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Egypt's conflict of alliances

SHLOMO SLOVIN

How long can President Sadat reconcile his policy of friendship with Russia, from whom he can get arms but no other support for aggressive policies towards Israel, with one of alliances with the more militant Arab socialist countries?

During 1971, President Sadat of Egypt warned repeatedly that the issue of war and peace in the Middle East would be finally settled before the end of the year. Typical of such pronouncements was one made in August: "Even if we have to lose a million martyrs, 1971 will not go by without the battle being resolved." But 1 January 1972, the so-called 'zero hour' for the Middle East, came and went without a renewal of the fighting. The Suez ceasefire, which has lasted for sixteen months, remains intact. On 23 January, in a lengthy broadcast to the Egyptian nation, Sadat explained that a 'fog', in the shape of the Indian-Pakistani war, had settled on his war plans. Egypt's scheduled attack across the Suez Canal had been deferred by the outbreak of fighting on the Indian subcontinent in early December. 'Not only was the world's attention focused on this battle but the balance of power, which we must never ignore when we enter our battle...was confused and disturbed.' This belated and 'foggy' excuse seemed rather transparent, not least to the students of Cairo University, who gave vent to their feelings in a series of sit-ins and street riots lasting for over a week and resulting in mass arrests and detentions. On 16 January a new Egyptian Government, dedicated to organizing the home front for 'total confrontation with the enemy', was appointed but the state did little to calm the tense atmosphere.

In the aftermath of the unrest, and perhaps with the intention of calming the situation, Sadat announced plans for a visit to Moscow in early February. A few days before he set out, in a speech at Aswan to a military audience which included Colonel Qaddafi of Libya, Sadat revealed that for some months in 1971 differences had impaired Egyptian-Soviet relations. He claimed, however, that these had been resolved during his earlier visit to Moscow in October 1971. Emphasizing once more the constructive role of socialism in the Middle East, he said that the Russian perspective of socialism must be the dominant one, and that the main point of contention was the Soviet Union's direction of the anti-Guerrilla war in Afghanistan.

In the Middle East, however, the Soviet Union was more than a partner bound together by the mutual desire to combat the forces of imperialism. It was also an ally in a contest over the leadership of the Arab world. But the Soviet Union could not provide Sadat with the arms he had requested in March, and Sadat's prospects for the impending war were not bright.

The announcement of the cease-fire was made at a time when the Soviet Union was facing domestic and external problems, and it appeared that the new Soviet policy was aimed at reducing the threat to the Middle East by the United States and Israel. But the Egyptians were not pleased by the Soviet Union's decision to withdraw from the Middle East, and this led to a deterioration in relations between the two countries. The Egyptians were also dissatisfied with the Soviet Union's support of Syria, which they saw as an attempt to weaken their own position in the region.

In conclusion, it can be said that the Egyptians were not satisfied with the Soviet Union's decision to withdraw from the Middle East, and this led to a deterioration in relations between the two countries. The Egyptians were also dissatisfied with the Soviet Union's support of Syria, which they saw as an attempt to weaken their own position in the region.


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By the second half of May he was once more in full control of the situation.

Nevertheless, the shock-waves of the upheaval along the Nile were quickly felt in Moscow. On 25 May, President Podgorny of the Soviet Union arrived in Cairo to ensure that, no matter what happened within Egypt's ruling party and what sort of ties Egypt was to institute with neighbouring Arab States, the dominant position of the Soviet Union in Egypt herself would not be threatened. As a result, a fifteen-year Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation between the Soviet Union and the United Arab Republic was signed. Besides a pledge 'to concert their policies' in the event of a danger to the peace, each party declared that it would 'not take part in any groupings of States, or in actions or measures, directed against the other' party. Moreover, it was stated that 'the commitments of the two parties under existing international treaties were not in contradiction with the present treaty.' To all intents and purposes, Podgorny's trip, originally labelled as an 'unofficial friendly visit', had succeeded in shoring up Soviet-Egyptian relations against all eventualities — internal or external.

The occasion to test the solidarity of this formalised alliance was not long in coming. On 10 July, President Numeiri of Sudan was overthrown by a pro-communist group of military officers. Iraq's extreme left-wing Government quickly accorded recognition to the new Sudanic regime. But Colonel Qaddafi (apparently with the silent support of Sadat) succeeded in foiling the plans of the new Sudanic Revolutionary Council. As a BOAC plane carrying two leading members of the Council (including the proposed new President) passed through Libya en route to Khartoum, it was forced to land at Benghazi and the two men were forcibly detained. The next day a counter-revolt in Khartoum restored Numeiri to the presidency. The subsequent purge and executions of communists and revolutionaries (including the two men taken off the BOAC plane) brought Sudanese-Soviet relations close to breaking point. This set of circumstances did not, however, prevent Sadat from publicly endorsing the anti-communist purge in Sudan. Commenting on the events in Khartoum, he declared: 'The Federation of Arab Republics was born with teeth... We are not planning to interfere in the internal affairs of anybody. But if anybody infringes against us, our teeth will be very sharp... Our teeth have appeared in Sudan and they are very sharp... I convey our absolute support to the Sudanese people and to Chairman Jafar as-Numeiri.'

The events in Sudan highlighted the two divergent paths which Sadat was attempting to follow. On the one hand, he was intent on uniting the Arab world in the spirit of Nasserite Pan-Arabism. To this end he was...
called upon to espouse a form of Arab nationalism of the Qaddafi-Numeiri brand, which by its very nature was antagonistic to the classic ideology and universalism of Marxist thinking. On the other hand, he realized only too well the extent to which Egypt was dependent on the Soviet Union, both militarily and diplomatically (in the United Nations). He was certainly in no position to cast off the Russian alliance which now was formally registered in the Soviet-Egyptian Treaty of Friendship. In effect, however, in the space of one month—April-May 1971—he had entered into two agreements which were at cross-purposes with one another. The twists and turns, to which Egyptian foreign policy was subjected as the deadline of 1 January 1972 approached and passed, reflected to a considerable degree the inconsistency of these two commitments which Egypt had accepted.

On 20 August the leaders of Egypt, Libya, and Syria met in Damascus and adopted a draft constitution for the Arab Federation, which was to be submitted to the voters in their respective States for endorsement on 1 September. In their joint declaration the three leaders emphasized "that the confrontation with the Zionist enemy lurking on our Arab territory has approached a decisive stage."18 In early October plans were approved for military co-ordination between the three countries. At the same time, Sadat made preparations for a visit to Moscow, which, he indicated, was designed to co-ordinate plans for bringing matters to a head before the year’s end. In a speech on the eve of his departure, he declared: "In these days at the end of 1971 we have reached a point in which the destiny of this fiery battle will be decided by peace or war."19

Russia disappoints Sadat

However, Sadat’s sojourn in Moscow, from 10 to 12 October, proved to him how difficult it was to drive the pan-Arab and Soviet horses in tandem. It became clear that the Soviet leadership was in no way prepared to underwrite his plans for an immediate offensive across the Suez Canal. For one thing, the Soviet leaders could find little purpose in promoting the grand military strategy of a new Arab Federation marked by such an anti-Soviet bias. Secondly, they could have had little confidence in the joint military prowess of the Federation. They must have reasoned that if Egypt alone was incapable of breaching the Israeli defences, then the 'legions of Syria' should hardly spell the difference. And thirdly, of course, active hostilities in the Middle East at this point did not coincide with the immediate Russian global strategy. The Soviet Union simply did not intend to become embroiled in a Middle Eastern war with the danger that this spelled for a direct confrontation with the United States. Moreover, any quarrel with the US in the Middle East would only expose...
member of it. This amounted to more than just an oblique criticism of the whole federal project.

Swift reaction from Libya

The repercussions came quickly; in fact they were already apparent even before the Moscow communiqué was issued. On 10 October, the day of Sadat's arrival in the Bonn Union, Colonel Gadaffi paid a surprise visit to President Bouteflika of Algeria. At the conclusion of their meeting the two Arab leaders announced that they had discussed 'the situation in the Arab world and the consequences of events under way there'. They agreed to hold regular meetings every four months. Reuters reported that 'the Algerian press emphasized the common stand between the two countries over the rejection of a peace accord with Israel as the only solution to the Middle East issue and their active support for the Palestinian terrorist movement'. Nothing could better reveal to Sadat the measure of Qaddafi's displeasure over his Moscow trip than this belligerence with Cairo's rival in North Africa. Clearly the Libyan leader meant to impress upon Sadat that there was more than one road to Arab unity. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that, on his way back from Moscow, Sadat stopped off in Damascus but failed to visit Tripoli—an omission which occasioned not a little surprise in the world's press.

From Sadat's viewpoint, the trip to Moscow in October had indeed been counter-productive. Not only had it failed to achieve the anticipated backing of the Kremlin for Egypt's war plans but it had also succeeded in sowing serious dissension between Egypt and her federal partners.

On 27 October, in an apparent attempt to mend his fences, the Egyptian leader travelled to Tripoli. After a lengthy meeting it was announced by Cairo radio that Sadat and Qaddafi had dealt with plans 'to confront the aggression in the coming period'. They also discussed Sadat's visit to Moscow and 'future possibilities' and, presumably, Sadat succeeded in convincing Qaddafi that, notwithstanding his Moscow trip, he remained faithful to his pledge to make 1971 the year of decision for war or peace. But the question remained as to how 'effective such a pledge could be at that point, when, to all intents and purposes', the Soviet Union had effectively negated any military adventures.

Sadat's dilemma

Sadat may have thought that he could confront the Russians with a fait accompli. If war with Israel broke out and Egypt was faced with imminent disaster, the Russians, he may have reasoned, could not but come to his rescue. They could ill afford to see their Middle Eastern ally go down to a further crushing defeat as in 1967. If, indeed, any such fanciful thoughts crossed Sadat's mind, they must have been totally dis-

pered by the Indian-Pakistani war. The US loss of face in that conflict made less likely any American willingness to absorb a setback in the Middle East—an area regarded as vital to US interests. Thus, any direct Soviet intervention in the area entailed, more than ever, the possibility of that confrontation with the United States which Soviet policy had steadfastly sought to avoid. And Moscow's circumvention was, no doubt, further increased by the sobering thought that the Soviet Union could be militarily involved on two fronts simultaneously—with the United States in the Middle East and with China in Asia. It may be assumed that the Soviet Union warned Sadat in unambiguous terms that, in any war he might unleash at his 'zero hour', he must expect to stand alone. The moment of truth had arrived for the Egyptian leader. Thus, Sadat's claim in January that the Indian-Pakistani conflict had torpedoed his war plans was perhaps not entirely without foundation. What he omitted to reveal, of course, was that his plans had already become void of reality once the Kremlin leaders had vetoed them in October.

By the end of the year Sadat's dilemma was highlighted. Given his refusal to enter into negotiations with the Israelis, he naturally inclined to a Qaddafi-like solution of all-out war, if only to honour his oft-repeated promise to make 1971 the year of decision. But to enter into hostilities without Soviet backing would be suicidal, so that he was back where he had started from.

As the month of December passed, Egyptian policy seemed to be rudderless, never sure whether it was headed in the direction of war or negotiation. For their part, the Russians were at that point openly dissociating themselves from Sadat's deadline. Thus on 22 December, in response to a direct State Department query, the Soviet Union 'categorically denied' that its ambassador in Cairo had pledged full Soviet support to Egypt in the event of war with Israel. (The report of such a commitment had been headlined a week earlier in a Cairo newspaper.) Yet even at this late date Sadat was still not prepared to acknowledge publicly that the road to war was barred. On 28 December, the Arab Socialist Union, meeting in extraordinary joint session with Egypt's Parliament under Sadat's chairmanship, issued an equivocal declaration which seemed to endorse both resort to war and a continuation of diplomatic negotiations.\(^{12}\) Sadat had apparently not yet decided between Tripoli and Moscow. Only on 13 January, in his famous 'frog' speech, did he formally abandon his threat of war, at least for the moment. The subsequent trip to Moscow in early February placed the seal on that retreat. The 'year of decision', born of the union of Egypt and Libya, was finally laid to rest within the Kremlin walls in February.

In the aftermath of Sadat's submission to the Russian veto, symbolizing the pragmatism of the Soviet-Egyptian alliance over that of the Arab

\(^{12}\) Le Monde, 30 December 1971.
Fishing control—national or international?
GERALD ELLIOTT

Restriction by international agreement has proved insufficient to conserve fish stocks. But is the extension of national fishing limits the right answer?

UNTIL a few years ago, fishing questions almost never entered international politics. Most fishing boats worked in coastal waters and were given adequate protection from foreign intruders by the traditional three-mile limit of sovereignty. A few countries, the UK, US, Japan, and the European countries, had deep-sea fleets but these operations were not so large or extended as to cause international friction.

This position has completely changed. Hardly a week now passes without some report of an international dispute on fishing. The determination with which British and Norwegian fishermen have pursued their interests during the Common Market negotiations illustrates a general situation. There is at present intense international competition for this rich but limited resource, and each country backs its industrial effort by political measures to secure its share.

The rapid growth of world fishing is shown by the figures. In 1958 the world catch was thirty-three million tons. By 1970 it had more than doubled to sixty-eight million tons. Part of this increase has come from countries which have discovered and exploited fish stocks off their coasts. Peru is the spectacular example of this, and now harvests ten million tons of anchovy a year. The rest is due to the expansion of long-distance fishing fleets by a number of advanced countries, notably Japan, Russia, Poland, and Spain. These fleets operate over all the world’s oceans and can fish for months at a time independently of any land base.

Efficiency of catching methods has also improved substantially with the use of more powerful ships, bigger nets, and electronic fish finders.

There are two serious effects of this increased efficiency. First, the combination of high catching power and mobility puts a heavy strain on fish stocks. Fleets congregate in promising areas and within a few years can take so much of a fish stock that it may never recover. Although the pessimistic predictions of fish population experts, based inevitably on slender evidence, are not always to be trusted, there are many areas where in recent years uncontrolled intensive fishing has wiped the sea clean of

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