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ARAB-EGYPT RELATIONS : PROSPECTS FOR RECONCILIATION

Half a decade has already passed since the leaders of Egypt and Israel with the mediation of the United States agreed to end the 30 years of rivalries between them and committed themselves to jointly contribute towards the establishment of peace in the Middle East. But years following the Camp David Accords have witnessed significant developments in the politics of the region bringing in more complications and tensions in the area. The erosion of the euphoria over Camp David was accompanied by intensification of Israeli aggressions against other Arab states, annexation of East Jerusalem, Golan Heights, occupation of South Lebanon and rapid increase of Jewish settlements in the occupied areas. The Palestinians—the victims of Israeli aggressions and Arab political feuds—continue to suffer from the agonies of stateless nationhood. The internal squabbles in the PLO including arms conflicts added to the tragedy having far reaching impact on intra-Arab relations. The outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war and its further escalation has complicated the whole gamut of relations in the region. The alignment pattern in the area has substantially changed and the intra-Arab relations have been complicated to such extent that Arab unity has become a distant possibility. The Lebanese crisis has deteriorated to such a degree as to threaten the very integrity of the state. Meanwhile the United States, which from the beginning tried to monopolise the Middle East politics bypassing the other superpower have somehow failed to manage the same—at least the recent events in the Middle East subscribe to that. President Sadat,

the main initiator of the Camp David process was assassinated by the radical elements of his country. In the meantime though the first phase of Camp David Accords, i.e. the Israeli withdrawal from Sinai has been completed, the future of the other two major issues, the autonomy talks on the Palestinian question and the normalization of Egypt-Israeli relations remains murky. Many Arab states who boycotted Egypt for signing treaty with Israel have softened their position with explicit interest to embrace Egypt among themselves. The issue and for that matter the whole Middle East politics took a new dimension in December 1983 when the PLO leader Yasser Arafat, whose organization raised the strongest voice against President Sadat's visit to Jerusalem, met President Mubarak in Cairo, expressed willingness to develop relations with Egypt and sought Egyptian help to uphold the Palestinian cause. Meanwhile Egypt, despite her commitment to the treaty with Israel, under President Mubarak desires to develop relations with fellow Arab nations. So it appears that the gap between Egypt and the Arab world has narrowed down. But still there are factors that may seriously hinder the process of a meaningful Arab-Egypt reconciliation.

In this backdrop the main objective of the paper is to explore the prospects for an Arab-Egypt reconciliation. Keeping this objective in view, it makes an effort to analyse the political developments in the Arab World since President Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in 1977 and to identify the various forces that are compelling both Egypt and the Arabs to review their mutual relations. The paper is divided into three parts. The first part presents a general review of the Arab political scene prevailing before Egypt's unilateral peace move with Israel and the immediate Arab reactions. The second part will deal with the Arab boycott of Egypt, its implications both for Egypt and the Arab world and in the third part an attempt will be made to find out the prospects for an effective rapprochement between Egypt and the Arab world.

I

Circumstances leading to Sadat's Jerusalem visit

A common question faced by any one interested in Middle East politics is why Egypt, the cradle of Arab nationalism and a pre-eminent Arab state who pioneered Arab struggle against Israel, went to sign a separate peace treaty with Israel—the arch enemy of the Arab world. In fact, since the third Arab-Israeli war in 1967 nothing dramatic had happened in Middle East politics which could compel Egypt to take a unilateral decision to compromise with Israel. Of course, the humiliating defeat of Egypt and the Arab world in the 1967 war created a sense of frustration among the Arabs, particularly the Egyptian people. But despite that there were hardly any signs of giving up the common Arab struggle against Israel. On the contrary, they vowed to strengthen the Arab unity. The oil rich Arab countries provided Egypt and other front-line states with substantial assistance to compensate the loss in the war.¹ In 1973, during the fourth Arab-Israeli war, the Arab political unity was in its zenith when most of the Arab states were directly or indirectly involved in the war and helped Egypt in various ways. The oil rich Arab states put on oil embargo against the US and other European states although for a short period. One positive outcome of the 1973 war for the Arabs was that it gave a sense of confidence in the Arab potential to fight against Israel. The war had underscored the importance of Arab unity for the solution of the Middle East crisis and there was hardly any indication that an Arab state might take any unilateral approach to the solution of the Middle East crisis.

Despite all these, the Egyptians had a lack of confidence in the Arab capability and many were suspicious whether Egypt could get back her lost territory only by depending on the Arab states. Many Egyptians were even convinced that although the growing

1. For details see, Dmitrev E. and Ladekein V., *The Way Towards Peace in Middle East* (Moscow) 1974, p. 135.

Arab assistance might be able to compensate her economic losses in the war, it could hardly contribute to restore her national dignity and prestige which she lost in the 1967 war, rather it would enhance Egypt's growing dependence on the oil-rich Arab states. Many Egyptians were in favour of seeking new ways and means and of exploring new avenues with a view to regaining back Sinai and put Suez Canal on operation, one with the prospect of getting oil and another for restoration of their principal source of revenue.

However, in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the Egyptian policy, it is worthwhile to examine the socio-economic and political scenario in Egypt prior to Sadat's historical visit to Jerusalem in 1977. President Nasser, the founder of modern Egypt, initiated a number of radical changes in the socio-economic and political life of the Egyptian society. He kindled the flame of Arab nationalism and made the Palestinian issue not only an all Arab one but brought it into the focus of world community. On the economic front Nasser's main priority was to establish socialism for the welfare of the entire nation in which he made a significant success. In the international arena Egypt had gradually developed a close relation with the Soviet Union and assumed the leadership role of the Arab world. Nasser's internal and external policy was not liked by all Arab states. In Egypt itself a class of Egyptian bourgeoisie, advocating for a substantial change in the socio-economic life emerged who did not subscribe to his policies. But their voice was not so pronounced during Nasser's time. Only after his death the 'open door' policy of President Sadat served the interests of this emerging class which had been looking for closer relations with the conservative Arabs and the West. This class was directly associated with the post-Nasser changes in the political fabric of Egyptian society and formed the base for crucial support that Sadat needed for his policy reorientation.² As a first step some socio-political measures were adopted including the launching of some new political parties having rightist ideological leaning. Meanwhile the leftist political parties

2. Wolid W. Kazzaha, *Palestine in the Arab Dilemma* (London) 1979, p. 90.

and pro-Nasser and pro-Soviet elements were either cornered or gradually got rid of.³ At the same time anti-Soviet sentiment was widely spread in Egypt in early seventies which ultimately led to Egypt's abrogation in 1976 of its Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation with the Soviet Union signed in 1971. In the economic field

On the domestic front a number of socio-political and economic measures were taken in pre-Camp David Egypt to prepare the Egyptian society toward a historical transformation.

restrictions on external trade and investment of foreign capitals were lifted and initiatives were taken to dismantle the public sector replacing it by the private sector. Other laws were adopted concerning the cancellation of commercial agreements with the countries of the East and the Third World and the reorganization of the nationalised sector.⁴ As a result of all these changes a growing Western influence was observed in the Egyptian society. Meanwhile a widespread domestic propaganda was launched in late seventies to create an impression that Egypt was over-committed to the Arab cause which had depleted her resources bringing in effect, political, economic and military disasters.

So it is seen that in the domestic field a number of socio-political and economic measures were taken to prepare the Egyptian society toward a historical transformation. In the diplomatic circle intensive efforts were made and a number of meetings between Egyptian, Israeli and US officials were held at different levels which paved the way for President Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in 1977.⁵ From the initial reaction it seemed that, in general, the Egyptian people supported President Sadat and favoured a peaceful solution of the Egypt-Israeli dispute.

3. For details see, Ghali Shoukri, *Egypt: Portrait of a President 1971-1981* (London) 1981, p. 358.

4. *Ibid*, p. 393.

5. R. B. Yasbai, *Israel's Move*, *Foreign Policy*, Spring 1981, p. 44.

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Sadat's unilateral move, however, did not remain totally unopposed in Egypt. Even some high government officials did not support Sadat's policy and as a protest against his visit to Jerusalem Mr. Fahmi resigned from his position of Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister which he had held since 1973. Mr. Mohamed Riad, the then Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, who was immediately appointed as Foreign Minister also resigned a few hours following his appointment.⁶ Protests also came from different section of people representing the Muslim radicals, leftists and pro-Nasser elements.

In spite of all these oppositions President Sadat went ahead with his peace move and in November 1977 he visited Israel. But from a close observation it seems that from the beginning of his peace initiative Sadat was not only guided by the Egyptian interests but favoured an overall solution of the Middle East conflict. In his Knesset speech in November 20, 1977 President Sadat stated, "The problem does not lie just between Egypt and Israel; moreover, no separate peace between Egypt and Israel or between any confrontation state and Israel could secure a lasting and just peace in the region as a whole. Even if a peace agreement was achieved between all the confrontation states and Israel, without a just solution of the Palestinian problem it would never ensure the establishment of a durable, lasting peace the entire world is now trying to achieve."⁷ But whatever might have been the real intention of Sadat, he failed to convince his Arab brothers, particularly the radicals, and his peace initiatives were outrightly rejected by them.

Immediate Arab Reactions

Sadat's visit to Israel and the subsequent developments in the region including Egypt's growing involvement in

6. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives, Record of World Events*, 1978, Vol. XXIV, p. 29155.

7. President Sadat's speech to the Israeli Knesset, 20 November 1977, translated from Arabic and published by the British Broadcasting Corporation in its *Summary of World Broadcasts*.

Africa⁸ created a mixed reaction in the Arab World and caused a considerable turmoil in Arab governmental and diplomatic circles. Almost all the Arab governments criticised and condemned the move,⁹ albeit with different degrees of intensity. The opposition to the move was expressed through various connotations like 'national mourning', 'shame', 'sacrilege', 'surprise' 'unilateral behaviour', 'harmful', 'illustration of the method of *fait accompli*' etc. According to their initial reactions the Arabs may be classified into three categories; (i) the Radicals (ii) the Moderates (iii) the Supporters.

(i) Libya, with whom Egypt had already a strained relations in the seventies following the former's failure of confederation attempts, took the leadership in anti-Sadat campaign and expressed the sharpest condemnation of the act. She decided to break off diplomatic relations with Egypt, officially demanded the expulsion of Egypt's membership from the Arab League, closed Libyan airspace and territorial waters to planes and ships belonging to Egypt or serving the latter. Moreover, Libyan representatives were sent to various Arab states, particularly to Syria, Iraq and South Yemen, in an attempt to bring these countries into an anti-Sadat platform to form a "Rejectionist Front". Iraq strongly condemned the move and described it as a serious challenge to the will of the Arab people and in Baghdad the Iraqi Foreign Ministry summoned all the heads of Arab diplomatic missions to find out a common strategy to be adopted against Egypt. Syria also took a strong stand on the issue and condemned the move but declined to share any front where Iraq was

8. After President Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in 1977 Egypt was more involved in African affairs. Some Egyptian Airforce technicians and combat units were sent to Zaire to assist the government repelling the Angolan revolutionaries. She supported Somalia in the Somali-Ethiopian conflict and in the crisis of Chad sided with Chad against Libya. So many Arab States were suspicious about Egypt's intentions and feared that she would gradually take the role of US policeman in Africa. For details see, Walid W. Kazziha, *op. cit.* p. 96.

9. Only Oman, Sudan and Morocco openly supported President Sadat's peace move.

an initiator with whom she already had a strained relation. The Palestinians strongly condemned the move and described President Sadat's visit as a betrayal to their cause.

To face the situation President Sadat invited all the confronting Arab states as well as the USSR and the USA to send representatives to Cairo for a Preparatory Conference for talks aimed at overcoming the obstacles to peace in the Middle East. But it was boycotted by the Arab states. Libya, Syria, Algeria, South Yemen and PLO met in Tripoli to form an "Arab resistance and Confrontation Front to oppose all capitulationist solutions advanced by imperialism, zionism and their Arab agents".¹⁰

(ii) The conservative Arabs, consisting mainly of the Arab Gulf states and Jordan reacted to the Egyptian move more moderately. They described it as 'a surprise', 'an unilateral move', which 'weakens the Arab ranks' and was 'harmful to the Arab cause'. Some of them even considered that the move had 'broken the ice and removed the psychological barriers' in the impasse situation of Middle East.¹¹ As a matter of fact, the moderates, considering their close relations with the West, particularly with the United States were unwilling to oppose the US sponsored move and to go in direct confrontation with Egypt. Rather, they followed a policy of wait-and-see and wanted to carefully observe the situation before giving their final verdict on the issue.

(iii) Morocco, Sudan and Oman having less involvement in the Middle East politics and closer relations with both Egypt and the United States openly supported the peace initiative and described it as 'a courageous and bold step aimed at driving the wheel of peace forward in the Middle East.'¹²

10. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives, Record of World Events* Vol. XXIV, 1978, p. 29163.

11. *Ibid.* p. 29161.

12. *Ibid.* p. 29162.

II

In spite of all Arab reactions and opposition Egypt continued with the peace process with Israel which ultimately resulted in signing of two documents "a framework for peace in the Middle East" and "a framework for the conclusion of peace treaty between Egypt and Israel" followed by signing the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel in March 1979.

In fact the main objective of these documents were to end the state of beleaguerancy between Egypt and Israel and to normalize their relations. But considering the very sensitive nature of the Palestinian issue and its importance in the overall Middle East politics a provision was kept in the Camp David Accords for a Palestinian

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"self governing authority" in West Bank and Gaza. But there was a basic perception gap between the parties concerned over the concept of 'self-governing authority'. For Egypt the application of autonomy was a matter that could be defined in terms of geographical whole covering West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. On the other hand, Israel agreed on autonomy only to the people of West Bank and Gaza and rejected the concept of territorial autonomy even for any of the occupied areas. As one US analyst put it, "For Begin, 'autonomy' is barely a millimeter beyond what exists now. For Sadat, it is a millimeter or so short of full sovereignty".¹³

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13. *Time*, 16 April 1979, p.36.

order to allow the parties to come with their own interpretations on the issue. Both Egypt and Israel were afraid that after the fulfilment of the first phase i.e., the Israeli withdrawal from Sinai, the Camp David process would hardly proceed any further. On the one hand, Israel intended to gain the maximum of concessions before her final withdrawal, on the other hand, Egypt was totally unwilling to subscribe to an autonomy agreement without the Jordanian and Palestinian participation which, according to her, would turn into a piece of useless paper.¹⁴ Egypt refused to become the spokesman of the Palestinian people, rather she openly recognised the right of self-determination of the Palestinians, the free choice of their own form of government. Egypt's position was that the parties' (Egypt and Israel) "task is merely to define the powers and responsibilities of the 'self-governing authority' with full autonomy and the modalities for electing it".¹⁵ However, the Egyptian policy on the Palestinians failed to satisfy the Arabs, particularly the radicals, who along with other Arab states consolidated their position and boycotted Egypt.

Arab Boycott of Egypt

The overall Arab attitude toward the Camp David Accords was undoubtedly negative and with the initiative of the 'Front of Steadfastness' the Arab League held an emergency Summit in Baghdad in November 1978 where all the Arab states except Egypt were present. In fact the Baghdad Conference, represented at the highest level worked out the main principles and positions which were later on adopted against Egypt. In the conference the leaders failed to reach a consensus and the Arab states were divided into

14. *Strategic Survey* 1981-1982, (IISS, London), p.82.

15. Speech delivered by Kamal Hassan Ali, Minister of Defence and Deputy Head of the Egyptian Delegation in the opening session of the Autonomy Talks (May 25, 1979), *The Egyptian position in the negotiations concerning the establishment of transitional arrangements for the West Bank and Gaza*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Arab Republic of Egypt. p.36.

two opposing groups. One with the influence of the radicals favoured a total boycott of Egypt and strong retaliatory measures while the other comprising of Sudan, Oman and Morocco extended active support to Egypt. The United States as the sponsor of the Camp David Accords, from the very beginning tried to influence the conservative Arabs, particularly Jordan and Saudi Arabia, to join the Camp David process by promising increasing assistance and offering package of military hardwares.¹⁶ But ultimately the bid failed and the conservatives joined the radical camp to oppose the Egyptian move.

After the ratification of Egypt-Israeli treaty in March 1979 some concrete measures were taken to implement the decisions of the Baghdad Conference. Diplomatic relations were broken off with Egypt and Arab ambassadors (except those of Oman, Sudan and Somalia) were withdrawn from Cairo. The Arab League headquarters were shifted from Cairo to Tunis and 60 non-Egyptian staff were transferred to the new headquarters while 500 Egyptian employees who remained in Cairo were regarded as having resigned from their posts. The Egyptian Secretary General of the league Mr. Riad, who held the post since 1972, resigned and the Tunisian Information Minister Chedli Klibi was appointed for the post.¹⁷ The Arab Civil Aviation Council voted to close Arab airspace to Egypt's national airline, Egypt Air, and ordered its 17 member airlines to suspend flights to Egypt. Even Egyptian periodicals, journals, newspapers and films were banned in the Arab countries. The World Tourism Organisation, at the request of the Arab states, moved its regional headquarters from Cairo to Amman.

In the economic field all Bank loans, deposits, guarantees and facilities and all financial or technical contributions and aids by Arab governments were withheld. The extension of economic aid by the Arab funds, banks and financial institutions were frozen and Egypt's

16. Leonard Binder, *United States Policy in the Middle East: Toward a Pax Saudiana*, *Current History*, January 1982, Vol.81, p. 1.

17. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives, Record of World Events* Vol. XXV, 1979 p.29951.

membership from the Arab financial institutions was suspended. She was also suspended from the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries and lost its shares in three inter-Arab companies with total capital of \$ 2.8 billion. The Board of Governors of the Arab Monetary Fund decided to suspend Egypt from its membership. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait threatened to withdraw their \$ 1.6 billion in petrodollars from the Central Bank of Egypt. The Gulf Organisation for the Development of Egypt, a consortium of oil-rich Gulf states which philanthropically pumped \$ 1.7 billion into Egypt in 1978, advised Cairo that it would scrap all pending projects. The Arab Military Industries Organization which was set up in 1975 to produce everything from helmets to helicopters with Egyptian manpower abruptly halted its operations from July 1979 and as a result 16,000 Egyptians lost their jobs.¹⁸

All these measures taken by Arab states threatened to paralyse Egyptian economy which was greatly depended on Arab economies. According to Western sources, for signing the treaty with Israel Egypt had to lose about \$ 1 billion Arab help a year. Furthermore, at the initiative of the Arab States, Egypt's membership from the Organization of the Islamic Conference was suspended. She was also suspended, temporarily, from the Non-aligned Movement, of which Egypt was one of the three founding members.

Implications for Egypt

All these socio-economic, political and diplomatic measures adopted by the Arab States had seriously affected the Egyptian national life. While facing the severe economic blow many Egyptians who supported Sadat's Jerusalem visit disliked to see Egypt totally isolated in the Arab world and to bear the economic hardships resulting from the boycott. Israel's unwillingness to continue the autonomy talks and her continuous hostility toward the Arab world including the annexation of Jerusalem and Golan Heights convinced

18. *Ibid*, p. 29952.

a substantial part of the Egyptian people that Camp David Accords had isolated Egypt from the Arab and Islamic worlds without contributing to the achievement of a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Some quarters even suggested the government to take necessary steps for reconciliation with the Arab world. The Muslim radicals, leftists and pro-Nasser elements gradually became active and tried to destabilise the situation in the country. Thousands of Egyptian workers lost their jobs and became unemployed. Despite Sadat's efforts to face the unemployment problem, by creating job facilities to the university graduates who failed to find those in the private sectors, more than 25 percent of the work forces of Egypt remained unemployed in 1980.¹⁹ Growing inflation further threatened the economic stability of the country.

The total Arab boycott posed a serious challenge to the Egyptian leadership. Egypt was cornered in the Arab world and her economy suffered a serious setback. Although the leadership tried to face the situation by using the growing American aid²⁰ and by increasing national revenues, the Egyptian economy was in a stagnant situation until 1980.

It appears from the above that by signing the peace treaty with Israel, Egypt got back Sinai which she lost in 1967, but at the same time she had to pay a considerably high price for it. The Arab hostility toward Egypt in reaction to her separate peace treaty with Israel was more intense than was expected either by Egypt or by the United States.

19. Herry F. Jackson; Sadat's Perils, *Foreign Policy*, No. 42, Spring 1981, p.60.

20. For signing the Camp David Accords Egypt received \$ 1.5 billion US military aid. She was also assured of massive financial assistance including her share along with Israel in US \$ 4.8 billion to be disbursed in three years from 1979. The US economic assistance to Egypt in 1977-78 financial year was about \$ 940.2 million while for the year 1980-81 the figure was about \$ 1300 million. (For details see, *Time*, 2 April 1979, pp.6-8, *Arabia The Islamic World Review*, March 1982, p.62.)

Implications for the Arabs

Arab boycott of Egypt had some significant implications for the overall Arab political scenario including substantial impacts on intra-Arab relations. The Palestinian issue was always in the centre of intra-Arab politics and was considered as one of the most important factors in Arab foreign policy making. So in that historical perspective Egypt's deviation from the common Arab stand and peace treaty

In their initial reactions to the Egypt-Israeli treaty many Arab leaders were guided by emotions and thus joined the anti-Egyptian Camp to mark their solidarity with the Palestinians lest alienate the volatile Palestini-ans or their own people.

with the zionist state of Israel was severely criticised and the Arabs could not but consider it as a betrayal to the Palestinian cause. But at the same time it will also be appropriate to state that in their initial reactions to the Egypt-Israeli treaty many Arab leaders were guided by emotions and thus joined the anti-Egyptian Camp to mark their solidarity with the Palestinians lest alienate the volatile Palestinian people or their own people who were very much sensitive to the issue. On the other hand it would not be correct to say that in their relations with Egypt the Arab leaders altogether disliked Sadat or his policy orientation. Nonetheless, the Arab states centering around the issue were able to be united for the time being when the radicals and conservatives came on the same platform. Some intra-Arab disputes were also resolved. Iraq had strained relations with Syria since 1973 for which she did not participate in the Tripoli Conference held at the initiative of the Arab radicals in 1977, but they were able to mend the fences on the occasion of the Baghdad Conference and a "Charter of National Action" was signed between them. But the euphoria of anti-Egyptian campaign did not last long and soon the Arab unity appeared to be fragile. And with the complicating situation in the Middle East many Arab countries started

to review their respective relations with Egypt from the point of view of their national interests and many of them resumed economic and trade relations with Egypt on bilateral levels.

However, the most important and serious implication of the Camp David Accords was that it isolated Egypt from the common Arab platform and the cause for which the Arabs were fighting since 1948 got lost. Without Egypt the Arab credibility was seriously undermined and their bargaining position vis-a-vis Israel was severely weakened. Many Arabs were even convinced that the division in Arab ranks in which Egypt was separated from the Arab world apparently emboldened Israel to carry on with her ulterior designs against the Arabs as evident in her military adventure into Lebanon and excesses caused there.

III

In the backdrop of the above mentioned implications of the Camp David Accords, this chapter will review the changes that so far have taken place in the positions of the parties and will examine the prospects of an effective Arab-Egypt reconciliation by finding out the various forces and factors that may influence the process.

Egypt

The assassination of President Sadat in 1981 broke the ice, removed the psychological barriers and opened the avenue for an Arab-Egypt rapprochement. If President Sadat was identified as a "US agent" or a "traitor" to the Arabs, his successor President Mubarak, appeared to be more moderate and acceptable to the Arabs. Various socio-economic and political reforms were carried out by President Mubarak. New laws were adopted governing economic and trade transactions, political opponents, eminent journalists, intellectuals and academicians were released and political

dialogue was started with opposition parties. All these steps taken by Mubarak not only helped him to consolidate his power but also drew attention of the Arab states. Moreover the Egyptian leadership tried to identify itself in relation to all Arab issues and events with the Arab world and repeatedly expressed Egypt's commitment to the Arab cause. Thus Egypt strongly criticised the Israeli annexation of Jerusalem, Golan Heights and Israeli raid on Iraqi nuclear station. As a protest against Israeli annexation of East Jerusalem she abandoned the autonomy talks with Israel and described the move as a gross violation of the basic principles of international law and the UN Charter.²¹ Later on, in an interview with an Israeli Journalist, in 1982, President Mubarak reaffirmed, "we are part of the Arab world and for hundreds of years we have good relations with it. There is no conflict between the peace process and our relations with the Arabs."²² Despite her relations and security agreement with Israel, Egypt on many occasions strongly criticised Israel and demanded more flexibility on her part as a precondition for seeking any meaningful solution of the Middle East crisis. Aware of the fact that the Arabs would never join Egypt within the framework of the Camp David Accords, President Mubarak attempted to explore new ways and means acceptable to the Arabs for the solution of the Middle East crisis. At a preparatory committee meeting of the Non-aligned nations in Kuwait in early 1982 (it was the first time since 1979 that an Egyptian delegation was invited by an Arab state) the Egyptian delegation proposed a new peace plan which envisaged a collective initiative based on mutual and spontaneous recognition of Israel and the Palestinian people and called to end all Israeli occupations in the Arab territories and to recognise the the right to establish an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza within the 1967 boundaries.²³

21. *South*, February 1982, pp. 13-14.

22. *Dawn* (Pakistan), 9 March 1982.

23. *Emirates News*, 8 April 1982.

The Israeli invasion in Lebanon in 1982 was another event when Egypt identified herself with the Arab world, particularly with the Palestinian people. Massive anti-American demonstrations were held in Cairo and the Egyptian cabinet described the Israeli act in Lebanon as a flagrant violation of international law and asserted that it could, in no way be justified.²⁴ Hundreds of young Egyptians signed a call-up list volunteering to fight the Israelis in Lebanon²⁵ while opposition leaders demanded to cut off oil supplies from Sinai to Israel. President Mubarak cancelled his scheduled visit to Jerusalem and ruled out any possibility of the resumption of Egypt-Israeli talks on autonomy. The bilateral normalization talks between Egypt and Israel were suspended for an indefinite period²⁶. The Egyptian ambassador from Tel-Aviv was also recalled. In spite of heavy dependence on American military and economic assistance Egyptian government criticised the US policy in Lebanon and called for a reassessment of US policy in the Middle East in favour of a speedy solution of the Palestinian problem.²⁷ From 1982 she was also reluctant to participate in the regular joint exercise with the US Rapid Deployment Force²⁸ and was a strong critic of the US-Israeli Strategic Co-operation Agreement. One of the main objectives of these steps and policy reorientations was to convince the Arabs that in spite of her relations with Israel Egypt did not leave the Arabs, rather she remained very much an independent Arab state. But in spite of all these the facts remain that Egypt is a party to the Camp David Accords, sponsored by a superpower and signatory of a peace treaty with Israel by which her options are strictly limited. So obviously to keep her options open and not to be the hostage of US-Israeli politics Egypt will be interested to improve her relations with the Arab world and even

24. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives Record of World Events*, Vol. XXIX, 1983 p. 31916.

25. *Arabia: The Islamic World Review*, October 1982, p. 13.

26. *Dawn* (Pakistan), 11 December 1982.

27. *Arabia: The Islamic World Review*, October 1982, p. 14.

28. *Time*, 25 October 1982. p.23.

with the Eastern bloc countries. And the Egyptian policy under Mubarak seems to be considerably flexible. It is nevertheless unlikely that Egypt will agree with the radicals who are demanding the denunciation of the Camp David Accords by Egypt as a precondition for improving their relations with her, because the Egyptian people will be hardly ready to sacrifice all they have achieved from the Camp David Accords.

Egypt has consolidated her position by breaking out the political isolation of 1979. She has already been readmitted in the Non-aligned Movement and the OIC and has developed her relations with the Third World countries, particularly with the African states. As an active member of the Organization of African Unity Egypt has been playing a significant role in African politics and the recent visit of President Mubarak to Africa (Zaire, Somalia, Kenya and Tanzania) demonstrates Egypt's growing interest in the continent.²⁹ Meanwhile Egypt's status in international arena has been strengthened, she has unanimously been elected as a non-permanent member of the Security Council of the United Nations from the African continent in 1983. So in the political field it seems that there are hardly any immediate factor, at least in the near future, that may compel the Egyptian leadership toward an early reconciliation with the Arab states.

In the economic field Egypt has overcome the difficulties of the early days of the Camp David Accords resulting from Arab

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economic boycott. By this time she has significantly improved her economic condition by increasing revenues from Suez Canal, Sinai oil and remittances from Egyptian workers abroad. For example

29. *Egyptian Mail*, 31 January 1984.

in 1981 Egypt earned \$2, 181 million from remittances in comparison with only \$29 million in 1970.³⁰ The structure of the economy has changed and the direction of trade has reoriented. If in 1970 only 26 percent of Egypt's merchandise exports went to the industrial market economies and 33 percent to the East European non-market economies, in 1981 the figures were 52 percent and 9 percent respectively.³¹ Although the total volume of Egypt's trade with the Arab countries is not known but with the high income oil-exporting countries (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Libya, UAE) she conducts only 3 to 4 percent of her trade which did not fall in 1981 in comparison with 1977, it rather increased slightly.³² In the field of external assistance, the Arab aid which were discontinued in 1979 for signing peace treaty with Israel were subsequently replaced by the US and West European assistance. The Egyptian industry, particularly the military one has also made a remarkable success.³³

So since Camp David Egypt has demonstrated that she can sustain and develop her economy even without the Arab assistance. The socio-economic and political progress Egypt has so far recorded from an isolated position hardly suggests that she would come forward or take the initiative for a reconciliation with the Arab world. Rather many Egyptians argue that it was not Egypt who left the Arabs, on the contrary, she was boycotted by the Arabs, so in any future reconciliation the Arabs should come forward and take the initiative.

The Palestine Liberation Organization

Egypt had always good relations with the Palestinians even before the emergence of the PLO. Although the Camp David disrupted formal PLO-Egypt ties, the PLO had been maintaining contacts

30. *World Development Report* 1983, World Bank, Table 14, p. 174.

31. *Ibid*, Table I2, p. 170.

32. *Ibid*, p. 171.

33. *Bangladesh Observer*, 12 January 1983.

with Egypt which became closer during the Israeli invasion in Lebanon in 1982. As alleged by the Palestinians, during the days of their hardship in Lebanon, Arab states failed to come forward with sufficient assistance to them and even some of them refused to accept the PLO guerillas evacuated from Beirut, while Egypt helped the besieged Palestinians and invited the PLO leadership to Cairo to form a government in exile which was highly appreciated by the PLO. President Mubarak in an article published in the *Washington Post* in August 1982 expressed his deep concern over the tragic developments in the region and asserted, "The single cause of instability in the Middle East is that the Palestinian People have been left by most of the powers alone beleaguered and cornered without seeing any way out. They are being denied a home and homeland and the inalienable right to exercise in that homeland their self-determination in peace".³⁴ As a result of all these the PLO-Egypt relations were considerably improved in 1982. In early 1983 the PLO expressed its willingness to join Egypt in search of a peaceful settlement of the Middle East crisis and was ready to improve its relations with Egypt without any precondition if only Cairo would recognise PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinians.³⁵

The internal feuding among various groups of the PLO in Lebanon in 1983 was another event which brought PLO closer to Egypt. Yasser Arafat with his loyal guerillas was besieged in Tripoli by other radical groups supported by Syria and Libya. Egypt strongly criticised the positions taken by the radical Arab States and reiterated her support to the cause of the Palestinian people. And to everybody's surprise PLO leader Yasser Arafat visited Cairo in December 1983 where he met President Mubarak and expressed his willingness to work with Egypt for an overall solution of the Middle East problem. During the 14th Islamic Foreign Ministers'

34. Text of President Hosny Mubarak's Essay published in *Washington Post*, 30 August 1982.

35. *Gulf News*, 18 January 1983.

Conference held in Dhaka in December 1983, the PLO representative played an active role in favour of Egypt's returning back to the Islamic body.³⁶ A similar role was played by Yasser Arafat in the Fourth Islamic Summit Conference held at Casablanca, Morocco which took the decision to readmit Egypt into the OIC.

The most important question that may strike to any political observer on the Middle East is why PLO, the main victim of the Camp David Accords came forward to embrace Egypt whom they considered as a 'traitor' to their cause. It has always been an irony

It is very likely that the PLO under Arafat would draw itself closer to Egypt and would play a more significant role in overall Arab-Egypt reconciliation than any other party for the sake of PLO's own interests.

of Palestinian fate that despite verbal sympathies they were hardly welcome in any Arab state and wherever they went, they were either expelled or became the victims of intra-Arab rivalries. In 1980 they were expelled from Jordan, in mid-seventies they fell victims of Lebanese civil war and again in 1983 they were expelled from Syria and Libya. In regard to their relation with the moderate Arab states, most Palestinians are convinced that financially the former can assist them but in real terms they cannot play an effective role to solve the problem because of their manifold constraints. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union who all along supported the Palestinian cause recently seems to be cool in her relations with the PLO because of its moderate policy orientation and negotiations with Jordan. In these circumstances the PLO, particularly the moderate groups under the leadership of Yasser Arafat, have hardly any option other than coming closer to Egypt. Moreover, Egypt is the only Arab state who inspite of her relations with Israel had all along maintained good relations with the Palestinians. So in days to come it is very likely that the PLO under Arafat would draw itself closer

36. *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), 9 December, 1983.

to Egypt and would play a more significant role in an overall Arab-Egypt reconciliation than any other party for the sake of PLO's own interests.

Arab States

In general, the Arab outlook toward Egypt since 1979 has changed in different degrees. Most of the Arab countries has reviewed their relations with Egypt from the perspectives of their national interests and priorities.

The moderates, who from the beginning of the Camp David process maintained a low key position and ultimately joined the radicals to oppose Egypt, have significantly changed their attitude and adopted a number of steps with a view to improving their relations with Egypt. Some of them congratulated Egypt on the occasion of her getting back of Sinai, expressed brotherly solidarity and called for Egypt's early return to the Arab fold.

This moderate group played an active role in embracing back Egypt to the OIC and many of them consider that the integrity of both Islamic and Arabic Organizations cannot be maintained without the presence of Egypt in both.³⁷ However, the nature of future Arab-Egypt relations will be mainly determined by national priorities of individual countries and the overall situation of the Middle East. At the same time there are some common factors that may seriously influence the future Arab-Egypt relations, Firstly, the Gulf war. The two neighbouring countries, Iran and Iraq, have been engaged in a fratricidal war since 1980. But the recent trend of the war not only complicated the situation, but also posed a threat to the security of the region. Iraq, one of the main initiators of the anti-Egyptian campaign of 1979, being concerned of her future in the war has softened her position toward Egypt. She now as strongly advocates Egypt's return back to the Arab fold as she needs more of Egyptian help in the war. Although diplomatic relations have not yet been formally reestablished, Iraq is

37. *The Egyptian Gazette*, 5 February 1984.

already receiving limited military assistance from Egypt.³⁸ With the further escalation of the Gulf war the Arab states of the Gulf along with Iraq may request Egypt to be more involved in the war by improving their relations with the latter. The growing spread of fundamentalism and radical elements in the region is another factor that may compel the conservative Arab states to improve their relations with Egypt and seek her help. The deteriorating situation in Lebanon is another factor that may draw the attention of the Arab states to improve their relations with Egypt. Fourthly, the growing Soviet influence in the region may work as a driving force to reunite the moderate Arabs and accelerate the process of Arab-Egypt rapprochement. Finally, Egypt's readmission into the Islamic body may encourage the Arab states to review their relations with Egypt.

Whatever compulsions the moderates may have, it seems that the radicals who described the Sinai withdrawal as a 'theatrical one' will blockade the process and try to sabotage the whole issue. The activities of the radicals very much subscribe to the idea. Because of

The Arabs, particularly the moderates have a number of concerns which may work as a driving force for their reconciliation with Egypt, but in the present circumstances it is difficult to foresee when, how and in what form an overall Arab-Egypt rapprochement may take place.

strong opposition of the radical group to the Saudi 8-point peace plan which implicitly recognised Israel, the Arab league could not hold its 1981 summit. Meanwhile the Soviets who had all along rejected the Egypt-Israeli peace moves, are most likely to continue with their influence on the radical Arabs in hindering the prospect of an Arab-Egypt reconciliation. The radical PLO factions, who strongly criticised Arafat's Cairo visit can hardly be expected to welcome such prospects either. Finally, the strong anti-Egypt position taken by

38. *International Herald Tribune*, 10-11 April 1982.

the Arab radicals during the Fourth Summit of the OIC hardly suggests any significant favourable change in near future as regards their policy toward the issue. On the contrary, they may adopt more radical stand in the Arab League and try to sabotage the issue which they could not do in the OIC because of strong Asian and African support in favour of Egypt's readmission.

Concluding Remarks

From the above discussion it seems that in the economic field there are hardly any immediate factor that may compel the parties toward an early reconciliation of their relations. In the political field, the parties, particularly the moderate Arabs have a number of concerns which may work as driving force for a possible Arab-Egypt reconciliation. But in the present circumstances it is very difficult to forecast when, how and in what circumstances an overall Arab-Egypt rapprochement may take place. Although from an outside observation the radicals seem to be weaker but there are evidences that they will strongly oppose Egypt's readmission into the Arab League. Their past and present activities very much subscribe to such possibilities. In these circumstances for the Arab League, where decisions are taken by consensus, it will be difficult to settle the issue. On the contrary, the division in the Arab world may be sharpened and the situation may be further complicated. Considering the very sensitive nature of the issue it may be more pragmatic for individual countries to review their relations with Egypt on bilateral levels so that further escalation of hostilities may be avoided. Improvement of relations at bilateral levels may lead to a climate conducive to overall Arab-Egypt reconciliation on the basis of a pre-eminence of shared perspectives over continued divergencies.