

Egyptian-Israeli Relations, History, Progress, Challenges and Prospects in the Middle East

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Abstract: *Since recognizing Israel as a state, Egypt has had the closest relationship with Israel in the region. Under the presidency of Mubarak, the relationship between the two countries evolved and broadened. Egypt as one of the important Arab countries of the Middle East and Islamic world plays a crucial role in international scene and relationship among nations because it has an intellectual and cultural impact on the other Muslim countries in the region. Egypt also controls the Suez Canal, main waterway providing trade between East and West. The current domestic conditions in Egypt and the overthrow of Mubarak suggest a new chapter in its political life that would change, Egypt's political milieu and its foreign political stance. Giving an overview of the relationship between Egypt and Israel from its very beginning to the present in four historical episodes, this article tries to analyze the impact of Egypt's domestic changes on the Egypt-Israel relationship in the post-Mubarak period and it focuses on the point that after its transition and its return to normalcy, Egypt would continue its relations with Israel, albeit with minor differences compared to the past. Indeed, they would continue their relationship in the state-state level, though the peoples of the two countries would be pessimistic and hold ill-feeling toward the*

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relationship between their Countries.

Key Words: *Egypt; Israel; Relationship; Peace Treaty*

Introduction

The Middle East, a sensitive and strategic region, which once has been the cradle of early human civilizations and the birthplace of great religions, has still kept its place as the center of gravity of international politics. Arab Muslim countries constitute a large section of the Middle East and one of these important countries in the Middle East and the Arab world is Egypt. Egypt as one of the largest countries in the Middle East has had a great impact on regional developments especially on Arab issues, Palestinian issues and the developments of North Africa. In recent history, Egypt has been at the cultural and political forefront of Pan-Arabism and the nonaligned movement (NAM). Since the establishment of Israel in 1948, Egypt has been the leader of other Arab countries in restoring Palestinian rights in the occupied lands. From 1948 to 1973, Egypt as an important player in the Arab and Palestinian conflicts, led the Arab nation in its war against Israel (Rutherford, 2008). However, with the Camp David Accords and the 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty, a new era of relationships between the two countries began (Gerges, 1995:70-71). After the 1979 Peace Treaty, Egypt having lost its leadership role in the Arab world over the Arab-Israeli conflicts, distanced itself from some of its Arab allies in the Middle East and built closer relationships with the US and Israel. As a result, Egypt and Israel became strategic allies.

Since the 1979 Peace Treaty between Israel and Egypt, there has been a continuous trend of animosity and strategic relationships between the two countries and as a result, the relationship between these two countries has come to be known as the "cold peace" (Dowek, 2001:176). Considering this issue, the recent movements that led to a revolution in Egypt is an initiator of a new era in Egypt's political life. This revolution will most probably affect all aspects of Egypt's internal politics and foreign policy in short term. Hence, by analyzing

Egypt-Israel relationships in four historical periods from the establishment of Israel up to now, this article intends to examine their relationship after the fall of Mubarak.

I. The Period of Animosity and Secret Talks (1947-1977)

Egypt up to now, because of its special political, military and economic situation, has always been a source of worry for the great powers in general and for Israel in particular. The first contact or conflict between Israel and Egypt goes back to the first Israeli-Arab war. When the state of Israel declared its existence in 1948, Arab countries, including Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan, sent their troops to Palestine, which resulted in a bloody war between the two sides. From 1948 to 1979 when Egypt and Israel signed a peace treaty, there was animosity between the two countries, but they also had some behind the scene talks. The armed forces of Arab countries led by Egypt were engaged in four wars with Israel (Pipes, 2006).

In the first war, the Arab armies first advanced and managed to gain back a large section of the Palestinian lands. Nonetheless, they were forced to retreat and return those lands under the pressure of the US and the UN (Hamsian, 2001:25).

Between 1948 and 1949, during the reign of King Farouk, Egypt had a lot of secret and behind the scene contacts with the state of Israel. Although the peace talks began in 1948 and resulted in a contract between Egypt, Israel, and other Arab countries on January 24, 1949, the Arab delegations present at the Luzon Conference on April 27, 1949, rejected direct talks with the Israelis. Nonetheless, Abdul Monem Mustafa, the head of the Egyptian delegation, who had refused to have a meeting with the Jews, eventually with the advice of Farouk's government, agreed to hold behind the scene meetings with the Jews in Switzerland. The letters and documents that Eliyahu Sasson, the head of the Israeli delegation, had sent to Moshe Sharett, Israel's Secretary of State, revealed all the secret negotiations between

Egypt at the time of Farouk and the state of Israel (Mustafa, 2003:219).

The defeat of Arabs in the 1948 War stained their reputation in the region. This defeat affected Egypt to the extent that it led to the change of its regime. A group of young military generals, who blamed the Egyptian government for its weakness in handling the war, mounted a coup in July 1952, which led to the removal of Farouk from power and his replacement with Muhammad Naguib. After Naguib, Gamal Abdel Nasser came to power. One of the things that Abdel Nasser did while he was in power was the nationalization of the Suez Canal. This gave Britain and France that considered themselves the owners of this canal, an excuse to attack Egypt. Hence, the second Arab-Israeli war began, this time with Britain and France supporting Israel to attack Egypt. Israel with a predetermined plan to capture the Sinai desert attacked Egypt on October 29, 1956 (*Egyptian - Israeli relations 1948-2011*). Britain and France occupied most of Egyptian cities except Port Said and Israel captured the Sinai desert. Nonetheless, due to the resistance of the Egyptian people and under the pressure of the US and the Soviet Union, Britain and France eventually accepted the ceasefire. On November 9, 1956, Israel was also forced to evacuate the Sinai desert (Herzog & Gazit, 2005:67).

After the establishment of Israel, Egypt was the only Arab country that could stand against Israel's expansionism. Israelis saw Egypt as a potential danger that could pose a serious threat to Israel by attacking it. However, when President Gamal Abdel Nasser was in office, Egypt did not want to get involved in a large-scale war. This was because after the nationalization of the Suez Canal, Egypt and its president were credited as the leaders of the Arab nation. Nasser was trying to avoid a direct war with Israel, but Syria, which at that time was controlled by the left wing of the Ba'ath Party, was in favor of direct confrontation with Israel (Azar, 1972: 185). Syria asked Egypt for help and Egypt was stuck in a quagmire. On the one hand, if it remained silent against Israel's threat to Syria, its reputation in the Arab world would be stained. On the other hand, if it intervened in the war, it would be defeated since Israel had a better military might

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as well as the support of western powers especially the United States (Hammel, 2001:143-144).

Israel being aware of the aggravation of the situation in Egypt, launched an attack against the Arab world who suffered a heavy defeat. Although the third Arab-Israeli war was known as the Six Day War, the fate of the war became apparent during the first hours of the war. On January 5, 1957, Israel launched a surprise attack against the Arab world and destroyed the Egyptian, Syrian, and Jordanian air forces. During the six days of the war, Israelis could capture the Sinai desert, the west bank of the Jordan River, and some parts of the Golan Heights (Oren, 2002:89).

After Nasser's death in 1970, Anwar al-Sadat became the president of Egypt. Considering Egyptian weakness against Israel, he decided to resolve the conflict over the occupied lands through negotiation. He notified the US Congressmen, who had attended Nasser's funeral, of his decision. After that, Sadat stated in a speech that he would be ready to sign a peace treaty with Israel and recognize it as an official country if Israel retreated from the east bank of the Suez Canal. (*Egyptian - Israeli relations 1948- 2011*). Sadat, in his speeches and interviews blamed Israel for the continuation of the crisis and its consequences. Egyptian people especially, students and supporters of Nasser wanted a national coalition to be formed to free the occupied lands. The no war-no peace was a dangerous situation that weakened the morale of Arab countries. Sadat tried to attract the attention of Israel's supporters and other countries in the world to the crisis in the Middle East. He did so with the help of the Arab world, and by using oil as a tool as well as using diplomatic measures. Nevertheless, the world's inattention to this issue and Israel's expansionism caused Syria and Egypt to launch an attack on the Golan Heights and in the Sinai desert on October 16, 1973. The Egyptian could capture the Sinai desert. However, on October 24 the same year, Israel with the military aid of the US while the Soviet Union remained silent on this issue attacked the West of the Suez Canal in Egypt and the Golan Heights in Syria. Israelis achieved a

considerable success and the situation changed in their favor. Therefore, the fourth Arab-Israeli war resulted in the initial victory but later defeat of the Arab world. This defeat was a humiliation for Arabs but a source of pride for Israelis since Arabs started the war for the sake of Palestine and their success or failure affected the Palestinian people (Hussein, 2011).

As it was mentioned earlier, the period from 1948 to 1979 can be called the period of animosity. With the establishment of Israel in this period, Arab countries in order to support Palestine got involved in four wars with Israel. Egypt as the largest Arab country and the leader of Arab nation was a forerunner in all these wars. In this period, by gathering Arab nations, Egypt established Arab nationalism, which it used as a tool in the war against Israel (shazlin, 2006:90).

From 1948 to 1979, in addition to wars, secret talks took place between Egypt and Israel. These talks became a basis for the Camp David Accords. Based on the released documents by the US State Department in 1979, the United States first contrived a plan to make peace between Israel and Egypt so that other Arab countries would follow Egypt (Telhami, 1999:381).

Of these documents, we can refer to Philip Ireland's document; he was the first secretary of the US embassy in Cairo. On these documents, it was said on behalf of Bak Bashi Ismail Shirin, the son-in-law of Farouk and a distinguished member of Egypt's Reconciliation Party, that Egypt had three ways to deal with Israel. The first way was war, which was not to the benefit of either side. The second way was the continuation of the current situation (no war-no peace), and the last one was to make peace between the two countries. Bak Bashi had stated that the peace process had to be carried out in two stages. In the first stage, borders had to be determined and Egypt's demands such as the return of Aqaba, which was a vital and strategic element for Egypt, had to be fulfilled. At the second stage, the problem of Gaza and its refugees had to be resolved if the refugees were expelled from the occupied lands. Bak Bashi had assertively stated that if Israel attended to the above issues, Egypt would come

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forward to make peace with Israel. Through these documents we can see that the US and the West European countries tried to bring the two sides to the table on many occasions, the Ben-Gurion's request to meet with Abdel Nasser via Richard Grossman, the British Prime Minister's envoy is one of them (Ebadi, 1992:55). Jacques Derogy, the chief journalist of the Express magazine who was known to have close contacts with the Jewish authorities, in his book, *The Untold History of Israel*, has written about all the contacts between Israelis and Arabs from 1917, the time of Balfour Declaration up to 1977, the time of Sadat's visit to the occupied Quds. Hesi Carmel, former Israeli diplomat and the Express magazine journalist in Israel, has also documented these contacts. These documents reveal that Sadat's visit to the occupied Quds was not a surprising action to many elites although it was a heavy blow to the morale of many Egyptian people and other Arabs (Ibid, 242-243). From 1977 onward, the relationship between Egypt and Israel entered a new stage, which is discussed in the next section.

II. Period of Commencing Relationships (1977-1994)

Even after the eclipse of Egypt's hegemony in the 1970s, this country has always tried to use its superiority in the Middle East especially in the Arab world to advance its goals (Podeh, 1993:92). Sadat's travel to the occupied Palestine was a turning point in the history of the conflict between Israel and the Arab countries. This travel was the basis for a transition in the history of the Middle East and the starting point of relationships between Cairo and Tel-Aviv. On Saturday, November 19, 1977, Sadat arrived in Quds. Israelis who still remembered Egypt's initial victory in the war of October 6, 1973, gathered to welcome Sadat. From the Israelis' viewpoint, Sadat's travel to Quds was a strategic development in Egypt's foreign policy that caused Egypt to get out of the circle of Arab-Israeli conflict. Hussein Abdelwahab, the editor of Egyptian newspaper, Akhbarelyom rejects this viewpoint. He believes that Sadat's travel to

Quds was a tactic and provided an opportunity for both sides to have some ease after four wars because after this visit, the Arab-Israeli conflict did not end. Moreover, Egyptian people rejected the normalization of ties with Israel; the Israeli ambassador in Cairo remained isolated, MOSAD's intelligence networks were spying in Egypt; and some Israelis continued to say the Misraim prayers^① (Sabri, 2007:76).

Sadat's decision to go to Palestine and start negotiations with Israel was not an abrupt decision because Egyptian and Israeli authorities were already engaged in direct and indirect negotiations. Many of the documents on these secret meetings from the time of Farouk and Nasser up to the time of Sadat have been published (Karawan, 1994:259-260). Farouk's envoys (1936-1952) met with Israeli envoys in Switzerland and these secret negotiations continued during Nasser's and Sadat's presidency with the encouragement of the US and the cooperation of some countries, such as Iran and Morocco. These secret negotiations, however, did not bring about satisfactory results for both sides due to Israel's sly political moves. After the 1973 war and following thirteen days of secret negotiations between Sadat's envoys and Begin's envoys, Israel and Egypt with America's mediation reached an agreement to sign an agreement so that relationships between the two countries could be commenced. On September 17, 1978 in Camp David, Sadat and Begin signed two accords which, according to Jimmy Carter, could smooth the process of peace and stability in the region. The first contract was about the peace between Israel and Egypt. Based on this accord, ultimate peace between Israel and Egypt was made and Israel was committed to evacuate the Sinai desert by April 1982. After that, the two countries could start diplomatic relationships. The second accord was about general peace in the Middle East and within the next five years of this accord, a sovereign state was to be created in the west of Jordan and

① Misraim is a prayer in which the Jews curse Egypt and Egyptian people and ask God to destroy Egypt.

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Gaza. Based on the second accord, Israeli troops had to leave most of the occupied lands and the envoys of Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and Palestine could decide about making peace in the region. The Camp David Accords postponed the issue of Bayt al-Muqaddas to the future. Nonetheless, neither the Camp David Accords nor other treaties, such as the Oslo Accords, brought peace and stability to the region and put an end to wars and bloodshed (Quandt, 2003:157-59).

From the 1990s onwards, Hosni Mubarak took a more active role in the negotiations. Israel's main goals in these negotiations were to keep most of the occupied lands, especially the West Bank, to have control over water resources and strategic locations of the region, and to manage the negotiations in a way that led to the weakening and divisions within the Arab world and thus created conflicts between them. In This way Israel could maintain its superiority over the Arab world (Zittran & Caplan, 2010:39-52).

In 1978, 1982, 1992, 1996, and 2006, Israel imposed wars on the Arabs and Lebanon. In compliance with the peace treaty, Egypt could not be engaged in military action against Israel (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

III. The Period of Negotiations, Economic Relationships, Normalization of Ties, and Emergence of Periodic Tensions (1994-2006)

The Madrid's Peace Conference on October 30, 1991 was considered a turning point in the Arab-Israeli peace process. This conference with America's peace plan and the slogan of "Land for peace" hosted delegations from Arab countries. When the Labor Party and Yitzhak Rabin came to power in Israel, this conference entered a new stage. Rabin saw Israel's retreatment from the South of Lebanon contingent on guaranteeing Israel's security by Lebanon through disarming and destroying Hezbollah. After ten rounds of negotiations ending in June 1993, the head of Palestinian delegation declared that the peace process was in danger and they could not continue the

negotiations. After this conference, Egypt quickly strengthened and in a way held the leadership of Arab-Israeli negotiations (Stein, 1991:12). Egypt played an important role in the Oslo Accords, which ultimately led to Gaza-Ariha convention in September 1993. This convention was the main tenet of the so-called Middle East Peace Plan and all the negotiations from 1993 to 2001 were conducted within its framework. Egypt also had an important role in the negotiations for the Taba summit.

Based on the 1979 Peace Treaty, Israel was supposed to buy Egypt's oil and gas. As a result, economic ties were formed between the two countries. Between 1994 and 2000, Israel exported commodities worth 181 million dollars to Egypt. These commodities included chemical products, fertilizers, and oil products. Egypt has also exported gas, oil, and agricultural products to Israel. In June 2005, Egypt and Israel signed a 2.5 billion dollar contract for the export of Egypt's gas to Israel. Egypt agreed to supply 1.7 billion cubic meters of natural gas over a 15-year period via an undersea pipeline from the Egyptian town of el-Arish to the Israeli city of Ashkelon. In 2005, Israel and Egypt signed the Philadelphia Deal in which Egypt agreed to station 750 members of its security forces in the border of Gaza to prevent smuggling of weapons to Gaza (The Israel Project Jerusalem Office). The two countries also expanded their agricultural cooperation. Egypt's economy, however, due to its own deficiencies, did not benefit much from the economic ties with Israel. In addition, the reports on Egypt's agricultural situation in the 1990s showed that Egypt's farmlands because of using Israeli agricultural products were badly harmed. There have also been plans to empty Egypt's water resources.

In recent decades, political ties between Tel Aviv and Cairo have constantly been affected by Israel's policies in the region and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Hence, Egypt-Israel relationship is referred to as the cold peace (Freedman, 1998:88). This situation worsened after September 11, 2001. Following Israel's extensive attack on the cities in the West Bank under the "deterrent shield" operation, Egypt in April of the same year decided to suspend its ties with Israel. The only open

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channels were the diplomatic channels for pursuing the Palestinian issue. Political ties between Israel and Egypt were constantly fluctuating between cold peace and cold war. The Egyptian and Israeli media as tools for a psychological war were actively working on the path of fluctuations in Israel-Egypt relationship. They played an important role in removing the tensions between the two countries.

After the invasion of Iraq by the US forces and their allies in 2003, Egypt' regional position and the role it plays in both the regional and international community have been the subjects of discussion. The Egyptian elite considering domestic, regional, and international variables believe that Egypt can still play its historical role in the Middle East (Ghahramanpour, 2003:112). From the Israeli viewpoint, Egypt despite the weakness in some of its potentials, in comparison with other players in the region can have a larger impact on the Middle East developments. The Egyptian elite evaluate Israel as a source of threat. The main reasons for this evaluation are as follows:

1. Israel has stationed sixteen legions of its military forces in the border between Egypt and Palestine.
2. Israeli nuclear plants and nuclear research centers exist on the borders of Egypt and Israel.
3. The US and Israel have a network of strategic, military and security ties that the most dangerous of them to Egyptian security is the US-Israel defense agreement of November 1988. Based on this agreement, if Israel gets involved in a military action with another country, the United States will take measures to support Israel. The United States will have direct military intervention and the US military forces will fight beside the Israeli forces (Gazit, 2009:71).

The above-mentioned reasons as well as some other factors constitute the main sources of the Egyptian assessment of Israel. Although the two countries have signed a peace treaty, Israel is still considered a dangerous threat to Egypt. Israel also wants to build a 250-kilometer wall on the border of Gaza and Egypt and hire the

natives and nomads of the Sinai desert to observe any action against Israel. Moreover, Israel has another grand project that endangers Egypt's economic and marine security as well as its strategic position. This project is building the Bahr al-Mayyit Canal.^①

Since the conclusion of the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt, they have had cold relationships in most cases and there have been many tensions in their relationship during the past decades. The most important issues that have affected this relationship are:

1. The failure of the talks between the Palestinian National Authority and Israel
2. Bombardment of Iraq's nuclear reactors by Israel in June 1981
3. Israel's attack on Lebanon in June 1982 and the genocide against Palestinian exiles in Sabra and Shatila in December 1982
4. The continuous presence of Israeli troops in South Lebanon until 2000
5. The continuation of building settlements.
6. The massacre of Palestinians in al-Khalil mosque in February 1994
7. Delay in the execution of al-Khalil agreement in 1997(NEDA Institute,2010:346)

Israel has always held Cairo accountable for Gaza's security problems. In addition, Israelis blame Egypt for the smuggling of weapons to Gaza because of Egypt's inability to control the underground canals in Rafah. Egypt has denied Israeli accusations and has even asked the US and European Union countries for their technical, military, and security aid in detecting the underground canals between Gaza and the Sinai desert. Nonetheless, Israelis complained about Egypt's noncompliance with Israel in besieging Gaza in order to eliminate the resistance movement led by Hamas (Cook, 2008).

①<http://www.planetark.com/dailynewsstory.cfm/newsid/31801/newsDate/27-Jul-2005/story.html>

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By analyzing these events, it can be concluded that despite the signing of a peace treaty, Egypt and Israel political ties have never been very friendly. For example, whenever the Egyptian government has taken a stance against Israel, all political parties of Egypt no matter pro or anti government have supported this position. This is because Arabs have always perceived Israel as a threat to the region. Overall, it can be said that regional developments as well as political international developments have called into question the survival of peace between the two countries. Israel and Egypt accuse one another for their lack of efforts in reforming, improving or making agreements to achieve peace in the Middle East. Nonetheless, Egypt as a country, which shares borders with the occupied Palestine and the Gaza Strip, can have considerable impacts on the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. Therefore, Egypt has always been considered as a mediator affecting the existing crisis (NEDA Institute, 2010:347).

The victory of Hamas in the 2006 election was another factor that led Egypt to get closer to Israel. That year, Egypt put Gaza under economic and political pressures to recognize Israel. ^①

IV. The Period of Cooperation (2006-2011)

After the Annapolis Conference and Bush's visit to the Middle East in early 2008, the Gaza Strip came under Israel's harsh siege and immense pressure. After the retreatment of Israel and the constitution of Hamas government led by Ismail Haniya, the people of Gaza have had a lot of problems and Egypt has also intervened in the issue of Gaza (Ben, 2007). Antagonism between Palestinian groups, especially Fatah and Hamas, and the conflict between Abu Mazen, the head of the Palestinian National Authority and Hamas leaders have, created many problems for Gaza and its people. While Israel is mainly responsible for the situation in Gaza and is the only beneficiary in this

^① Egypt urges Hamas to recognize Israel, renounce violence, http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2006-02-06-hamas_x.htm.

situation, Egypt's foreign policy and its position in the region have suffered a lot due to these conflicts (Sabri, 2007:81).

When the 33-Day War in Lebanon began, Egypt adopted a position that brought it closer to Israel. During this war, some Arab countries of the region, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and some others pursued a policy to prevent the growth, development and strength of non-state resistant players, such as Hamas and Hezbollah. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the Emirates, and some other countries, held Hezbollah accountable for the outbreak of the war and in a way justified Israel's aggression (Ziyad, 2010:118).

About the role of Egypt in the 33-Day War called Molten Lead Operation by Israel, new documents released by Wikileaks show that Israel was in accord with Fatah and Egypt in this war. In June 2009, Ehud Barak in his meeting with some members of the US Congress, referring to their consultation with Egypt and Fatah about the Molten Lead Operation, stated that Egypt and Fatah had been asked to be prepared to control Gaza collaboratively after the defeat of Hamas. Although there is no mention of the date of Barak's meeting with the Egyptians and the Palestinians and only the time of meeting with the American Congressmen is stated, it is clear that these meetings were held before December 27, 2008, which was before the outbreak of the 22-Day War. The documents in the various news networks, including *France 24*, have been published.^① Similar reports to the Wikileaks document had been published previously, but the Wikileaks document is in a way the first authentic document revealing Egypt and Fatah cooperation with Israel against Hamas.

Egypt and other countries of the region that participate in peace negotiations with Israel, at first remained silent during the Gaza War and even announced Hamas's adventurism and its non-extension of the ceasefire as the causes of the war. Gradually with the increase in

① Israel Consulted Egypt, Fatah on Gaza War: WikiLeaks," November 29, 2010, <http://www.france24.com/en/20101129-israel-consulted-egypt-fatah-gaza-war-wikileaks>

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the objections of public opinion to the war and the prolongation of the war, these countries pretended to support Palestine. These states prevented their citizens from organizing protests in support of Palestine. This action created tensions between these states and the proponents of resistance inside these countries. The criticism of Egypt and Saudi leadership position in the Arab world, the dramatic decrease in their popularity, especially that of Mubarak, and their closeness to the US and European countries, were the other outcomes of the Gaza War (Razavi, 2008:19).

Hessam Zaki, the spokesperson for Egypt's Ministry of Foreign Affairs who travelled to Brussels in 2009, in an interview with the Lebanese newspaper Assafir stated that the imposed siege on Gaza would not be lifted as long as Hamas governs Gaza. He added that there were two issues with regards to the situation in Gaza. The first one was the human situation for which the occupier was responsible and had to be resolved as quickly as possible. In this regard, he referred to the 2005 agreement between Israel and the Palestinian National Authority, which allowed Gaza to have apertures for the entrance and exit of commodities. Zaki asserted that the second issue was the political situation, which was very important and depended on the reconciliation between the Palestinians. He stated that Gaza's current situation was an illegal situation. The Palestinian National Authority was not present in Gaza and Egypt's stance in this regard was that the Palestinian National Authority should return to Gaza.^① After building walls on the border of Lebanon, in the West Bank, and around Gaza in the direction of the occupied lands of 1948, Israel was trying to aggravate the siege of 1.5 million Palestinians living in Gaza by building walls on the border of Gaza and Egypt. The aim was to

① Egypt presents to Brussels Meeting the Egyptian Vision Regarding the Situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and Egyptian Efforts to Restore the Truce in Gaza and Achieve Palestinian Reconciliation, <http://www.mfa.gov.eg/English/Ministry/News/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?Source=6781921f-3993-444a-859e-ee26ce851de8&new sID=4721d226-0f75-4fe4-9954-6713ce9f4404>.

make the people of Gaza surrender and remove Hamas from power. Egypt also backed this decision and first closed its border with Gaza. Then in 2007, Egypt closed the Rafah crossing. The siege of Gaza made the Palestinians plunge in harsh economic deprivation. Import and export of goods to and from Gaza were banned. Due to extensive destruction of Gaza's infrastructure by Israel in 2008 and 2009, Gaza was not able to reconstruct its infrastructure. Because of this and other economic and financial problems, tunnels were built on the border of Gaza and Egypt for importing necessary goods and medicine to Gaza. Nonetheless, Israel was unable to defeat Hamas and the resistance movement. Egypt observing Israel's inability in confronting Hamas and Abu Mazen's failure in establishing the national union government, started to build walls in Rafah with the help of the US and Israel. The wall was built to close the tunnels through which Palestinian people imported their necessary commodities. Although important political and religious figures of the Islamic world condemned this action, Egypt continued building the wall (Fraser, 2009).

For the peace negotiations, the most important measures taken by the government of Egypt since 2006 are:

1. The plan known as Palestine's national reconciliation: after the defeat of Fatah, which was considered Egypt's ally in regional and international matters, Mubarak put Hamas under pressure to let Fatah appoint a number of ministers for the Cabinet. This request was within the framework of the plan known as Egypt's national reconciliation. The Palestinian people, however, had voted for Hamas in the 2006 election and rejected the programs of Fatah.^①

① Fatah official urges Hamas to sign Egyptian reconciliation plan, <http://www.siasat.com/english/news/fatah-official-urges-hamas-sign-egyptian-reconciliation-plan>

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2. Closing Fatah crossing during the 22-Day War: Mubarak's government closed all Egypt's entrances to Gaza and prohibited any medical aid to Gaza.^①
3. Construction of a solid wall on the border of Gaza and Egypt in order to lay a complete siege to Gaza: the government of Egypt started the construction of 400 wells with the depth of 30 meters along the 12-kilometer border of Egypt and Gaza. The water from the Mediterranean Sea was to be transferred to these wells so that it would leak from the wells to the Palestinian lands and makes the underground tunnels collapse. In addition, it was not possible to build tunnels on these swamps any more.^②
4. Preventing convoys trying to break Gaza's siege from entering Gaza: when Judge Goldstone declared that Israel had committed war crimes during the 22-Day War, a wave of international sympathy with the people of Gaza was formed (Goldstone, 2009). Ships were sent from different parts of the world to help Gaza. When the passengers of Turkish freedom flotilla to Gaza were killed by Israel, Mubarak's regime was in line with Israel and did not let any ship enter the coast of Gaza. This situation continued until the fall of Mubarak in 2011.

V. The Issue of Israel after the Fall of Mubarak

A new wave of events has attracted the world's attention to the

① Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) (December 2009), 23 Days of War, 928 Days of Closure Life, One Year after Israel's Latest Offensive on the Gaza Strip, 27 December 2008 - 18 January 2009, www.pchrgaza.org/files/Reports/English/pdf_spec/23-days.pdf

② . Middle East Monitor, Special Report,(2010) Report- - Egyptian Government Infected by Mad Israeli Wall Disease, www.middleEastMonitor.org.uk/.../the-Arab-Organization-of-Human-Rights.

Middle East. In early 2011, revolutions broke out in some of the Middle East countries. Wave of protests, which began in Tunisia, occurred in other countries such as Yemen, Egypt, Bahrain, Libya, and more recently Syria. Among all these countries, the Egyptian revolution for two reasons had a larger impact on international politics. The first one is that Egypt was an important regional ally for the US and second is the Egypt-Israel ties and the issue of Arab-Israeli conflict.

The Egyptian protests began on January 25. At the forefront of these protests were the Egyptian youth who were aware of domestic and international political currents. Egyptian protesters wanted Mubarak, the 30-year dictator, to resign. They believed this was the first step to reform Egypt. Despite hidden international pressures on behalf of the US and the European Union to use violence against the protesters, eventually vice president Suleiman announced the resignation of Mubarak. Egypt under Mubarak's rule played the role of moderator in the Middle East for the US. This moderator effect was acting as a stabilizing force in the Arab-Israeli conflict (Raharjo, 2011). Since 1979, the US has granted an annual 2 billion dollars economic and military aid to Egypt. Therefore, Egypt-Israel ties after Mubarak is one of the US greatest concerns (Zarpli, 2011). An important point to consider is the US support for the resignation of Mubarak in the final days of his office. This was a threat to Egypt-Israel ties, which were in a state of cold peace (Raharjo, 2011). Israel's reaction to the Egyptian developments showed that Israel was worried about the events in Egypt. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a joint conference with his German counterpart, Angela Merkel, stated that he was afraid of Egypt being transformed into an Islamic Iran.^① Israeli newspaper, *Ha'aretz*, while criticizing the US for its lack of support for Mubarak, emphasized that Israel on the final days of Mubarak's rule had limited criticism of Mubarak in order to maintain the stability of

① Al Jazeera and agencies, Israel 'fears' post-Mubarak Era, <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/Middle East/2011/01/201113177145613.html>

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the region. *Ha'aretz* also stated that Israel had gathered its ambassadors to the Middle East countries in order to make decisions about Egyptian developments (Ravid, 24 June 2011).

Egyptian protests worried Israel and Israeli military officials have been holding meetings to analyze their general strategies for the future of Egypt. According to Israeli analysts, the most important threat to the future of Egypt-Israel ties and the peace treaty is the coming to power of the Muslim Brotherhood or the domination of their views in Egypt's foreign policy decision making.^① The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt is seen as a great threat to Israel in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Ehud Barak, Israel's Minister of Defense has recently said that they are getting prepared for the worst possible situation. He has also stated that Israel should take action to raise its long-term security for the first time since 1970s. Raising Israel's defense power according to Barak has led to the increase in its military spending after the Egyptian developments. Until the mid 1970s, Israel raised its defense power every year but since then because of the conclusion of peace treaty with Egypt, it has reduced its military spending from 23%-9% of its GNP.^② With the developments in Egypt, this country is now considered a potential threat to Israel. Therefore, recognizing the future political players and elites in Egypt is very important for Israel not only for the future of its ties with Egypt, but also as an independent system with an independent foreign policy.

VI. Continuation of Fragile Relationships and Emergence of Public Protests

They would continue their relationship at the state-to-state level,

① Al Jazeera and Agencies,(31 Jan 2011), Israel 'Fears' Post-Mubarak Era

② Israeli Defense Minister: Relations between Israel, Egypt not at Risk, ,By the CNN Wire Staff,
http://articles.CNN.com/2011-02-13/world/egypt.israel_1_israel-and-egypt-muslim-brotherhood-hussein-tantawi?_s=PM:WORLD

though the peoples of the two countries would be pessimistic and have ill-feeling toward the relationship between their countries. It has to bear in mind that after the Camp David Peace treaty, the Israeli Officials have mentioned in many cases that Egypt would be a strategic partner for Israel. Egypt's role as an interface in the case of relationship with the Arabs, Palestine conflicts and the informal ceasefire between Israel and Palestine has been important to Israel. The Camp David Peace Accord has gone through ups and downs from its beginning. For instance, this happened at the time when the Egyptian military airplanes launched an attack against the Israel's Nuclear Research Site in 2003. This and similar incidents led the analysts to describe the two states' relations as a cold peace. (freedman,1998:88) Despite the fact that Egypt's Military Supreme Council on February 12, 2011 declared that Egypt was committed to its international obligations, including the peace treaty, but Israelis are seriously concerned about the internal and future political events in Egypt.

Having a close look at the political analyses concerning Egypt and also considering the Military declaration shows that the military forces of Egypt would welcome Political Development in Egypt and they, also because of having some strategic interests with Israel and its connection to the financial and military aids that receives from the US, would continue its support for the peace Accord with Israel and would be consistent with their commitment in this field (Hassan, 2011). The peace treaty has had some advantages for both Israel and Egypt. As such, we can refer to the reduction in military spending of the two countries. Due to US aid, Egypt, to some extent, came of the situation of political, social and economic depression. Israel also reduced its defense budget from 23% to 9% of its GNP since the conclusion of the peace treaty. This has helped Israel's economic growth. Up to the time of the conclusion of the peace treaty and for some years after that, thousands of Egyptian and Israeli soldiers were stationed along the borders but now this number has decreased to a few hundred (Ben-meir,2011). In the case of any interruption or end to Egypt- Israel

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relationship both states would suffer not only politically and financially but also from the security aspect. Because Israel is importing 45% of its gas from Egypt and Egypt also has benefitted from these agreements, if these ties came to an end it would be harmful to both states. Right now the Egypt- Israel relationship after Mubarak is a concern to US, for any damage to Egypt- Israel would be a change to Egypt- US relationship. At this time it seems that Egypt is not going to leave aside the Americans' financial aide because in the case of any radical change in Egypt - Israel relation and a stop to the American's aides the fragile economic condition of Egypt would receive a sore pain (Hssan, 2011:3). At people's level, the situations in Egypt and Israel are different. The people of both countries think differently. In a survey conducted by the Zogbi International Institute in 2010, ninety percent of Egyptians named Israel as one of the two greatest threats to Egypt. On the other hand, most Israelis believed that the peace treaty would be in danger if the Egyptian revolution like the Iranian revolution would result in Islamists' gaining power and the constitution of another Islamic Republic. Based on the poll carried out by the Democracy Institute at Tel Aviv University, seventy percent of the Jewish respondents had stated that Egypt had low chances of constituting a democratic regime. In addition, forty-nine percent of the respondents thought that the revolution would have negative effects on the peace treaty. Considering the role that public opinion plays in the future of Egypt, Giden Loy, *Haaretz* Journalist argued that the Egyptian people never wanted an alliance with Israel. Also, in the early days of the Egyptian revolution, the Muslim Brotherhood wanted a referendum to be held in order to ask people's opinion about the relationship with Israel and the issue of Palestine. Egyptian people and political groups at the time of the revolution joined the Muslim Brotherhood in condemning Mubarak for his alliance with Israel (Raharjo, 2011). At the very beginning the provisional government in order to attract public opinion announced that it would relinquish trade with Israel. In addition, the opening of Fatah crossing was among the policies to please public opinion

(Kirkpatrick, 2011). After the revolution, the most important challenge to their relationship and showed the power of public opinion and the role of civil society in the internal aspect of political events in Egypt was the seizing of Israel's embassy in Cairo by Islamic groups. The attack was retaliation for the Israeli fighters attack in the Sinai Desert on August 19 which killed six Egyptians officers. When the Israel officials did not apologize for their fighters attack, the pressure of Egyptian public opinion forced Egyptian officials to call back their envoy from Israel. These suspensions in their bilateral relations in people's level and also the growing effect of public opinion in the shaping of foreign policy in Egypt will put their relationship in a tough situation and indirectly would be a bad sign to their future relationship (Hassan, 2011).

Taking a great power in the Egypt parliament by the Islamic groups and also the election of Mohamed Morsi as the President of Egypt has increased Israel's worries concerning its future relationship with Egypt. Although the president confirmed Egypt's attachment to all of its international commitments, including the peace treaty with Israel, but still there's some worries about the subject. Islamist rise to power in Egypt with the election of Mohamed Morsi as the president and also the indirect signals shown by the Egyptian for commencing a relationship with Anti-Israel government such as Iran and participating in the Non-aligned summit in Tehran are bad signals for Israel. It has to be taken into account that the close cooperation of Morsi with Hamas and the reopening the Rafah border crossing would be another alarm to Israel. While Morsi has taken the responsibility of improving the living conditions of Egyptians, any military help to Hamas would cause some tensions between Egypt and Israel and bring about some difficulty inside his country. By taking into consideration these current issues, Morsi has indicated that Egypt is going to take a more independent policy in the Middle East. Although The Mine obstacle to Egypt's independent foreign policy is the fragile economic condition and the reliance on America's financial and military assistance.

Conclusion

The following events after the downfall of Mubarak and rising to power of Mohamed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood have complicated the Israel- Egypt relationship. There are three major players in Egypt's current political scene based on whose views Egypt's domestic politics and foreign policy will be shaped. They are the military, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the revolutionary youth (April 6 Movement). The April 6 Movement was the initiator, as well as the stimulator, of the Egyptian revolution; its focus is on the internal matters and domestic political, social and cultural demands. This movement in spite of its support of Resistance has never wanted the breakdown of Egypt's relationship with Israel.

The second player in Egypt's developments is the Muslim Brotherhood. The Muslim Brotherhood is the largest Islamic movement in both Egypt and the Islamic world and one of the most powerful opposition groups to Mubarak. Although this group has been one of the oldest opposition groups to Mubarak, it has not played the major role in protests against Mubarak which led to his removal from power. The Muslim Brotherhood, however, is the greatest agent of threat to the future of Egypt-Israel ties and can challenge this relationship. With regard to domestic issues, the Muslim Brotherhood like the Egyptian youth movement demands a democratic Egypt with free elections. But, with regard to foreign policy, they have stated that they would rethink the relationship with Israel in the future. Nonetheless, there are divisions among the members of the Muslim Brotherhood with regard to this issue. Considering national interests, some of the members are opposed to radical actions. However, the majority of the members based on their Islamic ideology support the Palestinian resistance. The gaining power by Morsi who has a moderate background in the Muslim Brotherhood has made the prospect of Egypt- Israel relation more sophisticated. As it mentioned earlier, Morsi confirmed that the Egypt would be consistent with all of its international commitments, including the Peace Treaty. Beside this

he has declared so many times that the Egypt's foreign policy would be based on its national interest and more independent than Mubarak's Era.

The third player in Egypt's current political scene which has always played the most important role in both current and future internal and foreign affairs is the military. During the protests against Mubarak, the military remained neutral which showed that they were not supportive of Mubarak. Nonetheless, people are suspicious of the military since they think that some of the military men are Mubarak's old friends and want to deflect the revolution. Nevertheless, until the formation of a democratic government in Egypt, the military will probably play an important role in Egyptian developments. This is because, based on Egypt's constitution, the Military would be considered the supporter of people and the national interests. However, Morsi's immediate actions in decreasing the military's power and replacing military commanders and also taking away the privilege of law-making from the military council is a great transformation in Egypt's foreign policy. Though these actions are a great step on the road to democracy in Egypt, to draw a rushed conclusion now would be a great mistake. The military still have a great role in Egypt's events and it seems to be one of considerable players in the future of Egypt. Having a long-term look to Egypt's internal structure it would be obvious that the elites of Egypt before any structural change in the field of international policy have to modify some of the old domestic economic, cultural and political structures of Egypt. Egypt's journey to democracy has started newly and in this journey the elites of Egypt and its president Mohamed Morsi have to pay a high price. Fulfilling these ends, Egypt needs a policy of Détente in its relationship with the outside world more than anything else. Adoption of this policy would decrease any radical action from Egypt's side.

It has to be taken into account that the relationship of Egypt-Israel would not be such as before, and Egypt, considering the national interest and also the role of military, will continue its relation

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with Israel. Thus, it is probable that Egypt in some areas, including the Peace Treaty, will seek to make some changes in its relation with Israel and get more advantages. Egypt would also try to achieve more long-term strategic interests, some of which being:

1. Some changes to strengthen its presence in the Sinai Desert and push Israel to retreat to its 1967 border, as mentioned in the introduction of Peace Treaty.
2. Establishing an Autonomous Government in the West Bank of Gaza.
3. Recognizing an independent Palestinian State by Israel along the 1967 border.
4. Cooperating with Anti- Israel government, such as Iran, wrest more advantages.^①
5. Executing the 242 and 338 UN Resolutions to settle the borders according to 1967 and making Israel to leave the lands it occupied during the Six Day War.

Surely, any change in Egypt-Israel relationship would have fundamental effects on the regional and international relations. It also would alter the Balance of power in the international system.

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^① It's also possible that some of the officials in the new administration for the expense of closer relationship with Iran or with any neighboring country adapt a harsh attitude toward Israel. It has to bore in mind that Egypt was a rival to Iran in the past and it could be a rival to Iran in the future. In the past Egypt and Israel had common interest in preventing Iran from reaching its goals including its nuclear program. It has to be included that their different Shiite - Sunni interests and Iran's ideological actions could also affect their political relation in the future.

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