

# UFSI Reports

EGYPT: SADAT AND AFTER

by Alan W. Horton

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**Despite stylistic differences, Mubarak's Egypt is not a break with the past. Governmental structure remains essentially authoritarian. The country's economic problems are as intractable as ever, and its infrastructure — transport, irrigation, housing — appears to be crumbling under the sheer weight of people.**

When the fateful artillery vehicle moved past the reviewing stand in Cairo on October 6, 1981, President Anwar Sadat was seated alongside his Vice-President, Hosni Mubarak, the man who was shortly to become his successor, and Defense Minister Mohamed Abu Ghazala. The vehicle stopped. An officer and some men in blue berets jumped out. Sadat stood up, perhaps an unthinking reflex, perhaps to acknowledge what he thought was a special if unorthodox greeting. The soldiers began their grim work by lobbying grenades, then ran forward firing rifles and machine pistols, one man reaching point-blank range. Five bullets hit Sadat, including one each in the breast, the neck, and the collarbone. A dozen other people were also killed. Abu Ghazala was wounded but not seriously. Mubarak was unhurt.

Thus died an extraordinary leader. At the funeral a large group of notables gathered from every corner of the world, among them three ex-presidents of the United States. The outsiders, saddened and somber, may have been puzzled at the lack of public grief shown by the Egyptian public; seldom in diplomatic circles and the international press had a Third-World leader

achieved such stature. But the fact was that Sadat had been more popular abroad than he had lately become at home. To be sure, his 11-year ascendancy had had its dramatic and popular moments — the 1973 War, the expulsion of Russian military personnel, the visit to the Knesset — but the later years, the last two in particular, had been less dramatic, less glorious. Speaking not unkindly but analytically, an Egyptian friend of mine said: "You may now add to the list of Sadat's undoubted accomplishments the ability to die at about the right time." The Sadat era, he felt, had run its course. The assassination did not constitute a coup d'état nor was it a harbinger of radical change. Quite simply, and contrary to assassins' expectations, it signaled not an uprising but an unexpected and even useful opportunity for a new administration and some new faces.

Some aspects of those early years have already become legend. At the time of Nasser's death few observers expected Sadat would be the successor for long. During the Nasser years he had filled low-profile jobs and had occasionally projected the image of jokester. But the army backed him, at least provisionally, and selected him to hold Egypt together pending further developments. Whatever the officer corps then imagined those further developments to be, Sadat proceeded to shape them his own way. Among other assertive acts, he very soon accused his principal rival, another ex-officer named Aly Sabry, of conspiracy against the state. Again the army backed him. By the time Sabry and several brother officers were put into jail for long terms, it was clear that Sadat had taken charge.

Historians will tend to judge Sadat on his foreign policy achievements. Certainly his dramatic successes were in this realm, and their international impact will endure. But historians will also note correctly that Sadat used foreign policy to achieve domestic ends. Whether it was all part of a long-range plan or simply a series of brilliantly grasped opportunities, Sadat's feat of switching superpower sponsorship and arranging for massive American economic and military aid will one day stand as his major contribution, for good or ill, to modern Egyptian history. At the same time, his initiatives in foreign policy rearranged the structure of Arab and Israeli politics.<sup>1</sup>

The story has been told and will be retold many times with varying emphases and interpretations. Space limitations permit only the bare outlines here. Perhaps the best starting point is Sadat's War of 1973 (also called the Yom Kippur War and the Ramadan War).<sup>2</sup> Since 1967, ever since the devastating defeat by Israel in June of that year, Israeli troops had sat on the eastern side of the Suez Canal. Though the Egyptian attempt to sap the Israeli economy by desultory military activity that kept Israeli contingents pinned down in the Sinai was partly successful, nonetheless the Israeli presence on traditional Egyptian territory was galling. Because of unequal bargaining positions, negotiations were considered out of the question. So in bunkers and behind newly constructed embankments on the canal's western side, the Egyptian army prepared clandestinely for a new war. Disarmingly, Sadat had insisted two years before that some of his Russian advisors and their troops leave Egypt, but key Russian advisors did remain and Russian military supplies continued to arrive. In early October, eight years to the day before his assassination, Sadat ordered the recrossing of the canal. Secretly coordinated with Syria, the move caught Israeli intelligence flat-footed. The ensuing tank battle was the largest in history, with casualties high on both sides, but if calculated as a percentage of national population, Israeli losses were enormous. After a crucial airlift of weapons to Israel by the United States, the Israelis succeeded in reversing the tide of battle and themselves were able in one sector to cross the canal in the

other direction. At war's end they had almost encircled an Egyptian brigade; following the UN-arranged truce, they went on to complete the encirclement but were forced by international pressure to draw back to the truce lines. When an Egyptian and an Israeli general finally signed a truce document on October 24, Egyptian troops had retained a part of the Sinai and had done well enough generally for Sadat to proclaim a victory. The Egyptian public cooperated and validated the claim by enthusiastically participating in victory celebrations.

After the 1973 war Sadat asked most of the remaining Russians to leave. A Third-World journalist resident in Cairo put it this way: "As every Third-Worlder knows, one makes a public event of asking the Russians to leave when one wishes to get the attention of Washington." In this instance, at least, the United States ran true to form and began to exploit the new circumstances of Egypt's apparent shift away from the Soviet Union. Henry Kissinger, the American Secretary of State, even sought to become the sole mediator between Israel and Egypt. Giving little more than lip service to the notion of *détente*, he shuttled back and forth between the belligerents to arrange for Israeli pullbacks on a step-by-step basis. Sadat, on the theory that superpower *détente* and understanding impeded his own international leverage, was pleased to cooperate, noting that Soviet disgruntlement increased as the United States revealed a growing interest in playing a lone superpower hand. Soon the notion of step-by-step pullbacks was generalized to the status of an American approach to peace. With each step the United States was allowed to hope Egypt would be amenable to further steps in the direction of a settlement and further shifts toward a pro-American stance. Indeed, partly to show his growing interest in a stronger American connection, Sadat provided another piece of evidence; in 1974 he proclaimed the policy of the "Open Door," an attempt to encourage private investment by outsiders and (limited) private enterprise for Egyptians. While the proclamation did not herald great changes inside Egypt (the public sector still dominates the economy), it was at least a successful public-

relations act and a further signal that Sadat wanted to be friends — or in the words of an Egyptian observer, a signal that Sadat was making it easier for the American administration to take the bait. The bait was the possibility of a peace settlement sponsored exclusively by the United States, the enticing prospect of a good move in the cold war.

By 1976 the United States had reestablished formal diplomatic ties with Egypt, and money for economic assistance was flowing. While Egypt's economic problems were as intractable as ever, Egyptians could now hope for temporary relief, if not improvement. With the Carter administration came an attempt in Washington to wriggle off Sadat's hook, a renewed effort to work with the Soviet Union in the search for a settlement. In October 1977, the two superpowers issued a joint statement calling for comprehensive negotiations among the belligerents, offering superpower guarantees, and insisting that the "Geneva peace conference" — assembled after Sadat's War in 1973 and co-chaired by the United States and the Soviet Union — should be the framework for an overall settlement. But Sadat, clearly, wanted the United States to be his sole friendly superpower, and both he and Menachem Begin wanted the Russians outside the peace process. In November 1977, with the prime-time assistance of American newscasters Walter Cronkite and Barbara Walters, the Egyptian president arranged to circumvent American plans for Soviet involvement by flying directly to Israel to address the Knesset. Once again the United States, after recovering from a measure of surprise, found itself pleasurably contemplating, or forced to consider, an exclusive peacemaking role for itself.

The Knesset visit was a media event of major importance to Egypt. If the visit caught the American government by surprise, the same cannot be said for American television crews. They beamed the visit's natural drama and excitement into almost every American home. As Sadat in gleaming white uniform walked down from the plane and made his way along the reception line, the cameras panned in on one familiar face after another — Sadat shaking hands with a host of former Israeli enemies that included not on-

ly Begin but Rabin, Golda Meir, Weizman, Dayan, Eban, Peres, Navon — and throughout these rites Sadat projected an image of graciousness and statesmanship in an extraordinary mix of acting ability and political courage. Just as Israeli prime ministers have always been a part of the American political scene, so now Sadat also became an American household word, the first Arab leader to do so. After his address to the Knesset on the subject of peace and its conditions, the Egyptian president was followed to the rostrum by Begin — and once again, Sadat's stock rose as his relative largeness of spirit was made plain. No longer were Arabs a monolithic and distant force in the American mind; in the person of Sadat, Arabs became human, even likeable.

Sadat's breakthrough at the Knesset led directly to the Camp David Agreements and to massive American economic and military support. Following some ten months of ineffective conversations between Egypt and Israel, Carter stepped in and invited the leaders of both countries to Camp David. The unexpected results, announced in September 1978, were two agreements, the first a straightforward treaty of peace between two belligerents and the second "A Framework for Peace in the Middle East." The verbiage of the latter agreement has since been subject to varying interpretations revolving around the meaning of the phrase "full autonomy," a phrase suggested by Begin himself, to describe what the status of Palestinians in the occupied territories (West Bank and Gaza Strip) ought to become. The evidence suggests that since putting his signature on the second accord, Begin has fostered disagreement on its implementation in order to give himself the time to create the obstacles that would make implementation finally impossible.

When he signed the Camp David Agreements in 1978 and the actual Treaty of Peace in March 1979, Sadat might well have reflected that he had achieved four objectives.

1. He thought he had built a high road to political independence for Palestinians. Members of the Israeli opposition thought so too. Sadat expected that the creation of local administrative councils in the oc-

cupied territories (as called for in the agreements), combined with the natural momentum created by the phrase "full autonomy," would eventually result in Palestinian independence. So far, with delaying tactics, Begin has been able to block this evolution.

But were he alive today, Sadat could be satisfied with the final outcomes of the other three.

2. He arranged for the return of Egyptian territory lost in the 1967 War. In April 1982, the remaining portions of the Sinai were turned back to Egypt.

3. He established for Egypt an international image of stability, respectability, and responsibility, fostering friendship with the Common Market and Japan and promoting a new international interest in investing in Egypt. Despite the Arab boycott after the signing of the treaty, the voice of Egypt in the outside world has been more authoritative, and the amount of capital flows from foreign sources other than the United States has been substantially greater, amounting to more than \$1 billion annually.

4. Above all, he succeeded in procuring for Egypt the friendship and support of the United States, resulting in vast amounts of economic and military assistance. Moreover, because these inflows to this day remain tied to roughly equal arrangements with Israel, they are protected from legislative whittling on the part of vote-conscious members of Congress. The amounts reach some \$1 billion annually in economic aid and an equal or greater sum for the military.

In the years following these "undoubted accomplishments," Sadat had less success. If his reputation abroad remained unimpaired, at home he became an institution rather than a dramatic shaper of events. He spoke too often on television, boring the public with reminders of his own achievements. The climate became more authoritarian; journalists and writers felt themselves under increasing constraints. And the economy continued to present the same old problems, though these were mitigated markedly by the economic relief and activity arising from outside assistance and by other improved sources of income, especially higher prices for Egyptian oil and a greater number of

remittances sent home by some two million Egyptians working abroad. Yet the regime, however stable, was in the spiritual doldrums. The possibilities for enterprise created by the "Open Door" had resulted too often in consumer goods for the rich, and the new class of fat cats feeding on this export-import cream and driving sleek cars developed a lifestyle that offended many. Particularly offended were the religiously minded — the moderate Muslim Brotherhood and the immoderate violence-prone Islamic fundamentalists — but so were others whose share of the new private pie was small.

The threat to Egypt's military regime from the collectivity of Islamic fundamentalists (IF) or from one of the (largely uncoordinated) IF groups should be neither minimized nor exaggerated. Both then and now, Egyptian observers have disagreed on the nature of the threat.<sup>4</sup> At least two immediate questions arise: could the groups have brought down the regime, and if so, could they have established an alternate, Islamic regime? In 1974, when one group attempted a coup d'état with the help of followers enrolled in a semi-secondary engineering branch of the military academy and actually took control of the building, the result was dramatic and violent but not finally unmanageable or revolutionary. In 1977, when the army was called in to quell massive rioting following a reduction of food subsidies, the assumption was made that at least some well-organized cells of the IF groups had contributed significantly to the extent and intensity of the protest. Of the two incidents, the latter undoubtedly came closer to bringing down the regime, though in neither case can one indicate precisely how close they actually were. In retrospect, most Egyptian observers do not think the regime was in real danger in either instance.<sup>5</sup> But even had the IF been able to "topple the regime" (a most unlikely scenario), they would not have had the capacity, despite their rhetoric, to set up or impose an Islamic alternative of their own. Only by working through another institution, such as the army officer corps, could they hope to influence a future regime, and observers agree that since the eye-opening incident of 1974, such opportunities have probably gone by.

Yet fears clearly persisted among Sadat's intimates. These were fears not for the regime itself as much as for the long-term impact of fundamentalists on the modernization of Egyptian society or the short-term effects of sporadic violence, including acts of intersec-tarian violence that had been in-creasingly occurring, clashes be-tween extremist Muslims and opin-ionated members of the Coptic Christian minority. Among the educated public there arose a feel-ing that the regime should "do something." When the crackdown finally came in September 1981, it was greeted, despite criticisms of some aspects, with a measure of relief.

Sadat presented his crackdown as a move to prevent further sec-tarian strife. Some 1,700 persons were arrested, among them a num-ber of Copts who had been involved in clashes. The number also includ-ed some of Sadat's personal ene-mies, persons from the intellectual left and center who had displeased him by speaking out. (Other intellec-tuals, while not arrested, were harassed in several ways, such as being unceremoniously transferred from good academic or journalistic jobs to new posts of little account.) But most of the detainees were ac-tive exponents of Islam, the majority perhaps from the IF groups but some also from the politically moderate Muslim Brotherhood and other religious orders no longer believing in political violence. Despite Sadat's public explana-tions, urban Egyptians understood the real target of the crackdown was that brand of Islamic fundamen-talism for which killing can sometimes be a religious act. The Coptic community, notwithstanding the arrests of Copts, was generally pleased, appreciating the political necessity of blaming both Copts and Muslims in order to bring Muslim extremism under control.

Criticism of the crackdown focused on what were seen as character flaws in Sadat himself. When he included in his round-up a number of persons whose guilt lay not in IF connections but in the fact that they were personally annoying to the president, he appeared to display pettiness and capricious authoritarianism and did his image no good. Having in his early years established a more democratic cli-

mate than his predecessor had per-mitted, featuring the motto of "democracy and discipline," he was now seen to be stressing the notion of discipline almost exclusively. And when he announced the crack-down on September 6, he made no attack nor even comment on what were considered root causes of fun-damentalism, namely, the rumored corruption in high places that repelled Egypt's traditionalist citizenry and the publicly exhibited wealth that only a few had been permitted to ac-cumulate. These omissions, accord-ing to critics, reflected a growing political insensitivity, surprising from one who had managed his polit-ical rise so deftly.

Were capriciousness, authori-tarianism, and insensitivity the basic flaws — or were these traits evidence of something else, some-thing deeper? In the coming de-cades historians will be digging into memories and diaries for clues to this extraordinary man's character. A suggestive comment came recent-ly from a distinguished Egyptian who knew Sadat reasonably well and dealt with him over many years. When asked about Sadat's religious beliefs, he responded by saying Sadat was indeed a good Muslim for most of his life, believing deeply in God and His goodness and in God's great power for good. "But in the end," he said, "he deviated from the true path because he came to be-lieve — perhaps only in the last four or six months of his life — that God had singled him out." Believing himself God's instrument, Sadat may have felt that issues such as democracy and sensitivity to the needs of the governed were irrele-vant. On that day in October, when the fundamentalist assassins ran toward him, did he find it impossible to imagine that death was in store?

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Husni Mubarak's succession to the presidency went smoothly and constitutionally. Nobody expected otherwise. He was elected unani-mously by Egypt's essentially one-party parliament and clearly had the prior approval, however temporary, of the army officer corps. Because he had been Sadat's handpicked vice-president and had been groomed to succeed, the question was not whether he would assume the pre-sidency but whether, having assumed it, he could demonstrate his capaci-

ty to take charge and govern. If not, some remedy would have to be found, though Egyptian republican history contains no precedent for the removal of presidents while alive.

Like Sadat before him, Mu-barak was not considered pre-sidential material before his acces-sion. The educated public even held him in friendly contempt, referring to him in such mildly derisive terms as "la vache qui rit" (taken from the cover of a brand of French cheese). Yet he was considered a decent man, not really a part of the *shilla* or clique surrounding Sadat and un-tainted by the rumors of corruption that were growing. He had gradu-ated from the military academy with the class of '49 before transferring to the air force — no air force academy existed in those days — and had won the respect of brother officers of both services during the '73 war when he played the major role in directing Egypt's efforts in the air. Though the Egyptian public knew or cared little about it, he had been known as a straightlaced, ex-actly precise commanding of-ficer, dispassionate and fair.

Yet in December 1981, a scant two months after his accession, Mu-barak enjoyed a popular appeal of almost unparalleled dimensions, a honeymoon whose description strains credibility. On every side, cit-izens were at first surprised, then surprised and delighted, finally un-compromisingly enthusiastic. With-out repudiating his predecessor, he managed to make all the right moves. In his inaugural address he made some of the statements Sadat should have made but did not at the time of the September crackdown, such as the assertion that Egypt ex-isted not only to please a rich minority. He declined to live in presidential splendor, choosing to stay on in the same relatively simple family quarters. Cairo newspapers, after years of attention to Jehan Sadat, got the message quickly that pictures of the president's wife should not be featured. And without public comment, the network of resthouses established by his predecessor was dismantled, some of them bulldozed, some put to other uses. Not that Sadat's grand style was openly disavowed; it was simply changed into something else, different and low-key, that en-CHANTED the citizenry (at least for

the moment). This new charisma-in-reverse, it was said, was what Egypt needed.

The euphoria extended to more purely political and economic moves. For example, while vigorously pursuing the crackdown on Islamic fundamentalism launched the previous September by Sadat, Mubarak initiated a process of conciliation with those willing to work within the system. During the early months of 1982 jailed members of the Muslim Brotherhood, moderate and nonviolent, were selectively and quietly released. Likewise, the charges against some members of the center and left were allowed to fade from public consciousness, resulting finally in release. The Egyptian public applauded these actions, especially those relating to the center and the left because the charges had been such a thin disguise for Sadat's personal animosity. Sadat had viewed them as "piggybackers," persons who used the regime's troubles with sectarianism to foment further trouble, and while in a few instances the piggybacking charges may have been justified, imprisonment was clearly an overreaction. At one juncture Mubarak added a touch of publicity to his strategy. With a sure political touch and without undignified hurry, he brought to his office directly from prison cells a group of prominent intellectuals and set them free amid an atmosphere of public smiles and cordiality, intoning the importance of national unity to the apparent approval of all those at the ceremony. Egyptians understood the message; Islamic fundamentalists, seeking to overthrow the system, were beyond the pale, but on the other hand Mubarak's Egypt sought the support and even assistance of all who believed in its institutions and shared its goals.

Thus, Mubarak stands in silent contrast to his predecessor. For example, grand rhetoric is clearly alien to him; he talks (like Sadat in his early years) about Egypt rather than his own accomplishments for Egypt. He makes short public speeches, almost terse. When he quietly initiated a massive reinvigoration of a multimedia campaign to educate the Egyptian public on what constitutes Islam, the messages (including a stress on the nonviolent nature of the faith) on the radio and television were broadcast not by

Mubarak but by a coalition of articulate specialists — whereas Sadat (counterproductively) would have been on the air himself. In February 1982, when Mubarak visited Washington, he made clear the Egyptian need for greater flexibility in the use of USAID funds and, in fact, Egypt's need to distance itself from Washington, to avoid an image of dependence on its friendly superpower — whereas in Sadat's time American diplomats spoke occasionally of saving Sadat from himself by persuading him to restrain his enthusiastic pro-Americanism. And of major importance to urban Egyptians has been the contrast implied by Mubarak's adroit handling of intellectuals jailed by Sadat; by consulting on national problems with leaders of one of the small, permitted opposition parties, Mubarak indicated that within at least certain limits and on certain topics he favored national debate — favored (though within stricter limits) by Sadat in his earlier years, but later carefully avoided. On the economic front, for example, Mubarak introduced the issue of national prosperity, warning (tersely) that sacrifices would have to be made in view of falling income from abroad and that greater production was crucial to Egypt's well-being. The debate on this and other approved issues has been surprisingly open.

In the midst of the euphoria of late '81 and early '82, a politically seasoned Egyptian intellectual remarked wryly that he was at the moment expressing himself strongly because Mubarak, like Sadat before him, would soon have to muzzle the public. But though the honeymoon is now over, the debates continue in the press and even at a few semi-public meetings. Even issues as politically sensitive as overdependence on the United States or the use of American money to subvert research away from the national interest have been raised — or possibly permitted. For the fact is that open debate is still a favor handed down to the public, not an inalienable right temporarily suppressed and now returned. Thus, despite stylistic differences with its predecessor, Mubarak's Egypt is not a break with the past. Governmental structure remains essentially authoritarian. Parliament, heavily dominated by a regime-sponsored party, symbolizes hopes for a

democratic future but does not limit the power of the presidency. The press, currently free to print criticism and conflicting points of view, would consider it wise to respond speedily and positively to government requests to avoid certain issues. If the make-up of Mubarak's *shilla*, the presidential clique that in Sadat's time wielded great power, is still unclear or even unformed, the close relationship of the presidency to the army officer corps continues to be the backbone of political organization and political stability. Mubarak's deft handling of the regime's opponents may have increased its acceptance in Egypt but the institutions that safeguard free speech have little power of their own.

Though the honeymoon is over, the public still likes Mubarak. His reputation for honesty is untarnished. He remains low-key, modest, unpretentious — and highly effective in small-group situations. But the regime seems at dead center, inactive in most areas that Egyptians feel need much action. Egyptian economic problems, they say, need more than terse admonitions to increase production. And Israel, after its binge in Lebanon, merits sterner disapproval. Behind the criticisms, one suspects, lurks a yearning for a measure of flamboyance, not just action but action with panache, not a return to the days of Sadat but a bit of drama to take the mind off some of the tougher realities. Only in one important area has Mubarak made a dramatic move or two, and the popularity of the moves was not lessened by their capacity to make attention-getting headlines. With an indignation reflecting his puritanism, he has moved to prosecute a few of the better-known swindlers that amassed huge fortunes in Sadat's time; one of these was Esmet Sadat, the former president's brother, who (though disowned by the president) became a multimillionaire thanks to transport fraud and influence-peddling. But a "corruption drive" has limitations, because if one pushes too far too fast, people in high places for whom small (reasonable) amounts of corruption are a way of life can be embarrassed, leading to a loss of valuable allies.

The trouble is that Egypt's economic problems do not go away, and hence strong doses of charisma are helpful palliatives. Cursed with

uncharismatic bluntness, Mubarak can only confront Egyptians with hard facts — a whole dismal and enduring set of them, not unlike those for most developing countries yet more intractable than most.<sup>6</sup> Too many people are crowded onto too little arable land, and the population continues to increase by 2.9% each year. Landless or near-landless peasants have surged into Cairo, turning the city into an out-of-control urban mass of at least 12 million persons, somewhere near one-quarter of Egypt's total population. After great strides under Nasser in the extension of education and health services, now the services per capita are markedly less. Indeed, Egypt's entire infrastructure — transport, irrigation, services, sewage, telephones, housing, and so on — has come close to crumbling under the weight of people. Nasser provided jobs by featherbedding an expanding public sector but allowed the infrastructural plant to run down; Sadat, in a situation of rapidly decreasing options, arranged to turn to the United States for massive aid, primarily to renovate that infrastructure.

Whereas Sadat in his last few years had a run of economic luck, Mubarak has been less fortunate. Sadat, during the last half of the 1970s, could contemplate annual growth rates estimated to be between 8 and 10 percent.<sup>7</sup> And Egypt was blessed with rapidly growing income from abroad — oil exports, tourism, fees from the Suez Canal, and remittances from Egyptian workers overseas — as well as the first dramatic impact of major economic assistance from the United States and other industrialized nations. The year 1980 was a particularly heady one; the Egyptian balance of payments, always a problem at the best of times, had never been in better shape.<sup>8</sup> But late in 1981 and in 1982, the outside world began returning the country's economic affairs to their normal state. While revenues from the Suez Canal have continued to grow (though not as rapidly as projected), workers' remittances were down by some 19 percent and income from tourism by 24 percent, both drops due in large part to "leakages" caused by a suddenly thriving black market in foreign exchange. While these are bitter pills for a government that is now under heavy local pressure to

keep its currency propped up, the real blow has been the price of oil; for every dollar lost on the price of a barrel of oil, the Egyptian government loses some \$200 million, and loss of revenue because of the oil glut will probably be little short of \$1 billion in 1983. The trade deficit for 1981 is estimated at \$4.8 billion, some 30 percent larger than that of 1980. As growth rates have fallen, moreover, imports have increased — largely for investment, perhaps, but in immodest amounts for luxury items as well.

The public debate on what to do about the economy has focused on the obvious items but the guarantees that government action will bring solutions are submerged in a sea of economists' uncertainties. Yet to mollify the public, some action is necessary — or some flamboyant substitute. Since Mubarak is either incapable of the latter or too honest to try, he must act in ways that persuade educated Egyptians something is being done. Indeed, a few moves have been made. The import of luxury items has been made more difficult. Indirect subsidies for utilities have been made more difficult. Indirect subsidies for utilities have been reduced somewhat. And with the cooperation of USAID, long-term approaches to the reform of the public sector and to decentralization are in process. But despite public debate, no major attack on the underlying economic problems has been mounted. For example, the matter of government subsidies for basic commodities — which now cost the government some \$2.4 billion out of a total budget of some \$15 billion — constitutes not only a tremendous financial drain but also a hindrance to further growth. Indeed, in the view of some economists, the entire pricing system — controls inherited from Nasser's day on energy, agriculture, wages, industrial products — needs surgery, not bandages. What to do about it all is the kind of policy question that economists handle less well, and introduces such possibilities as malaise in the officer corps and civil unrest.

If the Egyptian economy often appears locked into place, other matters show change, not dramatic change of the Sadat variety but steady — at Egypt's usual ultra-deliberate speed. Foreign policy, for

example, is evolving in orderly fashion, despite the trauma of Israel's invasion of Lebanon. At no time has Egypt indicated that its new relationship with Israel was in jeopardy, nor has it in any way signaled its approval of recent Israeli behavior. Recalling his ambassador almost as a matter of correctness, Mubarak had dealt frostily with Begin but has made plain his determination not to turn back the clock to pre-Camp David times. In the meantime he pursues a quiet policy of rapprochement with the moderate Arab states, which now appear to include all but Syria and Libya. Even Iraq, grateful for help in its war with Iran, has become reconciled to Egypt and appears willing, like the others, to forgive Egyptian perfidy in due course. When formal forgiveness finally occurs will depend on many factors, but increasingly Egypt's traditional leadership of the Arab world is informally reasserting itself. Despite its absence at summit meetings, Egypt once again plays a major, if indirect, role in forming the Arab consensus.

Egyptian society is also changing, as inevitably it must. Observers have noted, for example, that the jumble of people has become more pronounced with each passing year. The class system becomes more intricate and subtle and more difficult to theorize about; new kinds of mobility more than keep pace with new sources of income from the new private sector and from abroad. If peasants appear less subservient, it may be because most now have relatives in the cities who have joined the ranks of the lower middle class — from which entrance into the military academy is not impossible. Entrepreneurial energy is on the increase, and so are the abuses perpetrated by the newly rich, yet the upper class that descends from the "good families" of pre-revolutionary days retains its identity and its vigor, the vigor stemming partly from its capacity to marry its women to upwardly mobile, ambitious young men. The lifestyles of that upper class have evolved; because Cairo is now so big and so crowded with cars, the well-to-do live more in their suburbs than they used to. Now it requires a major effort to go "into town" to shop or have lunch, or to travel to another suburb to see a friend. From Heliopolis to Maadi or Zamalek by

car takes over an hour during the day, often an hour and a half. Though communications are easier at night and parking places more possible, the evening interchange between parts of the city has become markedly less; social networks are now in clusters in the suburbs, which are cleaner and cosier. One goes to the shabby and dusty environs of "downtown" principally for work or for visits to special shops or government offices (increasingly offices are being located elsewhere). And because of the fleas, the well-to-do seldom go to downtown cinemas these days; special cinema clubs are available in pleasanter surroundings.

Some Egyptians discern a change in religious attitudes, even among the upper class. Certainly there have been signs of change in religious behavior over the last decade.<sup>9</sup> Though estimates vary, somewhere between one-third and one-fourth of the women on Egyptian campuses now clothe themselves in full-length mother-hubbardish dress complete with nun-like headcover, whereas a dozen years ago most women students dressed determinedly in international or Western dress, or as near to it as they could manage. The emergence of the new dress style was a dramatic sign of a more general phenomenon, namely, a greater interest on the part of many Egyptians in religious matters; this included not only Islamic fundamentalists of various kinds but such others as orthodox Muslims with prior secularist leanings or Christians estranged from the Coptic church. Why this surge of interest should have occurred at this time in Egypt (with similar, not necessarily connected occurrences elsewhere in the Islamic world) is a question that historians will be pondering for some time.

The visitor to downtown Cairo cannot help but notice the changes. At noon on Fridays, for example, portions of street and sidewalk in various parts of the city are sectioned off for prayers; straw mats are laid down, well-dressed men take part, and a sermon is piped in by loud-speaker. Not only are the full-length gowns with wimples in evidence but also a much greater number of "compromises" — a choice of women's costume that includes a normal dress of below-the-knee

length, long sleeves, stockings and perhaps boots, and a scarf over the hair. Williams<sup>10</sup> points out that some educated Muslim women have worn this less conspicuous style for many years. What appears to have happened in the most recent past is that increasingly it has become the choice of a great many, is even on its way (in the words of one observer) to becoming a national dress. Also in evidence, as for many decades before, are women dressed like peasants or urban poor (the adjective usually used for this mode is *baladi*), and the upper class for the most part continue to wear international dress. In short, where 20 years ago there was almost a dichotomy — the effective choices were *baladi* or international — now there is a range, almost as if the coming of the full-length fundamentalist dress some dozen years ago had broken the dichotomous mold and by doing so had made women free to choose what they really wanted to wear, pushed neither toward an ultra-modernism they did not feel nor toward a traditionalism gone by. And the choice of an increasing number in downtown Cairo appears to be a compromise dress that fosters culturally comfortable feelings about religion and modesty, that imparts a feeling of cultural authenticity but does not, like the full-length fundamentalist gowns, sit "in judgment . . . , critical of the way [society] appears to be going."<sup>11</sup>

Do changes in women's dress styles necessarily indicate change in religious attitudes? Are they, in words used by several Egyptian intellectuals, part of a search for cultural authenticity? Certainly some kind of attitudinal change is occurring, and speculation abounds. For example, if with last century's impact of the West the country became (in most general terms) divided into Westernizers and traditionalists, with the former winning out over the latter through decades of social change, are these recent occurrences signs that the tide has turned, that Westernization as political strategy or social direction has become discredited? Are they signs that finally a cultural accommodation is under way — with a melding of the traditional and the "modern"? This latter possibility has crucial implications for the role of Islam. In the past, so this theory goes, Islam has often been asso-

ciated with traditionalism and, hence, scorned or downgraded by Westernizers, who in secular fashion have adopted the Egyptian nation as their principal focus for loyalty, with only casual lip service to the universal religion that has provided them (if they admit it) with ethical beliefs. If Islam is primarily for traditionalists and secularist nationalism for Westernizers, then society is seriously divided and unsynchronized.

Such theories are, of course, too simplistic. Yet the fact they are being voiced has significance. Even members of the upper class — the most Westernized in thought, words, and behavior — have developed a new interest in the traditions of Islam; a few even pray, perhaps not five times a day but at least once on Fridays and probably more often. In their own sophisticated way, some of these once-dedicated-secularists are seeking cultural authenticity, a set of beliefs that can provide them and their children with an identity having roots in the Egyptian past as well as outreach into the modern age. One 45-year-old told me he would have blushed ten years ago in speaking about such matters, but the climate he said, had now thoroughly changed.

An Egyptian intellectual refers to what he sees happening as the reintegration of Egypt, a bringing together of the two halves of its national personality. This kind of assertion, of course, is dearly loved by intellectuals; yet it is not without validity. The Egyptian climate has indeed changed to something more integrated, more at peace, as if a process of self-reconciliation were occurring. Contrary to the (usually unvoiced and often instinctive) views of two decades ago that Islam and "modernism" were probably irreconcilable, there now appears to be a quiet conviction that such is not the case. In that quietness lies at least a measure of greater national strength, greater sureness of purpose, greater cultural certainty, a new psychological security. It is no historical accident, according to one long-time observer, that Egypt's voice in international affairs is now listened to with more respectful attention.

If these notions about change in Egypt, or notions akin to them, are grounded in reality, it is Mubarak who presides over them

and in some ways even embodies them. He combines an attachment to tradition with a belief in the institutions that govern Egypt, institutions borrowed from the West long ago but now integrated into Egyptian life. Convinced of the rightness of Egypt's course, he also convinces others. While no intellectual himself, he rules and represents a country that is once again playing its role of intellectual and cultural innovator in the Arab world, once again at the leading edge of regional change. While plain politics, do-

mestic and international, must remain his immediate concern, the final impact of his presidency may depend a great deal more on the way he manages to foster and encourage the social and cultural evolution now under way. Indeed, if he is able not only to maintain a policy of (relatively) free speech but also to institutionalize it, the rate of balanced change, of social and cultural development, may improve impressively.

April 1983

## NOTES

1. See Raymond William Baker, *Egypt's Uncertain Revolution Under Nasser and Sadat* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978) for a balanced account of the era, including treatment of the intricate relationships between foreign and domestic policy under Sadat and his predecessor. Since the assassination, a number of accounts have sought to discredit Sadat as if in angry response to Western praise. Some of these accounts are by Egyptians; an extreme example is Mohamed Heikal's *Autumn of Fury* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1983). Other accounts are by Westerners whose Egyptian sources have been unduly limited to anti-Sadatists.
2. See John Waterbury, "The Crossing," *AUFS Reports*, Northeast Africa Series, Vol.18, No.6 (1973).
3. For the texts of the agreements and of other relevant documents as well as a useful discussion of the factors affecting the agreements and their aftermath, see *A Compassionate Peace, A Future for the Troubled Middle East* (New York: Hill and Wang for the American Friends Service Committee, 1982).
4. See my "Egypt Revisited," *AUFS Reports*, No. 23, 1981, a general report written after an extended visit in November 1980. The report includes a round-up of information on Islamic fundamentalism in Egypt and its relationship to the regime.
5. Here a distinction must be made between the military regime and Sadat. By calling in the army in 1977, Sadat may have put his leadership of the regime in

jeopardy and risked being replaced. Following 1977, he refurbished and expanded a special security force (*el-amn el-markazy*) that could be used instead of the army in situations of civil unrest.

6. Egypt's endemic economic difficulties are described in many places. A good starting point is Robert Mabro, *The Egyptian Economy, 1952-1972* (London: Clarendon Press, 1974).

7. Recent economic data have been taken from "Economic Trends Report: Egypt" dated September 6, 1982 and produced by the Economic Section and Commercial Section, American Embassy in Cairo.

8. See "Egypt Revisited" pp. 1-3.

9. The literature on this phenomenon in various parts of the Islamic world is rapidly proliferating — to which any of the standard journals attest. For example, the first three articles of the 1983 winter issue of *The Middle East Journal* seek to define the new role of Islam in politics and society. For Egypt, see especially the perceptive article by John Alden Williams, "Veiling in Egypt as a Political and Social Phenomenon" in John L. Esposito, ed., *Islam and Development* (Syracuse University Press, 1980).

10. Williams, "Veiling . . ." p.75.

11. Williams, "Veiling . . ." p. 75. There are other reasons, of course, for choosing either the full-length fundamentalist dress or what I have here called the compromise dress. Elizabeth Warnock Fernea of the University of Texas at Austin has done extensive filmed interviews on this and related matters.