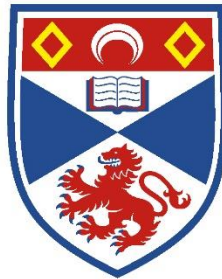


Bandwagon for Profit: Egyptian Foreign Policy toward Iran

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University of
St Andrews

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of PhD
at the University of St Andrews

Date of Submission

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Abstract

What explains the lack of normalized relations between Egypt and Iran? Despite mutual potential benefits Egypt and Iran could have gained from normalized bilateral relations over the past several decades, a range of factors prevented them from doing so, including personality politics, domestic political and economic considerations, as well as regional and external alliances and competing visions of regional order. Accordingly, the trajectory of modern Egyptian policy toward Iran has been non-linear. Realist and constructivist schools of International Relations theory, on their own, cannot adequately explain how Egypt's foreign policy toward Iran varied from times of hostility, friendship, stagnation, and openness under Presidents Gamal Abdel Nasser, Anwar Sadat, Hosni Mubarak, and Muhammad Morsi. As such, neoclassical realism--with its emphasis on the interaction between geopolitical structural conditions and the roles of leadership and domestic politics in shaping a state's foreign policy--offers the best framework for analyzing Egypt's foreign policy behavior toward Iran.

List of Abbreviations

BoI	Balance of Interest
BoP	Balance of Power
BoT	Balance of Threat
CENTO	Central Treaty Organization (Baghdad Pact)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
EGIS	Egyptian General Intelligence Services (Also known as GIS)
G-15	Group of 15
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IR	International Relations
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (Pasdaran)
LAS	League of Arab States
MB	The Muslim Brotherhood
MP	Member of Parliament
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCR	Neo-classical Realism
NPT	Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty
NSF	National Salvation Front
OIC	Organization of Islamic Conference
PA	Palestinian Authority
RCC	Revolutionary Command Council
SCAF	Supreme Council of the Armed Forces
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
U.S.	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
WWI	First World War
WWII	Second World War

Chapter One: Introduction

Thesis Question

This dissertation examines Egyptian policy toward Iran under four Egyptian presidents – Gamal Abdel Nasser, Anwar al-Sadat, Hosni Mubarak, and Mohamed Morsi. The main puzzle of this study is what explains the zig-zag trajectory of Egypt-Iran relations? – from *Nasser’s animosity toward the Shah to Sadat befriending him to the normalized stagnation under Mubarak and Morsi’s brief attempt for openness toward Iran*? What best explains this puzzle: systemic structure and power politics or competing identities and ideologies? If it is either of these then what is the role of the individuals (leaders)? Are they just agents of the material or ideational forces or do their views and perceptions play a role in enacting foreign policy?

Leaders play an important role in developing a state’s foreign policy. In that sense, *to what extent has Egyptian leaders’ ideas and views of the structural conditions affected their policy and relationship with Iran*? I believe that Egyptian-Iranian relations cannot be explained solely through the structural level of analysis or via identity and ideology, and that other levels are necessary; specifically, the role of the leaders and domestic politics in shaping the state’s behavior. This multi-layered analysis best explains the changes in Egypt’s policy toward Iran under each president.

Thus, I propose a neoclassical realist framework where the geopolitical structural conditions are the independent variable and the role/perception of the leadership are the intervening variables. The interaction of these variables helps explain the foreign policy behavior and alliance decisions (dependent variable) of Egypt. See Fig. 1 below



This framework is not in any way an attempt to exclude other factors and sources that might influence foreign policy nor is it favoring one variable over the other, but it’s an effort to explain

a unique puzzle that is not fully elucidated by material or ideational factors alone, or simply one level of analysis. Ultimately, “an over emphasis on the role of a leader’s personality can obscure the domestic and external environmental determinants without which the foreign policy pattern cannot be properly interpreted; [and] an excessive focus on a country’s structural position obscures variations in foreign policy that may result from particular domestic configurations and policy choices.”¹

What do Egypt and Iran have in Common?

What do the presidents of Egypt and Iran, two countries across the Sunni-Shiite chasm in the Middle East, have in common? A lot, it turns out, including preoccupation with their internal stability and hunger for economic growth. Both talk about moderation, and the deep resources of their ancient cultures, even as the region’s sectarian war rages. They claim to want greater human rights but insist that their systems can change only gradually. They seem to worry most about security — the specter of terrorism and turmoil that lies just across their borders.²

Egypt and Iran are deeply rooted ancient civilizations in the Middle East with history spanning thousands of years full of moments of strength and weakness. The rise and fall of empires creates competition, which by default lead to times of enmity and friendship. The earliest documented interactions between Persia and Egypt goes back to the 5th century BC. At the time, Persia under the rule of Cyrus the Great was a growing strong empire, while the rulers of Egypt were weak and declining. Egypt was part of the competition between the growing empires of the Persians and the Greeks, and Cambyses II of Persia would later invade Egypt in 525 BC. This competition continued until Alexander the Great managed to defeat the Persian King Darius III and united Egypt and Persia under his vast empire. Throughout the following centuries, relations between Egypt and Persia were defined and affected by the regional changes that took place. These changes

¹ Gerd Nonneman. “Analyzing the Foreign Policies of the Middle East and North Africa: A Conceptual Framework,” *The Review of International Affairs*. 3.2, 2003 pp. 118-130

² David Ignatius. “Egypt and Iran have the same problem and the same answer.” *Washington Post*. New York, September 22, 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/egypt-and-iran-have-the-same-problem--and-the-same-answer/2016/09/22/1b970644-8103-11e6-8327-f141a7beb626_story.html?utm_term=.aad1a4f2b2f8

included the competition between the Roman and Persian empires, followed by the expansion of Islam to include both lands, and up until the Ottomans' annexation of Egypt in 1516.³

Egypt and Iran are proud nations that value their traditions and continue to preserve their pre-Islamic history. Both countries share a common religion, Islam, although following different sects – Sunni Egypt and Shiite Iran. Despite the apparent sectarian schism, Egypt's Sunnism is more unique and encompassing to other traditions like Sufism and Shiism, when compared to Saudi Arabia's Wahhabism. After all, Egypt was ruled for 200 years by the Shiite Fatimid dynasty, which built its capital, Cairo and its famous al-Azhar mosque.

Both Egypt and Iran belong to the same geographic region, which makes them relatively prone to overlapping threats and challenges. However, lacking physical borders and direct geographic proximity reduces the possibility of direct military engagement and/or an intensifying military build-up between them. In their modern history, both countries witnessed foreign interference and invasions with varying degrees. They witnessed uprisings and revolutions promising better livelihood and prosperity, yet they continue to be ruled by authoritarian regimes despite the portrayed democratic façade. Both nations have the biggest population, along with Turkey, in the region with majority of youth, which make them susceptible to similar domestic challenges in the short and long term, such as housing, unemployment, and food and water security.

Regionally and internationally, Egypt and Iran share similar views toward most regional issues, however, sometimes advocating different techniques. For instance, they championed the cause to free the Middle East from Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) since 1974, a policy that remains unattainable due to Israel's nuclear strategic ambiguity and the recent fear over Iran's nuclear program. Cairo and Tehran agree on the importance of territorial integrity, unity and stability of Iraq and Syria. They also stand and support the Palestinian right to an independent and contiguous state even though Egypt advocates for this goal using peace and negotiations, while Iran accepts violent resistance as a path to that goal. Despite the lack of normalized relations, Egyptian and Iranian leaders and senior officials have met on the sidelines of numerous international and

³ Saeed al-Sabbagh. *"Al 'Ilaqa bayn al Kahera wa Tehran"* [Relations between Cairo and Tehran]. Cairo: Al Dar Al Thakafya, 2003. P. 11-16. For more information on the Egyptian-Iranian history, see, Hussein Mugeeb Al Masry. *Iran w Misr 'abr al Tareekh* [Iran and Egypt Through History]. Cairo: Anglo-Egyptian Publishing, 1971.

regional conferences, among which are the United Nations (UN), Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and the Group of 15 (G-15).

Early Diplomatic Encounters

Persia gained the right to send official representatives to represent Iran in any Ottoman land after signing the treaty of Erzurum II in 1847. The first non-resident official representative to Cairo arrived in 1852. Since the 1860's, Egypt started witnessing a gradual expansion in the Iranian community. The community was comprised mainly of merchants, who founded their own factories, ran their own shops and established magazines and associations. One of the Iranian community magazines, *Chihrinima*, reported that Iranians once dominated the famous Khan el Khalili bazar in old Islamic Cairo. By the late 1930's and 1940's most of the new generation of Iranians had assimilated into Egyptian culture. Several Iranian businesses merged with local rising businessmen, and Arabic became widely spoken among the community and inter-marriages with Egyptians became normal.⁴ At the time, Egypt was an attractive destination for business and culture, and Cairo was growing and appealing to a number of diverse cultural and ethnic groups.

At the turn of the 19th century, Egypt and Iran were undergoing similar challenges – people fighting for more rights domestically and standing against regional British domination and colonization. In 1919, while the Iranians were protesting the Anglo-Iranian treaty, the people of Egypt went out in the streets calling for independence and for the end of the British mandate. The growing sense of nationalism and revival of long-lost glory created synergy amongst the educated elite and politicians of both countries. However, separated by the distance, language among other domestic challenges, both states did not develop any formal coordination against the British. In 1922, Egypt gained its independence from Britain, which was welcomed by Iran and as a result, this elevated Iranian representation in Cairo to an official delegation. This marked the start of official diplomatic relations between both independent countries.⁵

⁴ For more information about the Iranian community in Egypt, see Mohammad Yadegari “The Iranian Settlement in Egypt as Seen through the Pages of the Community Paper: *Chihrinima* (1904-1966),” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 16.2, 1980. It is important to note that Gamal Abdel Nasser's wife, Taheya, was of Iranian origin.

⁵ Iran was the only eastern country that had a diplomatic presence in Cairo. On the other hand, Egypt was the first Arab country to have diplomatic mission in Tehran which started after the ascendance of Reza Khan to the crown in December 1925. For more info see: Ahmadi. *Ibid.*, p. 42

Relations between the two Middle Eastern powers have had multiple setbacks over the past century, with its most recent impediments tracing back to the Iranian revolution of 1979. Back then Iran's new leaders cut their relations with Egypt in protest over the signing of Egypt's peace treaty with Israel. This was later exacerbated when Egypt gave asylum to the deposed Mohamed Reza Shah. After the initial enmity that followed Iran's revolution, Arab states, including the Gulf monarchies, reopened their embassies and most have normalized their relations with Tehran and developed economic and trade ties during the 1990's and 2000's. Nonetheless, more than 38 years have passed since the 1979 Iranian revolution and no formal diplomatic relations was established between Egypt and Iran, and their relations at times are hostile. Over the course of the 20th Century, I argue that normal and friendly relations between Egypt and Iran were the exception rather than the norm. These exceptional close moments were guided by personal and political interests of the Egyptian and Iranian leaders, and their overlapping regional vision at the time.

Research Narrative

My research argues that despite mutual potential benefits Egypt and Iran could have gained from normalized bilateral relations over the past three decades, a range of factors prevented them from doing so, including personality politics, domestic political and economic considerations, regional and external alliances and competing visions of regional order. In particular, the regional changes that occurred in 1979—Iran's Islamic revolution and Egypt's peace treaty with Israel—have had the utmost impact in framing the ongoing antipathy in bilateral relations between Egypt and Iran. These dramatic changes effectively moved Egypt into the United States and Gulf monarchs camp, and Iran into the anti-U.S. orbit. Nader Entessar puts this in perspective by highlighting four factors that influence Egypt's policy toward Iran and the Gulf region in general: Arab nationalism, perceived security concerns, economic distress and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism following the 1979 Iranian revolution.⁶

However, with the demise of Arab nationalism after the 1967 war and the death of Gamal Abdel Nasser, the role of ideology and Pan-Arabism ceased to be a forceful variable that influenced Egypt's foreign policy. Despite persistently and conflictingly identifying itself as Arab, Islamic, African and Mediterranean, I argue that Egypt's foreign policies became more pragmatic; pursuing

⁶ Nader Entessar. "The Lion and the Sphinx: Iranian-Egyptian Relations in Perspective," in Hooshang Amirahmadi and Nader Entessar, ed. *Iran and the Arab World*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993, p. 161.

regime and state interests rather than ideology. The perceptions of the Egyptian leaders, economic challenges and regime consolidation policies contributed to sustaining unfriendly relations with Iran, especially under the cautious and risk-averse Hosni Mubarak. Moreover, the strengthening of Egypt's alliances with the United States and the Gulf monarchies is directly correlated to aloof Egyptian-Iranian relations.

There are several approaches to and interpretations of the Egyptian policies toward Iran. It can be perceived as a balancing act against an “ideologically-motivated actor pursuing power in the name of Islamic revolution.”⁷ But it can also be perceived as bandwagoning with the United States and Saudi Arabia against a regime – Iran - that is “pursuing self-interest in an anarchic and high risk environment.”⁸ In either case Iranian activities are perceived by Egypt as revisionist and represent a challenge to the regional configuration and status-quo already in place, which believed to be beneficial by the Egyptian governments. Hence, I contend that Egypt is balancing Iran as a result of its bandwagoning with the Gulf monarchies and the United States. As highlighted by Randall Schweller's balance of interest concept, those who balance seek “self-preservation and the protection of values already possessed,” while bandwagoning “is usually to obtain values coveted.”⁹ While the presence of threats is important for effective balancing, bandwagoning does not require one but can still be indirectly aimed at dealing with a threat. And the benefits driven from the latter behavior can be enough reason for Egypt to subscribe to the alliances' perceived threat, i.e. Iran.

In other words, Egyptian-Iranian relations do not travel in a straight line between both capitals in which a decision by one is directly affecting or influencing the decision of the other. Egyptian decisions and policies, however, are filtered through the Egyptian leaders' perspectives and regime's interests, in addition to the regional and systemic structures. This could be seen when looking at Egypt's policy toward Iran under each president. More specifically, Egypt's policies, since Sadat's turn to the West, rest on maintaining regional status-quo, material benefits (military and economic) and regime stature. This is achieved by upholding peace with Israel and extracting

⁷ Marc Lynch. “Regional International Relations,” in Ellen Lust, ed. *The Middle East*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 315

⁸ Lynch. *Ibid.*, p. 315

⁹ Randall L. Schweller. “Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist States Back In.” *International Security*, 19.1, (1994): p. 74

the necessary benefits from its allies. Extracting the needed benefits could be through offering lip service to its allies or the use of ideational balancing and counter framing against Tehran (Sunni vs. Shiite or Arab vs Persian). Therefore, relations with Iran should be seen through this lens.

In summary, to understand this peculiar relationship between Egypt and Iran, it is important to bear in mind two critical spheres – the domestic and the systemic structures - that influence the leadership and the foreign policy choices. That’s why neoclassical realism offers a better understanding to foreign policy and alliance behavior by combining the individual/domestic and systemic approaches.

Foreign Policy and the Role of the Individual

Realist thinking in foreign policy analysis has largely focused “on the power impulse and has usually taken states as monolithic actors rationally calculating costs and benefits in a power-balancing game,” where the rules are predetermined because of the anarchic system.¹⁰ Other schools looked at the “inner workings of these states, focusing on decision making, and/or the elites and personalities making policy.”¹¹ The structuralist and Marxian-derived approached “has seen states’ interaction and foreign policy as determined largely by structures beyond the state level, with some states being dominant, [and] some dominated.”¹²

The psychological-idiosyncratic school¹³ - one of the most prominent among foreign policy analysis approaches, especially in analysis of the Middle East - attempted to connect national interest and the state with the decision makers (presidents and monarchs).¹⁴ Such method made it easier for researchers and analysts to connect and associate the abstract concept of foreign policy with a state leader especially in developing nations. Who has not associated Egypt’s foreign policy actions with its presidents Nasser, Sadat or Mubarak; or Iran’s policies with the shah or Khomeini

¹⁰ Nonneman. Ibid., p. 119

¹¹ Nonneman. Ibid., p. 119

¹² Nonneman. Ibid., p. 119

¹³ For more on this see: Richard Snyder, H.W. Bruck and B. Sapin. *Foreign Policy Decision Making*. New York: Free Press, 1962. James Rosenau. “Pre-Theories and Theories of Foreign Policy,” in B. Farrell, ed. *Approaches to Comparative and International Politics*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1966, p. 27-93.

For Third World examples and application, see: Bahgat Korany et al. *How Foreign Policy Decisions are Made in the Third World*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1986, Chapter 2 specifically.

¹⁴ Other approaches include: Economistic Approach and Bureaucratic Politics School. Bahgat Korany provide a useful summary of these approaches in Bahgat Korany. “Foreign Policy in the Third World: An Introduction,” *International Political Science Review*, 5.1, (1984) pp. 7-20.

or even identifying U.S. foreign policy doctrines with the president who enacted them like Nixon, Carter, Bush or Obama? Henry Kissinger once said, “As a professor, I tended to think of history as run by impersonal forces. But when you see it in practice, you see the difference personalities make.”¹⁵

The idiosyncratic approach made a valuable contribution when it created a “distinction between the decision maker’s operational [real world] and psychological [leaders’ perceptual world] environments.”¹⁶ This was an important differentiation so that we recognize that leaders and politicians create their own realities, and that “decision makers act in accordance with their perception of reality, not in response to reality itself.”¹⁷ This also highlighted that “there is no necessary reason why the interests of self-seeking politicians should coincide with the national interest [of a state].”¹⁸

James Rosenau established a ranking for the foreign policy determinants (independent variables) that highlighted the psychological factor in all developing countries, regardless of the size, as the number one variable in determining foreign policy. Rosenau’s scheme was as follows: size of a country; economic status (developed or underdeveloped); type of political system (open or closed); degree of penetration by outside powers; and areas of contention (territorial, regional status...etc.).¹⁹ The work of Rosenau sparked debate and led Michael Brecher and his colleagues to develop a multivariable model of fourteen independent variables of five groups to differentiate between the operational and psychological environments of the decision makers.²⁰ Nonetheless, Brecher’s main focus was the leaders’ perceptions and images of the real world, which he later applied to Israel’s foreign policy and decision making.²¹ Despite the different theoretical and methodological grounds used by Rosenau and Brecher to discuss the topic, the outcome was that

¹⁵ Walter Isaacson. *Kissinger*. NY: Simon and Schuster, 1992, p. 13.

¹⁶ Bahgat Korany and Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, ed. *The Foreign Policies of the Arab States: The Challenge of Globalization*. Cairo: The American University Press, 2010, p. 24

¹⁷ Michael Brecher. *The Foreign Policy System of Israel*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972, p. 11-12

¹⁸ Christopher Hill. *The Changing Politics of Foreign Policy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p. 8

¹⁹ James Rosenau. “Pre-Theories and Theories of Foreign Policy,” in B. Farrell, ed. *Approaches to Comparative and International Politics*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1966, p. 27-93

²⁰ Michael Brecher, Blema Steinberg, and Janice Stein. “A Framework for Research on Foreign Policy Behavior.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. March 1969, p. 75-102

²¹ See: Michael Brecher. *The Foreign Policy System of Israel*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972; *Decisions in Israel’s Foreign Policy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974; and *Crisis and Decision-Making: Israel 1967 and 1973*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980.

the psychological-idiosyncratic variable overweighs the other variables. It's important to note, however, that Rosenau and Brecher have effectively reduced the complexity of foreign policy to the psychological-idiosyncratic variable where "Brecher privileges the policymaker's psychological environment over the operational in all cases, whereas Rosenau limits this psychological primacy to the countries of the global south."²²

The idiosyncratic model simplified the complex foreign policy making process by focusing the analysis on leadership perceptions. This interpretation has neglected other equally important variables like the political, economic and social status inside or outside the country of study. Therefore, a holistic approach is needed to better understand and explain a state's foreign policy. This is especially so because it is not uncommon that a leader changes but a state's foreign policy behavior continues in the same pattern.

The Varying Weights of Different Levels of Foreign Policy Analysis

Pre-theories and Theories of Foreign Policy by James Rosenau proposed that leadership and the international system would play a major role in the foreign policies of Third World states. From a somewhat different perspective, foreign policy is said to have, "in varying ways been determined by the needs of the regimes at home, the changing availability of resources, and the international strategic and economic framework."²³ But these factors have greater impact via leadership perceptions: the role of foreign policy should be looked at from "the leaderships' perceptions about the security of their regime, and about the opportunities and challenges presented by both their domestic and their external environments."²⁴ The personality and perception of leaders "take on added significance when power is concentrated in the hands of a leader, when institutions are in conflict, or in times of great change."²⁵

²² Korany and Dessouki. *Ibid.*, p. 25

²³ Nonneman. *Ibid.*, p. 122

²⁴ Nonneman. *Ibid.*, p. 121

²⁵ Daniel Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack. "Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In." *International Security*. 25.4, 2001, p. 109.

For other useful work investigating the role of leaders and their characteristics in shaping foreign policy and decision making, see Margaret G. Hermann. "Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior using the Personal Characteristics of Political Leaders." *International Studies Quarterly*, 24, 1980, pp. 7-46; Margaret G. Hermann and Charles F. Hermann. "Who Makes Foreign Policy Decisions and How: An Empirical Inquiry." *International Studies Quarterly*, 39, 1989, pp. 361-387; Barbara Kellerman and Jeffery Rubin, ed. *Leadership and Negotiation: A New Look at the Middle East*. New York: Praeger, 1988; and Margaret G. Hermann, Thomas Preston, Bahgat Korany and Timothy M.

Daniel Byman and Kenneth Pollack argue that “the goals, abilities, and foibles of individuals are crucial to the intentions, capabilities, and strategies of a state.”²⁶ These leaders, moreover, not only influence their states’ actions “but also shape the reactions of other nations, which must respond to the aspirations, abilities and aggressiveness of foreign leaders.”²⁷ To that Nonneman adds that “a strong, domestically secure leader will have much greater room for maneuver in his external bargaining, than is likely to be the case for a regime that is under serious pressure at home.”²⁸

This is particularly the case with Egypt. Each president played the critical role of the sole foreign policy maker – with some input from the security apparatus or the foreign ministry bureaucrats. The leaders used foreign policy as a tool to serve their domestic consolidation of power and legitimation especially with the lack of any democratic processes and respect of public opinion. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the Egyptian presidents were not constrained by the geo-politics and geo-economics of the region and the world. In short, one must trace the interaction between system and leader, structure and agent, with the motivations of the leader understood to be as much concerned with internal as well as external threats and opportunities.

Foreign Policy Restructuring in Egypt: Changing System, Changing Leader

In that sense, this study argues that Egypt went through two rounds of foreign policy restructuring since 1952 that were influenced by the leadership views of the system structure at the time. The first was under president Gamal Abdel Nasser (1954-1970) and the second under president Anwar Sadat (1970-1981). On the other hand, president Hosni Mubarak’s reign (1981-2011) witnessed periods of consolidation, status-quo and stagnation. How can we conceive of such major variations in foreign policy? —what might be called foreign policy restructuring?

Ali E. Hillal Dessouki describes foreign policy restructuring as:

a major alteration or breakup in the orientation of an actor in favor of establishing a new set of commitments and alliances. It is more than a change in tactics or instruments of policy implementation and goes beyond the routine fluctuations and oscillations of the foreign policy behavior of developing countries. It involves a

Shaw. “Who Leads Matter: The Effects of Powerful Individuals.” *International Studies Review*, 3.2, 2001, pp. 82-131.

²⁶ Byman and Pollack. pp.

²⁷ Byman and Pollack. *Ibid.*, p. 109

²⁸ Nonneman. *Ibid.*, p. 124

basic reconsideration of an actor's perceptions of the global or regional system and of its role within that framework.²⁹

There are several indicators to measure the restructuring of foreign policy which include “patterns of diplomatic, commercial, military and cultural relations between the country and the outside world.”³⁰ For example, Nasser realized Egypt's potential as an Arab and regional hegemon and he sought to exploit benefits from such standing. He cleverly played on

exploiting the changes in international balance of power, namely the local weakening of Western imperialism, the Soviet challenge to West dominance, and the national awakening of the Arab peoples, he achieved the long-sought British withdrawal from Egypt, defeated the Western security pacts, nationalized the Suez Canal and put Egypt at the head of an aroused Arab nationalist movement.³¹

Nasser's regional leadership came with a pushback from other regional powers and heavy costs represented in the Yemen War and the catastrophic defeat of 1967. Israel's control of Arab lands obliterated Nasser's ambitious foreign policy and dictated a radical toning down of his rhetoric and policies.

Sadat ascended to power under new regional dynamics and a weaker Egypt. He led an Egypt-first policy approach with a specific focus on regaining the Sinai and achieving peace with Israel. Through the 1970's and especially after the 1973 War, Sadat led a total change in Egypt's policies moving away from the state-led socialist approach to an open market policy without the necessary adjustments to protect the country from heavy debts and borrowing. Egypt's dire need for economic support and rehabilitation made it prone to western penetration that later minimized the room for maneuver under Mubarak. Nonetheless, Sadat's belief in the triumph of the West over the East (U.S. vs. USSR) “undoubtedly better positioned Egypt for the post-Cold War era of American hegemony and globalization.”³²

²⁹ Ali E. Hillal Dessouki. “Regional Leadership: Balancing off Costs and Dividends in the Foreign Policy of Egypt,” in Bahgat Korany and Ali E. Hillal Dessouki. *The Foreign Policies of Arab States: The Challenge of Globalization*. Cairo: The American University Press, 2010, p. 167

³⁰ Ali E. Hillal Dessouki. *Ibid.*, p. 167. For more on this concept, see K. J. Holsti. *Why Nations Realign: Foreign Policy Restructuring in the Post-War World*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1982

³¹ Raymond Hinnebusch and Nael Shama. “The Foreign Policy of Egypt,” in Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, ed. *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States*. London: Lynne Rienner, 2014, p. 151

³² Hinnebusch and Shama. *Ibid.*, p. 151

Mubarak, for thirty years, sustained the Sadat legacy and further cemented the status-quo. Despite an active foreign policy in his first 10 years to rehabilitate Egypt's relations with the Arabs, African nations, the Soviet Union and balance it with the U.S., his risk averse style led to the trading of foreign policy decisions for geo-economic benefits. This was particularly the case in Egypt's relations with the Gulf and the United States. By the end of his rule, Egypt's dependency on foreign financing and aid, in addition to regional changes, influenced its foreign policy positions. A case in point is Egypt's normalized stagnation with Iran despite opportunities for rapprochement offered by systemic and regional changes.

The Egyptian uprising of 2011 led some to expect a change in Cairo's foreign policy due to revolutionary pressures and the election of new leaders to power. The anticipation of a change from below and more adherence to public opinion proved ill-founded as "external constraints, economic dependency, the balance of power, combined with an entrenched national security state" proved stronger and resilient to the revolutionary moment.³³ This was further illustrated by the Muslim Brotherhood and President Morsi's incompetence and inability to build a national consensus on issues of regional and foreign policy.

Dissertation Plan

The dissertation is composed of six chapters including an introduction and a conclusion. The first chapter introduces the research topic, identified the puzzle and highlighted the thesis question. It follows with chapter two, which will provide a literature review for both the realist and constructivist schools in International Relations (IR). It aims to show the limitation of both schools in explaining the research puzzle, for which I propose a framework using neoclassical realism (NCR).

Chapter three is the beginning of my empirical work; starting a brief overview of their interaction under Egypt's monarchy. Then I move to explain the hostile relationship between Cairo and Tehran under President Nasser and his perception of Mohamed Reza Shah of Iran. Chapter four observes the growing close ties between Egypt and Iran under President Sadat, who established a close personal friendship with the Shah. The chapter looks at the political as well as the brief economic cooperation between both countries. I conclude with Iran's Islamic Revolution of 1979

³³ Hinnebusch and Shama. *Ibid.*, p. 152

and Egypt's peace with Israel, which created a new phase in both countries' relations. The fifth chapter analyze the stagnant and suspicious relations between Mubarak and the Islamic Republic. It highlights the different regional changes as well as the bilateral opportunities at normalization through Mubarak's 30-year tenure. Chapter six will discuss the short-lived presidency of Mohamed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) illustrating their attempt at rapprochement with Iran and the Salafists' role in growing anti-Iran and anti-Shiite rhetoric. Then chapter seven serves as a conclusion for the whole dissertation summarizing my empirical findings and highlighting areas for further theoretical or empirical research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review and Framework of Analysis

Introduction

This chapter will review the main tenets of both realism and constructivism. Both theories recognize the role of the state but from different perspectives – power vs. identity. Nonetheless, they do not provide a conclusive explanation to the puzzle of the study. Thus, I argue that Neoclassical Realism theory would be best positioned to explain Egyptian-Iranian relations. After this review of the literature, I will present a framework of analysis to explain the case of Egyptian policy toward Iran.

Literature Review

The predominant school in international relations (IR) theory, realism, puts its main emphasis on the role of the state as a rational unitary actor, and it aspires to explain the international system through power politics (material factors) and the inherent belief in the anarchy of the system.³⁴ Realists believe that the systemic structure is the most important variable in explaining alliance behavior and threat perception. The system is shaped by material factors and identity is not as important because state survival, which is always at stake trumps every other consideration. However, realism is not a single theory and various scholars have tried to bridge some of its gaps in an attempt to provide a more thorough and inclusive explanations by championing different iterations like structural realism³⁵, defensive³⁶ and offensive realism.³⁷

Classical realism is “primarily concerned with the sources and uses of national power in international politics and the problems that leaders encounter in conducting foreign policy.”³⁸ Neorealism focuses on “explaining common patterns of international behavior over time” by tracing “recurring patterns of world politics” to the anarchic structure of the international system.³⁹

³⁴ For classical realism work, see: Edward H. Carr. *The Twenty Years Crisis*. London: Macmillan, 1939; and Hans J. Morgenthau. *Politics Among Nations*. New York: Knopf, 1948

³⁵ Kenneth N. Waltz. *Theory of International Politics*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Pub., 1979

³⁶ See: Robert Jervis. “Cooperation under the Security Dilemma.” *World Politics* 30.2 (1978), pp. 167-214; Stephen M. Walt. *The Origins of Alliances*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987; Thomas J. Christensen and Jack Snyder. “Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity.” *International Organization* 44.2 (1990), pp. 137-168

³⁷ John J. Mearsheimer. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: Norton, 2001

³⁸ Steven E. Lobell, et al. *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 16

³⁹ Lobell, et al. *Ibid.*, p. 16

Neoclassical realism (NCR) takes account of both leadership concerns and systemic patterns, but its priority is to build theories of foreign policy not just theories of the system. It “seeks to explain variation in the foreign policies of the same state over time or across different states facing similar external constraints.”⁴⁰ Neoclassical realists argue that the structure is material but how states respond to it depends on domestic factors that include identity and perception and form an intervening belt. In other words, NCR seeks to explain why, if two states are exposed to the same structural changes/conditions, one state would see the change as a threat while the other would not. Why would one state bandwagon while the other chooses to balance? Such choices and decisions would depend on the domestic intervening variable, which affects the perception of the system.

On the other hand, constructivism, an emerging approach in IR during the 1980s, posed a challenge to neorealism and neoliberalism, and further developed during the post-Cold War era. It stresses the importance of identities and belief systems in shaping the actors - which in turn - shape the international system. Constructivist scholars argue that the state system is created by a constructed set of norms and identities, which affects states’ interactions with other states, and shapes their relations with the international system. While material factors are present and perceived, such perceptions are influenced by the ideational beliefs and norms of leaders and states. In other words, material factors mean nothing on their own, but become meaningful once they are interpreted through norms and structures of identity.

In the following section, realism and constructivism will be elucidated in more detail showing inadequacy on their own to explain the prolonged stagnation in Egyptian-Iranian relations.

Realism: Power Politics at Play

Realism is still considered the most widely influential theory used in explaining International Relations. Realist scholars build their analyses on several assumptions. First, the main actors in world politics are the territorial organized entities, i.e. states. Although states are not the only actors in world politics, realists believe that a great deal can be understood through the behavior and interactions of these states rather than through studying the role of the individuals, non-state actors or even international organizations. From here comes the state-centric approach as it regards

⁴⁰ Lobell, et al. Ibid., p. 21

humans to be incapable of living as individuals and must be members of a group that commands their loyalty and provides for their livelihood and above all, security. Second, realists believe that relations among states are always competitive and every entity is looking for its own interests amidst the insecurity of the anarchic international arena. Politics then becomes a struggle “among self-interested groups under conditions of general scarcity and uncertainty.”⁴¹ Third, realists assume that [material] power is essential for not only survival, but also for securing goals and interests.⁴² This anarchic international system has no central government to regulate states’ interactions, resulting in a lack of trust between states that prompts each to look for maximizing its power, especially the military, to attain its goals and interests. Competition is a direct consequence of anarchy, which creates a Machiavellian self-help system where each state should rely on itself, or an alliance, to achieve its interests and ensure its survival.⁴³

Given the anarchy and search for power, states are vulnerable to a security dilemma.⁴⁴ This dilemma entails that the more a state builds arms to protect itself from other states in the system, the more these states become insecure and more prone to increase their arms, which then prompts a negative never-ending cycle in which all become less secure. The problem is that even if a state is only arming itself for defensive purposes only, other states still may question its intentions and assume that its armament could threaten their security. The anarchic self-help system – suggested by realists – not only assumes a security dilemma, but also suggests that cooperation among states is difficult – if not impossible – to achieve in some cases. Nonetheless, according to Alexander Wendt, “security dilemmas are not given by anarchy or nature” but, they are “a social structure composed of intersubjective understandings in which states are so distrustful that they make worst-case assumptions about each other's intentions”.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Lobell, et al. *Ibid.*, p. 14

⁴² John Mearsheimer summarized the main conjunctures of realism as follows: 1. The absence of a central authority that sits above states and can protect them from each other; 2. States always have some offensive military capability; 3. States can never be certain about other states’ intentions; 4. States are eager to maintain their territories intact, and enjoy an autonomous political order; and 5. States are rational actors. John Mearsheimer. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003

⁴³ Scott Burchill et al. *Theories of International Relations*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009

⁴⁴ The term was originally coined by John Herz. See John Herz. “Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma”, *World Politics*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1950): 171–201. Also, Robert Jervis. “Cooperation under the Security Dilemma.” *World Politics*, 30.2, (1978): pp. 167-214.

⁴⁵ Alexander Wendt. “Anarchy is what states make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics.” *International Organization*, 6.2, (1992): p. 397

Realists are known for their pessimism toward “moral progress and human responsibilities” and they tend to view history as cyclical rather than progressive. Classical realism is skeptical of human ability to overcome conflict and establish durable peace and cooperation. The doubts are drawn from their belief in inherent lust for power within human nature alongside a belief that the international system can never be governed.⁴⁶ However, contemporary realists think that pessimism comes mainly from the nature of the international system rather than human nature. Still many critics point out that agency—Realist leaders’ belief in the anarchy of the world-- leads them to reproduce insecurity and conflict, a “realist world.” This anarchic world leaves states with Balance of Power (BoP) and its iterations – Balance of Threat (BoT) and bandwagoning - as the central concepts in mitigating anarchy.

Gregory Gause provides a critique to the neorealist approach in his paper: “Systematic Approaches to Middle East International Relations.” He discusses several shortcomings of the realist approach to understanding and analyzing Middle East politics. Gause highlights the predominance of ideological-political challenges, rather than direct threats from armies, as the most important factor explaining the system and changes to it. For example, Arabism and/or Islamism “offer legitimations for attempts to reorganize the international politics of the Middle East, to convert the region from a formally anarchic system of alike units to a hierarchical system of super-ordinate and subordinate units...”⁴⁷ These ideologies challenge the sovereignty of Middle Eastern states, which leads to instability in the interstate politics of the region. Moreover, most of the Arab-Arab conflicts are the result of ideological concerns and rivalries. Arab nationalism led by Nasser during the 1950s and 60s threatened other Arab ruling elites. Similar fears aroused in the aftermath of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. Arab Gulf monarchs feared that the revolution would be exported to their homelands. Moreover, the rising radicalization of Islamists in the region was among the main factors that led some Arab countries to support Iraq in its war against Iran during the 1980’s.

In Gause's point of view, the multi-polarity of the region contributes to the survival of many of its ‘artificial’ states and helps explain the failure of Arab unity. An example for this argument can be found in the politics of the Arab Cold War. A country like Jordan was using the Egyptian-Saudi

⁴⁶ Paul R. Viotti and Mark V. Kauppi. *International Relations Theory: Realism, Pluralism, Globalism and Beyond*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1998

⁴⁷ Gregory Gause III. “Systematic Approaches to the Middle East International Relations.” *International Studies Review*, 1.1, (1999): p. 26

rivalry to keep itself secure. It claimed neutrality although King Hussein allied with the Saudis fearing Nasser's oratory and its impact on his weak country, which could lead to its devastation. Another example is Oman, which tries to keep a balanced and good relationship with opposing regional powers like Saudi Arabia and Iran. Nonetheless, one cannot dismiss the influence exerted by outside powers like the United States on regional dynamics especially since the end of the Cold War.⁴⁸ The Middle East is widely affected by Kenneth Waltz's concept of "polarity of the system", where the world hegemon(s) influence and interfere in the policymaking and decisions of the regional states. Ever since the fall of the Soviet Union and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the United States has played a substantial role in Middle Eastern politics.

Classical Realism and the Balance of Power

Balance of power (BoP) is "a state of affairs such that no one power is in a position where it is preponderant and can lay down the law to others."⁴⁹ Nicholas Rengger argues that at least from the Renaissance onward the main principle that has been widely seen as a way of securing order in a chaotic and anarchic world is the balance of power.⁵⁰ This concept was clear with the emergence of the European state system, which became the cornerstone of the bi-polar system during the second half of the twentieth century.

Major classical realists like Hans Morgenthau, George Kennan and Rheinhold Niebuhr believed that a balance of power, especially post WWII, is the method that keeps the international system from falling back into an all-out war. BoP is based on the presence of nation-states that participate as individual actors in the system and are concerned with preserving what they perceive to be their national interests, which presumably include, among others, notions like national identity, independence, sovereignty, and power capabilities. The balancing states would create a system to help prevent any nation from becoming sufficiently strong (i.e. hegemon) to enforce its will on others. In the absence of any central authority, the only sanction other than international law is the capacity of the powers to hold each other in check. If this system fails, nothing prevents any sufficiently powerful state from ignoring the law and acting solely according to its interests.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.11-31

⁴⁹ Hedley Bull. *Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press, c.2002.

⁵⁰ Nicholas J. Rengger. *International Relations, Political Theory and the Problem of Order: Beyond International Relations Theory?*. London: Routledge, 2000

Hans Morgenthau presents the balance of power as one of the central concepts in his book *Politics Among the Nations*. He depicts it as “a necessary outgrowth of power politics.” However, his theory and particularly his balance of power concept, came under fire for being ambiguous and incoherent. Nonetheless, realists insisted that balance of power is an intrinsic feature of international relations and cannot be discarded. It might, however, be made more precise. Thus, Richard Little suggests that Morgenthau’s theory is based on a model that “conflates two different dynamic processes.” He adds that the first links balance of power with the unintended consequences of the engagement of great powers in their drive for hegemony. While the other is associated with “a complex set of social, ideational and material factors” that minimize the effects of the first dynamic and support the great powers in “maintaining an equilibrium that promotes their collective security and common interests.”⁵¹ Little argues that Morgenthau did not distinguish these two dynamics, whereby separating them could eliminate some of the confusion linked to Morgenthau’s approach.

Meanwhile, as much as the balance of power is the central concept, the English school theorist Hedley Bull, while accepting balance of power, identifies diplomacy and international law as further aides to maintain order. Another feature of Bull’s doctrine is to distinguish between the general ‘central’ balance of power and the local (regional) balance of power. During the Cold War phase, U.S.-USSR balance of power was regarded as a central balance to the international system, which differs from the local subordinate balance created within certain regions of the world.⁵²

The balance of power theory deals primarily with superpowers and a multi-polar international system. Its ability to explain regional balance of power is limited due to its focus on world hegemony as the main balancers who keep the world from colliding into war. The ability of these world powers to keep all the regions of the world at peace is in fact, rather limited. In the Middle East, a region prone to war and where there are several aspiring hegemony, some nation states have exploited the U.S. – USSR rivalry for their own national interests. Even after the fall of the Soviet Union, the American world hegemony and its regional influence did not help create a peaceful co-existing system.

⁵¹ Richard Little. *The Balance of Power in International Relations: Metaphors, Myths and Models*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 92

⁵² Bull. *Ibid*

Neo-Realism and the Balance of Threat

Representing a neorealist perspective, Stephen Walt contributed to this field through numerous works on alliance formation and championing the balance of threat theory.⁵³ It is regarded by some, including Walt, as an improvement to the “traditional balance of power theory by providing greater explanatory power with equal parsimony.”⁵⁴ Walt defines balancing as allying with others against the prevailing threat; while bandwagoning refers to alignment with the source of threat or danger. The main modification in Walt's argument is that “states ally to balance against threats rather than power alone.” In other words, states will balance against or bandwagon with the state that demonstrates high level of threat (not just increased power capabilities) and represents the biggest danger. He argues that understanding how alliances are made and why states balance or bandwagon is crucial to the study of international relations and security studies.

Walt’s main conclusion is that states usually balance and rarely bandwagon. He perceives that the level of threat is affected by four variables: aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive capabilities and state intentions. An example for that is the situation in the Persian Gulf. The enduring hostility between the United States and Iran, the maximization of power and presence of the U.S. military in geographic proximity increases the threat perception not only between the United States and Iran but also, Iran and its neighboring Gulf states. This leads to the creation of an alliance/balance between the United States and some Middle Eastern countries who share a similar threat perception vis-a-vis Iran.

Another premise for Walt’s argument is that alliances based on ideologies are less powerful, despite their prevalent presence in world politics. He believes that some of the ideologies are extremely divisive and lead to more competition than cooperation. A good example is pan-Arabism and its impact on the Arab world. Nasser’s eloquent usage of the ideology and the dream for Arab nationalism created more tension with other Arab states than cooperation and alliance. In fact, it led to the polarization of Egypt and Saudi Arabia and a proxy war in Yemen during the 1960’s. The same can be said of the pan-Islamic rhetoric championed by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979, when he called for toppling of the un-Islamic governments. His policies and inflammatory

⁵³ Stephen M. Walt. *The Origins of Alliances*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987; Walt, “Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power,” *International Security*, 9.4 (1985), pp. 3-43; Walt, “Testing Theories of Alliance Formation: The Case of Southwest Asia,” *International Organization*, 43.2 (1988), pp. 275-316

⁵⁴Walt. *Ibid.*, p. 263

discourse left many countries in the region apprehensive. Such concerns were later used by Saddam Hussein as a tool to rally support from the Arab states in his eight-year war against Iran.

Nonetheless, Walt's balance of threat theory was criticized for failing to account for the role of domestic politics, state-society relations and elite alliances. This led to a much richer debate on alliance formation, especially in the Third World. Jack Levy and Michael Barnett argued that the balance of power/threat did not account for "Third world alliances in general or how state-society relations in particular might give rise to distinctive patterns of alignment behavior."⁵⁵ They concluded that alliances in the Third World are formed "to secure urgently needed economic and military resources to promote domestic goals, respond to external and internal security threats, and consolidate their [leaders'] domestic political positions."⁵⁶ Levy and Barnett discern that there is a tendency to perceive alliance formations "in terms of the external security guarantees" that it could provide, while neglecting the economic, military or technological resources such alliances might bring. Also, they tended to downplay the realists' "assumption that external security is the most important goal for a state."⁵⁷

They believed that the importance of this goal does not make it the priority of every state, since such threats are not as frequently occurring as widely thought, especially when compared to concerns of regime stability and survival. They observed that,

many of the governing elites in the Third World states stand alien from society, their rule is often maintained by a narrow base of political support and fragile coalitions that are solidified more by material benefits and less by a mobilizing ideology. Politics of domestic survival leads governments to reward supporters and bribe, pacify or coerce dissidents.⁵⁸

Omni-balancing

The work of Levy and Barnett on domestic sources for alliances follows similar logic to the theory of omni-balancing developed by Steven David.⁵⁹ In his article, David argues for a new approach

⁵⁵ Jack Levy and Michael Barnett. "Alliance Formation, Domestic Political Economy, and Third World Security," *Jerusalem Journal for International Relations*, 14.4 (1992), p. 22

⁵⁶ Levy and Barnett. *Ibid.*, p. 35

⁵⁷ Jack Levy and Michael Barnett, "Domestic Source for Alliances and Alignments: The Case of Egypt, 1962-1973," *International Organization*, 45.3 (1991), pp. 372-373

⁵⁸ Levy and Barnett (1991). *Ibid.*, pp. 376

⁵⁹ Steven R. David. "Explaining Third World Alignment." *World Politics*, 43.2 (1991), pp. 233-256

to explain Third World alignments. He believes that the balance of power cannot explain alliance behaviors in the Third World as it fails to account for the “often fatal nature of the international and *domestic* political environment that characterizes the Third World.”⁶⁰ In this regard, omni-balancing “incorporates the need of leaders to appease secondary adversaries, as well as to balance against both internal and external threats in order to survive in power.”⁶¹ David’s observation shares the conclusion of Levy and Barnett that state leadership tend to deal with immediate threats first and their risk orientation vary, which makes it difficult to assume which state goal (security, economic development, and political stability) takes priority over the other.

In other words, David’s omni-balancing incorporates internal threats to the leadership, which is a missing element in the BoP theory, since it only focuses on the actual or potential external threats that face states. David illustrates his theory through the cases of Ethiopia’s Mengistu Haile Mariam (aligned with the Soviet Union) and Egypt’s Anwar al-Sadat (aligned with the United States). In both cases, he maintains that the leadership in Ethiopia and Egypt appeased the international power (secondary threat) to defeat their primary domestic challenges, and that the “simple balance of power approach would not have maximized the chances for survival” for those regimes.⁶² He concludes that the role of domestic factors and leadership are important to consider when analyzing alliance choices; accordingly, omni-balancing has shown that sometimes focusing on the leadership and elite interests can better explain alignment decisions than by only focusing on state interests and power structure.

Despite the nuance of David’s omni-balancing approach by including domestic politics and leadership, yet its sole focus on threats alone be it external or internal is limiting our understanding to other forms of alliance behavior. David follows the core assumption of neorealism where states balance more than bandwagon and they only do it against threats. While this might be true some time, this belief dismisses the cases where states balance for interest or bandwagon for profit. Hence, David’s theory could benefit from adding another dimension that could be termed as Omni-Bandwagoning, where regimes joins the alliance or team that offers the most benefits whether security guarantees, economic gains or as simple as regime legitimation.

⁶⁰ David. *Ibid.*, p. 235. See David’s explanation of Third World characteristics, pp. 242-245

⁶¹ David. *Ibid.*, p. 236

⁶² David. *Ibid.*, p. 250

Moreover, as much as omni-balancing could explain leaders' decisions to offset domestic threats by allying with an external strong power, it doesn't fully fit or explain our puzzle over time. Egypt's policy toward Iran had little to do with Iran's influence in Egypt or as a result to growing internal threats to the Egyptian regime. As much as Iran's policy and revolutionary rhetoric could at times aim to appease popular support in the Arab world, like during the 2006 Israeli war on Lebanon, there is no evidence that it's the main reason for Egypt's wariness from the Iranians.

Constructivism: The Role of Identity and Ideology

Constructivism is “characterized by an emphasis on the importance of the normative as well as material structures, on the role of identity in shaping political action, and on the mutually constitutive relationship between agent and structure.”⁶³ Identity plays an important role for constructivists. Although we might find similarities between several states in the world, still the identity of each of them shape their actions. A chief proponent of this school is Alexander Wendt who argued “that the structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces, and that the identities and interests of actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature.”⁶⁴ In a challenge to the inherent belief in anarchic international politics, Wendt argued that “anarchy is what states make of it.”⁶⁵ He believed that anarchy is a social construction, which is shaped and influenced by the beliefs and attitudes of states. In other words, anarchy “is not an unchanging structure which imposes certain constraints on states and compels all to participate in an endless struggle for power and security.”⁶⁶ In fact, it can be constructed in different ways, e.g. Lockean or Hobbesian.

Constructivists, whether modernists or post-modernists, believed in three core ontological concepts about social life. First, is that normative and ideational structures are just as important as material structures. If “neo-realists emphasize the material structure of the balance of military power, and the Marxists stress the material structure of the capitalist world economy, constructivists argue that systems of shared ideas, beliefs and values also have structural characteristics, and that they exert a powerful influence on social and political action.”⁶⁷ Wendt argues that “material resources only acquire meaning for human action through the structure of shared knowledge in which they are embedded.”⁶⁸ In addition, the role of normative and ideational structures is stressed further as they are “thought to shape the social identities of political actors.”⁶⁹ In other words, the norms of the international system condition and affect the identity of states.

⁶³ Christian Reus-Smit. “Constructivism,” in Scott Burchill et al, *Theories of International Relations*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p. 209

⁶⁴ Alexander Wendt. *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p.1

⁶⁵ Alexander Wendt. “Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics.” *International Organization* 46.2 (1992), pp. 391-425

⁶⁶ Scott Burchill et al. *Theories of International Relations*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p.28

⁶⁷ Christian Reus-Smit. “Constructivism,” *Ibid.*, p. 220

⁶⁸ Alexander Wendt. “Constructing International Politics.” *International Security* 20.1, 1995, p. 73

⁶⁹ Reus-Smit. “Constructivism,” *Ibid.*, p. 220

Second, constructivists call for understanding the importance of how non-material structures condition the actors' identities because they regard identities to inform interests and, in turn, actions.⁷⁰ Unlike realists who only look for how actors would pursue their goals and interests, which they take as given or derived from the system—i.e. power and security, constructivists “argue that understanding how actors develop their interests is crucial to explaining a wide range of international political phenomenon that the rationalists ignore or misunderstand.”⁷¹ Even though constructivists, like Wendt argue that “identities are the basis of interests,”⁷² they are amenable to the possibility of self-interested actors, however, “they argue that this tells us nothing unless we understand how actors define their ‘selves’ and how this informs their ‘interests’.”⁷³

Third, constructivism posits that structures and agents are in a process of mutual creation and reproduction. In other words, the institutionalized norms and ideas “define the meaning and identity of the individual actor and the patterns of appropriate economic, political, and cultural activity engaged in by those individuals.”⁷⁴ Wendt adds that “through reciprocal interaction that we create and instantiate the relatively enduring social structures in terms of which we define out identities and interests.”⁷⁵ In this regard, upholding liberal democratic systems that supports free market policy and human rights as the norm for a model modern legitimate statehood only exists and sustained because of the continued practices of liberal democracy among certain states.⁷⁶

By the 1990's, three different strands of constructivism were developed: System level, Unit level and Holistic constructivism. The first group, systemic constructivism, led by Alexander Wendt focuses primarily on the interaction between the unitary state actors in the international level and

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 221

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 221

⁷² Wendt. “Anarchy is what states make of it,” p. 12

⁷³ Reus-Smit. “Constructivism,” Ibid., p. 221

⁷⁴ John W Meyer, John Boli, and George Thomas. “Ontology and Rationalization in the Western Cultural Account,” in George Thomas et al, *Institutional Structure: Constituting State, Society and the Individual*. London: Sage, 1987, p. 12

⁷⁵ Wendt. “Anarchy is what States Make of it.” Ibid., p. 406

⁷⁶ See: Emmanuel Adler. “Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics.” *European Journal of International Relations*, 3 (3), 1997, pp. 319–63; James Fearon and Alexander Wendt. “Rationalism vs. Constructivism: A Skeptical View.” In Thomas Risse, Beth Simmons, and Walter Carlsnaes, ed. *Handbook of International Relations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. 2002, pp. 52–72; Ronald Jepperson, Alexander Wendt, and Peter J. Katzenstein. “Norms, Identity and Culture in National Security,” in Peter Katzenstein, ed. *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996, pp. 33-75

ignores what happens within the domestic political realm. Wendt's influential writings contributed vastly in developing this strand of constructivism.⁷⁷ As a believer that state identity shapes and informs its interests, his systemic approach created a distinction between two types of state identities: the social and the corporate. The social identity refers "to the status, role or personality that international society ascribes to a state;" while the corporate identity is "the internal human, material, ideological, or cultural factors that make a state what it is."⁷⁸ Wendt's approach, however, came under fire for confining and narrowing the processes that shape international societies. If a state's social identity is created through normative and ideational structures where these structures are recognized as the result of state practices, then it would be very difficult to explain and analyze – especially with ignoring the domestic realm - some fundamental changes that occurs in the international society or in the state identity.

The unit-level approach represents the opposite of the systemic approach by focusing on the domestic components bracketed by Wendt. They look at the relationship and impact of the domestic social and legal norms and the interests and identities of the states. The writings of Peter Katzenstein are of importance to this sub-school of constructivism. His stress on the central role of institutional regulation and the national social and legal norms, while not ignoring the role of international norms was a welcomed addition.⁷⁹ The inclusion of domestic level enriches the analysis and could help account for variations of interest and identity across states. However, the unit-level constructivism could be challenged for its inability to account sometimes for similarities between states when there are patterns of convergence in identity and interest.

The holistic constructivism approach attempted to bridge the dichotomy of domestic and international level approaches developed by the other strands of constructivism. This group of scholars thought to unify the corporate and social identities of the state into one analytical framework that regards the international and domestic levels as two faces of a single political and

⁷⁷ Wendt, Alexander. "Anarchy is what states make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization*, 46, 1992; "Collective Identity Formation and the International State," *American Political Science Review*, 88.2, 1994; and "Constructing International Politics." *International Security* 20.1, 1995

⁷⁸ Reus-Smit. *Ibid.*, p. 223

⁷⁹ See: Peter Katzenstein. *Cultural Norms and National Security: Police and Military in Postwar Japan*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996; and *Tamed Power: Germany in Europe*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997

social order. The works of John Ruggie – on grand shifts in international systems⁸⁰ – and those of Friedrich Kratochwil – on changes within the modern system especially after the Cold War⁸¹ – albeit distinctive yet complimentary. It helps “explain the development of the normative and ideational structures of the present international system, as well as the social identities they have engendered.”⁸² However, the more this holistic approach focuses on grand transformations in the international system, the more it moves toward a structuralist approach and the domestic and human element tend to drop out of the analysis.

Critics contended that constructivists’ focus on the role of norms and identities, while exaggerating the agency of states to make what they want of anarchy, limits the ability to fully explain international or regional politics. Reus-Smit highlights four discontents characterizing contemporary constructivism: “the disagreement among constructivists over the nature of theory [as opposed to an analytical framework], the relationship with rationalism, the appropriate methodology and the contribution of constructivism to a critical theory of international relations.”⁸³

Constructivism and the Middle East

In his book, *Dialogues in Arab Politics*, Michael Barnett offered a constructivist approach to understanding Arab regional politics. He tried to explain the constraints of pan-Arabism on inter-Arab relations and how identity can influence and shape states’ behavior. Barnett demonstrated that inter-Arab rivalry was over norms unlike what Walt believed that pan-Arabism was employed as a weapon by the Arab States against each other. Leaders used it as an ‘instrument’ at their disposal to justify their policy choices. Arabism became a powerful tool that established a set of norms supported by the Arab publics and recognized as the standard of state and governments’ legitimacy. Barnett recognized that “Nasser’s power derived not from Egypt’s military capabilities

⁸⁰ See: John Ruggie. “Continuity and Transformation in the World Polity: Toward a Neorealist Synthesis.” In Robert Keohane, ed. *Neorealism and Its Critics*. New York: , 1986; and “Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing Modernity in International Relations,” *International Organization*, 47.1, 1993

⁸¹ See: Friedrich Kratochwil. “The Embarrassment of Changes: Neo-realism as the Science of Realpolitik Without Politics,” *Review of International Studies*, 19.1, 1993; and Rey Koslowski and Friedrich Kratochwil. “Understanding Change in International Politics: The Soviet Empire’s Demise and the International System,” *International Organization*, 48.2, 1994

⁸² Reus-Smit. *Ibid.*, p. 225

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 226. Reus-Smit offers further details on the discontents pp. 225-229

but from his ability to impose a meaning on the events of his time, to establish the norms of Arabism, and to weave a compelling image of the future.”⁸⁴ Thus, while economic and security benefits were important for some of the Arab rulers, pan-Arabism precluded such state interests and prioritized independence from, and unity against, non-Arab actors. Moreover, the post 1991 Gulf War debate of identifying the region—whether Mediterranean, Arab, or Middle Eastern—shows the “normative fragmentation” the Arab states reached after the decline of Arabism.⁸⁵ Barnett’s work illustrates the importance of the norms and constructed identities in shaping the domestic and foreign policies of the Middle East states. This attests that power politics is not the only way to form policies.

Nonetheless, Hinnebusch highlights three main challenges to Barnett’s argument. First, “it exaggerates the agency possessed by small powers in a world system dominated by the Western core.”⁸⁶ Hinnebusch argues that Nasser’s ability to create and champion pan-Arabism was due to the bi-polar structure of the international system. The rivalry in the international level have given Arabism and its pan-Arab order a shelter from direct Western intervention. Second, “normative dissensus” is not the only reason for the fall of pan-Arabism as Barnett ignores the impact of “the anarchic systemic structure on states’ interests.” The insecurity caused by the Arab Cold War, the Yemen watershed and the 1967 disaster, led different Arab countries to look for ways to defend themselves even if at the expense of their shared norms. A step predicted by realism’s belief of the anarchic system or as Hinnebusch put it “the anarchy of the state system, the material structure, triumphed over pan-Arabism, the normative structure.”⁸⁷ Finally, Arabism did not build a pan-Arab economic integration or interdependence project. This made it easier for the Western capitalist economies to penetrate the region and consolidate state dependency on selling its primary commodity, oil, especially after the 1973 oil boom.

Another attempt to define and research how identity impacts foreign policy is the edited volume on *Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East* by Shibley Telhami and Michael Barnett. The book developed a middle ground approach where there is no single identity encompassed the

⁸⁴ Michael Barnett. *Dialogues in Arab Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, p. 7

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.50

⁸⁶ Raymond Hinnebusch. “Identity in International Relations: Constructivism versus Materialism, and the Case of the Middle East.” *The Review of International Affairs*, 3.2 (2003), pp.358 – 362

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 361

region. While there might be shared history, language, religion and customs that could generate a regional sense of community, these same factors automatically exclude other groups who have different sets of norms. The authors identify three rival levels of identity—sub-state, state, and supra-state—contesting for the loyalties of the population in the Middle East, which makes matters more complicated. The superiority of one type of identity over the other is not always straightforward. The homogenous and more politically established Egypt have had a better chance to develop a state identity vis-a-vis countries like Iraq or Lebanon who have numerous ethnic and religious sects.⁸⁸

The volume's case studies tried to explore the role of identity in foreign policymaking. In the case of Egypt, for instance, Ibrahim Karawan recognizes that Egypt has shifted between Arab and Egyptian identities depending on the leadership and circumstances.⁸⁹ Thus, each form of identity has produced different foreign policy outcomes that suited the country's goals and interests. Nasser's Arab nationalism required an activist role in the region to illustrate his pro-independence and anti-imperialism policies.⁹⁰ On the other hand, Sadat believed that Arabism constrained his ability to reach peace with Israel and to join the Western camp, so he decided to champion an "Egypt first" approach/identity. A task that was made easier after the failure and costs of Nasser's Arabism – particularly, the 1967 defeat.⁹¹ One can argue that Egypt's longstanding homogeneity and history has given its leaders such maneuverability, as opposed to other leaders whose artificial states and heterogeneous population restricted their abilities – i.e. Saddam Hussein in Iraq or King Hussein of Jordan. Nonetheless, Egypt's identity and its leaders' policies are not constructed in a vacuum to fit the national or regime interest at the time but they are also shaped by variables like system structure and Egypt's position within the region. These points were missed in the analysis provided by Karawan.

⁸⁸ Shibley Telhami and Michael Barnett, ed. *Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002

⁸⁹ Ibrahim Karawan. "Identity and Foreign Policy: The Case of Egypt," in Shibley Telhami and Michael Barnett, ed. *Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002, p. 156

⁹⁰ Karawan. *Ibid.*, p. 157-160

⁹¹ Karawan. *Ibid.*, p. 161-162

In *Islam in the Balance*, Lawrence Rubin adopts ideational balancing as an analytical framework to “understand how and why ideas can be national security threats.”⁹² He contends that - like regular security dilemma – the ideational security dilemma triggers ideational balancing using counter-framing narratives and resource mobilization. This counterbalancing “aims to mitigate the domestic political threat from a projected transnational political ideology.”⁹³ Rubin posits that transnational ideologies can present greater and more immediate threats in the Middle East than shifts in military power. Political ideologies, like pan-Arabism or pan-Islamism, use culturally resonating symbols in an attempt to alter regime’s legitimacy and create social unrest. This gives ideational threats an advantage over military threats since it can influence other states and regimes that are not in the immediate geographic vicinity using tools like radio, newspapers, Television and the internet. Rubin concludes that ideological regimes’ ultimate goal is to transform the members of the system/region to its side, and not necessarily to acquire territory or increase relative power in the international system.⁹⁴

His book tests the ideational balancing framework on the reaction of Egypt and Saudi Arabia toward Islamist regimes of Iran in 1979 and of Sudan in 1989. It poses the question of why Egypt and Saudi Arabia perceived Iran’s Islamic revolution and rhetoric as a national security threat, as opposed to Syria, which did not fear the export of the revolution. Looking at Egypt’s case, Rubin highlights the war of *takfir* (blasphemy) waged by the Ayatollah’s—especially Khomeini—against the Egyptian government and Sadat specifically. The symbols and characteristics used against Sadat such as pharaoh, traitor and infidel, have negative connotation in Islam and were purposefully used to de-legitimize his rule and degrade his image within the Egyptian society and the Arab world. As a result, the Egyptian government started using Islamic counter narratives—attacking Khomeini and his version of Islam—to neutralize the ideational challenge and control the Egyptian public sphere.⁹⁵

Rubin is correct in highlighting the role and influence of the transnational ideologies on regimes’ survival and balancing behavior, however he focused only on the domestic political price to be

⁹² Lawrence Rubin. *Islam in the Balance: Ideational Threats in Arab Politics*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004, p. 21.

⁹³ Rubin. *Ibid.*, p. 40. Rubin highlight two key differences from traditional security dilemma: the currency to acquire security is nonmilitary and the threat is political and targeting regime survival and legitimacy.

⁹⁴ Rubin. *Ibid.*, p.12

⁹⁵ Rubin. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-51

paid by these regimes, i.e. legitimacy and societal unrest. Despite the challenge posed by the extreme ideological change in Iran's rhetoric and foreign policy, the ideational balancing concept dismiss the impact of the structural changes of the system, the leadership role and the economic domestic variable. Egypt's position in the system was weakened after its peace treaty with Israel in 1979. Its access to Arab economic aid was halted and it was expelled from the Arab League. This applied severe material as well as ideational pressure on Sadat's regime. This was later among the main pillars of Mubarak's 1980's policies— economic and political survival as well as regaining Arab world leadership. Thus, in assessing Egypt's alignment choices and threat perception, the system-structure explanation should be accompanied with domestic economic and political variables.

In conclusion, constructivism acknowledges that 1) states collectively construct the system structure / external environment and they can make it more or less threatening; 2) states' identities are constituted by interactions, which generates patterns of either enmity or amity; and 3) identity matters in shaping conceptions of interests and threats. Despite the persuasive arguments presented in the constructivists' work to show the importance of identity, "the constructivist attempt to prioritize identity over interests is as misguided as the materialist attempt to reduce identity to an epiphenomenon."⁹⁶ Moreover, constructivists lacked the careful specification of the external material balance of power and the internal policy process that is available in other approaches like neo-classical realism.

In fact, with growing various competing values, norms and (sub/supra) identities in the Middle East, my framework attempts to upgrade the neo-classical realism approach by incorporating leadership perceptions and strategies. Through this variable, we could filter and better understand how leadership views and interactions with another state, affects the balance of enmity or amity between them as well as the material balance of power.

⁹⁶ Hinnebusch. "Identity in International Relations," *Ibid.*, p. 362

Bandwagon for Profit: A Framework of Analysis

Having surveyed the theoretical approaches available for the construction of an appropriate framework of analysis for my research, this section will lay out the framework which is built on Neo-classical Realism (NCR) and specifically Randall Schweller's balance of interest approach.

Despite all the criticisms and the shortcomings, realism remains central to the study of international relations and alliance behavior. Furthermore, it is the most appropriate prism for a state-centric analysis and essential in understanding foreign policy. Indeed, the Middle East exemplifies the realist views of anarchy with high risk of war, deep mistrust and regional competitiveness. It lacks any central authority or clear regional hegemons - despite the presence of several middle powers (would-be hegemons) - to alleviate suspicions, prevent wars or provide for regional security and/or economic cooperation. Nonetheless, realism alone does not offer a full comprehensive explanation as regional configuration and structure can provide a partial yet incomplete answer to the central question of this dissertation. Moreover, realism's focus on external influence and power turned the state into a black box, and downplayed the role of domestic politics, state-society relations and the leadership. This is particularly important as it represents "inconsistency for a theory that has proposed the primacy, even the exclusivity, of the state as an actor in international relations."⁹⁷

Thus, in the Middle East, where foreign policy is a prerogative of the president or the monarch, domestic-level analyses are critical as structural factors alone are unable to provide a comprehensive explanation. Through the section below, I will introduce neoclassical realism and the framework of analysis employed in this dissertation. This chapter will end with highlighting the methodology and setting the stage for the empirical chapters to follow.

Neoclassical Realism (NCR): A Valuable Foreign Policy Tool

My framework of analysis will be based on neoclassical realism. Theorists of this field attempt to explain foreign policy decisions by employing elements of the realist approach to international relations, while incorporating domestic-level analysis, which is needed to understand and explain foreign policy making and decisions.

⁹⁷ Korany and Dessouki, ed. *Ibid.*, p. 23

Foreign policy is regarded as the “goals sought, values set, decisions made and actions taken by states in the context of the external relations of national societies.”⁹⁸ In this regard, governments work “to design, manage and control the foreign relations.”⁹⁹ The various theories of foreign policy look at state behavior rather than patterns of outcome of state interactions, by which they “seek to explain what states try to achieve in the external realm and when they try to achieve it.”¹⁰⁰

Michiel Foulon writes that NCR is “a solid theoretical framework which departs from Wendtian constructivism, Moravcsik’s liberal theory, and Putnam’s two-level game liberalism ... by bridging three divides: the spatial (domestic–international), the cognitive (matter-ideas), and the temporal (present–future).”¹⁰¹ NCR is used in International Relations not because of its capability of explaining different phenomena but because of its strength in emphasizing on different levels of analysis and avoiding reductionist approaches that other theories suffer. In fact, NCR is a result of foreign policy studies looking at both structure of international system and domestic factors as well as their complex interactions. NCR does not just focus on systemic levels, but on subjective and domestic structures of states as well – through employing different intervening variables. Neo-classical realists believe that different levels of analysis are as important as the anarchical structure of the international system.

Gideon Rose describes *neoclassical realism* as:

It explicitly incorporates both external and internal variables, updating and systematizing certain insight drawn from classical realist thought. Its adherents argue that the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities. This is why they are Realist. They argue further, however, that the impact of foreign policy is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level. This is why they are Neo Classical.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Mark Webber and Michael Smith, et al. *Foreign Policy in a Transformed World*. London: Routledge, 2002, p. 2

⁹⁹ Mark Webber and Michael Smith, et al. *Ibid.*, p. 2

¹⁰⁰ Gideon Rose. “Review: Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,” *World Politics*, 51.1 (1998), pp. 144-172.

¹⁰¹ Michiel Foulon. “Neoclassical Realism: Challengers and Bridging Identities,” *International Studies Review*, 17 (2015), p. 635-661

¹⁰² Rose. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

More works on Neoclassical Realism include:

Brian Rathbun. “A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism,” *Security Studies*, 17:2, 2008, pp. 294-321; Nicholas Kitchen. “Systemic Pressures and Domestic Ideas: A Neoclassical Realist Model of Grand Strategy Formation,” *Review of International Studies* 36:1, (2010), pp. 117-143;

As described by Rose, neoclassical realists retain realism's assumption of power as a chief independent variable where the position of a state and its foreign policy are determined through the amount of power it possesses. Yet, he argues that "a theory of foreign policy limited to systemic factors alone is bound to be inaccurate much of the time."¹⁰³ Therefore, to be able to analyze how states understand and deal with the external threats and dynamics, the analysis must include unit level intervening variables like the decision-maker's perceptions and domestic state structures since state leaders can be constrained by internal as well as external politics. By re-introducing domestic politics and state structure to realism, neoclassical scholars challenge the exclusivity of the unit level analysis claimed by liberalism and constructivism.¹⁰⁴

Even though scholars of this school regard anarchy as part of the international system, they believe it is neither Hobbesian nor benign but rather murky, which make it difficult for states to detect if security is scarce or plentiful. Consequently, neoclassical realism position itself as a middle ground between structural realism and constructivism through stressing the role of independent and intervening variables. As Jeffrey Taliaferro observes "neoclassical realism's comparative advantage lies in its willingness to integrate unit-level and systemic-level, as well as ideational and material, variables into a coherent explanatory framework."¹⁰⁵ In other words, to understand the relationship between distribution of relative power and foreign policy, one needs to consider both domestic and external environment in which foreign policy of a state operates. Hence, one of the main goals of neoclassical realism is looking at how the distribution of power in international system, as well as leadership perceptions and domestic structures of states shape their foreign policy behavior and interactions with other states.

Neoclassical realism, unlike neorealism, posits "the important intervening role for the unit-level variables, specifically leaders' subjective assessments of the international balance of power and the ability of the state or central government institutions to extract and mobilize human and material resources for national security."¹⁰⁶ Taliaferro emphasize neoclassicals' top-down

¹⁰³ Rose. *Ibid.*, p. 152

¹⁰⁴ Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik. "Is anybody still a Realist?" *International Security*, Vol. 24, n. 2, (Fall 1999), pp. 5-55.

¹⁰⁵ Jeffrey W. Taliaferro. "Neoclassical Realism and the Study of Regional Order," in *International Relations Theory and Regional Transformation*, T.V. Paul, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 79

¹⁰⁶ Taliaferro. *Ibid.*, p. 77

approach toward the state where “systemic forces can only shape patterns of grand strategic adjustment through the medium of a national security or foreign policy executive.”¹⁰⁷ The role of the leaders, who are privileged with information from the political, intelligence and security apparatus, is to determine the systemic costs and benefits.

As Taliaferro points out that whenever “the international system provides clarity about the nature and magnitude of external threats but little clarity about the appropriate strategy to redress threats, neo-classical realism would expect the unit-level factors such as state power and elite perceptions and calculations to shape the style, timing, and nature of a state’s foreign and defense policies.”¹⁰⁸ As a result, leaders tend to define the national interest and assess threats according to “their subjective assessments and perceptions of the international distribution of power and other states’ intentions but always subject to domestic constraints.”¹⁰⁹ A task that is fundamentally challenging and entails ambiguity.

Steven Lobell’s edited volume, *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, represents one of the most sophisticated efforts to outline the neoclassicals approach to foreign policy.¹¹⁰ The authors argue that neoclassical realists account for the ways states respond to systemic constraints; and focus on what states are likely to do (outputs) rather than what states end up doing (outcomes) due to the influence of the international system.

Lobell and his colleagues argue that despite the leaders’ or governments’ access to information regarding the systemic pressures, it’s very difficult to predict the response of these states. Therefore, “neoclassical realism examines both international variables, such as the global distribution of relative capabilities and domestic ones, such as the state’s ability to mobilize resources.”¹¹¹ Such explanatory power position neoclassicals “to offer the best of both worlds: it is more useful than neorealism because it examines domestic politics and is superior to liberalism

¹⁰⁷ Taliaferro. *Ibid.*, p. 77

¹⁰⁸ Taliaferro. *Ibid.*, p. 78

¹⁰⁹ Taliaferro. *Ibid.*, p. 78

¹¹⁰ Steven E. Lobell et al. *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009

¹¹¹ Tudor Onea. Review *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, edited by Steven E. Lobell; Norrin Ripsman; Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, *International Journal*, 64:3, 2009, pp. 853-855, p. 854

because it pays attention to systemic constraints.”¹¹² Nicholas Kitchen observes, NCR “places the impact of ideas alongside the imperatives of material power in the making of foreign policy, rejecting the notion that either ideas or material factors are somehow ‘most fundamental’ and therefore deserving of analytic focus to the exclusion of the other.”¹¹³

Lobell and his colleagues establish the importance of both domestic and external variables, yet differ over which takes priority: the international or domestic pressures; and thus, suggest three alternative frameworks within NCR. The first group is closer to neorealism’s standpoint in which the domestic variables and constraints are only acknowledged and relevant when the state behavior is anomalous from the expected systemic viewpoint. The second group offers a middle ground by highlighting the impact of domestic politics on foreign policy decisions only within limitation. They argue that the content of the foreign policy is influenced by the international system, while style and timing of the policy is shaped by the domestic politics. Finally, the third group believes that the international and domestic variables should be considered equally influential in shaping a state’s foreign policy.¹¹⁴

To support their alternative approach, neoclassical realists maintain that unlike the balance of power approach, the structure of the system does not predetermine the decisions made by the state. Rather, it provides the actors with opportunities and constraints as

What matters is not what states have to do because the structure compels them (as Waltz and Wendt would want us to believe). Looking at what domestic interest groups want states to do (as Moravcsik and Putnam suggest) is also unsatisfactory. Rather, what can states do to represent domestic [socio]- economic [and political] interests within the predefined geopolitical context?¹¹⁵

Michiel Foulon adds that despite the external geopolitical structure that binds the state, “a perceptual layer at policymaker level also affects the operationalization of that structure.”¹¹⁶ In other words, the “complex domestic processes act as transmission belts that channel, mediate, and

¹¹² Onea. *Ibid.*, p. 854

¹¹³ Nicholas Kitchen. “Systemic Pressures and Domestic Ideas: A Neoclassical Realist Model of Grand Strategy Formation,” *Review of International Studies* 36:1, January 2010, p. 127

¹¹⁴ Steven E. Lobell et al. *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009

¹¹⁵ Foulon. *Ibid.*, p. 635

¹¹⁶ Foulon. *Ibid.*, p. 636

(re)direct policy outputs in response to external forces.”¹¹⁷ This effectively highlights the important role played by domestic politics and the leadership regarding foreign policy, alliance decisions, and threat perception.

The contribution of NCR through incorporating domestic intervening variables is a valuable addition to better understand the dynamics of foreign policy making and state behavior. However, NCR alone is not adequate for the purposes of understanding the Middle East or Egypt’s Iran policy. Adding in insights from Randall Schweller’s Balance of Interest (BoI) theory provides the extra needed explanatory power.

Balance of Interest Theory: A Nuanced but Understudied Approach

Randall Schweller developed an important but under-studied approach, *the balance of interest* (BoI) or *bandwagon for profit*, which is proposed as a supportive framework for this study. In his 1994 article, he discusses Walt’s balance of threat theory and its challengers, and found that Walt’s BoT “holds up fairly well as an explanation of alliance choices,” especially that none of his critics “proposed a comprehensive alternative.”¹¹⁸ Nonetheless, Schweller believe that BoT is not entirely adequate because:

1. Walt defines bandwagoning as a form of capitulation and as an opposite behavior to balancing, which leads Walt to only examine alliances with significant external threats where “balancing is more common than bandwagoning.”¹¹⁹
2. BoT is designed to look at cases, “which the goal of alignment is security... and systematically excludes alliances driven by profit [and interest].”¹²⁰

Thus, Schweller’s main challenge to BoT is in the definition of bandwagoning, which “departs from conventional usage; Walt excludes common forms of bandwagoning for profit rather than

¹¹⁷ Schweller, “Unanswered Threats: A Neoclassical Realist Theory of Underbalancing,” *International Security*, 29.2 (2004), pp. 164

¹¹⁸ Randall Schweller. “Bandwagoning For Profit: Bringing The Revisionist State Back in,” *International Security*, 19.1 (1994), p. 78

¹¹⁹ Schweller. *Ibid.*, p. 79

Walt’s defines bandwagoning as an “unequal exchange; the vulnerable state makes asymmetrical concessions to the dominant power and accepts a subordinate role ... [Its] an accommodation to pressure (either latent or manifest) ... [and] suggest a willingness to support or tolerate illegitimate actions by the dominant ally.” Stephen Walt. “Testing Theories of Alliance Formation: The Case of Southwest Asia,” *International Security*, 42.2 (1988), p. 282.

¹²⁰ Schweller. “Bandwagoning for Profit” *Ibid.*, p. 79

security; and it reflects a status-quo bias.”¹²¹ Schweller builds his case by revisiting the concept of bandwagoning and highlighting that alliances are not only motivated by threat, fear and danger, it’s also driven by opportunities and profits.¹²²

Unlike Morgenthau and Carr, Schweller notes that modern realists “assume that states are willing to pay high costs and take great risks to protect the values they possess, but will only pay a small price and take low risks to improve their position in the system.”¹²³ Schweller disagrees with Walt’s conclusion that balancing predominates and is far more common than bandwagoning, and argues that “states tend to bandwagon for profit rather than security ... and realism has underestimated the extent of bandwagoning.”¹²⁴

In developing his approach, Schweller highlighted four forms of bandwagoning:

1. *Jackal bandwagoning*, is when a (limited revisionist) state ally (bandwagon) with the rising (unlimited-revisionist) expansionist power or coalition seeking to upset the current status quo. In this case, system stability is expected to decrease. Schweller points out that during WWII Italy, Japan, Hungary, and Bulgaria were examples of the jackal bandwagoning behind Nazi Germany.
2. *Piling on*, is, by contrast, when a state sides with the stronger status quo powers – mostly with the side that already won the war – to claim unearned spoils and benefits. If the piling on decision is based on opportunity, then it is seen as a form of *jackal bandwagoning* but taking place at the end of wars. On the other hand, states may decide to pile on out of fear the strong state or coalition might harm them if they did not side against the losers.¹²⁵ In all cases, the piling on behavior would lead to increase system stability and diminish risks

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 79

¹²² Bandwagoning first appeared in Kenneth Waltz’s balance of power model, although he credited it to Stephen Van Evera. Waltz used bandwagoning to refer to a state joining the stronger side, while balancing would mean joining the weaker coalition. Kenneth Waltz. *Theory of International Politics*. NY: McGraw-Hill, 1979, p. 126. Stephen Walt defined Balancing as “allying with others against the prevailing threat; bandwagoning refers to alignment with the source of danger.” Stephen Walt. “Alliance Formation and the Balance of Power,” *International Security*, 9.4 (1985), p. 4. Also, Stephen Walt. *The Origins of Alliances*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990, p. 17.

¹²³ Schweller. “Bandwagoning for Profit” Ibid., p. 85

¹²⁴ Schweller. Ibid., p. 99

¹²⁵ Schweller. Ibid., pp. 95

post conflict. Examples are: Napoleonic Wars, the World Wars and the Gulf War where many states joined against the loser.

3. *Wave-of-the-Future*, is when states ally with a stronger power because it represents the new wave. This type of bandwagoning is “induced by charismatic leaders and dynamic ideologies, especially when buoyed by massive propaganda campaigns and demonstrations of superiority on the battlefield.”¹²⁶ Schweller uses the example of countries joining the Sino-Soviet bloc during the Cold War and those transitioned to liberal democracy in the late 1980’s and 1990’s. One could add bandwagoning of many Arab states with Nasser’s Egypt
4. *The Contagion or Domino effect*, by which an external force or incident triggers a chain reaction within a country or a region, fueling a bandwagon process. Examples for this include revolutions (Arab Uprisings), transition to democracy (Eastern Europe / Latin America), War (the World Wars) or peace.¹²⁷

Balance of Interest: Reconsidering the Revisionist State

The BoI paradigm has two levels of analysis – the state level and the systemic level. The unit (state) level “refers to the costs a state is willing to pay to defend its values relative to the costs it is willing to pay to extend its values;” while the systemic level “refers to the relative strengths of status quo and revisionist states.”¹²⁸ To calculate state costs, Schweller created an equation representing the state’s calculation of its relative interests - [State Interest (n) = value of revision (x) – value of status quo (y)] – and he explains it as follows:

By relaxing neorealism's assumption that states value what they possess more than what they covet, the full range of state interest emerges: some states value what they covet more than what they have; others are entirely satisfied with their possessions; still others value what they have only slightly more than what they covet, and vice versa; some states consider their possessions meagre but are not envious of others.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Schweller. Ibid., pp. 96-97

¹²⁷ Schweller. Ibid., pp. 98-99

¹²⁸ Schweller. Ibid., p. 99

¹²⁹ Schweller. Ibid., p. 100. Schweller explains that states are satisfied when the outcome of the equation is negative (status quo outweighs revision), while states are revisionist when the outcome is positive (revision outweigh status quo).

To further illustrate his modified approach and add depth to his analysis, Schweller makes a fundamental distinction, borrowed from Morgenthau, between revisionist and status quo states. Status quo power is described as those states that,

seek self-preservation and the protection of values they already possess; they are security-maximizers, not power-maximizers. For status-quo states, the potential gains from non-security expansion are outweighed by the costs of war. While they may seek to extend their values, status-quo states do not employ military means to achieve this end. For this reason, their interest in military power varies with the level of threat to their values.¹³⁰

On the other hand, revisionist states are the ones which

value what they covet more than what they currently possess, although this ratio may vary considerably among their ranks; they will employ military force to change the status quo and to extend their values. For revisionist states, the gains from non-security expansion exceed the costs of war ... Needing preponderant power to overturn the status quo, dissatisfied states band together precisely when it appears that they will thus be stronger than the conservative side, for its only then that they can expect to succeed in their expansionist aims.¹³¹

Schweller further divides revisionist powers into limited and unlimited revisionists. The limited revisionist states are: “typically regional powers that seek either compensatory territorial adjustments to reflect their increased power, recognition among the great powers, and/or change in the rules and decision-making procedures within, but not the basic principle of, existing regimes.”¹³² While, an unlimited revisionist state “is a revolutionary state that cannot be satisfied without destroying essential elements of the international order.”¹³³ The unlimited-aimed state is adamant to somehow alter the status-quo, and they seek something they don't have at the present time.

Jason Davidson lists the goods a state seeks, which are territory, status, markets, ideology, and the creation and change of international law and institutions.¹³⁴ A state that seeks an improvement in one or more of the previous goods is a revisionist, and will operate within the system in order to obtain the change it seeks. Revisionists are likely to attract other revisionist states against status quo defenders. States will, under certain circumstances, pursue strategies that will allow them to

¹³⁰ Schweller. *Ibid.*, p. 104-105

¹³¹ Schweller. *Ibid.*, p. 105

¹³² Randall Schweller. *Unanswered threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006, p. 29

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 29

¹³⁴ Jason W. Davidson. *The Origins of Revisionist and Status quo States*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2006

improve their positions rather than defend what they have. In Schweller's model states will decide their patterns of alliances - balancing or bandwagoning - on the basis of their foreign policy goals and preferences. He emphasizes that balancing and bandwagoning are not opposite behavior, albeit, the motivation for each is different, and concludes that “bandwagoning is commonly done in the expectation of making gains; while balancing is done for security and it always entails costs.”¹³⁵

Status quo and Revisionist States in the Middle East:

According to Marc Lynch, “states of the Middle East compete with each other for power, security and ideological influence in an environment that is formally anarchic but in fact thoroughly ordered by a shared public sphere and ideological concerns.”¹³⁶ All states of the region are keen on ensuring their own survival against internal and external threats which can take ideational forms as well as physical ones. The shared public sphere, based on Pan-Arabism or Pan-Islamism identity and norms, allows ambitious—revisionist—states to use these norms to pose ideational threats to weaker states. Clear examples are Nasser’s Egypt and Khomeini’s Iran. States’ security concerns and aspirations are reflected through both material power and ideological soft power with the leadership (role of the individual) playing the key role in utilizing these powers.

In the Middle East and through the past 60 years, one can argue that the region witnessed a competition among revisionist and status-quo states. Clear examples are Nasser’s Egypt (revisionist) vs Iran’s shah (status-quo); Sadat’s Egypt (status-quo) vs Khomeini’s Iran (revisionist); and Mubarak’s Egypt (status-quo) vs Saddam’s Iraq and Ahmadinejad’s Iran. In all these cases, there was a regime that challenged the regional order and championed the call for change using different methods from rhetoric and ideology to invasions and wars. The designation of the state depends on two important elements: amount of power and leverage a state possesses (economic and military), and its position regarding the world powers and other regional states. Other elements such as the societal cohesion and political systems are secondary. However, with the fall of the Soviet Union and growing American hegemony, status-quo in the region became

¹³⁵ Randall Schweller. “Bandwagoning For Profit: Bringing The Revisionist State Back in,” *International Security*, 19.1 (1994), p. 106

¹³⁶ Marc Lynch. “Regional International Relations,” in Ellen Lust, ed. *The Middle East*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 316

associated with the countries that are in alliance with the U.S. and the Western world (*Pax-Americana*).

In the 1950's and 1960's, Egypt championed the independence and anti-imperial movement using a mix of ideological and financial support for Arab solidarity and independence causes across the region. Egypt's aim was to challenge the longstanding tradition (status-quo) of subordination and dependency on the West. Nasser's policies can be seen as revisionist when compared to the policies of Iran and Saudi Arabia who opted for continuing the status-quo and alliances with the West. On the other hand, Iran's Islamic fervor of 1979 represented revisionist policies especially during the tenure of Ayatollah Khomeini. Among the main aims of the mullahs were to export the Islamic revolution to the rest of the region and alter the pro-Western alliance led by countries like Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Iraq represented another example of a revisionist state. The Iraqi leadership sought to illustrate its rising power and Arab leadership in the 1980's by settling territorial disputes through belligerence rather than diplomacy represented in its war with Iran (1980-1988) and invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

Egypt: A Bandwagon for Reward Case

Translating Schweller's vision to my study of Egypt's foreign policy, I argue that at the unit level Egypt has employed the bandwagoning tactic ever since Nasser's time. However, its role in the bandwagon has shifted from the leader to the follower. During the 1950's and 1960's, Egypt played the role of the regional bandwagon-master that was working to attract other states to its orbit to challenge the regional status-quo imposed by the imperial powers. While on the international level, Egypt was a *jackal* benefiting from the superpower rivalry and Cold War politics. For instance, it was a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), yet it depended on Soviet arms and benefited from the food aid program of the United States. Nasser believed in Egypt's leading role in the Arab world and as a potential regional hegemon. He used several tactics from ideological rhetoric (Pan Arabism) and robust propaganda machine to economic and military assistance (support for African and Arab independence and the Yemen war). As a result, some states joined Nasser's call out of believing in the cause and expecting benefits like Syria, Iraq and Algeria, while on the other hand, Saudi Arabia and Iran out of apprehension of Egypt's growing influence stood together to balance against Nasser using their economic wealth and alliance with the United States.

Anwar Sadat realized that Arabism is no longer fitting to his new aspiring policies of economic liberalism and peace with Israel. Egypt under Sadat restructured its foreign policy from an aspiring regional hegemon with socialist policy and anti-imperial rhetoric to a benign state with an Egypt-first approach and western-like aims. Sadat's objective was to gain as much benefits from his restructuring policies that would support the war and peace plans and help transform Egypt into capitalism. He understood that for Egypt to regain its lost land from Israel and achieve peace, he needs the U.S. on his side. Sadat mended fences with the anti-Nasser states, especially Saudi Arabia. He established closer relations with Iran, which at the time was the only country in the region with close ties to both Washington and Tel Aviv. Sadat regarded liberal western policies to be the next *wave of the future*, and by the end of his tenure has effectively put Egypt in the *Pax-Americana*.

Egypt under Hosni Mubarak represented the status-quo and stagnation. Mubarak inherited Sadat's policies and was keen on not rocking the boat too much. He used the regional changes of the 1980's to obtain benefits – mostly financial - through his rapprochement with the Arab countries and consolidating his cordial relations with the West and the United States. As a state with average military power but weak economic capabilities, undemocratic rule and poor state-society relations, Egypt demonstrates a prime example of the satisfied static state (*Lamb*) that bandwagons for profit to keep its possessions and preserve the status-quo. Accordingly, the state is not willing to pay or take risks to expand its interests, and in fact would sometimes give away leverage to sustain and preserve the regime and its perceived status in the region. This became more evident during the last decade under Mubarak when other smaller states, like Qatar and Oman, started playing key regional roles.

The tenure of the Muslim Brotherhood and Mohamed Morsi in power was too short to allow them to embark on any fundamental changes in Egypt's foreign policy. The expectations of a revolutionary foreign policy that would alter Egypt's status-quo positions was putdown when the Brotherhood and the newly elected president at the time vowed to respected Egypt's international commitments and its alliances. Morsi's attempt at a possible rapprochement with Iran was challenged domestically by the ultra-conservative Sunni Salafists and the security apparatus. In addition, the Brotherhood's domestic antagonistic policies made them lose any possible support for a change in foreign policy.

Iran, in contrast to Egypt, represented a status-quo power under the Shah; a time when Nasser was challenging the regional order. The Shah represented an example of what Nasser stood against – a Western puppet and friend of Israel, which made it difficult to reconcile relations between both countries. In the aftermath of the 1967 war and death of Nasser, the Shah's views and rhetoric were in-line with Sadat's perception of the region and the world. Sadat's policy of real politik and Egypt-first line thought to capitalize on friendly relations with the wealthy and Western-connected Shah of Iran. Thus, it was not a surprise that the 1970's witnessed the warmest and closest relation between Cairo and Tehran.

Nonetheless, the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran and Egypt's peace treaty with Israel not only changed the regional dynamics and alliances but was directly responsible for souring the relationship between both nations. Ayatollah Khomeini used the Pan-Islamic revolutionary rhetoric to discredit all the western allied regimes and call for a change in the regional structure – a reminder of Nasser's Pan-Arabism strategy. Iran since 1979 has represented a dissatisfied power that is more risk-averse and willing to take steps to advance its status and possessions within the region. The Iranian leaders have - and continue to - look for ways to assert their presence and regional influence through various means. Tehran understood that keeping the “revolutionary regime” intact and alive means being a dynamic and active player in the region. They sponsored aggressive rhetoric, and strategic maneuvering, and built political alliances (some along sectarian lines) mainly with non-state actors as tools for regional influence. Clear examples include Iran's influence in Lebanon through Hezbollah; their support to Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas against Israel; their strong hold over Iraq post 2003; the alleged support for the Houthis in Yemen and fighting on behalf of the Syrian regime to keep it alive.

Thus, neoclassical realism combined with Schweller's balance of interest theory, can shed light on the Egyptian-Iranian case. I argue that there are two key variables worth investigating to explain the Egyptian-Iranian paradox: structural-level analysis (independent variable) represented by both regional and international power dynamics, as well as domestic-level analysis (intervening variable) represented by the role of the leaders and their perceptions. The interaction of these variables could offer a new framework to understand and explain Egypt's foreign policy and its relations with Iran.

Methodology

This thesis addresses the under-researched subject of modern Egyptian foreign policy towards Iran, and seeks to explain the successive swings in the trajectory of their relations since the 1950s. The methodology of this dissertation follows the qualitative research approach employing a longitudinal within-case method, and it adopts a neoclassical realist approach to focus on system structure as an independent variable, and leader perceptions as an intervening variable.

Jack Levy observes that “despite the widespread use of case study methods throughout the social science, no consensus has emerged as to the proper definition of a case or a case study.”¹³⁷ Alexander George and Andrew Bennett view a case as “an instance of a class of events,” while a case study is a “detailed examination of an aspect of a historical episode to develop or test historical explanations that may be generalizable to other events.”¹³⁸ Peter Swanborn defines the concept as the “study of a social phenomenon in one, or only a few, of its manifestations.”¹³⁹ Levy concludes that due the various definitions most researchers view case studies as “an attempt to understand and interpret a spatially and temporally bounded set of events.”¹⁴⁰

This research focuses on a single case study, which is Egypt’s relations with Iran. However, for a better understanding of the broad research question, it uses longitudinal analysis through a within-case analytical comparison. The within-case comparison is undertaken by looking at the Egyptian policy toward Iran under four different Egyptian presidents - Nasser, Sadat, Mubarak, and Morsi. By discussing each president’s policies separately, the research delves deeper in the main case, Egypt, and offers better understanding of the puzzle. These sub-cases allows to have a closer observation of the intervening variable, leadership role, and its reactions to the continuation and change in the independent variable, structural conditions. Single case studies are most fitting when the authors are testing a framework or a theory as this work proposes. The research employs a top-down deductive reasoning through suggesting a theoretical framework for the topic of study. The hypothesis would be tested through the data collection and observations, and ultimately lead to confirming (or not) the framework.

¹³⁷ Jack S. Levy. “Case Studies: Types, Designs and Logics of Inference.” *Journal of Conflict Management and Peace Studies*. 25.1, 2008, p. 2

¹³⁸ Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Science*. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2005, p. 5, 17

¹³⁹ Peter G. Swanborn. *Case Study Research: What, Why and How?* London: Sage Publications, 2010, p. 22

¹⁴⁰ Levy. *Ibid.*, p. 2

The framework of analysis for this study is utilizing NCR and Schweller's balance of interest approach to explain Egypt's policy toward Iran under each of the four presidents. The generalizability of the research and conclusion through the testing of the framework on the single case of Egypt could lead to confirming, challenging or extending the use of NCR and/or Schweller's approach to constitute a cohesive framework to Egypt's foreign policy. Regardless of the outcome, this study opens the door to further research using the same or slightly modified framework, which has not been used as widely as realism or constructivism in explaining foreign policies and state behavior in the Middle East.

The choice of Egypt as the focus of my study originates from being an Egyptian national with deep interest in exploring Egypt's foreign policy and curiosity about the lack of normalized relations between Egypt and Iran. Egypt is the most populous country in the Middle East and the Arab world. Its historical roots and influential role makes it a natural choice as a testing case for a new framework. The study of Egypt's relations with Iran specifically is understudied and with the appropriate framework, one could shed some light to better explain this puzzle.

Data collection for this research has been challenging due to the scarce official correspondence between both countries as well as the difficulty of gaining access to any documents at the national archives of both Egypt or Iran. Thus, the materials I used for data collection and empirics has been semi-structured interviews, books, presidential speeches and memoirs, declassified documents (mainly in the United States), as well as archival newspaper clippings and reports. I also made use of the leaked U.S. government cables offered through WikiLeaks. The leaked cabled offered a unique perspective combining the American diplomats' views as well as the views of their Egyptian interlocutors.

Being fluent in Arabic and English gave me an opportunity to explore a wider selection of books and documents, and the ability to conduct interviews using both languages. Moreover, my basic Farsi skills helped me follow Iranian newspapers as well as other websites for a better understanding of the Iranian regional and international positions. Field research took around a year and half with multiple trips to Cairo and Washington D.C. and a single trip to Tehran. These trips

were very informative and useful, where I managed to interview former and current senior diplomats in the three capitals as well as journalists, professors and think tank analysts.

I used two ways to get in touch with the interviewees. The first was through directly contacting people I already knew or reaching out to others whose information was publicly available. The second method was through snowballing; i.e. getting referred to potential interviewees through people I knew or through others I already interviewed. I prepared a set of general questions to use in my interviews and added some specific ones based on the person I was meeting and their experience and expertise. The main obstacle faced was the inability to have on the record interviews with the former and current diplomats, who preferred to speak with me on background and no attribution. However, they agreed to me using our discussions and notes to support my analysis.

Chapter Three: From Farouk to Nasser: A Bandwagon in the Making

Introduction

Whereas the norm between countries is stable relationships, Egypt and Iran went through several hiatus periods during the second half of the twentieth century leading to what I call normalized bitterness and stagnation. Throughout this chapter, I give a historical overview of the Egyptian policy toward Iran by dividing the chapter into two sections.

The first section discusses the beginning of official relations in modern history, between the Pahlavi regime and independent Egypt in 1922. This period that ends with the Free Officers' movement of 1952, witnessed a cordial relationship emanating from somewhat similar internal dynamics and shared regional goals. Its highest moment was a marriage between the royal houses of Egypt and Iran. The importance of this section is that it shows early on the role and character of Egypt's leader and his entourage in shaping Egyptian policy toward Iran. It also shows early signs of a bandwagoning for profit and interests approach.

The second section looks at the challenging and hostile relationship under President Gamal Abdel Nasser, which resulted from a divergent leadership views and perception, different state interests and regional goals, as well as a polarizing international order. The Egyptian policy under Nasser exemplifies the role an unsatisfied regional power that leads a bandwagon in an attempt to change regional dynamics and order.

Friendship Treaty and Royal Wedding

The nascent Egyptian-Iranian relations encouraged both parties to seek other ways to cement this friendship. In November 1928, they signed a friendship treaty outlining diplomatic and consular rights for both countries and their citizens. This was followed by a trade agreement in 1930. Moreover, in September 1938, the Iranian foreign minister informed his Egyptian counterpart of Iran's interest to elevate its delegation's status in Cairo to an embassy. Egypt welcomed the move and by February 1939, both countries had elevated their representation status.¹⁴¹ Another step that emphasized the growing interest in developing their relations was the marriage between the royal

¹⁴¹ For more information, see: Al Sabbagh, *Ibid*, p. 19-21

families. In 1939, Prince Mohamed Reza (later Shah) married Princess Fawzia (King Farouk's sister). At the time, it was regarded as one of the most important regional socio-political events.¹⁴² The festivities led to the composition of poems and stories about the great civilizations and ancestors of both nations like Ramses and Cyrus.

The decision to bring both houses together had political and personal motives. For Reza Shah, the marriage represented an opportunity for him - and his son after him - to further consolidate their rule and legitimacy. By the end of the 1930's, Reza Shah was interested in creating a lasting dynasty and a legacy of modernizing Iran. He introduced social and political reforms, which angered some of the clergy and merchants who were already in contempt of the Shah's corrupt life and shady economic gains. At the same time, Reza was under pressure from both the Soviet Union and Great Britain for not cooperating against Nazi Germany. Iran's announcement of neutrality at the beginning of WWII, angered the British especially that Reza did not allow them to use Iran's territories or railways.¹⁴³ Therefore, marrying off his son to another regional royal house seemed like a grand opportunity and alliance at a critical time, when Reza was facing internal as well as external pressures.

On the other hand, the young King Farouk, who was greatly influenced by his advisers, thought the marriage would give him political and religious influence over the Arab and Muslim world. This was particularly important since he was a very young King with little political experience. Since the abolishment of the Caliphate in 1922, some Egyptian politicians and Azhari scholars advocated for declaring the King of Egypt as the new Muslim Caliph. The ascendance of Farouk to the throne represented an opportunity to revive this cause. Farouk spent a lot of time and money on showing-off his religiosity. He insisted on praying with the masses, contributing to charities and attending religious lessons and Islamic celebrations.¹⁴⁴ Despite media propaganda in support of the caliphate's idea, certain groups of the society, the *Wafd* party specifically, did not think the idea should be a priority, at a time when Egypt is facing mounting challenges, in addition to its fight for complete independence from Great Britain.

¹⁴² The Iranian Constitution was altered to get around prohibiting the inheritance of the crown through an non-Iranian parent. As a result, Fawzia was given the Iranian citizenship.

¹⁴³ Robert Graham. *Iran: The Illusion of Power*. London: Taylor & Francis, 2012. P. 55-56

¹⁴⁴ For more information about the Caliphate project and Islamic identity in the early years of Farouk's reign, see Chapter 8 in Latifa M. Salem. *Farouk wa Sokoot al-Malakiya fi Misr (1936-1952)* [Farouk and the Fall of the Monarchy in Egypt (1936-1952)]. Cairo: Madbouli Books, 1996, p. 733-832

In this regard, the marriage triggered a discussion about a century-old feud between Sunnis and Shiites, especially that the Sunni princess from Egypt was marrying the crown prince of the Shiite Iran. While there were voices against the communion, al-Azhar, the utmost Sunni institution in the Muslim world, intervened in support of the royal couple. Sheikh al-Maraghi issued a statement that there is nothing in Islam that prohibits marriages between Sunnis and Shiites.¹⁴⁵ After all, al-Azhar was involved in a plan attempting to unify Sunnis and Shiites, at that time. However, al-Azhar's leaders realized that among the basic elements for such unity, is the ability to communicate with the Iranians in their own language. Therefore, after Prince Mohamed Reza's visit to al-Azhar in 1939, al-Azhar's administration decided to add Persian as one of the language courses it offered.¹⁴⁶

The royal wedding had some influence on the relations between the two nations. Both countries developed cultural exchanges and ties through the translation of books, teaching Persian and Arabic at the universities by native speakers and the establishment of an Egyptian-Iranian youth organization in 1946 among other steps. However, the year 1947 witnessed a momentous incident reflecting such cultural and social exchange, through the establishing of *Dar al-Taqrīb* – The House of Rapprochement, which functioned as a forum for discussion and rapprochement between Sunni and Shiite Islam. The head of al-Azhar, Sheikh Mahmud Shaltut and Iranian cleric Mohammed Taqi Qommi were among the leading founders. The headquarter of the association was in Cairo and included members from Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen.¹⁴⁷ Even though the association did not yield considerable reconciliatory achievements, the famous 1959 fatwa by Sheikh Shaltut recognizing Twelver Shiism as a fifth school of Islam was considered a token of success.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Salem. Ibid, p. 744

¹⁴⁶ Rainer Brunner. *Islamic Ecumenism in the 20th Century: The Azhar and Shiism between Rapprochement and Restraint*. Brill Academic Pub., 2004, p. 119

¹⁴⁷ Al Sabbagh. Ibid, p. 22-23

¹⁴⁸ AssefAsef Bayat and Bahman Bakhtiari, "Revolutionary Iran and Egypt: Exporting Inspirations and Anxieties." In Nikki Keddie and Rudi Matthee, ed. *Iran and the Surrounding World: Interactions in Culture and Cultural Politics*. University of Washington: Seattle and London, 2002, p. 306. After Egypt and Iran severed their relations in 1979, Sheikh al-Azhar Abdel Rahman Bisar reversed Sheikh Shaltut's 1959 fatwa and prohibited adhering to Shiite jurisprudence.

When the royal marriage ended with a divorce in 1948, the Egyptian-Iranian relationship did not deteriorate but continued to be cordial.¹⁴⁹ This can be attributed to two reasons: 1. both countries were under similar regional and domestic pressures; and 2. their foreign and regional policies, even though not coordinated, were converging and not colliding.

World War II and the Rise of Anti-Colonialism in the Middle East

In August 1941, the British and Soviet forces invaded the northern and southern parts of Iran and forced the abdication of Reza Shah to his son Mohamed in September. One of Reza Shah's policies during his reign was to minimize foreign interference, by playing Great Britain and Soviet Union against each other – a similar tactic that Nasser later used with the U.S. and USSR. The Anglo-Soviet intervention was seen as a result of Reza's announced neutrality and contact with the Germans, at a time when the British were in need of support from all its protectorates and allies against the growing Nazi power.

Less than five months later, on February 4, 1942, a similar incident happened in Egypt. The British Ambassador Miles Lampson surrounded Abdin Palace with tanks and presented an ultimatum to King Farouk – either abdicate or appoint a new government led by the Wafd party.¹⁵⁰ The British intervention to force Mustafa al Nahhas as the new prime minister was an attempt to change the growing anti-British fervor, by installing a popular political party. Moreover, as it was wary of Reza Shah's contacts with the Germans, Britain was more apprehensive about the pro-Axis support in Egypt, especially with the advancement of the Axis forces into North Africa and later North West of Egypt (Battle of El Alamein).

The British's aggressive moves in both Iran and Egypt, as a result, exacerbated the rise of nationalist (and Islamic) fervor and anti-British sentiments. Domestically, newspapers in both Tehran and Cairo were critical of British policies and started highlighting what the other country was doing in its fight to curb London's influence.¹⁵¹ Moreover, both countries witnessed the rise of new players - namely Islamic groups - who would play a significant role in the domestic politics

¹⁴⁹ Fawzia was granted an Egyptian divorce in 1945 and it took Iran 3 years to approve it. The Shah and Fawzia had one daughter, Shahnaz, who was born in Tehran on October 27, 1940.

¹⁵⁰ Charles D. Smith. "4 February 1942: Its Causes and Its Influence on Egyptian Politics and on the Future of Anglo-Egyptian Relations, 1937-1945." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. 10.4, pp. 453-479

¹⁵¹ Al Sabbagh. *Ibid*, p. 25-26. Al Sabbagh quotes excerpts from both Iranian and Arabic newspapers.

of both nations. In 1928, the Muslim Brotherhood was established by Hassan al Banna in Egypt, while in 1946, *Fada'iyān-e Islam* (Devotees of Islam) was created by Navab Safavi. Even though the Muslim Brotherhood started as a charitable and proselytization organization, it later moved into politics and even had a secret military wing that assassinated politicians and intellectuals. On the other hand, *Fada'iyān-e Islam* started as an underground armed Islamic group with the mission to purify Iran and Islam from corrupting individuals.

Another element of convergence against Britain was the negative geographical \ changes to both Iran and Egypt. After the end of WWII, several countries around the world attempted to gain independence from various world powers, while others were simply created. In 1947, Pakistan – formerly part of British India- was established on the eastern borders of Iran. While in May 1948, Israel was created in the heart of the Arab world, flanking Egypt's eastern borders. For the rulers and peoples of Egypt and Iran, these newly established states would not have been established without British approval or at least complacency. The post WWII developments and the continued British influence in the region, intensified domestic pressures on the ruling regimes, where they witnessed a surge in nationalist fervor and calls for complete independence from British monopoly. In April 1951, the nationalist Dr. Mohamed Mossadegh was elected prime minister of Iran. A month later, he took the bold step of nationalizing the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), which took the British and the West by surprise. Mossadegh's attempted social reforms and his nationalization of Iran's oil pushed him to the forefront of the nationalist leaders in the Middle East and inspired others to follow suit. In Egypt, anti-British sentiments were growing higher, not just in reaction to Britain's influence in the political and economic spheres, but also due to its complacent role in supporting the creation of Israel. While Mossadegh was nationalizing the AIOC, Egypt's Prime Minister Mustafa Nahhas asked the parliament to abrogate the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian treaty that Nahhas himself had signed 25 years earlier. The parliament's revocation of the treaty in October 1951 coincided with Mossadegh's visit to Cairo the following month.¹⁵²

The crowds that waited to cheer Dr. Mossadegh's arrival at the airport and at Abdin palace were estimated to be in the thousands. Egyptians chanted slogans like "long live Mossadegh" and carried

¹⁵² Mohamed Mossadegh arrives in Cairo, Egypt. Pathe video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nOM0eL1cLc4>
Dr. Mossadegh visited Cairo November 19-23, 1951. He was on his way back to Iran from the United States where he spent six weeks of meetings at the United Nations and with the American administration.

banners welcoming the “Iranian warrior” to Egypt. Upon his arrival, Mossadegh told Al-Ahram newspaper that “Egypt and Iran are infected with the same disease [Great Britain] and the treatment is the same [full independence]”¹⁵³ and “a united Egypt and Iran can destroy the British Imperialism.”¹⁵⁴

While in Cairo, Mossadegh met with King Farouk but his main host was Mustafa Nahhas, who held several receptions and events to honor Egypt’s guest, including a ceremony to award Mossadegh an honorary doctorate degree from Fouad University (later Cairo University). However, the highlight of the visit was summed up in a joint statement pledging to expand the friendship treaty signed in 1928 and add additional trade, economic and cultural protocols.¹⁵⁵ In addition, Iran was the first to recognize Farouk’s new title “King of Egypt and Sudan”.

Following Mossadegh’s visit to Egypt, the newly-elected British government led by Winston Churchill realized the potential impact of Mossadegh’s policies within the region and the Third World. More so, Churchill thought that Mossadegh “was not only a danger to Britain’s oil supply but also an intolerable symbol of anti-British sentiment around the world.”¹⁵⁶ Less than a year later, Gamal Abdel Nasser and the Free Officers would champion Mossadegh’s nationalist and anti-British fervor to end Egypt’s monarchy and start a new phase in the region’s politics.

Nasser: The New Leader on the Nile

Gamal Abdel Nasser has been called many things: the liberator, the founder of modern-day Egypt and the lion of the Middle East. He was even associated with a special brand of political, economic and social governance – Nasserism. But Nasser was also seen as a serious threat to some of the nascent states in the region and especially to the imperial powers – France and Great Britain. This was exemplified in calling Nasser “Mussolini of the Nile” by former British Prime Minister Anthony Eden.

¹⁵³ Al-Ahram Newspaper, November 21, 1951.

¹⁵⁴ Stephen Kinzer. *All the Shah’s Men*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2003, p. 131; See also, <http://www.mohammadmossadegh.com/biography/egypt/>, Accessed Nov. 5, 2015

¹⁵⁵ For full text of the joint statement see, Al-Ahram Newspaper, November 23, 1951

¹⁵⁶ Kinzer. *Ibid*, p. 131

Nasser “stood as the first Arab leader to rise after the [World] war with a political voice that carried across borders with a message of pan-Arab power and unity,” representing “an avatar of Arab indignation.”¹⁵⁷ Patrick Tyler observes that Nasser did not invent Arab nationalism, “but in the cauldron of postwar politics, out among the detritus of empire, it had invented him, and his clarion was soon pulsating on Radio Cairo and on the medium that radiated to every corner of the region as the Voice of the Arabs.”¹⁵⁸ He once said in an interview “I have an exact knowledge of the frontiers of the Arab nation... These frontiers end where my propaganda no longer rouses an echo. Beyond this point, something else begins, a foreign world which doesn’t concern me.”¹⁵⁹

However, such knowledge and understanding started with little believe in the Arabs and Arabism especially after his experience in the Palestine war. He highlighted this in his book *The Philosophy of the Revolution* saying “we needed discipline but found chaos behind our lines. We needed unity but found dissension. We needed action but found nothing but surrender and idleness.”¹⁶⁰ Nasser, after the success of his coup in Egypt, would have a change of heart - “each time that you or someone else spoke to me of the Arabs, I laughed at what you said. I could not believe that Arab peoples were capable of anything. The Palestine War strengthened even more my conviction concerning the powerlessness of the Arabs. But when I realized of the potential possessed by the Arab states, that is what made me change my mind.”¹⁶¹

The “hagiographical accounts of Nasser’s life make much of his ostensible courage, organizational capacity, political cunning, and great compassion for the Egyptian people.”¹⁶² However, over the decades, Nasser’s character and legacy proved to be more complicated than the superhero figure these accounts portrayed. Despite his modest upbringing and challenged educational path, “Nasser’s great talent was not his military acumen—though his reflections on the Palestine war of

¹⁵⁷ Patrick Tyler. *A World of Trouble: The White House and the Middle East from the Cold War to the War on Terror*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010, p. 38

¹⁵⁸ Tyler. *Ibid.*, p. 38

¹⁵⁹ Jean Lacouture. *Nasser: A Biography*. Translated by Daniel Hofstadter, New York: Knopf, 1973, p. 86

¹⁶⁰ Gamal Abdel Nasser. *The Philosophy of the Revolution*. New York: Economica Books, 1959, p. 32-33

¹⁶¹ Lacouture. *Ibid.*, P. 183-184

¹⁶² Steven A. Cook. *The Struggle for Egypt: From Nasser to Tahrir Square*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 41

1948 suggest that he was competent at soldiering—but rather a complicated mix of political agitation, conspiracy, opportunism, and leadership.”¹⁶³

Nasser’s personal style and mode of governance “made the presidency a highly activist, interventionist force,” as he was “hard-driving, dynamic, domineering and suspicious of other members of the elite.”¹⁶⁴ This suspicion was not only against members of the King’s regime, but was extended to some of his fellow officers as well as public figures and intellectuals that he ordered the wiretapping of their communications.¹⁶⁵

He slowly but steadily got rid of anyone who opposed his ideas and views, including the first President of Egypt Mohamed Naguib who was put under house arrest. For example, Nasser’s abolition of all political parties and the creation of the Liberation Rally was “prompted by the desire to establish a body that would organize the people’s forces and overhaul the social set-up.”¹⁶⁶ This twisted attempt to overhaul the Egyptian society made “personal loyalty to Nasser become the key to obtaining and retaining power. [And while] the army provided the legitimization of the regime —Nasser was its personification.”¹⁶⁷

Egypt’s first President Mohamed Naguib, highlighted in his memoirs the early frictions and ploys among the Free Officers after the coup, and the cult-like mentality that Nasser established in order to cleanse the new regime from any non-compliant personalities or opposition. The political maneuvering and deceit as well as policies of appeasement and fear were common tactics in Nasser’s playbook.¹⁶⁸ Naguib was ousted and put under house arrest in 1954 after a power struggle with the new strongman. He acknowledged his naiveté as he saw each of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) officers creating their own stronghold and inheriting the former elite and aristocratic lifestyle. However, as time went by he believed Nasser was the strongest among

¹⁶³ Cook Ibid. p. 41. See also, Walid Khalidi. “Nasser’s Memoirs of the First Palestine War,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 2, no. 2 (Winter 1973): 3–32; Robert H. Stephens. *Nasser: A Political Biography*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1971; Anthony Nutting. *Nasser*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1972; Daniel Hofstadter. ed., *Egypt and Nasser*. New York: Facts on File, 1973

¹⁶⁴ Raymond Hinnebusch. “Egypt under Sadat: Elites, Power Structure, and Political Change in a Post-Populist State,” *Social Problems* 18, no. 2 (April 1981), p.444

¹⁶⁵ Abdel Fattah Abou El Fadl. *Kont Na’b Ra’yees al Mokhabarat*. [I was the Deputy of the Intelligence Agency]. Cairo: Dar al Shorouk, p. 174

¹⁶⁶ Derek Hopwood. *Egypt, Politics and Society: 1945-1990*. Routledge, p. 88

¹⁶⁷ Hopwood. Ibid., p. 88

¹⁶⁸ Mohamed Naguib. *Kont Ra’yees Misr*. [I was a President of Egypt]. Cairo: Al Maktab El Masry Al Hadeeth, 1986.

the RCC and his character – like a chameleon – is adaptable and changing based on the situation and the personal interest. Naguib “thought they [RCC officers] were revolutionaries but turned to be malicious,” and every one of them wanted to be the new king.¹⁶⁹

New Domestic, Regional and World Order

While Mohamed Mossadegh was challenging the Shah for the right to appoint the Minister of War and the Chief of Staff in July 1952, a group of young army officers were finalizing their move to oust King Farouk of Egypt. On July 23, 1952, a group of officers led by Mohamed Naguib and Gamal Abdel Nasser overthrew the Egyptian monarchy.¹⁷⁰

The young army officers rose to power at a changing time in the Middle East and the world. Faced with impending domestic challenges and changing regional and international order the new leaders of Egypt were at crossroads. The charismatic leader and orator Gamal Abdel Nasser opted for nationalistic rhetoric and policy. Nasser blamed decades of foreign influence and a corrupt and weak monarchy as the main reasons for Egypt’s ailments. He promised reforms and changes that would provide Egyptians with jobs, better living standards, free healthcare and free education. Throughout Nasser’s tenure, his revolutionary ideology championed independence, anti-imperialism and pan-Arabism, and inspired several Arab and African countries. His outspoken criticisms and activist (revisionist) foreign policy was a tool to consolidate and legitimize his rule. However, it also led to considerable backlash from other neighboring states, especially the Arab Gulf monarchies and Iran.

The world order post WWII changed to a bi-polar system with the United States and the Soviet Union on opposing ends. The superpowers’ interactions and competition polarized various parts of the world, including the oil-rich and conflict-prone Middle East. However, the new international context provided potential regional hegemony, such as Iran and Egypt, with a space to maneuver. The contentious superpower politics allowed regional states to use their enhanced value and

¹⁶⁹ Naguib. *Ibid.*, p. 201

¹⁷⁰ The Free Officers Movement was later dubbed the July 23, 1952 revolution. On July 26, King Farouk abdicated the throne to his baby son – Ahmed Fouad – and left Alexandria for exile in Italy (Farouk did not return to Cairo until his burial there in 1965). On June 18, 1953, the revolutionary command council abolished the monarchy and declared Egypt a republic.

latitude to pursue their objectives within the region. The possession of nuclear weapons and the mutual deterrence policy of the great powers, diminished the likelihood of global war especially after the Cuban missile crisis of 1962.¹⁷¹ As a result, the superpowers invested in propping its proxies and client regimes in various regions - including the Middle East - to balance each other. Thus, limiting the ability and possibility of the US and USSR to intervene aggressively in regional conflicts, unless a conflict had the potential to bring both powers to the brink of war (i.e. the 1973 war in the Middle East).¹⁷²

Moreover, the weakening and later retreat of Great Britain in the Middle East, as well as the presence of Israel, played important roles in getting America involved early on. Thus, it is important to note that the United States was interested - since the ousting of King Farouk - to find ways to work with the Free Officers, as part of its policy of deterring revolutionary regimes in the Middle East from turning to the communist bloc. In addition, the Anglo-Iranian oil dispute prompted America to aim for playing a role in maintaining a stable region to guarantee easy access to cheap oil.¹⁷³

By the time Nasser assumed power in 1954, Mossadegh had already been tried and put under house arrest. Mossadegh was ousted in August 1953, by a CIA-backed coup that re-installed Shah Mohamed Reza Pahlavi. Mossadegh's nationalization and anti-imperial policies were inspiring to Nasser who was following the same steps. Nasser nationalized several foreign assets and banks, launched a land reform project, and promised development and industrialization. However, his biggest move was nationalizing the British-French Suez Canal Company on July 26, 1956. At the time, Nasser was convinced that the West was using promised funds to build the high dam in Aswan, as a tool to coerce a change in his policies. After the abrupt American - and the World Bank's - decision to pull funding for the dam, Nasser moved to nationalize the Suez Canal, which was arguably the most important waterway in the world.

¹⁷¹ The Cuban Missile Crisis (16-28 October, 1962) was a 13-day stand-off between the United States and the Soviet Union over Soviet ballistic missiles deployed in Cuba.

¹⁷² Shahram Chubin and Sepeh Zabih. *The Foreign Relations of Iran: A Developing State in a Zone of Great-Power Conflict*. University of California Press, 1974, p. 134

¹⁷³ The U.S. Ambassador to Egypt Jefferson Caffery had a close relationship with King Farouk He was among the few dignitaries who were in line to salute Farouk before departing Alexandria to exile. The Free Officers' also wanted to have a good relationship with America. In the early days after ousting King Farouk, Nasser and Naguib met with Kermit Roosevelt in 1952-1953.

In addition to sharing the nationalist aspirations, the short-lived government of Mossadegh was among the first to recognize the new rulers of Egypt and had pledged its support in the international arena. It also rejected the policy of defense pacts with either of the superpowers and championed negative neutrality. Moreover, Mossadegh's decision to withdraw Iran's ambassador and freeze relations with Israel in 1951 – citing budgetary reasons - was another point that Nasser and the Egyptian government viewed positively. After all, Israel was regarded as a threat to Egypt and the Arab world. Accordingly, I infer that if Mossadegh and Nasser were in power at the same time, relations between Egypt and Iran would have been even warmer than the tone set during Mossadegh's visit to Cairo in 1951.

Nasser and the Shah: Balancing against Revisionism

Between 1953 and 1960, several incidents and misunderstandings occurred that downplayed any possibility for an Egyptian-Iranian entente, further widening the gap between both regimes, which eventually led to the severing of diplomatic relations. The first was the ousting of Mossadegh and reinstallation of the Shah. By coalescing with the West to return to the throne, the Shah officially ended Mossadegh's attempt to neutrality and national policies, and joined the Western bloc. Nasser viewed the Shah's pro-western policies and attitudes as a challenge to his anti-imperial and non-aligned policies. In fact, several newspapers as well as Egypt's radio started a campaign denouncing the 1953 coup and the Shah. For the Shah, this saga was as an internal matter, thereby threatening his attempts to consolidate power from the nationalists and leftists in Iran. The Shah felt that Nasser overstepped his boundaries trying to interfere and affect in Iran's domestic issues. This created an underlying friction between both countries until the last days of Nasser's rule.

Secondly, is the signing of the Anglo-Egyptian Agreement of 1954. This agreement effectively ended over 70 years of British occupation and mandate over Egypt. It called for the withdrawal of British military presence from the Suez Canal zone by June 1956. However, during the seven years' duration of the agreement, the "United Kingdom has the right to re-enter the base with its military force ... provided an attack is made by an outside power upon a state which is a member of the Arab Collective Security Pact or Turkey".¹⁷⁴ The Iranians were unhappy that this article

¹⁷⁴ For more information, see: Charles B. Selak Jr. The Suez Canal Base Agreement of 1954. *The American Journal of International Law*, 49.4, 1955), p. 487.

included Turkey and failed to include them or at least designate Iran as a non-outside power as it did with Israel.¹⁷⁵ This was regarded as an unfriendly message from Egypt, especially with the continued attacks of the Egyptian media against the Shah since the 1953 coup. The Iranians believed they were better friends to the Arabs – especially in terms of freezing Iran’s dealings with Israel – as opposed to Turkey - and Iran deserved acknowledgement and better treatment.

Egypt, through its Ambassador in Tehran, tried to explain to the Shah that Great Britain was the one that forced Turkey to be added to the agreement, so that his anger would be directed at Great Britain, and not Egypt. The Ambassador added that Iran should not feel threatened by such agreement because Egypt has no ill intentions towards Iran. In fact, Iran should support and congratulate Egypt in its success in finally pushing the foreign troops out. Also, Iran’s attempt to use its decision regarding Israel was not appropriate since it was in Iran’s interest, as well as the Arabs’, to take such action against Israel.¹⁷⁶

The third incident was Iran’s membership in the Baghdad Pact.¹⁷⁷ The idea of the pact was instigated by Britain and the United States, where they tried to lure Egypt into joining and leading a Middle Eastern regional defense and security pact, in coordination with London and Washington. This was part of the new Anglo-American policies of creating regional pacts to stand against the spread of communism and act as a continuation and extension of the defense and security policies of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).¹⁷⁸ Mustafa al Nahhas, Mohamed Naguib and Gamal Abdel Nasser rejected the idea citing military unpreparedness, the presence of foreign

The Treaty of Joint Defense and Economic Co-operation between the States of the Arab League, or as better known as the Arab Collective Security Pact, was signed in Cairo on April 13, 1950. The signatories were Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen.

¹⁷⁵ Per minutes attached to The Anglo-Egyptian agreement, Israel was excluded from the definition of “outside power”. See also, Chubin and Zabih. Ibid, p. 141

¹⁷⁶ Al Sabbagh. Ibid, p. 69-72. Al Sabbagh provides excerpts from unpublished memos between the Egyptian Embassy in Tehran and the Foreign Ministry in Cairo regarding this matter.

¹⁷⁷ Baghdad Pact was comprised of Britain, Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Pakistan. It was renamed Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) after Iraq’s 1958 revolution. The organization was dissolved in 1979 after Iran’s revolution.

¹⁷⁸ The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was created in April 4, 1949 in Washington DC, The signatories were the United States, Canada, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, France, Italy, Iceland, Luxemburg, Norway, Portugal and Great Britain. Turkey, Greece and West Germany joined later. Now this alliance expanded to include 28 member states.

Mohamed Hassanein Heikal. *Malafat al suways: harb al thalathin sana* (The Suez Files: The Thirty Years of War). Cairo: Al Ahram Center for Strategic Studies, 1986, p. 324

troops in Egypt, and preferring a policy of neutrality. For Nasser, such pacts represented a British-imperial attempt to maintain influence in the Middle East.

Fourthly was Nasser's surge in popularity across the Arab and Third world in the aftermath of the Suez Crisis of 1956. The portrayal of Nasser as the anti-imperial hero, who stood against the tripartite invasion, extended Egypt's traditional diplomacy beyond its borders. Thus, Nasser's Egypt considered itself the spokesman of the Arabs and had "legitimate interest in events in the entire Arab world ... from the Atlantic Ocean to the Arab Gulf."¹⁷⁹ The activist Egyptian foreign policy of Nasser in Africa and the Middle East, through the usage of both soft and hard power, led to strong backlash and pressures from both regional and international powers.

The United States, for example, issued the Dwight Eisenhower foreign policy doctrine in 1957. Eisenhower believed that Great Britain and France lost their stance and prestige in the region as a result to the 1956 tripartite invasion. This new reality, and power vacuum, might lead Nasser to expand Arab nationalism and unity across the region, which was something alarming to Washington, especially that Nasser had good relations with the Soviet Union and the Soviets might want to step in and fill the vacuum within the region. Thus, any country, according to the Eisenhower Doctrine, "could request American economic assistance and/or aid from U.S. military forces, if it was being threatened by armed aggression from another state."¹⁸⁰ Through this foreign policy strategy, the U.S. wanted to send several messages to its allies and foes that it stands ready to intervene to protect its core interests in the Middle East. The doctrine committed the use of U.S. forces "to secure and protect the territorial integrity and political independence of such nations, requesting such aid against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by international communism."¹⁸¹

Regionally, Nasser's hyperbolic rhetoric was alarming to the Arab monarchs as well as Iran. The Shah perceived Nasser as a tool for Soviet expansion in the Middle East and viewed his policies to be threatening, especially after surviving the 1956 Suez crisis and coming out more powerful,

¹⁷⁹ Chubin and Zabih. *Ibid*, p. 142

¹⁸⁰ The Eisenhower Doctrine, 1957. Milestones: 1953-1960, Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960/eisenhower-doctrine>

¹⁸¹ The first test for the Eisenhower Doctrine was in 1958 when the U.S. sent troops to Lebanon upon the request of Lebanese President Camille Chamoun to support him against his political rivals.

as a symbol of anti-imperialism. Moreover, the fall of the Iraqi monarchy in 1958 and the unanticipated union between Egypt and Syria sent shockwaves across the region. It pushed the Arab monarchies and Iran into the same camp; fearing an expansion of the Nasserist doctrine to their countries. Thus, the Shah sought to solidify his alliance with the United States by signing a defense treaty in March 1959. Through this treaty, the Shah received protection from any possible Soviet invasion and from Nasser's threatening rhetoric and moves in the Gulf.¹⁸² Moreover, in the aftermath of the Suez Crisis, the Shah started developing stronger ties with Israel. The Israeli and Iranian assessment to the growing Egyptian role in the region was worrying for both countries. Hence, an alliance between them could create a counterbalance to Egypt and Arabism. Starting in 1957, Tehran and Tel Aviv signed several agreements, beginning with selling Iranian oil to Israel, and eventually moving to other areas like trade, defense and security.¹⁸³

By July 1960, Egyptian-Iranian relations reached a low point when the Shah stated in a press conference on July 24, that Iran had recognized Israel.¹⁸⁴ Reactions from Arab countries varied. The Arab League viewed the move to be a grave matter that was to be discussed at its ministerial meeting.¹⁸⁵ Most countries treaded with caution and some requested that the Shah withdraw his recognition to Israel until the Palestinian rights were met. On the other hand, Egypt led a full media attack against the Shah.¹⁸⁶

The news of the restarting of the Iranian-Israeli relations was met with extreme reactions in Egypt. Nasser took the Shah's decision as a personal insult and a challenge to his rule, especially that the announcement happened around the same time Egypt celebrated its July 23 revolution and the dissolution of the monarchy. In a speech on July 26, Nasser started a trend of offensive rhetoric against the Shah and Iran that would later be transmitted through the radio, television and newspapers, and would lead to reciprocal responses from the Shah and the Iranian media. Nasser

¹⁸² Kenneth M. Pollack. *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*. Random House, p. 79

¹⁸³ Al Sabbagh. *Ibid*, p. 107-108. Al Sabbagh quotes several cables from the Egyptian Embassy in Tehran during that time (1957-1960)

¹⁸⁴ The Shah's government extended *de facto* recognition to Israel in 1950 citing reasons such as: 50 UN member states already recognize Israel; protecting Iranians in Palestine; and that some Arab states have already recognized Israel by signing armistices after the 1948 war. However, the following year, Mossadegh recalled the Iranian envoy to Israel. A note was sent to Iran's representatives abroad saying that Iran would not extend *de jure* recognition to Israel for the sake of the Arabs and Muslims around the world.

¹⁸⁵ "Iran's Recognition of Israel." *Times*, July 25, 1960

¹⁸⁶ Yitzhak Oron. ed. *Middle East Record, Vol. 1*. London: George Weidenfeld & Nicolson Limited, 1960, p. 216-220

accused the Shah of having a “Mossadegh syndrome” and selling “himself [the Shah] to his masters, imperialism and Zionism at a cheap price.”¹⁸⁷ Nasser ended the speech by cutting diplomatic relations with Iran and by end of July, both countries withdrew their ambassadors. The Iranian foreign minister responded by calling Nasser “a light-headed pharaoh who based his illegal power on ambition ... and cries imperialism, assassination, and the creation of rifts and dissension.”¹⁸⁸

During the period of 1960-1967, Egypt used two main tactics in an attempt to isolate Iran in the region. The first tactic was amplifying the Arab-Iranian disputes in the region and Iran’s ambitions to control the Middle East, especially the Gulf States. By continuously labeling the Shah and his government as puppets of the imperial powers, Nasser aimed to push the Arab monarchs – already concerned with Iranian behavior – to join Egypt and isolate Iran. For instance, in 1964, Egypt accused Iran of meddling in Lebanese politics, which led to the perception of its ambassador in Beirut as *persona non-grata*. Nasser also warned of Iranian immigration and their resettling in the Arab Gulf countries as part of a process to alienate the Arabs in their lands.

The second tactic was using Islamic tenants to expose Iran’s relations with Israel. After all, Israel was the main threat and concern for Egypt and the growing Iranian-Israeli relations was a contentious issue. Nasser involved al-Azhar, and the even the Coptic Church, to condemn Iran’s policies. Al-Azhar issued several statements and sent letters to the Shah and the top Shiite clerics in Qom calling for rescinding Iran’s recognition of Israel.¹⁸⁹ Egypt used its propaganda machine to disseminate anti-Shah sentiments; expose Iran’s security cooperation, trade and oil sales to Israel and lobby the Arab Gulf states to join forces against the Shah. Yet, these tactics were not as successful as Nasser wished. The Egyptian tactics depended mainly on two elements: building a strong Egyptian relationship with the Arab states against Iran and exploiting existing differences between the Arab Gulf monarchies and Iran. Despite the presence of the second element – Iran’s role in the Gulf and Israel as a threat and enemy – the inter-Arab relations were too polarized to allow for any form of unity against Iran.

¹⁸⁷ “Cairo Breaking Off Relations with Iran.” *Times*, July 27, 1960. Also See: “The address by President Gamal Abdel Nasser at the athletic festival and military parades held in Alexandria during the Revolution Day festivities.” 26 July 1960, <http://www.nasser.org/Speeches/browser.aspx?SID=914&lang=en>; and Al Sabbagh, *Ibid*, p. 110-111

¹⁸⁸ Oron. *Ibid*, p. 217

¹⁸⁹ Oron. *Ibid*, p. 219. See also, Al-Azhar Magazine, July 1960, Vol. 2:32, p. 229-238

The contentious and hostile relations between Egypt and Iran had an opposite effect on the Arab Gulf monarchies, especially after Nasser continued attacks against the Gulf's "reactionary" regimes. While attempting to villainize Iran and the Shah in the eyes of the Arabs, his rhetoric and actions on the ground drew the Gulf sheikhdoms towards Iran, as all feared the aspiring hegemonic role of Egypt. A glaring example of Nasser's regional miscalculations, was the 1962 Yemen war. Egypt's decision to intervene militarily by sending weapons and over 50,000 soldiers and advisors to Yemen, led the Saudis to believe that Nasser was coming after all the wealthy monarchies of the Gulf. The Saudi concern was identical to the Shah's view. Iran's government believed that Nasser's Arab unity excuse for intervening in the Yemeni war, was a cloak to cover his real intention, which was to gain access to the mineral resources of the wealthy Gulf.¹⁹⁰ The Shah accused Egypt and Nasser of "spending \$1M a day towards the killing of Muslims in Yemen and secretly sending arms to the Cyprus government, for the massacre of Turkish Muslims in Cyprus."¹⁹¹

For the Gulf States and Iran, the presence of Egypt in the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula was a threat and act of aggression. As Malcolm Kerr put it, Nasser "assumed the stance of the militant revolutionary, uncompromisingly dedicated to the overthrow of all its conservative neighbors."¹⁹² Thus, as a result of Egypt's intervention in Yemen alongside the republicans, the insecure and anxious Saudis teamed up with Iran and Jordan to support the royalists, in an attempt to curb the Egyptian growing influence.

The continued push by Nasser for Pan-Arabism, the failed union with Syria and the ill-sought adventure in Yemen took a toll on Nasser's policies and was slowly alienating and putting Egypt under pressure. By 1966, the war in Yemen became costly, seemingly unwinnable and increasingly unpopular in Egypt. Nasser started to look for options to disengage from the war, while saving his face and prestige. To that effect, he met with King Faisal of Saudi Arabia on the sidelines of the Arab summit in Alexandria in 1964. Time Magazine reported that this meeting was probably as a result of both leaders realizing "that military victory was probably impossible in the bleak, strife-

¹⁹⁰ Chubin and Zabih. *Ibid*, p. 152

¹⁹¹ "Shah's Attack On Pres. Nasser." *Times*, December 4, 1964

¹⁹² Malcolm Kerr. *The Arab Cold War: Gamal Abd al Nasser and His Rivals, 1958-1970*. Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 25

torn land”, and the longer the fighting continues, the longer it distracted them from uniting against Israel.¹⁹³ The meeting ended in high spirits with Nasser and Faisal promising to “1) cooperate fully to solve the existing differences between the various factions in Yemen, 2) work together in preventing armed clashes in Yemen, and 3) reach a solution by peaceful agreement.”¹⁹⁴ Nonetheless, the situation in Yemen deteriorated, and the relationship between Egypt and Saudi Arabia reached the brink of war. In August 1965, President Nasser and King Faisal met again in Jeddah and managed to reach an agreement over the situation in Yemen. The agreement built on three stages over 15 months, stipulated the creation of a new caretaker government, followed by the withdrawal of the Egyptian troops and ending with a referendum to determine the type of government in Yemen.¹⁹⁵ The agreement was never implemented and was faced with continuous obstacles from both sides. Unfortunately for Nasser and Egypt, the retreat from Yemen came as a result of the catastrophic 1967 defeat against Israel.

The defeat shattered the Pan-Arab unity dreams of Nasser and exposed inter-Arab rivalries. The new realities – preparing for the next war against Israel and retrieving the lost Sinai Peninsula - led Nasser to realize the need to revisit and adjust his policies and relations with other regional countries. This meant that there was a need for less inter-Arab antagonism and more efforts to unify the cause against Israel. In the end, Israel, not Arab nationalism, became the main threat and needed a new approach. As a result, Egypt’s policies started to become more pragmatic and more focused on its own interests and less hostage to pressures from other countries. The 1967 Arab summit in Khartoum started a rapprochement process among the Arab countries.

Despite the initial jubilation of the Shah for Nasser’s humiliation against Israel, Iran was quick to announce its support for the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution 242 that called for Israel’s withdrawal from the Arab lands occupied after the 1967 war.¹⁹⁶ Iran also denounced the annexation of Jerusalem. Such a move helped start a slow thawing of the Egyptian-Iranian relationship. Nasser’s acceptance of the defeat, in addition to his new pragmatic approach, as well as the regional changes post 1967, was setting the stage for a *quid pro quo* with Iran.

¹⁹³ "The Alexandria Duet". *Time Magazine*. September 25, 1964, p. 46

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 46

¹⁹⁵ "Nasser-Faisal Agreement On Yemen Ceasefire." *Times*, August 25, 1965

¹⁹⁶ Saeed al-Sabbagh reports that the Shah was in Paris when the war erupted and he expressed his satisfaction for Nasser’s humiliation by Israel to some of his aides. See Al-Sabbagh, Saeed. *Ibid.*, p. 167-8

The British eminent withdrawal from the Gulf, for example, was welcomed by Egypt and Iran. However, Egypt was adamant to denounce any Iranian attempt to change the Arab nature of the Gulf, and in particular, against any endeavor to annex Bahrain.¹⁹⁷ On the other hand, although Iran was critical of Egypt's involvement in the Gulf issues and wanted the Gulf regional politics administered by the littoral states, as a show of goodwill toward the Arab Sheikdoms; Iran announced its respect to the will of the Bahrainis. However, it later moved to occupy three small islands – Abu Mussa, and the Greater and Smaller Tombs – which were claimed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE).¹⁹⁸ The move by Tehran was denounced and regarded as an aggression, yet Egypt did not intervene and was gradually accepting that its role in the Gulf was being relegated to the biggest and wealthiest of the Arab Gulf monarchies: Saudi Arabia.¹⁹⁹

Another element that brought Iran and Egypt together was the ramification of the 1968 coup in Iraq. The new leaders in Baghdad became more nationalist than Nasser in the aftermath of the 1967 defeat. Nasser's humiliation was a chance for the Iraqi *Baathist* regime to attempt to fill his spot and outshine him. Iraq was against any ceasefire with Israel and opposed the Rogers Initiative of 1970 despite Nasser's approval.²⁰⁰ When Iran took over the islands, the new Iraqi leaders led an effort along with Syria, Kuwait, Algeria, UAE and Libya to emphasize the Arabness of the region and protect Arab interests. The Iraqis were aiming to garner support to lead the Arab world after Egypt's shattering defeat. In this regard, Egypt refused to allow the Iraqi approach to influence its new regional policies. Hence, Egypt did not support Iraq's suggestion to the Arab League to cut relations with Iran or joined the discussions that took place at the UN, regarding the same issue.²⁰¹ Instead, Egypt urged the Arabs countries to focus on Israel's threat.

In the period between 1967 and 1970, the Egyptian and Iranian leadership became cognizant, in that the other side can play a useful diplomatic role in their respective areas of concern, i.e., the rising Iraqi challenge in the Gulf for Iran, and Israel for Egypt. After several attempts by different countries, resumption of relations between Egypt and Iran took place in August 1970 – one month

¹⁹⁷ Daniel Dishon. ed. *Middle East Record, Vol. 4, 1968*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1973, p.200

¹⁹⁸ The three islands are still a contests issue between UAE and Iran, but Iran has *de facto* control over them.

¹⁹⁹ Nicholas Herbert. "Iraq relations may be resumed." *Times*, February 5, 1968

²⁰⁰ Rogers Plan was an initiative to stop the War of Attrition and impose ceasefire between Egypt and Israel. The framework was proposed by U.S. Secretary of State William Rogers in December 1969 and was approved by Egypt and Israel in June and August of 1970, respectively.

²⁰¹ Chubin and Zabih. *Ibid*, p. 167

before Nasser's sudden death.²⁰² In a show of respect, Iran announced three days of mourning and sent a delegation to the funeral headed by its prime minister.

Throughout the tenure of Nasser and the Shah, it was clear the diverging domestic and foreign policies of both regimes. Both leaders were insensitive to the other's security and ideological concerns. However, it seemed that both countries were pursuing similar goals utilizing different means. The Shah sought to play a regional role and alleviate Iran's security concerns through alignment with the West. On the other hand, Nasser's non-alignment policy was resting upon the right "to decide individual questions of international politics on their merits, and not in accordance with whether or not they fitted into one or another of the Great powers' scheme of things."²⁰³

Conclusion

As discussed through this chapter, the relations between Egypt and Iran have been influenced by the new bi-polar world order and its influence on the Middle East, as well as by the personal understanding and beliefs of the leaders on both sides. While in the early 1950's, Egypt and Iran were facing similar structural and domestic challenges – British colonialism, corrupt monarchies and nascent domestic politics – by the time Nasser assumed power, the situation had drastically changed. The superpowers' Cold War became the name of the game and it influenced regional politics across the world. Moreover, the colonial legacy in Egypt and the Arab world gave Nasser a reason to champion the causes of pan-Arabism, non-alliance and anti-imperialism.

Despite being situated in the same geo-political zone, the foreign policies of Egypt and Iran represented sharp contrasts and reflected their revisionist versus status quo positions. Whereas "the Shah's principle fears were Soviet imperialism and subversion, Nasser's were Western imperialism, [Israel], and divisive Western-sponsored pacts. While the Shah welcomed the Baghdad Pact and the Eisenhower doctrine, to Nasser they were anathema. While the Shah ... bought his arms from Washington, Nasser did his shopping in Moscow."²⁰⁴ Moreover, whereas

²⁰² One of the countries that played a mediating role was Jordan. Asadollah Allam, the Shah's Minister of the Royal Court, noted in dismay Iran's Foreign Minister, Ardeshir Zahedi, announcement that Jordan would act as a mediator. Alinaghi Alikhani, ed. *The Shah and I: The Confidential Diary of Iran's Royal Court, 1968-1977*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2008, p. 157

²⁰³ Miles Copeland. *The Game of Nations: The Amoralty of Power Politics*. NY: Simon & Schuster, 1970, p. 143

²⁰⁴ Chubin and Zabih. *Ibid.*, p. 141

the Shah thought to transform Iran into a modern nation and liberalize his country, Nasser believed in running a state-controlled economy, and a tight political and public space.

Egypt's foreign policy under Nasser was an example of the unsatisfied regional power that is aiming to attract likeminded regimes in its orbit. It's the *Wolf* (on a regional level) in Schweller's bandwagon for profit theory, which aims to restructure the region; and also as a *Jackal* that tries to benefit from the superpower rivalry on the international level. In short, Nasser's galvanizing rhetoric and rising power in the Arab world made Egypt the bandwagon other states aim to join hoping for benefits and better positioning in the region. However, Nasser's success in consolidating and legitimating his rule was hindered by several regional disappointments: from failed unity with Syria, to the disgraceful Egyptian intervention in Yemen and the catastrophic Arab defeat against Israel. These all took a heavy toll on Egypt's domestic and foreign policies. Nasser realized the limitations on his abilities and policies to force a change in the regional structure, which led to a new realism.

Chapter Four: A Honeymoon turned Sour

Introduction

This chapter will discuss relations between Egypt and Iran under President Anwar el Sadat. Through his eleven-year tenure, Sadat transformed Egypt's domestic and foreign policies. He moved from a state controlled socialist economy to an open market system cherishing imports; and from dependency on the Soviet Union to an alliance – and later dependency on - the United States. Egypt also managed to regain Sinai through waging the 1973 October war and engaging in negotiations with Israel that led to the first peace treaty between an Arab state and Israel in 1979. Hence, it was not a surprise that Sadat's new Egypt would look for partners that would help through the different stages of such gigantic change, and Iran looked like a natural fit as one of those new partners.

Sadat's Character and Rise to Power

Anwar Sadat inherited a new reality from Nasser – occupied Sinai, weak and ailing economy, social frustration and upheaval, as well as a domestic political challenge represented in Nasser's holdover figures. Through the early years of the 1970's, he steered away from Nasser's Arabism and adopted an "Egypt first" approach. This meant rapprochement with regimes previously antagonized by Cairo, while looking at opportunities to join the western world. Particularly, his quests for peace with Israel, dependency on American and western aid and open-door economic policies were signs of such transformation; and a departure from previous domestic and regional commitments under Nasser.

As a military veteran and later a state bureaucrat for several years under Nasser, Sadat witnessed the shaping and development of the Pan-Arab policies of Nasser. However, in the aftermath of the 1967 defeat, Sadat, who never stood up to challenge Nasser's views, comprehended the limitations of Arab nationalism on his plans for transforming Egypt. Thus, he decided to abandon aggressive Arab nationalist rhetoric and promote a pragmatic collective Arab regional understanding. Sadat understood the importance of extracting resources that would help him build up for the war against Israel, reach a subsequent peace plan and lead to Egypt's modernization. As such, he continued the path begun before Nasser's death of mending relations with the Arab states - especially Saudi Arabia- as well as Iran.

Sadat's character and style of governance has been scrutinized by friends and foes alike. Some hailed him a visionary and man of peace while others called him a traitor and a Pharaoh. Mohamed Naguib remembered Sadat as a man with "peasants' cunning," never revealing his true views on issues discussed at the RCC, and his responses did not mean he agreed or disagreed but rather showed that he had been waiting and thinking.²⁰⁵ Thus, when Nasser died, very few believed Sadat will be more than a placeholder. However, he surprised everyone by becoming Egypt's new strongman. Unlike Nasser's interventionist and domineering attitude, Anwar Sadat was more tolerant and accepting of the status-quo. However, this relatively easygoing attitude was maintained as long as there was no encroachment on the presidential rights.²⁰⁶

His modest and hardship upbringing and ability to overcome prison time in his early years gave him "faith in his good fortune [which] perhaps developed in him a tendency to adventurism and a proclivity for gambling."²⁰⁷ This description of Sadat by his Foreign Minister, Mohamed Ibrahim Kamel, matched a similar assessment by the CIA for U.S. President Jimmy Carter. In his first year in office, Carter met with Anwar Sadat, and was taken by his boldness and eagerness for peace in the Middle East. The CIA analysis said that "Sadat was a visionary – bold, reckless, and willing to be flexible as long as he believed his overall goals were being achieved. He saw himself as a grand strategic thinker blazing like a comet through the skies of history."²⁰⁸

Kamel's impressions of Sadat as a nature-lover, a romantic with vivid imagination and his inclination to solitude could be attributed to the time spent in solitary confinement in his youth. Sadat's access in prison to romance and crime novels as well as biographies of famous leaders and politicians led to picturing himself as "a war hero, a prophet of peace or as simple fellah (peasant)," and at other times as "a clan chief, a czar, a paragon of piece."²⁰⁹ Such vivid imagination and fond of greatness and publicity was termed the "Barbra Walters Syndrome" and "Noble Prize

²⁰⁵ Naguib. *Ibid.*, p. 202

²⁰⁶ Hinnebusch. "Egypt under Sadat" *Ibid.*, p. 445

²⁰⁷ Mohamed Ibrahim Kamel. *The Camp David Accords: A Testimony*. London: Keagan Paul International, 1986 p. 118. For more about his upbringing and early years see: Anwar Sadat. *In Search of Identity*. London: Collins, 1978.

²⁰⁸ Lawrence Wright. *Thirteen Days in September: Carter, Begin and Sadat at Camp David*. New York: Knopf, 2014, pp.13-15

²⁰⁹ Kamel. *Ibid.*, P. 119

Complex.”²¹⁰ Nonetheless, Sadat’s “impatience and enthusiasm for success were more than he could control” as expressed by Kamel.²¹¹

Ismail Fahmy, Egypt’s Foreign Minister 1973-1977, observed that Sadat “seemed to be a natural and sincere man, somewhat complex but not sophisticated, willing to say what he thought. But he also seemed to be very isolated, with no special relationship with anybody, in fact distrustful and contemptuous of those around him. He did not appear to have any clear ideas about long-term policies, but rather to be inclined to live from one day to the next, in fact from moment to moment, dealing piecemeal with problem as they arose. I was much more impressed by his human qualities than by his genius, and was rather apprehensive about what might happen to Egypt with Sadat at the helm.”²¹² Fahmy’s comment came after meeting Sadat for the first time in 1973. Despite their different views on certain issues of foreign policy, they managed to work together until Fahmy resigned in 1977 in disagreement over Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem.

Regional Dynamics

The post 1967 war structural changes could no longer be ignored. With Egypt’s diminishing military and economic resources, it stood no chance in fighting Israel to retrieve Sinai. Thus, the two heavyweights, Saudi Arabia and Iran, formerly antagonized by Nasser’s regional policies, were the most poised to help Egypt. Riyadh and Tehran were growing economic powers, due to their oil industry and both had close relations with the West and the United States. Moreover, Iran’s relations with Israel were of particular interest to Sadat in his quest for peace. Sadat believed that strengthening the newly resumed relations with Iran and mending relations with Saudi Arabia would help provide stability and economic benefits for the region. In addition, it would provide security assurances to the vulnerable Gulf sheikhdoms encircled by Egypt to the west and Iran to the east.

Moreover, Sadat started a transformation towards the Western bloc led by the United States. He believed that the joining the liberal democratic countries and abandoning socialist economic policies are the way to rebuild Egypt. Sadat, although not a democrat or utilizing democratic

²¹⁰ Wright. *Ibid.*, p. 15

²¹¹ Kamel. *Ibid.*, P. 123

²¹² Ismail Fahmy. *Negotiating for Peace in the Middle East*. London: Croom Helm, 1983, p. 13

means, viewed liberal democracy and open market policy as the next wave of the future, and wanted to be part of it. This prompted him to launch a multi-party platform and advocate open market policies in the second half of the 1970's.²¹³ A key component in Sadat's Western transformation was developing relations with the United States. In his first 2 years, he opened a secret channel with the United States through his national security advisor Hafez Ismail and America's Henry Kissinger. He followed that with expelling the estimated 20,000 Soviet advisors in the summer of 1972, hoping that America would take his calls for peace and retrieving the lost Arab lands seriously.

Sadat believed that the plan to retrieve Sinai was built around forcing America, the main supporter of Israel, through military actions or diplomacy, to guarantee Israel's withdrawal and peace between Cairo and Tel Aviv. American involvement would pressure the Israelis to respect the treaty and would be compelled to think several times before endorsing any future aggression. Moreover, Sadat thought that championing the path for peace would show the rest of the Arabs the benefits it could bring in terms of regional peace and security and economic prosperity.

Sadat's pro-American sentiments and views that America should sponsor the peace efforts were summed in a letter by Henry Kissinger to President Gerald Ford on the eve of Sadat's visit in 1975,

The State visit of President Sadat will be the first ever by an Egyptian Chief of State to the United States. The visit will dramatize the extraordinary change which has occurred since the October 1973 war not only in U.S.-Egyptian relations, but also in the U.S. position in the Middle East ... Sadat has based his policy on the belief that peace in the Middle East on terms satisfactory to Egypt and the Arabs can be achieved in cooperation with us. We have an interest in seeing Sadat's policy succeed. In the longer term, we hope to develop a relationship with Egypt that will endure beyond Sadat.²¹⁴

Sadat and the Shah: Personality Politics

The Shah and Sadat met for the first time during the September 1969 Organization of Islamic Conference in Rabat. Despite clashing during the meetings, both leaders managed to overcome their differences and moved on to build a close personal relationship that would later put Sadat on

²¹³ Sadat expressed his views clearly throughout his memoirs. Anwar el-Sadat. *In Search of Identity: An Autobiography*. New York: Harper and Row, 1977. See also, William J. Burns. *Economic Aid and American Policy Toward Egypt: 1955-1981*. Albany: State University of New York Press (SUNY), 1985, pp. 174-199.

²¹⁴ Quoted in Lloyd C. Gardner. *The Road to Tahrir Square: Egypt and the United States from the Rise of Nasser to the Fall of Mubarak*. New York: The New Press, 2011, p. 114.

a collision course with the Islamic revolutionary leaders in 1979.²¹⁵ Asadollah Alam, the Shah's Minister of the Royal Court, noted in his diary that the Shah attacked the Egyptian representative at the conference who was Anwar Sadat. Allam couldn't tell if Sadat "chose not to respond, whether out of a realization that his country was in the wrong, or whether simply out of respect" for the Shah.²¹⁶ He added that Sadat's "courteous behavior during the Rabat conference much impressed the Shah, laying the foundations of an extraordinary friendship."²¹⁷

By the time Sadat consolidated and pacified his domestic front in summer 1971²¹⁸, Iran had already established close relationships with most of the moderate Arab states from Kuwait and Oman to Morocco and Tunisia. Anoushiravan Ehteshami points out:

For better or for worse, however, Iran's swift recognition of Kuwait in 1961 against Iraqi threats, its leading role in raising the price of crude oil in the 1970's, its armed forces involvement in defense of the Sultan of Oman against his internal enemies in 1973-74 (Dhofar Rebellion), its condemnation of Israeli 'excesses' in consort with the international community, its finalization of a peace treaty with a hostile Iraq in 1975, and the continuity of its politico-military and economic ties with the non-Arab Middle Eastern states as well as with the influential extra-regional powers, all pointed to the existence of a strong and confident power-broker in the shape of imperial Iran whose regional force and status was such that even its unilateral actions could affect the political and military balance of the entire subsystem.²¹⁹

This prompted Sadat to realize the importance of Iran in his regional and international calculations. Iran's strong alliance with the United States and its status as the only country in the region with good relations with Israel was of key importance to Sadat, who aimed to neutralize the Shah's

²¹⁵ Saeed al-Sabbagh reports that Sadat and the Shah had a heated debate about the role of war and peace in settling disputes. The Shah was condescending in his comments in which Egypt should learn from its mistakes and uncalculated adventurous. King Faisal of Saudi Arabia intervened to mediate and defuse the tension between Sadat and the Shah. Al-sabbagh, Saeed. *al 'laqat al Maşrya al Iranya byn al Wşal w al Qiy'a: 1970-1981. (Egyptian Iranian Relations: 1970-1981.)* Cairo: Dar al Shorouk, 2007, p. 66-67

²¹⁶ Alinaghi Alikhani, ed. *The Shah and I: The Confidential Diary of Iran's Royal Court, 1968-1977*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2008, p. 93.

²¹⁷ Alikhani. *Ibid.*, p. 93

²¹⁸ In May 1971, several influential members of the Arab Socialist Union resigned in an apparent attempt to create a constitutional vacuum and possibly stage a coup against Sadat. In anticipation of this move, on May 15 Sadat announced that more than 100 officials were arrested, including Vice President Ali Sabri, Ministers of the Interior and of War, on charges of plotting a coup. This move by Sadat was dubbed the "Corrective Revolution".

²¹⁹ Ehteshami, Anoushiravan. *Wheels within Wheels: Iran's foreign policy towards the Arab world*. In Amirahmadi, Hooshang and Nader Entessar, *"Reconstruction and Regional Diplomacy in the Persian Gulf."* Taylor and Francis, 2003, p. 157-158

relations with Tel Aviv and turn it to his advantage.²²⁰ After all, Iran's record was generally in favor of the Arab rights – voting against the UN partition plan of 1947 and later in favor of UN Security Council Resolution 242. Sadat's overtures to both Saudi Arabia and Iran made the Shah see the “nascent cooperation as a base and foundation for the entire region.”²²¹

In April 1971, the Egyptian foreign minister - Mahmoud Riad - visited Tehran, marking the first time in the history of both countries for such a visit. This visit was part of Sadat's new approach and openness toward Iran in an attempt to appease the Shah to support Egypt's plan for peace and cooperation in the region. While in Tehran, Riad's discussions focused on three main issues: the renewed bilateral relations; Sadat's initiative in February 1971 for a limited Israeli withdrawal to re-open the Suez Canal, and building on the Shah's relations with the U.S. to reach a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. This meeting was followed by a visit to Egypt in May, from the Iranian foreign minister Ardeshir Zahedi to update the Egyptian leadership on the Shah's talks with the Americans and Israelis, and show support for the new Egyptian political orientation.

In October 1971 while on his way to Moscow, Sadat stopped in Tehran to meet with the Shah. This was the first visit of an Egyptian head of state to Iran. Sadat believed that world dependence on Middle Eastern oil could play a strong role in bringing Egypt, Iran and the Gulf monarchies together. As the country controlling the Suez Canal, Egypt can play a strategic and economic role in regional affairs, especially with normalized Egyptian-American relations. On the other hand, the Shah believed that better relations with Egypt, the biggest country in the Arab world, would empower Iranian-Arab relations and weaken Soviet influences in the region.

Throughout the 1970's until the outbreak of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, both leaders developed a very close personal relationship that was reflected in the developing Egyptian-Iranian relations on a wide range of issues. They held numerous meetings and phone conversations to discuss regional and international concerns.²²² As the only country in the region with Israeli ties, Iran was steadily moving in support of Egyptian views on the Arab-Israeli conflict and becoming critical of

²²⁰ Israel was the reason Nasser cut relations with Iran in 1960 and would later be the reason Khomeini cut relations with Egypt in 1979.

²²¹ Entessar, “The Lion and the Sphinx”, *Ibid.*, p. 165

²²² For more details about the Egyptian-Iranian relations during the 1970's, see Al-Sabbagh, Saeed. 2007, *Ibid.*

Israel's policies. This shift in Iranian policy made the Israelis wary of the Shah turning against them.²²³

The breakout of the 1973 war put the Shah in a peculiar situation and prompted him to attempt a balance in his reaction to the crisis. On one hand, the Shah rejected a request from Saudi Arabia and Lebanon to close Iran's mission in Israel, cease supplying Israel with oil and ban *El Al* flights between Tehran and Tel Aviv.²²⁴ And, on the other hand, he declined an American request to give Israel some American phantom jets to cover its losses in the first days of the war. Moreover, Iran supplied Egypt with over 600,000 tons of much-needed oil during the war; transferred a Saudi battalion to the Golan Heights, and carried injured Syrian soldiers to be treated in Iran. In addition, the Shah offered Iranian medical and relief aid; and allowed the Soviets to use Iran's airspace to deliver military supplies to Egypt and Syria.²²⁵

The war and its aftermath showed how strong the nascent Cairo-Tehran axis had become. Iran stood by Egypt in every step that followed in the attempt for peace, from the disengagement plans in 1974 and 1975 to the Camp David Accords of 1978.²²⁶ The Shah was the first leader, after U.S. President Carter, to announce his unequivocal support for peace between Egypt and Israel. In addition to their mutual views regarding peace and developing bilateral cooperation, Sadat and the Shah both distrusted the Soviet Union and gradually formed an anti-communist alliance. This was especially clear in the second half of the 1970's with the creation of the Safari Club in 1976.²²⁷ The Club was a grouping of the intelligence services of France, Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia and

²²³ On April 23, 1974, the Israeli Ambassador to Iran confided to Asadollah Allam that there is a cooling of relations between Iran and Israel. The Shah's response was "if we are backing the Arabs it is only because their claims are valid." And added that "we could hardly act otherwise. Indeed we did precisely the same thing after the war of 1967." Alikhani. *Ibid.*, p. 366.

²²⁴ Asadollah Allam reports that he received the Saudi Ambassador on November 5 requesting that Iran ban Israeli airline use of Iranian airspace and stop pumping oil to Israel. Allam was shocked by the audacity of the requests and replying that these steps could lead to open war with Israel. Alikhani. *Ibid.*, p. 331

²²⁵ Alsabbagh, *Ibid.*, p. 46-47; Entessar, "The Lion and the Sphinx", *Ibid.*, p. 165. On the Soviet use of Iranian airspace, the Shah, on October 11, 1973, declined the use of Iranian airspace by Soviet military planes transporting spare parts. However, he accepted that the Soviets use their civilian airline, Aeroflot, to carry the same task. Alikhani. *Ibid.*, p. 325-326.

²²⁶ Asadollah Allam reported that Yitzhak Rabin, Israel's Prime Minister, met with the Shah in December 1974 and asked his support for any initiatives that arises between Egypt and Israel. Alikhani. *Ibid.*, p. 401

²²⁷ The term was first revealed by Mohamed Hassanein Heikal after getting access to the Shah's archives. See Heikal, Mohamed. *Iran: The Untold Story*. Pantheon Books, 1982 p. 113. Members of the club led several interventions like supporting President Mobutu against the Front for the National Liberation of the Congo and supporting Siad Barre in the Ethio-Somali war after Cuba and USSR sided with Ethiopia.

Morocco with indirect connections to the United States. The club's operation center was established in Cairo and its purpose, as HRH Prince Turki bin Faisal put it, was to "share information with each other and help each other in countering Soviet influence worldwide, and especially in Africa."²²⁸

Economically, Iran increased its investments and economic support to rebuild Egypt after the 1973 war. Egyptian-Iranian bilateral trade and investment was almost nonexistent prior to 1974. During April and May of 1974, however, Cairo and Tehran exchanged high-level economic and trade visits to discuss possible joint projects. These visits concluded with the signing of the first joint economic protocol between Egypt and Iran. During the 1974-1978 period, the Shah provided Egypt with hundreds of millions in investments, soft loans and grants, which were then used in the reconstruction of Port Said, and the cleaning and widening of the Suez Canal.²²⁹ In addition, several joint ventures were created including the Egypt-Iran Bank, Egypt-Iran Textile Company, a construction and engineering company and a maritime company. The two countries expanded the initial framework by adding a joint tourism agreement and a direct airline route between both capitals.²³⁰ Moreover, Egypt was keen on attracting Iranian funding to the Suez-Mediterranean (SUMED) oil pipeline.²³¹ Despite failing to bring Iranian money, Egypt was able to convince the Shah to limit and later stop Iran's use of the Eilat-Ashkelon pipeline in 1975.²³² By the end of 1975, Iran's estimated investments in Egypt reached \$680 million, in third place after Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.²³³ Sadat, in return for Iran's support, offered special access and use of port facilities to support Tehran's growing trade and commerce. Due to Egypt's economic difficulties and limited production, its main exports to Iran were peanuts, citrus products and cotton with limited

²²⁸ Quoted in Joseph J. Trento. *Prelude to Terror: The Rogue CIA and the Legacy of America's Private Intelligence Network*. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2005, p. 101

²²⁹ As a show of support from the Shah and appreciation from Sadat, the then 15 years old Crown Prince accompanied president Sadat in the re-opening of the Suez Canal. Asadollah Allam reported the hospitality and dignified treatment they received from Sadat and his family. Alikhani. *Ibid.*, p. 424-425.

²³⁰ Alsabbagh, *Ibid.*, p. 130-142

²³¹ SUMED is a joint venture company between Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait and Qatar. It was created in December 1973 to oversee a 320 KM oil pipeline from Ain Sukhna port in Gulf of Suez to Sidi Kerir on the Mediterranean. The pipeline was an attempt to provide an alternate route to the extended closure of the Suez Canal. The line was officially opened in 1977.

²³² Eilat-Ashkelon pipeline was the second line created by the Iranian-Israeli joint venture company *Transasiatic*. The line was created in 1968 to supplement an earlier line between Eilat and Haifa opened in 1959. See Alikhani. *Ibid.*, p. 66-67. Israel nationalized the company after Iran's 1979 revolution and was ordered in 2015 by a court in Switzerland to pay \$1.1b in compensations to Iran.

²³³ Alsabbagh, *Ibid.*, p. 138

financial returns. It is important to note that the balance of payments and trade between both countries have always been in Iran's favor.

The transformation in the Egyptian-Iranian relations under President Sadat was a result of the changing structural conditions as well as the new approach championed by Sadat. In the aftermath of Sadat's consolidation of power in 1971, he started slowly departing from core Nasserist policies associated with Arabism, by toning down Egypt's interventions and over-extension in the region. The realization that Egypt was weaker than it used to be sank in after the 1967 defeat, and was further exacerbated during the 1970's. Sadat's real politik approach and change in course was accelerated and fastened after the 1973 war against Israel, as he thought to reap in benefits of the war – i.e. better relations with the West and America as well as peace with Israel. Tellingly, his aspiration for peace made him a hero in the West, but an outcast and traitor amongst the Arabs, who were not prepared to negotiate or conclude any peace with Israel. While domestically, the miscalculated hasty decisions to accelerate economic liberalization and the open-door policy, have created bigger challenges that Egypt continues to face until today.

The 1979 Islamic Revolution

On January 16, 1979, the Shah and his family left Iran for the last time in search for exile. It was natural for the Shah to choose Egypt as his first stop, due to the closeness he developed with Sadat. From there he spent some time in Morocco, the Bahamas and Mexico before being admitted to the United States for medical treatment. Since the departure of the Shah in January, and with the announcement of the Islamic Republic in April, the revolution leaders led by Imam Khomeini demanded the Shah's extradition. On November, 4 1979, a group of radicalized students stormed the U.S. embassy in Tehran and held 56 diplomats hostage for 444 days. The hostage crisis was later supported by Khomeini and was portrayed as a response to American support of the deposed Shah and for hosting him. The Iranian hostility and safety of Americans put immense pressure on President Carter, who was preparing to run for a second term. In a step to appease Khomeini and resolve the situation, the United States moved the Shah to Panama in December 1979, where he stayed until March 1980, when he accepted the offer for political asylum from his friend Anwar

Sadat.²³⁴ The Shah was welcomed in Cairo by Sadat, who for the Shah, was the only friend left. After a battle with lymphatic cancer, Mohamed Reza Pahlavi died at age 60 in the Maadi military hospital in Cairo. As a show of respect, Sadat insisted to hold full military honors funeral and buried the Shah in *al-Rifa'i* mosque, next to his former brother-in-law King Farouk of Egypt.

Sadat's decision to make peace with Israel was met with rage and disbelief from the Arab world.²³⁵ Signing the peace treaty with Israel shunned Egypt from the Arab world. Despite an enthusiastic and supportive Iran under the Shah, the Islamists who took over in 1979, were in a rare unison with their Arab neighbors (moderates and radicals) against the peace process. The notion of peace with the Israelis was seen as anti-Islamic, and as a betrayal to Arab unity against a unilateral peace with Israel. As Ehteshami observes, "the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, and Iran's enthusiastic endorsement [under the shah] ... raised fears in most Arab capitals that a US-orchestrated strategic consensus would be emerging in the form of a Cairo-Tel Aviv-Tehran axis."²³⁶ These fears were built around three core issues: first, the potential security threat and pressure such axis would cause to the radical Arab states (Iraq, Syria and Libya); second, the marginalization of the role of the smaller (conservative) monarchies in regional calculations vis-a-vis the stronger new axis; and third, neutralizing Egypt's role in the Arab-Israeli conflict would relegate the conflict from the regional agenda, and reduce the possibility of using it as an ideological and political rallying point. Even though "the modern and plentiful military forces of Iran, Israel and Egypt far outweighed those of any combination of Arab armies," the eruption of the Islamic revolution and ousting of the Shah ensured that no Egyptian-Iranian military alliance would materialize.²³⁷

²³⁴ Abbas Milani. *The Shah*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 418-433. Milani recounts that Lloyd Cutler, Carter's emissary, met with the Shah at the hospital in New York and told him that South Africa, Paraguay and Egypt were willing to host him. The United States was against the idea that Egypt host the Shah; fearing that it might threaten Sadat's delicate situation after signing the peace treaty with Israel. However, the Shah was against going to both Paraguay and South Africa.

²³⁵ The Camp David Accords were signed September 17, 1978 and comprised of two separate agreements: *A Framework for Peace in the Middle East* and *A Framework for the Conclusion of a Peace Treaty between Egypt and Israel*. The latter agreement was culminated by signing a peace treaty on March 26, 1979.

²³⁶ Ehteshami, *Ibid.*, p. 160

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 161

Despite Egypt's initial acceptance of the new leadership in Iran, the mullahs did not reciprocate.²³⁸ Iran's domestic politics complicated matters further as several groups – from nationalists to leftists to the clergymen - competed for legitimacy and power consolidation, and a media campaign ensued against Egypt's peace with Israel and the suggestion to host the Shah.²³⁹

Recognizing Israel and joining the western (American) alliance came back to challenge the relationship between Egypt and Iran. The ideological doctrine of the new leaders in Tehran was aligning with the Front for Steadfastness and Confrontation in their opposition to Egypt's peace treaty.²⁴⁰ Yasser Arafat as well as Syrian and Libyan emissaries flew to Tehran to persuade Khomeini to join their cause of opposing Egypt.²⁴¹ Expectedly, in a *deja vu* to Nasser's decision in 1960, Israel and the western influence were the main reasons Khomeini cited in cutting relations with Egypt in April 1979. Ever since, the war of words and accusations escalated between Egypt and Iran, and more precisely Sadat and Khomeini.²⁴² For example, in an interview with Egyptian journalist Mohamed Hassanein Heikal in 1979, Khomeini said that: "the Egyptian nation is one thing, and Mr. Sadat is something else. How sad I am to see that person who says he is the leader of an Islamic country sits at the same table as two persons who are both enemies of Islam, the Israeli regime [and] the United States."²⁴³ On the other hand, Sadat was critical of Khomeini's brand of Islam. In a television interview, he said: "I am sad of the Islamic nation, because Khomeini's fever is beginning to catch onto some Moslem leaders. But I will not hesitate to fight this disease if it tries to creep into some souls here [Egypt]." Sadat continued to defend the exiled Shah against Khomeini's quest for extradition saying that: "he [Khomeini] is distorting Islam and

²³⁸ The Egyptian Prime Minister Moustafa Khalil sent a congratulatory message to the interim government of Mehdi Bazargan on February 17, 1979. Egypt later recognized the new Islamic Republic on April 4, 1979. Copy of the letter is quoted in al-Sabbagh, *Ibid.*, p. 173-175

²³⁹ One of the telling incidents as reported by al-Sabbagh is the takeover of the Egyptian embassy in Tehran by a group of Arab students after Khomeini's condemnation of the peace treaty.

²⁴⁰ The National Front for Steadfastness and Confrontation was composed of Syria, Libya, Algeria, People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen) and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). They came together in opposition to Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in November 1977, and his peace plans with Israel.

²⁴¹ Yasser Arafat was the first foreign and Arab leader to visit Tehran after the revolution. He arrived with numerous of his top aides and met with Khomeini on February 17, 1979 – only 2 weeks after the return of Khomeini from his exile in France. Arafat believed that the Iranian revolution was as a godsend gift to replace Egypt's departure from the Arab-Israeli conflict.

²⁴² See: Hanan Hammad. "Khomeini and the Iranian Revolution in the Egyptian Press. *Radical History Review*, 2009. Hammad provides analysis and a closer look at the Egyptian press coverage and portrayal of the Iranian revolution and Ayatollah Khomeini through in-depth archival research.

²⁴³ Quoted in Assef Bayat and Bahman Bakhtiari. *Ibid.*, p. 308

hunting a sick man [the Shah] thousands of miles away, who has left him the country to do with [Iran] what he wants.”²⁴⁴

Adding to the fanfare was Sadat’s offer of political asylum to the Shah and his family. The Shah’s arrival in Cairo infuriated Khomeini and his clergymen. For several months, the media in both countries continued the tug of war using Islamic references in justifying its actions. Egypt’s press carried continuous attacks against the Islamic republic and portraying Khomeini as a “purveyor of false Islam and hatred.”²⁴⁵ On the other hand, Ayatollah Sadeq Khalkhali, known as the hanging judge for his death sentences against the Pahlavi regime members, called for the execution of Sadat as an act of revolutionary justice.²⁴⁶ Khalkhali’s message and Iran’s Islamism found new resonance with some of the Islamic Jihad members in Egypt. On October 6, 1981, Egyptian lieutenant Khalid al-Islambouli would lead a group of Islamists to assassinate Anwar Sadat during the annual military parade commemorating the October 1973 war. In the aftermath of Sadat’s assassination, Iran’s leaders symbolized their content for Sadat’s death by hailing Islambouli’s actions and calling for an Islamic uprising in Egypt. Later in 1982, a postage stamp was issued to celebrate Islambouli’s martyrdom; a street in Tehran was renamed after him, and murals were created to honor the ringleader of Sadat’s assailants.

The Iranian Revolution and Egypt’s Islamists:

The success of the Iranian revolution in toppling the pro-Western regime of the Shah and empowering the Shiite clergymen to lead and form an ‘Islamic republic’, received mixed feelings among the Islamists of Egypt. The rise of anti-American and Israeli sentiments and enmity in a big country as Iran was alarming to the Egyptian leadership who were already fully committed to peace with Israel and to friendly relations with the West and America. However, it is important to note that the Iranian revolution was “secondary to the indigenous overall trend of back to Islam,” which could be detected back to the post-1967 defeat against Israel. The Egyptian government frequently criticized Khomeini’s model of governance as not being representative of true Islam, and Egypt’s decision to host the shah was “in accordance to with its values and principles. The

²⁴⁴“Sadat Denounces Iran’s Khomeini.” *Observer-Reporter*, Washington, PA, December 26, 1979, <https://goo.gl/Jc83np>

²⁴⁵ Entessar, “The Lion and the Sphinx”, *Ibid.*, p. 166

²⁴⁶ “Iranian Reiterates Trial Threat.” *New York Times*, March 25, 1980
<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9F01E2D91238E432A25756C2A9659C94619FD6CF>

shah stood by Egypt before, during and after the October war.”²⁴⁷ While semi-official newspapers like *al-Ahram* and *al-Akhbar* allowed space to discuss the role of Islam in politics, they carried the stereotypical image that “Shiites are extremists; their doctrines mystify rather than clarify Islam; the sect is based on elitism; [and] what drove Iranian foreign policy under Khomeini was Persian neo-imperialism.”²⁴⁸

The official religious establishment, *al-Azhar*, was critical of the new Islamist leaders in Tehran fearing an instigation of “Islamist sentiments abroad as part of revolutionary Shiite activism.” In his book, Leonard Binder described al-Azhar’s scholars view as:

“Some ulama are doubtlessly willing to accept the extremist fundamentalist formula... Most, however, cannot conceive of themselves in the role of a Khomeini, and they fear the consequences of the emergence of a charismatic leader of a clandestine band of violent revolutionaries who would overthrow the present institutional amalgam and establish a millennial Islamic regime.”²⁴⁹

Shahrough Akhavi found this hostility to be interesting and ironic as the Egyptian scholars were “willing to attempt a reconciliation with the Iranian clergy prior to the revolution.”²⁵⁰ He added that this view was not just because of the official state policy toward the revolution, but also in part because “those Iranian clergymen who had worked for rapprochement in the earlier years were not enthusiastic about eventually even openly antagonistic to Khomeini.”²⁵¹

In his analysis of the Egyptian Islamists reaction to Iran’s revolution, Rudi Mathee distinguishes three different views: the extreme *Takfir w al-Hijrah* and Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ); the mainstream conservative Muslim Brotherhood; and the Islamic left.²⁵² As expected the militant Jihadi groups were welcoming of the Islamic revolution and condemned hosting the Shah in Egypt.

²⁴⁷ Assef Bayat and Bahman Baktiari. “Revolutionary Iran and Egypt: Exporting Inspirations and Anxieties,” in Nikki R. Keddie and Rudi Mathee, ed. *Iran and the Surrounding World: Interactions in Culture and Cultural Politics*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2002.,” *Ibid.*, p. 310

²⁴⁸ Shahrough Akhavi. “The Impact of the Iranian Revolution on Egypt,” in Esposito, John L. ed. *The Iranian Revolution*. Florida: Florida University Press, 1990, p. 151

²⁴⁹ Leonard Binder. *Islamic Liberalism: A Critique of Development Ideologies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988, p. 493

²⁵⁰ Akhavi. *Ibid.*, p. 141

²⁵¹ Akhavi. *Ibid.*, p. 141

²⁵² Rudi Mathee. “The Egyptian Opposition on the Iranian Revolution,” in Juan R. Cole and Nikki R. Keddie, ed. *Shiism and Social Protest*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986, p. 248-249. See also: Walid M. Abdelnasser. “Islamic Organizations in Egypt and The Iranian Revolution of 1979: The Experience of The First Few Years,” *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 19.2, 1997

In one of the early statements from the Islamic Student Association at Cairo University, it is clear that they saw Islam as “a comprehensive religion that legislates for this world and the next and organizes all of life,” and that people should turn to the Islamic clergy (*Ulama*) who “have always been their refuge in the past and their leaders in modern Islamic liberation movements.” They continued to warn against allying with the imperial powers who look for local leaders to do their bidding and eventually it is those enemies of Islam who “will seek to exploit differences between Sunnites and Shiites in order to weaken the *Ummah* (Islamic community).”²⁵³ The leaders of EIJ thought to emulate the Iranians (regardless of the Shiite nature of their leaders) by mobilizing the masses against the regime in Egypt whom they deemed apostate.

The Muslim Brotherhood was in a tight position. On one hand, they had benefited from Sadat’s amnesty and implicit support to work unrestricted. On the other hand, the Islamic revolution in Iran represented one of the goals of their organization: changing the ruling system in Egypt to an Islamic one. Several articles and books were written by members or affiliates of the Brotherhood supporting the Iranian revolution and its regional and world impact. Magazines like *Al-Dawah*, *Al-Itisam*, and *Al-Mukhtar al-Islami*, featured pieces viewing the revolution as an ally for the Arabs against Israel; as a savior to the people from moral dissolution and loss of identity.²⁵⁴ Iran represented for many Egyptians, as Asef Bayat highlights, “a solution, an alternative model, and a successful one [as] it was an Islamic state with institutions, rulers, ideology and popular support.”²⁵⁵

However, the eruption of the Iran-Iraq war in September 1980, the punitive measures carried by the clergymen in Tehran and the Shiite nature of the Iranians, made the Muslim Brotherhood uneasy and reluctant to continue its balancing act. The Arab support for Iraq against Persian Iran was polarizing, especially that Sadat gradually sided with Iraq. Moreover, Iran’s chief ally in the Arab world was Syria, whose president Hafiz al-Asad exterminated Muslim Brotherhood members among thousands of his people in the Hama massacres of 1982. As a Sunni Arab organization, the Brotherhood, had to reconcile its Pan-Islamic euphoric moment with the realities on the ground especially after the Revolutionary Courts and Death Commissions in Iran executed thousands of people from the Shah’s regime and the leftist and Islamist movements. Rudi Mathee sums up the

²⁵³ Akhavi. *Ibid.*, p. 141-142

²⁵⁴ See Akhavi Shahrough. *Ibid.*, p. 144-147

²⁵⁵ Bayat and Baktiari. *Ibid.*, p. 311

Muslim Brotherhood's view of the revolution in three phases. The first stage was one of "unqualified enthusiasm and unconditional euphoria," which was followed by a phase of apologetic and defensive rhetoric, and culminating with ambivalence and discomfort.²⁵⁶

The Islamic left (or Liberal Islamists according to Leonard Binder) supported the Iranian revolution at the beginning but they believe it deviated over the course of time. Professor Hassan Hanafi of Cairo University, a former member of the Muslim Brotherhood, was a chief proponent of the Islamic left alternative and believed Iran's movement represented a leftist view of Islam. The revolution "represents for the Islamic left a broadly based social movement that has struck a blow for the anti-imperialist cause."²⁵⁷ The same view was expressed by Abd al-Sattar Tawilah in an article for the weekly *Ruz al Youssef* stating that "we supported the Iranian revolution because one of its affirmed objectives was to remove Iran from the American ascendancy." However, the revolutionary leaders were incapable of delivering and resorted to a dictatorship worse than that of the Shah.²⁵⁸ Hanafi was critical of the Brotherhood's departure from supporting social justice, welfare and national dignity. In addition, Hanafi goes on to criticize the Egyptian government's reaction as "frightened of the remote possibility of a Khomeini type Islamic revolution." He goes on to claim that "Islam is capable of serving as an umbrella for all political trends," and while the Iranians managed to succeed, it doesn't mean it will be successful in Egypt as "revolutions are not copied."²⁵⁹

The differing views regarding Iran among some of Egypt's Islamists represents the amount of influence the Iranian revolution had on the mindset of these groups. According to Bayat, "Iran's revolutionary experience contributed tremendously to popular religiosity and Islamic mood, sentiments and sensibilities." This was considered "part of the totality of Islamic revivalism led by Iran" and a success to their revolution.²⁶⁰ As relations with Iran deteriorated post Egypt's peace with Israel and the escalating war of words and accusations between Sadat and Khomeini, the Egyptian government started taking steps against groups supportive of an Iran-like revolution.

²⁵⁶ Matheei. *Ibid.*, p. 263-264

²⁵⁷ Akhavi Shahrough. *Ibid.*, p. 149

²⁵⁸ Quoted in Akhavi Shahrough. *Ibid.*, p. 149

²⁵⁹ Hassan Hanafi. "The Relevance of the Islamic Alternative in Egypt." *Arab Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 4, No. 1/2, (Spring 1982), p. 74, 64. Hanafi published Khomeini's classic *al-Hukuma al-Islamiya* (Islamic Government) and founded a short-lived magazine called *al-Yasar al-Islami* (Islamic Left) with Mohamed Auda and Ibrahim Disuqi.

²⁶⁰ Bayat and Baktiari. *Ibid.*, p. 313

After all, Iran's revolutionary rhetoric represented a threat to the stability of Cairo's government especially that Tehran attacked and challenged the core of what Sadat, and later Mubarak, stood for – better relations and alliance with the West and peace with Israel.

Throughout the 1980's and 1990's, Cairo continued to crackdown on militant Islamists and in some instances accused Iran of backing some of these groups. In 1979, Egypt's authorities discovered a cell called *Ansar Khomeini* (Khomeini Supporters), and during trial of EIJ members in 1980 "Iran was pointed to by militants as one of the escape routes open to them, and contacts between Jihad and Iranian officials were admitted."²⁶¹ Despite the Sadat government's attempts to quell rising jihadi tendencies, members of the EIJ infiltrated the military parade of October 1981 and assassinated President Sadat. The group hoped to set in motion an Islamic uprising across the country, yet the government managed to foil their attempt.

Conclusion

Sadat's tenure saw the closest relations with Iran, which appeared in the steady communication and dialogue, the various bilateral agreements and Iranian investments, and the Iranian support to the peace process. The changing regional alignments as well as Sadat's objectives were the main reasons for the Egyptian-Iranian entente. Sadat believed that aligning with the United States would provide much needed benefits for Egypt and that the next wave of the future is moving toward the West and liberal democracy as opposed to socialist Soviet model. Sadat, like Nasser, had monopoly over the foreign policy establishment. It was obvious and evident through his decision to open back channels with the U.S., kick the Soviet experts in 1972 and start a shift to the west; in addition to his peace negotiations tactics with Israel that excluded and sidelined his foreign ministers and led to their resignation. Sadat used foreign policy as a tool to legitimize his rule and domestic decisions. Not surprisingly, the Shah as well has used his close ties with the United States to create domestic submissiveness. Both Sadat and the Shah thought they could extract a win-win formula from their cooperation especially that both were bandwagoning with the U.S. for a bigger regional role under the Cold War dynamics.

²⁶¹ Quoted in, Shahrough Akhavi. "The Impact of the Iranian Revolution on Egypt," in John L Esposito. ed. *The Iranian Revolution*. Florida: Florida University Press, 1990, p. 143

However, this relationship deteriorated quickly after the Iranian revolution of 1979, with the ascendance of Ayatollah Khomeini to power. The changing and opposing policies of both regimes made it harder for reconciliation especially with a growing personal resentment between Sadat and Khomeini. The signing of the Egyptian-Israeli peace, the American support to Cairo and the Arab isolation of Egypt, were the reasons Khomeini and his government used to cut relations with Egypt. Later, Iran added hosting the deposed Shah and supporting Iraq in its War against Iran, as other causes to the enmity. If Egypt was once the main regional bandwagon that attracted other dissatisfied states using anti-imperial and Arab unity rhetoric, it was now Iran's turn under Khomeini to shake the growing pro-American regional dynamics by utilizing its Islamic revolution and rhetoric to lure Islamists in the region to its side.

Chapter Five: Prolonged Bitterness and Normalized Stagnation

Introduction

Throughout the last two chapters, I reviewed and discussed Egyptian policies toward Iran under Presidents Nasser and Sadat. Through this historical narrative, it became evident that Egypt's foreign policy in general, and its relations with Iran in particular, warrants more than a realpolitik explanation. Instead, Cairo's leadership perspectives and views of the domestic, regional and international order were an integral part in the calculation and outcomes of Egypt's foreign policy. These views reflect a wide range of calculations and conclusions that stem from leadership characteristics, internal political and economic factors and system structure. These factors are so intertwined that one cannot assess the nature of Egypt's policies toward Iran, "in isolation from the broader network of Egypt's interest in the Arab world and the domestic environment in which those interests are shaped."²⁶²

This chapter will primarily focus on the Hosni Mubarak years, whose presidency stretched from 1981 to 2011. The main research question of this chapter is as follows: why did Egypt and Iran failed to achieve an entente during those 30 years? Mubarak's tenure witnessed several structural changes in the domestic, regional and international spheres; from the Gulf wars, the fall of the Soviet Union, the protracted Arab-Israeli conflict to the regime's fight against Islamic insurgency and the socio-economic challenges. These changes generated a potential regional balance of power, where an Egyptian-Iranian normalization and detente seemed plausible and could have helped stabilize the region. Nonetheless, these changes (independent variable) did not lead to the full restoration of diplomatic relations between Cairo and Tehran due to the leadership role and perception (intervening variable) of Egypt's leaders. As Ahmed Abu el Ghiet said "we have to admit that the main element in the possibility of developing this relationship [Egypt and Iran] ... was the security dimension and the personal experience of the President and intelligence services."²⁶³

²⁶² Philip H. Stoddard. *Egypt and the Iran-Iraq War*, in Thomas Naff, ed. "Gulf Security and the Iran-Iraq War." National Defense University, 1995, p. 26

²⁶³ Ahmed Abu el Gheit. *Shehadaty: al-Seyasa al-Kharejya al-Masrya 2004-2011 – [My Testimony: Egyptian Foreign Policy 2004-2011]*. Cairo: Nahdet Misr Publishing, 2013, p. 387

The chapter will start with a brief background on the rise of Mubarak to the presidency then proceed in three sections. The first section, 1981-1990, represents the estrangement period that witnessed a continuation of the bitterness between both countries especially with the Iran-Iraq War developments and Egypt's support to Iraq. This phase ends with the shocking Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The second section, 1991-2000, witnessed attempts to normalize relations between Cairo and Tehran but was never completed. Despite changing regional and international dynamics – unipolar world, weakened Iraqi regime, established relations between the Gulf monarchies and Iran and efforts for Arab-Israeli peace, the Egyptian-Iranian relations didn't go beyond opening interest sections and bilateral meetings on the sidelines of multilateral conferences. The last section, 2001-2010, saw the closest attempts for normalization between Mubarak and Mohamed Khatami and later attempts under Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. However, the uncertainty around Iran's nuclear program, its rising influence in the region through its support for Iraq's Shiites, and for Hezbollah and Hamas against Israel reinforced the suspicions Mubarak and his security sector had about Iran.

Mubarak's Character and Rise to Power

When Mubarak assumed power in the aftermath of Sadat's assassination in October 1981, regional dynamics were far from peaceful and/or were in favor of Egypt.²⁶⁴ At the time, the Arab world had shunned Egypt for its peace treaty with Israel; a deadly civil and proxy war was ongoing in Lebanon; Iraq and Iran were engaged in war, and Afghanistan was attracting Islamists to fight against the Soviet Union. Domestically, Egypt was reeling in economic and societal distress, and anxious about the rise of local Islamists and jihadists who were empowered by the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the assassination of President Sadat.

Mubarak, who was appointed Vice President in 1975, entered office without a clear domestic or foreign political vision. He was not known for having specific opinions or clear political views during his time as Egypt's second man. His biggest achievement that got him the title of VP, was being the Air Force commander during the 1973 war against Israel, and as agreed by many

²⁶⁴ One telling incident is Sadat's funeral. The state funeral was nothing compared to Nasser's. Security was tightened and the populace was not allowed to participate. Only 3 Arab countries sent officials to attend (Morocco, Oman and Sudan) compared to numerous foreign dignitaries including Israel and the United States. <http://www.nytimes.com/1981/10/10/world/officials-from-around-the-world-attending-sadat-s-funeral.html>

foreigners and Egyptians, “it was Mr. Mubarak's lack of visibility, coupled with his fierce loyalty to Mr. Sadat, that permitted his political survival and ascendancy.”²⁶⁵ His seemingly weak character made him the subject of jokes and nicknames among Egyptians such as ‘The Laughing Cow,’ in reference to a bland French cheese with the same name.²⁶⁶ Such descriptions were in line with the view that Mubarak was risk averse and not one who would rock the boat. In a famous interview prior to his re-election in 2005, Mubarak said that he did not have any political aspirations or looking for position in the government. He added that his highest hope was to retire from the military service and be appointed an Ambassador in London to enjoy life with his family.²⁶⁷

In one of the leaked U.S. State Department cables, the American Ambassador Margaret Scobey offered a precise assessment of President Mubarak,

President Mubarak is the proud leader of a proud nation. He draws heavily from his own long experience in regional politics and governance ... Mubarak peppers his observations with anecdotes that demonstrate both his long experience and his sense of humor ... During his 28-year tenure, he survived at least three assassination attempts, maintained peace with Israel, weathered two wars in Iraq and post-2003 regional instability, intermittent economic downturns, and a manageable but chronic internal terrorist threat. He is a tried and true realist, innately cautious and conservative, and has little time for idealistic goals ... Mubarak is a classic Egyptian secularist who hates religious extremism and interference in politics. The Muslim Brothers represent the worst, as they challenge not only Mubarak’s power, but his view of Egyptian interests. As with regional issues, Mubarak, seeks to avoid conflict and spare his people from the violence he predicts would emerge from unleashed personal and civil liberties.²⁶⁸

Similar sentiments were expressed in interviews with senior Egyptian diplomats and former foreign ministers who worked closely with Mubarak. In their assessment, Mubarak’s first ten years were active with a focus on consolidating his authority domestically, maintaining peace with Israel and regaining Egypt’s role in the Arab world and Africa. In his second ten years, Egypt started economic restructuring by following an

²⁶⁵ Judith Miller. “Loyalty and Invisibility Took Mubarak To Top.” *New York Times*, October 8, 1981. Accessed, January 2016 <http://www.nytimes.com/1981/10/08/world/loyalty-and-invisibility-took-mubarak-to-top.html>

²⁶⁶ Miller. “Loyalty and Invisibility Took Mubarak To Top.” Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Full Interview with Emad Adeeb (in Arabic), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rrhTnkziLVM>. The comments made about retiring as Ambassador are between 2:57:10 and 2:58:40. An Arabic transcript can be found here: <http://elaph.com/Politics/2005/4/57918.htm?sectionarchive=Politics>

²⁶⁸ “Scenesetter: President Mubarak’s Visit to Washington.” *WikiLeaks*. May 19, 2009. https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09CAIRO874_a.html

IMF plan to avoid collapse and bankruptcy. At the same time, Egypt's regional policies were mainly focusing on supporting and at other times coercing the Palestinian leadership to seek peace with Israel. While in the last decade, Mubarak was disinterested in any new initiatives or change in course. The rise of his son, Gamal, and his association with a new younger group of politicians and businessmen fueled the prospects of a succession plan, which haunted Mubarak until his ouster in February 2011.²⁶⁹

The foreign policy “decisions were settled within the president's immediate circle,” which often followed the security and intelligence apparatus' suggestions.²⁷⁰ With the departure of Amr Mousa from the Foreign Ministry to the Arab League, “the General Intelligence Service (GIS), which answers directly to the president, took charge of the central issues of foreign policy,” and its chief Omar Suleiman became “Mubarak's most important adviser, and was the number one Cairo contact for foreign governments.”²⁷¹

In his memoirs, Ahmed Abu el Gheit highlighted the files that Mubarak entrusted Suleiman and the GIS to run, which were Libya, Sudan, Israel and Palestine as well as the security and intelligence relations with the United States. Abu el Gheit also referred to several incidents where he succeeded in convincing Mubarak to keep a public role for the Foreign Ministry on some of Suleiman's missions.²⁷²

Mubarak's New World

Mubarak's chief task in his first months was to stabilize and ensure domestic security. Mubarak saw that the domestic and foreign policies set forth by Sadat were not particularly wrong, as “Sadat's most serious mistake was not pursuing a false path but trying to go too far, too fast.”²⁷³ Mubarak tried “to shore up domestic support for the regime by emphasizing Egypt's traditional Arab, Islamic and African affiliations” in an attempt to break the regional isolation against

²⁶⁹ Author interviews with four former Foreign Ministers and other senior diplomats who worked with Mubarak.

²⁷⁰ Jannis Grimm and Stephan Roll. “Egyptian Foreign Policy under Mohamed Morsi: Domestic Considerations and Economic Constraints.” *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) - German Institute for International and Security Affairs*, November 2012, https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2012C35_gmm_rll.pdf

²⁷¹ Grimm and Roll. *Ibid.*

²⁷² Ahmed Abu el Gheit. *Shehadaty: al-Seyasa al-Kharejya al-Masrya 2004-2011 – [My Testimony: Egyptian Foreign Policy 2004-2011]*. Cairo: Nahdet Misr Publishing, 2013

²⁷³ Mohamed Sid-Ahmed. “Egypt: The Islamic Issue.” *Foreign Policy*. No. 69 (Winter, 1987-1988), p. 23

Egypt.²⁷⁴ As a first step Mubarak released the groups and individuals detained by Sadat in September 1981. He wanted to bring them onboard in an attempt to start a new page with everyone and set forth an action plan for revitalizing Egypt's economy and foreign and domestic policies. After all, the regional dynamics were changing and it was in Mubarak's interest to regain Egypt's chief role among the Arabs and in the region.

I. The Islamists Factor

By the end of the 1970's, Islamic resurgence in Egypt started to take a different shape and form, encouraged by domestic and regional changes. Islamic activism was not a new phenomenon in Egypt and has a long history dating back to the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The calls to return to early Islamic teachings and system of governance have had several proponents including from within al-Azhar itself. However, by 1928 these calls started taking shape in the form of organized groups like the Muslim Brotherhood.²⁷⁵ Islamists at that time claimed that Egypt's ailments were attributed to colonialism and foreign influence as well as corrupt leaders. Over time, the Brotherhood started playing an influential role in social and political circles, benefiting from the continued competing interests and rivalry between the King, the Wafd Party and the British. For instance, Hassan Hanafi recalls that the Muslim Brotherhood continued to be an important player, particularly among university students and unions despite the sweeping victory of the Wafd Party in the national election of 1951.²⁷⁶ The MB managed to reach deeper into the society than any other group at the time using religion, piety and social services as soft power.

Nonetheless, during the 1950's and 1960's the Brotherhood was subjected to severe crackdown by the Egyptian government. The new regime led by Gamal Abdel Nasser was not willing to tolerate any dissent that would challenge its authority or policies whether it uses political or religious ideologies. Hence, numerous members of the Muslim Brotherhood organization were hanged, received prolonged imprisonments, or simply expelled from Egypt. Similar verdicts were taken against members of the Egyptian communist leaders for instance. When Sadat assumed power in

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 23

²⁷⁵ For historical and sociological accounts of the Muslim Brotherhood, see: Musa Husayni. *The Muslim Brethren: The Greats of Modern Islamic Movements*. Beirut: Khayat College Book Cooperative, 1956; Mitchell. *The Society of the Moslem Brothers*. London: Oxford University Press, 1969

²⁷⁶ Hanafi. "The Relevance of the Islamic Alternative in Egypt." *Arab Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 4, No. 1/2, (Spring 1982), pp. 54-74

1970, he thought to turn over a new leaf with the Muslim Brotherhood, in an attempt to support his rule vis-a-vis Nasser's strongmen. Sadat reopened the public sphere to the Brotherhood, so as long as they stayed in their religious and preaching realm without interfering in the political sphere. However, with the speedy steps towards liberalization and peace with Israel, splinter groups like Islamic Jihad, the group that later assassinated Sadat, started challenging the regime's liberal western policies in an attempt to create an Islamic state and society in Egypt. The religious anti-state rhetoric spread among segments of the society benefiting from the socio-economic challenges and attempts for peace with Israel. Ultimately, the fundamentalists called for imposing Islamic rule and jurisprudence on society, even by force. They rejected all sorts of nationalism and democratic rule and declared societies that follow such ideologies as apostate.

Wary of the rise of militant Islamists and possibility of civil unrest, Mubarak could not keep up with Sadat's swift transformative policies. He opted for accommodational policies similar to his regional attempts at reconciliation. Thus, Mubarak started by releasing the politicians and intellectuals Sadat imprisoned shortly before his assassination. He believed any differences over Egypt's domestic and foreign policies between the regime and the opposition "should be subordinated to the need for a united stand against terrorism inspired by religious fanaticism."²⁷⁷ It was imperative to try "to isolate the most dangerous opponents of the regime, the Islamic extremists, from the nonviolent secular opposition" for the survival of the regime.²⁷⁸

Fear of militancy was not the only concern for Egypt, conversion to Shiism was another area of apprehension. In 1989, Egyptian police arrested 41 people claiming they were a nucleus of a secret Shiite movement that starting with four Sunnis converting to Shiism. The group was later charged with planning to overthrow the Mubarak regime.²⁷⁹ In 1996, the state security reported another case when they arrested a group of 56 Shiite Egyptians allegedly propagating an Iranian-style revolution.²⁸⁰ Despite toning down its comments on Egypt's crackdown on Islamists, the Iranian regime under President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani said that "from the viewpoints of the Egyptian rules the exchange of ideas and meetings between different Muslim groups is against the law and

²⁷⁷ Mohamed Sid-Ahmed. "Egypt: The Islamic Issue." *Foreign Policy*. No. 69 (Winter, 1987-1988), p. 28

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25

²⁷⁹ Akhavi Shahrough. *Ibid.*, p. 143

²⁸⁰ Bayat, Assef and Bahman Baktiari. *Ibid.*, p. 316

considered as anti-state activities. The fact is that communications between Muslims are quite usual and natural and no person in his sound state of mind can accuse Muslims of subversive activities just because they pay a visit to another Muslim country or because they met with Shiite leaders.”²⁸¹

Egypt was not willing to tolerate any groups using Islam – or Jihadism for that matter - to muddle its internal dynamics or attempt to topple its ruling regime. Hence, the more demonized and isolated Iran became regionally and internationally, the more moderate and better positioned Egypt would appear, both economically and politically.

II. The Political-Economic Challenges

Egypt’s long preserved territorial integrity as well as the long history of foreign interventions, have shaped its leaders’ security concerns. This also highlighted the borders where Egyptians needed to protect the most, the Mediterranean Sea in the north and Sinai in the east, as all invasions through history used either front. Ever since its creation in 1948, Israel has been considered the primary security threat not only to Egypt, but to the whole Arab world. The signing of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty in 1979 reduced the threat of future wars between Egypt and Israel and brought Egypt closer to the United States and the West. Nonetheless, the subsequent peace efforts did not result in tangible resolution of the conflict on the Palestinian or Syrian tracks. The continued control of right wing governments in Israel and the Palestinian infighting led to a stalemate and the loss of faith in the process.

Moreover, access to water has been one of the main pillars allowing Egypt to survive through the centuries. Egypt’s dependence on the Nile River meant that it needed to guarantee no single power control the flow of the water. As John Waterbury observes “no other major river valley is shared by so many autonomous actors and no other downstream state is utterly dependent for its livelihood as Egypt is upon its river.”²⁸² In other words, the geographic location and historical considerations have defined Egypt’s primary security threats.

²⁸¹ Quoted in Bayat, Assef and Bahman Baktiari. *Ibid.*, p. 316-317

²⁸² John Waterbury. *Hydropolitics of the Nile Valley*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1979, p. 63.

Internal developments and international economic problems have supplied more than adequate replacements for the threat perceptions that once centered on Israel. Economic development has barely kept up with population growth. Movement toward democratization and toward free-market economies was slow or invisible. Social ills were growing, modernization generated a variety of tensions, and governments were not seen as responding effectively.²⁸³ Throughout the 1980's and 1990's, Egypt's traditional national security perception was expanded to add a geo-economic security perspective. If the main objective of a nation is to safeguard its territorial integrity against external as well as internal threats, and utilize power politics amongst other means, to achieve such objective. However, geo-economics expands the states' national security concerns to its socio-economic cohesion and economic development prospects. As a result, increased productivity and competitiveness; implementing economic reforms, and protecting and expanding the states' sources of income become critical to the economic survival of a nation.²⁸⁴

Since the 1970's, Egypt has witnessed a growing economic dependency on the Gulf. The oil boom and developmental schemes of the Arab Gulf states provided extensive work opportunities for all levels of the Egyptians society. In addition, the wealth accumulated by these states was reflected in direct investments and aid to Egypt, especially between 1973-1978 and continuing to present day until today. According to estimates from the Egyptian Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) reports, 3.3 million Egyptians were working in the Gulf between 1974 and 1984, and transferred "\$33 billion in cash transfers, deposits in banking, goods and commodities. This sum represented almost three times the amount of the American economic aid to Egypt."²⁸⁵ The annual average of over \$3 billion continued despite growing regional tensions and wars – the Iran-Iraq war and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait – with total remittances reaching \$77 billion by 1993.

Throughout the 1980's, Egypt managed to benefit politically and economically by utilizing its geopolitical position and through capitalizing on couple of regional and international factors. These factors - the Cold War, Gulf security, and the Arab-Israeli conflict – boosted Egypt's status

²⁸³ James Leonard. ed. *National Threat Perceptions in the Middle East*. New York: United Nations, 1995, p. 4

²⁸⁴ Abdel Monem Said Aly. "From Geopolitics to Geo-economics: Egyptian National Security Perceptions," in James Leonard, ed. *National Threat perceptions in the Middle East*. New York: United Nations, 1995 p. 17

²⁸⁵ Aly, Abdel Monem Said. *Ibid.*, P. 23-24; According to the 1993 USAID Annual Report, U.S. Economic aid amounted to \$18 billion between 1975-1992.

and influence. The Egyptian participation in the second Gulf War alleviated serious pressures on the economy through cancelling billions of dollars in military and economic debt owed to the U.S. and the Gulf states.²⁸⁶ The American and Gulf debt reliefs, in addition to the rescheduling of other Paris Club obligations, reduced Egypt's foreign debt by 50 percent.²⁸⁷

Nonetheless, with the end of the Cold War, the American responsibility to protect the Gulf and the launch of the Arab-Israeli peace process in the 1990's, Egypt's power capabilities became less needed. The importance of the geopolitics started slowly giving way to the rising geo-economics. The economic indicators of Egypt showed limited ability to compete regionally and internationally. Egypt's dependency on foreign aid and its foreign reserves, contingent on various forms of rent rather than production and exports, further weakened its ability to play a role in the regional transformation. Tarek Osman observes that Mubarak's best option to alleviate economic woes was to join the *Pax Americana* "where greater security was founded on American guarantees and regional economic integration. In return, Egypt would be rewarded with increased foreign direct investment, a leading place in an emerging system and continued international support; its success in the effort would be measured by investment dollars, trade surpluses and regime continuity rather than any true internal regeneration, the achievement of long-term strategic objectives or sense of historic fulfillment."²⁸⁸

Egypt's economic crisis has been used as an explanation to Sadat's decision to visit Jerusalem in 1977 and pursue a peace deal with Israel. Proponents of this argument believe that Egypt needed to reduce its military budget and divert some of it to economic development, in addition to obtaining international aid packages. In this regard, peace with Israel would be the means to that end by showing leadership among the Arab world to end the conflict with Israel and gain U.S. military and economic support. However, if the dire economic conditions were the challenge,

²⁸⁶ See: David Lauter and Jim Mann. "U.S. to Void Egypt Debt; Weighs Big Arms Sale to Israel." Los Angeles Times, Sep. 1, 1990; and "Bush Forgives Last of Egypt Arms Debt." Los Angeles Times, Dec. 29, 1990

²⁸⁷ The Paris Club is "an informal group of official creditors whose role is to find coordinated and sustainable solutions to the payment difficulties experienced by debtor countries." <http://www.clubdeparis.org/>
The Former Egyptian Ambassador to the United States, Abdel Raouf el Reedy gave a detailed account on the debt relief process in his memoirs. Abdel Raouf el-Reedy. "*Rehlet al Omr: Misr we America - Ma'rek al Harb we al Salam*" [Life Journey: Egypt and America and The Fight for War and Peace]. Cairo: Nahdit Misr Publishing, 2011, pp. 473-487

²⁸⁸ Tarek Osman. *Egypt on the Brink: From Nasser to Mubarak*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010, p. 179

Sadat had other options than to pursue a full recognition and peace with Israel. He could simply have stayed the course of stalemate and win aid from the oil-rich Arab monarchies.²⁸⁹

III. Regional and International Politics

Mubarak's ascendance to power led to some fundamental shifts through the 1980s "in four critical areas of Egypt's foreign policy: Egyptian-Arab/Palestinian relations, Egyptian-Israeli relations, Egyptian-US relations, and Egyptian-Soviet relations."²⁹⁰ While Egypt managed to regain its land and pursue peace with Israel as well as develop an alliance with the United State under Sadat, its relations with the Arabs and Soviets were affectedly severed. Mubarak and his foreign ministry bureaucrats sought that their chief task was "to moderate the policies of Anwar Sadat" and reverse the Arabs' isolation without sacrificing any of the accomplishments of Sadat. Namely, the close relationship with the West for military and economic aid, and the peace treaty with Israel.²⁹¹ Ali Dessouki's portrayal of Mubarak's foreign policy style sums it up: "Egyptian foreign policy under Hosni Mubarak has been characterized by stability, moderation, and predictability [and] the price has been a retreat from Egypt regional leadership role."²⁹²

Surviving the 1995 Addis Ababa attempt on his life, has left Mubarak more prone to the security services strategies and policy recommendations. The insecurities developed by Mubarak allowed for an influential role in policymaking to the State Security and General Intelligence Services (GIS) over the Foreign Ministry in certain portfolios: Palestinian-Israeli, Sudan and Iran. Shama and Hinnebusch argue that "the continued rift with Iran was partially the result of the anxieties of Mubarak's security aides about the possible connections between Iranians and domestic Islamic groups."²⁹³

²⁸⁹ See, Telhami, Shibley. *Power and Leadership in International Bargaining: The Path to Camp David Accords*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, p. 9-10

²⁹⁰ Stoddard, Philip H. "Egypt and the Iran-Iraq War," in Thomas Naff, ed. *Gulf Security and the Iran-Iraq War*. Washington DC: National Defense University, 1995, p. 26

²⁹¹ Stoddard. *Ibid.*, p. 26-27

²⁹² Ali E. Hillal Dessouki. "Regional Leadership: Balancing off Costs and Dividends in the Foreign Policy of Egypt." In Bahgat Korany and Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, ed. *The Foreign Policies of the Arab States: The Challenge of Globalization*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2010, p. 167-194

²⁹³ Raymond Hinnebusch and Nael Shama, "The Foreign Policy of Egypt," in Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, ed. *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2014, p.122

A. The Arab World

By end of the 1970's, all Arab countries had cut their diplomatic relations with Egypt except Sudan, Oman and Somalia, and managed to kick Egypt out of the League of Arab States (LAS) and move its headquarters to Tunis. In addition, an Arab diplomatic effort, especially from the Steadfastness Front, managed to suspend Egypt's membership in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC).²⁹⁴ The Arabs' goal was to isolate Egypt after signing a peace treaty with Israel in 1979. However, Egypt's diplomacy and extensive foreign relations managed to avoid suspension at the Non-Aligned Movement Conference (NAM) and the African Union (AU).

Mubarak's immediate foreign policy challenge during his first decade was "to resolve the contradiction between the standards of nationalist legitimacy established under Nasser and the combination of close U.S. and Israeli connections and isolation from the Arab world brought on by Sadat's policies."²⁹⁵ Mubarak's principle strategy in this regard was to portray himself and Egypt as supporter of the status-quo and a beacon for moderation and stability in the turbulent Middle East.

Despite Sadat's re-orientation toward the West, most Egyptians – as one result of decades of Nasser's Arabism – continued to believe in Egypt's traditional Arab leadership role. Thus, it made Mubarak's job less challenging domestically. Moreover, Mubarak worked to change the "Egypt First" approach championed by Sadat, who asserted that Egypt should base its foreign policy "on the interest of Egypt alone [and] on values only the people of Egypt feel." Mubarak, on the other hand, perceived Egypt as "part of the Arab nation; it does not split from the Arab nation, nor does it forsake the Arab nation's causes."²⁹⁶

Nonetheless, Mubarak's job was challenging as he had to strike a balance between conciliating with his Arab brethren, while preserving Egypt's dignity. In addition, Cairo was not willing to make any sacrifices or suffer further tolls on behalf of the Arab world; and that the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty was not a negotiable point, during any reconciliation effort with the Arabs.

In the early 1980's two scenarios were proposed regarding Egypt's policies toward the Arabs:

²⁹⁴ Egypt was readmitted to the OIC in 1984 and to the LAS in 1989. The LAS headquarter returned to Cairo in 1990.

²⁹⁵ Hinnebusch and Shama. *Ibid.*, p.132

²⁹⁶ Anwar el Sadat. Speech to the Egyptian Student's Federation. Alexandria, April 3, 1974; Hosni Mubarak. Speech to the joint session of the upper and lower houses of the Egyptian Parliament. Cairo, November 6, 1983

1. A media smear campaign against the Arab regimes, that have done nothing but to complain and accuse Egypt of betraying the Arab and Palestinian cause, while not offering other alternatives to the peace process promoted by Egypt.
2. Tread thoughtfully and patiently using diplomatic means to regain Egypt's relations with the Arab world. This would mean to overcome the insults of some Arab states, explain Egypt's positions courteously, and use inter-Arab rivalries to Egypt's advantage.

The first scenario would have been Sadat's choice and solution to the anti-Egypt sentiment among the Arabs, as he believed that the Arabs will come back to Egypt like "lamps grazing in the Nile valley." The second option fit more with Mubarak's cautious and risk-averse nature, and through which he managed to get back into the Arab fold.²⁹⁷

Mubarak inherited a strong team of foreign policy bureaucrats and advisors; chief amongst them were Boutros Ghali and Osama el Baz.²⁹⁸ In early 1983, Ghali and his colleagues at the foreign ministry secured Mubarak's approval on a plan to visit several Arab countries to discuss restoration of diplomatic relations. In February 1983, Ghali flew to Baghdad to meet with foreign minister Tarek Aziz and President Saddam Hussein. In his meeting with Aziz, he stressed that "Iraq is in need of Egypt at this moment more than Egypt is in need of Iraq, and that his mission is to reestablish the Cairo-Baghdad axis."²⁹⁹ Ghali's analysis and comments were based on the continued bilateral military relations and arms sales, as well as Egypt's diplomatic interventions on behalf of Iraq. Saddam responded to Ghali's message saying that "Egypt was and will continue to be the leader of the Arab World," and "the bilateral relations will restart at the right time." Iraq believed that because the decision to sever relations with Egypt was taken by majority of Arab nations, Iraq cannot go back on it by itself.³⁰⁰

The active but cautious diplomacy of Egypt in the early years of Mubarak's tenure enabled Cairo to fend off any chances to pressure Egypt to go back on its peace deal with Israel. Senior Egyptian

²⁹⁷ Boutros Ghali. "Bayn al Nile wa al Quds" [Between the Nile and Jerusalem], Cairo: Dar el Shorouk, 2013, P. 87

²⁹⁸ Boutros Ghali was Egypt's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs from 1977-1991. Osama el Baz was a Political Advisor to President Mubarak.

²⁹⁹ Ghali. *Ibid.*, p. 48

³⁰⁰ Ghali. *Ibid.*, p. 48-50. According to Osama el Baz, Mubarak discussed with the North Koreans halting arms sales to the Iranians who were in war with Iraq, as well as Mubarak's deliberations with the Americans on behalf of the Iraqis.

officials' visits to Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon among others helped to start a thaw in the relationship with some of the Arab regimes. Despite the lack of diplomatic relations with the Arab world, the economic, military and trade relations continued, and the Egyptian expatriates did not face much reprisals. Mubarak used this to his advantage in order to reintegrate Egypt gradually into the Arab world, and prove through shrewd diplomacy and the miscalculations of his rivals the importance of Egypt to the Arabs and especially to the Gulf monarchs.

An example of world recognition and diplomatic success was Egypt's election to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in October 1983. The voting in the General Assembly gave Egypt 126 votes versus 24 to Algeria and 1 to Libya. However, 1983 ended with a surprise visit to Cairo by Yasser Arafat. The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) chief unexpectedly visited Cairo and held a closed meeting with Mubarak that ended with reconciliation. It is not known what was discussed and how this meeting led to such swift change especially since Arafat was among the leading anti-Sadat peace policies. However, it seemed that with Iraq immersed in a prolonged war with Iran, the civil war and Israeli aggression on Lebanon and Syria's manipulation of some Palestinian factions, Arafat was forced to start looking for new regional allies.³⁰¹ Nonetheless, Arafat's visit to Cairo took his PLO colleagues by surprise, and some denounced it as treason and a violation of the Palestinian National Council (PNC) resolutions banning contact with Egypt until abrogating the Camp David Accords.³⁰²

As it was the first country to withdraw its Ambassador from Cairo after the Baghdad summit, Jordan was the first Arab country to resume diplomatic relations with Egypt in September 1984. Speaking to the press, King Hussein of Jordan defended his decision, and that it was inevitable that the Arabs would resume their relations with Egypt. He added that "Egypt has proven itself under President Hosni Mubarak to be a fighter for Palestinian and Arab causes."³⁰³ Egyptian officials saw the decision as "a victory for President Hosni Mubarak's policy of reconciliation with Arab states while adhering to the Camp David peace accords of 1978 and Egypt's peace treaty with

³⁰¹ Botrous Ghali expressed these mixed feelings when he accompanied Arafat during his one-day trip to Egypt. See, Ghali, *Ibid.*, p. 84.

³⁰² Judith Miller. "Palestinians Fault Arafat for Egypt Meeting." *New York Times*, December 23, 1983
<http://www.nytimes.com/1983/12/23/world/palestinians-fault-arafat-for-egypt-meeting.html>

³⁰³ Judith Miller. "Hussein Defends Move to Restore Relations with Cairo." *New York Times*, October 1, 1984
<http://www.nytimes.com/1984/10/01/world/hussein-defends-move-to-restore-links-with-cairo.html>

Israel.” On the other hand, Syria and Libya saw Jordan’s move as a stab in the back of Arab solidarity and some Syrian newspapers called for implementing an Arab boycott on Amman.³⁰⁴

B. The Iran-Iraq War

Iraq’s decision to invade Iran in September 1980 came a time of regional transformation. The rise of Khomeini and his Pan-Islamist (*Shiite*) ideology represented a threat to several regional states especially the Gulf monarchies. Saddam, who took over Iraq’ presidency in 1979, thought that attacking at a moment of internal Iranian challenges and perceived weakness would make him the defender of Arabism. This was especially important since Egypt was isolated from the Arab fold and Syria was allying with Iran. Moreover, Saddam thought such war would also avenge Iraq’s lost control over *Shatt al-Arab* and he abrogated the 1975 Algiers agreement with Iran.

When the war started in 1980 Sadat was still Egypt’s president. Even though Sadat and Ayatollah Khomeini exchanged animosity and Egypt sold arms to Iraq, these elements did not lead to a substantive breakthrough in the relations with the Arabs. After all, Iraq was a leading member of the rejectionist camp that detested Sadat’s peace with Israel. For the rest of his presidency, Sadat remained detached from the conflict and focused on retrieving Sinai from the Israelis.

When Mubarak held office, the relations with the Arabs was on top of his agenda. He recognized that Egypt’s policy toward the Iraq-Iran war was an opportunity to slowly restart its relations with the Arabs. Despite initial disinterest in involving Egypt in the Iraq-Iran conflict, it was the Iranian offensives in spring of 1982 that led to an Egyptian-Iraqi alliance of convenience. Cairo’s policies were built around political and economic considerations. Politically, Mubarak thought that supporting Iraq would be an opportunity to reassert Egypt’s Arabism and accelerate rapprochement with the Arab world. Egypt also saw the war as chance to reduce Iraq’s alleged regional leadership especially given the deteriorating relations among the steadfastness group - Iraq on one side and Syria and Libya on the other side.³⁰⁵

³⁰⁴ Judith Miller. “Syria Denounces Move by Jordan.” *New York Times*, September 27, 1984. <http://www.nytimes.com/1984/09/27/world/syria-denounces-move-by-jordan.html>

³⁰⁵ Phillip H. Stoddard. “Egypt and the Iran-Iraq War” in Thomas Naff, ed. *Gulf Security and the Iran-Iraq War*. Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 1985, pp. 40-43

The inter-Arab rifts was not only a political opportunity for Egypt but also an economic one. The rivalry between Saddam Hussein and Hafez al Assad during the Iraq-Iran war provided Egypt with a chance to gain much needed foreign currency at a time of economic difficulties for Cairo. As a former recipient of Soviet arms, Egypt was in a position to supply the Iraqi forces with spare parts and ammunition. According to Kaveh Farrokh, Egypt was the third largest supplier of weapons to Iraq after the Soviet Union and France.³⁰⁶ The arms sale to Iraq and the remittances of Egyptians abroad were critical for Cairo. It was estimated that arms sold to Iraq between 1982-1985 ranged from 1 to 2 Billion USD.³⁰⁷ Moreover, the large Egyptian workforce in Iraq, estimated at 1 million, employed in a wide range of sectors contributed around 1 billion USD to Egypt's foreign currency. The presence of a high number of expats allowed the Iraqi government to conscribe as many of its citizens for the war effort.³⁰⁸

The View from Tehran

Ever since Iran cut its relations with Egypt in April 1979, both countries have engaged in a rhetorical war especially between President Sadat and Ayatollah Khomeini. Each country saw the other as a supporter of what the other despises. The Ayatollahs saw Egypt as the embodiment of all the ills of the Middle East through its peace with Israel, pro-America policies, and the hosting of the deposed Shah. The Iranian revolution built its foreign policy around the export of its Islamic revolution to the rest of the region, the support for Palestinian rights and liberation of Jerusalem, and hostility toward the United States (Great Satan) and Israel. Iran's view and attacks on Egypt prompted Sadat to respond using similar vociferous rhetoric showing his disdain toward the new regime in Tehran. The Egyptian leadership saw Iran's new foreign policy behavior as a threat to the regional stability, that Sadat was adamant to create and lead create along with the Shah and America. Tehran's Islamic rhetoric and its staunch support for Islamic militancy across the region were specifically regarded by the Mubarak regime as a threat to Egypt's national security. Therefore, it was clear that the leadership views as well as the changing regional dynamics

³⁰⁶ Kaveh Farrokh. *Iran at War:1500-1988*. Osprey Publishing, 2011, p. 401

³⁰⁷ There are no official amounts reported for the Egyptian arms sales to Iraq. See, Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp. *Iran and Iraq at War*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1988, p. 145; and Judith Miller. "Egypt Gains in Fight to End its Diplomatic Quarantine." *New York Times*, October 7, 1984. <http://www.nytimes.com/1984/10/07/weekinreview/egypt-gains-in-fight-to-end-its-diplomatic-quarantine.html>

³⁰⁸ The Egyptian workers were predominantly active in agriculture, oil services and production and construction. See, Phillip H. Stoddard. "Egypt and the Iran-Iraq War", in Thomas Naff, ed. "Gulf Security and the Iran-Iraq War." Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 1985, pp. 49-50

represented by the Iranian revolution, Egypt's peace with Israel and the Iran-Iraq war would lead to a continued enmity between Cairo and Tehran.

Despite Mubarak's attempts to avoid the strident denunciations of Iran and to downplay Egypt's support to Iraq, relations between Cairo and Tehran did not see any improvement. In fact, both regimes continued to directly and indirectly accuse the other of instability. In 1982, Iran issued a commemorative stamp for Sadat's assassin, Khaled el Islambouli. A move that enraged the Egyptians. During the summer of 1984, president Mubarak accused Iran and Libya of mining the Gulf of Suez, which damaged several ships. The accusations had no conclusive proof and were later retracted by the Egyptians. Khomeini, however, denied Iran's involvement and blamed the incidents on the United States and Israel to discredit Iran.³⁰⁹

Nonetheless, despite Egypt's support to Iraq against Iran, Mubarak realized the importance of showing an attempt to achieve ceasefire. In April 1984, Cairo devised a plan with the support of the non-aligned movement to stop the ongoing war. This plan did not resonate well with the Iranians who saw Egypt as biased toward Iraq. Iran announced pre-conditions, knowing that Iraq will not accept them, or to accept a ceasefire that demanded the resignation of Saddam Hussein and a United Nations investigation into who started the war.³¹⁰ As much as it was important for Egypt to show sincere steps for ceasefire, the move seemed unrealistic, since Egypt and Iran had no diplomatic relations, in addition to accusing Egypt of supplying arms and military expertise to Iraq.

Mubarak denied such allegations and highlighted Egypt's position in an interview:

I want to say that from the beginning Egypt has not supported the war between Iraq and Iran, which are Islamic countries between which there was friendship. I hope we have a role to mediate between Iran and Iraq. I don't know the reason that caused Iran to adopt a certain stand toward us, although we do not help Iraq to the extent that allows offensive military operation to be launched against Iran. We support negotiations and mediation for solving problems ... Up to this

³⁰⁹ See: Judith Miller. "Egypt Links Libya and Iran to Mines." *New York Times*, August 11, 1984 <http://www.nytimes.com/1984/08/11/world/egypt-links-libya-and-iran-to-mines.html>; Wadie Kirolos. "Iran and Libya Suspects in Red Sea Mining." *United Press International*, August 13, 1984 <http://www.upi.com/Archives/1984/08/13/Iran-and-Libya-suspects-in-Red-Sea-mining/8815461217600/>

³¹⁰ Judith Miller "U.S. Official, in Egypt, Discusses New Cairo Plan to End Gulf War." *New York Times*, April 13, 1984. <http://www.nytimes.com/1984/04/13/world/us-official-in-egypt-discusses-new-cairo-plan-to-end-gulf-war.html>

moment, we have no military forces in Iraq, as some think. We have expertise in war. In wars we cannot send an incomplete force ... This has not occurred because it is not in our interest that fighting should continue between Iraq and Iran. It is not in our interests that the resources of these countries go down the drain.³¹¹

In fact, there were allegations that Egyptian workers were forced to join the Iraqi army. Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq, Taha Yassin Ramadan, said that "between 12,000 and 15,000 Egyptian volunteers were helping the war effort."³¹² Despite continuously denying any official involvement or sending fighters, Mubarak alluded that the Iraqis had "sought the help of retired Egyptian military personnel who had ... gone to work in Iraq."³¹³ Nonetheless, by 1988, around 3,000 Egyptians were held by Iran as prisoners of war (POW). Iran regarded the non-Iraqi fighters as mercenaries, who are not protected under the international law and conventions. However, Tehran later agreed as a goodwill gesture to release them to Egypt.³¹⁴

Egypt's overall strategy during the war was to make sure it never ends with a clear conqueror or conquered. This stance was in accordance with Mubarak's recognition that Egypt's long-term ability to influence the region and pursue its interests would not benefit from a "victorious Iran or Iraq bestriding the Gulf like a political, military and economic mini-superpower."³¹⁵ Egypt's support to Iraq led to Saddam's reconciliatory statements such as "Mubarak is not Anwar Sadat," and that "Arab solidarity cannot be strong and effective without Egypt".³¹⁶

Mubarak's measured approach was welcomed by the Arab Gulf monarchs seeing Egypt once again returning to its Arab brethren. As evident in the Kuwaiti foreign minister announcement that "Arab Gulf states are working actively to convene an Arab summit which would bring Egypt back into

³¹¹ Quoted in Stoddard. *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43

³¹² Robert Holloway. "Egypt and Iraq form closer ties." *Times* [London, England] 6 July 1983: 6.

³¹³ Quoted in Itamar Rabinovich and Haim Shaked, ed. *Middle East Contemporary Survey*. Vol. 10. London: Westview Press, 1986, p. 111

³¹⁴ Farrokh. *Ibid.*, p. 401.

Nader Entessar wrote that *al-Ahrar* and *al-Shaab* opposition newspapers in Egypt reported while on a visit to Iran in 1986 that 10,000 Egyptians were held as POWs. Entessar. *Ibid.*, p. 172

³¹⁵ Heller, Mark A. "The Iran-Iraq War: Implications for Third Parties." Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies / Harvard Center for International Affairs, January 1984

³¹⁶ Quoted in Nader Entessar. "The Lion and the Sphinx: Egyptian Iranian Relations in Perspective", in Hooshang Amirahmadi and Nader Entessar (ed.), *Iran and the Arab World*. Palgrave, 1993, p. 169-170

the fold.”³¹⁷ Egypt’s active but cautious role in the region in addition to the mistakes of others allowed for the thaw of relations with the Arabs. Mubarak used such opening to his advantage by rebuilding his ties with the Gulf states to provide much needed financial support.³¹⁸ Egypt’s relations with the GCC, and Saudi Arabia in particular became later a cornerstone of Mubarak’s foreign and regional policies.

1990-1991: The Gulf War

The end of the Iran-Iraq war, the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in April 1989, and the election of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani to the presidency represented the beginning of the second republic in Iran.³¹⁹ Rafsanjani formed a technocratic government attempting to open up the economy, urban development and reconstruction, and repairing Iran’s regional and international relations. His foreign policy strategy relied on two elements: recovering economically and militarily through ending Iran’s regional and international isolation. He emphasized peaceful measures by which Iran “should strive seriously for peace to be established in the region. If there is no peace in the region, then I do not think that matters can progress as they should... Trust among neighbors and a calm situation in the region can automatically solve many problems for us.”³²⁰

Rafsanjani’s attempts at moderation and finding new avenues for bringing Iran out of its isolation could not have happened without at least minimal endorsement by Khomeini prior to his death. This represents a significant change since Khomeini was very clear about his plans for exporting the revolution beyond Iran’s borders as he said in 1980 that:

We should try hard to export our revolution to the world and should set aside the thought that we do not export our revolution, because Islam does not regard various Islamic countries differently and is supporter of all the oppressed... If we remain in an enclosed environment we shall definitely face defeat. We should clearly settle out accounts with the superpowers and should demonstrate to them that... we shall confront the world with our ideology.³²¹

³¹⁷ Edward Mortimer. “Gulf moderates seek to readmit Egypt.” *Times* [London, England] 27 Nov. 1984: 7. See also, Robert Fisk. “Gulf Arabs reap profits of aiding regime they oppose.” *Times* [London, England] 21 Oct. 1987: 8.

³¹⁸ Nicholas Beeston. “Mubarak keen to rebuild Gulf ties.” *Times* [London, England] 9 Jan. 1988: 6.

³¹⁹ The 8-years Iran-Iraq war ended with both parties accepting UNSC resolution 598 in July 1988 and agreeing to return to the principles of the 1975 Algiers Accords signed by Saddam Hussein and Mohamed Reza Shah.

³²⁰ Quoted in Anoushiravan Ehteshami. *After Khomeini: The Iranian Second Republic*. London: Routledge, 1995, p. 146

³²¹ Quoted in Ehteshami. *Ibid.*, p. 131

The new Iranian direction required support from senior revolutionary figures in an attempt to neutralize the hardline forces within Iran. Ayatollah Montazeri, who was a close associate and heir-apparent to Khomeini, endorsed the new path led by Rafsanjani and stressed that if political freedoms and economic developments are guaranteed that would make Iran a model for other countries and this would be the real exportation of the revolution.³²² The new realities on the ground – the economic and political cost of the war with Iraq, loss of support within the Arab steadfastness group, and inviting Egypt back to the Arab fold – put Iran in a tight position and required a new plan to decrease the tension within the Gulf. The leaders in Tehran capitalized on the new changes and started reconciling with the GCC states, especially after the 1987 Arab summit in Amman, Iran’s activities against Iraq and the GCC states were condemned.

By the end of 1988, Iran had normalized its relations with most of the GCC countries and took steps to reconcile with Saudi Arabia, calling on the “southern neighbours to cooperate with us [Iran] in order to resolve existing issues concerning the oil market, maritime laws and Resolution 598.”³²³ It was important for the pragmatists led by Rafsanjani to balance the forces within the Iranian domestic system to sustain the moderate overtures externally. After all the external developments (or lack thereof) were utilized by the different competing factions to advance their agenda domestically.

First Attempts at Rapprochement

Iran’s president and his technocrats’ moderate rhetoric toward the Arab Gulf states, the passive support of the U.S. led international coalition to liberate Kuwait, and the pursuing of an economic development approach over ideology looked promising. Arab normalization of political, military and economic relations with Egypt represented a change to the regional dynamics. After being shunned for almost 10 years for its peace with Israel, the Arabs decided to overcome their difference with Egypt and benefit from the Arab heavyweight. Iran took note of the changes and after securing normalization with its immediate Gulf neighbors, Tehran started in the summer of 1990 to approach Egypt to restore diplomatic relations.

³²² Ehteshami. *Ibid.*, p. 138

³²³ Quoted in Ehteshami. *Ibid.*, p. 139

Iran started sending goodwill messages for reconciling with Egypt. On the sidelines of the OIC meeting in Cairo in July 1990, members of the Iranian delegation announced plans to release the Egyptian Prisoners of War (POW) captured during the Iran-Iraq war. This statement came after Iran had earlier released twenty fishermen who were captured inside its territorial waters. This goodwill gesture was welcomed by Egypt, all the while ignoring a letter from the Baghdad-based Massoud Rajavi, head of the National Liberation Army of Iran, claiming that "Iran's seat in the Islamic Conference Organization, United Nations, Non-Aligned Movement and other international bodies belongs to the Iranian Resistance" and that the regime in Tehran "does not legitimately represent the Iranian people."³²⁴

Iran's gestures continued in November 1990 by releasing 44 Egyptian prisoners held since the Iran-Iraq war.³²⁵ By end of March 1991, both countries decided to reopen the interest sections that were closed in 1987.³²⁶ Hopes were high to fully normalize relations between both countries especially with the growing rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia.³²⁷ However, three areas of contention came to the forefront – Gulf security, the Middle East peace process and support for Islamists.

Areas of Contention

I. Gulf Security

In the aftermath of second Gulf War and the liberation of Kuwait from the Iraqi invasion, Egypt, Syria and the six GCC states signed the Damascus Declaration in March 1991. The declaration envisioned a peacekeeping force led by Egypt and Syria – based in Kuwait - to help protect the Gulf from any future aggression. Iran was not shy from voicing its disagreement of the proposed Arab security pact, as this meant the involvement of other players, particularly Arab states, in the Gulf region, which would weaken Iran's regional influence, especially after Saddam's defeat in

³²⁴ Lee Stokes. "Iran moves toward closer ties with Egypt at Islamic conference." *United Press International*, July 31, 1990

³²⁵ "Iran Frees 44 Egyptian POWs." *The Associated Press*, November 13, 1990

³²⁶ Carol Berger. "Egypt and Iran to resume diplomatic relations." *The Independent (London)*, March 26, 1991

Despite cutting off relations in 1979, Egypt and Iran maintained interest sections at the French and Swiss embassies respectively. In 1987 Egypt recalled its lone diplomat in Tehran and kicked two Iranian diplomats from Cairo on allegation of supporting Islamic extremist groups.

³²⁷ "King Fahd receives Iranian Foreign Minister." *United Press International*, April 26, 1991

Kuwait. Iranian Vice President Hassan Habibi stated that securing the Gulf "is impossible without Iran's presence," and "[it] is not over presence of the others [Egypt and Syria], but rather on the necessity of Iran's contribution to maintaining tranquility in the region."³²⁸ The deputy Iranian foreign minister also hinted at Egypt's inability to carry a viable security role due to its economic challenges. Moreover, the post-war United States and western military presence in the Gulf were criticized by Iran. At a Friday sermon, Ayatollah Abdel Karim Ardabili declared that the "presence of the world's biggest military power in a region, home of the world's largest energy deposits, is a very serious threat to Muslims."³²⁹ Nonetheless, the continued American involvement played in favor of the Iranian hardliners, in keeping with its revolutionary rhetoric and domestic mobilization against the Great Satan and its allies.

Tehran's request to be involved in the Gulf security arrangement was cautiously welcomed by some Gulf states like Oman and UAE, who were willing to accommodate an Iranian role, despite skepticism regarding Iran's foreign policy intentions. On the other hand, Egypt refused any role for Iran in the Gulf stating that "the Iranian brothers [need] to understand that security in the Gulf stems from Pan-Arab considerations and that any security system in the Middle East cannot be discussed or implemented without an Egyptian role."³³⁰ President Mubarak was quoted in an interview to al-Hayat newspaper saying "it is up to the GCC states themselves to decide how to cooperate with Iran... they could take other forms of cooperation except militarily."³³¹ Also, Sheikh Salem al-Sabah of Kuwait said that "Iran is an Islamic neighbor, but the Damascus Declaration is an Arab matter."³³² By the fall of 1991, the Damascus pact was obsolete and was described by a former Egyptian foreign minister as "born dead", due to the lack of complete trust and transparency amongst the Arab nations, in addition to the United States' offer to police the region on behalf of the Gulf states and contain both Iran and Iraq.³³³

³²⁸ "Iran Insists on Role in Post-War Gulf Security." *The Associated Press*. July 15, 1991

³²⁹ "Iranian clergyman attacks U.S. military presence in gulf." *United Press International*. June 15, 1991

³³⁰ "Egypt says gulf security is up to Arabs." *United Press International*. June 26, 1991

³³¹ "Mubarak Hopes no Essential Revision to Damascus Accord." *The Associated Press*. July 16, 1991.

³³² "Gulf States, Egypt and Syria Reaffirm Support for Pan-Arab Force." *The Associated Press*. July 16, 1991.

³³³ Author interview with a former Egyptian Foreign Minister. Cairo, Egypt, August 2015.

In March 1991, an agreement reached in Damascus called for a Pan-Arab security force with Egypt and Syria providing the bulk of the troops in exchange for financial aid from the Gulf Arab monarchies. The plan fell apart after some GCC states, specially Kuwait, hinted at preference for Western troops, which prompted Egypt to withdraw its soldiers. For the full text of the Damascus Declaration, See: Bruce Mady-Weitzman. "Inter-Arab Relations," in Ami Ayalon, ed. *Middle East Contemporary Survey 1991*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1993, p. 163-165

II. Arab-Israeli Peace

The American and Arab attempt at restarting the Middle East peace process was denounced by Iran, where they conveyed a message to Arab rulers “that such a plan must only be accepted if it is in the interests of the Palestinians.”³³⁴ The Iranian regime regarded itself as the region’s anti-American force and it was its duty to reject any American initiative that would strengthen its presence in the Middle East. The Iranians, especially the hardliners, were trying to create a wedge between the Arab states and the Palestinians by portraying the Arabs as lenient toward Israel and only the resistance path would bring back the lost lands. Iran’s official news agency carried out attacks against Washington for its continued interference in the region, whether under the pretext of Gulf security or the peace process. While it criticized the Arabs for considering compromises with Israel (which was considered an illegal state by Iran), such as lifting the Arab economic boycott, without Israel offering anything in return. However, Iran’s biggest surprise was that Syria, its longstanding Arab ally, had initially accepted the American plan without consulting with Tehran.

While the world looked at the 1991 Madrid peace conference as a starting point to possibly reach an Arab-Israeli settlement, Iran denounced the conference and invited all the radical pro-resistance and anti-negotiations movements to an international conference in Tehran. In a statement by Iran’s former interior minister, Mohtashemi, he said:

To take part in America’s so-called Middle East peace conference means to declare war on Islam and Muslims, and the participants are classed as *moharebs* [those who wage war against God and deserve death], for they have committed an unforgivable crime; and in accordance with Islam, the blood of the *mohareb* enemy must be shed. And no doubt the revolutionary Muslims, at the earliest appropriate opportunity, will carry out their religious duty against them, under any circumstances.³³⁵

The Islamic republic continued to pride itself as one of the only countries that oppose the Arab-Israeli negotiations. It sustained the criticism and portrayal of the U.S. “as an archenemy of the Muslim world; to denounce Israel and deny its right to exist; and to criticize the Arab states participating in the conference.”³³⁶

³³⁴ “Iran criticizes U.S. and Arab supporters on Middle East.” *Agence France Presse (AFP)*, July 24, 1991

³³⁵ Quoted in Rubin, Lawrence. *Islam in the Balance: Ideational Threats in Arab Politics*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014, p. 103

³³⁶ Menashri, David. “Iran,” in Ami Ayalon, ed. *Middle East Contemporary Survey 1991*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1993, p. 409

III. Support to Sudan and Extremists

The Iranian revolution and Khomeini's Pan-Islamic rhetoric were perceived by some Islamist groups as a model to follow, to change the secular corrupt pro-western governments in the Arab world.³³⁷ However, the mass executions and reprisal carried out by the Islamic regime in Tehran, discouraged some of the initial supporters of the revolution. Moreover, the 1980's war against the Soviets in Afghanistan seasoned the fighting techniques and tactics of the Islamic Jihadists - *Mujahidin* – who flocked from all parts of the world to support Islam against the atheist Soviet Union. Upon returning to their countries, these jihadists started to look for ways to replace the ruling un-Islamic government with Shari'a abiding ones.

Egypt was one of many countries that stood against Khomeini's policies and ideology, for fear of replication domestically and regionally, which would threaten the domestic and regional security of the Middle East. A case in point was the assassination of Sadat and the attempt of the Islamic Jihad to establish an Islamic regime in Egypt. At the same time, despite the worry from Islamic extremists Cairo supported jihadists fighting in Afghanistan through supplying low-level arms and turning a blind eye at the Egyptians who traveled to participate in the war. Upon their return, some of those jihadists were arrested while others stayed abroad, planning attacks against the Egyptian government and its security forces.

Mubarak's government became more concerned about Iran's activities after a group of Islamist officers in 1989 led a coup in neighboring Sudan, creating its own form of Islamic regime. Iran offered support to the new regime in Khartoum as part of its revolutionary Pan-Islamic agenda and many jihadists, including Osama bin Laden in 1996, looked to Sudan for refuge. As early as summer of 1992, the Egyptian government started pointing to the close ties between Khartoum and Tehran, as one of the reasons behind the latest wave of violence between the Egyptian government and the Islamic fundamentalists.³³⁸

Escalated Tension and Rhetoric

³³⁷ Author interview with a former senior member of the Jama'a Islamia

³³⁸ For more information about Egypt's fight against Islamists, see Ami Ayalon, ed. *Middle East Contemporary Survey 1991*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1993, p. 366-374

Egypt started a media quarrel accusing “Sudan's fundamentalist Islamic military government [of] training terrorists in Iranian-sponsored camps for strikes aimed at destabilizing Egypt.”³³⁹ The interior minister of Egypt went further to say that “more than 2,000 members of Iran's Revolutionary Guards are in Sudan to train extremists,” and this information was based on interrogations of captured extremists. Cairo even implicitly accused Iran’s emissary of attempting to contact some radical Islamists.³⁴⁰ This came after president Mubarak, a month earlier, called on Iran to “stop interfering in the internal affairs of Arab and Islamic countries,” and vowed to stand with and support the Arab Gulf monarchs against any Iranian threats or pressures. He asked that “If Iran wants to prove its goodwill, it must abandon attempts to impose its hegemony on Arab states in the Gulf.” In effect, Cairo won't deal or normalize relations with “those who export revolution and encourage extremist ideas.”³⁴¹

Furthermore, In a rare appearance at a seminar for a group of students at Cairo university, Egypt’s Minister of Defense Mohamed Hussein Tantawy said:

Iran is the biggest threat to Egypt because of its anti-Egyptian policies and measures and the sabotage activities that undermine peace and security in the region. Iran continues to adopt the policy of exporting the extremist revolutionary ideology through various means and phased strategies. It also is seeking to play a major role in the region’s security arrangements and opposes any Egyptian role in this sphere. It also is strengthening its military by obtaining advanced capabilities.³⁴²

As much as Iran’s president tried to seem moderate and build bridges with the Arab neighbors, some hardliners within Iran were not fond of the new reconciliatory direction. Politicians and clergymen alike, saw Rafsanjani’s rhetoric to be lenient and deviating from the revolutionary path set by Khomeini. The rapprochement with Egypt was a clear example of that. Conservative newspapers published op-eds and articles opposing normalization with Egypt as depicted by the daily newspaper, *Resalat*, arguing that “given the fact that Egypt is still a lackey of Zionism, it not clear why the future of relations between Tehran and Cairo, the two opposite poles of faith and blasphemy, resistance and compromise, have become a topic of discussion in political circles.”³⁴³

³³⁹ Sammakia, Nejla. “Egypt Worried By Alleged Sudan-Iran Guerrilla Training.” *The Associated Press*. August 8, 1992.

³⁴⁰ Guindi, Maurice. “Egypt Says More Than 2,000 Iranian Revolutionary Guards in Sudan.” *The Associated Press*. December 2, 1992.

³⁴¹ “Mubarak To Iran: Stop Threatening Gulf Arabs Or Face Egypt.” *The Associated Press*. November 14, 1992.

³⁴² *Al-Ahram Newspaper*, December 9, 1992.

³⁴³ Quoted in Bayat and Baktiari. *Ibid.*, p. 318.

Another daily paper stated that the regime in Cairo “will certainly have no better fate than that of the defunct Sadat.”³⁴⁴ Even groups of students at Tehran university protested normalizing ties with Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Despite Syrian and Qatari attempts at mediating between Cairo and Tehran, it did not result in a change of views albeit succeeded in reducing the media feud between both nations. Iran’s activities and policy effectively challenged Egypt’s traditional spheres of influence: The Gulf region, the Arab-Israeli conflict and Africa through Iran’s alliance with Sudan. These structural and material changes, as well as Iranian media attacks against Mubarak and Egypt prompted Cairo to recall its emissary, after 21 months of re-opening its interest section, thereby accusing Iran of backing anti-government Islamists in Egypt and destabilizing the Gulf region.³⁴⁵

After reports Iran is setting up a naval base in Port Sudan, Mubarak warned that such move represents a threat to Egypt’s security. One government newspaper said the president was threatening a military strike.³⁴⁶ Later, Egypt decided to “restrict telephone and fax communications with five Muslim countries that it accuses of harboring terrorists.” The five countries were: Sudan, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Cairo attributed the move as part of its attempt to crackdown on Islamic extremists funded and trained by outside forces.³⁴⁷

De-escalation Steps and Areas of Cooperation

The strained relations between Egypt and Iran continued as none of the main obstacles toward normalization has been effectively tackled. Each side continued to accuse the other of intervening in the other’s spheres of influence and escalating tension in the region. Nonetheless, there were brief moments of coordination on certain regional and international issues. Both countries managed to tone down the media attacks and look for common interests and areas of cooperation. Among these areas was the continuous call by Egypt for the creation of a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone (WMDFZ) in the Middle East.³⁴⁸ Another area of mutual understanding

³⁴⁴ Quoted in For more information about the press coverage of Egypt and Iran, see Ami Ayalon, ed. *Middle East Contemporary Survey 1991*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1993, p. 384-385

³⁴⁵ “Egyptian Diplomat in Tehran Returns to Cairo.” *The Associated Press*. December 6, 1992.

³⁴⁶ Guindi, Maurice. “Egypt Warns Against Iranian Naval Presence in Sudan.” *The Associated Press*. March 11, 1993

³⁴⁷ Baligh, Dalia “Egypt Restricts Communications with Five Countries.” *The Associated Press*. May 17, 1993

³⁴⁸ The idea of WMDFZ in the Middle East started by a joint proposal to the United Nations in 1974 by Egypt and Iran. For a factsheet and chronology of the initiative, see <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/mewmdfz>

was at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) organized in Cairo to discuss population growth, maternal and infant mortality, and family planning. The conference participants were to suggest solutions for balancing population growth and development. While Egypt and Iran agreed that higher population growth is a threat to development, elements within both countries as well as other Islamic countries accused the UN and the Western world of encouraging un-Islamic and culturally unacceptable notions like, abortion, pre-marital sex, and homosexuality.³⁴⁹

In May 1994 prior to the population conference, Iran's FM Ali Akbar Velayati visited Egypt to attend a meeting of the foreign ministers of the NAM marking the first visit by an Iranian foreign minister since 1978. Velayati led a political and economic delegation and held bilateral meetings with President Mubarak and Foreign minister Amr Moussa. The Iranian press criticized Velayati's visit to Cairo as against the national interest of the Islamic republic, despite what other officials claim. However, Velayati defended his visit to Cairo was in accordance with Iran's interests for being an active member of the international community, and that his trip was approved by the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and President Rafsanjani. He said the meeting was "constructive and positive," but he assured the conservatives in Iran that normalization with Egypt "needs work to reach to a common understanding and removal of all hurdles and the correct flow of information on both sides".³⁵⁰ In an another interview, Velayati stressed that cooperating with Egypt on international issues is one thing, and having normalized relations is another; reiterating "Iran's opposition to the Camp David accord and compromise with Israel," especially the latest attempts for peace by some Arab and Islamic countries.³⁵¹ This came after President Rafsanjani said that Iran "believe[s] that by signing the Camp David accord, Egypt created a gulf among the anti-Zionist Muslim and Arab countries," nonetheless, "we consider Egypt as a great Islamic country and welcome conditions enabling us to resume relations."³⁵²

³⁴⁹ Fisk, Robert. "Holy alliance' tries to wreck birth-control conference; Fundamentalists are spreading lies about the last-minute attempt to avert a world population explosion." *The Independent*, August 31, 1994

³⁵⁰ "Iran criticized by local daily for sending delegation to Cairo." *Xinhua General News Service*, June 9, 1994; and "Velayati rejects criticism on his visit to Cairo." *Xinhua General Press Service*, June 9, 1994

³⁵¹ "Iranian FM on Iran's foreign policy." *Xinhua General News Service*, June 28, 1994

³⁵² "Iran ready to develop foreign relations: Rafsanjani." *Xinhua General News Service*, June 7, 1994

Despite the tense relations, both sides started exploring potential economic and trade cooperation. After several meetings between both countries, they reached an agreement to settle a debt worth \$149 million owed to Tehran since the Shah's reign. The agreement stated that "Egypt would give Tehran equipment, designs and technical support [over five years] worth the amount of the debt to be used for sugar plants in Iran's Gulf province of Khuzistan."³⁵³ The settlement of the debt encouraged both sides to look at developing ties "in the fields of construction materials, industrial machinery, automotive, heavy industries, petrochemicals and foodstuffs."³⁵⁴ Moreover, the continued meetings on the sidelines of regional and international conferences led to resuming the joint operation of the Misr-Iran bank, the Egypt-Iran textile company and the joint shipping company, which all started in the late 1970's. According to the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), by May 1996 Iran's usage of Egypt's Suez-Mediterranean pipeline (SUMED) bypassed Saudi Arabia and "by the end of Rafsanjani's presidency, bilateral trade between Iran and Egypt was reported to be around \$80 million."³⁵⁵

However, all these gestures and attempts to build an economic and trade relation did not succeed in normalizing or breaking the political impasse between Cairo and Tehran. Both sides were still locked in their own perceived security and ideological concerns. Egypt was more prone to these threats than Iran as it has been fighting terrorism by Islamic extremists since the late 1980's, which made the regime sensitive to any rhetorical, logistical and financial support from outside forces. This was particularly the case in 1996 when Mubarak explicitly "accused Iran of helping assailants who tried to assassinate him [in Addis Ababa] last year." The accusation was based on "information coming from the confessions of the arrested terrorists [on trial in Ethiopia] that Iran is involved and that it helped Sudan train for this attack."³⁵⁶ This blunt accusation against Tehran came after the Egyptian police announced it was "holding 44 suspected extremists who had confessed to receiving support from Iran," to carry out attacks and assassinations in Egypt.³⁵⁷ A jailed member of al-Jihad group revealed "that his group has been receiving funds and support from Iran."³⁵⁸ This was part of Egypt's continuous charges against Sudan and Iran for their alleged

³⁵³ Elkoussy, Bahaa. "Egypt, Iran settle debt dispute." *United Press International*, December 1, 1994

³⁵⁴ Bayat and Baktiari. *Ibid.*, p. 317.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 317

³⁵⁶ Baligh, Dalia. "Mubarak: Iran Involved in Assassination Attempt Last Year." *The Associated Press*. September 17, 1996

³⁵⁷ Hanna, Nashwa. "Egypt: 44 suspects linked with Iran." *United Press International*. August 28, 1996

³⁵⁸ "Egyptian militant claims Iran link." *United Press International*. September 8, 1996

role in supporting Islamic extremists in Egypt through training, financing or simply offering safe havens. To this day, these charges have been categorically denied by Khartoum and Tehran.

The Egyptian accusations did not stop at the domestic front, but was also critical of Iran's attempts to destabilize the Gulf region, through fueling the Shiite uprisings within the Arab monarchies. Bahrain, ruled by the minority Sunnis, was the center of worldwide attention in the summer of 1996, after an 18-months political strife between the government and Shiite activists, allegedly backed by Iran, calling for the restoration of the parliament suspended since 1975. The Arab summit called on Iran to respect Bahrain's sovereignty and refrain from intervening in the internal affairs of the Arab countries.³⁵⁹ Syria's attempt to mediate between Iran and Bahrain by holding a ministerial level meeting that includes Egypt was rejected by Mubarak due to Iran's subverting regional attempts.

Mubarak and Khatami: A Second Attempt at Normalization

The election of the reformist candidate Mohammad Khatami in 1997 was a high moment in Iran's internal politics and was soon reflected in Iran's regional and international interactions. The moderate camp in Iran managed to galvanize support for policy and institutional reforms reflected in openness in press, cultural and civil society work. The reformists, to the surprise of many observers, managed to win majority in the municipal elections of 1999 and the parliament elections of 2000. Khatami's sensible messages of unity and dialogue were welcomed by Egypt and the Arabs. Egypt's Foreign Minister, Amr Moussa, said that Khatami's election "left a positive impact on the region," hoping that Cairo and Tehran could work together to remove "ambiguities" in their relation.³⁶⁰ According to a close aide to Mubarak and former diplomat, "the President [Mubarak] liked Khatami and his moderate rhetoric and willingness to open Iran to the world."³⁶¹

Khatami's elections coincided with the 1997 OIC meeting in Tehran, which gave his moderate messages resonance at one of the biggest gatherings of States. The conference also reflected the frustration of the Arab and Muslim countries from the stagnant and intransigent Israeli position in the peace process. Despite not attending the meeting, Mubarak sent Amr Moussa who met with senior Iranian leaders including President Khatami. After a meeting with former president

³⁵⁹ Hanna, Nashwa. "Mixed summit reactions in Cairo." *The Associated Press*. June 24, 1996

³⁶⁰ "Iran, Egypt discuss Israeli "threats"." *Agence France Presse*. October 3, 1997

³⁶¹ Author interview with former diplomat and aide to President Mubarak. January, 2015

Rafsanjani, Moussa was quoted saying that “the recent regional developments [Israel’s anti-peace policies and challenges facing the Muslim countries] have brought the positions of Iran and Egypt closer to each other. We must pave the way for boosting relations.” Rafsanjani emphasized the need to capitalize on “these common views and have dialogue in other regards to expand ties and cooperation.” Moussa also expressed positive sentiments regarding Khatami’s moderation at the OIC summit as a basis for a new climate and approach between Egypt and Iran.³⁶²

Despite the cordial exchange of statements and views, Mubarak was still suspicious and not fully comfortable with the normalization idea. He wanted to see steps by Iran to halt support for extremists before relations could improve, “I want to be clear in my own mind that the relations will not be exploited to recruit (terrorist) elements who make trouble.”³⁶³ He welcomed Khatami’s remarks for normalization and his possible good intentions but wanted “to be sure that this is not just a maneuver but a genuine normalization of ties ... I don't know what will happen afterwards.”³⁶⁴ Mubarak’s comments reflected his distrust of the Iranian regime who according to him “talk the talk but don’t walk the walk,” which made him more inclined to change his mind easily on any steps with the Iranians for the simplest reasons or statements from Iranian officials and the press.³⁶⁵ An example of that was Mubarak’s decision to not appoint an ambassador to Iran because of a statement from Foreign Minister Velayati about keeping relations with Egypt at a cultural representation level.³⁶⁶

Steps for Potential Normalization

Egypt and Iran started treading slowly and cautiously toward cordial bilateral relations and coordinated regional stances, especially with growing Iranian ties with the Arab Gulf states. Officials from both countries started exchanging visits and discussing a wide range of issues. Two incidents in 1998 were deemed positive. The first was in June when Egypt and Iran signed an economic cooperation protocol, which “aims at promoting Egyptian-Iranian relations and stipulates bilateral visits by economic delegations as well as holding trade fairs in each other's

³⁶² “Iran, Egypt aim to improve ties.” *Agence France Presse*. December 8, 1997. See also, “Iran says it want better ties with Egypt.” *Agence France Presse*. November 9, 1997; and “Egyptian FM says better ties with Iran possible.” *Agence France Presse*. December 12, 1997

³⁶³ “Egypt unsure about Iranian normalization offer.” *Agence France Presse*. December 30, 1997

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, *Agence France Presse*. December 30, 1997

³⁶⁵ Author interview with former diplomat and aide to President Mubarak. Cairo, Egypt, January, 2015

³⁶⁶ “Mubarak calls on Iran to break with terrorism ahead of rapprochement.” *Agence France Presse*. October 22, 1997

countries.” The president of the Iranian Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Mines Ali Naghi Khamushi spoke of the need to develop bilateral economic and trade relations as “Iran can serve as a bridge for Egyptian goods for central Asia while Egypt can be a bridge for Iranian goods for Africa.” According to the Middle East News Agency, “bilateral trade between Iran and Egypt stood at just \$75 million in 1997, with Egypt selling Iran \$40 million worth of sugar, medicine and food products and buying \$35 million worth of carpets, pistachios and spare parts for buses.”³⁶⁷ As a result of this protocol, businessmen from both countries exchanged visits and participated in tradeshows in Cairo and Tehran. The other step was Egypt naming a career diplomat, Refaa el Tahtawi, as the new ambassador to Tehran. Ambassador Tahtawi would eventually play a prominent role in trying to bridge the gap between both countries.³⁶⁸

For the first time a long time, both countries were getting positive media coverage. A newspaper in Tehran asked that if “the Islamic Republic could improve its relations with Saudi Arabia, what was keeping it from doing the same with Egypt.”³⁶⁹ Both capitals received media delegations who met with politicians, intellectuals, and religious figures where both sides emphasized the need for further exchanges and discussions irrespective of difference in opinions. In January 2000, a group of Iranians established the Egyptian-Iranian Friendship Society in Tehran to lobby for better relations. Despite being denounced and attacked by hardliners, the society received support from several reformist figures and individuals close to Khatami.³⁷⁰ With encouraging statements from both sides and opening the door for economic and trade relations, optimism was growing that both countries will restore relations soon. This feeling was further reinforced when Presidents Mubarak and Khatami spoke on the phone in June 2000, which marked the first direct contact between the heads of the two states since 1979. Mubarak, who played an essential role in supporting Iran’s bid for membership to the G-15, wanted to call Khatami personally and congratulate him on Iran’s accession to the group.³⁷¹

³⁶⁷ “Iran, Egypt sign economic cooperation protocol.” *Agence France Presse*. June 14, 1998

³⁶⁸ “Egypt upgrades mission in Iran in sign of warming ties.” *The Associated Press*. October 28, 1998

³⁶⁹ Bayat and Baktiari. *Ibid.*, p. 319

³⁷⁰ “Iran condemns attack on Iran-Egypt friendship society.” *The Associated Press*. January 17, 2000

³⁷¹ The Group of Fifteen was established in 1989 on the sidelines of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit in Yugoslavia. The group have members from Africa, Asia, and Latin America and currently have 17 member states. For more information, see: <http://g15.org/member-countries-2/historical-background/>

The phone conversation, exchange of visits and views, and the nascent economic and trade relations were all steps in the direction of building trust and leading to full normalization. The domestic and regional dynamics were changing, where ties between Egypt and Iran could be further strengthened. The traditional pretexts for the stagnation, sometimes animosity, relations between both countries were slowly being altered. Islamist extremists in Egypt have rescinded their vow of violence to change the government. Iran and its Gulf neighbors have strengthened their diplomatic, economic and political ties, and the impasse in the Arab-Israeli peace were all reasons that should have brought Egypt and Iran closer. Nonetheless, relations never reached full normalization.

With rescinding terrorism in Egypt and Iran's moderate and better relations with the Gulf, Egypt started looking for other reasons to bring up whenever confronted with the decision to resume relations with Iran. The street named after Khaled al-Islambouli in Tehran became the new thorny issue. Islambouli was among the group assassinating President Sadat in 1981 and was sentenced to death. The Iranian government decided to put his name on a street in Tehran and create murals for his memory. Mubarak's conditions before the resumption of ties were based on Iran to stop "exporting revolutions, offering shelter to terrorists and naming streets in Iran after them is over." An Iranian hardline paper, *Jomhuri Islami*, was quick to lash out at Mubarak saying that "the name and memory of the brave martyr Khaled al-Islambouli, the great Egyptian officer who shot the traitor Sadat are eternal."³⁷²

The Egyptian demand to change the street's name before normalization of their relations, made several Iranian newspapers and politicians question Egypt's sincerity in resuming ties, to the extent that some officials hinted at the shah's cemetery in Cairo as a counter claim to the Islambouli street. Khatami's chief of staff cautioned that Egypt and Iran "are two great civilizations which should not tie relations to a debate over a street, or a cemetery."³⁷³ The Egyptian officials' rationale was surprised to hear some Iranians comparing and equating between honoring an assassin and the tomb and remains of the former shah. A former Foreign Minister said "if Iran was sincere in resuming ties then it should not have had a problem changing the name of the street as a sign of

³⁷² "Hard-line Iranian paper says Sadat's assassin was a hero." *The Associated Press*. December 29, 1997

³⁷³ Nasrawi, Salah. "Tehran street blocks Egypt's reconciliation with Iran." *The Associated Press*. May 31, 1999

goodwill, especially that they know honoring an assassin like Islambouli is a stab to the dignity of Egypt.”³⁷⁴ On the other hand, a former Iranian Ambassador highlighted Iran’s view by questioning Egypt’s pre-conditions to resuming the relationship, “if both sides believe better ties is the way to go then they should sit down and have a frank dialogue to work things out.” He believed that President “Mubarak and the security apparatus were responsible for the impasse,” in addition to “Egypt’s close relations with the Saudis and Americans.”³⁷⁵

The Iranian government and members of its parliament announced the intent to change the name of the street if it brings full normalization, and called on Tehran’s city council to consider it. However, the street name was never changed, which is a sign of the diverging interests and conflicting views within Iran to the resumption of relations with Egypt.³⁷⁶

2003: The U.S. Invasion of Iraq

The United States invasion of Iraq in March 2003 was a turning point in the regional dynamics. The fallout of the war created a power vacuum that the Americans and their allies could not control or fill. Hence, with the fall of the Taliban in 2001 and Saddam Hussein in 2003, Iran capitalized on the vacuum and expanded its network of influence further into Iraq and the Levant. Unlike the Gulf War of 1991, the Arab countries were not supportive of the U.S. led coalition to invade Iraq. Egypt warned that “the war would produce 100 new bin Ladens,” but it did not join any of the vocal anti-war diplomatic efforts led by the Europeans. In fact, Mubarak believed that the Americans “could not be stopped from carrying out their war plans,” and U.S. forces were allowed to pass through the Suez Canal on its way to start the offensive operations.³⁷⁷ The war plan and coalition making, revealed the diminishing role of Egypt in the region, as opposed to its central role in the build-up to the 1991 Gulf war.

³⁷⁴ Author interview with a former Egyptian Foreign Minister. Cairo, January, 2015

³⁷⁵ Author interview with a former Iranian Ambassador to Egypt. Tehran, August 2015

³⁷⁶ The author visited Tehran in August 2015 and saw at least two murals for Khaled al-Islambouli around the city as well as the street sign.

³⁷⁷ Hinnebusch, Raymond and Nael Shama. *Ibid.*, p.139

The post Iraq war's regional changes were so stark and more divisive, especially after the Iranian nuclear program³⁷⁸ was revealed in the summer of 2002 as well as the infamous Axis of Evil.³⁷⁹ The region was effectively divided into the status-quo pro American camp including Gulf States, Egypt and Jordan vis a vis the resistance axis of Iran, Syria, Hezbollah and Hamas. However, the Egyptian-Iranian relations did not get as close as it did by the end of 2003. On December 10, 2003, Presidents Hosni Mubarak and Mohamed Khatami met on the sidelines of the UN Summit on Information Technology in Geneva. This meeting marked the first meeting at this level since 1979 revolution.³⁸⁰ This meeting was particularly timely not only because of the ongoing regional changes and the old rift between both nations, but also it came after the King of Jordan and the President of Algeria had visited Iran earlier that year for the first time ever. The mood was positive and hopes were high that the Mubarak-Khatami meeting would be the step needed to finalize a path for normalization between both countries. Egypt's Foreign Minister, Ahmed Maher, explained that the resumption of ties is the logical development but "it is necessary that the two parties undertake additional and preparatory action to reach what we want." On the other hand, President Khatami said that he found "Mubarak's viewpoints in such areas as Iraq and Palestine were close to those of Iran," and they both "agreed that relations between the two countries should be promoted."³⁸¹ Yet, Khatami saw some political and ideological differences of opinion between both countries. One of those differences was "the Western demand for Iran to acknowledge Israel as a sovereign state," in which Cairo supports while Tehran rejects completely.³⁸²

In the first half of 2004, Egypt and Iran held couple of bilateral meetings to discuss possibilities for normalization. The meetings entailed presenting the views and actions necessary to move forward. According to a senior Egyptian diplomat, "both sides came with different agendas to the meetings. Egypt wanted to start by solving security issues before discussing political differences, while the

³⁷⁸ For a timeline and more information about Iran's nuclear program, see Albright, David and Andrea Stricker. "Iran's Nuclear Program." The Iran Primer, United States Institute for Peace (USIP), 2015, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/irans-nuclear-program> Accessed: August, 1, 2016.

³⁷⁹ The Axis of Evil was a description given by U.S. President George W. Bush for the states sponsor terrorism and aim to acquire Weapons of Mass Destruction. The list of states Bush announced were Iran, Iraq and North Korea during the January 2002 State of Union speech. Full transcript here: <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>

³⁸⁰ "Presidents of Egypt, Iran hold first summit in 24 years." *Agence France Presse*. December 10, 2003

³⁸¹ "Egypt seeks return to full ties with Iran, Khatami still sees differences." *Agence France Presse*. December 13, 2003

³⁸² "Khatami says Iran hopes to resume ties with Egypt." *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*. December 23, 2003

Iranians wanted to normalize relations first then discuss security concerns.” The diplomat asserted that “the influence of the security and intelligence apparatus in Egypt was stronger,” as they claimed Iran has been harboring Egyptian terrorists, which was denied by the Iranians.³⁸³ The stalemate in these talks was further derailed after security services crackdown on Egyptian Shiites on allegations of following Iran. In March 2004, police arrested Mohamed al-Derini, an Egyptian Shiite who run the unrecognized organization, Supreme Council for Descendants of the Prophet.³⁸⁴ This was followed by arresting an Egyptian engineer “spying for Iran and plotting to assassinate Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak,” in addition to allegedly “giving the Islamic Republic details about oil installations at the Saudi port of Yanbu.”³⁸⁵ The Egyptian was sentenced for 35 years and the court called for the arresting his handler, an Iranian diplomat, who was sentenced in absentia. The Iranian government denied its involvement and called this incident a show by the Egyptians, to please allies like Israel and Saudi Arabia.³⁸⁶

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad: A Hardliner in Power

Since his election to Iran’s presidency in 2005, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, was credited with inflammatory statements against the United States, Israel and Iran’s neighbors. His hardline views caused apprehension across the Arab world. Ahmadinejad’s tenure that ended in 2013, nonetheless, saw three close attempts at rapprochement with Egypt; two under Mubarak and one under Mohamed Morsi.

Mubarak respected the moderate Mohamed Khatami but the bilateral meetings and discussions did not lead to normalization as expected by some on both sides. And the divergence between both sides over whether security or political normalization comes first was further derailed with the spy saga. However, before the end of 2005 the Iranians were reaching out to Egypt to restart a dialogue for possible resumption of relations.

³⁸³ Author interview with a Senior Egyptian Diplomat. Cairo, August 2015

³⁸⁴ In a meeting with American Embassy officers in 2009, al-Derini said that his arrest in 2004 was “for publicly criticizing Saudi Arabian "Wahabi" influence on Egyptian society.” See, “Egyptian Shi’a Leader on Relations with GOE, Iran.” *WikiLeaks*. March 31, 2009 https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09CAIRO547_a.html

³⁸⁵ “Egyptian jailed for 35 years for spying for Iran.” *Agence France Presse*. March 27, 2005

³⁸⁶ “Iran summons Egyptian diplomat over spy trial.” *Agence France Presse*. March 31, 2005

In October 2005, the Egyptian foreign minister Ahmed Abu el Gheit received a message from the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Mohamed ElBaradei, informing him of Iran's interest in restarting bilateral talks. The message was passed to Mubarak who rejected any move toward the Iranians.³⁸⁷ The Iranian message was repeated by Iran's foreign minister Manouchehr Mottaki, who was in Cairo for the Iraq Neighbors Group meeting. Mottaki suggested to Abu el Gheit "to develop cultural ties and tourism as a first step," in which Mubarak commented that "they want to send thousands of Iranian tourists then infiltrate the Egyptian society."³⁸⁸ Mubarak added that such proposals should also be cleared with the security services, which Abu el Gheit noted that it was also vetoed.

Nonetheless, and despite Egypt's hesitation, the Iranian attempt for reconciliation continued with a request for a direct meeting between Ahmadinejad and Mubarak on the sidelines of an Islamic Summit in December 2005 hosted by Saudi Arabia. Abu el Gheit was in favor of the meeting and encouraged Mubarak to accept it but the President decided against the idea, and instructed his foreign minister to represent Egypt in the conference. However, Mubarak surprised everyone by showing up in Jeddah for couple of hours, which Abu el Gheit believed was a courtesy to the Saudis.³⁸⁹

Abu el Gheit - like other Egyptian diplomats through their career - has interacted with Iran's diplomats on various regional and international issues, and as a foreign minister he was interested in creating a dialogue with Iran that would advance cooperation and communication between the Arabs and Iranians. This was particularly important in the wake of Iran's nuclear ambitions, its extensive influence in Iraq post Saddam, the alliance with Syria, support for Palestinian resistance and leverage in Lebanon through Hezbollah. The 2006 Israeli attack on Lebanon and the West's lobbying against Iran's nuclear program ceased any possibility for dialogue between Egypt and Iran. In fact, Egypt criticized the role of Hezbollah in instigating the war and accused Iran of intervening in Arab issues by meddling in Lebanon's already fragile political system.

The lull in relations was broken when Ahmadinejad stated that, in May 2007, that "we [Iran] are ready to establish diplomatic ties with Egypt. If the Egyptian government signals its willingness,

³⁸⁷ Abu el Gheit. *Ibid.*, p. 387

³⁸⁸ Abu el Gheit. *Ibid.*, p. 388

³⁸⁹ Abu el Gheit. *Ibid.*, p. 388

we will open our embassy that very same day.”³⁹⁰ The move surprised the Egyptian officials as it came from the hardline president whose supporters are usually opposed to reconciliation with Egypt. Cairo welcomed the statement and the possibility for bilateral dialogue but an Egyptian diplomat downplayed the significance of the statements as several outstanding issues are still unresolved. The diplomat highlighted these sticky points in Iran’s interference in Egypt’s domestic affairs and harboring wanted extremists.³⁹¹

Despite Mubarak’s view of the Iranians as untrusted, he thought it was important to understand their thinking. From that stand point, Ahmed Abu el Gheit wrote a report to the president encouraging him to allow for a dialogue with Iran. The foreign minister highlighted that “relations between Egypt and Iran have not been competitive for years and while Iran’s activities in the region are sometimes troublesome, we should have a dialogue with them to explain our positions and understand theirs.”³⁹² The assessment report highlighted areas of commonality between Cairo and Tehran such as: rejecting the U.S. hegemony in the region and its double standards, standing against foreign agendas and interferences in domestic affairs, preventing war between Sunnis and Shiites, and a solution for the Palestinian conflict. Abu el Gheit reiterated Egypt’s position and demands by continuing to call on Iran to remove the “mural of former Egyptian President Anwar Sadat’s assassin, Khaled el-Islambouli, and change the name of a street honoring him.”³⁹³ In addition to encouraging a security dialogue that starts with delivering the wanted Egyptian terrorists; halting Iranian support to the Palestinian groups (Hamas and al-Jihad) that oppose peace; and not to impede any possible Egyptian role in the Gulf security arrangements.³⁹⁴ The foreign ministry concluded by suggesting some goodwill gestures like opening telephone communications between both countries and facilitating Iranian participation in exhibition and conference in Egypt. By the end of 2007, several high-level political and security meetings were conducted between both countries to look at ways to ease suspicion and build confidence.³⁹⁵ The discussions included bilateral and regional issues with Egypt stressing a security first approach while the Iranians calling

³⁹⁰ “Iran says ready for full diplomatic ties with Egypt.” *Agence France Presse*. May 17, 2007

³⁹¹ “Iran: “Surprising” Overture to Egypt by Ahmadinejad.” *WikiLeaks*. Cairo, Egypt, May 16, 2007 https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07CAIRO1442_a.html

³⁹² Abu el Gheit. *Ibid.*, p. 392-393

³⁹³ “Egypt welcomes resumption of ties with Iran, Iranian FM says.” *Associated Press*. May 28, 2007

³⁹⁴ Abu el Gheit. *Ibid.*, p. 393

³⁹⁵ Some of the senior figures that visited Egypt were former President Mohamed Khatami, Former Speaker of Iran’s Parliament Gholam Ali Haddad Adel, and Ali Larijani, former Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council and Chief Iranian Nuclear Negotiator, and currently the Speaker of the Parliament.

for political normalization first then discuss security needs and understandings. Abu el Gheit highlighted that the Egyptian delegation that visited Iran in December 2007 concluded that political normalization will not benefit Egypt since Iran is not willing to provide any security concessions. On the other hand, Iran would use Egypt's normalization as a card in its negotiations with the world powers over its nuclear program and possibly create a wedge between Cairo and the Gulf states.³⁹⁶

The exchange of visits and discussions between Egypt and Iran grabbed the attention of the Americans who according to the leaked cables reached out to the Egyptian ministry of foreign affairs for updates and clarification. The Egyptian diplomats downplayed the visits and negotiations citing the outstanding security preconditions and Iran's insincere positions.³⁹⁷ The Americans' assessment was "we believe that FM Aboul Gheit is most forward-leaning on advancing Egyptian-Iranian relations. However, given the traditional disdain GOE leadership has for Iran, as well as bitter recollections of Iranian meddling in Egypt, we assess that Egypt will remain cautious, and stick to the preconditions."³⁹⁸

The cables also revealed that President Mubarak thinks "the Iranian President Ahmadinejad is an extremist, who does not think rationally," and that normalization with Tehran will never happen until Egypt's security concerns are met.³⁹⁹ He told a visiting Congressman that Egypt's message to Tehran was "give us these people [wanted terrorists], and we will think about restoring diplomatic relations."⁴⁰⁰ In another cable from 2009, the American Ambassador wrote that "Mubarak and his advisors are now convinced that Tehran is working to weaken Egypt through creation of Hezbollah cells, support of the Muslim Brotherhood, and destabilization of Gaza. Egypt has warned that it will retaliate if these actions continue."⁴⁰¹ Mubarak was also convinced that the Americans and Israelis can bomb Iran's nuclear sites if necessary despite the geographical challenges and security repercussions. He warned former president Khatami that Ahmadinejad

³⁹⁶ Abu el Gheit. *Ibid.*, p. 392

³⁹⁷ "Egyptian MFA on Relations with Iran, Larijani Visit." *WikiLeaks*. Cairo, Egypt, January 3, 2008 https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08CAIRO18_a.html

³⁹⁸ "Egyptian MFA on Relations with Iran, Larijani Visit." *Ibid.*

³⁹⁹ "Mubarak Calls Ahmadinejad "Extremist," Says No Plans to restore Ties with Iran." *WikiLeaks*. Cairo, Egypt, January 8, 2008 https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08CAIRO36_a.html

⁴⁰⁰ "Mubarak Calls Ahmadinejad "Extremist," Says No Plans to restore Ties with Iran." *Ibid.*

⁴⁰¹ "Scenesetter: President Mubarak's Visit to Washington." *Ibid.*

should not taunt the Americans who do not need to boots on the ground to dismantle Iran’s nuclear program, “all they need to do [is] destroy Iran's air defenses and then strategically bomb all its nuclear sites.”⁴⁰² Ahmed Abu el Gheit notes that he found the president’s conviction about any possible Israeli attack to be surprising especially that this would put a lot of regional countries at war with Iran and would prompt an intervention from the Americans and possibly the Russians.⁴⁰³ Mubarak’s thoughts and beliefs were similar to those of the security apparatus represented in Omar Soliman, the head of Egypt General Intelligence Service (EGIS). In several meetings with visiting American dignitaries, Soliman asserted Egypt’s security concerns from Iran’s activities. In a 2008 cable, Soliman said that “Iran remains a significant threat to Egypt. It continues to influence Shia in Iraq and the Gulf. Iran is supporting Jihad and spoiling peace, and has supported extremists in Egypt previously. If they were to support the Muslim Brotherhood this would make them our enemy.”⁴⁰⁴ The EGIS chief’s comments came after the exchange of visits and discussions between Egypt and Iran, which shows that Cairo was entering these talks with strong prejudice and zero-sum approach. In a different cable from 2009, Soliman told General David Petraeus that he hopes “Iran will stop supporting Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood and other cells within Egypt.” If they did that then “we are ready for good relations with Iran.”⁴⁰⁵ Soliman added that he received a positive message from the Iranian intelligence chief indicating Iran’s respect to Egypt’s domestic affairs, but if they did not cease such activities “we are ready.”⁴⁰⁶

Egypt and The Iranian Nuclear Program

Despite growing contention between Iran and the international community about its nuclear program, especially after the election of Ahmadinejad to the presidency, Egypt was against any American intervention or strikes against Iran’s nuclear facilities, as this would increase the instability and chaos in the Middle East.⁴⁰⁷ Foreign Minister Ahmed Abou el Gheit said that “Egypt

⁴⁰² “Mubarak Calls Ahmadinejad “Extremist,” Says No Plans to restore Ties with Iran.” Ibid. These beliefs contradict with earlier statements by Mubarak warning against bombing Iran. See, “Mubarak says U.S. should refrain from striking Iran; calls Hezbollah a ‘legitimate’ resistance.” *Associated Press*. August, 19, 2006

⁴⁰³ Abu el Gheit. Ibid., p. 395

⁴⁰⁴ “CODEL Voinovich Meeting with EGIS Chief Soliman.” *WikiLeaks*. January 2, 2008. https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08CAIRO9_a.html

⁴⁰⁵ “General Petraeus’ Meeting with EGIS Chief Soliman.” *WikiLeaks*. July 14, 2009. https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09CAIRO1349_a.html

⁴⁰⁶ “General Petraeus’ Meeting with EGIS Chief Soliman.” Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ “Mubarak says U.S. should refrain from striking Iran; calls Hezbollah a ‘legitimate’ resistance.” *Associated Press*. August, 19, 2006

absolutely does not agree with solving the Iranian nuclear issue by force or any military action,” and “Egypt supports peaceful settlement for this issue through negotiations which guarantee the Iranian right to a peaceful nuclear program.”⁴⁰⁸ Egypt’s stance regarding Iran’s nuclear program was built around the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which allows all countries the right to develop peaceful nuclear programs. This was particularly important since Egypt announced several times its plans to revive a nuclear program frozen since the 1986 Chernobyl catastrophe.⁴⁰⁹ The position of Egypt was welcomed by the Iranians, who requested Cairo’s support at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which was reviewing Iran’s nuclear program. As a member of the board of directors of the IAEA, Iran was hoping that Egypt would vote against referring Iran’s nuclear file to the UN Security Council (UNSC). However, Egypt did the opposite in September 2006 by voting in favor of referring Iran’s program to the UNSC citing its longstanding position for a WMD-free zone in the Middle East.⁴¹⁰

Moreover, the leaked cables from the U.S. State Department revealed that Egypt was keeping up-to-date on the nuclear negotiations between Iran and the P5+1⁴¹¹ and interested in details about Iran’s capabilities and prospects. Several meetings between visiting American diplomats and their Egyptian counterparts showed Washington’s interest in garnering regional and Egyptian support against Iran’s nuclear program. Since the outbreak of information on the Iranian nuclear program in 2003, the George W. Bush administration started implementing unilateral and multilateral extensive economic sanctions and threatened military action, to curb Iran’s nuclear ambitions and any possibility for a nuclear weapons program. In a meeting with the U.S. representative to the UN in Vienna, foreign minister Abu el Gheit said that Egypt agreed with the U.S. that Iran should not possess nuclear weapons because this would lead others in the region to pursue WMD; in addition, Israel would not agree to denuclearize. Abu el Gheit warned that unilateral American sanctions without Russian and Chinese support would not be effective in pushing Iran to the negotiating table especially when there are opportunists in adjoining countries who would circumvent sanctions in Iran’s favor.⁴¹² Egypt, however, would later acquiesce to American and

⁴⁰⁸ Maggie Michael. “Egypt rejects any strike against Iran and looks to normalize relations.” Associated Press. September 19, 2007

⁴⁰⁹ Egypt signed the NPT in 1970 and ratified the agreement in 1981.

⁴¹⁰ Ahmed Abu el Gheit recounts the IAEA vote in his memoirs. Abu el Gheit. *Ibid.*, p. 388-389

⁴¹¹ P5+1 refers to the countries negotiating with Iran on its nuclear program. It stands for the five permanent members of the UN Security Council – U.S., UK, Russia, China and France’ plus Germany. Its sometimes referred to as the E3+3.

⁴¹² For more on the Egyptian-American discussions on Iran, see:

European demarches to support financial and energy sanctions despite the limited interactions between both Cairo and Tehran.⁴¹³

Despite Egypt's support for Iran's (and any other country's) right for peaceful nuclear energy and research program under the NPT and IAEA regulations, it always disagreed with the U.S. on its double standard and lack of commitment on pressuring Israel to join the NPT and renounce its alleged nuclear weapons.⁴¹⁴ The leaked American cables also revealed that the League of Arab States (LAS) shared the point of view of Egypt regarding the use of diplomatic means to solve the Iranian nuclear program and America's lack of consideration to the Israeli program.⁴¹⁵

2006 War: Israel vs. Hezbollah

The regional polarization in the aftermath of the Iraq war was most evident during the summer of 2006 when Israeli forces invaded southern Lebanon and bombed the Lebanese capital Beirut. The war was Israel's response to Hezbollah's kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers. Hezbollah, which has been Iran's proxy in Lebanon since 1982, was heavily criticized by some Arab leaders as taking "uncalculated adventures that threatens Arab's national security."⁴¹⁶ While on the other hand, the Arab publics cheered Hezbollah and its leader Hassan Nasrallah for standing against Israeli aggression.⁴¹⁷ The rise of the powerful group in Lebanese politics using anti-Israeli and resistance

"Egyptian Position on Possible IAEA Referral of Iran to the UNSC." *WikiLeaks*. Cairo, Egypt, January 18, 2006 https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06CAIRO269_a.html; "Iran: Centrifuge Briefing to Egyptian MFA." *WikiLeaks*. Cairo, Egypt, February 1, 2006 https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06CAIRO601_a.html; "Iran/IAEA: GOE Presses for Reference to Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons; Voting Position Undetermined." *WikiLeaks*. Cairo, Egypt, February 2, 2016 https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06CAIRO647_a.html; "Iran/IAEA: Egypt and U.S. "See Eye to Eye," Believes Methodical Approach at march Board Meeting Best Approach." *WikiLeaks*, Cairo, Egypt, March 2, 2006 https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06CAIRO1319_a.html; "Ambassador Schulte Discusses Iran with FM Aboul Gheit." *WikiLeaks*. Cairo, Egypt, August 31, 2006 https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06CAIRO5430_a.html

⁴¹³ "Joint Demarches on Increasing Diplomatic Pressure on Iran." *WikiLeaks*. Cairo, Egypt, December 3, 2008 https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08CAIRO2457_a.html.

In a meeting with a senior manager at the Misr-Iran bank, I was told that the bank was put under sanction by the United States for its joint ventures with Iran.

⁴¹⁴ In addition to the information provided in the leaked State Department cables, Ahmed Abu el Gheit highlights Egypt's position on Iran's nuclear program and America's double standards in his memoirs. Abu el Gheit. *Ibid.*, p. 389-401

⁴¹⁵ "Arab League with Under Secretary Joseph on Iran and Policy on Israeli Nuclear Program." *WikiLeaks*. Cairo, Egypt, April 19, 2006 https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06CAIRO2350_a.html

⁴¹⁶ Quoted in Hinnebusch and Shama. *Ibid.*, p.140

⁴¹⁷ Marc Lynch. "Arab Media Split." *Abu Aardvark*, July 17, 2006 - http://abuaardvark.typepad.com/abuaardvark/2006/07/arab_media_spli.html; and "Arabs watching helplessly." July 14, 2006 http://abuaardvark.typepad.com/abuaardvark/2006/07/arabs_watching_.html

rhetoric as well providing social services the stagnant Lebanese state could not deliver, was alarming to several Arab states. Moreover, Iran's close ties to Hezbollah and its alliance with Syria were critical and distressing. Nonetheless, Mubarak was hopeful that Iran would use its influence on Hezbollah and relations with Syria to help stabilize Lebanon.⁴¹⁸

Some leaders, like King Abdullah of Jordan, linked the rise and emboldened Hezbollah to the growing Iranian influence in Iraq attempting to create a "Shiite crescent" in the Middle East. The fear of the spread of Shiism, and particularly political allegiance to Tehran, was among the chief concerns of the Arab Sunni leaders since the Revolution of 1979. The rise of Shiites in post Saddam Iraq brought back the Gulf sheikhdoms' fears that their local Shiite population would rise against them. For its part, Egypt's security services have always been uncomfortable and suspicious of its nominal Shiite community, who are usually the first victim whenever Cairo wanted to appease the Saudis or antagonize the Iranians. Mubarak expressed his concerns by accusing the Shiites of the Arab world as "always loyal to Iran and not the countries where they live."⁴¹⁹

The Rise of Hamas and the 2008 Gaza War

Hamas, a Palestinian resistance group and an off-shoot of the Muslim Brotherhood established in the 1987, won the legislative elections in the Palestinian Occupied Territories in 2006 upsetting the decades dominant Fatah organization and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). The Islamist group did not recognize Israel and have long vowed to fight until it liberates Palestine. The rise of Hamas led the U.S. and Israel to isolate the democratically elected group, which was designated as a terrorist organization. The international and regional pressures on Hamas as well as the Palestinian infighting were among the factors for its decision in the summer of 2007 to kick Fatah and the Palestinian Authority (PA) officials from the Gaza strip and take control of the heavily populated territory.

The Egyptian government has always been suspicious of Islamists and their threat to the regime stability and survival. The 2004 and 2005 terrorist bombings in Sinai were pinned on alleged collaboration between Egyptian and Palestinian militants; the success of the Egyptian Muslim

⁴¹⁸ Salah Nasrawi. "Egypt's Mubarak urges Iran to help stabilize Lebanon." *Associated Press*. August 13, 2006

⁴¹⁹ Jailan Zayan. "Iranian influence a double-edged sword for Egypt's Shiites." *Agence France Presse*. November 11, 2006

Brotherhood in the 2005 Parliamentary elections; the electoral victory of Hamas in 2006 and its control of Gaza in 2007, “aroused fears among Egypt’s ruling elite of a resurgence of militant Islamists in regional politics.”⁴²⁰ Egypt was not at ease with Hamas’ new position and rising power especially with reports of Iranian funding and support, but tried to maintain a dialogue hoping for Palestinian reconciliation and to moderate Hamas’ positions on peace with Israel.⁴²¹

The move by Hamas was cheered by its supporters inside the Occupied Territories, while fingers were pointed at Syria and Iran for encouraging and supporting Hamas’ move. Despite bilateral discussion and rapprochement earlier in the year between Egypt and Iran, Cairo blamed Tehran for Hamas’ takeover of the Gaza strip. Minister Abou el Gheit said that “Iran’s policies encouraged Hamas to do what it has done in Gaza and this represents a threat for Egypt’s national security because Gaza is a stone’s throw from Egypt.”⁴²² Cairo’s position was delicate, on one hand it calls for a peaceful resolution for the Palestinian problem, yet it is tacitly complicit in the Israeli blockade of Gaza by closing its Rafah crossing with the strip. This gave Iran, Syria and Hezbollah a powerful reason to accuse Cairo of aiding Israel’s siege of Gaza and called on Egypt to stand against Israel’s aggression by opening the borders and allowing humanitarian aid.

In January 2008, the dire economic situation and shortage of water, gas and foodstuffs prompted Gazans to breach the 7-mile border wall with Egypt. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians poured into Northern Sinai to buy essential goods spending an estimate of \$250 million.⁴²³ The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) estimated 750,000 Palestinians have crossed the Egyptian borders in the process.⁴²⁴ Mubarak and his security were stunned and could not use force to push back the hungry and sick Palestinians, however, the Egyptian government vowed to rebuild the cement border wall and use force if this incident was repeated.⁴²⁵

Conclusion

Throughout his presidency, Mubarak remained unprepared to pursue better relations with Iran, citing security concerns and zero-sum assertions. There are two levels of possible explanations for

⁴²⁰ Hinnebusch and Shama. *Ibid.*, P. 142.

⁴²¹ Abu el Gheit covers in details the views of the foreign ministry and the intelligence agency regarding Hamas and the Palestinian infighting. See, Abu el Gheit. *Ibid.*, p. 464-473

⁴²² Ines Bel Aiba. “Egypt and Iran to hold talks on renewing ties.” *Agence France Presse*. September 18, 2007

⁴²³ “Palestinians breach border, pour into Egypt.” *Associated Press*. January 23, 2008. http://www.nbcnews.com/id/22794305/ns/world_news-mideast_n_africa/t/palestinians-breach-border-pour-egypt/

⁴²⁴ Abu el Gheit. *Ibid.*, p. 469

⁴²⁵ Abu el Gheit. *Ibid.*, p. 469-470.

the prolonged stagnation between Cairo and Tehran: the views and beliefs of Egypt's leadership and security apparatus regarding Iran and Egypt's regional alliances, and bandwagoning with the Gulf monarchies and the United States.

On the domestic front, Mubarak and his security and intelligence apparatus always viewed Iran in a negative way. Since the Islamic revolution, Egypt has continuously been suspicious of Iran and its policies. While this could be true in some instances closer to home - like Iran's support for the nascent Islamist regime in Sudan or funding Hamas and al-Jihad in Gaza - the Egyptian approach has always been rigid, with little room for negotiation. Security services have believed that irrespective of Iran's apparent intentions for cooperation and goodwill messages, Iranians are working to infiltrate Egypt to advance their revolutionary zeal across the region.⁴²⁶ To advance its plans, Egyptian security believes Iran uses a mix of revolutionary and Islamic rhetoric to appeal to the Arab population. And even though Egypt has a nominal Shiite population, Egypt's security has looked at them as a possible *Trojan Horse* that could give Iran access to the Egyptian society.⁴²⁷ Moreover, Mubarak was always distrustful of Iran's rapprochement attempts and was convinced of the insincerity of Iran's officials and the duality of Iran's domestic apparatus as main challenges toward any normalization.⁴²⁸

Mubarak and his regime invested in and enjoyed strong relations with the Gulf monarchies, especially the Saudis, which provided much needed economic aid and investment for the populous Arab state. Despite cordial and normalized diplomatic relations between the Gulf Arabs and Iran especially on the economic and trade level (Qatar, UAE, Oman, and Kuwait), the Saudis remained wary of Iran. This was particularly clear after the American invasion of Iraq. The vacuum created with the fall of Saddam Hussein was filled with Iran and its Shiite proxies, which represented a threat to the Saudis who have a considerable Shiite population in its oil-rich Eastern province. Moreover, the 2006 Lebanon War as well as the Israeli attack on Gaza in 2008, were two other incidents showing Iran's growing reach into the Arab world through supporting Hezbollah and Hamas. Iran's backing to these two Arab militant Islamist groups, regardless of their sect, showed

⁴²⁶ Ahmed Abu el Gheit. *Shehadaty: al-Seyasa al-Kharejya al-Masrya 2004-2011 – [My Testimony: Egyptian Foreign Policy 2004-2011]*. Cairo: Nahdet Misr Publishing, 2013, p. 387

⁴²⁷ Ahmed Abu el Gheit referred to discussions among some Arab states of a spread of conversion to Shiism in Syria, Egypt and some African states like Senegal and Niger. *Ibid.*, p. 388.

⁴²⁸ Abu el Gheit. *Ibid.*, p. 387

Tehran's pragmatism in championing policies that would advance its interests against Egypt's. These latter incidents were also worrisome to the Egyptian regime that shares borders with the Hamas-controlled Gaza strip and despise Islamists, especially the militant groups.

Egypt's alliances did not stop with the Gulf, but included strategic relations with the United States and the Europeans, which influenced the anti-Iran rhetoric at times. Egypt looked at its Western partners for military and economic aid, which when added to the Gulf support have kept Egypt's economy afloat. In addition, Egypt's adherence and understanding of the peace treaty with Israel have put a burden and pressure on Cairo's leadership at times when dealing with certain regional issues including relations with Iran. According to a senior diplomat, the Egyptian leadership was sometimes worried to take a decision that could benefit Egypt's national interest so that it does not upset its relations with certain countries.⁴²⁹ Thus, it was clear that for Mubarak's regime, maintaining these alliances and benefits were far more important than normalizing relations and opening up to Iran. Indeed, the regional system in the 2000s seem sharply divided between an Iran-led self-styled 'resistance front' including Syria, Hezbollah and Hamas and the "moderate bloc" aligned with the United States and led regionally by Saudi Arabia and Egypt. In short, Egypt's perception of Iran and its alliance choices and economic dependence compelled its leaders to normalize stagnant relations with Iran, instead of normalizing bilateral relations at large.

⁴²⁹ Author interview with a senior Egyptian diplomat. Cairo, August 2015.

Chapter Six: A Brief Tenure and A Timid Policy

Introduction

This chapter will discuss briefly the 2011 Egyptian uprising that led to the ousting of Egypt's long-serving president Hosni Mubarak, and consequently the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood through parliamentary and presidential elections. Although former president Mohamed Morsi ruled for only one year, in that short time he became the first Egyptian president to visit Tehran since relations broke in 1979. The short-lived presidency and parliamentary majority of the MB, in addition to the fluidity of the internal dynamics and regional structure, makes it difficult to provide a concrete projection of possibilities for change in Egypt's foreign policy behavior had the MB stayed in power longer. Nonetheless, I will analyze certain events and developments that took place under Morsi's leadership, namely his visit to Tehran, proposal for a regional quartet on Syria, and finally implicit support for Jihad in Syria.

The 2011 Egyptian Uprising

On January 28, 2011, thousands of Egyptians took to the streets of Cairo and several other governorates demanding reforms and change. They called for "bread, freedom and social justice"; symbolizing the ailing economic development, increasing gap between the rich and poor, humiliating social conditions, corruption and the stifled public sphere. By the end of the day, protesters managed to camp in downtown Cairo (and other major cities) and were officially calling for the fall of the Hosni Mubarak regime.⁴³⁰ It's important to note that these peaceful protests started on the national Police Day – January 25 – to denounce police brutality and torture techniques that led (and continue to lead) to many deaths at police stations and prisons, among them the young Khaled Said, who became an icon of the uprising.⁴³¹ Other irritants that played a role in galvanizing the protesters included: the fraudulent 2010 parliamentary elections, the suspected succession of power to Mubarak's son, Gamal, and the success of the Tunisians to oust

⁴³⁰ Abdel Latif El-Menawy provides an insider's account of the Egyptian uprising. See: Abdel Latif El-Menawy. *Tahrir: The Last 18 Days of Mubarak*. London: Gilgamesh Publishing, 2012. See also, "Timeline: Egypt's revolution." *Aljazeera*. February 14, 2011. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/01/201112515334871490.html>

⁴³¹ "Khaled Said: The face that launched a revolution." *Ahram Online*. June, 6, 2012. <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/43995.aspx>; "Egypt police jailed over 2010 death of Khaled Said." *BBC*. March 3, 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26416964>

their long-serving dictator Zine el Abdin bin Ali.⁴³² Despite attempts by the ruling regime to dissuade the protesters through appeasement⁴³³ and fear tactics,⁴³⁴ after 18 days Mubarak stepped down and handed the power to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF).⁴³⁵

After the fall of Mubarak, many assumed that whoever would come to power would be more accountable to the will of the people. This assumption was based on:

1. Revolutions often change regime identity and perspective; hence it affects foreign and domestic policies. However, these changes require that the revolutionaries are an integral part of the ruling elite if not constituting the new elite. This was particularly clear in the examples of Nasser's 1952 movement and Khomeini's 1979 revolution.
2. In post-revolutions, the role of domestic politics, which is likely to be a more powerful factor since public opinion and conflicting elite claims affects foreign policy behavior more than in normal times or under authoritarian regimes.⁴³⁶

That was not the case when Mubarak's generals took power and proved to be no revolutionaries at all, internally or externally. The SCAF led the transitional phase in Egypt until a new president was elected in June 2012. During these 14 months, Egypt witnessed the creation of numerous political parties and the election of a new parliament dominated by the MB and their Salafi ally,

⁴³² Jack Shenker. "Egypt's rulers tighten grip amid claims of election fraud and intimidation." *The Guardian*. November 30, 2010. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/nov/30/egypt-poll-electoral-fraud-claims>; "Tunisia: Ex-President Ben Ali flees to Saudi Arabia." *BBC*. January 15, 2011. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-12198106>.

For more background see: Lloyd C Gardner. *The Road to Tahrir Square*. New York: The New Press, 2011; and John R. Bradley. *Inside Egypt: The Land of the Pharaohs on the Brink of a Revolution*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

⁴³³ Griff Witte, Mary Beth Sheridan and Karen DeYoung. "In Egypt, Muslim Brotherhood reverses course, agrees to talks on transition." *Washington Post*. February 6, 2011. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/05/AR2011020501707.html>

⁴³⁴ Peter Beaumont, Jack Shenker, Harriet Sherwood, and Simon Tisdall. "Egypt's revolution turns ugly as Mubarak fights back." *The Guardian*. February 2, 2011. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/feb/02/egypt-revolution-turns-ugly>

⁴³⁵ David D. Kirkpatrick. "Egypt Erupts in Jubilation as Mubarak Steps Down." *The New York Times*. February 11, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/12/world/middleeast/12egypt.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>

⁴³⁶ Raymond Hinnebusch and Nael Shama, "The Foreign Policy of Egypt," *Ibid*.

the Nour party.⁴³⁷ The transition was marred by several violent incidents and legal irregularities that led to further grievances among the various competing groups.⁴³⁸

On the foreign policy front, the military generals sought to tread carefully and follow Mubarak's cautious line promising to respect Egypt's alliances and international agreements. It's important to note that even though the uprising's main demands were mostly calling for domestic changes, Mubarak's pro-U.S. foreign policy, close ties with Israel and dependence on aid tended to delegitimize his regime.

SCAF's time at the helm was further stained by an explosion of anti-Israeli and anti-American rhetoric, demonstrated by the government crackdown on foreign civil society organizations, the break-in into the Israeli embassy in Cairo and numerous explosions to the pipeline carrying Egyptian natural gas to both Israel and Jordan.⁴³⁹ The newly appointed Foreign Minister, Dr. Nabil al-Araby, attempted to carve some independence for Egypt by facilitating – with the Egyptian intelligence - the reconciliation pact between Fatah and Hamas, reopening the Rafah border and calling for new and open relations with all states including Iran.⁴⁴⁰ These statements and actions angered long-time allies in the Gulf, the United States and Israel, and their annoyance might have played a role in moving al-Araby to lead the League of Arab States instead of the Egyptian foreign ministry.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁷ Ahmed Morsy. "Is Egypt Turning Islamist?" *The Atlantic Council*. December 7, 2011 <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/egyptsource/is-egypt-turning-islamist>

⁴³⁸ For more info see: Ahmed Morsy. "Egypt's Transition in Danger of Regression." *The Atlantic Council*, April 27, 2012 <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/egyptsource/egypts-transition-in-danger-of-regression>; "On the Eve of Pivotal Supreme Court Rulings, All Scenarios Point to Turmoil," *The Atlantic Council*, June 13, 2012, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/egyptsource/on-the-eve-of-pivotal-supreme-court-rulings-all-scenarios-point-to-turmoil>;

"SCAF Declaration Turns "Soft Coup" Into Hard Reality," *The Atlantic Council*, June 18, 2012, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/egyptsource/scaf-declaration-turns-soft-coup-into-hard-reality>

⁴³⁹ Ahmed Morsy "Egypt's Paradox: Foreign-Funded Military Attacks Foreign-Funded NGOs," *The Atlantic Council*, January 4, 2012, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/egyptsource/egypts-paradox-foreignfunded-military-attacks-foreignfunded-ngos>

"Egyptian protesters break into the Israeli embassy building," *BBC*, September 10, 2011, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14862159>

⁴⁴⁰ Jeffrey Fleishman, "Egypt's new foreign policy tests old alliances," *Los Angeles Times*, May 8, 2011, <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/may/08/world/la-fg-egypt-diplomacy-20110508>

⁴⁴¹ Ian Black, "The two swift changes in foreign policy that signal a new Egypt," *The Guardian*, May 20, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/may/20/foreign-policy-changes-new-egypt>

Morsi's Character and Rise to Power

Even though the MB announced it would not seek to dominate the parliament, recalling its belief in partnership and not domination, “after the uprising the lure of power overshadowed the Brotherhood’s rhetoric and progressive position.”⁴⁴² Similarly, in the lead up to the presidential elections of 2012 the organization promised not to field a candidate for the presidency. However, the guidance bureau of the MB reversed its decision, and not only did it nominate deputy leader – Khairat el Shater – but also fielded a back-up candidate, Mohamed Morsi, who became known as the ‘spare tire’.⁴⁴³

Mohamed Morsi was Egypt’s first democratically elected civilian and Islamist president.⁴⁴⁴ Morsi was a member of the MB since his early university years and continued as an active member even when studying for his engineering PhD in Southern California. In 2000, he ran successfully as an independent – since the MB were officially banned from running - for the Egyptian Parliament, and led the organization’s parliamentary bloc till 2005. Morsi was jailed several times – though not as long as other Islamists - during the Mubarak regime, and was one of several members of the Brotherhood rounded up the night before the January 28 protests, though he managed to escape with scores of other prisoners after the collapse of public order and policing the next day.⁴⁴⁵ To exaggerate his political career and defiance to the Mubarak regime, the now-banned Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) once described him as “one of the most prominent political leadership figures of the Brotherhood, the organization that led the struggle against the ousted repressive regime in its last decade.”⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴² Khalil Al-Anani. *Inside the Muslim Brotherhood: Religion, Identity and Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 156. Al-Anani provides interesting and detailed insights about the Muslim Brotherhood and its internal dynamics. See also, Carrie Rosefsky Wickham. *The Muslim Brotherhood: Evolution of an Islamist Movement*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.

⁴⁴³ “Brotherhood to run for Egypt's presidency,” *Al-Jazeera*, April, 1, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2012/03/2012331191231210148.html>; Maggie Michael, “Spare Tire assumes the wheel in Egypt,” *National Post*, June 25, 2012, <http://www.pressreader.com/canada/national-post-latest-edition/20120625/281767036310252>

⁴⁴⁴ Yasmine Saleh and Marwa Awad, “Islamist joy as Morsy elected Egypt president,” *Reuters*, June 24, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-election-idUSBRE85G01U20120624>

⁴⁴⁵ Josh Levs, “Egypt’s new president: U.S.-educated Islamist,” *CNN*, June 25, 2012, <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/06/24/world/meast/egypt-morsi-profile/index.html>

⁴⁴⁶ Laura Smith-Spark, “The rise and rapid Fall of Egypt’s Mohamed Morsy,” *CNN*, July 4, 2013, <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/07/02/world/meast/egypt-morsy-profile/>

The internal system of hierarchy, obedience, dogmatic thinking, and sometimes opportunism within the Brotherhood can be traced since its founding. Morsi, like many others, represented an example of the lackluster foot soldier within the organization who, for decades, “obediently followed the Muslim Brotherhood’s strict rules, abiding by the principle of unquestioned obedience to its supreme leader.”⁴⁴⁷ In the words of a former member of the MB, Abdel-Sattar el Meligi: “Morsi has no talents but he is faithful and obedient to the group’s leaders, who see themselves as above other Muslims,” and that he “would play any role the leaders assign him to, but with no creativity and no uniqueness.”⁴⁴⁸ A clear example was his – and the Brotherhood’s – acceptance of Egypt’s peace treaty with Israel, despite playing an active role rejecting normalization as a young member of the MB in his home governorate. It showed that “Mr. Morsi has dutifully mirrored the group’s strategy of couching a hardline doctrine with short-term pragmatism.”⁴⁴⁹

Morsi’s weak character, inadequate leadership skills and blind obedience to the MB, made his presidency unofficially subordinate to the Brotherhood’s guidance bureau and the most senior and powerful among them. It was no secret that deputy leader, chief strategist and financier of the MB, Khairat el Shater, was the strongman behind the curtains of Morsi’s presidency who foreign governments and diplomats flocked to meet to discuss business and politics.⁴⁵⁰

Iran and the Egyptian Uprising

The Arab uprisings, especially in Egypt, represented an opportunity for Iranian leaders to voice support and claim Iran’s leadership. A couple of days after the uprising in Egypt, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei made statements comparing Iran’s 1979 Islamic revolution to the popular uprisings in the Arab world. Khamenei further described the upheaval in the region as “an “irreversible defeat”

⁴⁴⁷ Michael, “Spare Tire assumes the wheel in Egypt.” Ibid. For a background on the prison breaks see, Rania Abouzeid, “Did Prison Breakout Reveal a Plan to Sow Chaos in Egypt?” *Time Magazine*, March 16, 2011, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2059301,00.html>. Morsi would be later put on trial and sentenced to death for his alleged role in organizing the prison breaks. See, “What’s become of Egypt’s Mohammed Morsi?” *BBC*, November 22, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-24772806>

⁴⁴⁸ Michael, “Spare Tire assumes the wheel in Egypt.” Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹ Michael. Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ Amira Howeidy, “Meet the Brotherhood’s enforcer: Khairat El-Shater,” *Ahram Online*, March 29, 2012, <http://english.ahram.org/News/37993.aspx>

for the United States and an “Islamic awakening” in the Middle East.”⁴⁵¹ Khamenei’s comments seems to be, in part, intended to win over the rising Islamist parties in the Arab countries. The Iranian leader’s statement spurred condemnation from both the Egyptian government and the Muslim Brotherhood. Egypt’s foreign minister, Ahmed About Gheit said that Khamenei is “revealing feelings of hatred and hostility toward Egypt.”⁴⁵² The Brotherhood also rejected the Supreme Leader’s statement, insisting it was the Egyptian people’s revolution.

With the fall of Mubarak, who was always suspicious of Iran, the fluidity of regional dynamics and the rise of Islamists to power, Tehran believed a new relationship with Cairo would soon follow. This feeling was reinforced when Egypt, despite Israeli concerns, allowed two Iranian vessels to transit through the Suez Canal—for the first time since 1979—on their way to Syria for training.⁴⁵³ In addition, Nabil al-Araby’s statement, after meeting the head of the Iranian Interest Section in Cairo in 2011, was regarded as a positive and bold step toward rapprochement. The foreign minister emphasized that “the Egyptian and Iranian peoples deserve having relations that reflect their history and culture, provided they are based on mutual respect for the state sovereignty and the non-interference whatsoever in the internal affairs.”⁴⁵⁴

Over the summer of 2012, a group of Egyptian intellectuals, journalists, and businessmen, dubbed “the people’s diplomacy delegation,” visited Tehran and met with several key government officials, including President Ahmadinejad. They discussed possibilities for restoring ties between the two countries, with Ahmadinejad expressing Iran’s readiness to support Egypt by sharing its industrial and technological expertise. Ahmadinejad also revealed Iran’s hope for restored relations despite that “our enemies do not want our two people to come together. Relations must return without preconditions because there are many factors in common between the two

⁴⁵¹ Meriz Lutz, “Iran’s supreme leader calls uprisings an ‘Islamic awakening’,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 4, 2011, <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/feb/04/world/la-fg-khamenei-iran-egypt-20110205>

⁴⁵² “Egypt FM: Khomeini statement reflects malice,” *Egypt Independent*, February 5, 2011, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/egypt-fm-khomeini-statement-reflects-malice>

⁴⁵³ “Egypt allows Iranian warships ‘can use Suez Canal’,” *BBC*, February 18, 2011 <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-12493614>

⁴⁵⁴ “Nabil Al-Araby receives Head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Interests Section in Cairo,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, April 4, 2011, <http://www.mfa.gov.eg/English/Minister/News/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?Source=6781921f-3993-444a-859e-ee26ce851de8&newsID=aab43408-5b9e-42af-a9a4-b13848aa418c>

peoples.”⁴⁵⁵ The Egyptian delegation met with Iranian foreign minister Ali Akbar Salehi who reiterated Ahmadinejad’s sentiments and promised to consider changing the name of Islamboli street to “Egypt’s Martyrs, in honor of those who died during the Egyptian revolution.” Salehi added that mutual benefits would come out of normalizing the relations citing as examples Iran’s \$12 billion trade and 32 daily flights with the UAE, and millions of Iranian tourists who visit neighboring countries.⁴⁵⁶

The parliamentary victory of the Brotherhood and later Mohamed Morsi’s election to the presidency were welcomed by Iran as the “final stages of the Islamic Awakening and a new era of change in the Middle East.”⁴⁵⁷ In a phone call, Ahmadinejad wished Morsi success and extended an invitation to attend the NAM summit in August. Morsi, still configuring his foreign policy approach, hoped to demonstrate that the new Egypt would not follow ideological lines or be a Western puppet but rather will be open, independent and pragmatic. However, first comes first! The first foreign trip for Morsi was to Saudi Arabia, which was against the removal of Mubarak and wary of the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Saudis and Arab Gulf states were the main financial backers of Egypt after the uprising. Thus, Morsi’s visit was important to appease Saudi Arabia and diminish concerns regarding Egypt’s new direction, and counter refute assumptions that possible relations with Iran would be at the expense of Egypt’s relations with the Gulf states, or their security and stability.

Iran’s enthusiastic responses to the Egyptian uprising had several potential motivations. First, Tehran might have hoped to capitalize on the post-Arab uprisings realities and the rise of Islamists to advance its narrative of an ‘Islamic Awakening’ and to bolster anti-Western sentiments among regional governments. Second, Iran’s anxious attempts to renew relations with Egypt could also be attributed in part to escalating pressure and international sanctions against Tehran. The U.S. and the EU had tightened sanctions on Iran, with a focus on the financial sectors and the oil industry. By re-establishing relations with Egypt, Iran thought it could win safe access to the Suez Canal and bypass sanctions by opening a new market for its goods. Finally, as the situation in Syria

⁴⁵⁵ Amany Maged, “An intimate meeting with the Egyptian people’s diplomacy delegation in Tehran,” *Ahram Online*, June 2, 2011, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/13466.aspx>

⁴⁵⁶ Maged. Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ “Iran considers Morsy’s win as an ‘Islamic Awakening’.” *Reuters*. June 24, 2012. <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/iran-considers-morsys-win-islamic-awakening>

worsened, Iran looked at Egypt as a potential partner to counteract the possible loss of its Syrian ally.

Morsi's Foreign Policy and Relations with Iran

The post-Mubarak governments, especially with the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood to power, sought an independent foreign policy that would regain Egypt's prominence in regional issues. With the election of Mohamed Morsi to the presidency, some expected that the long-awaited Muslim Brotherhood opportunity to run Egypt had arrived and new domestic and foreign policy paths would thus emerge. These ambitions faced a domestic struggle for power among various players – revolutionary and liberal groups, remnants of the old regime, and the military - each trying to carve a niche in the new political map using long lists of grievances, self-aspirations and external supporters. In addition, while the MB had long called for changes to the Egyptian governance system and the conduct of foreign policy, it had never been a revolutionary force that came to power and had the chance to topple and restructure the system.

Moreover, the limited foreign policy experience of the president and the Brotherhood prompted Morsi to appoint Rifaa el-Tahtawi, a career diplomat who once headed the Egyptian representative office in Tehran, to run the presidential office. However, el-Tahtawi alone was not enough to formulate the foreign policy agenda. Morsi appointed Essam el-Haddad, a member of the Brotherhood's guidance bureau, as Presidential Assistant for Foreign Relations and International Cooperation. El-Haddad, who had close ties to Khairat el Shater, had an extensive network of contacts with Western countries from his time living abroad. This appointment indicated that foreign policy decisions were made in close consultation with leading figures of the MB and its Freedom and Justice Party.⁴⁵⁸

The inherited foreign policy from Mubarak was built on “three key pillars: building strategic relations with the United States, maintaining the peace treaty with Israel, and promoting the security of Arab states in the Gulf,” and it was not going to be easily uprooted.⁴⁵⁹ Moreover, the new president and his Islamist coalition were already under scrutiny regarding Egypt's foreign

⁴⁵⁸ Grimm and Roll. “Egyptian Foreign Policy under Mohamed Morsi.” Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹ Ahmed Morsy. “Morsi's Un-Revolutionary Foreign Policy,” *Middle East Institute*, April 14, 2013, <http://www.mei.edu/content/morsi%E2%80%99s-un-revolutionary-foreign-policy>

policy trajectory, for which Morsi had to reassure the international community that “Egypt will maintain its strategic relationships and international commitments,” demonstrated by “an array of state visits in an attempt to present himself as a statesman and assure Egypt’s allies that he, the Egyptian government, and the Muslim Brotherhood are reliable and responsible partners.”⁴⁶⁰

Nonetheless, two files presented a possible departure from the Mubarak-era strategy: relations with Hamas and with Iran. Hamas, a Muslim Brotherhood affiliate, cheered the rise of Islamists in Egypt, and the Egyptian Brotherhood was more accommodating and sympathetic to the situation in Gaza than Mubarak, who was suspicious of Hamas’ motives and accused of complicity with Israel. The Morsi government kept the borders open, supplied food and fuel and was outspoken against Israeli atrocities. However, Morsi’s policy of compassion for Hamas was alarming for the military-security apparatus for fears of growing Islamic radicals in Sinai and any impact on relations with the already anxious Israelis. While the Rafah border was kept open, the military started an aggressive campaign targeting and flooding the smuggling tunnels along Egypt’s border with Gaza. The military was also clear to avoid taking the responsibility for Gaza, which Israelis had been pushing for through their tightened siege and denial of basic access to humanitarian aid. Morsi’s government was put to the test when Israel launched an attack on Gaza in November 2012. Any expectations for confrontation between Egypt and Israel were averted and Morsi resorted to symbolic gestures through recalling the Egyptian ambassador from Tel Aviv, sending the Prime Minister to Gaza and holding anti-Israeli demonstrations. The MB would later play an essential role in brokering a ceasefire, which won them praise from both Washington and Tel Aviv.⁴⁶¹

With regards to Iran, Morsi’s decision to attend the NAM summit in Tehran was met with concern from Western media seeing it as a challenge to the U.S. policy in the region and a victory for Iran.⁴⁶² Thomas Friedman wrote a harsh piece criticizing Morsi’s visit saying that Iran wants “heads of state like you [Morsi] to attend ... to signal to Iran’s people that the world approves

⁴⁶⁰ Ahmed Morsy. “Morsi’s Un-Revolutionary Foreign Policy.” *Ibid.* See also, Aya Batrawy, “Egypt’s Morsi Pledges to Respect Pact with Israel,” *Huffington Post*, 9 September 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/09/egypt-morsi-israel_n_1868599.html.

⁴⁶¹ Peter Baker and David Kirkpatrick, “Egyptian President and Obama Forge Link in Gaza Deal,” *New York Times*, November 21, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/22/world/middleeast/egypt-leader-and-obama-forge-link-in-gaza-deal.html?ref=barackobama&r=0>

⁴⁶² David Schenker and Christina Lin, “Egypt’s outreach to China and Iran is troubling for the U.S. policy,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 24, 2012, <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/aug/24/opinion/la-oe-schenker-egypt-ties-to-china-20120824>

of their country's clerical leadership." He added that Morsi is "lending his legitimacy to an Iranian regime that brutally crushed just such a [democratic] movement in Tehran. This does not augur well for Morsi's presidency. In fact, he should be ashamed of himself."⁴⁶³ The U.S. State Department refrained from stating an official position on Morsi's visit, commenting that any rapprochement between Cairo and Tehran is "a national decision [for Egypt] to make," and that "our message to any leaders who are going to Tehran for the NAM meeting is that they should use this opportunity to express to the Iranians all of our concerns."⁴⁶⁴

Egypt responded with an outreach strategy to reassure its regional and international partners that Morsi's stopover in Tehran did not signal a shift in Egyptian foreign policy, and that "Cairo is not currently in the business of any strategic partnership with Islamist or Islamic regimes in the region."⁴⁶⁵ The Morsi government's assurances were aimed at the Gulf countries, whose petrodollars were the main lifeline of the Egyptian economy at the time; at the United States and Europeans, engaged in intense nuclear negotiations with Iran; and at Israel, which was worried and apprehensive about possible Egyptian leniency with Hamas in Gaza and rapprochement with Iran, which could ultimately influence American decisions regarding the annual \$1.3 billion aid package to Egypt.

While in Mecca for a special OIC summit, Morsi sought to show Egyptian leadership by proposing an Islamic Quartet comprised of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran to help coordinate and devise a regional solution to the Syrian crisis. An Egyptian spokesman was quoted arguing that Iran "could be part of the solution rather than part of the problem [because] if you want to solve a problem, you have to gather all the parties that have a real influence on the problem."⁴⁶⁶ Morsi later spoke of Iran as "a main player in the region that could have an active and supportive role in solving the Syrian problem," using its close ties to the Assad regime.⁴⁶⁷ Nonetheless, the Egyptian

⁴⁶³ Thomas Friedman, "Morsi's Wrong Turn," *New York Times*, August 28, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/29/opinion/friedman-morsis-wrong-turn.html>

⁴⁶⁴ "Daily Press Briefing," *U.S. Department of State*, August 22, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2012/08/196831.htm>

⁴⁶⁵ Dina Ezzat, "President Morsi attempts foreign policy balancing act," *Ahram Online*, August 29, 2012, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/51550.aspx>

⁴⁶⁶ Dina Esfandiary, "Iran and Egypt: a complicated tango?" *European Union Institute for Security Studies*, October 18, 2012, <http://www.iss.europa.eu/fr/publications/detail-page/article/iran-and-egypt-a-complicated-tango/>

⁴⁶⁷ "Morsi: Iran 'vital' to ending the Syrian crisis," *Al Jazeera*, September 23, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/09/201292373523831134.html>

proposal proved to have not been coordinated with Egypt's traditional allies, namely Riyadh and Washington. Out of the four states, Iran was the only supporter of the Syrian regime and its role was loathed by its nemesis Saudi Arabia whose leaders did not effectively participate in the quartet meetings and deliberately let the initiative die. The United States welcomed any attempts at alleviating the civil war in Syria but was against Iran's participation, seeing it as part of the problem and thus inconceivable as part of the solution.⁴⁶⁸

The concern of an Egyptian-Iranian understanding was downplayed after Morsi's speech at the NAM criticizing Iran's ally, the regime of Bashar al-Assad. The historic but short stop in Tehran saw Morsi slamming the Syrian regime and its backers, and calling for Iran to join the calls of liberty and freedom by the Syrian opposition.⁴⁶⁹ The statements seemed to strike a nerve that led the Iranians to deliberately mistranslate parts of the speech by replacing Syria with Bahrain and Arab Spring with Islamic Awakening; raising many questions about Iran's motives.⁴⁷⁰ Morsi's comments contrasted with the statement delivered by Supreme Leader Khamenei, who did not mention the Syrian crisis but focused instead on attacking the United States and Israel. As a response to Morsi's address, the "long-time Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Moualem walked out of the hall in protest," while "Ahmadinejad, who sat next to Morsi on the podium, was stone faced during much of the speech."⁴⁷¹

Morsi won the praise of the ultra-conservative Sunnis, or Salafists, who regard Shiites as heretics and were critical of the visit. The speech started with praising Prophet Mohamed and his companions (the first four caliphs), revered by the Sunnis, while the Shiites despise the first three.⁴⁷² This struck a chord with the Salafists who described Morsi's words as an earthquake to the Iranians.⁴⁷³ The Salafists, who were MB political allies, became the strong domestic vocal

⁴⁶⁸ Its important to note that the United States would later engage Iran as well as Russia on the Syrian crisis attempting to reach a ceasefire between the fighting parties, and a settlement to the crisis.

⁴⁶⁹ Nasser Karimi, "Egypt leader slams Syrian regime during Iran visit," *Associated Press*, August 30, 2012, <https://www.yahoo.com/news/egypt-leader-slams-syrian-regime-during-iran-visit-073812088.html?ref=gs>

⁴⁷⁰ Saeed Dehghan, "Bahrain attacks Iran over mistranslating Morsi's speech on Syria," *The Guardian*, September 3, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2012/sep/03/bahrain-iran-mistranslating-morsi-syria-speech>

⁴⁷¹ Barbara Slavin, "Egypt's Morsi Upsets Iran," *Al-Monitor*, August 30, 2012, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2012/al-monitor/egypts-morsi-upsets-iran.html?utm_source=&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=4353

⁴⁷² The Shiites believe that the first three caliphs usurped the succession and leadership after the Prophet's death, which in they believe should have went to his cousin and son-in-law, Ali.

⁴⁷³ Sarah El Deeb, "Morsi's bold debut strikes a chord in Egypt and the US," *Associated Press*, September 2, 2012, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/morsis-bold-debut-strikes-a-chord-in-egypt-and-the-us>

group against mending relations with Iran, while the security services took a backseat role. Ultraconservatives with close connections and similar views to those of Saudi-Wahhabism, rejected any closer ties with Iran citing sectarian differences and Iranian attempts to control Arab and Sunni states.

Rapprochement attempts continued despite the regional and domestic uneasiness. A former Egyptian ambassador described Egypt's view of Iran as "a modern Middle Eastern state with a rich heritage, strategic location in the vicinity of generous oil and gas resources, and an active foreign policy," which is difficult to ignore.⁴⁷⁴ In September 2012, news surfaced of a potential sale of Iranian oil to Egypt. Under U.S. sanctions, any country that wishes to buy Iranian oil or invest in its energy sector required a waiver, otherwise it would be banned from accessing American financial systems and some of its institutions could be sanctioned. Only a handful of close American allies like, South Korea, India and Japan had such a waiver. Once Egypt realized the difficulty of obtaining and justifying the waiver, it decided not to jeopardize the \$1 billion U.S. debt relief by buying Iranian oil.⁴⁷⁵

Since the ouster of Mubarak and rise of the Islamists to Egypt's leadership, many editorials and opinion pieces compared and questioned if Egypt is turning into another Iran.⁴⁷⁶ However, the issuing of a new constitutional declaration by Morsi giving himself sweeping powers, citing "an attempt to fulfill demands for justice and protect a transition to a constitutional democracy," raised the stakes against the Muslim Brotherhood domestically and regionally.⁴⁷⁷ In addition, the leaked news of an alleged meeting between Quds Force Commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Command (IRGC) Qassem Suleimani and Egyptian officials led to further fears that the Brotherhood was treading a similar line like that of Iran by building parallel institutions and

⁴⁷⁴ Quoted in Esfandiary. Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ An Egyptian diplomat told me they made a request for a waiver to buy Iranian gas but the United States delayed the response, which Egypt understood as a rejection.

⁴⁷⁶ Stephen Zunes, "Why Egypt Will Not Turn Into Another Iran," *Huffington Post*, May 25, 2011, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/stephen-zunes/why-israel-will-not-turn- b 821684.html>
Con Coughlin, "Egyptians want democracy, but is their country turning into Iran?" *The Telegraph*, November 29, 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/egypt/9711694/Egyptians-want-democracy-but-is-their-country-turning-into-Iran.html>

⁴⁷⁷ David Kirkpatrick and May El Sheikh, "Citing Deadlock, Egypt's Leader Seizes New Power and Plans Mubarak Retrial," *New York Times*, November 22, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/23/world/middleeast/egypts-president-morsi-gives-himself-new-powers.html>

security forces loyal to them. The Times of London reported that Suleimani discussed the security and intelligence experience of the Iranians, and that a member of the MB said “the meeting was intended to send a message to America, which is putting pressure on the Egyptian government, that we should be allowed to have other alliances with anyone we please.”⁴⁷⁸ A news story at Al Arabiya later reported that Egypt’s Minister of Interior was dismissed for his opposition to the rapprochement with Iran, which was unconfirmed.⁴⁷⁹ The Egyptian government and the Muslim Brotherhood denied the meeting with Suleimani took place and attributed these sensational claims “to smear the president, who is on the defensive after opposition protests” against his domestic policies and decisions.⁴⁸⁰

Egyptian-Iranian engagement continued with the visit of Iran’s President Ahmadinejad to Cairo marking the first visit by a sitting president since the 1979 revolution. Ahmadinejad’s three-day visit to attend the OIC summit in Cairo was intended to encourage a thaw and further discuss developing bilateral relations. Nonetheless, the visit did not go as smoothly as hoped; one headline captured it, “Ahmadinejad kissed and scolded in Egypt.”⁴⁸¹ The Iranian president received a state welcome by Morsi but was rebuked by Sheikh al-Azhar, Ahmed al-Tayeb, and his colleagues. In untypical official sectarian language from al-Azhar, the institution highlighted Iran’s destructive role in Syria, its harassment to Bahrain, and use of Shiism to infiltrate and influence Sunni states. Ahmadinejad was further humiliated when men threw shoes at him while visiting Islamic Cairo, in a show of disdain to Iran’s policies in the region and an unwelcome note to Shiism in Egypt.⁴⁸² The Iranian president’s visit came after a conference was organized in Cairo in January to discuss the status and discrimination against the Arabs of Ahwaz in the oil-rich Khuzestan province in

⁴⁷⁸ Hugh Tomlinson, “Iranian spy chief’s visit to Cairo was meant to ‘send a message to America,’” *The Times*, January 8, 2013, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/middleeast/article3650461.ece>

⁴⁷⁹ “Egypt’s ex-minister replaced for opposing rapprochement with Iran,” *Al Arabiya*, January 10, 2013, http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2013/01/10/259608.html?fb_action_ids=4785255682049&fb_action_types=og.recommends&fb_source=aggregation&fb_aggregation_id=288381481237582

⁴⁸⁰ Ian Black, “Iran struggles to woo reluctant Egypt,” *The Guardian*, January 15, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/on-the-middle-east/2013/jan/15/egypt-iran-morsi>

⁴⁸¹ Tom Perry and Yasmine Saleh, “Iran’s Ahmadinejad kissed and scolded in Egypt,” *Reuters*, February 5, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-iran-idUSBRE9140EK20130205>

⁴⁸² Adam Makary, “Shoes hurled at Iranian President Ahmadinejad during trip to Cairo,” *CNN*, February 7, 2013, <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/02/06/world/meast/egypt-ahmadinejad-shoe-attack/>

Iran. The Ahwaz conference coincided with the visit of Iran's foreign minister Salehi and was opened by a senior aide to Morsi and leader of a Salafi party.⁴⁸³

The main outcome of the Egyptian-Iranian discussions was the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to promote tourism between the two countries. In a sign of détente, the Iranians decided to allow Egyptians to travel visa-free to Iran, and Egypt announced it will allow three government travel agencies to organize tourism packages for Iranians. The regulations restricted Iranian tourists from visiting Cairo, while allowing them access to ancient pharaonic sites in Upper Egypt and Red Sea resorts. In April 2013, a charter flight carrying Iranian tourists arrived in Aswan.⁴⁸⁴ The arrival of Iranian tourism was met with unprecedented public anti-Shiite discourse led by Egypt's Salafists. A group of Salafi protesters chanted against the attendance of an Iranian diplomat to a conference at al-Azhar university. The main slogans were "Islam is innocent of Shias," "we reject the existence of Iranian Shias in Egypt," and "No to Iranian tourism in Egypt."⁴⁸⁵

The protesters moved to Iran's interest section in Cairo calling for expelling Iran's diplomats and stopping the Shiite 'invasion' of Egypt through tourism. The ultraconservative protesters warned the Muslim Brotherhood against any normalization with Iran and that Shiites are not welcome in Egypt.⁴⁸⁶ The Salafi Call and its political arm, the Nour party led the effort to reveal the reality of Shiism and their dangers to the Arab and Sunni world through the spread of Shiism. As explained by Sheikh Sherif El-Hawary, one of Salafi Call's leading members, "Egypt is a real catch because the Shiites see it as the main base for Sunni Islam, which they want to overtake. They believe their

⁴⁸³ Mustafa Salama, "Ahwaz: Iranian racial oppression opposed in Egypt," *Daily News Egypt*, January 14, 2013, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/01/14/ahwaz-iranian-racial-oppression-opposed-in-egypt/>

⁴⁸⁴ See: "Iran-Egypt relations on the mend: 1st Tehran-bound flight leaves Cairo." *Ahram Online*, March 30, 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/68036.aspx>; Nada Badawi, "Egypt restricts Iranian tourists from visiting Shia sites," *Daily News Egypt*, April 2, 2013, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/04/02/egypt-restricts-iranian-tourists-from-visiting-shia-sites/>

⁴⁸⁵ "Salafis protest Iranian diplomat's visit to Al-Azhar University," *Al Masr Al Youm*, March 29, 2013, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/salafis-protest-iranian-diplomat-s-visit-al-azhar-university>

⁴⁸⁶ Ahmed Aboulenein, "Salafis protest Shi'a 'invasion'," *Daily News Egypt*, April 5, 2013, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/04/05/salafis-protest-shia-invasion/>; "Al Shia Lan Yadkhola Masr we Law Ala Dema'na" [Shiites won't enter Egypt if over our blood], *YouTube*, May 9, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vFFB7u3VEiY>

Mahdi [twelfth Imam] will only appear once Egypt is in their reach, but God willing, this will not take root.”⁴⁸⁷

Along the same line, a spokesperson for Shiites in Egypt, argued that Iranians attempt to spread the Shiite political Islam indoctrinated by Ayatollah Khomeini, which could be treacherous. In an ironic statement, he “called on Salafists and Wahhabis to organize protests outside the Iranian embassy in Cairo,” and demand the expulsion of its envoy.⁴⁸⁸ The discussion moved from the streets to Egypt’s Upper House of Parliament where the culture and tourism committee had a heated debate about the impact of Iran’s tourists on Egypt. Tharwat Abdallah of the Nour party emphasized the danger this poses to national security as it could lead to Egyptians converting to Shiism. He even went as far as saying that “Shias are more dangerous than naked women,” and calling on the Morsi government to limit the relationship with Iran as it was under former president Mubarak.⁴⁸⁹

The ongoing daily atrocities committed by the Syrian regime and its allies Iran and Hezbollah against the Syrian people, as well as the slow thaw of relations between Cairo and Tehran played in favor of the sectarian narrative advanced by Saudi Arabi and the Salafists. Portraying the Syrian regime as Alawite – an offshoot of Shiism – made it easier to paint the picture as war between Sunnis and Shiites in Syria and to galvanize support based on such notion. To spite Iran and accommodate their base of support, Egyptian Salafist and hardline preachers organized a rally at Cairo stadium calling for jihad in Syria. Morsi attended the rally announcing cutting ties with Syria and denouncing Hezbollah’s involvement in the fight alongside Bashar al Assad.

Despite not endorsing the call for jihad, Morsi’s appearance at the rally “was seen as implicit backing of the clerics’ message [for jihad],” especially after a senior aide to Morsi announced that “while Egypt was not encouraging citizens to travel to Syria to help rebels, they were free to do so and the state would take no action against them.”⁴⁹⁰ The implicit endorsement by the Muslim

⁴⁸⁷ “Salafists to hold conference against ‘spread of Shia doctrine in Egypt’,” *Ahram Online*, April 4, 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/68461.aspx>

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁹ “Shias are more dangerous than naked women: Salafist MPs,” *Ahram Online*, May 13, 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/71355.aspx>

⁴⁹⁰ Hamza Hindawi, “Egypt seen to give nod toward jihadis on Syria,” *Associated Press*, June 16, 2013, <https://www.yahoo.com/news/egypt-seen-nod-toward-jihadis-syria-202608813.html?ref=gs>. See also: Alastair

Brotherhood and Morsi for the growing sectarian rhetoric and conforming to their ultraconservative allies could be seen as a concession to the Salafists after the “government's moves to improve ties with Shiite Iran,” and to win their support “ahead of giant anti-Morsi demonstrations planned by his opponents on June 30.”⁴⁹¹

The call for jihad and incitements against Shiites led a group of extremists to murder four Egyptian Shiites in cold-blood. Despite denying responsibility in instigating such a horrific act, the Salafi Call and Salafi Nour party were “blamed for the rising extremist rhetoric against Shia Muslims,” as posters demonizing Shiism and its followers appeared in several Egyptian cities bearing the logo of both organizations.⁴⁹² In a statement by Human Rights Watch, it condemned the weak official response and failure of the police to intervene despite prior knowledge of mounting incitement against Shiites in the village. It added that “Shia in Egypt have felt increasingly at risk after more than a year of mounting anti-Shia invective by Salafi sheikhs, Muslim Brotherhood members, and Al Azhar.”⁴⁹³

The Fall of the Brotherhood and the Ouster of Morsi

While Morsi and the MB were attempting to charter a new path for Egypt's foreign policy, their domestic political strategy was under pressure and criticism from different groups; namely, their allies the Salafists, the National Salvation Front (NSF), and the military.⁴⁹⁴ As discussed above, the Salafi Nour party took issue with Morsi's coziness toward the Iranians and the potential impact of interaction with the Shiite country. They also believed the MB was not sincere in applying Islamic Law, *Shari'a*, and created a divisive environment. On the other hand, the National Salvation Front (NSF) and other revolutionary groups believed Morsi “broke his promise of an

Macdonald and Maggie Fick, “Egypt's Brotherhood joins Sunni front over Syria,” *Reuters*, June 14, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-sectarian-idUSBRE95D0YI20130614>

⁴⁹¹ Hindawi. Ibid.

⁴⁹² Ayat al-Tawy, “Egypt's Islamists under fire over Shia mob killings,” *Ahram Online*, June 24, 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/74821.aspx>

⁴⁹³ “Egypt: Lynching of Shia Follows Months of Hate Speech,” *Human Rights Watch*, June 27, 2013, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/06/27/egypt-lynching-shia-follows-months-hate-speech>

⁴⁹⁴ The National Salvation Front was formed in November 2012 after Morsi's Constitutional Declaration. It comprised of a wide range of public figures and political parties, and led by former IAEA chief and Nobel Laureate Mohammed ElBaradei. For more on the group see:

“Profile: Egypt National Salvation Front,” *BBC*, December 10, 2012, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-20667661>; “Egypt's National Salvation Front sets five demands for President Morsi,” *Ahram Online*, January 26, 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/63343.aspx>

inclusive government and repeatedly demonized his opposition as traitors.”⁴⁹⁵ The ailing economy and shortages of electricity and fuel further angered the population and added to their mounting discontent. By the spring of 2013, “more than half of his [Morsi] score of official advisers had abandoned him, along with his vice-president, his minister of justice and numerous sundry bureaucrats.”⁴⁹⁶ In a resignation letter by one of Morsi’s senior legal advisors, he cited “a lack of vision; failure to achieve revolutionary goals or to empower the Egyptian youth; failure to accommodate or even consult political opponents; and the overweening influence of Mr. Morsi’s fellow Muslim Brothers in devising policy.”⁴⁹⁷ He added that Morsi’s pandering to Iran and its tourists was dangerous in that it could make Egypt susceptible to Iran’s expansionist regional schemes.

For their part, the military, widely recognized as Egypt’s most powerful institution since the 1952 Free Officers’ coup, was in a latent mood during Morsi’s presidency. During his one year in office, Morsi and the MB “thought they had tamed Egypt’s military, forcing out top generals and reaching a deal with their successors that protected the armed forces from civilian oversight.”⁴⁹⁸ Nonetheless, “the military remain[ed] master of its own destiny and a rival source of authority,”⁴⁹⁹ especially with expansive political and economic privileges to protect. The growing domestic strife under Morsi prompted the military, in January 2013, to call for unity and consensus to pass the turbulent times. However, it was Morsi’s attendance at a rally full of hardliners and his implicit support for jihad in Syria that brought the army to the tipping point as explained by an officer saying that “the armed forces were very alarmed by the Syrian conference at a time the state was going through a major political crisis.”⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁵ David Kirkpatrick, “Army Ousts Egypt’s President; Morsi is Taken into Military Custody,” *New York Times*, July 3, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/04/world/middleeast/egypt.html?hp&_r=2&

⁴⁹⁶ “Pious politics: President Muhammed Morsi’s efforts to befriend Iran upset his other allies,” *The Economist*, May 4, 2013, <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21577117-president-muhammad-morsis-efforts-befriend-iran-upset-his-other-allies-pious>

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Ben Hubbard, “Military Reasserts Its Allegiance to Its Privileges,” *New York Times*, July 3, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/04/world/middleeast/Egyptian-military-reasserts-its-allegiance-to-its-privileges.html?action=click&contentCollection=Middle%20East&module=RelatedCoverage®ion=Marginalia&pgtype=article>

⁴⁹⁹ “Egypt’s Army Says Morsi Role at Syria Rally Seen as Turning Point,” *Reuters*, July 2, 2013, <http://www.voanews.com/a/egypt-army-says-morsi-role-at-syria-rally-seen-as-turning-point/1693911.html>

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

On June 30, 2013, huge demonstrations took to the streets against the Muslim Brotherhood calling for early presidential elections. The military and police protected the protesters and the next day the SCAF issued a 48-hour ultimatum to reach a solution or it will intervene, which the MB and Morsi dismissed. By the end of the day on July 3, the military had ousted Morsi and put many of his senior aides and MB leaders in custody or under house arrest. The Defense Minister, Abdul Fattah al Sisi, announced a transitional roadmap for post-Morsi Egypt, and by design or coincidence a year later he would become Egypt's new president.

Conclusion

The brief tenure of Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood highlights the importance of a multiple level of analysis approach to foreign policy. The rise of the Brotherhood occurred at a time of regional and domestic fluidity and change, where the Arab uprisings took most of the regional and international powers by surprise especially the United States. Despite the calls for domestic reform and change, very little was done to ensure that anti-Mubarak demands were met. The competing narratives of the military, the Islamists, the remnants of Mubarak's regime and the unorganized revolutionary forces played a role in the failure to change. Despite the victory of the MB, their divisive consolidative approach contributed to derailing the process.

Egypt's foreign policy suffered from competing internal narratives as well as regional changes. Despite the recognizable influence of the Muslim Brotherhood on Egypt's political scene, their foreign policy was not part of a grand Islamist project or any project, for that matter. In fact, there was a rare consensus across Egypt's various political camps concerning the need to regain the country's regional leadership role as well as ending one-sided dependency on the West, as these were seen as the legacies of Sadat and Mubarak. Morsi and the Brotherhood thought that the changing domestic dynamics and fluid regional order would enable them to modify Egypt's foreign policy approaches. As much as they were compelled to accept Egypt's international obligations, and on top of it the peace with Israel, Morsi and the MB believed they could build new and stronger bridges with countries like Turkey, Qatar and Iran. However, the nascent steps and gestures of Egyptian-Iranian rapprochement were faced with regional anxiety from Egypt's traditional allies and domestic hostility from the Salafists.

Morsi's foreign policy symbolism might have given his supporters the impression that Egypt was moving toward a new path. However, nothing much changed – no alliance was built with Hamas or Iran, and Egypt's regional leadership aspirations were devoid of substance. The short-lived attempt at reorienting Egypt's foreign policy seemed at odds with Egypt's limited capabilities. As Nael Shama observed, Egypt “under Morsi...was hostage to its urgent economic needs,” struggling to stay solvent and adjusting to a new domestic political reality.⁵⁰¹ The Brotherhood thought a new foreign policy path would accrue domestic and international legitimacy as well as foreign funding to stabilize the country. While “diversifying international partners certainly appears a sensible way to enhance its [Egypt's] negotiating position,” Egypt was too dependent on financial assistance from the Gulf states, the United States, and the EU.⁵⁰² Thus, any extreme change in policy at such a time would not have been in Egypt's interest.

⁵⁰¹ Nael Shama. *Egyptian Foreign Policy from Mubarak to Morsi: Against the National Interest*. London: Routledge, 2013, p. 230

⁵⁰² Grimm and Roll. “Egyptian Foreign Policy under Morsi.” *Ibid.*

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This chapter serves as an overall conclusion to this dissertation. It sums up the empirical findings and highlights how neo-classical realism can further explain foreign policy decisions by employing the role of domestic politics and leadership as integral parts to the analysis. Moreover, by adding Schweller's balance of interest approach, which is understudied on the international level and almost never tested in the Middle East, we can reach some conclusions and explanations of state behavior that would not be otherwise attainable using balance of power and/or balance of threat approaches alone.

The dissertation examined Egypt's foreign policy toward Iran and sought to answer the main question of why Egypt has had prolonged enmity and stagnation in its policy and relationship with Iran. As discussed in the introduction of this dissertation, existing research on this topic has been limited and has relied solely on the application of realist or constructivist theories for explanation. On their own, these theories do not adequately address the reality and complexity of foreign policy making in Egypt as they focused on some variables and dismissed others. Analyzing foreign policy outcomes using one variable or approach takes away from the ability to understand a country's behavior and foreign policy making process. Thus, this research used a combination of neoclassical realism as well as balance of interest as the framework for a more comprehensive analysis. This eclectic approach combining leadership and structural conditions as the main variables proved to be a much more useful frame for explaining the calculations of Egypt's foreign policy decisions. In particular, the interaction of structural conditions and leadership perceptions helped explain the foreign policy behavior of Egypt toward Iran. Neoclassical realism proved to be a useful approach in understanding foreign policy through integrating external as well as internal variables. Despite the presence of some scholars within the NCR field who prioritize material factors over domestic ones and vice versa, the integration of multiple levels of analysis and a nuanced framework is a valuable contribution to the study of IR and foreign policy, especially in authoritarian and Third World countries.

Throughout the research, it was clear that Egyptian leaders' policies toward Iran were influenced by their personal views and perceptions of Iran as well as the regional/international distribution of power. The internal dynamics, whether the Islamist threat or economic dependency, were secondary. If the interaction among states is what defines the international system, then the

individuals and institutions that run these states are important variables in explaining the international system and must be an integral component of the analytical framework. Nonetheless, leaders do not operate in a vacuum or reign free of challenges, and even in authoritarian and Third World countries where they have seemingly undisputed powers, they are still prone to certain domestic as well as external constraints. I argue that as much as leaders' perceptions are important – and while they possess space for maneuverability based on their understanding of the system, the structure of the internal dynamics or external system will refine and in some cases, alter their decisions. The Egyptian-Iranian case study poses important questions regarding the role of the leadership's views and beliefs in shaping Egypt's foreign policy. It also shows that no matter what leaders' perceptions are, at some point they must refine them due to system constraints, be they internal or external.

Another question that arose is whether a change in one of variable alone—or all of them—leads to a change in a country's foreign policy and alliances? The research argued that a change in one variable alone is enough for a direct change in policy or relations between both nations, but it did open space for maneuver and/or adjustment in behavior at times. What seemed consistent across the study was the inevitable role of structural conditions on Egypt's foreign policy. In addition, I observed that the attitude of Egyptian leaders toward Iran change negatively or positively based on how each of them individually perceived Iran and its role in their domestic, regional and international strategy.

Egyptian presidents had a monopoly to shape the general direction of foreign policy with some input from the security and intelligence establishments and foreign ministry bureaucrats. This autonomy in determining foreign policy came with certain geo-political and geo-economic restrictions, which dictated specific policies. Hence, all Egypt's leaders attempted to manipulate foreign policy to serve domestic economic and legitimacy needs that would have been otherwise difficult to handle.

The research demonstrated that all Egyptian presidents benefited from or were directly affected by the political and social contexts in which they governed. Nasser's risk-taking could not have succeeded without Cold War competition and the popularity he gained as champion of Arab nationalism, which allowed him to act freely from domestic constraints. Similarly, Sadat could not

have engaged in his electric shock policies if it were not for the regional and international context that allowed him such space to lead Egypt toward peace with Israel. On the other hand, Mubarak would not have been so cautious and risk-averse if he was not worried about certain domestic challenges, namely the rise of radical Islamists and Egypt's solvency. As for Morsi's short tenure, the symbolism of his 'open' foreign policy was a result of the revolutionary chaos post-Mubarak. However, this changed toward the end of his short-lived presidency, after just one year domestic political forces united against his and the MB's perceived authoritarian decisions. Thus, it is important not to over-rely on psychological or idiosyncratic factors alone when analyzing foreign policy, since even the greatest of leaders must act and be wary of their specific environment in order to rule steadily.

This leads to another observation of this study, which is the prevalence of the bandwagon for profit approach on the foreign policy of Egypt in general and towards Iran in particular. As discussed in the empirical chapters, all leaders looked for ways to maintain their regime's interests and survival by invoking policies to maximize benefits and rewards even if it meant demonizing Iran and exaggerating its threat. Iran did not constitute a direct military threat to Egypt but maintaining unfriendly relations guaranteed Cairo's leaders steady relations with its Gulf patrons and a flow of much-needed economic aid. The exception to this was Egypt-Iran relations under Sadat, which saw Cairo joining Tehran's bandwagon with Washington and improving relations with Iran based on a win-win equation.

During the time of King Farouk of Egypt, the relationship with Iran was seen as an opportunity to build a case for proclaiming Egypt as the Caliphate after the fall of the Ottomans in WWI. The Shiite beliefs of Iran's leaders and people did not stop al-Azhar from approving the marriage of Iran's Crown Prince to the sister of Egypt's King. In fact, al-Azhar thought it would be an opportunity to start a rapprochement between the two main sects of Islam, Sunnism and Shiism, which would further strengthen Egypt's claim for Islamic leadership and lobbying for establishing a Cairo-based Caliphate. Despite the quick end of the marriage, relations did not sour. Both countries were busy struggling against British foreign influence and were consumed in other domestic challenges. This minimized any opportunities for collaboration and consolidation of efforts against the British between both countries. However, the visit of Mohamed Mossadegh to Cairo in 1951 after his decision to nationalize Iran's oil coincided with Egypt's decision to

abrogate the 1936 agreement with Britain. Mossadegh was welcomed with fanfare from both the Egyptian government and the people, and culminated his trip with signing a friendship agreement.

By the time Nasser consolidated power in 1954, the nationalist Mossadegh was already ousted. Nasser, who believed in ridding the region of foreign interference, saw the Shah of Iran, brought back to power by a CIA-backed coup in 1953, as a puppet of imperial powers. Two main factors, therefore, could be attributed to the collision of Nasser and the Shah. First, they represented opposing views and values with regards to the international and regional system, which was influenced by Cold War politics as well as their personal beliefs. Nasser championed a non-alignment policy, although he later leaned on the Soviet Union for military and economic support, while the Shah was a close American ally in the region. Second, both leaders sought political legitimization of their rule through invoking nationalist policies. Nasser used Arabism as a tool to consolidate his leadership and legitimacy within Egypt and beyond, while the Shah appealed to Persian nationalism as a tool to create a modern political populist environment.

Nasser's perceived triumph and survival against the tripartite attack of the 1956 Suez War, coupled with growing pro-Nasserite groups in the Arab world, further emboldened him. Egypt's expanding influence and rhetoric raised fears and worries among some Arab countries, especially those in the Gulf, a reality which was manipulated by the Shah to portray Nasser as the real threat for the region. The Shah's statement about Iran's relations with Israel represented the appropriate moment for Nasser to cut relations with Iran in 1960. Nasser's excuse was the Shah's adherence to western pressures and the danger it posed to Arabs especially after normalizing with Nasser's enemy, Israel. It was a show of power in shaming those who recognize Israel and embrace western alliances. Attacking and discrediting the Shah, from a non-Arab state, was a scarecrow tactic to double down on Arab unity beliefs, and an effort by Nasser to make the Gulf monarchies fearful of Iran, which ultimately backfired with Egypt's quagmire in Yemen and the catastrophic defeat of 1967. It wasn't until after Nasser's defeat that he started moderating his rhetoric, which led to starting a thaw with the Arab Gulf states and Iran for the sake of preparing for war against Israel.

Egypt's relations with Iran saw the closest cooperation under President Sadat. The relationship was built around the shared regional and international views of both leaders. Sadat's interest in regaining Sinai, joining the western camp and achieving peace with Israel was welcomed by the

Shah who saw developing relations with Egypt as a way to pacify the fears of Arab Gulf states and have a leading role in the Arab-dominant region. The personal relationship of both leaders allowed for creating back channels with both the United States and Israel, as well as starting several economic and trade agreements and enterprises after the 1973 War. Iran contributed financially in clearing the Suez Canal as well as the reconstruction of damaged cities along the waterway, and by the end of the 1970's Iran was the third biggest investor in Egypt after Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The personal connection between Sadat and the Shah did not trickle down to the people's level, however, for better understanding of each other's cultures and norms. The close relationship was hindered, moreover, after the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran. Ayatollah Khomeini saw Sadat as a traitor to both Islam and Iran by signing a peace treaty with Israel and for hosting the ousted shah. On the other hand, Sadat vilified Khomeini's rhetoric as non-Islamic and an instigator of chaos in the region. Unlike Nasser who used Arabism, Khomeini used Islam as a populist approach to call for the annihilation of Israel, anti-American policies and empowering Islamic revivalism across the region. For the new leaders in Iran, Islamism was the only tool they could employ to gain access and support within the Arab and Muslim world.

Preconceived notions and regional and international changes played a role in framing the relationship with Iran under Hosni Mubarak. As Vice President under Sadat, he witnessed the close relationship between Sadat and the Shah. In fact, Mubarak visited Tehran in late 1978 to update the Shah on the Camp David negotiations and to show support to the Shah who was facing growing opposition and protests. Even though he treaded carefully trying to mend Egypt's relations in the region during his first couple of years as president, Mubarak sided with Iraq against Iran through selling arms and by allowing Saddam Hussein to conscribe many Egyptian workers to join the war. However, with time and a thaw in relations between Iran and its Arab neighbors across the Gulf, Mubarak became amenable to exchanging ambassadors and running interest sections in both capitals. Nonetheless, his mistrust, personal dignity, and the security sector's influence in addition to Egypt's regional and international alliances continued to hinder possibilities for normalization with Tehran. Moreover, the rise of Iran following the start of the Iraq War in 2003 through its long reach with proxies in Lebanon, Iraq and Syria as well as support to resistance groups like Hezbollah and Hamas represented a new challenge to Middle Eastern regional security. Iran's nuclear program and its alleged weapons component added to the growing fears of not only the Arab world but to Israel and America as well. However, the closest moments for the full

resumption of relations between both countries came under Mohamed Khatami in 2004 and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2007. In both instances, Egypt's security services vetoed negotiations over the lack of cooperation from Iran on delivering wanted extremists hiding in Tehran, in addition to concerns about Shiite proselytization.

The new changes delivered by the Arab uprisings and the rise of an Islamist government in Egypt led by the Muslim Brotherhood gave Iran hope to finally normalize relations with Egypt. At the time, Iran was under severe sanctions and isolation by the West while locked in a prolonged nuclear negotiation with the six world powers. An opening with Egypt would give Iran breathing room and show it was not totally isolated. Moreover, full relations with Egypt could help in case the Syrian regime would fall and be lost as an Arab ally to Iran. At the same time, the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and their promise to pursue independent foreign policy that would respect Egypt's national interests was a good sign for Iran. In fact, the Brotherhood looked at better relations with Hamas and Iran as two files that would distinguish them from the Mubarak regime. The exchange of visits by Morsi and Ahmadinejad were historic, and Morsi's initiative to include Iran as part of a regional quartet on Syria was a bold move, though met with anxiety by Egypt's traditional Gulf allies. Cairo was quick to respond by assuring them that any prospective relations with Iran would not detract from Egypt's commitments to the security and stability of the Arab Gulf states. Domestically, unlike the discouraging role for a thaw with Iran played by the security services under Mubarak, during the Morsi era the Salafi Nour party led this fight. The Salafists, traditionally having close ties to Saudi Arabia and known cooperation with Egyptian state security, organized protests and held conferences to warn against any normalization with Iran. They used sectarian rhetoric to galvanize the Egyptian people against Shiites and highlight Iranian support to the Syria's regime killing its Sunni citizens. The Salafists demanded a halt to the nascent Iranian tourism to Egypt initiative on fears of increasing Shiite influence and money that would alter Egypt's Sunni culture and traditions.

In short, the leadership role is critical and necessary in understanding a state's foreign policy behavior; however, their role should not be exaggerated so as to dismiss other equally important variables like the domestic and structural environments. NCR's contribution by highlighting a multi-variable approach is indeed useful but requires further testing in the Middle East. There is very little area studies and theoretical work that utilizes NCR to analyze foreign policies of Middle

Eastern states. Moreover, even though Schweller's bandwagon for rewards approach is a useful theory that has shed light on Egypt's foreign policy vis-a-vis Iran, further research is needed to determine the validity of this approach on other cases of Egypt's foreign policy, or generally as a tool for understanding regional dynamics in the Middle East. Schweller only applied his approach on the international level and among world powers, and for this approach to acquire wider acknowledgement and become a go-to tool like balance of power or balance of threat, it needs to be applied on regional and state levels as well.

Egyptian-Iranian relations will continue to be an important field of study for practitioners and academics of foreign policy and International Relations of the Middle East. Future changes in this bilateral relationship will require, among other things, significant political will on both sides, at the highest levels. Improved relations between Egypt and Iran could be not just mutually beneficial, but of benefit to the region as well. There is room for dialogue and cooperation, but this must come with confidence-building measures and proposals based on win-win approaches instead of zero-sum assumptions that regional players too often put forward as disincentives. The future of bilateral relations and scenarios related to shifting alliances and regional stability offers several areas for additional research.

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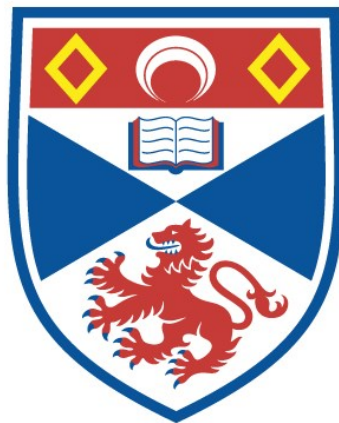
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BANDWAGON FOR PROFIT:
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Ahmed Morsy

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