Egypt-Israeli Conflict And The West- Essay, Research Paper

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The History of the conflict in the Middle East is long and

well documented. To both, and to many biased observers the history

of the Egyptian/Israeli conflict is very one sided, with one

government, or one people causing the continued wars between the

two neighboring states. But, as any social scientist of any reputation

will state, all international conflicts have more than one side, and

usually are the result of events surrounding, and extending over the

parties involved. Thus, using this theory as a basis, we must assume

that the conflict between Israel and Egypt is more complicated than a

partial observer would see it. For the purpose of this paper, we are

going to examine the basic factors of Egypt’s Involvement and conflict

with Israel, with some emphasis on the involvement of the United

State, and the Western Nation in this conflict. Also, I wish to pay

particular attention to the question of who, or what brought these

countries into conflict. Were they both victims of their situation, or

did they become actively involved in promoting conflict, or perhaps a

third party source, such as the US pushed them into conflict?

In 1948, the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of

Israel was read by David Ben-Gurion in Tel Aviv. The Egyptians, like

most of the Arab states saw this as a creation of a Western State,

backed by the British Empire, and thus an imperialistic entity in the

Arab homeland. Considering the past 20 years of the Egyptian state,

and of most of the Arab nations, was a continual conflict again

imperial powers, the Egyptian were naturally weary and afraid of any

new imperialistic powers developing in the Middle East. In September

1947, the League of Arab States decided to resist by force the plan

for the partition of Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish State, and

when the Jewish state was created, the armies of the various Arab

states entered into Palestine to save the country for the Arabs again

“Zionist” aggression. The Arabs were defeated and the Arab Countries

saved a small amount of land, the Transjordon, and the West Bank.

Similarly Egypt saved strip of territory around Gaza.

The causes of this war, and Egypt’s involved can be examined

in several ways. Obviously, the creation of the State of Israel by

Ben-Gurion and his supporters provided a excuse for the Arab Nations,

and Egypt to attack the Jewish population in Israel. As mentioned, the

Egyptians saw the formation of Israel as an Imperialist state, and

they were defending the land for the Palestinians, and more

importantly for the newly developing arab unity. While the United

States was not actively involved in the war, either by providing arms

or providing much assistance, their actions did create an interesting

and volatile atmosphere. As soon as the state of Israel was created,

the United State quickly recognized the state and started diplomatic

relations with the newly formed government. At the same time, the USSR

recognized Israel, not wishing the US to be seen as the champion for

the newly found state. Although there is no definitive proof, one can

assume that Egypt, and the rest of the Arab nations felt the need to

quickly react to the situation, in almost a type of fear that powers

outside their Arab influence, such as the United States were quickly

impeding on their territory, by using Israel as a means of their

peaceful aggression.

Still, Egypt was clearly the main aggressor in this instance,

and was not defending their own territory, but instead attempting to

obtain territory, which they did succeed in acquiring, through the

Gaza Strip. The Egyptian actions quickly set the tone of conflict in

the Middle East, giving the Israelis no option but the take an initial

purely military response in defense of their newly formed state. In

the minds of the Israeli leaders, Egypt was nothing but a threat to

the existence of the Jewish state, and thus, perhaps rightly, should

only be dealt with as an enemy.

From the outcome of this poorly prepared war emerged Gamal

Abdul Nasser, who commanded an Egyptian Army in Palestine. He

organized a clandestine group inside the army called the Free

Officers. After the war against Israel, the Free Officers began to

plan for a revolutionary overthrow of the government. In 1949 nine of

the Free Officers formed the Committee of the Free officers’ Movement

and in 1950 Nasser was elected chairman. In 1952, the Free Officers

Movement led a revolution in Egypt and took power, under the newly

formed Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) , with Muhammad Naguib as

president and commander in Chief. Almost all leader in the RCC were

soldiers, many who had fought in the 1948 war and this seriously

affected the outlook of them towards Israel, and their policies

towards Israel as a state. Most of them had some type of conflicts

with the British and were totally, and completely against colonial

power in the Middle East, of any kind.

While Naguib was the head of the RCC and the government,

Nasser was the real power behind Egypt. Although the first 2 years of

the RCC’s existence was a struggle of power, Nasser eventually won,

and the Egyptian foreign policy was dictated by him. Within a few

months Naguib officially began prime minister, minister of war,

commander in chief and the president of the RCC. Interestingly enough,

Nasser took no direct actions during the next few years against

Israel, but instead focused on internal colonization, by trying to get

the British out.

It should be mentioned that around this time, the great

contracts against the USSR were formed and implemented. The North

Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Southeast Treaty organization

were supposed to contain the Soviet Union in the west and east. The

Baghdad pact, brought Britain, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and Iraq to form

a barrier on the USSR’s south borders. It seems that Nasser failed to

see this importance, even when Britain initially refused to talk about

leaving Egypt until Nasser agreed to an alliance. This decision

affected him later, when he sough foreign aid.The United States seeing

the growing cold war conflict in this region sought to use the

conflict between Israel & Egypt to its advantage. While they didn’t

wish to offend either side, at the time, they couldn’t yet pledge

allegiance to either side.

When in 1955, after the British had agree to eventually leave

the Canal Area, Nasser started to become convinced once again that

Egypt had to arm to defend itself against Israel. Still, the first

attack in 1955 was Israel, when they attacked Egyptian Military

outposts in Gaza. Quickly, realizing his possible situation, Nasser

sought western aid only to find that neither the U.S., France or

Britain was willing to help. Because Nasser had refused to join an

anti-USSR alliance, he was seen as a threat, especially by people such

as the Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. Nasser, then turned to

the USSR and accepted soviet weapons, which put them directly against

the western push for influence in the Middle East. This decision

effected Nasser influence on the Western powers for it made sure than

in later years that Israel, and not Egypt would get assistance from

the United States or Britain. Yet, they he had no choice, except to

arm himself in this manner.

In Secret Britain, the United States and Israel agreed to

allow Israel to attack the Canal from across the Sinai Desert. When

Israel neared the canal, Britain and France would issue an ultimatum

for an Egpytian and Israeli withdrawal from both sides of the Canal,

and Anglo-French force would then occupy the canal and prevent further

fighting, and keep in open for shipping. Israel did not agree to this

plan, unless first Britain and France agreed to destroy the Egyptian

Air Force. British Bombing did destroy the Egyptian Airforce and

Israel occupied Sinai. The United States was angered because it had

not been informed by its allies of the invasion, and realized that it

could not allow the Soviet Union to appear as the champion of the

Third World against Western Imperialism. Thus, the US put pressure on

the British and French to withdraw.

While France and Britain withdrew, Israel was very reluctant.

Eisenhower placed a great deal of pressure on Israel with withdraw

from all of its territorial acquisitions, and even threatened

sanctions if Israel did not comply. The Israelis did withdraw, but

carried out a scorched earth policy destroying everything they passed.

For the first time in a while, Egypt saw the United States as a

possible friend to their cause, and realized that the US would not

always support Israel. Nasser began to look at the United States as a

possible ally against Israel, if his connections with the USSR failed,

and saw the possible opportunity of gaining this through the

superpower conflict. Similarly, Nasser realized that his new found

status as the champion of the Arab nations against the Imperial powers

made him a more powerful figure than before.

During the mid-1960’s the Tension between Israel and Egypt

increased. In November 1966, Egypt signed a 5 year defense pact, and

Israeli forces crossed into the West Bank of Jordan and destroyed the

village of As Samu. IN 1967 Israeli leaders threatened to invade

Syria, and serious Air Battle Begain. Soon after, Egypt attacked place

troops on the border, but did not strike (although Nasser’s commanders

urged him to). Then, when in June 5, Israel launched a full-scale

attack and defeated all of Egypt’s forces within 3 hours.

After the 1967 war, the first move of the Arabs was to hold a

summit in Khartoum in September 1967. At that meeting, Saudi Arabia

agreed to give Egypt the financial aid needed to rebuild its army and

retake land lost to Israel. At this conference the Arab leaders were

united in their opposition of Israel and proclaimed what became known

as the three “no’s” of the Khartoum summit: no peace with Israel, no

negotiations, no recognition.

At the UN in November, the Security Council unanimously

adopted resolution 242 which provided the framework for the settlement

of the June 1967 War. This resolution called for Israel to withdraw

“from territories occupied in the recent conflict”, for the

termination of the state of belligerency and for the right of ALL

states to exist in that region. In 1968 Egypt agreed to accept the

resolution if Israel agreed to evacuate all occupied areas. By

accepting this agreement, for the first time Egypt recognized the

State of Israel. The rest of the Arab nations, not agreeing with this

plan, saw the Egyptian government as being a sell out. Sadly, Israel

rejected the agreement, and Nasser believed that since Israel refused

to support resolution 242, while Egypt accepted it, he had no choice

“but to support courageous resistance fighters who want to liberate

their land.” Thus, the “War of Attrition” broke out, where Egypt

attacked, through artillery Israeli forced dug along the canal. The

result was Israeli air response which virtually destroyed the Egyptian

Artillery.

During this time, the Israeli Military was supplied by the

Nixon Administration, because it supposedly regarded Israel as a

bulwark against Soviet expansion in the area. Nassar, seeing that his

chances were few, flew to Moscow and asked the Soviet Union to

establish an air defense system manned by Soviet pilots and

anti-aircraft forces protected by Soviet troops. To obtain this aid,

Nassar agree to grant the Soviet Union control over a number of

Egyptian airfields as well as operational control over a large portion

of the Egyptian. Although recent and possibly future analysis may see

otherwise, it currently seems that the Soviet Union took a calculated

risk of possible superpower confrontation over the Middle East. It

seemed possible at the time, that the two superpowers were using these

two countries as pawns in their larger game. But, when Nasser

returned, he and the Israelis accepted the Rogers Plan, and in August

of 1970, the fighting halted along the Suez Canal, and a 90 day truce

began.

This truce was criticized once again by some of the Arab

powers, including the Newly formed PLO, who openly advocated the

removal of Nasser from power. This led to a conflict between the PLO

and Egypt, and many PLO members were expelled from Egypt. During this

time, Egypt desiring a true, in conjunction with Jordan attacked PLO

and other territory bases in order that they would not jeopardize the

treaty. During this time, when Nassar was attempting to bring the PLO

together once again with the rest of the Arab world, Nassar became

sick and died.

When Nasser died, it became apparent that his successor, Anwar

as Sadat, did not intend to be another Nasser. As Sadat’s rule

progressed, it became clear that his priority was solving Egypt’s

pressing economic problems by encouraging Western financial

investment. He wished to regain relations the United State, hoping for

US investment into his country, and pushed the idea of peace as a

means for prosperity.

On February 4, 1971, Sadat announced a new peace initiative

with Israel, that called for peace in return for a partial withdraw

from Sinai. A timetable would then be set for Israel’s withdrawal from

the rest of the occupied. Egypt would reopen the canal, restore

diplomatic relations with the United. Sadat’s initiative fell on deaf

ears in Tel Aviv and in Washington. According to sources at the time,

the State Department still viewed Egypt as a threat in the cold war

conflict.

Internally, the Egyptian economy was being steadily drained by

the confrontation with Israel. Economic problems were becoming more

serious because of the tremendous amount of resources directed toward

building up the military since the June 1967 War, and it was clear

that Sadat would have to demonstrate some results from his new policy.

In the last half of 1972, there were large-scale student riots, and

some journalists came out publicly in support of the students. Thus,

Sadat felt under increasing pressure to go to war against Israel as

the only way to regain the lost territories.

On October 6, 1973, Egyptian forces launched a successful

surprise attack across the Suez Canal. The Syrians carried out an

attack on Israel at the same time. For the Arabs, it was the fasting

month of Ramadan, and for Israel it was Yom Kippur. The next day,

President Nixon formally asked Congress for emergency funds to finance

the massive airlift of arms to Israel that was already under way.

During this time, the Major Oil producers in the region cut back

production to the United States as an embargo because of these

actions.

Israel was able to counterattack and succeeded in crossing to

the west bank of the canal and surrounding the Egyptian Army. Sadat

appealed to the Soviet Union for help. On October 22, the UN Security

Council passed Resolution 338, calling for a cease-fire by all parties

within twelve hours in the positions they occupied. Egypt accepted the

cease-fire, but Israel, alleging Egyptian violations of the

cease-fire, completed the encirclement Army to the east of the canal.

The Soviet Union was furious, believing it had been

double-crossed by the United States. On October 24, the Soviet

ambassador handed Kissinger a note from Brezhnev threatening that if

the United States was not prepared to join in sending forces to impose

the cease-fire, the Soviet Union would act alone. Luckily the UN sent

a force there to enforce the cease-fire.

Meanwhile, Syria felt betrayed by Egypt because Sadat did not

inform his ally of his decision to accept the cease-fire. Two days

after Sadat, Syria accepted the cease-fire as well. The Israelis,

however, paid a heavy price for merely holding their attackers to an

inconclusive draw. The war had a devastating effect on Israel’s

economy and was followed by savage austerity measures and drastically

reduced living standards. For the first time, Israelis witnessed the

humiliating spectacle of Israeli were seen on Arab television. Also,

for the first time captured Israeli hardware was exhibited in Cairo.

Sadat’s prestige grew tremendously. The war, along with the

political moves Sadat had made previously, meant that he was totally

in control and able to implement the programs he wanted. He was the

hero of the day. In 1977 the outlook for peace between Israel and

Egypt was not good. Israel still held most of Sinai, and negotiations

had been at a stalemate since the second disengagement agreement in

1975. Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin was a hard-liner and a

supporter of Israeli expansion. He approved the development of

settlements on the occupied West Bank and reprisal raids into southern

Lebanon. After the food riots of January 1977, Sadat decided that

something dramatic had to be done, and so on November 19, 1977, in

response to an invitation from Begin, Sadat journeyed to Jerusalem,

and agreed upon peace.

Many Egyptians accepted peace with Israel if it meant

regaining Egyptian territories. Of the Arab countries, only Sudan,

Oman, and Morocco were favorable to Sadat’s trip. In the other Arab

states, there was shock and dismay. The Arabs felt that Sadat had

betrayed the cause of Arab solidarity and the Palestinians. In spite

of Sadat’s denials, the Arabs believed that he intended to go it alone

and make a separate peace with Israel.

In fact, that is what happened. In December 1977, Egypt and

Israel began peace negotiations in Cairo. These negotiations continued

on and off over the next several months, but by September 1978 it was

clear that they were deadlocked. President Jimmy Carter had become

closely involved in the negotiations. In an effort to break the

deadlock, Carter invited Sadat and Begin to Camp David. The

negotiations were tense and almost broke down several times. On

September 17, however, Carter announced that the Camp David Accords

had been reached. They consisted of two parts, the Framework for Peace

in the Middle East and the Framework for the Conclusion of a Peace

Treaty between Israel and Egypt.

The Camp David Accords made Sadat a hero in Europe and the

United States. The reaction in Egypt was generally favorable, but

there was opposition from the left. In the Arab world, Sadat was

almost universally condemned. Only Sudan issued an ambivalent

statement of support. The Arab states suspended all official aid and

severed diplomatic relations. Egypt was expelled from the Arab League,

which it was instrumental in founding, and from other Arab

institutions. Saudi Arabia withdrew the funds it had promised for

Egypt’s purchase of American fighter aircraft.

In the West, where Sadat was extolled as a hero and a champion

of peace, the Arab rejection of the Camp David Accords is often

confused with the rejection of peace. The basis for Arab rejection was

opposition to Egypt’s separate peace with Israel. Although Sadat

insisted that the treaty provided for a comprehensive settlement of

the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Arab states and the PLO saw it as a

separate peace, which Sadat had vowed he would not sign. The Arabs

believed that only a unified Arab stance and the threat of force would

persuade Israel to negotiate a settlement of the Palestinian issue

that would satisfy Palestinian demands for a homeland. Without Egypt’s

military power, the threat of force evaporated because no single Arab

state was strong enough militarily to confront Israel alone.

The Camp David Accords brought peace to Egypt but not

prosperity. With no real improvement in the economy, Sadat became

increasingly unpopular. His isolation in the Arab world was matched by

his increasing remoteness from the mass of Egyptians. While Sadat’s

critics in the Arab world remained beyond his reach, increasingly he

reacted to criticism at home by expanding censorship and jailing his

opponents. In addition, Sadat subjected the Egyptians to a series of

referenda on his actions and proposals that he invariably won by more

than 99 percent of the vote. For example, in May 1979 the Egyptian

people approved the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty by 99.9 percent of

those voting.

Sadat’s handpicked successor, Husni Mubarak, was

overwhelmingly approved in a national referendum on October 24.

Mubarak’s main concern in regard to the Israeli conflict was concerned

to regain the Sinai Peninsula for Egypt and to return his country to

the Arab fold. One of Mubarak’s first acts was to pledge to honor the

peace treaty with Israel. In April 1982, the Israeli withdrawal from

Sinai took place as scheduled. A multinational force of observers took

up positions in Sinai to monitor the peace. Egypt was allowed to

station only one army division in Sinai. Since then, Egypt has had a

decent relationship with Israel and the United States, and it has been

seen by many Arab Countries as the traitor in many circumstances.

It is perceivable that without the influence of the United

States the peace in Israel would have been different, if not sooner.

The United States, in order to push the cold war policies saw Israel

and Egypt as pawn in their global game of politics. Especially in

the early years, neither country saw the United States as a enemy nor

as a ally, and thus depended on it for little. Yet, both countries saw

the possibility of gaining resources from the great western power, or

at least its enemy the USSR.

Under Carter, however the United States, perhaps for the first

time, played a peace-making role in the Middle East. Perhaps Carter

was being the peaceful President, or more likely he realized the need

for peace in the middle east in order to lower the gas prices, and for

the US to harness the immense resources of the region.