

The U.S. and Egypt: The Potential Crisis

Earl L. Sullivan

The clay feet of one of the main idols of contemporary international relations have been found and his collapse is awaited. Some observers even go so far as to suggest that the fall of the idol will also bring about the political demise of the land from whose soil he rose and upon which he now rests his laurels.

Mohammed Anwar el-Sadat has a Bebe Rebozo-type as a close friend and advisor whose very name has become a kind of "shorthand for corruption." The president of a republic, he has created around himself the atmosphere of a royal court, an imperial and imperious presidency, and also pays little or no attention to his official advisors. Furthermore, his wife, unlike Nasser's, occasionally transcends the boundaries of convention regarding the role of a woman and thus offends the sensibilities of Moslem society.** Finally, and most damning, his international policies have isolated him from his Arab brethren and neither he nor his new American allies have been able to achieve their alleged attempt to Westernize a fundamentally Eastern society.****

There is, of course, more than a kernel of truth in some of this criticism. President Sadat is imperious, corruption abounds in Egypt, Mrs. Sadat has offended some elements of Egyptian society, the Egyptian economy limps from disaster to snafu, and the peace treaty with Israel is intensely unpopular among certain elements within Egypt and in most of the Arab world. Furthermore, the specters of Iran and Lebanon haunt the entire Middle East, and the possibility that Egypt will follow in their wake frightens supporters of Sadat and Egypt while encouraging those who wish misfortune to either or both.

Simplification, although sometimes necessary, is often dangerous, particularly when it might be used as the basis for making, or unmaking, policy. This is the problem with recent *reportage* on Egypt, and here I will attempt, among other things, to correct misleading impressions. Like most leaders, Sadat may have clay

feet, but his show few signs of crumbling just yet.

The United States and Egypt are now bound in a geopolitical relationship of mutual convenience because they share a complementary conception of the main dangers and promises of contemporary international politics. But while their perspective on the world is complementary, it is not identical. Different perspectives can lead to differences of opinion, perhaps major differences, regarding policy or implementation of policy. This could precipitate a crisis. Both parties will be better prepared to manage the inevitable future disputes over policy if they understand how and why Egypt and the United States became unofficial allies after nearly twenty years of mutual suspicion and hostility.

Among the most interesting aspects of recent American foreign policy is that the number of "special relationships" which bind the U.S. to other countries has grown, largely as the result of American responses to the initiatives of other governments. The U.S. prefers to avoid such entanglements because they often involve special access to American leaders, the American treasury, and the American pub-

*Sadat's Bebe Rebozo is Osman Ahmad Osman, who, in addition to having a reputation for corruption (whether deserved or not), has another distinctly noteworthy occupation: His major firm, the Arab Contractors, is regarded as the most efficient and competent construction firm in the Middle East. However, more distance between the president and this competent but compromised man and his business activities would improve the president's image in Egypt.

**Mrs. Sadat makes public statements on controversial issues, particularly those affecting the welfare of women and children. As long as she, and the regime, continue to support women's rights, she will continue to offend conservative elements in Egypt and elsewhere. However, she may counter some of this criticism by her current well-publicized campaign to conserve and restore the major Islamic monuments of Egypt, thus perhaps gaining some support among mainstream Moslems, if not the Far Right.

***These criticisms are widespread but have been most persuasively noted in "The Struggle for Egypt's Soul" by Fouad Ajami in *Foreign Policy* (Summer, 1979); "Egyptian Foreign Policy" by Mohammed H. Heikal in *Foreign Affairs* (July, 1978); and "Letter From Egypt" by Joseph Kraft, *The New Yorker* (May 28, 1979).

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lic. Israeli leaders, for example, not only make requests of the executive branch of government—a common practice of most foreign states—but also go straight to Congress. In addition, they go over the head of both branches of government to the American people. Leaders from special-relationship countries can, and do, become a part of the *domestic* political process in the United States, penetrating the system and influencing and at times distorting its decisions.

As an intended consequence of the policy of President Sadat, the United States is in the process of acquiring a new “special relationship.” Viewed from Cairo, it is a deliberately cultivated consequence of the foreign policy of the Sadat regime. Viewed from Washington, Egypt is simply one of several states with whom the USA has bilateral relations of considerable national security significance. The “special relationship” with Egypt will be resisted somewhat or its existence may even be denied. However, the nature of contemporary international relations will not permit this new link to be terminated without peril to American security.

Although the United States now has at least two special relationships with Middle Eastern countries—Israel and Saudi Arabia—it is in the American national interest to permit another such relationship to evolve with Egypt. (Rather than a special relationship with Iran, the U.S. had symbiotic ties with the shah and failed to understand the significance of the difference between a link with a leader and a relationship with a country.) In what follows, I will explore the genesis of the contemporary situation in order that the more serious problems associated with its future management may be identified.

Americans—particularly after the Camp David summit, President Carter’s trip to Egypt and Israel, and the dramatic signing of the peace treaty on the lawn of the White House—may be tempted to claim or believe that the rather sudden and drastic changes in the Middle East are the result of American influence, pressure, and diplomatic skill. Certainly, Henry Kissinger, Cyrus Vance, Roy Atherton, Hermann Eilts, President Carter, and others have used influence, pressure, and diplomacy to aid in giving birth to a new era for the Middle East. But this was possible only because Mr. Sadat *invited* American help to solve the problems of bringing an end to the perennial crisis that has characterized the area. The major new factor in the Middle East equation is this invitation, which might never have been extended had not President Sadat suspected that the Russians were implicitly behind a 1971 attempt to remove him and replace him with the apparently pro-Soviet Ali Sabri. Even a man of less sensitive ego would have been tempted to switch allies if the first ally were perceived as wanting his deposition.

But personal protection was not President Sadat’s only motive. As he himself says, Russian actions threatened the independence of Egypt and this was completely unacceptable to a man as nationalistic as Anwar el-Sadat. Pan-Arabism was the principal political vehicle of Gamal Abdel Nasser, and he made it into a major political force. Without denying the moral validity of pan-

Arab values, Anwar el-Sadat began his presidency with an assertion of the values of Egyptian nationalism. But his expulsion of Soviet military technicians and advisors was not followed by a total break with Russia, nor did all Soviet technicians leave Egypt. Egypt’s main external problem remained its dispute with Israel, and Russian help was necessary if anything was to be done militarily about redressing Egypt’s grievances and redeeming honor lost in the humiliating June war of 1967.

While Egypt needed a major ally, the Soviet Union did not appear to Mr. Sadat the most reliable or even the most useful one for Egypt. In order to get Arab and Egyptian land back from Israel and to proceed more rapidly with Egypt’s modernization, he believed American influence and technology would be better. Mr. Sadat waited only until the beginning of the 1973 war to begin the switch. Nasser, after the 1967 war, had given the Soviets virtual *carte blanche* in taking over the management of Egypt, especially in the military sector. In 1973 Sadat moved cautiously in the opposite direction, but in the same spirit, and made it very clear that he was eager to change horses in midcrisis. Even *during* the October war, fought *with* Russian weapons and help, *against* American weapons and help, Sadat downplayed the Russian connection and began talking about his “good friends” Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon! In the midst of the crisis of war Sadat adroitly used what may be the major political asset of a weak state: the ability to grant or deny access to one’s territory. A weak state may have a desperate need for assistance from a superpower, but if it has a geopolitically crucial location, it can decide *which* superpower. The Soviets had no choice but to resign the role of chief patron, and the Nixon administration was not about to resist the offer to accept it. This weapon of weakness worked as well in 1973-74, when Egypt invited the Americans in, as it had in 1972, when the Russians were “forced” to leave.

At first the Americans were cautious and unsure about how to implement their new role. The best and the brightest began to arrive, led by Ambassador Hermann Eilts, and the task of rebuilding Egyptian-American relations was undertaken in earnest. This job was confused, as far as the Egyptians were concerned, by the seeming chaos of American politics: No less than three men occupied the White House between 1974, when formal diplomatic relations were resumed, and 1979. And each has had to be educated carefully to understand the historically unprecedented role the United States was playing in Egypt and with Egypt in the Middle East.

According to a majority of its new élite, Egypt desperately needed peace to be free of the burden of the conflict with Israel and able to proceed with “development,” by which most Egyptians really mean “modernization” or even “Westernization.” After the October war and the consequent rapprochement between Egypt and the United States, the type and volume of aid to Egypt changed as new sources of aid were added. Led by the Americans, other Western states, conservative Arab oil states, and major international organizations provided Egypt with many billions of dollars in capital and technical assistance.

But "progress" does not come easy. After three years of little or no improvement, impatient with the slow pace of events, and uncertain of the Carter administration, Mr. Sadat unilaterally decided in November, 1977, to change the rules of the Arab-Israeli game. His trip to Jerusalem was a signal to the U.S. that though Egypt was militarily weak, economically poor, and dependent on Saudi and American aid, Sadat was willing and able to act *alone* to force the attention of the world on him and the problems of his people. He had learned, perhaps by watching Henry Kissinger, that normal, cautious, slow diplomacy can sometimes be replaced by dramatic and flamboyant actions. However, unlike Kissinger, who mainly responded to initiatives, Sadat created them.

As a result of his trip to Jerusalem on November 19-20, 1977, Anwar el-Sadat fundamentally altered the context within which Middle East international relations will take place for some time to come. Between October, 1974, and November, 1977, most political initiatives, in keeping with the original strategy of step-by-step diplomacy, were taken by the United States. As President Sadat had said many times, "The issue of peace is in America's hands." To a large degree this was still true, but now American and Israeli initiatives had to be taken within a framework established by Egypt.

Mr. Sadat is a master of diplomacy by surprise, an unconventional and risky style that upsets and even psychologically threatens professional diplomats. His trip to Jerusalem cost Sadat the considerable talents of Foreign Minister Ismail Fahmy, respected though disliked by many Egyptian diplomats. Mohammed Riad, minister of state for foreign affairs and a protégé of Fahmy's, was offered the job of foreign minister, but he also chose to leave the administration, even though, unlike Fahmy, he was not a man of independent means. Rather than dip again into the ranks of Egypt's large and polished corps of career diplomats, the president selected Dr. Butros Ghali, a Coptic Christian, lawyer, and political scientist, to assume the function, if not the full title, of foreign minister. Talented, widely respected and admired, Dr. Ghali is enough of a pan-Arabist to be an occasional Arab League diplomat, but is also a man whose credentials as a strong Egyptian nationalist are unambiguously clear. Since his appointment as minister of state for foreign affairs he has acted, under President Sadat's direction, as a lawyer for his country, trying to get the best deal he can for Egypt. Like Henry Kissinger, Ghali is an intellectual *cum* diplomat and has the capacity to speak the language of Arab, African, Western, and socialist politics at both the intellectual and diplomatic levels.* But perhaps more important, he was an outsider and, unlike Kissinger, more of a tactician than a strategist.

Ghali's appointment was a signal that Sadat alone would make major decisions and that nationalism was to be the benchmark of Egyptian foreign policy. The signal was reinforced when such patriotic technocrats as Osama El Baz and Mustafa Khalil were added to the foreign policy team. Islamicism and pan-Arabism are the main rivals to Egyptian patriotism, but recent events in both Lebanon and Iran are forcing the people and leaders of

virtually every Arab state to choose from among the three. Today, patriotism rather than pan-Arab nationalism increasingly dominates inter-Arab politics,** and Islamicism may yet eclipse pan-Arabism as well.

The Egyptian initiatives of November, 1977, can be viewed against the background of several recent developments. *First*, there was a widespread belief in Egypt that Israel might risk a preemptive military strike against Egypt and/or Jordan and Syria. Both Israeli troop movements in the Sinai, ostensibly designed to counter sizable Egyptian troop maneuvers, and Israeli attacks on southern Lebanon in early November helped reinforce Egyptian fears.***

Second, the United States and the USSR seemed to be reaching some kind of superpower "deal" that could have resulted in mutual reduction of arms transfers to states in the Middle East and, perhaps, an agreement to let the Middle East recede from the headlines of international diplomacy. One of the major reasons Sadat went to war in 1973 was to create a crisis, thus forcing the superpowers to intervene *on behalf of a settlement*.

Since coming to power, President Sadat had been saying he was serious about peace, but like most political figures in the Middle East he suffered from a lack of credibility. Although the excess rhetoric and verbal flamboyance of public diplomacy is intended mainly for domestic audiences, it is listened to carefully by foreign ones, who hear only what they wish to hear: Israelis have believed that Arabs desire the extinction of the Jewish people, while Arabs have feared Israeli imperialism, and some few have even fantasized about the nightmare of a Jewish state "from the Nile to the Euphrates." Thus, even for those few leaders who genuinely wished to seek a lasting settlement, there has been a chronic and near-total failure to communicate.

In 1973, in an effort to break this fatal cycle, Egypt coordinated a surprise limited war to regain lost territory and to force the superpowers into taking Sadat and his views seriously. Henry Kissinger had the sense to listen and, in response, to begin the process known as step-by-step diplomacy. In 1977 Sadat again moved dramatically to forestall a possible superpower "deal" that would, if successful, have largely excluded Egypt and other states in the region from the decisionmaking process.

The events of November, 1977, should be seen not only as theatre designed to place Sadat and Egypt at the center of world attention, but also as a carefully calculated gamble to achieve a lasting peace. This second

*See *Worldview* Associate Editor Mark Bruzonsky's interview with Butros Ghali in the July/August, 1979, issue of *Worldview*.

**For an insightful and provocative essay on this theme see Fouad Ajami's "The End of Pan-Arabism" in *Foreign Affairs* (Winter, 1978-79). He continues exploring the theme, with specific but oversimplified reference to Egypt, in "The Struggle for Egypt's Soul," *Foreign Policy* (Summer, 1979).

***Viewed from Israel, Egyptian troop movements may have looked like overt preparation for war; while from Egypt, Israeli actions brought back memories of 1967.



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major strategic consideration guided President Sadat: The superpowers had to be forced to regard the Arab-Israeli dispute as a principal world problem demanding immediate attention. In 1973 a costly war was used to attract such attention; in 1977 Mr. Sadat got even more attention from a forty-five-minute plane ride. He placed both Israel and Syria on the defensive and hoped to force their sponsors, the USA and the USSR, to "encourage" them to make important substantive moves toward a settlement involving Jordan, Gaza and West Bank Palestinians, and Egypt. Sadat no doubt understood that any such settlement would exclude Syria, if for no other reason than that Syria would refuse to follow the lead of Egypt. The threat to Israel was also clear: If settlement was not reached, Israel would be to blame in the eyes of the West. Sadat, in Western opinion, established his credibility as a peace-oriented diplomat who followed through on both promises and threats while keeping the support of his people.

A *third* important background element was the economic and political penetration of Egypt by Saudi Arabia, a direct consequence of Egypt's desperate economic condition. Unlike American penetration, Saudi activity, or some aspects of it, threatened the very nature of the Egyptian state by favoring, and in fact directly subsidizing, right-wing Moslem elements. If these elements were to come to power, they might upset the delicate balance of the modern Egyptian polity.* While Egypt gives certain exclusive rights to Moslems—only a Moslem can be president, for example—it is a secular state. Especially since 1973,** many Egyptian Moslems have felt renewed pride in Islamic ideas and institutions and have grown more fearful of the danger to traditional Islamic values posed by Egypt's frantic efforts to join the "modern" world. The potential for religious conflict, always a part of nineteenth and twentieth-century political life, has thus been exacerbated by encroaching modernity and Saudi "investment" in and grants to right-wing Moslem organizations.

One way to assert one's own religiosity is to attack someone else's, and disputes with religious overtones have periodically marred recent Egyptian political life. Egypt's economically, politically, and intellectually significant Coptic community is exceedingly conscious of its vulnerability as a conspicuous minority. The regime has tried, with considerable success, to reduce the potential for religious strife. Recent conflicts have been deplored publicly and privately by the president as well as by both Moslem and Coptic leaders. One especially sensitive and continuing issue, the movement to introduce traditional *Shariya* (Islamic law), has been op-

posed by Sadat but encouraged by Saudi Arabia as one of the unofficial strings attached to Saudi aid to Egypt. While most Egyptian Christians fear that the imposition of Islamic law would make them second-class citizens, many Egyptian Moslem intellectuals are also uncertain and fearful regarding the benefits of such a fundamental change in the legal system. Saudi pressure on this subject, no matter how subtle, is resented by Egyptian patriots. Sadat's decision to make a trip to Israel was taken without consulting the sensitive Saudis and can be understood in this light as a declaration of Egypt's *political* independence from Saudi Arabia in spite of its manifest *economic* dependence on Saudi aid.

Saudi power in the Middle East stems primarily from its dual role as banker and broker, and to a lesser extent from being the protector of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. But in a sense, Saudi Arabia has bought its role as a political broker by exercising its financial role as banker. In politics what is to be done is no more important, and sometimes less so, than who gets the credit (or blame) for doing it. No one in the Arab world seriously disputes the Saudi role as protector of the holy places of Islam. But the awkward fact is that Jerusalem is the third holiest city for Moslems, and Saudi Arabia is not its real protector.

*While the Moslem Right, if it came to power, might upset the system, it may do so more as a result of political and economic inexperience and naiveté than because it is Islamic. An Islamic political revival is not *in itself* a threat to a healthy polity any more than a Christian revival is a threat to political order in the West. If there can be Christian Democrats in Europe, why not Islamic Democrats in the Middle East? This question is especially relevant for Egypt, which has a large number of humanistic, well-educated, and politically sophisticated intellectuals who are as committed to democracy as they are to Islam. The implication that the Sadat regime will collapse and that Egypt "awaits its death as less sophisticated, less polished sorts, claiming authenticity, push it into its grave" is one of the most moving, and misleading, portions of Fouad Ajami's recent essay, "The Struggle for Egypt's Soul." What he projects as a certainty is only one of many possibilities—and, rather than imminent and certain, as he implies, it is among the least likely.

**The October war was touted as a holy war. It was an event through which Egypt regained some territory and, most important, its lost pride, reinforcing and linking patriotism and Islam. But increased contact with Western states following the war threatened traditional Islamic values by exposing virtually the whole population to the tantalizing materialism of the West. The consequence was a defensive backlash. Many in the Coptic community have had a similar reaction to Western materialism. As a result, monasticism and asceticism have enjoyed a vigorous revival.

Furthermore, the extraordinarily conservative Saudi monarchists fear Soviet influence in the area but realize they cannot protect themselves against Soviet encroachment without outside aid. They also fear a revival of Nasserism as a Middle Eastern version of Soviet hegemonism. At least in the past, Saudi Arabia provided many billions of dollars of economic and military aid to Sadat's Egypt. If the Sadat regime were to collapse under the burden of Egypt's multifarious problems, no one really knows what would happen, and the Saudis, as true conservatives, have a morbid dread of the unknown.

For all these reasons, many in the Egyptian élite believe that Saudi Arabia has no realistic choice but to continue supporting Egypt financially and politically. The March treaty between Egypt and Israel presents a severe test of the assumption that Egypt and Saudi Arabia are bound together by moderate politics and the desire to thwart Soviet ambitions in the Middle East.

Egypt has no real quarrel with Saudi Arabia's wish to exercise power as banker and broker in and for the Arab world. But it wants the Saudi monarchy to function as a banker for Egypt's development and a broker for Egypt's interest *as determined by Egypt*. President Sadat's trip to Jerusalem was, among other things, a dramatic way of emphasizing this.

A new geopolitical fact constitutes a *fourth* and extraordinarily compelling reason for Sadat's abrupt and dramatic shift in tactics (the trip to Jerusalem) and strategy (the overt preparation for some form of settlement with Israel). It is now understood that the Sinai peninsula has considerable potential economic value and is no longer important chiefly for its military significance. In recent decades it has been useful for staging tank battles, launching surprise attacks, or as a no-man's land separating Egypt and Israel, giving both of them time to prepare against preemptive strikes.

The land is the same, but Egypt's perception of its importance has changed. There is considerable oil and other mineral wealth in Sinai, and Egypt was certainly aware of this long before it became a news item. The discovery of new oil in the Sinai diminished Israeli incentives to relinquish the area while increasing Egyptian interest in its return. And the discovery of new oil at El Tar was announced publicly at the time final preparations for the Sadat trip to Jerusalem were being made.

The Israelis apparently felt that this new situation increased the prospects for peace, especially with Egypt. For Israel, petroleum in the Sinai could be *either* a prize of war or bait to lure Egypt to the bargaining table. Sadat, fearing that Israeli leaders would opt for war, used preemptive diplomacy rather than preemptive war and intervened directly in Israeli politics to strengthen the hands of those Israeli officials who sought a diplomatic settlement rather than a military solution. By going to Israel when he did, it became possible to discuss the issue of the return of territory in a way it could not have been discussed later, when the significance of the oil discovery in Israeli-occupied territory would have made an impact on the public in both states. Rather than saying, in the spring of 1978 or later, "Now that you have discovered oil on our land we would appreciate it

very much if you would return the land," Mr. Sadat went to Jerusalem with stately dignity and, in the eyes of the Egyptian, Israeli, and Western publics, considerable honor and courage. Had he waited until April, he might have had to whimper; in November he could purr, and even roar a little.

The thrust of the foregoing argument is that if one likes the current pattern of international relations in the Middle East, one should give most of the credit to President Anwar el-Sadat of Egypt. Conversely, if one does not like the current state of affairs, particularly the concept or details of the peace settlement between Egypt and Israel, then one should blame Sadat. But whether one likes or dislikes what is going on, it is necessary to realize that it is the president of Egypt more than anyone else who has brought the Middle East to its present delightful or disastrous condition.

The major features of contemporary international politics pertaining to the Middle East are the following:

1. Arab disunity is so extensive that inter-Arab relations have seldom if ever been worse.
2. Soviet influence is restricted to a few comparatively marginal elements and to geopolitically peripheral states.
3. American involvement in the internal affairs of Middle Eastern states has never been more intense, significant, complex, expensive, and risky.
4. Relations between Egypt and the leading states of the Western world have never been better.
5. Domestic politics and policies will soon eclipse foreign politics and policies in virtually every Middle Eastern state. Development or its failure; revolution or its impossibility; civil war or the imposition of police terror—these are the major issues and choices the people and leaders of the Middle East must confront (or are already confronting) in the proximate future.

The leaders of most states, including the United States of America, have nothing but shopworn and demonstratively inappropriate ideas for coping with the problems that the major states of the Middle East must solve rapidly or not at all. The burden of the past is so heavy that things will begin falling apart soon unless tangible "progress" is made in the battle to improve the quality of life for the people at large. If not, Iran or Lebanon are the most likely models for what is to come in such currently semi-calm states as Syria, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Sudan, Tunisia, Jordan, and Morocco. Egypt, as will be discussed later, is likely to follow its own highly distinctive pattern of degeneration unless substantial developmental change occurs soon.

A settlement between Egypt and Israel should be recognized as the direct and virtually inevitable result of the first three points above. And these conditions are also the direct or indirect result of the policies pursued by President Sadat since the end of the October war of 1973. This is not to say that Sadat has been the only significant actor, nor does it imply the absence of error and cant on his part. But he has been the single most

influential statesman in the Middle East for the past five years. However, his future ability to manipulate events in the area will depend less on diplomatic brilliance than on his ability to master the politics and economics of improving the quality of life in Egypt. This is so because peace will remove the Egyptian-Israeli dispute from the center of Egyptian politics. Regardless of whether a comprehensive peace is secured, the patience of the Egyptian public with a deteriorating physical environment and economic deprivation is at an end. The problem of development or its absence will inevitably occupy the center of Egyptian politics for at least the next generation.

A reasonable majority of both the élite and the masses in Egypt and Israel supported the settlement at the time it was made. In Egypt the biggest disputes over the treaty came *after* it was signed in March rather than before, because it was only then that the terms were widely known. But a majority are still in favor of a settlement, even though many are uncomfortable with the terms of *this* settlement.

Public expectations regarding the benefits of peace have been raised to a dangerously high level; and among the principal former confrontation states people expect more than can be delivered. Specifically, there is a widespread belief that the major economic problems facing each country can be solved because the military burden will diminish rapidly and sharply.* These expectations are specious, partly because both Egypt and Israel will still have to maintain sizable military forces, and this realization has begun to hit the masses of each state. Short-lived euphoria will be followed quickly by despair of a more lasting and threatening nature. Governments can be expected to fall or be forced to make fundamental changes in both substance and style of operation. In Egypt the first step has been taken: Parliament was dissolved and the Constitution was changed. A new parliament—almost 100 per cent pro-Sadat—and a “new” cabinet, with few new faces, were formed; but it is doubtful that these changes will be sufficient. The new parliament is less respected than the old one, and the lack of a public outlet for the opposition is unhealthy. In Israel the economic situation is out of control and the Begin government is rightly held responsible for gross mismanagement.

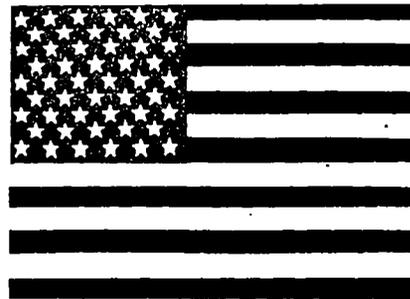
Many thoughtful Egyptians feel that Egypt did not get enough out of the Camp David accords and the subsequent peace agreements. Most Egyptians who read the treaty did not like its terms, particularly those limiting Egyptian control over Egyptian land. But Egypt probably got all it could under the circumstances prevailing in the fall and winter of 1978-79. And the timing was the choice of Mr. Sadat. The circumstances of Arab disunity, and the displacement of Soviet by American influence, were created in whole or major part by him. Mr. Carter's intervention at Camp David and later was necessary, but very much in the way a midwife is necessary at a difficult birth. The Americans, the Israelis, and the Arabs have all had to play the game by the new rules created unilaterally by President Sadat.

Sadat is willing to make sudden and drastic changes without consulting even his Egyptian advisors, let alone

his major diplomatic allies. He excels at the politics of surprise. However, because Sadat gets so much attention there is a great danger that his personal importance will be exaggerated while the underlying importance of Egyptian nationalism, which he has played upon and upon which he has built his strength, will be underappreciated.

Focus on the role of the individual leader has characterized Western writing and policy on Egypt. During Nasser's era this view probably had more validity than it does now. Without wishing to deny the importance of President Sadat in the making of Egyptian foreign policy, I wish to suggest that Egyptian goals without Sadat dominating the scene would be pretty much the same as they are now. This is but another way of saying that *truly* revolutionary change is not likely to convulse Egypt in the near future. It also suggests that circumstances are such that Egypt as a country has little choice but to attempt to do what President Sadat is so well known for: seek closer ties to the West and pursue a policy of reconciliation with Israel. If Sadat were to be removed from the scene for reasons of health, possibly there would be a period of upsetting and frightening chaos. (Vice-President Hosny Mobarak, Mr. Sadat's chosen successor, shares his strategic views and is often used to help implement Sadat's policies.) But Sadat, in effect, represents a new class that has come to power since 1952, and the grip on power by that class shows no sign of weakening. Though lacking ideological unity,

*An interesting discussion of some of the problems related to this issue can be found in Edgar L. Feige's "The Economic Consequences of Peace in the Middle East" in *Challenge* (January-February, 1979). The specific case of Israel is taken up by Ann Crittenden in "Israel's Economic Plight" in *Foreign Affairs* (Summer, 1979). In Egypt the military is the most viable potential rival to Sadat, and the current regime is not likely to reduce the military budget. As of now, the military supports Sadat, but a significant cut in the budget could cause active opposition. Besides, the military may be needed in the near future to defend the Sudan or Egypt's border with Libya.



*"Too much of recent American policy
has concentrated on the man, Mr. Sadat."*

this class shares a common economic interest in preserving Egypt's major bilateral relationships and has felt that all they and Egypt need are Sadat and time. Time is something Egypt has always had. But if through some tragedy Egypt were to lose Sadat, probably someone with a similar strategic and economic conception would eventually, if not immediately, replace him. This strategic vision has yet to be fully articulated, but its basic outline can be discerned.

In recent decades Egyptian foreign policy has followed, *albeit* with numerous twists and turns, a geopolitical logic that allows three strategic alternatives: a Southern policy, an Eastern policy, or a Northern policy.

A Southern policy is designed to protect the Nile and its headwaters. This is a vital interest for Egypt. Largely because of good relations between Egypt and Sudan, this interest seems secure for the time being, thus enabling Egypt to concentrate on other issues and policy directions.* The Eastern policy, which aims at securing the eastern borders of Egypt against attack or enabling Egypt to expand its influence eastward, has been a key feature of Egyptian policy for several decades.** Since at least 1973 (and to a great degree since 1967) Egypt has had, of necessity, a mainly defensive Eastern policy. It is this strategy that has guided the country in seeking American help to negotiate peace with Israel. American rather than Soviet help was needed because the U.S. has been perceived as the only state with significant influence with Israel.

But if Egypt is to achieve developmental change, neither a Southern nor an Eastern policy will suffice, or so a majority of its governing nationalist elite believes. Development assistance sufficient to make a difference in the quality of life is available only by pursuing an energetic Northern policy. Such a policy will emphasize the Mediterranean aspects of Egypt, and, as a part of it, Egypt will seek an "unofficial" alliance with the major naval power in the Mediterranean—the United States—together with trade and aid relationships with the wealthier states of both Western and Eastern Europe. Egypt prefers that this alliance with America be "unofficial," as was America's "alliance" with Britain for most of the nineteenth century. Egypt, like nineteenth-century America, wishes to preserve its independence and freedom of choice and thus wishes to avoid a patron-client relationship.

The degree of Egyptian sensitivity on this issue is extraordinary. For most of this century Egypt has been a client state of a major power but has accepted such status only as a temporary expedient. When the patron state, first Britain then the USSR, became too overbearing, Egyptian nationalism contrived its expulsion. And today, Egyptian nationalists of all ideological varieties, except perhaps the extreme Moslem Right, are prepared to "lean to the North"—but not at the expense of Egyptian independence or the integrity of its value system.

Furthermore, most Egyptian nationalists believe that any alliance involving the economic dependence of Egypt on a foreign state must be temporary. There is widespread belief that, with proper development assis-

tance, Egypt can in the next generation be virtually autarkic, at least in the sense that it will not in the future depend on any *one* foreign state.

Prior to 1973-74 no one, with the possible exception of the president himself, considered Anwar el-Sadat a master of diplomacy. He seemed tipped precariously on the edge of failure. Then, following the October war, a few kind words were heard from Henry Kissinger. But most people still remembered the days of fluster and bluster and thought Secretary Kissinger was simply stroking the well-known ego of the sensitive Egyptian leader. Now, in 1979, he has the reputation of being the Houdini of foreign policy, but few of his admirers give him high grades in handling domestic social or economic problems. His individualistic style, moreover, while appropriate for diplomacy, is not likely to be much help when applied to such internal social problems as the unclogging of Cairo's antiquated sewers or reforming the overcentralized Egyptian bureaucracy. But he may prove to be as much a surprise in these areas as he was in foreign policy. As Gail Sheehy has suggested in "The Riddle of Sadat" in *Esquire* (January 30, 1979), "If anyone has the capacity to transmit his personal powers of rebirth to the land he so passionately loves, it is Muhammad Anwar el-Sadat." But if he does not, his days as an influential and respected statesman are numbered and he (or his successors) will maintain power only by an increasingly authoritarian system.

Too much of recent American policy has concentrated on the *man*, Mr. Sadat. The U.S. has acted to support *him*, to reinforce *his* position vis-à-vis other Arab or Egyptian leaders, and, in general, to prop up *his* ailing and fragile regime.

Between 1974 and 1978 such a personalized policy was probably necessary. If the analysis in this article is correct, however, American policymakers should consider two guidelines for the future. *First*, the United States must continue to refrain from intervening on behalf of individuals in domestic political struggles for power and influence. No matter how sophisticated in American or international politics they may be, American officials are unlikely to understand Egyptian politics well enough to be able to participate in them successfully. In fact, direct American involvement is more likely to produce an anti-American backlash than anything else, and American sponsorship of a politician may, in the long run, do more to harm the individual and his cause than to help. *Second*, American aid should focus as much as possible on projects that are clearly of long-

*Sudan is to Egypt what the Balkans were, in Churchill's mind; to Europe, a "soft underbelly." Those who wish to defend Sadat's policies must defend Sudan and its current regime, which is under severe internal and external pressure to withdraw support from Sadat. And for those who oppose the settlement, there is no better way to undermine it than through Sudan.

**Heikal's "Egyptian Foreign Policy" neglects the North, while Ajami's "The Struggle for Egypt's Soul" fails to discuss the South. Thus they both miss the *relative* importance to Egypt of the East.

term benefit to the Egyptian *people*—and this manifestation of humanistic and practical concern should be communicated clearly and unambiguously to the Egyptian public. In short, the United States should support Mr. Sadat but make clear that this is done because the U.S. supports Egypt and wants a long-term “special relationship” with the largest and most political and geographically central country in the Middle East.

If the future of Egypt is to be determined by its new class and if, as many seem to think, that new class lacks the imagination and leadership skills to be for Egypt what the generation that included Mao, Chou, and Deng Xiaoping was for China, then the burden on American and Egyptian leaders is phenomenal. But the United States is much less likely to be able to change Egypt from the outside than are Egyptians from the inside. The U.S. should support these leaders, regardless of ideology, as long as they are nationalists and are seeking authentic Egyptian solutions to problems, some of whose roots lie deep in the soil and history of the country. Extraordinary patience will be necessary on both sides.

Egypt has suffered so long from systematic neglect and pillage that its major domestic problems may have no near-term solutions. The United States can, therefore, look forward to an intense, expensive, and lengthy involvement. And if the U.S. is not prepared or able to spend that kind of time and money, then Egypt—and with Egypt the rest of the Middle East—could again become a Soviet playground. The domino theory is alive and well and living in the Middle East today.

The United States does not *own* Egypt, so it cannot lose it. What it does have is a special relationship, the continuation of which depends mainly on American constancy, forbearance, and foreign aid of real benefit to Egypt. But if the U.S. does not actually help Egypt to help itself with its foreign *and* domestic goals, then it may lose not only its special relationship but also its control over access to most of the oil of Arabia.

As a result of the March treaty, the United States is committed, in Egyptian eyes, *to the development of Egypt and the continuation of step-by-step diplomacy until a comprehensive and just settlement is achieved*. The failure of the United States to keep its word will be regarded by the entire Arab world as a signal that America is not a reliable ally. Therefore, failure on either count will jeopardize our relationship with Egypt and with the majority of the Arab oil states. A stable and friendly Egypt—unlikely without both economic and diplomatic successes—does not guarantee the continued production of sufficient oil to satisfy Western needs, but without it such a flow is impossible to sustain for long.*

In one sense, Egypt is the functional replacement for Vietnam, with AID replacing the CIA. American will and wisdom were tested in Vietnam, and both were found wanting. Now our will and wisdom are being tested in Egypt. We lack the wisdom and perhaps the means to solve the problems of Egypt on our own, and we Americans have yet to ask ourselves if we have, after Vietnam, the will to devote considerable time to this fascinating and geopolitically pivotal piece of land. In

the absence of an ongoing war, will the American public, along with Western Europe and Japan, accept the financial and moral obligation implicit in the March treaties to work with Egypt's leaders and improve radically the quality of life for the people of Egypt?

If there is to be a crisis in future Israeli-American relations, most likely it will stem from fundamental disagreement on basic geopolitical issues, especially the future of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and Jerusalem. Because the disagreement, should it occur, will be so fundamental, the Israeli-American relationship may be subject to severe strain and, from the American side, could even decline in importance relative to other bilateral relationships.

By contrast, the coming crisis in Egyptian-American relations arises, paradoxically, from agreement on basic issues. This agreement is based on a similar geopolitical perspective, which refuses to accept Soviet control of the Middle East and has thrust Egypt and the United States of America into a special relationship whose dimensions and implications are enormous but as yet unclear. Furthermore, the rules of conduct between the very rich and the very poor are no clearer in world politics than in city politics. This alone could result in a crisis. Still, as the two are bound by common geopolitical interests, any early solution to such a crisis would be mutually desired.

Egypt and America are like newlyweds in a mixed marriage: They know they are right for each other but expect trouble from family members on both sides. They are also mature enough to know that mixed marriages can be exciting and productive but are almost always difficult. As in any such affiliation, both parties must learn to understand the needs, habits, and quirks of the other, and both must have their own needs satisfied. This is not a brief flirtation, where each tries to extract maximum benefit in the shortest possible time. Egypt and America are setting out gingerly to establish what many realize is an unconventional relationship. If it is to endure, it will require careful nurturing, honesty, mutual study, patience, luck, and periodic balancing of accounts.

The task is formidable. The United States must work with Egyptian officials in an effort to bring about sufficient real and visible improvement in the quality of life to satisfy the aspirations of the people and sustain their hope for a better future. How can this be done without severely bruising the sensitivities of Egyptian decision-makers or fundamentally threatening some important traditional Egyptian values? Unless a workable answer can be found for this question, Egyptian-American relations could deteriorate into a traumatizing crisis of major proportions. [WV]

*For the short term our new relationship with Egypt, and our continuing acquiescence in Israeli occupation of Arab land held since 1967, may weaken our relationship with such important oil-exporting states as Saudi Arabia. The short-term damage may well be long lasting if we do not make significant progress in and with Egypt *and* unless there can be a positive role for Saudi Arabia to play in the peace process and, perhaps, in helping Egypt as well.