friends.”²²⁷ According to the Brotherhood, the subjugation of another religious community was deplorable because it undermined the sanctity of God’s creation. “By virtue of our religion, we say to Jews and Christians, ‘You have your religion and we have ours’.” Islam, *Al-Da‘wa* argued, required that all believers be granted freedom of worship because “there is no compulsion in religion.”²²⁸ Thus, the Brotherhood envisioned the creation of an Islamic state in Palestine modelled on the Ottoman *millet* system.

Ironically, the Brotherhood’s suggestions for resolving the Palestinian problem thus overlapped with the policy preferences of the left. While the MB contested the left’s call for a secular state in Palestine, its advocacy of equality among Jews, Christians and Muslims in a post-Zionist Palestinian state was compatible with the left’s call for a bi-national state. Moreover, in the short term both the Brotherhood and the left agreed on armed struggle to effect the liberation of Arab land. The programmatic overlap between these approaches produced a considerable degree of fluidity between appeals to Islam, Egyptian nationalism and Arabism as forms of identification. Thus, *Al-Da‘wa* lamented the loss of Arab unity in the post-war period.²²⁹ Note how seamlessly the following passage from *Ruz al-Yusuf* also fuses appeals to each of the three forms of identification to urge armed resistance. Describing the battle of Suez, the reporter writes that Shaikh Salama

stayed in the town [and] continued to live and work like any Egyptian believing in God and his fatherland. But when the hour of battle drew near, he became a hero... This is what will happen on any pure peace of territory of the homeland exposed to aggression... Indeed, this is what the Syrian and the Palestinian do every day on the battle front. The lesson of Suez is that the battle is not over yet, and the role of the popular resistance is alive.²³⁰

Egyptian nationalism, Islam, and Arabism, then, all overlapped inasmuch as they favoured Egypt’s military contribution to resolving the Palestinian problem.

²²⁷ D: 6/1978

²²⁸ D: 8/1976

²²⁹ D: 7/1976

Despite this agreement, however, significant differences remained. Whereas the MB believed in an essentialised ‘Jewish’ other, the left de-constructed such representations. While the left favoured the creation of a secular state in all of Palestine, the Brotherhood preferred an Islamic government. The biggest difference, however, lay in diametrically opposed views of the Soviet Union. Whereas the left favoured Moscow’s continued support of Cairo, the Brotherhood argued that the Kremlin supported Israel just as much as the White House did. Had not the Soviet Union voted for the partition of Palestine in 1948? [Illustration 27]²³¹ The MB’s staunch opposition to Moscow largely stemmed from its *weltanschauung*. According to Banna and Qutb, communism and capitalism were two sides of the same coin because they both constituted ‘materialist’ philosophies conflicting with Islam’s ‘spiritualism’. Thus, while the Brotherhood’s conceptualisation of the Arab-Israeli struggle converged to some extent with the arguments articulated by the left, vital differences remained. As the remainder of the chapter will show, this discursive tension helps explain both the growth of opposition toward the peace process after 1975— as well as its inability to offer any concerted resistance to Sadat’s rapprochement with Israel.

C. ‘The Path toward Peace does not lead to Jerusalem’

In the wake of the Disengagement Treaty, Arab attention was riveted to the Lebanese Civil War. Many Egyptians argued that Kissinger’s success in neutralising Egypt’s resort to military force in the Sinai increased US and Israeli pressure on Lebanon after 1975 [Illustration 28]. Reports of Israeli plans to partition Lebanon into several states along confessional lines surfaced in all major papers.²³² *Al-Da‘wa*, *Ruz al-Yusuf*, and *Al-Tali‘a* concurred that Israel wanted to destroy Lebanon’s delicate fabric of sectarian co-existence to

²³⁰ RY: 4/2/1974

²³¹ D: 4/1977

²³²

undermine the PLO's proposal to found a Palestinian state in which Jewish, Muslim and Christian citizens would enjoy full equality before the law. The UN General Assembly resolution which declared Zionism a form of 'racism' and 'racial discrimination' in November 1975 demonstrated that Israel had trouble justifying her existence as a Jewish supremacist state in the Middle East, *Ruz al-Yusuf* argued. Rending Lebanon's consociationalism was in Israel's interest because it would vindicate Israel's character as an exclusivist entity discriminating against its non-Jewish citizens, *Al-Da'wa* and *Al-Tali'a* contended.²³³ Statements by Israeli Defence Minister David Eliezer that a new Arab-Israeli war was imminent provided little reassurance.²³⁴ Thus, Sadat's signature of the Sinai II Disengagement Treaty was seen as fanning the flames of internecine war in the Levant.

Meanwhile, consistent reports about Washington's unprecedented re-armament of Israel raised fresh doubts about Sadat's pursuit of a *pax Americana*. The arms Israel received between 1975 and 1976 alone amounted to 40 per cent of Washington's entire military aid to Tel Aviv since 1948.²³⁵ Worse still, reports suggested that Israel had developed a nuclear bomb. Kissinger's delivery of Pershing missiles to Israel— which placed Cairo and Baghdad directly within Israel's nuclear orbit— added to Egypt's security fears. Israel's proximity to large Arab population centres like Damascus and Beirut— coupled with the fact that 500,000 Arabs lived on her soil— meant that Arabs leaders would threaten the future of their own populations if they decided to use nuclear weapons against her. However, the reverse was true for Israel. Very few Jews remained in Arab countries. If Israel decided to bomb a remote Arab metropolis like Baghdad or Cairo, she was likely to cripple her enemy at one stroke. The Arab states, Hasan Agha contended, were therefore "exposed to mortal danger."²³⁶ And this irrevocably transformed the nature of any future Arab-Israeli conflict.

²³³ D: 7/1976; 10/1976; RY: 27/10/1975; T: 10/1975

²³⁴ RY: 27/10/1975

²³⁵ D: 10/1977

²³⁶

Tel Aviv's potential threat to shower Arab metropolises with nuclear warheads effectively neutralised Cairo's trump card in the October War—the strength of her conventional forces. In the event of a future conflict, the Arab states would be “paralysed in their military ability to strike while Israel has full freedom of manoeuvre.”²³⁷ In the light of such considerations, Sadat argued that Egypt should sign a peace treaty quickly. Egyptian commentators, however, drew just the opposite conclusion. Mahmud ‘Azmi argued that Israel’s aim was to use the threat of nuclear warfare as a means of extracting territorial concessions from the Arabs in any final status agreement. If the Arabs wanted to neutralise this leverage, they needed to develop nuclear arms as well.²³⁸ This was not an unrealistic prospect. A study conducted by the UN Security Council found that a state investing only \$11 million a year could develop a nuclear bomb within a decade. Moreover, even if there was no point for Cairo to drop any nuclear explosives on Israel, it made perfect sense to develop small-scale tactical nuclear weapons as a military deterrent, Agha contended. These would offset Israel’s ability to threaten Arab states with use of her nuclear weapons. As a result, Israel’s ability to neutralise the impact of Egypt’s conventional forces in any future war would be impaired.²³⁹ *Ruz al-Yusuf* noted the irony of Egypt’s attempts to seek a peace which might literally blow up in her face [Illustration 29].

Despite the growing pressure to safeguard Egypt’s security through increased re-armament, Sadat launched a new diplomatic initiative in November 1977. Mark Tessler and Marilyn Grobschmidt have argued that the rapturous reception Sadat received upon returning from his visit to Jerusalem illustrated “the absence of deep-rooted feelings that would prevent an Arab government accountable to its citizens from accepting a compromise that included recognition of Israel’s existence.”²⁴⁰ Hasan Nafaa, however, has contended that this line of

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ RY: 21/2/1977

²³⁹ T: 9/1975

²⁴⁰

argument skirts the crucial issue. It was not so much a question of whether Egyptians were prepared to accept Israel, but rather what kind of a peace settlement they would obtain. Popular acceptance of a peace treaty hinged on the extent to which it could satisfy Palestinian demands for national self-determination, because a return of the Sinai was the minimum Egyptians felt they were entitled to after the October War. Sadat's demand for an unconditional Israeli withdrawal to the boundaries of 1967 in his speech to the Knesset thus appeared as a defence of Arab rights. Most Egyptians felt their President had stepped into the lion's den and given the enemy a piece of his mind. Therefore, it would be "misleading" to construe Sadat's popular reception in 1977 "as national support for what happened after signing the treaty."²⁴¹

A look at press reactions to the visit corroborates Nafaa's interpretation. Contrary to what Tessler and Grobschmidt contend, support for Sadat's initiative was not universal. When Sadat announced his intention to travel to Jerusalem, Foreign Minister Ibrahim Fahmi promptly tendered his resignation. Moreover, *Tagammu'* criticised the visit before it had even begun, arguing that the path toward peace "did not lead to Jerusalem." The party identified fully with Sadat's search for peace, but this was precisely why it disagreed with the means Sadat deployed to that end. Sadat's speech to the Knesset was objectionable because it seemed to legitimise Israel's claim that Jerusalem constituted the country's 'eternal capital'. Not even Washington had accepted this argument. Even worse, the map draped across the walls of the Knesset embodied Herzl's vision of 'Greater Israel' stretching from the Nile to the Euphrates. By addressing Israel's parliament, Sadat appeared to acquiesce in the future expropriation of Arab and Egyptian land.²⁴²

Press: Indianapolis, 1995. 150

²⁴¹ Nafaa, Hasan. "Arab Nationalism: A Response to Ajami's Thesis on the 'End of Pan-Arabism' in Farah, Tawfiq. *Pan-Arabism and Arab Nationalism: The Continuing Debate*. Westview: London, 1987. 144

Al-Ahali's main objections concerned strategy. The paper argued that it was impossible to achieve peace unless each party to the conflict was in equal need of reconciliation. As long as the Arabs were too weak to enforce Israeli withdrawals, Tel Aviv would see no need to end the occupation. This was "an objective law independent of the will of the two parties." The problem was that rather than strengthen the Arabs' position toward Israel, the visit weakened it— and this at a time when Israel's military strength had grown by 180 per cent compared to 1973. Sadat's statement that the October War would be the last Arab-Israeli conflict meant that Cairo had forfeited the Arabs' most valuable bargaining chip. Even worse, Sadat's failure to consult with any other Arab leader before conducting the trip sowed divisions at a time when Arab unity was desperately needed to counter Israel. Thus, the fragmentation of Arab ranks was discursively linked to an absence of democratic deliberation. *Al-Ahali* lamented that "no democratic dialogue" had been conducted on an issue that concerned "the destiny of all Arabs." Such dialogue "might have offered a vision" of Egypt's "political vitality" to the world. The paper stressed that it exercised its right to criticise the visit because any "genuine democracy" rendered constructive opposition "incumbent upon each party and citizen."²⁴³ Thus, while Tessler and Grobshmidt focus on the issue of Israel's recognition, *Al-Ahali*'s preoccupation with the type of peace treaty Egypt was likely to obtain reveals preoccupation with the issue of Arab solidarity and democracy.

The criticism of the left dovetailed somewhat with the Brotherhood's own objections. For the first time, the MB openly questioned Sadat's foreign policy. Tilmisani emphasised that Islam "prohibits the Muslim from agreeing to detach a part of his land through voluntary sanction." Even if superior force compelled a Muslim to acknowledge the usurpation of his land as an objective fact, a Muslim "does not resign himself to giving his voluntary approval."²⁴⁴ Like *Al-Ahali*, *Al-Da'wa* blamed Sadat for fragmenting Arab ranks. Insofar as

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴

his journey divided Muslims, Sadat became guilty of sowing strife (*fitna*) in the Islamic *umma*. This was objectionable because God had said that “those who fragment their religion and form sects I do not esteem them highly.” It was not simply a matter of incurring divine disapproval though. Insofar as he was blamed for fragmenting Muslim ranks, Sadat also appeared to aggravate Egypt’s security predicament.²⁴⁵ For “the defence of Palestine” was synonymous with the “defence of Damascus, Baghdad and Cairo.”²⁴⁶ Arabism continued to inform the Brotherhood’s view of Egypt’s national security interests.

The Brotherhood’s criticism also squared with *Al-Ahali* to the extent that it emphasised the absence of democracy in Egypt. *Al-Da‘wa* resented the way in which the ‘brainwashing’ orchestrated by the state-controlled media in the wake of Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem curbed free thought. ‘Abd al-‘Azim Mu‘tani began by arguing that the propaganda offended common sense. The problem, he said, was that the official media exaggerated the likelihood of securing peace “to the point of siding with Israel, absolving her from all responsibility, and making excuses for her crimes toward the Arabs and Palestinians.” Following Sadat’s visit, the state-controlled broadcast suddenly depicted Israel as “a peace-loving country opposed to war.” According to Mu‘tani, this claim was preposterous. For if Israel truly wanted peace, why had she launched three aggressive wars against Egypt in 1956, 1967 and 1969? Had Israel not repeatedly attacked southern Lebanon since the end of the October War? If Israel was truly peace-loving, why had she not volunteered to return occupied Arab land in exchange for a settlement after the October War? The argument that Israel was peace-loving was not only an insult to common sense, Mu‘tani argued. Worse still, it suggested “that we are the actual villains of the piece.”²⁴⁷ The Egyptian media thus appeared to have swallowed Zionist propaganda hook, line and sinker.

²⁴⁵ D: 12/1977

²⁴⁶ D: 1/1978

²⁴⁷

The attempt to present Israel in a favourable light ultimately meant imposing a new orthodoxy to the detriment of all dissenting voices. The suppression of free speech, however, was contrary to 'Islam', Mu'tani maintained. Following Sadat's return from Jerusalem, an editorial in one of Cairo's daily newspapers had argued that "Islamic history needs to be re-written from scratch because it was penned in a spirit of hostility toward the Jews." Even if Egyptians were to assume that Israel was peace-loving, Mu'tani objected, it was impossible to acquiesce in any "falsification of our history." History was a 'trusteeship' whose events had to be recorded as they occurred "without adding to, or subtracting from them." However, the journalist's suggestion also violated religious scripture. For did not the *Qur'an* tell Muslims that "you will find the most hostile people toward believers the Jews and polytheists" (5)? This was not to say that Islam sanctioned the oppression of Jews, Mu'tani emphasised, for God told believers, "do not allow your hatred for other men to turn you away from justice. Deal justly, that is nearer to true piety" (5:8). After emigrating to Madina, Muhammad had granted the Jews freedom of worship and equality before the law. Indeed, argued Mu'tani, treating minorities with respect was a duty for "God loves the equitable" (*She who is tested*: 80).²⁴⁸

The problem was rather that Sadat's propaganda tried to downplay the historical fact that the Jews in Madina had betrayed their covenant with Muhammad. The implication was profound. The official media's attempt to re-write Islamic history implied that the *Qur'an*—revered as the literal expression of God's word—was wrong. The issue then boiled down to one of representation and authority, for "should we believe you or the *Qur'an*?" Mu'tani asked.²⁴⁹ The limitations that the peace process imposed upon the freedom of speech thus violated the most sacred tenets of the Brotherhood's belief. And this undermined the legitimacy of Sadat's régime itself. Tilmisani ostensibly warned the President that "the enemy

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

will exterminate you the day he can vanquish your people” for “no ruler or power will remain unless its people is strong. The power and honour of a ruler depends upon ... his people’s strength and honour.”²⁵⁰

The debates pre-occupying Egyptians after Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem in 1977 therefore did not focus primarily on the question of Israel’s recognition, as Tessler and Grobschmidt imply. Both *Al-Da‘wa* and *Al-Ahali* feared that the fragmentation resulting from the visit would weaken the Arab nation as a whole. What was new this time was that discussions also began to concentrate on the likely repression which a peace treaty would entail for Egyptians themselves. While *Al-Ahali* bemoaned the lack of democratic debate ahead of Sadat’s journey, *Al-Da‘wa* criticised subsequent limitations on the freedom of speech. Insofar as the opposition drew attention to the way in which a peace treaty threatened to erode the limited democratic freedoms Egyptians had tasted after the October War, it helped increase resistance to the peace process after November 1977.

D. ‘No Normal or Stable Condition’

Israel’s invasion of southern Lebanon in March 1978 appeared to confirm the thesis that Egypt’s safety was inextricably bound up with that of other Arabs. Tel Aviv’s phased retreat after a week of intense combat provided only cold comfort. According to *Al-Ahali*, the invasion served as a graphic reminder that a separate peace with Egypt would allow Israel to liquidate the Palestinian presence. After all, Israeli Defence Minister Ezer Weizman had used the hotline established between Cairo and Tel Aviv in November 1977 to ask Sadat for restraint in Cairo’s official response to the incursion.²⁵¹ As *Al-Da‘wa* emphasised, Israel agreed to withdraw only after neutralising the Palestinian Resistance. Israel’s invasion ultimately served to discredit US mediation on the Egyptian-Israeli track. While American

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

officials insisted on Israel's right to secure boundaries, "it has not occurred to anyone to offer security to the Arabs." On every occasion, "our American friends announce that the balance of power must remain" in Israel's favour. The result, effectively, was to impose an arms embargo on the Arabs, Salim argued.²⁵² While Carter agreed to sell Cairo military jets in the summer of 1978, US officials admitted that Washington would not have consented to the deal "if American planes to Saudi Arabia and Egypt constituted a threat to Israel."²⁵³ Because the planes served defensive purposes only, the delivery did "not change the balance of power in the Middle East in Egypt's favour."²⁵⁴ Israel's perceived threats to Arab security ultimately undermined the wisdom of pursuing peace with a sabre-rattling neighbour. Even if Tel Aviv signed a peace treaty with Egypt, "it would be nothing but a truce."²⁵⁵

Given these fears, the state-run media emphasised the economic dividend expected to accrue from a peace treaty instead.²⁵⁶ Realists and Liberals have typically invoked Egypt's faltering economy to support the argument that ordinary Egyptians favoured a separate peace with Israel— if only for the hard currency and foreign investment it would provide.

According to Telhami, conspicuous consumption by *nouveau-riche* Gulf Arabs in Cairo reinforced "the fundamental resentment" that ordinary Egyptians harboured "toward their oil-rich Arab brethren ... in matters of day to day life." Inter-Arab disparities of wealth supposedly reduced the appeal of Arabism and helped pave the way for a separate peace treaty with Israel. Thus, "whatever dissonance would emerge from the abandonment of Arabism could probably easily be rationalised."²⁵⁷ Telhami implies that Sadat judged the mood in his country accurately and therefore made a rational decision to trade Arab solidarity for hard currency.

²⁵² D: 4/1978

²⁵³ D: 6/1978

²⁵⁴ AH: 22/2/1978

²⁵⁵ D 4/1978

²⁵⁶ D: 5/1978

²⁵⁷

A close reading of the press, however, shows that this is a *non sequitur*. Despite promises of future wealth, the likelihood that peace would produce prosperity looked doubtful. “They said Egypt needs hard currency,” Tilmisani argued “but then they opened the doors of this country and the crisis ballooned.” The problem was that Sadat identified ‘peace’ with the same kind of neo-liberal policies which— in the eyes of many observers— had aggravated Egypt’s economic crisis in the first place. Sadat’s promises of the untold riches a peace treaty would supply was “an illusion with which they try to dupe the Egyptian citizen.”²⁵⁸ According to Yusuf Kamal, the Gulf Arabs’ failure to sponsor a ‘Marshall Plan’ for Egypt after the October War, indeed, was deplorable. Egypt had sacrificed her soldiers in October 1973 so that the Gulf states could impose the oil embargo and cream off profits. However, Kamal did not therefore conclude that Egypt should shed her pan-Arab commitments. Since the value of the dollar had slipped by more than 50 per cent between 1966 and 1976, the Gulf Arabs’ decision to deposit their oil rent in Western banks had resulted in net losses worth \$14 billion. Hence, it would be better for the Gulf Arabs to invest in Egypt, Kamal argued. Insofar as such investments would resuscitate Egypt’s faltering economy, they would allow Cairo to resume her historical role at the helm of the Arab liberation movement. And once Cairo exerted military pressure on Israel, the Gulf Arabs could impose a new oil embargo as in 1973.²⁵⁹ The solution to economic disparities with the Gulf lay in more, not less Arab unity.

The belief that the cure for Egypt’s economic decline lay in Arabism also informed the views of the bourgeoisie supporting Sadat’s *Infitah*. In February 1978, Sadat had permitted the neo-liberal Wafd Party to be resurrected. Officially, the New Wafd supported a peace treaty with Israel only under the proviso that it resolve the Palestinian problem. More than a third of all party members believed that respect for Palestinian rights assumed primacy over a

²⁵⁸ D: 4/1978
²⁵⁹

concern for narrow Egyptian interests. Support for this view steadily grew throughout 1978. In keeping with their neo-liberal ideology, all Wafdists wanted to develop strong economic links with the rest of the Arab world. Once it became clear that Sadat's rapprochement with Israel would lead to a break with Egypt's Arab neighbours, the New Wafd dissented from the peace process. The shift appears to have reflected the views of its constituency. A survey of upper middle class Egyptian students conducted after Sadat's visit to Jerusalem found that 71 per cent felt they were primarily 'Egyptian' rather than 'Arab'. Identification with Egypt, however, did not preclude attachment to Arabism, since 71 per cent also believed that Egypt was part of the 'Arab nation'. Sixty per cent felt that Egypt should only make peace if Israel returned *all* occupied Arab territories and permitted the creation of an independent Palestinian state.²⁶⁰

While the Wafdists' staunch secularism precluded an alignment with the Brotherhood in opposition to the peace process, they locked step with the NPUP. In the spring of 1978, both caucuses co-ordinated blistering attacks on the peace process in the People's Assembly. In May 1978, Sadat cracked down. Rather than submit to a purge of its leaders, the New Wafd voted to disband itself voluntarily.²⁶¹ Simultaneously, Sadat staged a plebiscite banning all 'communists' and 'unbelievers' from political activity. While the NPUP refused to dissolve itself voluntarily, Sadat stopped short of outlawing the party. From the summer of 1978, the party could no longer hold public meetings. In September, several independent NPUP members published a declaration to encourage the formation of a national coalition against Camp David. Yet *Al-Ahali* was shut down in October after devoting an entire edition to a scathing indictment of the peace process.²⁶² Nonetheless, a loosely organised "Group of 100" had crystallised within the party opposing the peace process by the beginning of 1979.²⁶³

²⁶⁰ Hinnebusch, 208-33

²⁶¹ Ibid., 198, 208-217

²⁶² Beattie, 244

²⁶³

“Possessed of a viable cadre organisation and still able to speak for an articulate segment of the attentive public,” the NPUP “could not be wholly ignored by the régime.” Yet “only in concert with other opposition forces could it seriously challenge it.”²⁶⁴ While opposition to the peace process thus grew steadily ahead of Sadat’s journey to Camp David, repression could still keep a lid on the mounting discontent of an opposition split between the official parties and the extra-parliamentary Brotherhood.

By the time Sadat travelled to Camp David, considerable opposition to a separate agreement with Israel had crystallised. The Camp David Accords concluded in September 1978 did not constitute a separate peace yet. Rather, they outlined a framework for future negotiations for an Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. Sadat accepted a division of the Accords into two separate categories. In the first section, Israel committed herself to a full withdrawal from the Sinai. In return, Cairo agreed to ‘normalise’ relations with its northern neighbour. The second part outlined proposals for granting ‘autonomy’ to the Occupied Territories. The de-coupling of the two sections signalled that Egypt would not be able to withhold the normalisation of bilateral relations as leverage until Israel implemented ‘autonomy’ in the West Bank. While the Accords referred to ‘the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people’, they did not mention their ‘right to self-determination’. Sadat accepted administrative ‘autonomy’ for the Occupied Territories though he had rejected the concept a few months earlier.²⁶⁵ Israel, Jordan, Egypt and the Palestinians were to determine the exact modalities of autonomy in joint negotiations. However, since the Accords referred to “Palestinians *as mutually agreed*,” Israel retained a veto over PLO participation. After a five-year interim period, the final status of the “West Bank and Gaza and its relationship with its neighbours” would be determined. But because there was no commitment to a *full* Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories, the formula basically rubberstamped Israel’s continued occupation.

Even worse, the Accords neither contained provisions to dismantle existing Jewish settlements nor a moratorium on the construction of new ones.

Opposition to the Accords in Egypt fell along a continuum ranging from outright criticism of Sadat to a more conciliatory stance. While Egypt's left opposed the Accords tooth and nail, the Brotherhood showed more restraint. In fact, the left criticised Tilmisani's "timidity."²⁶⁶ The latter insisted that Islam did not permit criticism to turn into slander, "for God weighs intentions before He weighs actions." The problem, according to Tilmisani, was that the Accords breached a ruling by Islamic jurists which held that "if a part of Muslim land is occupied, and Muslims are able to retrieve but do not do so, they sin collectively." Given Begin's statements that the Accords legitimised Israel's continued sovereignty over the Occupied Territories, it was extremely doubtful that Camp David would usher into regional peace settlement, Tilmisani argued.²⁶⁷

The first part of the Accords dealing with the proposed Egyptian-Israeli peace was no less objectionable. "Where is the full withdrawal if our troops are denied freedom of manoeuvre other than within 50 kilometres east of the Canal?" Tilmisani asked. While Egyptian forces could not move across the Sinai, international forces were free to patrol the peninsula as they wished, and "everyone knows the interests these states share with Israel."²⁶⁸ Needless to say, the Accords contained no corresponding provisions limiting the number or movement of Israeli forces beyond the border. 'Peace' thus appeared to prolong the occupation. No free state would ever accept restrictions on the freedom of movement of its forces on its own soil in a state of peace, Ihsan 'Abd al-Qaddus contended. Hence, the Camp

²⁶⁵ Stein, 253

²⁶⁶ D: 12/1978

²⁶⁷ D: 10/1978

David Accords “might be considered a temporary” arrangement, “but they cannot be considered a normal or stable condition.”²⁶⁹

Sadat’s failure to heed such sentiments produced growing pressures for democratisation. According to the Brotherhood, the Accords violated the spirit of democracy. Tilmisani argued that every individual in an Islamic nation possesses “the right to advise a ruler about what he sees as being wrong.” The ruler needed “to open his heart for every advice or criticism that may be directed at him.” By virtue of such a dialogue “the affairs of nations are set aright, and the conditions of the people are improved.”²⁷⁰ According to Salim, “the differences between the Arabs,” he continued “in truth is only a difference between the Arabs’ leaders and rulers, not between their peoples. Applause for one ruler .. does not indicate the support of the nation.” If the people resorted to silence, this did not mean that they accepted Israeli aggression and a surrender of their land, Salim maintained.²⁷¹ As a result, *Al-Da’wa* argued that Arab régimes have lost their *raison d’être*. They had curbed democratic freedoms under the pretext of cementing national unity to confront Israeli aggression. But the Accords illustrated their utter failure to liberate any land. Quite the opposite, the Accords entrenched Israel’s occupation. Since Arab rulers could no longer be relied upon to represent the national interest, their political power needed to be curbed.²⁷²

Despite ideological differences, the criticism of the left thus echoed that of the Brotherhood. Insofar as Sadat’s pursuit of a settlement with Israel violated shared conceptions of Egypt’s national interest, the ‘peace’ process highlighted the absence of democracy within Egypt. Notwithstanding their joint opposition, underlying political differences precluded the formation of a cohesive platform challenging Sadat’s foreign policy. Though it opposed a separate peace, the New Wafd’s secular outlook precluded an alliance with the *Ikhwan*.

²⁶⁹ D: 11/1978

²⁷⁰ Ibid

²⁷¹ D: 12/1978

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Thanks to the régime's support for the Brotherhood on university campuses, the left eyed Tilmisani's acolytes with deep-seated suspicion.²⁷³ Rumours that Islamists were planning to assassinate writers of *Ruz al-Yusuf* exacerbated the cleavage.²⁷⁴ Moreover, by the time the Camp David Accords were signed, Tilmisani "den[ied] anyone the right to exploit our view in support of their position." The left's "exploitation of our view is wrong because we express our view for the satisfaction of God alone and not for our opponents."²⁷⁵ As the following chapter will show, the atomisation of the opposition impeded concerted opposition to the peace process, even as dissatisfaction with Camp David ironically rose in the run-up to Egypt's 'Autumn of Fury'.

²⁷³ RY: 12/9/1976

²⁷⁴ RY: 12/12/1976

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6. 'No Peace for Egypt': March 1979 - October 1981

The régime's ability to ride out the mounting domestic crisis— albeit at the expense of Sadat's life— has often been interpreted as proof that Arabism had declined in Egypt. As Michael Barnett and Telhami put it, “a pan-Arabist Egypt could not have made bilateral peace with Israel.”²⁷⁶ However, as the foregoing discussion illustrated, Egyptians continued to identify their own security with that of other Arabs. The present chapter will argue that rather than indicate the demise of Arabism, the period leading up to the 'Autumn of Fury' was characterised by its resurgence— given that the increase in Israeli militarism after Camp David appeared to confirm the fears of Sadat's critics that Egypt's withdrawal from 'the battle' would expose the entire Arab world to Tel Aviv's onslaught. The perception of an acute Israeli threat produced a paradoxical development. Growing anxiety over Egypt's vulnerability increased opposition to the peace process. Yet Sadat's decision to respond with brute force, allowed him to paper over the growing discontent by exploiting cleavages between the left and Islamists. In the long run, however, repression only de-legitimised his own rule. While Sadat's mass arrest of opposition figures in the autumn of 1981 could limit the damage, it could not save Sadat himself from the people's fury. Thus rather than explain the comparatively smooth transition to Husni Mubarak's presidency in terms of a decline in Arabism, the following chapter will stress the potency of suppression.

Even before he signed a separate peace, Sadat took a number of steps to silence mounting criticism of the peace process. His decision to dissolve the People's Assembly in January 1979 two months before he inked the Camp David Treaty provided the clearest indication yet that the peace process would erode the limited democratisation effected after the October War. To discipline an increasingly unruly caucus within his own party, Sadat purged 200 NDP deputies. Opposition party candidates were not only prohibited from

broaching Camp David in their campaigns, but they also faced open intimidation. Reports that ballot boxes were stuffed in several constituencies abounded. The only two opponents of Camp David to be re-elected possessed private militias able to confront government forces who harrassed voters in their constituencies.²⁷⁷ Sadat also interfered in elections for Egypt's professional syndicates ensuring that Ahmad al-Khawaga would triumph against a declared opponent of the peace process in elections for the leadership of the Lawyers' Syndicate in 1978.²⁷⁸

Liberal scholars like Janice Stein have interpreted Sadat's ability to de-fang organised opposition in 1979 as evidence of the President's rational decision-making.²⁷⁹ The election of docile deputies supposedly proved that his cost-benefit calculation regarding Camp David had been correct. Part of the problem with Stein's argument is that her analysis abruptly ends in 1979, whereas opposition to the peace process built up until 1981. Moreover, the political reality in 1979 was more complex than election results alone would indicate. While members of the Journalists' Syndicate preferred to elect complaisant representatives to secure official patronage, Nasirites and Marxists continued to dominate the organisation until the President's assassination. Nor was the installation of a malleable chairperson in the Lawyer's Syndicate any guarantee of perpetual loyalty. Within a short period, Khawaga metamorphosed into a fierce critic of Camp David, turning the Bar Association into "a true cauldron of political opposition."²⁸⁰

While fickle loyalties complicated Sadat's efforts to contain opposition after 1979, his desire to maintain a façade of democratic legitimacy also placed logical limits on the expediency of relying on repression to assert control. Following his crackdown on the NPUP,

²⁷⁶ Telhami and Barnett, 17

²⁷⁷ Hinnebusch, 173 and Beattie, 240-1

²⁷⁸ Bianchi, Robert. *Unruly Corporatism: Associational Life in Twentieth-Century Egypt*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1989. 110-111

²⁷⁹ Stein in Evans et al. 78-89

²⁸⁰

Sadat tried to create a more pliant left-of-centre opposition in December 1978. Thus, he asked Ibrahim al-Shukri to head the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) in the hope of co-opting NPUP voters and New Wafdists. The core of SLP members espoused a populist Egyptian nationalism “not at all dissimilar to Nasirism.” However, following Sadat’s growing rapprochement with the West, the party increasingly attracted the President’s disenchanted establishment supporters.²⁸¹ Its heterogeneous membership enhanced Shukri’s ability to project the movement as “a rallying point for opposition elements.” SLP leaders “occupied an interesting middle ground” between New Wafdists, moderate Islamists, Egyptian patriots and Arab nationalists. The party’s “populist socialism” still “left much room to attract national capitalists.”²⁸² In the 1979 elections, the SLP won 29 seats in Parliament. By 1980, it possessed 180,000 registered members and sold more than 60,000 copies of its weekly newspaper *Al-Sha‘b* through which the party “reached a significant section of the ‘attentive public’.”²⁸³ Its editors “knew that opposition to Israel and the Camp David Treaty was the one common denominator among nearly all opposition elements, and they hit hard upon this theme.” According to Kirk Beattie, the paper contributed “significantly to efforts to form an opposition coalition during the 1980-81 period.” By heating up “the political atmosphere,” *Al-Sha‘b* “in a direct sense ... set the stage for Sadat’s assassination.”²⁸⁴

When Sadat signed the Camp David Treaty in March 1979, however, the situation was less clear-cut. It is true that an important segment of the Islamist constituency had broken with the régime by now. Sadat’s trip to Jerusalem had radicalised the *Gama‘at* who trounced their opponents in student council elections between 1977 and 1978. From 1978 onward, they also began to call mass prayers in public squares attracting up to 70,000 people.²⁸⁵ Following the Islamists’ take-over of campuses in Minya and Asyut, Sadat ordered a heavy-handed

²⁸¹ Hinnebusch, 167-170

²⁸² Beattie, 245-7

²⁸³ Hinnebusch, 167-170

²⁸⁴ Beattie, 246

crackdown in April 1979.²⁸⁶ Notwithstanding the agitation, however, the situation was still relatively fluid. Despite wide-spread scepticism regarding Israeli intentions, Sadat's achievements could only be gainsaid with difficulty. For the first time ever, Israel had committed herself in print to withdraw from a substantial portion of Arab land. Despite all prevarications, Begin had put his signature on a document that provided a vehicle for resolving the Palestinian problem. Thus, many Egyptians briefly welcomed the Treaty as a means of retrieving the Sinai and the Occupied Territories.

The SLP greeted Camp David with conditional support. This approval hinged on Israel's withdrawal from all occupied Arab land, Egypt's return to Arab ranks, and the normalisation of relations following Israel's withdrawal from the Occupied Territories.²⁸⁷ Israel's decision to complete the first stage of her withdrawal from the Sinai ahead of schedule revived hopes for a withdrawal from the Occupied Territories. After all, Israel was now demolishing settlements she had been built during the Camp David negotiations. Might she not do the same in Palestine later? Shukri recalled that Tunisian President Habib Burqiba had secured independence following the maxim "take what you can today, and ask for more tomorrow." Shukri's belief that Egypt's isolation from the Arab world would be short-lived strengthened his optimism. Since the Rejectionists had already acknowledged Israel's right to live within secure borders by agreeing to UNSCR 242, he felt that inter-Arab disputes were cosmetic differences over means rather than ends.²⁸⁸ Ostensibly, the SLP agreed to Camp David "in response to popular fervour for the peace initiative."²⁸⁹ The SLP's conditional approval of the Treaty reflected wide-spread hopes that Camp David might lead to a recovery of the Occupied Territories.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 253

²⁸⁶ Gaffney, 105

²⁸⁷ SH: 1/5/1979

²⁸⁸ SH: 22/5/1979

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Even those who rejected the Accords did so with reservations. Tilmisani neither “criticise[d] the President for exerting every effort to find peace,” nor would he “place any obstacles in his way.”²⁹⁰ Though it remained pessimistic about the prospects of Israel’s withdrawal, the Brotherhood supported the liberation of any Muslim land— like the Sinai— without sacrificing the aim of retrieving all occupied territories later.²⁹¹ As long as it was unclear whether Israel would actually honour her Treaty commitments, there was some room for ambiguity. Even as relations between Egypt and Israel soured, Tilmisani stressed that he was “not asking for the Egyptian army to advance on Tel Aviv to throw ... Israel into the sea.”²⁹² If the MB rejected Camp David, this was rather because peace did not go far enough.

According to Tilmisani, “the desire for peace is one thing, the means of achieving it another.”²⁹³ Genuine peace, Tilmisani insisted, had to be one between peoples and not simply between two governments. Moreover, it had to be ‘comprehensive’. Nor could any side exploit the other. In the event, Camp David met none of these conditions. The continued occupation of Arab land, not only suggested that the Treaty was ‘a partial rather than a comprehensive peace’, but also that it came at the expense of one party.²⁹⁴ However, the Brotherhood’s stance was not one of unmitigated rejection. By 1978, *al-Da‘wa* had begun distancing itself from earlier calls for a return to the pre-1948 borders of Palestine and spoke almost exclusively of the need to reclaim the West Bank and Gaza strip alone.²⁹⁵ More significantly, Tilmisani criticised Syria for preventing the PLO from participating in the Autonomy Talks between Egypt and Israel.²⁹⁶ Tilmisani’s view that Israel’s inflexibility in the autonomy talks “only strengthens the Rejectionist states” betrays an implicit acceptance of

²⁹⁰ D: 3/1979

²⁹¹ Abdel Nasser, Walid Mahmoud. *The Islamic Movement in Egypt: Perceptions of International Relations, 1967-1981* Kegan Paul International: London, 1994. 130

²⁹² D: 9/1980

²⁹³ D: 3/1979

²⁹⁴ D: 9/1979.

²⁹⁵ Abdel Nasser, 129. From my own research, it appears that the March 1979 edition of *Al-Da‘wa* was the last issue, in which Tilmisani openly called for a return to the pre-1948 borders of Palestine.

the negotiations as a framework for retrieving the Occupied Territories.²⁹⁷ Thus, while the MB rejected Camp David, this appears to have been a ‘conditional rejection’ based on doubts over whether the treaty would return the Occupied Territories rather than any categorical repudiation.²⁹⁸

However, Begin soon dashed such hopes, as talks for Palestinian autonomy stipulated in the Camp David Accords headed for an impasse. The Brotherhood’s pan-Arab perspective allowed it to portray the lack of progress as a threat to Egyptian security. According to *Al-Da’wa*, setbacks in the negotiations “clearly indicate that we were right when he said that we did not trust Israel.” Begin’s behaviour thus confirmed the Brotherhood’s ‘conditional rejection’ of the Treaty. Ultimately, Israel’s refusal to concede Palestinian rights was perceived as a threat to Egypt’s own safety for “if one part of the Arab world is ravished, so is every other part.”²⁹⁹ This was not just a rhetorical flourish. Tilmisani feared that Israel might interpret Egypt’s acquiescence in Tel Aviv’s expansion of Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories as a sign of weakness and exploit the situation to her advantage.³⁰⁰ He reminded his readers that Israel still occupied a third of the Sinai. The régime’s inability to guarantee Egypt’s safety, in turn, offered implicit grounds for questioning its legitimacy. Israel’s vast military superiority over Arab “military dictatorships built on the suppression of their peoples” was due to the fact that she “is the only democratic state in the region.” If Israel had not been defeated in war, this was because the unfettered exercise of public pressure “helps reveal every mistake” in military planning.³⁰¹ The unstated implication was that Egypt’s security would continue to be threatened if Sadat persisted in monopolising decisions on the nation’s defence. Tilmisani also implied that the protection of Egypt’s safety implied the need to abolish of one-person rule.

²⁹⁷ D: 4/1980; 6/1980

²⁹⁸ Heikal (1983), 117

²⁹⁹ D: 9/1979

³⁰⁰ D: 10/1979

While Israel's refusal to grant the Palestinians full autonomy confirmed the Brotherhood's initial rejection of Camp David, it soon led the SLP to re-examine its conditional support of the Treaty. After all, "peace is indivisible." Begin "is required to implement the entire Treaty and not just certain clauses."³⁰² The implications were momentous. If Israel used peace to accomplish what she had not been able to obtain by war, then "Camp David was just an armistice, not a comprehensive peace."³⁰³ Like *Al-Da'wa*, *Al-Sha'b* concluded that Israel's dilution of the comprehensive spirit of peace was the prelude to a renewed attack on Egypt. Historical precedents seemed to suggest that Camp David was an unreliable guarantee of safety. Ben-Gurion had breached the Armistice Agreement of 1949 by launching the Suez Canal War in 1956. Because it guaranteed "security of each side and freedom from fear of attack ... until a safe solution to the Palestinian problem has been reached," the Armistice Agreement "already established the framework for a peace treaty," Mahmud Riyad contended. And since clauses in the Armistice Agreement were remarkably similar to those found in the Camp David Accords, he concluded that Egypt had strong reason to doubt Israel's sincerity.³⁰⁴ The acute perception of Egypt's territorial vulnerability thus led the SLP to re-consider its conditional support for Camp David in the early months of 1980.

The re-examination of policy reflected increasing restiveness among the opposition and the population at large. Khawaga had begun turning the Lawyer's Syndicate "into a veritable bastion of opposition activity" by organising public discussions to denounce the peace treaty. Since the Syndicate contained a wide spectrum of political orientations, it was well placed to co-ordinate efforts unifying the opposition.³⁰⁵ In January 1980, it officially rejected normalisation of relations until Israel's complete withdrawal from all Arab land

³⁰¹ D: 9/1979

³⁰² SH: 26/2/1980

³⁰³ SH: 20/5/1980

³⁰⁴ SH: 8/4/1980

³⁰⁵

occupied in 1967.³⁰⁶ The Journalists' Syndicate followed suit.³⁰⁷ At the same time, the Free Officers 'Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi and Kamal al-Din Husain attempted to build a national coalition Socialists, Wafdists, Muslim Brothers, and various NPUP members. A dozen well-known politicians also signed a petition to end normalisation.³⁰⁸ *Al-Sha'b* organised a campaign on 26 February 1980- the day the Israeli embassy was opened- allowing the people to "express their anger" by hoisting "a million Palestinian flags to welcome one Israeli flag in Cairo."³⁰⁹

When the Lawyers' Syndicate burned two Israeli flags that day, some of its members openly called for Sadat's downfall.³¹⁰ The agitation struck a popular chord. In what became the country's first politically motivated kidnapping, an ordinary farmer called Sa'd Halawa tried to trade hostages for an end to normalisation in a village outside Cairo. During his stand-off with the police, Halawa played patriotic songs by 'Abd al-Halim Hafiz evoking the 'Abd al-Nasir period.³¹¹ Simultaneously, the MB and various *Gama'at* launched protest rallies against normalisation in April 1980.³¹² In May, several prominent opposition figures authored another petition calling for an end to normalisation. In a sign of increasing cross-party consensus, its signatories now included both members of the left and of the Brotherhood. Once the SLP had joined the MB and the NPUP in their rejection of normalisation, opposition to the Treaty became the primary unifying force among the opposition. Nonetheless, the persistence of strong mutual suspicions between the left and the Brotherhood thwarted efforts to establish a more concerted national front.³¹³

³⁰⁶ SH: 29/1/1980

³⁰⁷ SH: 26/2/1980

³⁰⁸ Beattie, 260

³⁰⁹ SH: 4/3/1980; 11/3/1980

³¹⁰ Beattie, 251

³¹¹ Safty, Adel. *From Camp David to the Gulf: Negotiations, Language & Propaganda, and War*. Black Rose Books: Montreal, 1992. 110

³¹² D: 5/1980

³¹³

In the light of these divisions, the government was able to reduce the agitation through increased repression. In February 1980, Sadat promulgated the Law of Shame which entered into force in May. The Law created a special 'Court of Values' which suspended from public life anyone "broadcasting or publishing false or misleading news or information which could inflame public opinion."³¹⁴ Once it had been passed, a renunciation of Camp David could have meant the suspension of the SLP's existence as a party. In the absence of a concerted cross-party effort to resist the government, the SLP refrained from withdrawing its support of the Accords for the time being.³¹⁵

Yet while the law temporarily weakened the opposition, paradoxically, it also fuelled more long-term discontent against the peace process. *Al-Sha'b* interpreted the Law of Shame as an attempt specifically to silence the anti-normalisation movement.³¹⁶ Because peace again appeared synonymous with authoritarianism, the opposition was able to equate the struggle against normalisation with a defence of political freedom. *Al-Sha'b* increasingly spoke of the "need to close our ranks to resist this onslaught against democracy."³¹⁷ Arguing that Israel's military strength was a function of her democratic system, Sadat's former Foreign Minister Isma'il Fahmi also maintained that "the normalisation of relations between Egypt and Israel forces us to understand that there is a necessity to establish genuine and unfettered democracy in Egypt." Fahmi's statement that "the end of the state of war with Israel and the promulgation of laws to this end cannot be welcomed so long as there is a war of laws in Egypt" suggested that the government's stand only hardened opposition to the Treaty.³¹⁸ Paradoxically, the calming of tensions by the summer of 1980, therefore, masked the way in which the government's growing authoritarianism stoked opposition to the peace treaty.

³¹⁴ Heikal (1983), 110

³¹⁵ Beattie, 260

³¹⁶ SH: 4/3/1980

³¹⁷ SH: 4/3/1980

³¹⁸

While the SLP put plans to withdraw its support for Camp David into cold storage, a series of new developments kept *Al-Sha‘b* on the offensive. First, the Israeli Knesset declared Jerusalem its ‘eternal and indivisible capital’ on 30 July 1980. For most observers, it was clear that Sadat’s peace (*salam*) meant surrender (*istislam*).³¹⁹ Even worse was Sadat’s agreement in October 1980 to divert the Nile to Israel to help Tel Aviv settle three million Soviet Jews in the Negev desert. Both *Al-Da‘wa* and *Al-Sha‘b* agreed that the offer constituted an attack on Egypt itself. By extending the Nile water “as an exclusive gift to a hostile occupying power,” Sadat ensured that “our land is taken twice. First by military occupation, then by thirst and depopulation ... and then shall ... Israel watch us perish?” By increasing Israel’s capacity to absorb thousands of new settlers, Egypt would also raise Israel’s manpower and productivity for future wars. Even worse, the water might be used to power a new nuclear reactor in the Negev desert.³²⁰

Writing in *Al-Sha‘b*, Ni‘ama Fu‘ad concurred. A well-known historian, Fu‘ad had published an influential book in June 1974 arguing that Egypt’s history needed to be re-written after ‘Abd al-Nasir’s death to reflect the country’s Pharaonic cultural identity.³²¹ Sadat had seized upon such works as justification for his pursuit of an ‘Egypt-first’ policy and a separate peace. However, as chapter two suggested, Egyptian nationalism and Arabism were not construed as mutually exclusive forms of identification. Nor did a renewed emphasis on Egyptian nationalism translate into a rapprochement with Israel in the immediate post-war period. Fu‘ad’s discussion of normalisation in 1980 reveals that her emphasis on Egyptian nationalism constituted neither a blank cheque for Sadat’s rapprochement with Israel, nor an abandonment of Arabism. “The Nile,” she wrote, “is not just the property of 40 million Egyptians, but of future generations as well.” Apart from the obvious depletion of water

³¹⁹ SH: 5/8/1980

³²⁰ D: 3/1981

³²¹ Tibi, Bassam. “Die Wiederentdeckung der Ägyptisch-Nationalen Kulturellen Identität: Ägyptens Lösung

resources, Fu'ad criticised that Sadat was handing the country's most precious resource to a sworn enemy. In a reference to the Biblical plagues that the ancient Israelites inflicted upon Pharaonic Egypt, she likens the 'new warriors' Israel would produce with the aid of the Nile water to "locusts ... buzzing disturbingly before a frightful metamorphosis turns them into predators attacking in every possible direction." She continued, "the happy solution to Israel's water shortage.... aggravates Egypt's problem and that of the Arab world." While rationalists like Telhami have claimed that "the roots of Arabism in Egypt were not very deep," note how an eminent Egyptian nationalist equates the destiny of Egypt with that of the Arab world.³²² By diverting the Nile to Israel, Sadat threatened to sell both Egypt and the Arabs's future down the river.

The proposed sale thus offered strong grounds to question the legitimacy of Sadat's rule. "Sovereignty...?" Fu'ad asked, "Nobecause sovereignty satisfies the wants of its people.... And sovereignty resides in democratic systems, whereas we follow the spirit of democracy only in fake avowals..."³²³ Fahmi similarly argued that the issue of the Nile water highlighted the disparity between Sadat's democratic pretensions and reality. "In advanced nations, representative institutions responsible to the people implement strategic decisions within the [spectrum of] choices tolerated by the people," he noted, "the constitutions allow no one to transgress these bounds."³²⁴ Hamid Rabi'a called for civic participation even more explicitly. Because the "Nile water decision touches upon national security" it was necessary to "consult jointly with military institutions, intellectuals, '*ulama*', and the National Security Council in its true function as the representative of all political power and not just as the protector of the President and his cronies."³²⁵ The French government, he said, would have submitted a similar question "to a popular referendum" while "political tradition in Britain

³²² SH: 9/9/1980, Telhami, 142

³²³ SH: 9/9/1980

³²⁴ SH: 25/11/1980

³²⁵

requires the participation of the opposition party.”³²⁶ The anger over Sadat’s decision produced a democratic backlash. Khawaga turned syndicate discussions into weekly seminars, conducted alternately by the Wafdist Muhammad Fahim Amin and the MB’s Muhammad al-Mismari. More than 700 lawyers of different ideological persuasions threatened Sadat with life-long resistance if any Nile water was sold to Israel.³²⁷ *Al-Da‘wa* ominously reminded its readers of the bad fate suffered by pharaohs and other authoritarian rulers.³²⁸ Fears that normalisation would strengthen Israel at Egypt’s expense thus greatly weakened the legitimacy of Sadat’s regime.

There was worse to come. Once Israel intensified strikes against PLO positions in Lebanon, she raised the prospect of a new regional war in the winter of 1980 and 1981. Fears that Egypt’s future generations might suffer from normalisation now shifted to the realisation that the lives of the current generation might be at stake as well. *Al-Sha‘b*’s first lengthy article on Lebanon in November 1980 discussed the likelihood of a new Arab-Israeli war in a post-Camp David era.³²⁹ The historian Muhammad Khairi ‘Isa now argued that the question of who controlled Palestine “is a matter of life and death for Egypt.” Historically, most attacks against Egypt had come from the east. The moderate climate and good soil in Palestine had allowed invading armies to return and replenish, whereas the scarcity of food and water in the Sinai had prevented Egypt from establishing a permanently viable defence on the peninsula. When Egypt tried to do so in 1956 and in 1967, she had suffered defeat.³³⁰ The implication was that Egypt again lay prostrate before Israel’s forces after Camp David had practically demilitarised the Sinai.

In the early months of 1981, Sadat’s decision to sign the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty despite Israel’s staunch refusal to do likewise compounded these security fears, for

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Beattie. 251

³²⁸ D: 9/1980

³²⁹ SH: 4/9/1980

“how can we stay calm if Israel.... is stockpiling atomic arms? ... Without real guarantees, all talk of peace will remain wind.”³³¹ Worse still, Begin’s categorical refusal to return the Occupied Territories raised fears that Israel might also decide to retain her foothold on Egyptian turf, since “the airports and settlements now prevent her withdrawal from those parts of the Sinai that she still occupies....”³³² The combination of these fears for Egypt’s safety finally led the SLP to cancel its support for Camp David. The decision echoed wide-spread popular agitation against normalisation. When Israeli President Yitzhak Navon visited Cairo in November 1980, working class protests forced the cancellation of his address to the People’s Assembly and his visit to an industrial plant. Spontaneous demonstrations also greeted the opening of the Israeli booth at the Cairo International Book Fair in January 1981.³³³ By the spring of 1981, frustration at Israel’s decision to declare Jerusalem her capital, worries over Sadat’s decision to sell the Nile water and fears over Israel’s increased military activities led the SLP to declare the government’s foreign policy illegitimate.

The escalation of regional tension in the summer of 1981, however, finally pushed the stability of Sadat’s regime to the brink. In April 1981, Israel downed four Syrian planes while pounding PLO positions in Lebanon.³³⁴ In June, she destroyed Iraq’s nuclear reactor near Tamuz. In July, Tel Aviv bombed PLO headquarters in residential west Beirut killing 300 civilians. Begin’s threat in April to strike the Syrian army if it made good on its warning to deploy missiles in the Biq’a Valley appeared to confirm that Camp David had clipped Cairo’s wings. Article Six of the Accords barred Egypt from entering into any alliance that conflicted with the Treaty. Had the Treaty not prevented Egypt from applying pressure upon Israel in Lebanon, *Al-Sha‘b* argued that “Egypt could have played an important role” in

³³⁰ SH: 25/11/1980

³³¹ SH: 18/2/1981

³³² SH: 3/3/1981

³³³ Safty, 116

³³⁴ Sayigh, Yezid. *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1993*.

defusing the tension in Lebanon. The most important issue raised by the confrontation, however, was Egypt's own vulnerability. Part of the reason why "the people cannot face Israeli aggression with equanimity" was that "any attack on Arab peoples is an attack on Egypt." Pan-Arabism was "not just a romantic, religious attachment, but one of security."³³⁵ Rather than a comprehensive peace treaty, Camp David had become "a means of sheltering Israel's armaments so that they may strike Egypt in the future."³³⁶ Israel's raid on the Iraqi nuclear reactor drove the point home. At an SLP rally organised in the wake of the bombing, it became clear "that there is no peace for Egypt. Today, Israel destroys the Iraqi nuclear reactor. Tomorrow, it will bomb the Aswan Dam."³³⁷ The acute perception of vulnerability stemmed from the fact that the raid "has put the Arab-Israeli struggle on an entirely new level: It now extends beyond the borders of the traditional Confrontation States and affects everyone."³³⁸ Security fears discredited Camp David for "what kind of peace is this when the region is beset by the danger of full-scale war?"³³⁹ By the summer of 1981, peace with Israel appeared like a continuation of war by other means.

The result was to exacerbate the cleavage between Sadat and the people. Under the slogan 'Popular Egypt is not Official Egypt,' thousands gathered at an SLP rally at which "all political and syndicalist forces joined each other despite their different orientations to condemn the attack, assigning the Egyptian government responsibility alongside Israel."³⁴⁰ Although Sadat was not privy to the assault, the timing of the raid less than 48 hours after a face-to-face meeting with Begin created the impression that he was in cahoots with the Israeli leadership.³⁴¹ The opposition smelled betrayal, for "even if Begin did not necessarily take the decision to bomb Iraq" during these talks, "the Egyptian establishment, by virtue of ... its

³³⁵ SH: 19/5/1981

³³⁶ SH: 26/5/1981

³³⁷ SH: 23/6/1981

³³⁸ SH: 11/8/1981

³³⁹ SH: 23/6/1981

³⁴⁰ SH: 11/6/1981

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adherence to the Treaty bears full responsibility for giving [Israel] the freedom to continue her atrocities.”³⁴² The government’s subsequent declaration that it sought to deepen reconciliation with Israel only strengthened the impression that Sadat shed crocodile tears over the aggression. Calls for democratisation now became increasingly strident. “The people know their rights, and with an overwhelming majority, they reject normalisation,” Tilmisani trumpeted, adding the thinly veiled threat that if Sadat did not end normalisation soon, the people “will look upon the government with grave misgivings.”³⁴³

Al-Da‘wa took Israel’s raid on the Iraqi nuclear reactor as the occasion to publish a scathing review of the way in which Camp David had increased authoritarianism over the past two years. Because Article 3 of the Treaty “continuously requires Egypt to prohibit any activity, view, thought or opinion, hostile to Israel, ... it limits the autonomy of local law, and imposes restraints on the government.” Sadat’s decision in May 1979 to prohibit candidates opposing Camp David from running for the People’s Assembly had turned “all opposition to this new law [into] an electoral crime” punishable by three years of imprisonment. Thus, “the Egyptian citizen opposing Israel was excluded from participation in political and party life.” In addition, the Law of Shame of May 1980 had stripped critics of normalisation of the right run for any public sector or syndical post. Thus, “in their own country, Egyptians have been commuted from opponents of the Treaty into second class citizens- stalked by [...] the death of civil life, just like in the Middle Ages.”³⁴⁴

Yet while the fears raised by the attack on Iraq “provided a potential basis for the formation of a revolutionary coalition,” divisions within the opposition coupled with Sadat’s crackdown in September 1981 again precluded the organisation of a concerted National Front. It was true that the Union of Egyptian Workers, the SLP, the NPUP, the MB and all

³⁴² D: 7/1981

³⁴³ D: 4/1981

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Syndicates opposed Camp David by the summer of 1981.³⁴⁵ The Journalists' Syndicate was in an especially defiant mood. Despite Sadat's threat to boot recalcitrant editors out of office, the journalists elected Khuli as chairperson and returned an opposition majority to the Press Syndicate Council in March 1981. Simultaneously, the GI and MB sponsored mass rallies denouncing Camp David in Cairo and Alexandria which attracted 250,000 participants each. Meanwhile, Hilmi Murad and Fathi Ridwan of the SLP tried to lock step with Islamist youth groups and Arab Rejectionist states.³⁴⁶

Despite the agitation, however, the opposition was not able to move beyond condemnations. Khomeini's repression of his erstwhile liberal allies in Iran raised serious doubts among secular opposition groups over the wisdom of a similar alliance in Egypt.³⁴⁷ The New Wafd therefore kept a low profile. Moreover, the MB still had an axe to grind with the NPUP. When the latter denounced the *Ikhwan* as a terrorist organisation in January 1980, *Al-Da'wa* riposted "at least we are not puppets controlled by foreigners. Look at what your red friends are doing in ... Afghanistan!"³⁴⁸ In the absence of a concerted national opposition movement, the government's crackdown could contain most pressure without confronting a more existential threat.

In July 1981, Sadat shut down the Lawyers' Syndicate. In September, he ordered the arrest of 1,536 opposition figures, including such unlikely bedfellows as Khuli and Tilmisani. *Al-Da'wa* and *Al-Sha'b* were both closed. By putting some of the more violent opposition elements behind bars, Sadat may have helped to prevent a descent into revolutionary upheaval.³⁴⁹ Yet if he had, he still had to pay for it with his own life. When Khalid al-Islambuli killed Sadat on 6 October 1981, he exclaimed "I shot the pharaoh!" But he had not shot his deputy. It was true that *Gama'at* members in Minya and Asyut staged a violent rising.

³⁴⁵ SH: 10/2/1981

³⁴⁶ Heikal (1983), 224

³⁴⁷ Beattie, 267

³⁴⁸ D: 3/1980

Yet Vice President Husni Mubarak faced no serious challenge when he acceded to the Presidency. As in the summer of 1980, divisions within the opposition allowed the government to step in and fill the breach.

As the preceding discussion has shown, it would be wrong to confuse the absence of a viable revolutionary challenge in 1981 with popular approval of the peace process. By underscoring the Treaty's failure to protect Egypt's safety concerns, Israel's growing assertiveness after March 1979 greatly destabilised Sadat's regime domestically. While the SLP had initially welcomed Camp David in the hope that it would pave the way to Palestinian statehood, it gradually joined the Brotherhood in active opposition. Throughout the two years after Camp David, Israel's increased military activities ensured that Camp David appeared like a *diktat*.

Even so, the opposition was unable to effect a far-reaching transformation. As Foucault once put it, there are "revolutions which leave essentially untouched the power relations [that] form the basis for the functioning of the state." Such revolutions do not preclude "subversive re-codifications of power relations" beneath an apparent surface of calm, though.³⁵⁰ The discursive struggle over Egypt's relations with Israel after the October War constituted such a case. When Islambuli felled Sadat, he shouted, "Glory to Egypt!" suggesting that the struggle over Egypt's relationship with Israel was primarily a contest over Egypt's identity itself.³⁵¹ By slaying Sadat, Islambuli rejected Sadat's Egypt-first policy and sought to re-align his country's path with an Egyptian nationalism that would tolerate the 'Arab' and 'Islamic' identities the media had helped evoke after the October War.

³⁴⁹ Finklestone, 279

³⁵⁰ Foucault in Deleuze, 64

7. Conclusion

Structuralist interpretations of Sadat's foreign policy shift in the 1970s have typically emphasised the way in which Camp David satisfied Egypt's 'material' needs— both military and economic— to establish the 'rational' character of Sadat's choices. This has had significant historiographical implications. By dismissing the opinions of Sadat's domestic opponents as essentially 'irrational', Realists and Liberals have ignored the degree to which opposition to the Egyptian-Israeli peace process fuelled political discontent ahead of the President's assassination. In order to determine the President's 'rationality', IR scholars— ironically— have obscured the very events that might question Sadat's political 'realism'. Although Sadat's Western biographers have not overlooked the political turmoil engulfing Egypt, they have nonetheless upheld the view of Sadat's 'rationality'— attributing opposition to the peace treaty to a radical fringe movement irrepresentative of the population at large.³⁵² The result has been to downplay the depth of domestic opposition to Camp David.

The present analysis has attempted to move opposition to the Egyptian-Israeli peace process back into the centre of historiographical debates of the period. It adopted a Constructivist approach to map the discursive milieu providing the backdrop for Egypt's 'Autumn of Fury'. Unlike the 'materialist' perspective which informs Realism and Liberalism, Constructivism holds that the 'national interest' is grounded in ideational constructs. Insofar as Constructivism emphasises the contested nature of Egypt's 'national interest', it allows for multiple policy preferences to emerge through societal debates. This helps account for the chasm that evolved between Sadat and many fellow citizens in response to the peace process. In addition, Constructivism helps to explain the tangible results which a

³⁵¹ Fernández-Armesto, 162

polyphonic discourse about the ‘national interest’ may yield. Drawing on Foucault’s notion of the ‘materiality of discourse’, Constructivists have argued that ideas confront social actors as ‘objective’ facts. The notion that thought spurs action helps to explain the political mobilisation which gripped Egypt in response to Sadat’s violation of domestic norms.

Chapter three explored the articulation of such norms through interpretations of the October War. Insofar as the war integrated Egypt socially and regionally, it allowed citizens to imagine themselves as a single nation. To the extent that it provided a vehicle for fusing ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ it instilled national pride. To the degree that it responded to a collective Arab desire for liberation, the war also led to a resurgence of Arabism. The manner in which the left-wing press constructed Egyptian and Arabist identities favoured Egypt’s active contribution to resolving the Palestinian problem. Given the way in which the war appeared to undermine Zionism, many Egyptians preferred an assimilationist approach in line with the PLO’s proposal to establish a democratic, secular and bi-national state in Palestine. Thus, the experience of the war contributed to the construction of a ‘national interest’ at odds with Sadat’s plan for a separate peace. Given Egypt’s military success and the perception that there was no serious partner for peace in Israel, Egyptian papers advocated political negotiations backed by the use of force as leverage.

Chapter four analysed the manner in which these policy preferences conflicted with Sadat’s embrace of Kissinger’s shuttle diplomacy between the end of the war and the Sinai II Disengagement Treaty in September 1975. Thanks to the resurgence of Arabism in the October War, Egyptians were likely to view any American or Israeli threat—imagined or real—to the security of another Arab country as the harbinger of a fifth Arab-Israeli war. Insofar as Cairo’s step-by-step withdrawal from the pan-Arab fold seemed to enable Israel to engage in renewed confrontation, it created discontent with the peace process. Yet given the way in which Egypt’s piece-meal retrieval of occupied land and the PLO’s growing

international acceptance produced results consistent with the October War, opposition was still limited.

Chapter five explored the reasons for the growing radicalisation of opposition to the peace process in the wake of the Disengagement Treaty. Political, demographic and social changes created the conditions for the emergence of a multi-vocal Islamist discourse that overlapped ideationally with the policy preferences of the left. While Israel's massive re-armament after 1975 continued to raise fears for Egypt's security, Sadat's pursuit of peace now threatened to erode the gains of the limited democratisation effected after the October War. The increasing mobilisation of domestic opposition stemmed from the way in which concern over the maintenance of personal freedoms now compounded the pervasive *angst* elicited by Israel's military resurgence.

By the time Sadat signed the Camp David Accords, the persistence of a shared Arabist outlook ensured that Israel's military activities throughout the region continued to be perceived as an attack on Egypt itself. Insofar as Israel's increasing militarism after 1979 highlighted the fact that Sadat had only secured a 'limited' and 'separate' — rather than a 'comprehensive' and 'just' — peace treaty, it raised fears for Egypt's security to unprecedented levels. The fact that the régime responded to the resulting political opposition with increasing heavy-handedness seemed to confirm the view that a defence of the limited democratisation secured after the October War was synonymous with opposition to the peace treaty. The result was to erode the legitimacy of Sadat's régime to the point of producing armed insurgencies in the *Sa'id*.

Thus, while the October War had been associated with the liberation of occupied land, political liberalisation and Arabism, 'peace' became affiliated with repression and military capitulation. To the extent that the Egyptian media called attention to the ways in which the

peace process clashed with the identities they had helped construct after the October War, they contributed greatly to fomenting opposition to the régime.

The ideational symmetry between Arabism, Egyptian nationalism and Islam constructed in the wake of the October War thus proved crucial in framing Egyptians' negative perceptions of Israel in the post-war period. The notion that Arabism remained attitudinally entrenched in Egyptian society departs significantly from the standard interpretations of the period. Realists like Telhami have argued that "the roots of Arabism in Egypt were not very deep."³⁵³ This perception implicitly draws on Malcolm Kerr's study of the 'Arab Cold War' which illustrates the narrow pursuit of Egyptian interests beneath the veneer of 'Abd al-Nasir's pan-Arab rhetoric.³⁵⁴ Similarly, Fouad Ajami has argued that the resentment of Egyptians at having shouldered a disproportionately large share of losses during the wars with Israel led to "the death of pan-Arabism" in the 1970s.³⁵⁵

However, as previous chapters have shown, Egyptians continued to identify with Arabism up until Sadat's assassination. Even if pan-Arabism was nothing more than an ideological tool cynically manipulated by 'Abd al-Nasir, "we still have to ask why it was such a useful instrument" in the first place. Indeed, "a convincing answer must refer to the prevalent societal norms that made this issue resonate."³⁵⁶ Moreover, although Ajami believes that "political ideas make their own realities," it is unclear how far Sadat's rhetoric about an 'Egypt-first' policy actually trickled down.³⁵⁷ Roger Owen's interpretation that Ajami meant to say that the "power of individual Arab states to resist pan-Arab appeals has become greater" in the 1970s, would suggest that Arabism continued to reverberate with many

³⁵³ Telhami, 142

³⁵⁴ Kerr, Malcolm. *The Arab Cold War, 1958-1964: A study of Ideology in Politics*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1970.

³⁵⁵ Ajami, Fouad. "The End of Pan-Arabism," *Foreign Affairs*, 57, 2 (1978/79), pp. 355-8, and 369-70

³⁵⁶ Telhami and Barnett, 16

Egyptians.³⁵⁸ Even if there was disgruntlement over the disproportionately large share of Egypt's sacrifices on behalf of the Palestinian cause, this did not mean that the Egyptian public necessarily considered a separate peace with Israel leading to Egypt's political isolation from the Arab world an enviable alternative.³⁵⁹ Once it became clear that Camp David allowed Israel to accelerate "dispossession of the Palestinian people, Egyptians were almost unanimous in rejecting ... this application of Camp David."³⁶⁰

Moreover, since individuals may hold multiple identities at once, "for many Egyptians at various times being an Egyptian and an Arab nationalist was smoothly accomplished and did not unleash any identity conflicts."³⁶¹ What did unleash a tragic identity conflict was Sadat's attempt to portray Egyptian and Arab nationalism as though they were incompatible.

³⁵⁸ Owen, Roger. *State, Power, and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*. London: Routledge, 1992. 90

³⁵⁹ Nafaa in Farah. 144

³⁶⁰ Safty, Adel. *From Camp David to the Gulf: Negotiations, Language & Propaganda, and War*. Black Rose Books: Montreal, 1992. 99