

## Middle East Report by Thierry Lalevée

### Egypt's star rises

*But the fruits of diplomacy will be bitter, if the United States cannot stop the bloody Israelis.*

Ostracized by the Arab world as an accomplice of Israel since it agreed to the Camp David treaty in 1977, Egypt is now looking to become once again the political center of the Arab world. Indicative of this was a commentary by Israeli analyst Mordechai Abir on Radio Jerusalem, Aug. 5. Abir emphasized that "[a] farfetched [idea] only two years ago, it is now not unthinkable that Egypt will soon regain its natural leadership of the Arab world."

Since the April-25 Israeli return of the Sinai, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has met with Saudi King Fahd and other Arab leaders in an effort to re-establish diplomatic relations.

But the failure of the United States to restrain Israel in its bloody drive to invade west Beirut, may cause Washington to lose Egypt, its most trusted Arab ally. Since the invasion began, Mubarak has delivered numerous messages to Reagan that the U.S. position in the Arab world would be destroyed as a result of Israel's aggression. A member of Egyptian Foreign Minister Hassan Ali's July 29-Aug. 1 delegation to Washington revealed that Egypt will look toward Europe for a new partnership if the United States does not finally succeed in stopping Israel.

Immediately after the June 6 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Mubarak announced an indefinite postponement of the Palestinian autonomy talks with Israel. Since then

Egypt has served as a mediator for the PLO with Washington, stressing that the only solution to the Lebanese crisis is for the United States to break with the Kissinger-drafted 1975 agreement with Israel, which specifies that Washington will neither talk to or ever recognize the PLO.

Using the fact that it has relations with Israel to act as a unique mediator with Washington in the crisis, Egypt has maneuvered in turn to rebuild its bridges to the Arab world.

Over the weeks, Washington has been very slow to move, but there was no doubt that the Egyptian voice has had more weight in American ears than any other. When President Mubarak attended the funeral of King Khaled in Mecca, he was more than warmly welcomed by his old friend King Fahd. Some weeks later, the Iraqi leadership, itself in search of allies, invited Mubarak to attend the September non-aligned summit in Baghdad.

Although some cynics may consider that after all, the Lebanese crisis was "good business" for Cairo, no one in Egypt dares to think so, for obvious reasons. Egypt knows that its fate is closely intertwined with the rest of the region. This was the substance of the most recent message sent by President Mubarak to President Reagan during the Hassan Ali visit. The message detailed precisely that the lack of American pressure on Israel, ensuring an Israeli *diktat* over Leba-

non and a massacre of the Palestinians would have but obvious consequences: the immediate destabilization of all of America's friends in the region, beginning with the Gulf countries. An Israeli victory would be de facto a victory of the forces of radicalism, be it under a Palestinian or Islamic fundamentalist cover; a victory for Ayatollah Khomeini.

To stop that, there were few steps Egypt could take to contain an upcoming wave of terrorism. As Hassan Ali declared to *Le Monde* of Paris on Aug. 3, "If Beirut is taken over by the Israelis, I do not know how we could continue to maintain normal diplomatic relations with Israel." Internally, President Mubarak is taking the necessary steps to defuse radicalism. He de facto supported all the efforts of the left opposition to support the PLO, sending money and supplies to Beirut, and is about to announce an amnesty for most political prisoners. But everyone knows nothing more can really be done, as, in the words of a diplomatic source, "Once we break relations with Israel, everything will change in the region." There is growing dissatisfaction expressed in the daily Egyptian papers, where it is openly regretted that peace was made with a country which does not want peace." But it is similarly understood that breaking relations with Israel will be a step of little value compared to the destruction of Beirut. This is what Egypt has been trying to have the Americans understand, and the immediate future will tell if they succeed. As for the Americans, the present lack of courage to act means not merely the collapse of the ill-fated Camp David treaty, but the collapse of a region.