

Egypt: an urgent test case for America's policy toward Africa

by Thierry Lalevée

Although most media coverage of Egypt treats that country as part of the "Middle East," in fact Egypt is the gateway to the African continent and the major political and economic center for Africa. Between a Middle East region torn apart by more than 30 years of conflicts and an African continent ravaged by local and regional wars and now faced with mass starvation, Egypt could become the focal point from which solutions to these ills can be discussed and implemented. It was in Cairo in 1977 that all the countries of the Middle East and Africa met for the first time.

Egypt's African dimension is uppermost in the minds of the leadership in Cairo, and this has been proven by Egyptian President Mubarak's recent African tour of Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Zaire, and Morocco, as well as the frequent visits of Minister of State Butros Ghali to numerous countries where Egyptian technicians are requested. Of particular importance are relations between Sudan and Egypt. Whatever happens in one country affects the other immediately, negatively or positively. Egypt's basic idea is to foster not merely local development, but regional units of development, an Egyptian specialist recently outlined to *EIR*. For example, the specialist stressed, if it weren't for Qaddafi, the best regional path of development would be to form some kind of close relationship between Libya, Sudan, and Egypt, and then Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, and so forth. Underlining such proposals is the complete understanding that "peace and development are closely interdependent," as was stressed recently at a seminar on Africa by the foreign ministry, because "while a better future for mankind is impossible without peace, the spread of poverty and deprivation coupled with a widening gap between the rich and the poor can only lead to mounting frustrations and world tension."

Cairo and Washington

As such issues are raised and discussed, another one, much more bitter, comes up: the state of Egypto-American relations. With 10,000 years of history, most Egyptians know that history does not quite repeat itself; there are similarities at most. In today's Egypt there is nonetheless an uncanny feeling of *déjà vu* when it comes to Egypto-American relations. It looks to them as though Washington bureaucrats and

strategists were committed to sabotaging relations between two countries. There is a strong parallel to the early 1950s when the new President Nasser was doing his best to root out British imperialists' influence on the country, calling on U.S. President Eisenhower for help. What was asked for were not weapons, but economic aid and participation in one of Egypt's major projects, the construction of the Aswan Dam. The fact that developing good relations between Egypt and America would pave the way for an early settlement with Israel was

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obviously not the concern of the anglophile State Department led by John Foster Dulles, which vetoed the project. In a similar way, Dulles and his friends in France, Britain, and Israel concocted the 1956 Suez crisis, unleashing 25 years of wars and instability in the region, several times bringing the entire world close to nuclear confrontation!

Dulles is not around anymore, but the same crowd remains; and Henry Kissinger, back in the political scene in Washington, is quietly pulling the strings of what Reagan believes is his own foreign policy. And Egypto-American relations will soon be on a collision course.

Officially, the United States, Egypt, and Israel are "partners in peace," according to the words written in the 1978 Camp David agreement, but these words don't have the same meaning and weight in Washington, Tel Aviv, and Cairo. Seen from Cairo, America's foreign policy seems utterly incomprehensible, and even pro-American officials within the government can find no other explanation than that the United States is fundamentally *not* interested in peace, and *not* interested in economic development, but wants "political

control over the entire African continent and the developing sector to grab the raw materials." This may sound simplistic, but little to the contrary has emerged from the United States recently.

At the same seminar of the foreign ministry an ambassador complained loudly that "sometimes African colleagues and myself, fed up and frustrated, would, while representing our respective states at international forums, present our problems to representatives of the developed countries. . . . They did listen to us and many times assured us of their convictions that our presentations were logical and viable. . . . Alas, I can *never* recall that these verbal utterances were backed up or followed by any actions. . . ." He added that in further discussions they were told that "as long we believe that the technological progress that made it possible for orbiting space ships would be reflected also in projects to eradicate hunger, malnutrition, epidemics, and diseases in developing countries, as long as we continue to live with these dreams, illusions, and faith in humanity, then we had better shed all hopes for any substantial improvement in the lot of the developing countries."

To a large extent, U.S. policy toward the region is proving that official's point. This was also underlined during the visit of Egyptian President Mubarak to Washington in late February. No other President in the past year gave so much importance to the United States as Egypt's, travelling to Washington no less than three times. This was clearly misunderstood; for the Egyptians, it underlined the willingness to consult with a "partner in peace," for the administration it created the illusion that Egypt could be considered a mere vassal. When it came to concrete discussions, all Egyptian demands were bashed out and very undiplomatically thrown into the wastebasket. According to observers who followed Mubarak's last visit carefully, it was an entire failure on political, economic, and military issues. Egypt's request to receive treatment similar to Israel's—not with respect to the quality of military deliveries (an impossible demand anyway), but with respect to their financial side, pointing out that the United States had not hesitated to give Israel several debt moratoria on their military purchases—were met by dead silence, and there was no discussion. Mubarak's new proposals on the question of the Israeli-Arab conflict and the need for a dialogue between America and the PLO met the same fate, as did other proposals and discussions on Egypt's economic and financial relationship with the United States.

Egypt has to rely on the United States for regular wheat deliveries, as well as for financial help to buy such deliveries. While this could be a mere aspect of a broader relationship between the two countries, the American side has been systematically handling it in an arrogant way to remind Cairo, almost daily, that it is in a dependent position and should not forget it. Proposals to have such an insulting practice change have been refused: the State Department, AID, and other departments like it this way.

Is America Egypt's ally?

It is a question worth asking in Washington these days, because, as far as the State Department is concerned, Egypt is not America's ally. This was concretely proven during Mubarak's talks in Washington, one observer said. That refers also to a particular White Paper policy statement released in early February by the State Department in cooperation with the New York Council on Foreign Relations, the American branch of the Royal Institute of International Affairs of London. The paper, which was based on several months' research by State Department officials in the United States, London, and Egypt concluded saying that Egypt and Sudan "should not be considered as reliable allies of the United States as there is no way to prevent their takeover by Islamic fundamentalist elements." This is no research paper, but a policy statement and a policy orientation. As the Washington bureaucrats know, there is a sure way of preventing the takeover of Egypt and Sudan by Islamic fundamentalists: going for the kind of economic aid and cooperation which, firstly, could transform Sudan into Africa's breadbasket, and secondly, could help Egypt win its war against the desert by speeding the process of reclaiming thousands of hectares of sand into fertile land. But that's not Washington's policy, these days.

The State department is unfortunately right, at least on one point: If the United States maintains the same level of cooperation with Egypt as it does now, if AID goes on sabotaging from the outside and from the inside the national economic development of the country, as an Egyptian official recently described it in New York, then there is little hope for Egypt. But that is not the issue; the issue is that Henry Kissinger, the State Department, and their likes are already committed to such a disaster happening.

What does the State Department really want from Egypt? Do they want to send the Egyptians back to the Soviet fold? The Egyptians, who had an unfortunate taste of the Soviet brand of "socialist" colonialism, as they say, have certainly no such wish, but what is the choice? The chosen alternative for now is to walk on a tightrope and Egyptians know it; to swallow American insults while making new openings to the Soviets or their allies—hence Mubarak's get-well telegram to Soviet-allied Syrian President Assad a few weeks ago.

They have learned from history, and it is not difficult for most to see a trap in the sudden decision in Washington to flood Sudan with weapons while for years badly needed economic aid was refused. Isn't it the case that some in Washington would be very happy to see Egypt and Sudan engulfed in a several-year war of attrition with Ethiopia and Libya, making them more dependent first, then expendable at will, just as a variant of the 1956 scenario? That will not be easy to achieve, as the present leadership is ready to use all available weapons to fight for its development and its newly achieved peace. In such a fight, the real loser may not be Egypt but the United States.