

Four Points toward the Understanding of Egypt's Foreign Relations

CHEN Tianshe^①

(School of History, Zhengzhou University)

Abstract: *To understand and perceive the foreign relations of contemporary Egypt, the focus must be placed on four essential starting points, namely, geography, interests, the Cold War and the leaders of Egypt. As the basis of Egypt's foreign relations, the geography of Egypt determines fundamental directions of Egypt's foreign relations: the Arab world, Israel, great powers, Europe and Africa. Although safeguarding national interests is the fundamental starting point in Egypt's foreign relations, the national interests of Egypt have different points of emphasis at different times. Additionally, Egypt still bears the mission of protecting the interests of the Arab nation. As the international background of Egypt's foreign relations before the 1990s, the Cold War had great impact on many aspects of Egypt's foreign relations; the United States and the Soviet Union were top priority in its foreign relations during that period of time. Under the unique political mechanism, Egyptian leaders have supreme power in foreign policy decision-making and Egypt's foreign relations are branded with a mark of personal traits of Egyptian leaders. Despite the recent Egyptian political mutation, geography, interest and leaders are still the basic focus of external relations of Egypt, so Egyptian diplomatic pattern is unlikely to*

^① Dr. CHEN Tianshe, Associate Professor of School of History, Zhengzhou University.

have dramatic changes.

Key Words: *Foreign Relations of Contemporary Egypt; Starting Points; Geography; Interests; The Cold War; Leaders*

Ever since the Egyptian Revolution of 1952, Egypt has been playing an important role in both the Middle East and international politics, featuring rather active foreign relations. To understand and perceive the foreign relations of contemporary Egypt at a macro level, focus should be placed on the following four points:

I. Geography: the Basis of Egypt's Foreign Relations

Covering an area of about 1,020,000 square kilometers (2002:11), Egypt has a population of about 73,579,000 people (2006) (2007: April 3). Possessing a land bridge between Asia and Africa, this transcontinental country is bordered by the Mediterranean Sea to the north, Sudan to the south, the Red Sea and Saudi Arabia to the east, and Libya to the west. It is bordered by Israel and Palestine in west Asia. The Suez Canal serves as an important waterway that connects the Atlantic Ocean, the Mediterranean Sea with the Indian Ocean by way of the Red Sea. The geographical location of Egypt means a lot to Egypt. "The geographic position of Egypt predetermined the role of Egypt in history. A strong Egypt was capable of shouldering responsibilities in proportion to its geographical location while a declining Egypt would become nothing but part of a foreign empire controlling this position. When Egypt proved to be unable to make use of this position, others would always take it over. All in all, this physical position has never been discarded; neither would history have it discarded," said Mohammed Hasanein Heikal, a well-known Egyptian (Heikal, & Guan, 1992).

The unique geographic position determines fundamental directions of Egypt's foreign relations:

The first refers to the Arab world. Geographically, Egypt is a

Four Points toward the Understanding of Egypt's Foreign Relations

bridge that connects the eastern and western parts of the Arab world, making Egypt the center of the Arab world. The unchangeable geographic and historical factors of Egypt, reiterated Nasser, predetermined that Egypt is not only part of the Arab world but also the center of the Arab world, the hero and leader who must undertake the mission of Arab unity (Chen, 2005:9). Therefore, what Nasser pursued throughout his political life was Arab nationalism. Prior to the Yom Kippur War in 1973, President Sadat fought for the lost land of the Arab world under the banner of Arab nationalism. However, ignoring the opposition of the Arab world, President Sadat made a separate peace with Israel, which isolated Egypt from the Arab family. "In history, Egypt has been playing two roles in the Arab world, i.e., unification and innovation. Now that Egypt, isolated from the Arab family, has lost its ideals for the future and its activities also come to a standstill in its limited political and geographic spheres in this area. A situation similar to that in the Balkan area took shape here (Heikal, & Guan, 1992:371). After taking office, President Mubarak fully realized the important position of Egypt in the Arab world. He made great efforts so as to enhance the relations between Egypt and other Arab states, finally bringing Egypt back to the Arab family.

Among the relations between Egypt and other Arab states, Egypt cares most about the following three states. The first country is Sudan. For one thing, Sudan has close ties with Egypt in history; the former has always been regarded by the latter as its strategic backyard. For another, Sudan, an upstream country on the Nile, bears on the water security of Egypt. The second country is Palestine. Palestine bears on Egypt's security in the east wing. In addition, as Palestine is a key entity at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, it is an important stage for Egypt to bring into play its influence in this area. The third country is Saudi Arabia. Due to the unique religious position and abundant oil dollars of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, on the one hand, longs for its support when it comes to Middle East affairs and more economic aid from Saudi Arabia, but, on the other hand, tries its best to avoid possible

competition from Saudi Arabia in terms of regional influence.

The second refers to Israel. As a powerful neighbor in the east, Israel is an important factor concerning the national security of Egypt. All previous Egyptian governments deemed that Israel is a major country to be alert against, always paying close attention to the situation in Israel. Even after peace was made between the two countries, Egypt still keeps an eye on Israel, unwilling to develop further relations with the latter. What's more, the fact that Israel is the only Middle Eastern country in possession of nuclear weapons makes Egypt upset. Former Egyptian foreign minister Amr Moussa (He is now the Arab League Secretary General) once said, "As long as Israel possesses any weapons of mass destruction that pose a threat to its neighbors, it's unthinkable for Israel to integrate into this area" (Dowek, 2001:267). Of course, Israel has no complete trust in Egypt, either, which remains an important factor for the appearance and continuation of Egypt's "cold peace" with Israel.

The third refers to great powers in the international community. It has been a difficult problem for Egypt to tackle with its relations with great powers (especially the US and the Soviet Union) in the international community. "In terms of its relations with other countries," argued critics, "Egypt's relationship with the Arab world affects its foreign relations within the region as a whole while its relations with the UK, the US and the Soviet Union are of great significance outside this region. The interference of these three powers is one root reason for the long-term disturbance in the Middle East. Egypt's relations with these three powers stand out among all its foreign relations. To be more specific, Egypt's relationship with the US and the Soviet Union, the two superpowers, seem particularly important for it affects the overall situation of Egypt's foreign relations" (Chen, 2005:34). As a result, Egypt has to be rather cautious so as to survive the fighting between world powers. For instance, during Nasser's reign, although Egypt was in close ties with the Soviet Union, it also kept a relationship with the US for a long time. Later on,

Four Points toward the Understanding of Egypt's Foreign Relations

during Mubarak's reign, although Egypt was on good terms with the US, it also developed a relationship with the Soviet Union (Russia) so as to seek some kind of balance.

The fourth refers to Europe and Africa. Geographically, Egypt is close to Europe. Actually, both sides had close ties in history. In modern times, Egypt was deeply influenced by Europe and later, under the invasion and control of European powers, finally became a semi-colony and protectorate of the UK. After the Suez War of 1956, the influence of the UK and France on Egypt was actually not worth mentioning. After the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Egypt's relation with Europe, especially with the European Community, underwent substantial changes. Egypt and the European Community began bilateral cooperation and political talks. The first decade of the 21st century saw rapid development of bilateral relations between Egypt and Europe. In May 2004 Egypt and Europe signed a partnership agreement, followed by frequent visits of state leaders. By the end of 2006, President Mubarak had paid 46 visits to France, 24 visits to Germany and 18 visits to Italy (Wang, 2006:86). At the same time, state leaders of European Union countries also paid numerous visits to Egypt. In recent years, the European Union has become the largest trade partner of Egypt. For example, in 2005, Egypt's imports from France and Germany reached €1.418 billion and €1.35 billion respectively. Its imports from Italy, the second biggest trade partner after the US, reached €2.6 billion (Wang, 2006:86). Besides, the European Union was one of Egypt's main donors. Between 2004 and 2005, assistance from the EU to Egypt amounted to \$ 522million (2005:133).

Egypt has traditional relations with Africa. One ring in Nasser's Three Ring Theory is Africa. When Nasser was still in office, Egypt supported the national liberation movements in Africa and Egypt had rather close ties with Africa. As most African countries opposed Sadat's decision of making separate peace with Israel, the relationship between Egypt and Africa cooled down. During Mubarak's reign, the

bilateral relationship improved and moved forward steadily. Mubarak called for making all Africa a nuclear-free zone and he also made great mediation efforts to resolve armed conflicts in Africa. He was re-elected Chairman of the Organization of African Unity in 1993. In May 1998, Egypt joined the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa. Moreover, Egypt also signed bilateral economic and technological cooperation agreements with numerous African countries.

II. Interests: the Fundamental Starting Point of Egypt's Foreign Relations

National interests are, said critics, "pivotal factors that determine and affect the behaviors of a state in international relations and inter-state relations reflect the interest interaction between different political and economic entities." (Zhang, 1989: 54). National interests are a comprehensive concept, mainly including security, economic and political interests (Zhang, 1989:55-56). The foreign relations of Egypt are no exception; their starting point and purpose is to safeguard the national interests of Egypt.

However, different tasks encountered by Egypt at different times meant its national interests had different priorities, which correspondingly affected the foreign relations of Egypt. When Nasser first took office, the primary task for Egypt was to realize and consolidate the national independence of Egypt and the most urgent problem was how Egypt could obtain enough weapons and economic aid to defend the newly-born regime. As Egypt's efforts of calling for help from Western countries failed, Egypt had to turn to the Soviet Union. The relationship between Egypt and the Soviet Union developed rapidly for the generous Soviet aid made Egypt almost completely dependent on the Soviet Union. After the Yom Kippur War in 1973, the primary task of Egypt was to recover the Sinai Peninsula occupied by Israel and save its collapsing economy. The US

Four Points toward the Understanding of Egypt's Foreign Relations

became what Egypt could rely on because of its unique influence on Israel and enormous amount of foreign aid. The following years saw rapid recovery and development between Egypt and the US. The Egyptian-Israeli relationship also briefly improved. The Soviet Union was ignored because it could not help Egypt as the US did. Then the relationship between Egypt and the Soviet Union went from bad to worse and finally the two countries fell apart. Former American Secretary of State Kissinger said, "Russians can only offer you (Egypt) weapons but we can offer you peace" (Heikal, & Xing, 1979:4). During Mubarak's reign, the primary task faced with Egypt was to develop the economy and increase its regional influence. The first difficulty Mubarak faced was how to return to the Arab family. For this purpose, Egypt decided to freeze its relationship with Israel so as to win approbation from Arab countries step by step. Egypt gradually improved its relations with Arab countries and finally recovered diplomatic relationship with these countries. In May 1989, Egypt returned to the Arab League. Since the 1990s, Egypt has been improving its relations with Arab countries seriously and engaged itself in resolving big issues of the Arab world. Since then Egypt has been playing an important role in the Arab world. Meanwhile, considering the leading position of the US in the Middle East and its enormous aid to Egypt, Egypt continued to attach importance to its relationship with the US. The Egyptian-US relationship moved forward for further development.

Although Egypt placed its relations with great powers in the center of its foreign strategy, Egypt tried to protect its national interest instead of simply catering for great powers. In its relation with the Soviet Union, Nasser insisted not approving the military base eagerly needed by the Soviet Union in spite that the Soviet Union offered Egypt a large amount of military and economic aid. When the "neither war nor peace" strategy of the Soviet Union hindered Egypt's preparation for its war against Israel, President Sadat made up his mind to drive out the military experts of the Soviet Union of Egypt.

During Mubarak's reign, the US, as an ally of Egypt, continued to provide Egypt with a lot of military and economic aid, which, however, did not prevent Egypt from criticizing the US. Egypt made strong criticism of the US with regard to many issues. For instance, Egypt and the US had constant disputes over issues like the US-led global counterterrorism war and democratization and the peace process in the Middle East. Statistics of the US Congress show that 80% of Egypt's votes on the general assembly of the UN were against the US (Wu, Chen, & Wang, 2004:128).

Besides its national interests, Egypt, as an Arab country, also bears the mission of safeguarding the interests of the Arab nation. The Palestine-Israeli conflict is mainly concerned with the interests of the Arab nation. Egypt was a main force of the Arab camp in the Palestine-Israeli conflict. It has been working hard for the resolution of the Palestine issue. During the peace talks between Palestine and Israel, Egypt always worked as a supporter of Palestine, pressuring Israel all along. When the Arab nation was faced with challenges, Egypt was rather active in mediating all parties, fighting for unity of the whole Arab nation. To some extent, Egypt's attitude was a symbol of the attitude of the Arab world. Nevertheless, the national interests of Egypt were often in discord with that of the Arab nation. On such occasions Egypt would sacrifice the interests of the Arab nation so as to protect its own interests. For example, to recover the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt sought for separate peace with Israel in breach of its policy of "no recognition, no peace, no negotiation" against Israel. This badly damaged the interests of the Arab nation, which was also the root cause that Egypt was isolated by Arab countries after Egypt had made peace with Israel. In addition, the heavy debts and responsibilities that Egypt bears caused much negative influence on itself. For instance, Egypt's involvement with the Palestine-Israeli conflict caused severe human resource, economic and military losses to itself. Egypt's economic losses in the four Arab-Israeli wars reached \$100 billion (Wang, 2006:32). Nasser's keen support to Arab

Four Points toward the Understanding of Egypt's Foreign Relations

revolutions, especially its involvement in the Yemeni Civil War, brought more losses than gains. During Mubarak's administration, however, Egypt paid great attention to the balance between its national interests and the interests of the Arab nation. For example, before most Arab countries recognized Israel, Egypt insisted that Egypt should maintain peace with Israel but the Egyptian-Israeli relationship must be kept at a reasonably low level.

Of course, all the Arab countries, including Egypt, are faced with the balance between their national interests and the interests of the Arab world. The discord between the two kinds of interests also affects the relations between Arab countries. The relationship between Egypt and Saudi Arabia was a typical example, in which case both fought for the legal rights of the Arab nations. When Egypt was fighting against Israel in the front, Saudi Arabia offered Egypt tremendous financial support. In particular, the unity and cooperation between the two countries during the Yom Kippur War was exemplary. To push forward the peace process of the Middle East, Egypt made great mediating efforts between the Arab world and Israel while Saudi Arabia put forward a peace plan in 1981 and then another in 2002. During the Gulf Crisis and the Gulf War, both were dedicated to the liberation of Kuwait. However, from time to time there were also disputes between Egypt and Saudi Arabia because of their disparities in national interests and ideology. The worst case occurred during the Yemeni Civil War in the 1960s. The two countries once broke off their diplomatic relations because of their different opinions on making peace with Israel. Moreover, the two countries were in discord because they both wanted to be the leader of the Arab and the Islamic world. For instance, when making security arrangement in the Gulf area after the Gulf War, Saudi Arabia rejected the proposal of rebuilding its security forces out of Egyptian troops, instead, Saudi Arabia relied on Western countries for its safety. The imbalance between the interests of Arab countries and the interests of the Arab nation influenced the unity and cooperation in the Arab

world badly. "All Arab nationalists require, consciously or subconsciously, the interests of Arab nationalism to be subordinated to their national interests, class interests and personal interests, which is the very reason why Arab nationalism cannot lead the Arab nation to unification," said some critics (Yang & Zhu, 1996:82).

III. The Cold War: the International Background of Egypt's Foreign Relations

The Cold War was an important factor affecting the international relations from the end of World War II to early 1990s. After World War II, Egypt became a focus of the competition between the two superpowers, the US and the Soviet Union. As early as the 1950s, the US attempted to include Egypt in its Middle East defense plan so as to contain the Soviet Union but was rejected by Egypt. During the Suez Crisis, the US put great pressure on Egypt instead of supporting this strategic ally. The main reason was that the US feared that the Soviet Union might take advantage of this opportunity to get in the Middle East. Former American president Dwight Eisenhower said, "We should put forward the best thinking for problems likely to be solved; in particular, the rescue mission of helping Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria out of their failure under the control of the Soviet Union... Since Britain and France have lost their influence in the Middle East, to save these countries and make them turn to the West, we must dare to be the leader" (Warner, 1991:316). However, the US failed to render Egypt much real help. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union opened the Egyptian gate through economic and military aid, making Egypt a tower of strength of the Soviet Union in the Middle East. In contrast, Egypt and the US fell apart and finally broke off their diplomatic relationship in 1967. Although the relationship between Egypt and the Soviet Union developed rapidly after the Six-Day War, the role of the US played in tackling the Palestine-Israeli conflict reduced Egypt's confidence in the Soviet Union. Therefore, it was no surprise that

Four Points toward the Understanding of Egypt's Foreign Relations

Nasser improved the Egyptian-US relations in his late years.

After taking office, Sadat tried his best to enhance the Egyptian-US relationship. The US made it one prerequisite that Egypt should stay away from the Soviet Union. Despite the fact that Egypt managed to launch the Yom Kippur War and won some victory at the beginning of the war by relying on the weapons provided by the Soviet Union, Sadat had no confidence in the Soviet Union any longer. Consequently, the relationship between Egypt and the Soviet Union continued to deteriorate and finally broke up. Egypt started to put its total reliance on the US. The fight between the US and the Soviet Union in Egypt ended with a US victory and Egypt became a strategic ally of the US in the Middle East. During the 1980s, the Soviet Union was in a disadvantageous position in its confrontation with the US. Although Egypt recovered its diplomatic relationship with the Soviet Union in 1984, the bilateral tie could not be compared with what it used to be. The Egyptian-US relationship moved forward steadily. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the weakened Russia had not much strength to compete with the US. As a result, the Egyptian-US relationship continued to develop while the Egyptian-Russian relationship lost its dominance in Egypt's foreign strategy.

As of the 1990s, under the influence of the Cold War, the foreign relations of Egypt had been in the shadow of US-Soviet confrontation. The US and the Soviet Union were rather active during the Suez War of 1956. During the Yemeni Civil War, the republicans and the royalists were at daggers drawn; the two sides were supported by Egypt and Saudi Arabia respectively. It happened that Egypt and Saudi Arabia were supported by the Soviet Union and the US respectively. The Six-Day War of 1967 and the Yom Kippur War appeared to be the confrontation between the Arab world and Israel, which actually was the confrontation between the US and the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union backed Egypt while the US backed Israel. The Yom Kippur War was actually a grand contest of Soviet weapons versus American weapons. The failure of Arab countries led by Egypt

during the two wars indicated that the US had the upper hand in its contest against the Soviet Union in the Middle East. During the Yom Kippur and afterward, the US made a lot of efforts to mediate between Egypt and Israel, with another purpose of keeping the Soviet Union away. To prevent Egypt's Third Army from being wiped out, the US put great pressure on Israel, saying, "if Israel did not raise its siege of this army, the Soviet Union would have an excuse to dispatch troops to the Middle East. All in all, Israel must immediately open the logistics channels of Egypt's Third Army" (Zhang, & Zhao, 1987:234). After the Yom Kippur War, Egypt told the US that Egypt would like to help clean up the Suez Canal, which incurred the disapproval of the Soviet Union. On May 24, 1974, an Arabic radio station in Moscow said, "some Americans are attempting to pressure Egypt with the demilitarization of the Suez Canal as an excuse so as to limit the navigation freedom of Soviet ships" (Hussini, 1987:205). Likely, the peace process between Egypt and Israel could not avoid the contest between the US and the Soviet Union. 戴斯明, once a US State Department spokesman of the Reagan administration, pointed out that the Camp David peace process and the fight against the Soviet threat in the Middle East was complementary to each other (Chen, 2005: 98).

Obviously, although Egypt had been consistent in its neutral and non-aligned policy, Egypt had to rely on one side against the background of the Cold War. "In the global political zero-sum game played by the two superpowers in the 1950s, Washington believed that Egypt's non-aligned policy diminished the strength of the West in a key strategic region (the Middle East), calling Egypt a traitor. In contrast, Egypt considered the Baghdad Pact, which included Britain and Iraq, to Egypt's adversary, be an alliance against Egypt. Due to its objection to the West Camp which supported the establishment of the military advantage of Israel, Egypt turned to the East Camp for weapons" (Lefebvre, 1993:325), said Jeffrey A. Lefebvre. The evolution of the Egyptian-US relationship had an impact on the evolution of the

Four Points toward the Understanding of Egypt's Foreign Relations

Egyptian-Soviet Union relationship and vice versa. "At that time (during Nasser's reign), to make any change in Egyptian policies was considered to be undermining the position of the US because the starting point of the American position was to ensure the relations between Egypt and the West stay as they used to be. Therefore, the policy changes of Egypt always led to mutual estrangement between Egypt and the US. Meanwhile, this would always push Egypt toward the Soviet Union a little bit more, which then led to more contacts between Egypt and the Soviet Union. It was said that Egypt had become a doorway through which the Soviet Union could easily get into the Middle East," said Sadat (Sadat, & Zhong, 1976:76).

IV. Leaders: Personal Traits in Egypt's Foreign Relations

According to the 1956, 1958, 1964 Constitutions and the 1971 permanent Constitution as well as its amendments, Egypt is a presidential republic where the president has been dominating the political life of the country. When making foreign policies, the president almost has absolute decision-making power. Some researchers believe that decision-making of foreign policies is a proprietary territory of the Egyptian president and his courtiers (Wang, 2006:32). The power like that of a king and the unique position in foreign policy making of the Egyptian president marked Egypt's foreign relations with the individualities of the president himself.

During Nasser's reign, Egypt gave extensive support to the national liberation movements in Asia and Africa because Nasser himself hated colonialism and imperialism. He took part in the Palestine War of 1948. The humiliation of the defeat of Arab countries made up his mind to fight against Zionism and devote himself to the Palestine-Israeli conflict. Out of his sense of responsibility for the Arab nation, He was keen about the Arab unification. He precipitated the union of Egypt and Syria in 1958, also known as the United Arab Republic. He also worked hard to expand Egypt's influence in the

Arab world and supported Arab revolutions. Taking Egypt as an example, many other Arab countries organized free officers movements and launched revolutions. Egypt was hailed as the source of Arab revolutions.

When Sadat took office, he had no confidence in developing a relationship with the Soviet Union because he disgusted and distrusted it. The relationship between Egypt and the Soviet Union worsened steadily. Ismail Fahmy, once Foreign Minister of Egypt, said that Sadat "never understood, liked or trusted Russians and Russians treated him the same way" (Fahmy, 1983:11). In contrast, Sadat liked the American leaders; he had full confidence in President Carter, regarding him as a friend the Egyptian people and could be relied on. Therefore, he welcomed Carter's mediation in the Egyptian-Israeli peace talks with open arms, which led to big breakthroughs in and rapid development of the Egyptian-US relationship.

Sadat liked to act in an arbitrary fashion and discriminated against those with different views. He often made big decisions by himself. It was said "when faced with important problems, he would return to his place and stay there for a couple of days. He did not like to read memos or reports. He liked to surprise his assistants. His advisors called him a Pharaoh in private" (Karawan, 1994: 257). Former American President Nixon once described him as a person who liked to think, and to be alone. He seldom exchanged views with his ministers. Many important decisions were made when he was walking alone along the Nile after lunch (Nixon, 1983: 340). Sadat often made unexpected decisions which he called "lightening shock strategy" (Karawan, 1994:256). This made many foreign policies that he decided during his tenure often surprising. For instance, in 1971 he made the decision to join the Libyan-Syrian Federation. Only two people knew about his decision of driving out the Soviet experts, which was only made several hours before the Soviet ambassador got the notice. The time of launching the Yom Kippur War was decided after his discussion with Syrian President Hafez Assad and only his

Four Points toward the Understanding of Egypt's Foreign Relations

senior officers were notified about this. The decision of his visit to Jerusalem was also his personal decision. Only Hasan Tuhami, the Deputy Prime Minister, knew about this decision before he declared this to the People's Assembly. The personality and the position in foreign policy decision-making of Sadat played an enormous role in Egypt's foreign relations especially in the breakthroughs of the Egyptian-Israeli relationship. Ephraim Dowek, former Israeli ambassador to Cairo, commented, "No doubt, he is a major peace maker. Without his vision, determination, willingness of risking himself and the nation and his evaluation of the short-term and long-term historical process, it would be unthinkable for our generation to realize peace with Egypt" (Dowek, 2001:282).

Mubarak also held in hand the power of foreign policy decision-making. After he became president of Egypt, the Egyptian National Security Council seldom held meetings. Interestingly, the Council was responsible for making relevant national security strategy and handling important problems concerning national security. Mubarak preferred to consult the courtiers and associates around him. After serving the army for a long time, Mubarak developed a character of determination and following orders. After the assassination of Sadat, the Egyptian-Israeli peace process was fragile. Mubarak did not hesitate to let the peace process continue. However, he did not think well of most Israeli leaders. For example, he disliked Israeli Prime Minister Shamir, whom he took to be "uncompromising and dogmatic", "an enemy of peace and an obstacle of Egypt's goals in this region" (Dowek, 2001: 290). Therefore, he insisted on not meeting with Shamir at any place and waited for the change of the Israeli administration. Later on, he strongly condemned Israeli Prime Ministers Netanyahu and Sharon. He distrusted them so he met with them as seldom as possible. For instance, Mubarak did not invite Sharon to visit Egypt until a long time after the latter took office in 2001. Even during the Rabin administration and the Barak administration when the Egyptian-Israeli relationship improved,

Egypt did not hold back its criticism on Israeli leaders. Mubarak always refused to visit Israel (the only exception was his participation in the funeral of Prime Minister Rabin). To sum up, the Egyptian-Israeli relationship stayed in a cold peace situation for quite a long time.

It is thus clear that the presidential system and the unique decision-making mechanism of Egypt stamped Egypt's foreign relations with a brand of Egyptian leaders. The personality traits of the leaders influenced the development of Egypt's foreign relations to some extent. However, it must be pointed out that despite the influence of the sentiment of Egyptian leaders what determines the essence of Egypt's foreign relations is still the national interests of Egypt.

To sum up, geography, interests, the Cold War and Egyptian leaders are four fundamental starting points toward understanding Egypt's foreign relations. Geography is the basis of Egypt's foreign relations; it sets the fundamental directions on Egypt's foreign relations: the Arab world, Israel, great powers, Europe and Africa. Although safeguarding its national interests is a fundamental starting point in Egypt's foreign relations, its national interests have shown different points of emphasis at different stages. Additionally, Egypt still bears the mission of protecting the interests of the Arab nation. The Cold War had great influences on many aspects of Egypt's foreign relations; the United States and the Soviet Union were top priority in its foreign relations before the 1990s. Under the unique political mechanism of Egypt, the Egyptian leaders have supreme power in foreign policy decision-making thus Egypt's foreign relations were stamped with a brand of Egyptian leaders.

In retrospect of the evolution of Egypt's foreign relations over the past half century, Egypt's foreign relations had different points of emphasis at different times and Egypt's relations with other countries were also different from one another. Generally speaking, Israel had the greatest influence on the national security of Egypt. Egypt paid

Four Points toward the Understanding of Egypt's Foreign Relations

close attention to its relationship with Israel. However, the bilateral relationship did not develop steadily because of Arab factors. Therefore, it stayed at a relatively low level. The Arab world is a platform on which Egypt can bring into play its role in the region. Egypt and other Arab countries had close political and cultural ties but their economic relationship stayed at a low level. For this reason, although the economic and trade relationship between Egypt and Saudi Arabia developed rapidly, it stayed at a low level as a whole. From the 1950s to early 1970s, Egypt maintained a rather high level of relationship with the Soviet Union. Then the bilateral relationship deteriorated quickly and finally broke up. After the recovery of diplomatic tie between Egypt and the Soviet Union in 1984, the bilateral relationship did not make much progress. The Egyptian-Russian relationship also stayed at a relatively low level. From the 1950s to early 1970s, Egypt kept a cold relationship with the US. During this period of time, the relationship between Egypt and Europe also stayed at a relatively low level. However, the relationship between Egypt and member states of the European Communities (the European Union) developed very fast. Although Africa had been a traditional diplomatic field of Egypt, the relationship between Egypt and Africa stayed at a low level because of the overall situation of Africa.

Recently, the Egyptian political situation is in ups and downs. There have been anti-government protests at the end of January 2011. The president Hosni Mubarak was forced to resign on February 11 and the Supreme Council of the armed forces took over state power in Egypt. The constitutional amendment released on February 27th requires that the President's term of office is four years and only one consecutive term. Nabil el-Araby has been the new foreign minister during the new government led by Essam Sharaf who has taken into office on the March 8. These changes will inevitably lead to the adjustment of domestic and foreign policies in Egypt. However, it is believed that geography, interests and leaders are the basic focus of

external relations of Egypt, so Egyptian foreign relations pattern is unlikely to have dramatic changes. First, the Egyptian-US relations will continue to develop. The United States has provided substantial long-term economic and military aid. During the political changes in Egypt, the Egyptian military had close cooperation with the US and had also got their supports, in the future they also need the support of the United States. Meanwhile, the Middle East strategy of the United States also needs help from Egypt. Therefore, the development of Egyptian-US relations is mutual request. Second, peaceful relations with Israel will not change. This kind of peace is critical not only for Egypt, but also for Israel as well as the United States. The three countries have been in line with the fundamental interests. The Supreme Council of the Egyptian armed forces has promised to abide by all signed international and regional treaties which means Egypt will continue to maintain peaceful relations with Israel. Israel has also given a positive response. Third, the new constitutional amendment just modified the conditions of the president's campaign and terms of office and did not have too many restrictions on its power. In the future, the President of Egypt is still in a strong and dominant position in foreign policy. Of course, there would be some adjustments in specific external relations.

References

- Chen, J. (2005). *Egypt and the Middle East*. Beijing: Peking University Press.
- Dowek, E. (2001). *Israeli – Egyptian relations, 1980-2000*. London: Frank Cass and CO. LTD.
- Economic and Commercial Counselor's Office of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Arab Republic of Egypt (2007: April 3). The population of Egypt reaches 73.579 million. Retrieved December 13, 2009, from <http://eg.mofcom.gov.cn/aarticle/jmxw/200704/20070404528909.html>.
- Fahmy, I. (1983). *Negotiation for peace in the Middle East*. London: Croom Helm.
- Heikal, M. H. (1992). *Autumn of Fury: The Assassination of Sadat*. Translated by Guan,

Four Points toward the Understanding of Egypt's Foreign Relations

- C. Beijing: World Affairs Press.
- Heikal, M. H. (1979). *Relations between Russians and Arabs*. Translated by Xing, C. Beijing: Xinhua Publishing House.
- Hussini, M. M. (1987). *Soviet-Egyptian Relations, 1945-1985*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Information Agency of the Ministry of Information. *Arab Republic of Egypt (2002). Egypt Year Book 2002*. Egypt Information Office.
- Information Agency of the Ministry of Information, *Arab Republic of Egypt. (2005). Egypt Year Book 2005*. Egypt Information Office.
- Karawan, I. A. (1994). Sadat and the Egyptian–Israeli peace revisited. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Vol. 26, No.2.
- Lefebvre, J. A. (1993). The United States and Egypt: Confrontation and Accommodation in Northeast Africa, 1956-60. *Middle Eastern Studies*. Vol. 29, No.2.
- Nixon, R. (1983). *Leaders*. Translated by You, X. Beijing: World Affairs Press.
- Sadat, A. (1976). *Memoirs of Anwar el-Sadat*. Translated by Zhong, A. Beijing: The Commercial Press.
- Wang, J. (2006). An analysis of Egypt's foreign policy. *West Asia and Africa*. No. 4.
- Wang, S. (2006). The unique position of Egypt and its role in Sino-African co-operation. *International Politics Quarterly*. Vol. 4.
- Warner, G. (1991). The United States and the Suez crisis. *International Affairs*. Vol.77, No.2.
- Wu, B., Chen, D., & Wang, L. (2004). *Egypt*. Chongqing: Chongqing Publishing House.
- Yang, H., & Zhu, K. (1996). *National conflicts and religious disputes: The history of hotspot issues in contemporary Middle East*. Beijing: People's Publishing House.
- Zhang, J. (1989). *Introduction to International Relations*. Beijing: World Affairs Press.
- Zhang, S., & Zhao, H. (1987). *A history of US-Mideast relations*. Beijing: China Social Sciences Press.

(translated by FAN Peng, Foreign Languages School, East China University of Political Science and Law)