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The Foundation and Composition of Egypt’s Role in the Arab World

Historically analysing Egypt’s role within the Arab world by focusing on the presidencies of Gamal Abdel Nasser, Anwar Sadat & Hosni Mubarak

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Egyptian President Anwar Sadat at the pyramids of Giza on the outskirts of Cairo, Egypt.
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Abstract

The choice of topic “The Foundation and Composition of Egypt’s Role in the Arab World” is not purely out of interest. It rises out of the abundance of literature and discourse that places Egypt at the centre of the Arab world with very ambiguous reasoning and seemingly haphazard confusion. This thesis thus seeks to do two things. First it aims to show that through the suspension of material capabilities we can instead focus on the norms surrounding regional powers as well as role conception, which can lead to a better understanding of Egypt’s status in the region which is often ascribed as more political, cultural and social rather than based around military and economics. This research uses certain fixed variables to better understand this; Egypt’s self-conception as a leader, its identity and its absorbing nature. Secondly, it aims to map out, historically, how Egypt’s role has taken different forms and manifested itself differently throughout time. This thesis uses the presidencies of Gamal Abdel Nasser, Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak as three distinct eras that can provide us an insight into three different ways we can observe Egypt occupying a distinct role in the Arab world. In order to understand how role behaviour is not static, it is posited that it is necessary to recall some of the major political events and how they have acted as catalysts, for more general contextual changes. It is noted however that all the variables cannot be taken into account further research is suggested on this topic.
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Introduction

Egypt, it is often said, is undeniably important to the Arab world, to the extent that without it one would be looking at an amputated region. Yet despite a widespread recognition of Egypt’s special status there is also a somewhat pervasive uncertainty over the very nature of this status, clear in the way it is assumed by many but in largely different ways. What this paper wishes to expose is this discrepancy in the hope that by appreciating its perplexity we can formulate a better understanding of the foundation and composition of Egypt’s role in the Arab world. In order to achieve this, a better conceptualisation of both power and identity is needed since these are the undercurrents informing and shaping our understanding of Egypt. Furthermore, one needs to investigate how Egypt’s unique role has a long history of representation and that whether real or ‘perceived’ this has been important in its construction in the Arab psyche.

The concept of Egypt as a regional power is filled with positive opportunities as well as contradictions and as a consequence, the case of Egypt asks one to re-evaluate how we conceptualise regional power and role perception. Egypt has many strong attributes, particularly when one focuses on the surface nature of Arab politics. We can identify a variety of reasons for why Egypt is referred to as the centre and political pulse of the Middle East, perhaps the most obvious of reasons being its geographical location, a state that is simultaneously part of many worlds: African, Mediterranean, Middle Eastern and Arab. Politically, Egypt has been a trendsetter in many regards. Whilst actually arriving late to the transnational movement of pan-Arabism, Egypt found it relatively easy to take the reigns as compared to its Arab neighbours. Moreover, it lead the 1967 and 1973 wars, and without it, the war effort came to a complete halt. It was also the first to truly move towards some kind of peace with Israel as well as the first Arab state to become core part of the new Pax-Americana that would shape a large part of twentieth century Middle Eastern politics, not to mention it status as leader of the Arab League. Its political role has at times even transcended beyond the Arab world as was seen in its role as one of the key founders of the Non-Aligned Movement.
Culturally, despite the rise of Al Jazeera and Lebanese pop music, the cultural pervasiveness of Egypt remains undeniable with powerful transmitters such as Cairo Radio and The Voice of the Arabs having a huge impact on the Arab world. Egyptian film, music, literature and poetry were also significantly dominant. Despite attempts by some Arab states to ban Egyptian cultural imports, the Arab masses often went to great lengths to smuggle them into their local markets. Furthermore despite the rise of Saudi Wahhabism Egypt remains an important place in Islam by being the home of Al-Azhar University as well as a number of Islamic scholars such as Muhammad Abdou.

Such a historical record indicates that Egypt’s role as an Arab leader is, in a way, natural and assumed. Yet Egypt’s status in the Arab world has, throughout its history, rarely met its own expectations not to mention the expectations of others. The political experiments of Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak have all undergone significant failures and disappointments. Militarily, although the strongest due to arguably sheer population size, it has gained little from the Arab war efforts of the twentieth century. Furthermore, its military is assisted by the enormous amount of aid that the US gives Egypt each year although why it warrants such importance from the US requires further academic analysis. Economically, Egypt is a poor country by all indicators, with scarce natural resources and one of the lowest per capita income rates in the Arab world. It is largely reliant on Suez Canal revenues and cotton exports and has suffered from permanent budget deficits. The economic policies of Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak were quite different from one another but economic failure was common to all three presidents.

With these factors in mind, Egypt can largely be seen to be a state that has had many shortcomings. As a political and social trendsetter it has been successful in inspiring and motivating people, however when it comes to tangible accomplishments, it has in fact achieved very little. Why then, do the people of the Arab region continue to look upon Egypt as a state that has an important role to play when this place of supposed opportunity rarely leads to a tangible success story? What this research hopes to better understand therefore is the discrepancies between the assumptions and dreams of Egypt being a regional leader and the limitations it has which hinder its ability to actually complete this reality.
Significant academic progress has been made by both Middle Eastern area specialists as well as by scholars of International Relations theory however there are significant gaps between the two that does not allow either of them to sufficiently understand Egypt’s place in the Arab world. Realist-inspired interpretations of Arab Politics dominate international relations theory\textsuperscript{1}. They favour the explanatory power of anarchy and the distribution of power, therefore cultural phenomena emanating out of Egypt has often been seen as causally consequential. When attempting to understand regional power and regional hegemonies realists tend to focus on either the build up of military arsenals or particular types of balancing behaviour and whilst symbolic politics and cultural capital is recognised, it is seen as a tool manipulated by leaders, a tool that is ultimately subservient to material resources. This perspective tends to put a limit on Egyptian power in the Arab world by implying that it is largely perception-based and therefore has little substance. But is this truly a good reflection of what we see throughout the Arab world? The answer is no. Despite lacking many important material capabilities, Egypt has had a distinctive role to play in the Arab world which cannot be answered solely by realist theory as it lacks the tools to sufficiently analyse the ongoing dialogue between Arab states on what roles states should and do play. These discourses are infused with social norms and shared identity features which cannot be sufficiently understood by realism which renders all states faceless characters in the game of politics. Realists have also had difficulty explaining the changes that have occurred in the Arab World. When multipolarity has been constantly evident in the Middle Eastern system and Egypt has continually been short of material capabilities does this not explain continuities rather than change?

Additionally, Area specialists who focus solely on the Middle East tend to do the opposite of the realists by emphasising the uniqueness of Arab states and how Arab politics has a distinctive cultural and social foundation, thus leaving their work fairly under theorised.

What this research suggests as an alternative to these approaches is to use a blend of the work of realists and area specialists and combine it with constructivist theory which offers a kind of political

middle ground. In this way we can understand how Egypt’s role in the Arab World, although not static, does rest on an abundance of symbolic and cultural capital, strengthened by certain normative features infused in Arab politics. This kind of power is related to power and domination just as material capabilities are, however, its source is a cultural storehouse rather than just a military arsenal. So in order to examine Egypt's status and power in the region we must understand its culture and social structural norms and develop theory which can better explain how this formed identity influences upon aspects of political life such as foreign policy aims and regional status. We are therefore adding a different way of interpreting why and how Egypt has a unique status in the Arab world because we are suspending (not getting rid of) ‘real world’ hard power facts such as military and economic strength in order to better examine the possibility that Arab international relations are socially constructed and therefore the ‘roles’ that states occupy have been given meaning by cognitive structures rather than just material resources.

Instead of focusing on whether Egypt has power or does not have power based on a specific set of criteria that it either lacking or possessing in abundance, what this paper proposes is that the power and uniqueness of Egypt lies in the multiple ways Egyptian power manifests itself. So the question becomes less about whether Egypt has power, and more about what sort of power is Egypt showing at this point in time. This question is incredibly important because we are attempting to fundamentally understand the waxing and waning aspects of Egyptian character and how this aligns to for a coherent Egyptian Self, which is a politically active figure that constructs foreign policy.

It is for this reason that this research proposes taking a quite lengthy time period in order to observe this changes and transformations as well as to investigate the relationship and commonalties between them. The menu of Egypt’s roles are linked and not isolated from each other, in other words, in different contexts Egypt’s social and political roles align themselves in different ways. This is a nation that has a much longer history of representation to draw from than majority of its neighbours and has an extensive record of assimilating and absorbing changes into its constitution.
Political leaders have a very important role in this process because they actively take part in framing political events as well as political and cultural symbols. Political leaders are also notable performers who interpret their roles and the roles of their state and whilst they do have some autonomy in these processes they must also answer to normative expectations and underlying cultural frameworks in order for them to work.

It is for these reasons that there will be three chapters that use the eras of Gamal Abdel Nasser, Anwar Sadat, and Hosni Mubarak as a springboard to study certain specific events that reflect something distinctive of that period. The choice of the three Egyptian presidents is not purely for chronological convenience but rather, because each era and personality were incredibly different from one another though connected enough that we can possibly identify certain generalisable traits. It is unnecessary to take the persona of each president and enforce it upon the whole era, but there are certain commonalities of each that set the mood so to speak and moreover, it is beneficial to identify the types of power that each president chose from their ‘cultural tool kit’ as they attempted to define the role of Egypt within the Arab world.

The era of Nasser will be looked at first, and in a number of ways espouses the notion of a ‘grand and passionate Egypt’. Nasser was a grandly ambitious leader and this is in many ways projected in the aspirations and role claimed by Egypt as a nation at this time. Then we will turn to the era of Sadat, who oversaw a much more ‘traditional and world-weary Egypt’. Anwar was a man less concerned with the Arab world and more with Egypt itself. He reflected a much more internally focused Egypt that was weary of the politics of Arabism and eager for Egypt to be a leader by first leading itself and by forging its own political destiny. The era of Mubarak will be considered last as a period that illustrated a highly ‘pragmatic and revisionist Egypt’. Despite arguably playing a less prominent role, Egypt never truly sidelined nor ostracised from the Arab family. The wider context is also interesting, for the new era of Pax-Americana was a ‘sensible’ era of change and ill-suited to the Egyptian roles of the past.
What this approach allows us to appreciate is how there are not a simple set of facts that either lead or do not lead to regional power status. Rather, there are a variety of narratives existing simultaneously and in order to implement a sophisticated academic understanding of what is occurring we must understand the power dynamics operating between them. What is essentially being investigated is ‘what Egypt means’ to people and with this question comes the suggestion that this cannot be answered solely by theories such as realism because to a certain extent it is historically and socially contingent.
Chapter One

Theoretical Foundations

Egypt is a nation state that in several ways appears to simultaneously give two public impressions: that of a naturally born Arab leader and that of a state forever struggling with the expectations seemingly misplaced upon it. From an academic perspective one can fundamentally observe that a core issue barring a better understanding of the seemingly contradictory nature of Egypt’s appearance is due to the need for a re-conceptualisation of particular theoretical frameworks. When looking at states that seem to occupy a distinct position on a regional level there is often a certain level of difficulty found in explaining the nature of this state’s role because it requires one to examine both meta-theories of international relations and power as well as the recognition of the specificity of the region which operates within its own system. The assessment of key theoretical frameworks is an essential prerequisite because it first and foremost clarifies how this thesis thinks about and applies interpretations of theoretical abstractions as well as underlining why such theoretical concepts are indispensable if we are to better understand the foundation and composition of Egypt’s role in the Arab world.

In order to best encapsulate the essence of what this thesis hopes to theoretically investigate throughout the following chapters, two theoretical frameworks will be reflected upon in depth. First and foremost there needs to be a reconceptualization around the notion of regional power and leadership. Secondly there will be an analysis of the literature surrounding role conception. Following these considerations, the synthesized approach taken in this thesis will be put forward as well as an explanation of the intended benefits of this approach.
Regional Power and Leadership

A large amount of academic literature is dedicated to the study of the so-called ‘Great Powers’ however there is a noticeable gap when it comes to the study of regional powers. Furthermore, within the existing literature surrounding regional powers there is often confusion over what exactly a regional power is (or should be) and therefore a certain amount of definitional consideration needs to be taken in order to explore how this thesis topic will use as well as fit in to the existing debate.

Primarily, one must make a distinction between a regional power and a middle power. The term middle power is problematic in the sense that it implies that the international system is constituted by a hierarchical order where all states are placed on a continuum due to set criteria. While this may be useful for certain studies it won’t be for this particular one since it has the potential to ignore the unique attributes of an area which may be essential to why the state in question has any power at all as well as fundamentally particular to how this power is expressed. The study of regional powers describes a research area that combines a geographic concept – region, with a basic concept in International Relations theory – power. In the classic work of Martin Wight he provides us with a helpful definition that differentiates between the different categories. According to him, “The interests of regional great powers are focused on a limited region where they can act on their own accord. Regional great powers are potential candidates for the status of middle powers in the international system” (Wight 1978: 63). Additionally, although apart of the English School of International Relations Wight states in quite a realist fashion that the classification of great powers, middle powers and regional powers is on the basis of their power which is first and foremost, military power (Wight 1978: 65). This is important to note because until quite recently, most of the literature surrounding the different types of ‘powers’ based their classifications around measures of military power, economic power and demographics (See Lemke 2008: 22, Mearsheimer 2005: 47-8). These academic works can clearly to be seen to have been influenced by the work of Kenneth Waltz who stated that, “The structure of the system changes with changes in the distribution of capabilities across the system’s units” (Waltz 1979: 97).
Recent academic theoretical models have moved away from these sorts of approaches somewhat in order to create a more multidimensional power model which can provide a more suitable framework to study regional powers and leadership. By delinking regional power from just material capabilities we can start to see how a number of other factors come in to play, helping one understand the salient features contributing to regional power and leadership positions. More recently one can notice a number of academics that have combined different approaches in IR theory to analyse regional powers. Realist-inspired arguments are still important to understand the distribution of power resources and the polarity but constructivism has also been successfully utilized to highlight that ideas about leadership, status and the regional order and its boundaries are also essential in our academic research.

We start to see a little of this in the writing of Oyvind Osterud (1992: 12) who defines regional powers as: a state which is geographically part of the delineated region, able to stand up against any coalition of other states in the region, one who is highly influential in the region, as well as maybe also being a great power on the world scale in addition to its regional standing (unlike a middle power). Here, we can clearly see a mixture of hard power capabilities as well as more ideational factors (by being ‘influential’). Maxi Schoeman (2003: 350) goes further with this by specifically identifying how the nature of regional leadership requires various factors to be met in order to have an influential role in the region. These include: the internal dynamics of the state allowing it play a stabilizing and leading role in its region, the state indicating and demonstrating willingness (as well as capacity) to assume the role of regional leader, stabilizer and, if not peacekeeper, or at least peacemaker, as well as, the state being acceptable to its neighbours which sometimes requires a broader, extra-regional acceptance supported by other big powers. Shoeman’s criteria does not merely describe a role that comes in being once we add greater economic and military capability to a state, it is instead, a role that is on some level, ascribed to the state in question.

Therefore, we have begun to get to the essence of something else that all regional powers and leaders need in order to hold their position – status. Regional leadership not only requires a self-created identity which allows for this to be incorporated into the state imagination but just as importantly it
also relies on the recognition by others, by stronger and weaker states who are willing to accept that
the state in question is a legitimate power or leader for the region.

The various causes and sources of a state’s status is an important part of identifying regional powers
and explaining the varied nature of what it means to be a regional power. By now we are not only
taking into account material capabilities but also the way status manifests itself. Delte Nolte (2010:
893) writes that a regional power is defined as a state that (among other things), “articulates the
pretension (self-conception) of a leading position in a region…” and, “whose leading position in the
region is recognized or at least respected by other states inside and outside of the region…”.
Therefore, we should not assume that each region will produce a regional power or leader
automatically. A state needs more than just an abundance of material capabilities relative to its
neighbors’; it also needs this status acknowledgment by others as well as by itself. Additionally Delte
Nolte (2010: 893) argues that regional powers are those who are essential in creating or upholding the
status quo of the region. They may influence the geographical delimitation and political-ideational
construction of their region as well as define and articulate a common regional identity or project.

However, the above discussions imply that regional powers are all quite similar, at least in terms of
power/status outcomes. Whilst it would be hard to argue that status does not play some sort of role in
all regional powers, the way status manifests itself, as well as other factors such as identity and
material capabilities can mean that regional powers can exist in a number of different ways, some
more consistent through time than others. This can be seen in Thomas Pederson’s (2002: 682) theory
of co-operative hegemony which modifies neo-realism in a way to incorporate ideational factors when
one studies regionalism. Co-operative hegemony is a type of regional order which essentially,
“implies a soft rule within and through co-operative arrangements based on a long-term strategy”
(Pederson 2002: 683). The theory provides an interesting framework to view how powers that lack
material capabilities can still become regional powers through power-sharing with smaller states in
the region leading to a fairly stable system due to commitment both the big and small regional powers
have to a long-term regionalist policy strategy (Pederson 2002: 687).
One can go further with the notion of differentiating regional powers however, seen most clearly in the work of Sandra Destradi who argues that regional powers can pursue all sorts of foreign policy strategies in their region leading to three distinct kinds of regional powers: regional empires, regional hegemons and regional leaders (2010: 908). Instead of using these terms interchangeably as they often are, Destradi gives us a useful framework for defining the differences between the three concepts and how they can be applied to explain different styles and strategies of regional powers.

By acting imperially, a regional power tends to act unilaterally with an emphasis on military capabilities (Destradi 2010: 909). Hegemony on the other hand, is argued to be “a form of power exercised through strategies which are more subtle than those employed by states behaving as imperial powers” (Destradi 2010: 912). Hegemonic regional powers are self-interested actors whose power rests on a balance between coercion and consensus, and it should be remembered that this relationship is spoken about in a number of other works (Hurrell 2004: xxix; Cox 1977: 421; Lake 1993: 469).

Regional leadership is different again mainly due to the goals pursued by the dominant regional state in question. While the hegemonic regional power pursues self-interested goals, the leader on the other hand, “guides – ‘leads’ – a group of states in order to realize or facilitate the realization of their common objectives” (Destradi 2010: 921). Leadership does not always involve the exercise of power from the regional power, because it is the followers who voluntarily wish to participate and so requires a different understanding compared to say incentive-driven soft hegemony. This notion of followers is important here and written about by other such as Andrew Fenton Cooper, Richard A. Higgott and Kim Rochard Nossal (1991: 398) and James G. Burns (1978: 18). Nevertheless the distinction between say leadership and say a soft hegemony is not always clear cut, both have a normative dimension which is often difficult to source due to certain fundamental power dynamics seen when considering discourse. Thus, although articulated as a follower’s voluntary wish, activities may in fact be a reflection of a very effective discursive hegemony that creates consent (See: Nabers 2010: 937; Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 7, 13; Lukes 1974: 28-9).
These concepts are still useful to differentiate between various regional powers because it makes one aware of the different goals pursued and means employed by regional powers in their relations with others. It is also useful to notice how regional powers often use a combination of these strategies depending on the context, even changing from one to another throughout the course of time.

So inevitably the identification of regional powers is two-fold. The first requires us to analyse the source of regional power which can include material capabilities, status and recognition and any other factors that contribute to a multidimensional power model. The second requires us to differentiate between the various regional powers that are out there to understand how their position manifests itself and has been shaped. This may require looking at a variety of different regional power strategies to truly understand how their power has materialized in their region and affected the regional order.

**Role Conception**

Role conceptions are undoubtedly a concept that has much to do with the notion of status that was touched on just before. One could suggest that role conceptions are the processes which often lead to the outcome - status. However, as both tend to be quite elusive it is necessary to delve a bit more into them specifically. The social sciences (sociologists, psychologists and anthropologists in particular) have been the main disciplines to investigate the way individuals enact different roles within their society in order for them to fit in to other’s expectations. It is for this reason that we must look to these disciplines prior to examining how roles and role-making fit into the field of International Relations. Ralph Turner (1956: 316) defined a role as,

“A collection of patterns of behavior which are thought to constitute a meaningful unit and deemed appropriate to a person occupying a particular status in society (e.g., doctor or father), occupying an informally defined position in interpersonal relations (e.g., leader or compromiser), or identified with a particular value in society (e.g., honest man or patriot)”.

The above, provides us with a clear workable definition of what a role is, but does not provide us with much clarity regarding the relationship between role and status. This however becomes less
ambiguous as Turner continues, for he clearly addresses the nature of the relationship seen when he states,

“Role will be consistently distinguished from status or position or value type as referring to the whole of the behavior which is felt to belong intrinsically to those subdivisions. Role refers to behavior rather than position, so that one may enact a role but cannot occupy a role. However, role is a normative concept. It refers to expected or appropriate behavior and is distinguished from the manner in which the role is actually enacted in a specific situation, which is role behavior or role performance” (Turner 1956: 317).

On a similar wavelength, Ralph Linton (1936: 113) also attempts to distinguish between the two, stating that,

“A role represents the dynamic aspect of a status. The individual is socially assigned a status and occupies it with relation to other statuses. When he puts the rights and duties which constitute the status into effect, he is performing a role.”

Thus, despite the level of debate surrounding the definition of role there does seem to have emerged a level of consensus through the consideration of role as a type of behavior and status which refers to norms and cultural/societal expectations attached to various positions.

As can be seen, there is a substantial amount of theory that has been developed around the idea of roles. Yet, there has been a lack of academic work dedicated to extending role theory to the field of International Relations and general foreign policy analysis. The notion of status in the international arena is more ambiguous than the idea of position in a social context, and additionally, its consequences on actual foreign policy behavior and outcomes is still relatively unexplored.

Despite focusing mainly on national role self-conceptions rather than on alter role prescriptions, K. J. Holsti (1970) arguably provides one of the best studies illustrating how role conception can be applied to the study of foreign policy. Holsti (1970: 246) defines national role conceptions as essentially, the ‘image’ of the appropriate orientations or functions of the state toward, or in, the external environment. These role conceptions are reinforced as well as shaped by role prescriptions coming
from the external environment, which can vary in their level of influence upon national role self-conceptions (Holsti 1970: 246). Role prescription from the alter comes from things such as system structure, system-wide values and treaty commitments (Holsti 1970: 245). Role conceptions that come from within the nation are created from things such as location, natural resources, national and traditional values, public opinion and personality (Holsti 1970: 245). These two independent variables combine to create the nation’s status or position which then goes on to explain and shape foreign policy behavior (role performance).

Holsti identifies a number of national role conceptions. Regional leadership is one of these role conceptions, and often is accompanied by a number of others (Holsti 1970: 261). Just like people then, states are multi-faceted with many personality traits that tend to align differently. Holsti’s research also illustrates how despite some academic research which delineates states as fairly polar in terms of material capabilities, the states themselves often view themselves as having multiple roles, especially on a more regional level where issues and role conceptions seem to be most salient and where they seem to be most focused (Holsti 1970: 291).

One of the largest issues with conceptualizing role theory is that sources do not always reveal the origins of the particular role conception in focus. They will speak about the role itself, but not always make reference to its subterranean roots. This is something that this thesis has to grapple with and constantly be aware of. Despite these challenges the concepts role and status need to be included when analyzing foreign policy behavior. Material capabilities and the international system at large are important factors, but role theory allows us to capture a state exercising individuality. As Wahlke et al (1962: 243) state,

“Even if, at this stage of research development, we cannot in every case link roles or role orientations to behavior, the fact that legislators do articulate what they think they should do by virtue of their relations among themselves and between themselves and clienteles suggests that roles are effective indicators of behavioral possibilities.”
One could argue that role conception is more important in the study of certain states over others and therefore a general application is not advocated here, nonetheless, it is important in the study of Egypt as will be revealed in the following chapters.

*Synthesized Approach*

As was previously mentioned in the introduction this thesis uses a mixture of International Relations theory. Realist-inspired arguments are taken into consideration but this research attempts to make that case that sometimes these arguments related to material capabilities and the balance of power need to be suspended so that we can consider constructivist ideas relating to the power of culture and social structural norms and the effect they have on forming identities which in turn influence aspects of political life such as foreign policy aims and regional status. It is suggested here that because roles and status are created partly cognitively then we need a more multi-dimensional approach to capture this more holistically.

This thesis uses realist-inspired arguments and constructivist theory as the meta-foundations to the research. They are, by and large, the parameter to which the thesis conducts itself. The more specific theoretical literature concerning regional leadership and role conception allows us to flesh out our theoretical knowledge in order to better apply it the specific topic of Egyptian role and status in the Arab world. These operate in more of a sub-system and although referred to often, one should not forget the underlying underpinning to this thesis which is traditional International Relations theory.

The method of analysing each of the three chosen eras involves looking at a selection of independent variables or catalysts from that period of time as well as certain fixed variables in order to measure the dependent variable, which is essentially the question this thesis is asking. It has been recognised here that not all the independent variables can be taken into account because it is beyond the scope of this thesis. In this paper however, the independent variables that have been chosen (certain catalytic events) can still offer us an example framework from that time within which we can view a certain Egyptian role-conception operating and how context can possibly be a way of understanding the *kinds* of roles seen throughout time. It is important to note then that this thesis is a mere starting point to
observing points in time where Egypt played an important role in the Arab world and how it has transformed throughout time. Further research would dedicate more time to a wider range of independent and structural variables.

There are three fixed variables that this thesis puts forward as being influential factors on how Egypt’s role in the Arab world manifests itself. The most important one is Egypt’s self-conception as a leader, whereby despite history not being an essential precedent to grand status, this thesis will show that its continual performance and recognition of it by other Arab states has means that it becomes a widely agreed upon Arab norm, thus the cycle becomes firmly entrenched in inter-Arab politics.

Another common variable is Egypt’s strong identity which has historically placed it in a better position to play the role of leading other Arabs. This identity is the result of Egypt’s long history, geography and by the fact that it has a largely homogenous population (Jebb 2004: 10). The last factor that accompanies the first two is Egypt’s absorptive nature. Many states find there is tension between nationalist identities and other identities (regional or religious for example), however Egypt throughout this study has shown a remarkably ability to assimilate them without diluting them.

Certain periods of history have prioritised the Egypt’s Arab identity (the Nasser era for example) whilst others have prioritised Pharaonism or Egyptian national identity (the Sadat era for example) however emphasis on one suits different kinds of role performance and does not necessarily result in the dilution of others.

Method of Analysing Egypt’s Regional Role Conception/Performance:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables (Catalyst Events)</th>
<th>Common Denominator (fixed variable)</th>
<th>Dependent Variable (outcome that is measured)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intrinsic Egyptian centrality quality/ies:</td>
<td>What kind of power is Egypt displaying at this point in time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Self-Perception as a leader</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Absorbing nature of Egypt</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Strong national identity</td>
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For example the leader in power and current political environment which may include key political events.
With Regards to methodological tools, this thesis largely relies on primary and secondary historic sources. The abundance of historical secondary sources on events and occurrences on Egypt’s 20th century history has been utilized, especially with regards to scholars who were writing close to the time. Primary sources have also been looked at to better understand discourse, which include; head of state memoirs, media reports, state speeches, government official rhetoric, as well as the opinions of prominent intellectuals. There are very few research sources dedicated to the study of Egyptian and Arab public opinion during these time periods, and whilst it is realised this is a downfall of this thesis, it is asked that the reader keeps it in mind how hard it is to gauge public opinion when the study focuses on a state that has a highly authoritarian government in power. However, the focus on elite opinions is simultaneously quite fitting due to the nature of Egyptian government which is highly centralised. Foreign policy in particular was dictated largely by the president and other high government officials within Egypt and from other states, therefore it remains appropriate that this is the focus of this study, seen most notably in the way that each era is characterised by a particular president.
Chapter Two

Nasser: The Grand and Passionate Egypt

The era of Gamal Abdel Nasser is undoubtedly the easiest period to observe a highly influential Egypt. When scholars refer to a time where Egypt was the cultural centre of the Arab world they often tend to focus on this period. Nasser was the Egyptian who captivated not only his own people but also the entire Arab world. As a significant cultural core during the era of pan-Arabism, Egypt was the key in defining what it meant to be Arab, or more plainly, it helped construct the Arab Self in a particular way. Although we can view such actions and state behaviour as expected, or as ‘Egypt’s natural right’, we are urged to ponder why these widely held assumptions exist. Egypt, was clearly the most active Arab leader during this period but it begs the question of how this became an accepted norm, especially when one considers the fairly isolationist stance Egypt had at the beginning of the twentieth century. Nasser (1955: 55) himself sums up the elusive notion as well as any other when he stated,

“The annals of history are full of heroes who carved for themselves great and heroic roles and played them on momentous occasions on the stage. History is also charged with great heroic tales which do not find actors to play them on the stage. I do not know why I always imagine that in this region in which we live there is a role wandering aimlessly about seeking an actor to play it. I do not know why this role… should at last settle down, weary and worn out, on our frontiers beckoning us to move, to dress up for it and to perform it since there is nobody else who can do so.”

If we allow this quote to be a springboard to further research one will find that it perfectly sums up why in order to understand the outcome we must formulate a better investigation of the process. As was spoken about in the previous chapter, one must understand how independent variables may possibly combine with a certain fixed variable (or common denominator) in order to create dependent variable. In this chapter the independent variables
in question (or catalyst events) will include: the Baghdad Pact, the Suez Crisis of 1956 and the Egyptian union with Syria. Although not the only independent variables, they do provide useful insights to observe Egyptian role performance. Before these events are looked at in turn however a brief background is given to Egypt’s place just prior to 1952.

**Background**

In the early twentieth century prior to the era of Nasser, Egypt had an important role to play in Middle Eastern Politics. It quite unlike the one that was seen after 1954, but Egypt was still characterised by the transcendent traits mentioned earlier: Egypt was still absorptive, exhibited a strong sense of national identity and displayed constant self-reference of its role position. A more strict sense of nationalism was favoured in the 1920s and 1930s which helps explain the less proactive role Egypt had, especially when one also takes into account the strong colonial presence that still lingered around this time. Taha Hussein was one of Egypt’s greatest thinkers at the time and wrote the historically significant book ‘The Future and Culture of Egypt’ in 1938 which expressed clearly the sentiments of the time. The Egypt that Hussein spoke of was one that did not prioritise its role in solely the Arabs because Egypt was plainly larger than just the Arab world (Galal 1993:5).

H. S. Deighton wrote in 1946 about the sense of national exceptionalism displayed around this time by Egypt and how it translates to the chosen role it believes it should play in Arab international relations, clearly seen when he stated, “Egypt sees in the Arab cause a worthy object of real and active sympathy and, at the same time, a great and proper opportunity for the exercise of leadership, as well as for the enjoyment of its fruits. But she is still Egyptian first and Arab only by consequence, and her main interests are still domestic” (1946:519).

This more insular character did not change immediately after the revolution of 1952, and it should be remembered that after the Free Officers came to power their outlooks did not venture much beyond Egypt’s borders. In fact the years 1952-54 in particular are particularly good at showing that despite a state having a certain kind and level of status in a region, there needs to be an element of *willingness*
for it to be truly felt regionally and for that state to act as a kind of regional power. As is put forward well by Cline et al (2011:141-5) in order for states to play a role in the international arena or occupy a specific sort of status, they need the opportunity, the willingness as well as status attribution from other states. 1955 was in many ways a turning point in this respect but prior to it, Egypt did not possess the willingness to act upon the opportunities it possessed for regional leadership.

In February 1954 the British Foreign Office conducted a survey to investigate the extent of Egypt’s drive to expand its influence into the Middle East and North Africa. The responses that the survey received from other Arab countries indicates that by 1954 it had not even really begun (Jankowski 2001: 55). The British Embassy in Lebanon gives a good example of what was seen throughout the Arab world when they stated, “not only is Egypt failing to extend her influence in Lebanon, but she is not really trying to” (Jankowski 2001: 56). The British Ambassador at the time, Sir Ralph Stevenson seemed to also come to these sorts of conclusion, stating that he doubted Egypt would be able to maintain a position of leadership within the Arab world (Janowski 2001: 56). However, Stevenson’s inability to separate opportunity from willingness caused him to make a flawed prediction.

Prior to Nasser firmly turning Egypt towards the direction of its Arab neighbours it was not that it lacked the ability to do so but there was also no willingness behind it. Thus, Nasser encapsulates the grand and passionate Egypt for it was here that we can observe a time when Egypt’s role and Nasser’s purpose turned towards the Arab world most ardently and whole-heartedly and indeed, increased to such a degree that it caught many previous observers off-guard.

**Act of Leadership I: The Baghdad Pact**

The mid-1950s was when Egypt started to become much more Arab-centred however Nasser was no magician. Egypt already had a role to play, it was just a matter of channelling that to the Arab world specifically and creating a willingness and passion for it to manifest itself in the way that it did. A change in Nasser’s tone can be noticed in his address of July 22 1954 whereby he stated that the goal of the revolution was for the Arabs to form a united nation and the need for Arab solidarity in the face
of Western imperialism (Janowski 2001: 60). However 1955 is when one can really see the Egyptian regime’s goals starting to crystallize, since it was at this time that the Baghdad Pact started to tangibly form. The Baghdad Pact was essentially a Western effort to build a Middle Eastern organisation that would be Western in its outlook and safeguard the region from the potential expansion of Soviet influence. Its architects were mainly Britain, Iraq and Turkey but what was so interesting about the Pact was that instead of shedding light on the Cold War, it became an event that starkly illustrated inter-Arab relations and what the Middle East would look like in the post-colonial era (Butt 2003). As King Hussein wrote (1962: 101), “1955 was the decisive turning-point in the post-war history of the Arab world, and the Baghdad Pact was the start of it all.”

The presence of superpowers or colonial powers tends to muddle regional sub-systems. With the withdrawal of the British by the mid 1950s one can begin to view the power dynamics of the Arab world on its own and realise the historic legacies behind them, in particular the antagonistic relationship between Egypt and Iraq. Geography plays a very important part and is intrinsic to the fixed variables spoken of that constitutes Egypt’s role in the Arab world: self-reference, being absorptive and possessing a strong national identity. Having said that, Iraq was not without its own leadership qualities and it is for this reason that both states seemed to overlap one another when it came to occupying specific roles in the Arab world. Both Iraq and Egypt have long historical memories and hold important geographic locations. Iraq and Egypt are both home to ancient civilisations: Mesopotamia and the land of Egypt as defined by the Nile Valley. Both have historically been strategic locations that bridge eastern civilisations with western ones (Podeh 1995: 15). Subsequently both have experienced being centres of gravity in their region which has thus led to a self-conception held by both that they are well-suited to an important role in leading the Arabs.

However, it was Egypt who emerged from the Baghdad Pact as the apparent leader of the Arabs, not Iraq. Such an outcome is interesting and requires one to ponder why. The Cairo Conference on 6 February 1955 was significant in shaping the balance of power, whereby smaller states who attended such as Syria, Jordan and Lebanon were left in no doubt of Egypt’s strength of condemnation against the projected pact and this was perhaps one of the main factors for why they chose not to support it.
(Sanjian 1997: 247, Gerges 1994: 25). A number of reasons contributed to Egypt’s ability to triumph in setting the Arab agenda over Iraq. Egypt had the greatest military capabilities in the entire Arab world in the 1950s. Its forces more than doubled that of Iraq’s as did its military spending, Iraq spending $83.5 million in 1958 as opposed to Egypt’s $211 million. Economically however, Iraq outstripped Egypt along almost all indicators. Despite having a promising industry and agricultural sector Egypt in 1958 was exporting $470.4 million and importing $661.7 million. Iraq on the other hand was the third largest producer of crude petroleum in the Arab world and in 1958 was exporting $566.7 million and importing only $307.4 million (Podeh 1995: 22).

Despite these factors this thesis wants to draw attention to how important political and cultural capabilities proved to be in turning the tables as well. Both used diplomacy skilfully however Egypt arguably was more successful due to its ability to control happenings within the Arab League whereby Nasser directly manipulated the League’s collective security arrangements (Hasou 1985: 74-84). Essentially what Nasser did was equate Egyptian nationalism with Arab nationalism and as a consequence any Arab national even within Iraq who went against the Egyptian vision was branded as opposing Arab national interests (Abid & Abid 2009: 27).

This was possible at the elite level due to what was happening on a more ground level. Iraq can clearly be seen to have faltered when it came to radio and press propaganda which Nasser’s Egypt excelled at. Egypt was a largely homogenous society with a strong national identity which by this stage in the country’s history was becoming more and more Arab-centred. This did not mean that Egypt was becoming diluted in a cultural sense but merely that it showed rather effortlessly how it could absorb the other Arab countries into an Egyptian-inspired Arab world and essentially, be both Egyptian and Arab simultaneously. Voice of the Arabs and Cairo Radio were instrumental political weapons and reached not only the most remote of Egypt’s villages but all across the Middle East and North Africa. This must be taken into account with Egypt’s existing cultural place in the Arab world which involved being a large producer of films, producing books that found their way into other local markets even when banned and also having a large number of teachers whom taught in other Arab countries often bringing ‘Egypt with them’ (Podeh 1995: 26). It was the pre-existing cultural power
that Egypt possessed that led them to utilise propaganda as an instrument of foreign policy (Dawisha 1975: 897).

This is not to say that Iraq was without its own political and cultural power, however despite being a state with a long and proud historic legacy Iraq was a largely fragmented society, with its state borders being constructed by foreign powers after the First World War rather than naturally. This contributed to Iraq’s inability to bring other Arab countries to it, because although stable at the time of the Baghdad Pact it still showed little ability in being able to export a strong sense of identity and to be absorbing first and foremost of its own Iraqi population let alone other Arabs. This detracted from the strong role conception that Iraq had (like Egypt) that it was a naturally born leader of a pan-Arabist movement.

Additionally one should note the specific context of the Baghdad Pact. Egypt, simply put, espoused ideas that were better suited to the time. Whether it actively shaped these interests or was merely more in tune to them than others is difficult to assess – most likely it is a bit of both. The reality of the 1950s was that decolonisation was starting to gain momentum and nations everywhere wanted little to do with former colonial powers. Egypt’s disapproval of the Baghdad Pact was built along these lines through its policy of ‘positive neutralism’ – a policy that was based around choosing neither superpower and was about instead having the power and courage to forge an independent destiny outside of the Cold War (Flower 1972: 192). Part of Egypt’s technique was by negatively associating particular Arab rulers or leaders with imperialism or Zionism (Dawisha 1975: 900). This can be seen when Voice of the Arabs declared in 1958,

“You brethren of the Iraqi Arab army are well aware that the government of Nuri al-Said disperses the (Iraqi) officers and prevents them from holding high rank in the Iraqi army. They are replaced by Turkoman officers to ensure the subjection of the Iraqi army and to force it to be loyal to imperialist obligations” (Barnett 1998: 117).

In the above statement, one can observe the association of Nuri al-Said’s to both imperialism and to his alleged Turkish descent, therefore making him unfit to lead the Arabs. As a consequence we can
see that the level and type of success that Egypt had was not just to do with pre-existing Egyptian leadership status and the new flavour that Nasser brought to the arena but also due to the occurrences that were happening with many other Third World countries in as well as outside the Middle East and Egypt’s ability to work within that framework with its existing capabilities. However despite this, it is worth emphasising the effect Egypt had on the Arabs as a dynamic actor rather than just one who arguably just benefited from the structural occurrences at the time. Egypt displayed a leadership role through its ability to forge its own Arab agenda that was not advocated solely by Egyptians but received and adopted by their Arab brothers. By framing the Baghdad Pact as going against Arab nationalism rather than just an agreement going against Egypt it was able to successfully stop Arab leadership moving to Iraq, and more importantly benchmark Egypt as the safe keeper of Pan-Arabism.

*Act of Leadership II: The Suez Crisis of 1956*

Although the Baghdad Pact can be seen as the beginning of what was seen as Egypt’s increasing grand status in the Arab world, it could be said that it was the Suez Canal Crisis of 1956 that was the event that truly captured the imagination of Arabs and created a seemingly unshakeable belief in the normative goals of Nasser’s Egypt. The nationalisation of the Canal was instrumental in affirming Egypt’s heroic status as well as Nasser’s daring and seemingly superhuman persona and is essential in understanding what led two nations who do not share geographic borders – Syria and Egypt – to form a united state. With regards to Egypt’s recipe for role conception, the event further legitimised its constant self-reference as leader of the Arabs and reinforced Egyptian national identity by rejecting former colonial bonds. With regards to being particularly absorptive of others into the Egyptian Self, this was seen quite clearly in Syria’s wish to join with Egypt soon after 1956.

The Suez Canal opened in 1869 and was a Western project up until 1956. As Edward Said (1978: 88-92) argues, the creation of the Suez Canal was the West’s way of bringing the Orient (the Middle East) out of the unknown and into the world of the West so that its very identity could be shaped by the West and made subordinate to it. The role of Egypt therefore was to be the ‘civilising hope’ for the rest of the Middle East. This is seen by Francoise Charles-Roux, president of the Suez Canal
Company, who stated that when Egypt was restored to prosperity and regenerated by wise and enlightened administration it “would shed its civilising rays upon all its Oriental neighbours” (Marlowe 1964: 31). Therefore we can observe that the role of Egypt was related in the sense that it was a centre of gravity in the Arab world, however the difference between then and the Egypt of 1956 was that the nationalisation of the Canal would lead the nation to holding its own future, making them a seemingly more legitimate Arab leader and hero, rather than a leader whose power was ‘given’ to them by colonial powers whom they were ultimately subservient to.

The role that Egypt and the Suez Canal more specifically had in the struggle for remaking Arab identity can clearly be seen in Nasser’s speech which first revealed his plans. In it he stated,

“The Suez Canal was one of the facades of oppression, extortion, and humiliation. Today, citizens, the Suez Canal has been nationalised and this decree has in fact been published in the Official Gazette and has become law. Today, citizens, we declare that our property has been returned to us. The rights about which we were silent have been restored to us” (Cook 2012: 67-8).

In the view of many Arabs, since it was Egypt who was bestowed the power by the Europeans to bring ‘Western civilisation’ to the Middle East, it was only fitting that it was then Egypt’s role to reject that vision in order to replace it with their own Pan-Arabist dream on behalf of all other Arabs. Egypt seemed, from the perspective of Egyptians and other Arabs, to hold the proper self-conception as a regional leader and a regime fit enough to carry out this plan of action. However what is interesting is that the Suez Crisis was not a military victory for Egypt. It was completely outclassed by Israel, France and Britain and suffered enormous losses as soon as Israel first invaded the Sinai on October 29 which included a daytime drop of 500 paratroopers (Cook 2012: 69). The Anglo-French-Israeli alliance only agreed to withdraw after being pressured by the United States, Soviet Union and the United Nations (Neff 1996: 83).

The aim of Britain, France and Israel was to humiliate Nasser through military defeat causing him to resign or be asked to leave by the people yet the opposite occurred. Nasser’s status as a leader was
undamaged and instead experienced an upswing in popularity. Nasser and Egypt as a whole was cast in the role of a hero-martyr by other Arabs (Dekmejian 1971: 46). The Suez provides an excellent example of how the role that the Nasser regime sought for Egypt at this time allowed them to combine nationalist achievements and economic benefits (from say canal revenues) with regional agenda building. The regional status that they held made it easier for them to seek national ambitions because challenges that seemed to target Egypt and Nasser were instead seen to attack Egyptian-led Pan-Arabism and therefore any response to the attack could be shaped as an apparent Arab aspiration laden with legitimacy.

Outside the realm of Egypt, the symbolic effect of the Suez Crisis can be judged to be immense by observing the extensive changes that it provoked throughout many other Arab states further indicating Egypt’s status as the ‘political trendsetter’ state. There was a huge shift in regional Arab politics towards Egypt and its brand of Arab nationalism. Richard Nixon (1982: 290-1) reflected on the effect that Nasser had quite clearly in one of his books, stating:

“The constant din of his propaganda reached throughout the Arab world. When I visited the Middle East in 1957, I did not stop in Egypt, but wherever I went I heard his voice on the radio. In the markets and streets of Libya, the Sudan, the Tunisia and Morocco, I saw people, young and old, rich and poor, listening to his voice with looks of almost ecstasy, he used both radio and television with consummate skill, not only for his own exhortations, but to get his message across through the medium of entertainment, he mobilised the best of entertainment in the Arab world, and they made songs such as ‘how we build the high dam at Aswan’ – popular hits.”

Saudi Arabia remained in favour of Nasser publicly due to public popularity but not privately and similarly, the people of Lebanon agreed with Nasser’s message and consequently put their government in a difficult situation when it refused to sever relations with Britain and France (Khalidi 1989: 385). Jordan was also in a difficult position due to relations with Britain with King Hussein admitting that whilst he signed the Arab Solidarity Agreement in Cairo in 1957 which secured Jordan 12.5 million Egyptian pounds per year for ten years to replace British subsidy he felt that the regional
and domestic pressures had not really given him a choice to act otherwise (Satloff 1994: 159). All these political occurrences were the result not so much of Egypt’s military prowess but of the symbolic capital it had due to its role as an Arab leader.

**Act of Leadership III: The United Arab Republic, 1958-62**

The greatest ripple effect of the Suez Crisis however can be seen on the effect that the event had on the nation of Syria. Discussions of unification were minor in Egyptian-Syrian relations prior to 1956, however the Suez War catalysed both domestic turmoil in Syria as well as enthusiasm towards unification (Seale 1965: 262). During the Suez crisis, crowds in Damascus attended a pro-Egyptian rally chanting “one flag, one people, one country” (Mufti 1996: 78) and it was not long until Syrian politicians were also advocating Arab unification. However it should be noted that the Syrians proposal for unity to the Egyptians should not be attributed solely to Egypt’s status, there were a number of other factors including Syrian domestic politics. Syria had gone through a number of governments in the past decade and the Ba’athists who were currently in power felt that in order to inject some form of stability into Syria they had to unite with Egypt, which would counter the growing Communist political base (Kerr 1971: 11).

However, the creation of the United Arab Republic was not really consistent with Egypt’s role performance during this period or with any other period for that matter. As was mentioned earlier, part of Egypt’s status power was in its ability to combine absorptive power with a strong Egyptian identity, in other words, an ability that allowed an Arab identity for example to coexist next to an Egyptian one without diluting the latter. The creation of the UAR ran the risk of ruining this balance and should be considered as one of the factors that lead to the republic’s short four year lifespan. From the outset, many sources stipulate that it was Syria who approached Egypt and that Nasser lacked any real enthusiasm at the prospect of Arab unity becoming a firm reality and having to get tangled up within Syrian politics (Barnett 1998: 130, Cook 2012: 73-4, Abdel-Malik 1968: 256, Seale 1965: 314). However the calls for Arabism were strong even for one of its chief architects. Nasser was very much aware of how rhetoric was not just ‘worthless talk’ but a powerful way of forming
expectations. Just as his grand Egyptian-led Arabist movement was a role performance that enabled him to achieve certain foreign policy objectives, it also constrained him to do things that he and Egypt were not overly keen to do – such as the unification with Syria.

Subsequently Nasser found himself in a symbolic trap of sorts by the end of 1957 because he was required to commit Egypt to increased regional activity and Arabism in order to maintain role and status legitimacy. Egypt could not maintain its grand status or keep igniting the passions of other Arabs if it backed down from a union with Syria when all along this is what it had been championing (Teti 2004: 86). However this is where we can perhaps observe an example of how role conception can swing to a certain extreme and be made unstable, largely due to it lacking some of the key fixed variables. State and imagined community were made to coincide in Egypt, not for Egypt to be subsumed by Arab identity (Kienle 1995: 53). For them to correspond you need the self reference to be a leader, a strong national identity and to be absorptive. The UAR required Egypt to be overly absorptive at the cost of national identity.

The only aspect of the UAR that was in Egypt’s favour and in line with their usual modus operandi was that the republic was clearly Egyptian-led, with Syria being like an almost province of Egypt rather than a republic between two equal states. The Charter of the Egyptian Liberation Rally (1953) illustrates this historic line of thinking because it sought to enable “Egypt to fulfil her international mission, as a strong state... assisting the Arab peoples” (Khalil 1962: 688). Thus, we can see even from the outset, Egypt’s vision of Pan-Arabism envisaged “unequal relations of power between protector and protégé or patron and client” (Kienle 1995: 63). Syria’s approach to the UAR was completely different on the other hand because it conceptualised nation and identity very differently. Syria already imagined itself as part of an imagined community of Arabs or at the very least, as part of ‘Greater Syria’. The very fact that it was they who approached Egypt and were willing to submit to its authority indicates that Egypt was imagined as part of their community, not as one of “them” but as one of “us” (Kienle 1995: 57). Syria, as one may observe, widely held a perception that the ‘region’ of Syria was artificial in a number of ways. This was completely the opposite of Egypt which although had an awareness of its ‘Arab brothers and sisters’, maintained a firm sense of Self even at the peak of
Arabism. This is what allowed them to connect themselves to other Arabs but simultaneously maintain enough distance in order to play the role of a leader.

**Conclusions**

Despite the misfortune the befell the Arab world with the outcome of the 1967 war and the disenchantment with Nasser following it, one cannot help but notice the obvious sense of fascination felt by Arabs towards the occurrences of the 1950s and 60s and the key role attributed to Egypt in creating it. While it is realised that Nasser’s era was filled with a number of other historic events that can provide more insight into examples in action of Egyptian role behaviour, they are beyond the scope of this thesis. However despite this shortcoming one can still observe how Egyptian self-reference as a regional leader, its strong identity and its ability to absorb outside forces and people mixed with specific contextual arrangements led Egypt to accept a role that ‘was wandering aimlessly’ until it seemed to fall at their doorstep.

The Nasser era ended with much disappointment and more recently it is not uncommon for people to refer to the empty rhetoric of Nasser, as perhaps events such as formation and ultimate failure of the UAR contributed to. Despite these factors however, Nasser was a historic figure who fit in well with what is largely seen as a ‘historic’ nation. Egyptian’s sense of where history had led them and what role they should have in the future was articulated for them by Nasser in a very apt fashion. As Tarek Osman (2011: 60) correctly states,

“Egypt was yearning to resume its traditional role as regional leader. Within its own borders, Egypt is a poor country with few resources, scores of problems and limited potential. In its role at the political heart of the Arab world, the region’s cultural trendsetter and the centre of debate and action, Egypt can transcend its limitations and expand its capacities. All of Egypt’s great rulers have been aware of these components of the country’s collective psychology – as have great swaths of people. The Egyptians took to Nasser’s project because it was an imperative based on the country’s historical experience.”
It should be noted that despite the abundance of literature that speaks of Egypt’s leading role in the Arab world during the era of Nasser there is an issue with a large majority of analyses for they tend to prioritise Egypt in this era as being a state that encapsulates ‘true’ regional power when in actual fact Egypt was exhibiting a specific type of role and occupying a distinct position.

As was illustrated in this chapter, although the Arab world was captivated by Nasser and the grand Egypt, it did not necessarily blindly follow it. Many Arab leaders were so concerned over Nasser that they maintained relations with Britain or the United States. As Nixon (1982: 290-1) aptly observed, “Nasser’s leadership was pyrotechnic... He meddled compulsively in the affairs of other Arab countries... [making] both firm friends and bitter enemies, few were neutral about him”. Therefore to speak of this time as the golden era of Arab relations which was followed only by fragmentation denies the constant bickering and competition that is seemingly forever present within the Arab ‘family’. By having a more elastic view of state roles, status and power this chapter has aimed to highlight the ways in which the Egyptian role manifested itself within the era of Nasser as it truly was – an inspiring leader who was simultaneously domineering in many aspects.
Chapter Three

Sadat: The Traditional and World–Weary

Egypt

The Anwar Sadat era oversaw an Egypt which had very different priorities to that of the previous Nasser era. The previous chapter examined a few events in order to better understand the grand leadership role that Egypt occupied during most of the 1950s and 1960s which seemed to hold such normative appeal for many Arabs throughout the region. Egypt, it seemed, finally stood for something that was appropriate for a nation of its historic and cultural standing. The Sadat era instead saw an increasing agreement between all Arabs to respect state geographies and boundaries. Egypt throughout the 1970s became gradually more inward focused due to a variety of reasons. Some can be attributed to the persona and actions of President Sadat; others were due to specific domestic and regional changes. This thesis however does not follow the argument of waning Egyptian power and prefers to rather illustrate the different roles the state has taken up.

Anwar Sadat had a certain type of appeal that differed from Nasser. Many accounts refer to him as a kind of village chief, and one who was greatly shaped by the fact that he came from a poor village in the Nile Delta. Sadat was a man less concerned with the Arab world and more with Egypt itself. After the Six-Day War of 1967, one can observe quite generally a much more internally focused Egypt that was weary of the politics of Arabism and eager for Egypt to be a leader by first leading itself and by forging its own political destiny. This came about due to the immense defeat Egypt experienced from the war with Israel which had left the Egyptian military in shambles, lost them the Sinai Peninsula and
severely reduced Egypt’s prestigious status in the region. The 1970s subsequently saw an Egypt less
sure about itself and of its role in the Arab world, however this does not mean Egypt lacked an
important role to play. As will be seen, it remained a key actor whose actions sent ripple effects
throughout the region and much of its power can be seen in the way it leads itself and its level of
political and social autonomy.

As has been previously discussed, this thesis approaches the concept of Egypt’s role in the Arab world
by examining how examples of independent variables can combine with certain common fixed
variables in order to help us understand a dependent variable (in this case, Egypt’s role in the region).
In this chapter the independent variables, or catalysts, looked at will consist of two key events that
shaped inter-Arab relations in this decade: the October War of 1973 and the Arab-Israeli Peace
Process 1974-1979. Both provide good insights into how context and particular Egyptian features can
influence upon role behaviour.

Background

Before one can truly evaluate the course which Sadat placed Egypt on, there must be a certain level of
knowledge of the state of affairs just after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War (The Six-Day War). To say that
Sadat completely changed the course of Egypt’s foreign policy is slightly misleading and omits the
confusion and changing role conception that Nasser and Egypt as a whole went under from 1967 to
1970, Nasser’s death. Although the Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973 were on the surface fought in
similar ways with regards to the Arab coalitions involved and the symbolic representations they used
to represent Israel, the political motivations and mentality of the October War largely deviated from
that of the Six-Day War. The post-1967 period saw a more conservative orientation for most Arab
states.

This turn away from the ideological towards more conservative orientations can clearly be seen at the
Arab League Summit held in Khartoum after the 1967 war. Nasser illustrated quite clearly at the
summit that he was less preoccupied with exporting Egypt’s influence to the other Arab states and
more concerned with rebuilding Egypt’s resources and reclaiming the Sinai. According to Tahseen Bashir, a high profile Egyptian diplomat who worked closely with both Nasser and Sadat, “the Khartoum conference became the moment of the new realism, the ascendance of realpolitik over ideology, a commitment to the status quo rather than to revolution” (Barnett 1998: 166). According to Bashir, in adopting this orientation, Nasser’s goal became to regain Egyptian – not Arab – territories (Barnett 1998: 166). This redirection away from the ideologically-based legitimacy issue of Israel toward the issue of boundaries and territory is also highlighted by Egypt’s immediate acceptance of UNSC Resolution 242 which asked Israel to go back to the territorial boundaries it had prior to 1967, and thus proposed the notion of ‘land for peace’ (Lowe et al 2008: 308).

Furthermore, Nasser withdrew from aggravating other conservative governments, chiefly by making amends with Saudi Arabia at the summit (mostly over the issue of Yemen), and also by the closure of the Voice of the Arabs radio broadcasts and the dismissal of Ahmad Sa’id (Boyd 1993: 316). Arab states in general were becoming less concerned with unification and in its place, defined themselves more strongly by the Arab-Israeli conflict. Egypt’s role in the region visibly changed from attempting to integrate the other states into their vision of Egyptian-led Pan Arabism towards inter-Arab cooperation which Egypt seemed to feel was its role to actively mould in order to reclaim national territories which primarily served their national interests. Thus while Sadat would take Egypt in a direction that speculatively Nasser would never have done, we can still observe huge elements of change even before Sadat came to power.

**Act of Leadership I: The October War (The 1973 Arab-Israeli War)**

Although both the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli Wars were largely Egyptian-led Arab coalitions, the October War of 1973 really saw Egypt acting not only quite unilaterally in a military sense but also in its political motivations for going to war and in what it hoped to achieve through its actions. This is perhaps most obvious in Sadat’s ambiguity leading up to October 1973, as well as the circumstances in which Egypt accepted a ceasefire and the effect this had on other Arab states, most notably on Syria. Egypt’s role can be best understood as a combination of certain independent variables such as
the previous loss of territory and Sadat’s own desire to prove himself, as well as the fixed variables that are referred to in this thesis; the Egypt’s self-reference as an Arab leader which needed to reaffirm its position after 1967, its strong identity as being Egyptian and what this identity entails, as well as a certain level of absorptiveness which allowed for other Arabs to support Egypt by sharing a sense that they were all united as a people and therefore should tackle the issue as a kind of family. This last fixed variable was less strong however, reflecting the fact that Egypt was returning back to a more inward-focused Egypt, less concerned with its Arab identity as was seen prior to 1954.

Egyptian prestige and status suffered from the immense defeat of the 1967 war however this did not in fact lead to a completely diminished role for Egypt. The Middle Eastern region between the years of 1967 and 1973 was largely in limbo due to uncertainty of what Egypt would do next (Al-Sayyid Marsot 1985: 156). This ambiguity only reaffirmed the evaluation of Sadat made by US diplomats right after Nasser’s death who assessed him as a weak leader who would be unable to hold onto power in the long term (Sadat 1978: 277). These factors make it clear that not only did Egypt as a state have to regain its prestige but that simultaneously Sadat personally had to prove his own capacity to lead Egypt appropriately. Despite the uncertainty of whether Egypt and Sadat would deliver on these objectives, the region waited with baited breath regardless. Avraham Sela (1998: 148) who discusses the Arab regional order at the time stresses this point when she states,

“By and large, the changes were a reflection of Egypt’s new constraints and choices. Its vacillation and dilemmas kept the whole Arab system in limbo, just as its decisiveness and action drew in other Arab states behind its lead. Egypt’s diminished regional power and prestige after 1967 notwithstanding, the course of regional politics in the period until 1973 still underlined its centrality to shape the parameters of new inter-Arab relations...”

However what this thesis also wants to draw attention to is the distinct change in Egypt’s motivations. Although it still proved central to the most important of Middle Eastern issues, Egypt can be seen to no longer actively willing to occupy an important role as an Arab leader; it was doing this almost purely for Egypt, on a material level as well as on a more symbolic level. This was therefore the beginning of a return to a traditional Egyptian mentality that was more insular.
The impasse between the Arabs and Israelis ended quite dramatically when Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack on October 6 1973 and smashed through the Israeli defences. However within a week, Israel had stabilised its position and assumed military dominance. The two superpowers intervened however and the United States in particular exercised its might by pressuring Israel to accept a ceasefire on October 24. As the Arabs did not exactly gain a military victory it is perhaps difficult to understand why it was considered such a successful war to the Arabs. In order to understand why the war was considered largely a success by Egypt one must understand that Egypt went into the war with fairly limited goals. From the Egyptian leaders’ perspective, there had been, “no thought of being able to crush the IDF and enter Israel; only a limited war was envisaged, one that would show Nixon and Kissinger that we wouldn’t accept the status quo” (Beattie 2000: 134). What Sadat essentially wanted was peace in the long run; even if he had to first go to war in order to make sure that peace was ‘honourable’.

Sadat reasoned that such a limited war would at least rally the Arab world towards Egypt, challenge the idea that Israel was invincible and above all, pave the way to peaceful settlement with Israel whereby Egypt would have substantial more leverage when it came to negotiating (Riad 1982: 39-50). As Sadat himself said, “There will be no war after the October War for the very simple reason that Egypt is the key to war or peace in this area. Without Egypt there will be no war but Israel should learn the facts of the area because we shall be living together” (Finklestone 1996: xxxii). This quote reveals two key factors about Sadat: that he was aware of the role that Egypt had in the region and that he was eager to take Egypt in a more realistic direction which would inevitably force the whole region to move with it as they all ‘learn to live with each other’. Sadat’s reasoning for this went further than just the realisation that Egypt could not afford to keep going to war, it was also a due to the notion that Sadat was “trying to comprehend what precisely was his ultimate role in transforming Egypt and why the country had fallen so far behind his ideals” (Finklestone 1996: 9).

Sadat was well known for his attachment to the land of Egypt and its distinct history. It was only natural therefore that he wanted to return Egypt to its rightful role as a great nation in its own right with a great deal of self-autonomy. In order to achieve that he perceived that he must first reclaim the
land that was Egypt’s, as well as allow the Egyptian forces to regain their honour in combat. Therefore while Sadat was highly aware of Egypt’s strong national identity as well as firm advocate of Egypt rightfully (in his eyes) referencing itself as a leader, he did lack an understanding of Egypt’s absorptiveness. The main reason Sadat wanted to ‘absorb’ other Arab states into the 1973 Arab coalition by emphasising how they were all ‘Arab brothers and sisters’ was to further all their commonly-held aims, however as soon as Egypt’s needs and goals were met this union started to reveal a level of artificiality, as was seen most notably in the way Egypt accepted a ceasefire without taking into account Syria’s wants or opinion (Finklestone 1996: 115).

The October War is the event in Sadat’s era that most illustrates a certain level of Pan-Arabism but even here, Egypt was clearly one minded in its goals, and almost solely Egypt-oriented. This lack of inclusiveness with the other Arab states can be seen to amplify itself throughout the rest of Sadat’s presidency. The October War of 1973 was Sadat’s chance to create a window of opportunity for himself and Egypt. Not only were they attempting to rid themselves of wrongs seen to be done to them by Israel, but they simultaneously creating a new environment which would allow Egypt a degree of flexibility in order to occupy a different role in the Arab world, one that would not be constrained by severe Arabism.

Act of Leadership II: The Arab-Israeli Process, 1974-1979

Sadat’s strategy for achieving what he perceived as Egypt’s new approach to regional politics consisted of both war and negotiation. With the October War now over, Sadat was finally in a reasonable position to begin the long arduous path of peaceful negotiation with Israel. Therefore, it is unwise to view Sadat’s trip to Jerusalem as shocking and surprising for the move can long be seen to be a part of a lengthy process whereby Sadat was attempting to steer Egypt in a new direction, based on self-reliance and less constrained by Arab consent. As has already been mentioned, the 1970s very much affirmed that the Arab-Israeli conflict was becoming less about ideology and more about economics, territory and boundaries, thus many symbolic pretences can be seen to begin falling away in Sadat’s era. As Cecil A. Hourani stated as early as 1971,
“... the pretence of a united Arab effort against Israel has disappeared, and on the military,
[political and international levels the only reality is the confrontation of two states, Egypt and
Israel. The Arab world as a whole is absent from the scene except as spectators on the
sidelines... [W]e cannot be surprised or indignant if the Egyptian regime decides is policies in
the light of its capacities and interests of Egypt alone” (Hourani 1971: 40).

Thus while middle eastern commentators often speak of Egypt’s diminished role in the Arab world
due to the eventual signing of the peace treaty with Israel in 1979 this view tends to disregard the
fundamentally unique status that Egypt has and that it was essentially the position that it currently
held that allowed it to make these political decisions. It was Egypt’s self reference as the Arab world’s
centre of gravity that supported Sadat’s bold independent diplomatic actions in the peace process.
This is not to say that the move was not informed by certain personality traits of Sadat, economic
considerations and other contextual variables; however Egypt’s self-conception as a leader was partly
what allowed Egypt to do it independently. Whether its actions were viewed positively or negatively,
Egypt certainly played a role that sent ripple effects throughout the region.

Despite Egypt being in a situation better than the rest to conduct peace the peace process was still a
difficult task for Egyptians to grapple with. If there had not been an overwhelming sense of weariness
towards the conflict it would arguably been impossible. After the October War and for the rest of the
decade Egyptian society made significant moves towards greater Pharoahism and Egyptianism, which
resembled a much more traditional cultural stance as was seen prior to 1954, most notably during the
1920s and 1930s (Osman 2011: 41-44). This was prompted by an intense media campaign in Egypt
following the war of 1973 that honed in on the idea that Egypt had done enough for the Arab cause.
As Saad Eddin Ibrahim (1988: 27), a well known Egyptian sociologist, noted,

“Their sacrifices in war casualties stood at 100 000 and in money at $30 billion... No other
Arab country matched their sacrifices... The United States will never allow Israel to be
defeated and the Soviets will never give Egypt enough arms to defensively win in war...
Egypt’s severe economic problems are due to the continuous state of war with Israel... Egypt
is heavily indebted while the rich Arabs are depositing billions of dollars in foreign banks.”
By 1975 billboards proclaiming “Mother Egypt”, “Egypt First” and “Egypt First, Second and Last” could be found within the country, raising the hopes for peace (Baker 1978: 142). Such a withdrawal from Pan-Arabist ideals towards more nationalist ones required Egyptians to reassess their core identity values and debates within the Egyptian media began frequently asking whether “the Egyptians were truly Arabs” (Ibrahim 1988: 27). Although public opinion polls are incredibly hard to come by in the Arab world at the time, one small study indicates that while in 1974 as many as 55 percent of Egyptians supported the PLO strategy of continuing the struggle against Israel until a Palestinian state was created, by 1978 this had dropped to only 18 percent, with 77 percent supporting Sadat’s peace initiative. Sadat fuelled the public’s sense of patriotism as well as expectations in an increase of prosperity that would accompany a peace deal. Although public opinion towards the peace treaty very much changed from 1979 onwards, prior to this and throughout the 1970s quite generally, one does pick up on a sense that Egyptians were sick of their Arab leadership role and were willing to cease occupying this role for another more traditional and insular one. This would not have been possible without a strong national identity (which explains why Syria could not take this route) nor would it have been possible without self-referencing itself as a leader who forges its own foreign policy (which also explains why a peace treaty was impossible for Jordan at this time).

Much of this general world-weariness can be attributed to the economic issues of the 1970s and Sadat’s vision for where he wanted to take Egypt’s economy once it was free of the threat of war. By the end of 1976 Sadat’s government faced a $2 billion budget deficit. Foreign debt exceeded GDP, and debt repayments were an estimated 70 percent of exports (Cooper 1982: 122). This only got worse when Sadat decided to cut state subsidies on cooking gas, rice and sugar. By January 1977 the next year, the surprise subsidy reductions caused large food riots throughout Egypt (Brownlee 2011-12: 651). Arab financial aid from the oil-rich states to the confrontation states (mainly Egypt) remained a thin trickle prior to the riots despite the immense needs of the Egyptian economy (Sela 1998: 190).

Sadat, according to Joseph Finklestone (1996: 174), was constantly aware of the huge amounts of money used to buy arms which could have instead been used for improving the countries agriculture
and bring about a technological revolution; this was essentially the inspiration behind the famous *infitah* (open door) policy. According to Finklestone (1996: 185-6), Sadat thought Egypt had become a backward country due to the adoption of slogans that advocated war. Sadat wanted peace so as he could create an environment that fostered development as well as supporting a society that was okay with putting Egypt first. Sadat envisaged a grand role for Egypt that was based around the land of Egypt rather than with its relations with Arab countries. When Sadat made his historic visit to Jerusalem in 1977 and made his speech before the Israeli Knesset he quite admirably requested for a comprehensive peace rather than a separate one, one which solved the Palestinian issue. However one cannot ignore that Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem was not the first, but by far the most extreme example so far of Egypt bypassing joint Arab action in the peace process and breaking commitments to other Arab states out of purely Egyptian considerations. Whilst undoubted quite a courageous move, it simultaneously highlighted Egypt’s independence and self-role perception of being an individualistic leader. Sadat was unsurprisingly firm in his 1977 speech about Egyptian land, stating,

“To speak frankly, our land does not yield itself to bargaining, it is not even open to argument. To us, the nation’s soil is equal to the holy valley where God Almighty spoke to Moses. Peace be upon him. We cannot accept any attempt to take away or accept to seek one inch of it nor can we accept the principle of debating or bargaining over it” (Lacqueur & Rubin 2008: 211).

Ultimately all of Sadat’s rhetoric which implied that he was a firm advocator of a comprehensive Arab peace and devoted to Arab unity came to naught as the Camp David Accords of 1978 and the subsequent Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty of 1979 came to fruition. In the end, despite all the promises, Egypt did indeed form a separate peace treaty with Israel that largely declined to deal with the Palestinians or other Arab territories seized in 1967 such as Syria’s Golan Heights. Egypt strongly self-referenced itself as a autonomous leader and clearly had a strong Egyptian identity values operating in this instance, which was what allowed it to even carry out such a monumental task. However there was a lack of abortiveness when it came to its sibling Arab states which ultimately led to a separate peace treaty which horrified the other Arabs. The strength in two fixed variable and the
weakness in the third essentially helps us understand the role that Egypt undertook during Sadat’s era and how it was formulated.

Egypt’s political actions with regards to the peace process are also a very good way of understanding just what Egypt meant to the Arab world. Although Sadat may not have been very integrating with the other Arab states at times, the Arab states proved to take Egypt’s apparent defection very badly. Egypt was clearly not as interested in pan-Arab leadership status anymore, and the other Arab states had to grapple with the realisation that there was seemingly a role that had voluntarily been relinquished. The more radical Arab states worked hard to apply diplomatic and economic sanctions upon Egypt however the Arab states were quite restrained on making any move until 1979 when the peace treaty was signed. The Arab states also tried to give Egypt numerous opportunities and incentives to back out of the Camp David agreement, one of which included a $5 billion grant for Egypt’s ‘national struggle’ (Sela 1998: 202). Once again, even when Egypt was acting with solely its own interests in mind, its role in the Arab world was still one of an active *game changer*.

**Conclusions**

Egypt’s role during the Sadat era was only diminished in the sense that its status as a regional power evoked less of the passion and fascination that it did in the 1950s and 1960s. However, Egyptian status as a key regional player still meant that it actively shaped inter-Arab relations and Arab-Israeli politics, the key issue of the 1970s. Egyptian politics and role perception was tainted by a certain world weariness and traditionalism that caused its role in Arab politics to care less about the Arab states and more about where Egypt itself wanted to go in the future. These moves can be viewed through the analysis of certain catalysts of the period such as Egypt’s dire economic situation, the desire to reclaim the Sinai Peninsula and a level of fatigue towards more war and a desire for peace. However there were also fixed variables operating at differing strengths. Egyptian national identity was operating more strongly than usual, with a return to a more narrow view of Egyptianism as seen in the early 20th century seen in apparent necessity for Egypt to regain its honour in combat in 1973, and the social dialogue after the war that took place. Self-referencing itself as a leader was also a key
part of Egyptian role-perception, however it altered from the previous reference as a pan-Arab leader to instead being a highly autonomous leader that had the strength to fashion its own political destiny, thus advocating a high level of self-reliance. Furthermore, just prior to Sadat, Egypt was seen as being a clear example of how a state could find strength in absorbing its Arab identity without diluting its national one, however during this era the balance clearly began to swing in a more nationalistic direction that climaxed with the signing of the separate Egypt-Israel peace treaty in 1979.

Although Egypt’s political actions might not have inspired imitations from other Arab states as they did during the Nasser era, Egypt’s important role in the Arab world was highlighted in the reactive way that Arab politics grappled with a less cooperative Egyptian leader. This is illustrated in the words of one Jordanian official, who stated,

“Egypt, as the largest Arab country, was the centre of Arabism. Imagine a family and the father abandons them – the immediate reaction is to try and cope with the new demands but after a while the family begins to understand that there is no father figure who can provide guidance and consequently begin to go their own way” (Barnett 1998: 200).

Whilst Egypt’s moves to make peace did not immediately make other Arab states follow its lead and instead led to a certain pariah status in the region what is interesting is that Egypt’s retreat from an Arabist role indeed had the ripple effect of all the Arab states eventually adopting more nationalist strategies. Rather than Egypt’s apparent departure from the Arab fold having the effect of banding the Arab states more closely together, they instead became increasingly fragmented.
Chapter Four

Mubarak: The Pragmatic and Revisionist

Egypt

Egypt’s role during the Nasser and Sadat eras seemed to occupy two different extremes. In the Nasser period we saw a nation that advocated a fiery mantra of Pan-Arabism that was eager to include every other Arab in its vision. In this era Egypt was the *primus inter pares*, eager to occupy a role that seemed to encompass the view that Egypt was the natural leader of the Arab world. In the Sadat period we saw an Egypt that became more insular and practical. One can observe that Egypt had had enough of occupying a role that allowed them to carry the burdens of the whole Arab world and thus showed just how autonomous Egypt was in making decisions by clearly illustrated how self-reliant it could be. After the assassination of Sadat, his Vice President Hosni Mubarak became the President of Egypt and proceeded to rule from 1981 to 2011. The role that Egypt occupied for much of this era can be characterised as being both revisionist and highly pragmatic. On one hand, one can observe an Egypt that is somewhat nostalgic for some of its previous roles, as well as simultaneously being glad that it is not as involved as it previously was, and very much focused on domestic and economic stability. On the other hand, there is a high degree of pragmatism that dominates the Mubarak era, realising that the fiery rhetoric of previous eras is ill-suited to this one, and Egypt’s role must revolve around finding an appropriate place for Egypt in the current political order, as part of Pax-Americana. Despite these rather diverse self-induced questions, one thing that is certain is that Egypt’s role conception during the Mubarak era is *not* cloaked in ambivalence. It clearly still has a large interest in
the regional political environment and agenda and its place within it, often quite actively trying to set the pace of Arab politics.

However, there is a certain amount of confusion and lack of purpose that also dominates Egypt’s role during the Mubarak presidency and this also needs to be addressed. Mubarak did not have the charisma of Nasser, or the strong patriotic pride of Sadat. Mubarak lacked a grand vision and much of the personality that his predecessors were seen to have and similarly, Egypt as a whole seemed to lack a grand project as such that needed a specific kind of role in order to fulfil it. As an alternative to the grand visions of the past instead we can see that Mubarak solely aimed at injecting a greater sense of calm and practicality into the Arab world.

As will be shown, Egypt’s power in this context lies in its ability to be a neutral and pragmatic middle man, one that does not overtly lead but remains indispensible to Middle Eastern politics and social life. The few selected independent variables or catalysts used to explore and provide insight to this idea will include looking at the re-Arabisation of Egyptian politics as it re-entered the Arab fold in the 1980s, Egypt’s role in the Gulf War, and Egypt’s role in the Arab-Israeli Peace Process in the 1990s. These events explicitly highlight the way that Egypt’s special role in the Arab world is arguably quite distinct because it is able to go through these grand revisions. Furthermore, this chapter will touch on the confusion by Egyptian society on what role its country should be playing in the Arab world and how this itself sparks a revisionist role-conception.

*Act of Leadership I: The Re-Arabisation of Egyptian Politics in the 1980s*

As Sadat correctly identified, Egypt is a state that has an incredibly long history and a strong national identity and culture. However, one cannot ignore that it has strong links to the broader Arab world through history, religion and language. Sadat ultimately did not give an adequate amount of tribute to these links, nor did the other Arab states when they began to boycott Egypt in 1979. Most academic literature seems to brush over the 1980s as a time when Egypt was completely ostracised by the Arab world, and seemingly only appears to re-enter the Arab fold in the late 1980s and with the events of
the Gulf War (1990-91). However this view is misleading and ignores some important realities that have the potential to give us more information on the nature of Egypt’s role in the Arab world. 

Although Egyptian-Arab relations hit a low point after 1979, communications between heads of state as well as trading relations highlight how difficult it actually was to ostracise Egypt, in fact it was almost impossible and therefore although formal re-integration didn’t occur until the late 1980s, this result should not be viewed as surprising or unforeseeable.

By the end of April 1979 (a month after the peace treaty was signed), all Arab states had cut diplomatic relations with Egypt. The exceptions were Sudan (who did later when the Israel embassy opened later in Cairo), Somalia and Oman (Sela 1998: 209). At first Egyptians from all different political persuasions were angry at the actions of the other Arab states for in their eyes, Egypt had done enough to further the Arab/Palestinian cause and to them it seemed their sacrifices were unappreciated (Said Aly 1988: 70-73). As was shown in the previous chapter, a rise in Egyptian nationalism that stressed Egypt’s ties to the Nile and the land allowed them to further express their disdain because it emphasised the notion that Egypt could survive on its own. However this soon changed and Egyptians soon started to feel uncomfortable with being relegated to the Arab periphery. This is captured well by Anis Mansour’s daily column in Al-Ahram on July 17 1982,

“There is not a single pen in Egypt which has not cursed Israel. There is not a single voice that has disavowed its previous faith in the possibility of total peace with Israel... The essence of peace is a Palestinian state... otherwise there is no peace even if every single Israeli carried an atomic bomb, and even if American space ships carried every Palestinian to the moon!... We had reconciled with Israel, looking forward to a comprehensive peace... It turned out to be a mistake... The most optimistic among us know that it will take another 34 years to correct that mistake” (Ibrahim 1988: 19).

Mansour was one of Egypt’s most prominent writers and journalists at the time, a close confidante of Sadat and prior to the peace treaty, a strong advocate for peace. The above words are a good example of the change in sentiment by many Egyptians by the early 1980s especially after Israel invaded Lebanon earlier that year.
What is also often unmentioned however is how uncomfortably the boycott of Egypt also sat with other Arabs though. The moves to ostracise Egypt during the 1980s jarred inappropriately with Egypt’s historic self-reference as a leader of the Arab world. Although history is not necessarily an essential precedent for leadership, as we have seen throughout this thesis so far, Egypt’s constant role performance as an important and key Arab state was very much a part of Egyptian identity and due to its absorptiveness, this role-perception had been received by the other Arab states and often reciprocated through their recognition of Egypt’s place in the region. Therefore despite Egypt playing different roles of varying prominence, the 1980s seemed to sway too differently away from the status quo of the region and broke with a key Arab norm: that Egypt was a core part of the Arab world.

From the beginning of the 1980s, despite the breaking of diplomatic relations, Egypt still maintained meaningful communications between most Arab countries. Despite being cast out of the Arab League, with its headquarters being relocated to Tunis from Cairo until 1989 (BBC 2011), Egypt steadily maintained bilateral relations with many Arab states. In fact, these bilateral relations were fairly steady throughout the 1980s despite often being veiled in secrecy, especially after other Arab states recognised the role Egypt played in helping Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War with military aid, as well as playing a diplomatic role. As Bruce Maddy-Weitzman (1987: 123) stated, the boycotts imposed on Egypt, “seemed archaic, or even irrelevant, in light of Egypt’s broad involvement in system-wide issues and its bilateral ties with nearly every Arab state”. Some bilateral relations were quite high profile however, perhaps one of the most notable in the early 1980s being Yasser Arafat’s visit to Cairo in December 1983 which caused quite a bit of political fanfare and seemed to reassert Egypt’s historical role as a protector of Palestinian rights (Maddy-Weitzman 1986: 136). Another prominent moment came when Jordan re-established formal relations with Egypt in September 1984 (Maddy-Weitzman 1986: 136). However prior to these moves, King Husain made his thoughts clear as early as January 1982 when he stated, “The Arab world without Egypt is an incomplete world” (Sela 1998: 215).

Relations with Saudi Arabia are also worth mentioning. Political and economic relations were kept up throughout the decade and in the political sphere one can observe relations warming, albeit
informally. However relations with Saudi Arabia were always more behind the scenes, so as to not
run the risk of possibly angering Syria. As Edward Kerr aptly put, “relations between Egypt and Saudi
Arabia after the peace treaty were similar to that of a divorced couple who still maintained ‘friendly
contact’” (Feiler 2003: 157).

Trade between Egypt and other Arab countries is another good way of appreciating how superficial
the boycotts of the 1980s were. Trade, aid, loans and so on were all supposed to cease between Egypt
and the other Arab countries however the economic embargo hardly operated like that in reality.
Imports to Egypt from Saudi Arabia increased from under $50 million in 1979 to over $80 million in
1985. Saudi exports to Egypt also increased from about $40 million in 1979 to almost $250 million in
1984 (Sullivan 1999: 65). Trade between some other Arab countries also increased as most Arab
states circumvented the embargo soon after it was implemented with the exception of Libya and Syria
whose relations with Egypt remained rancorous for most of the decade (Sullivan 1999: 66). Egyptian
workers were also let into other Arab states in huge numbers and Egypt gained billions of dollars in
remittances (Sullivan 1999: 69). Overall as one can see, Egypt actually became more a part of the
Middle Eastern economy during the 1980s which thus supports the idea that Egypt being an incredibly
large and absorbing country cannot simply be ignored.

So whilst there was an attempt to send Egypt’s Arab role to the political backwaters it was clearly too
important a presence to fully embargo. The peace treaty was too important to be silent about however
pragmatism seemed to triumph in this instance. Though it should be noted that there was more to
Egyptian and other Arab behaviour than just pragmatism. Although Mubarak shuttled around the
Arab world quite skilfully trying to improve Arab relations, there is still a sense that Egypt was done
working within the previously accepted Arabist frameworks and would maintain its autonomy. Egypt
maintained its peace with Israel whilst communicating with the other Arab states and often it was the
Arab states that would individually and eventually move towards bilateral relations with Egypt.

Sudan’s President Numayri articulated this point as early as 1982 at the Fez Summit when he stated
that relations with Egypt should be up to the individual state to decide rather than being a collective
decision (Hamid 1983). Egypt under Mubarak seemed to combine elements of both the Nasser and
Sadat eras in this instance for whilst it was clearly uncomfortable with its current relegated status it simultaneously was unwilling sacrifice self-autonomy to get it back. This is essentially the revisionist tendency that was spoken of earlier, as Egypt attempted to traverse the political environment and made decisions not only on what role it wished to occupy but what it was willing to do in order to take it up. Their position was articulated clearly in one instance by Mubarak speaking on the issue of restoring diplomatic ties and Egypt’s return to the Arab League, whereby he stated, “He who cuts ties with Egypt should be the one to restore them – we won’t run after anyone” (Maddy-Weitzman 1987: 124).

What we see in the 1980s is that all three of the fixed variables spoken of were trying to operate: the self-reference as a leader, Egypt’s strong identity, and its absorptiveness. This example highlights how Egypt’s identity whilst not completely dependent on other Arab states, still needs a certain level of closeness and self-imagery with its neighbours in order to be strong. This ties in with the concept of Egypt being absorbing of others in the region, which then connects to continue the perpetual cycle of Egypt self-referencing itself as a leader which is then recognised by other Arab states.

Act of Leadership II: The Gulf War (1990-91)

Sadat’s saying which asserted that “99 percent of the political cards are in the hand of the United States” (Finklestone 1996: xxxii) seemed to very much characterise the legacy that Mubarak left upon Egypt. The Gulf War whilst displaying a certain ‘Egyptian comeback’ to Arab politics simultaneously affirmed that the end of the Cold War would bring about an even larger American presence into the Middle East. This was the era of Pax-Americana. Despite Egypt being needed in the Gulf War not just for man power but to also lend legitimacy to the fact that Arabs were invading a fellow Arab state, Egypt’s role in the Gulf War was also laced with practical economic needs. By keeping this in mind one can see that Egypt’s role whilst having an element of classic Egyptian Arab leadership, undeniably also illustrated Egypt’s role as a fundamental middle-man, intrinsic to the Middle East security environment. Egypt was no doubt a fundamental game-changer; however it was also subject to the power politics of even greater powers.
Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait on August 2 1990 posed serious threats to Egypt’s role in the Arab world as well as also providing some good role-performance opportunities. Mubarak from the beginning of his ascension to the presidency made it clear that the peace with Israel would be honoured and the alignment towards the United States would be maintained (Gazit 1986: 88), and thus Egypt had invested quite a lot in the whole region harmoniously moving towards peace and increased pragmatism. Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait and bid for Arab leadership challenged the Egyptian vision for the region. Egypt’s role at the time was posed as a moderator of sorts that was fairly happy with maintaining the status quo. Iraq on the other hand, articulated a view that admonished American presence in the Middle East and other Arab state’s (such as Egypt) traitorous actions regarding the Palestinian issue. Egypt had steadily improved relations with all Arab states since the 1979 peace treaty and Iraq was challenging this progress. The Egyptians saw Saddam Hussein as trying to usurp Arab leadership by portraying himself as an Arab strongman, and Egyptians believed that no other state had a right to the leadership mantle but them (Aftandilian 1993: 29). As was seen previously in chapter two with the example of the Baghdad Pact, Egypt’s role within the Arab world has often come into contact with a recurring pattern: the competition between the Mesopotamian and Nile Valley-based power centres in the region.

Despite the threat to strategic interests however, Egypt was able to use the Gulf War as an opportunity to reaffirm its role as a leader in the Arab world. Egypt and Saudi Arabia managed to get twelve Arab states behind Arab League’s resolution 195 which denounced Iraq’s threats to the GCC states and its concentration of troops on the Saudi border as well as expressing support for the steps taken on behalf of Saudi Arabia’s “right to legitimate defence”, most notably being the allowing of foreign troops to be stationed in the Kingdom (Maddy-Weitzman 1991). Mubarak displayed strong leadership in leading the anti-Iraq coalition and Egypt’s intellectual and religious establishment also helped to combat Iraqi propaganda (Aftandilian 1993: 30). Egypt also assisted with the largest military deployment, sending 30 000 Egyptian troops by 11 August (Maddy-Weitzman 1991). Whilst positioning itself as a moderate actor, there was still a sense that Egypt maintained a somewhat Pan-Arab protector role in this instance that echoed a role seen in Egypt’s past. This is quite clear in the
statements of Mubarak in October 1991 when he stated that Egypt took part in the liberation of
Kuwait “because Egypt cannot renounce its principles, shun its Pan-Arab responsibilities, or remain a
bystander regarding an Arab commitment which emphasises the duties of joint-defence”.
Furthermore, on the topic of Egyptians who died in the Gulf, Mubarak claimed that they “gave up
their lives to underline the fact that Egypt will always remain the bastion of security for its Arab
world” (Authors emphasis) (Aftandilian 1993: 33).

Despite Mubarak pushing for this important Arab role operating somewhat underneath America’s
shadow, the Egyptian public were largely uneasy about occupying such a role and essentially worried
about the sort of status that Egypt was increasingly adopting as a pro-Western Arab government. As
Mohamed Sid Ahmed a columnist for Al-Ahram said, “It's very difficult to imagine that the Egyptian
army, which is at peace with Israel, could go to war against other Arabs” (Robinson 1990). Whilst
most Egyptians did not support Saddam Hussein or feel sorry for him, they were very emotionally
disturbed by the images of suffering Iraqis especially due to sanctions imposed after the war (Hetata
1991: 241-3). These sentiments were captured well in Yusuf Chahine’s documentary ‘Cairo
Illuminated by Her People’ which recorded the Egyptian university student protests against Egypt’s
involvement in what was largely seen as an American war. The documentary showed thousands of
students protesting against the war and essentially highlighted how worried some Egyptians were on
the type of role that Egypt was occupying and the path it was taking Egypt down (Baker 1994: 399-
400).

The government claimed Egypt played a successful role in the war which ultimately led to the US
cancelling $7.1 billion of Egypt’s debt (Wilkins 1992: 175) and Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and the
UAE forgiving $6 billion (Greenhouse 1991), however Egyptian citizens saw it as essentially
America buying Egypt in order to have legitimate Arab cover for its operations. Thus the Gulf War is
a good example of the highly revisionist nature of Egypt during the Mubarak era which was often at a
loss as to regain or maintain status in a way that was appropriate for them. The rhetoric expressed by
Egyptian officials is indicative of Egypt once again self-referencing itself as a leader as well as being
absorbing other Arab states into an Egyptian-led coalition, however the fragmented nature of the Arab world at this time, made Egypt’s actions seem like a bittersweet success for many ordinary Egyptians.

**Act of Leadership III: The Arab-Israeli Peace Process during the 1990s**

It was not until the late 1980s that the other Arab states seemed to somewhat concede that there was a level of vision behind Sadat’s actions during the late 1970s. Thus despite Egypt making peace through the adoption of a very self-reliant role (as was seen in chapter three), by the 1990s many Arab states were starting to follow suit. The Gulf War in this respect was the catalyst for such efforts due to high level of fragmentation it revealed. The war was one of the direct factors which led the Arab states to the 1991 Madrid Conference (Harb 2005). Once again Egypt proved to be a trend setter for Arab politics and by using it status as the only Arab state to have peaceful relations with Israel was able to play the role of the middle-man in the peace process. Even though the US was also involved in this process, Egypt’s role in this instance was looked upon more favourably than it was in the Gulf War because the issue is one that Arabs as a whole are still in favour of pursuing collectively. This was clear in the Egyptian press as this statement from *al-Wafd* illustrates,

> “You thought that Arab unity had collapsed, or that the glow of Arab struggle had died away. But it turned out that it was glowing under the ashes, and when the wind of challenge blew from Israel, the Goliath woke up. You will find that the Egyptian people... are supportive of President Mubarak’s Arab approach, because he put Egypt in its rightful place at the head of the Arab convoy” (Doran 2001: 117).

The way this role was envisaged however was very different to the more confrontational roles Egypt had had in the Nasser and Sadat eras. Egypt’s role now relied on its ability to solve problems.

A number of scholars have used the peace progress to illustrate waning Egyptian power due to what appeared to be the sidelining of Egypt during the peace process (Makar 2007: 28). This is due to the fact that Egypt was not directly involved in the bilateral peace negotiations. Jordan and Israel did not include Egypt in the negotiations that led to their peace treaty in October 1994 and in the Syrian-
Israeli talks the US was the only mediator (Hollis 1999: 137. Furthermore the Oslo Agreement between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) was conducted between themselves with the Norwegians acting only as facilitators (Hollis 1999: 137). However the Egyptian presence was essential in keeping the Israel-Palestinian actions moving on a number of occasions. Yasser Arafat paid the greatest heed to Egypt, consulting with Mubarak regularly (Hollis 1999: 137).

Furthermore, following the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles in September 1993 Egypt hosted a number of negotiations upon its implementation and subsequently mediated the Cairo Agreement of May 1994 which involved dealing with Arafat’s initial reluctance to sign it (Chronology 1994: 172). Egypt also convened a summit in December 1994 with Saudi Arabia and Syria in order to coordinate the Arab position and make sure that bilateral negotiations with Israel were prioritised with Israel’s immediate neighbours rather than with the faraway Arab states (Satloff 1995). This then led to Cairo hosting the first four-way summit among Egypt, Jordan, Israel and the PLO in February 1995 (Makovsky 1995).

Egypt used its role as a mediator in order to gain greater leadership status in the Arab world. This can be perceived in national discourse, particularly in this instance whereby Mubarak giving a speech at Alexandria University in 1992 stated,

“We are helping as much as we can [in the peace process] because our position and Egypt’s status in the region are basic and pivotal... We cannot abandon our role because this constantly highlights Egypt’s importance” (Jebb 2004:150).

It was also seen within the sentiments of the media and expressed by Egyptians on the street. A Cairo radio commentary at the time gives us a specific instance of this discourse actively manifesting itself from a more ‘mainstream’ source,

“Everyday Egypt reaffirms its national and principled commitment to the Arab nation in its capacity as the nation’s big sister. As such, Egypt bears a special responsibility to defend the nation’s causes and security, and counter any aggression against the Arab People regardless of source...” (Aftandilian 1993:36).
The rhetoric of the media highlights the revisionist nature of Egyptian society at the time, which almost seems to signal a return to Egyptian role performance of the Nasser era. However Egypt’s place within Pax-Americana and the context make it a revisionist strategy laced with pragmatism. As Amre M. Moussa articulated in 1996, “Nasser was one of the leaders of this country, and his era was one of the most active in the region’s political development... [However] at the same time, his charisma, leadership, and policy worked in the sixties and would not work in the nineties” (Satloff & Pipes 1996). Egypt’s foreign policy walked a fine line during the 1990s peace process. On one side they were the key negotiator and helped facilitate progress between various Arab states and the PLO. However they also kept their distance to Israel with many remarking that their relations had increasingly turned cold. This was needed in order to affirm their Arab role which gives them legitimacy. This approach was noticed and accepted as a pragmatic way of formulating a new Arab regional order by other Arab states (Gerges 1995). Despite these differences, Egypt can clearly be seen to present itself as a leader in the Arab world who has a moderate vision for the Middle East. This self-reference is incredibly important in understanding why it actively went about trying to work within the peace process and what the peace process ultimately meant to Egypt.

**Conclusion**

Whilst the Mubarak era saw an Egypt that followed a sensible and practical political strategy with regards to the role it played within the Arab world, it simultaneously illustrated a revisionist policy that was somewhat nostalgic for its active regional roles from past eras but also unwilling to devote as much of itself in the pursuit of that role especially in the face of domestic economic instability. Therefore Egypt’s constant influential presence in Arab diplomacy and economics during the 1980s, it’s moderate peace-making protector role during the Gulf War, as well its appeal to peaceful pan-Arab sentiment with its participation in the peace process are somewhat reminiscent of past eras, however the decision to stay within the Washington camp by maintain peace with Israel, working closely with the US in the Gulf War and advocating peace in a way that was largely in tune with Washington, demonstrates that the current Egyptian role is conducted within certain practical limits.
Therefore whilst Egypt was invested in the status quo under Mubarak, it was increasingly questionable as to whether this is a status quo of their own creation or one of outside powers.
Conclusion

Academic literature has a tendency to view Egypt’s role and status in the Arab world in one of two ways. Some view it as a natural possession of Egypt (Ajami 1998: 248), whereby there are political and cultural reasons behind it, however ultimately the foundation of Egypt’s role is largely ambiguous. Others view Egypt’s role as mainly leadership in the arena of Arab politics, a strong part of Nasser’s era but which has subsequently waned in power since then resulting in Egypt being a middle power, overpopulated and largely in debt. In a number of ways, both these views are correct, however they lack an understanding of how Egyptian status and role perception operates and transforms itself and their arguments fall short because of this. The central argument of this thesis is that the foundation and composition of Egypt’s role in the Arab world cannot be understood properly by simply looking at material capabilities and conventional power projection. In order to understand Egypt’s role and status in the Arab world one must understand the multiple ways that Egyptian power has manifested itself and the diverse number of roles that Egypt has taken up. A state cannot be a role; it can only occupy a role. Therefore due to the fact that role-conception is not static one can only hope to identify the variety of roles and see how they merge and fold into one another and if there are any commonalities.

This thesis has attempted to highlight a few common factors (or fixed variables) that can be seen throughout the period of this study in Egypt’s role performance. First and foremost there is Egypt’s strong self-reference as a leader and as a state that naturally possesses grand status in the region. Although history is not an essential precedent to grand status, this thesis has showed that its continual performance and recognition by other Arab states has meant that it has become a widely agreed upon Arab norm, thus the cycle becomes firmly entrenched in inter-Arab politics. Although Arab states may fight amongst themselves for regional leadership, this has never meant that Egypt has been sidelined as a state with little status or power. However as was seen throughout chapters two, three...
and four, what kind of leader Egypt decides to be largely depends on particular catalysts occurring at particular points in time which indicate larger contextual or structural changes.

Another common variable is Egypt’s strong identity which has historically placed it in a better position to play the role of leading other Arabs. Egypt’s long history and geography has meant that it is the only Arab state to have been created fairly naturally (guided by the Nile Valley) and has a very homogenous population (Jebb 2004: 10). Another factor that accompanies this is Egypt’s absorptive nature. Many states find there is tension between nationalist identities and other identities (regional or religious for example), however Egypt throughout this study has shown a remarkably ability to assimilate them without diluting them. This phenomenon was researched by Egyptian anthropologist Laila El-Hamamsy who asked the question, “How is the Egyptian, with this strong sense of Egyptian identity, able to look on himself as an Arab, too?” She answered her research by looking at how Egyptianisation has meant Arabisation. This was seen in a number of instances throughout this study whereby Egypt was able to shape the Arab agenda and combine both in a distinct fashion.

As the introduction and theoretical chapter made clear, this thesis focuses on how the above common factors, as well as other contextual factors form to create and compose Egypt’s role in the Arab world. Whilst material capabilities are important to our political analysis of regional powers this paper sought to ‘suspend’ these factors in order to better explore regional powers and leadership, as well as role-perception and status and their histories of representation in the case of Egypt. These notions were explored on fairly abstract level in chapter one. The history of representation is why such a lengthy period had been analysed in this research. The longer time period allows one to truly observe how Egypt’s roles change, transform and align themselves differently over time. As was also mentioned previously political leaders are also performers who interpret their roles and the roles of their state and whilst they do have some autonomy in these processes they must also answer to normative expectations and underlying cultural frameworks in order for them to work which is why the three main chapters in this thesis were based around the Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak presidencies.
Chapter two looked at the era of Gamal Abdel Nasser and Egypt’s role as ‘The Grand and Passionate Egypt’. In this time period Egypt used its self-reference as a leader as well as its highly absorbing character in order to have a huge influence on other Arab societies and their politics. Pan-Arab leadership was the inspiration behind an Egyptian-led vision of the Arab world which was to be respected and autonomous of the superpowers. This role was pushed into effect by certain contextual occurrences which we can use as frames in order to view Egypt’s role: those being, The Baghdad Pact of 1955, The Suez Canal Crisis of 1956 and the creation of the United Arab Republic (1958-62). Nasser’s era was arguably the time period that saw the most proactive in Egyptian role-performance.

Chapter three looked at the era of Anwar Sadat and Egypt’s transformation towards a more insular role, titled here as ‘The Traditional and World-Weary Egypt’. In this period Egypt became increasingly concerned with purely Egyptian issues which thus led them to pursue a path that was more ‘traditional’. This was seen chiefly in Sadat’s aspiration to recover Egyptian honour and the Sinai, which was fundamentally influenced by his love for the land of Egypt and his great belief that it was a great nation that could pursue a more independent course for a country’s of its stature. Egypt was simultaneously weary of its role as the Egyptian protector of Arab rights and thus its self-conception of being a leader was formulated differently. These kinds of role performances were highlighted in the 1973 October War and the consequent Arab-Israeli peace process which ultimately led to the Camp David Accords and the signing of the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty.

Chapter 4 looked at the era of Hosni Mubarak and Egypt’s reconciliation with a very different strategic environment, which most notably was overshadowed by the presence of America in the Middle East. Mubarak’s presidency whilst not really overseeing an Egypt that promoted a grand vision similar to past eras, nevertheless still self-referenced itself a leadership role in the Arab world based around moderation and pragmatism. The subtle presence of Egypt within the Arab world during the 1980s clearly illustrated how intrinsic it was to the region despite being apparently ostracised. Additionally, the Gulf War and 1990s peace process illustrated the pragmatism of the Mubarak era that not only enveloped Egypt but also the wider Arab world which was increasingly fragmented and
nationalistic. Despite these trends, Egypt maintained an important role here as well, as a mediator and middle man.

Overall, this thesis has observed how Egypt’s self-conception as a leader and status as a culturally rich regional power has allowed it to actively shape Arab politics despite suffering from overpopulation and chronic economic problems. As Dr. Osama al-Ghazali Harb (2005) articulated, “Egypt is one the few countries whose foreign role surpasses its human and material potential.”

Finally it should be noted that this does not mean Egypt’s role in the Arab world is one-dimensional and therefore it is misleading to say whether Egypt’s role within the Arab world is ‘increasing’ or ‘decreasing’. Instead this research suggests that it would be much more beneficial to appreciate the diversity of roles that Egypt occupies that whilst linked, are influenced by certain catalysts and contextual occurrences of the time. The importance of this study comes at an incredibly important time as Egypt starts to emerge from the 2011 Egyptian revolution. The immediate future will most likely see Egypt’s role within the Arab world manifest itself differently once again, despite the difficulty in predicting the direction it will take. From this perspective it is perhaps wise to recall the words of the famous Egyptian Louis Awad, who wrote, “The state in Egypt is invariably on the side of renewal in periods of success and cultural flowering, and on the side of what is old in times of defeat and setbacks. But the spark of renewal is never extinguished and smoulders beneath the ashes until it erupts again. Such is the rhythm of Egypt’s history” (Ajami 1998: 242).
Bibliography


