

EGYPT MAY 1971 – ANWAR AS-SĀDĀT BECOMES THE COUNTRY'S SOLE LEADER*

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When Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir died, the Egyptian regime lost its solid stabilization element. His personal charisma had been the regime's greatest asset. His unexpected death on 28 September 1970 ushered a period of uncertainty, as the new era was marked by a creeping retreat from the fundamental pillars of Egypt's domestic and foreign policy at the time. In order to understand the nature of the goals, means and style of the policy of his successor Anwar as-Sādāt, it is necessary to focus on the latter's perception of international and regional politics, including for example, the moves of the superpowers towards détente, the military balance between Israel and the Arab countries; and competition within the Arab world. Anwar as-Sādāt created his own ways of manipulating the constraints on Egypt and using his capabilities in developing foreign policy at the local, regional and global levels.

Keywords: new president elected, initial appearances of continuity, preparations for the liberation of the occupied territories, disagreements in the state governance, the president gets rid of his opponents

The first period of the new era was characterised by continuity. The cabinet was virtually the same as the one Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir had appointed in 1986. As his prime minister Anwar as-Sādāt appointed Maḥmūd Fawzī,¹ the long-serving

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¹ As-SĀDĀT, Anwar. *Baḥṭ ʿan ad-dāt. Qiṣṣat ḥayātī* [In Search of Identity. The Story of my Life], p. 219; HAYKAL, Muḥammad Ḥasanayn. *Uktūbar 73. As-silāḥ wa as-siyāsa* [October 73. Weapons and Politics], p. 60.

foreign minister, who had already retired.² The new president at first made it conspicuously clear that his government was a continuation of the previous one, but he was already preparing to change the *nāṣirist* political line.³ The government took several measures to benefit the poorer sections of society: it lowered the prices of some goods such as sugar, tea and cooking oil, had roads repaired and tried to shore up the debt-ridden public transport system. It also launched a careful policy of reconciliation with the bourgeoisie by halting the processes of expropriation of individuals and families and by returning previously expropriated properties. Ironically, in the name of the continuation of *nāṣirization*, *denāṣirization* was in fact initiated.⁴ Moreover, the death of Jamāl ʿAbdānnāṣir opened up the prospects of a “softer” Egyptian foreign policy towards the West.⁵ Although a number of premises and assessments were later shown to be incorrect, this concept served for almost three years to justify a pro-American policy aimed primarily at undermining Soviet influence in Egypt by pointing to the large supply of American arms to Israel.⁶ The biggest problem the new president faced during his first term in office was the effort of a group of leading politicians to steer domestic and foreign policy in the name of *nāṣirism*.

Anwar as-Sādāt, however, sensed his opportunity: with the help of the popularity he owed to the presidency and the support of the army, of which he had become supreme commander under the constitution, he decided to eliminate gradually all his potential rivals.⁷ He was not familiar with the plan for the forthcoming military operation against Israel, so it was necessary to give him time to familiarise himself with its details before approving its implementation. The minister of defence, Colonel-General Muḥammad Fawzī, had to fill him in on the plan drawn up on the basis of an evaluation of all the factors. During the first months, the new president did not object to the military and political calculation on which the original plan was based and supported it.⁸ The avowed

² RUBINSTEIN, A. Z. *Red Star on the Nile. The Soviet-Egyptian Influence Relationship since the June War*, pp. 131–132.

³ GOMBÁR, E., BAREŠ, L., VESELÝ, R. *Dějiny Egypta* [The History of Egypt], p. 622.

⁴ MANSFIELD, P. *The Arabs*, p. 297.

⁵ FREEDMAN, R. O. *Soviet Policy Toward the Middle East Since 1970*, p. 41.

⁶ SORBY, K. R. *Anwar as-Sādāt a příčiny vedúce k vojne v októbri 1973* [Anwar as-Sādāt and the Causes Leading to the War in October 1973]. In *Medzinárodné vzťahy* [Foreign Relations], 2014, No. 3, p. 239.

⁷ SORBY, K. R., SORBY Jr, K. *Blízky východ v medzinárodnej politike (1971 – 1990)* [The Middle East in International Politics], p. 15.

⁸ RIYĀD, Maḥmūd. *Mudakkirāt Maḥmūd Riyād (1948 – 1978)* [The Memoirs of Maḥmūd Riyād], Vol. III; *Amrīkā wa al-ʿArab* [America and the Arabs], pp. 93–94.

commitment to continue the policies of his predecessor was intended to reassure the domestic and foreign scene; as soon became apparent, there were significant changes in actual policy.

The unexpected death of Jamāl ʿAbdānnāṣir undoubtedly influenced the postponement of the date for the start of liberation operations. Revolutionary events in the Sudan (May 1969) and in Libya (September 1969) changed the situation in the Arab camp. Anwar as-Sādāt, in an attempt to evade responsibility for issuing the expected order to fight for the liberation of the occupied territory, began to use the slogan of the national struggle to hide behind the chimera of the proposed Arab Union.⁹ In his view, it was first necessary to secure arrangements for the conditions of unification, and he therefore began to encourage and rouse the states concerned to attend a meeting where preparations for the implementation of this project were to be discussed.¹⁰ He claimed that he was waiting for a collective decision by all four States of the future Union, although he knew that such a project was not realistic, since Libya and Sudan had not been involved in the planning, preparation and management of military operations from the outset. Anwar as-Sādāt's aim in creating a common state was a tactical manoeuvre to draw the constitutional and political authorities as well as the Egyptian public into the preparations for the implementation of this project and to divert their attention from the main task, which was to carry out the struggle for the liberation of the territories.¹¹ In addition, he began to make it clear that he preferred individual rule to collective leadership.¹²

The attitude of the Soviet leadership towards Anwar as-Sādāt since his assumption of office had been marked by distrust and doubts. Although he was not unknown to them, the prevailing view was that he belonged to the right wing in the former Revolutionary Command Council and although he was a sycophant of his predecessor, he was not one of the champions of progressive social change. There was a view that there was a quiet struggle going on in the Egyptian leadership between the right and the left, namely between Anwar as-Sādāt and ʿAlī Ṣabrī, who was not, however, the “man of Moscow” in Cairo, as he was described by some. According to Muḥammad Haykal, he felt called to

⁹ As-SĀDĀT, Anwar. *Baḥṭ ʿan ad-dāt* [In Search of Identity. The Story of my Life], p. 229.

¹⁰ Al-IMĀM, Ṣalāḥ. *Ḥusayn ash-Shāfiʿī shāhid ʿalā talāṭat ʿuṣūr* [Ḥusayn ash-Shāfiʿī Witness of three Epochs], p. 161.

¹¹ FAWZĪ, Muḥammad. *Istrāṭijīyat al-muṣālaḥa. Al-Juzʿ at-tānī min muḍakkirāt al-farīq awwal Muḥammad Fawzī* [Strategy of Conciliation. Part II of Memoirs of Colonel General Muḥammad Fawzī], p. 132.

¹² ANSARI, Hamied. *Egypt, the Stalled Society*, p. 159.

continue the policies of Jamāl ʿAbdānāṣir, from which the new president was slowly moving away.¹³ At the same time, Soviet officials became convinced that ʿAlī Ṣabrī was not the leader of the “left wing” as they had believed, but that the left consisted of many scattered, uncoordinated groups.

From the end of October 1970, two different conceptions began to emerge in the leadership of the state. Senior party and state leaders, later simplistically referred to as the ʿAlī Ṣabrī group or “power centres”, advocated a return to the policies pursued in the 1960s: in domestic politics, the industrialisation of the country, state socialism, and the position of the ASU above other organs of power such as the government and the army. In foreign policy, they had a decidedly hostile stance towards an aggressive Israel and advocated an alliance with the USSR. On the other side were the president and his supporters, who accepted this policy with great reserve: they urged diplomatic opening up to the West, arguing that isolation deprived Egypt of choice. The ʿAlī Ṣabrī group countered by arguing that expecting US diplomatic support was an illusion unless Egypt returned to a capitalist system. Many of those around the president were known to hold conservative economic and social views. For example, Sayyid Marī became a target of criticism by leftists in the 1960s for his advocacy of the rights of large landowners. By returning many properties confiscated from large landlords, the president made it clear that he was of a similar mindset.¹⁴

As time went on, Anwar as-Sādāt became increasingly insistent on breaking away from the system of collective leadership that he had initially agreed to, so he began to discreetly pursue a policy independent of the ASU Supreme Executive Committee and to reach out to disaffected groups.¹⁵ The ʿAlī Ṣabrī group initially had an advantage, as its members headed many key organs, including those in power. It also exerted its influence over a broad base through these connections. The president initially had only his office and the presidential guard at his disposal, but as head of state he had constitutional authority over the army, the police, and the ASU. His situation was complicated by the fact that these organs were not headed by his sympathisers. Anwar as-Sādāt, however, did not wait with folded arms and began to forge links with lower cadres to cut his rivals off from the base.¹⁶

¹³ HAYKAL, Muḥammad Ḥasanayn. *Uktūbar 73. As-silāḥ wa as-siyāsa* [October 73. Weapons and Politics], pp. 134–135.

¹⁴ HINNEBUSCH, R. *Egyptian Politics under Sadat. The post-populist development of an authoritarian- modernizing state*, p. 42.

¹⁵ COOK, S. A. *The Struggle for Egypt. From Nasser to Tahrir Square*, p. 119.

¹⁶ HINNEBUSCH, R. *Egyptian Politics under Sadat*, p. 43.

The realization of Anwar as-Sādāt's goals, the consolidation of his own power, and with it the final assertion of the dominance of the right wing of the bourgeoisie and bureaucracy, was hindered – at various levels of the state apparatus and political system – by the presence of adherents of the *nāṣirist* progressive reconstruction of society. Getting rid of them therefore became his primary task. The state and political system during the last years of the previous government was built on the cooperation of a number of important institutions, which were called centres of power. At the head of this system was the President of the Republic. This system included the ASU – the only mass political organization in the state, headed by a central committee.¹⁷

The president's retreat from his predecessor's way of governing and from collective leadership became increasingly evident. He needed to bring about changes in the political and constitutional organs so that the person of the president would be the only constitutional body with the right to take decisions. Therefore, during this period, he was looking for a way to get rid of the collaborators who were restricting his rule. The only way to achieve this was to change the form of the state and to establish new organs of power. The best way to carry out this plan seemed to him to be the proposed project of uniting Egypt, Syria, Libya and Sudan.¹⁸ In accordance with the plan for the establishment of an Arab federation, Anwar as-Sādāt invited the Syrian president and the other two heads of state, signatories of the "Tripoli Charter", to Cairo to conclude a second round of negotiations on the military-political situation after 5 February 1971, when the second extension of the ceasefire would expire, and also to agree on the implementation steps for completing the form of unification of the four states.¹⁹ The meeting between Anwar as-Sādāt, Muḥammad al-Qaddāfī, Jaʿfar an-Numayrī and Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad and their delegations took place on 21 – 22 January 1971. Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad came to Cairo for the meeting for the first time as president of Syria. However, the Sudanese delegation reaffirmed its

¹⁷ FAWZĪ, Muḥammad. *Istrātījīyat al-muṣālaḥa* [Strategy of Conciliation. Part II of Memoirs of Colonel General Muḥammad Fawzī], p. 147.

¹⁸ The "Tripoli Charter" was a skeleton agreement concluded by Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir, Muḥammad al-Qaddāfī and Jaʿfar an-Numayrī with reservations on 27 December 1969. Its main objective was to ensure the security of the young Libyan regime by allying with its neighbours. The next steps should have been agreed at a later date in Cairo. In Ad-DĪB, Fathī. *ʿAbdannāṣir wa tawrat Lībiyā* [ʿAbdannāṣir and the Libyan Revolution], pp. 399–402.

¹⁹ MAZHAR, Sulaymān. *Qiṣṣat aṣ-ṣirāʿ bayna as-Sādāt wa rijāl ʿAbdannāṣir* [Story of the Struggle between as-Sādāt and ʿAbdannāṣir's Men], p. 49.

previous reserved stance, arguing that economic integration had to take place before steps towards unification could be taken.²⁰

The outcome of the meeting was embarrassing and those present could not shake off the impression that the leading role of Egypt, personified by the late Egyptian president, had faded away and that Syria and Libya were giving priority to the liberation struggle. This gave the impression to the Western states and Israel that the idea of unification was to be a way out to overcome the consequences of the regional change following the loss of Arab leadership in the person of Jamāl ʿAbdunnāṣir, which led to the disintegration of the leadership and the coordinated Arab advance against Israel. The change was manifested in particular by the disintegration of the Eastern Front and the disappearance of the effectiveness of the Palestinian resistance on the Jordanian front after the crisis of September 1970. Developments in the Egyptian party and state leadership, however, suggested that the pursuit of this project was of great importance to Anwar as-Sadat in the context of the preparation of a new constitution.²¹

Anwar as-Sādāt, in seeking to conclude the Middle East conflict by agreement, had prudently pursued all avenues open to him. The first of these was a renewed attempt by UN Special Representative Gunnar Jarring to break the impasse. The possibility of reopening the Suez Canal had been a frequently raised topic since early 1968 as one of the options for a partial settlement that could lead to a final agreement.²² By the end of the year, the Israeli government had already had to come to terms with the fact that Egypt would not withdraw any batteries of missiles to the line before 7 August 1970, and so it yielded. The decision of the Israeli government on 28 December 1970 to resume indirect talks with Egypt, through Gunnar Jarring revived hopes for progress on this matter.²³ Abba Eban, the Israeli Foreign Minister, commented on this by saying that “both Richard Nixon and William Rogers believe – quite rightly – that Israel should climb down from the triumphalism of the Six-Day War and start working on a strategy of accommodation in the Middle East. In their view, the fighting that may drag the U.S. into an unwanted confrontation with the USSR must stop”.²⁴ Although Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir was not impressed by

²⁰ FAWZĪ, Muḥammad. *Istrāṭījīyat al-muṣālaḥa*. Part II, p. 163.

²¹ Al-IMĀM, Ṣalāḥ. *Ḥusayn ash-Shāfiʿī shāhid ʿalā ṭalāṭat ʿuṣūr*, p. 176.

²² RIAD, Mahmoud. *The Struggle for Peace in the Middle East*, p. 187.

²³ RUBINSTEIN, A. Z. *Red Star on the Nile*, p. 136.

²⁴ EBAN, A. *Personal Witness: Israel Through my Eyes*, p. 488; TYLER, P. *Fortress Israel. The Inside Story of the Military Elite who Run the Country and why they Can't Make Peace*, p. 214.

the offers of Anwar as-Sādāt and resisted for several months, she finally had to agree to a cease-fire.²⁵

At several meetings between 14 and 17 April 1971, the details of the new Arab federation were worked out. A Federation of Arab Republics (FAR) from Syria, Egypt and Libya was initialled with an invitation to Sudan. At these meetings, Anwar as-Sādāt clearly emerged as the sole leader of Egypt, so that ʿAlī Ṣabrī became convinced that the notion of collective leadership was fading. He was clearly opposed to this plan and pointed out that the president was overstepping his authority by pushing for Egypt's entry into the union.²⁶ Anwar as-Sādāt took no notice and had no reason to. Not only did he accept the decision despite objections, thus openly demolishing the illusion of unity and consensus, but he also scored a great personal success.

On April 17, 1971, the initialling of the agreement between Egypt, Syria and Libya to form the Federation of Arab Republics took place in Tripoli.²⁷ That Anwar as-Sādāt proceeded to such a serious decision as unification with other Arab states without first negotiating with other members of the regime dismayed many of them. To let this move by the president go unheeded was to accept the possibility of a repeat of unilateral decision-making, and thus to voluntarily abandon the concept of power-sharing among the highest organs of the state. Moreover, the creation of the FAR would have created space for the president to carry out a full reorganisation of the highest organs of power in a state where the majority was still in the hands of his rivals. An unpleasant complication for the *nāṣirists* was that they could not openly oppose the president's plan for a federation at the pan-Egyptian level, lest they be accused of opposing the promotion of Arab unity, one of the basic postulates of *nāṣirism*.²⁸ For this reason, ʿAlī Ṣabrī and his group refused to bring the issue to public attention, arguing that drawing the masses into the matter might cause disorder and anarchy in the country because the masses were not sufficiently organized and thus did not have objective information about the nature of the ongoing political struggle. Therefore, they decided to take the struggle to the Arab Socialist Union (ASU) where they had a strong position.²⁹

²⁵ FINKLESTONE, J. *Anwar Sadat. Visionary who Dared*, p. 73; FAWZĪ, Muḥammad. *Istrāṭījīyat al-muṣālaḥa*. Part II, p. 195.

²⁶ Al-IMĀM, Ṣalāḥ. *Ḥusayn ash-Shāfiʿī shāhid ʿalā ṭalāṭat ʿuṣūr*, p. 176.

²⁷ IMĀM, ʿAbdallāh. *Inqilāb 15 māyū. Al-qīṣṣa al-kāmila* [The Coup of 15 May. The Full Story], p. 179–180.

²⁸ KNYAZEV, A. G. *Egipet posle Nasera, 1970 – 1980* [Egypt after Nasser], pp. 30–31.

²⁹ IMĀM, ʿAbdallāh. *Sāmī Sharaf yataḥaddat. ʿAbdannāṣir kayfa ḥakama Miṣr?* [Sāmī Sharaf speaks. ʿAbdannāṣir how did he rule Egypt?], p. 403.

ʿAlī Ṣabrī did not withdraw from the struggle, and at a special meeting of the ASU Supreme Executive Committee held on 21 April 1971, he explained the reasons why he and his colleagues were opposed to the formation of the UAR. He accused the president of having made a major decision without consulting his colleagues. He stated that the move had not been preceded by a serious examination of the causes of the previous failed unification with Syria, which had left a lasting trauma in Egypt, while serious ideological and political differences persisted even today between the states of the new union.³⁰ He also strongly criticised the draft constitution of the Federation of Arab Republics. At the end of a heated debate, only two members of the ASU Supreme Executive Committee (Anwar as-Sādāt and Prime Minister Maḥmūd Fawzī) voted in favour of Egypt's entry into the Federation; all others were opposed, and the proposal was rejected.³¹ In the end, the Central Committee did not vote on unification.³² The president argued that he had the right to make treaties and other bodies had the right to approve or reject them. In the event of disagreement, he threatened to put the matter to a referendum.³³

Although after much hesitation the ASU Central Committee did not reject outright the unification project, the president left humiliated and angry.³⁴ He decided that the power struggle had to end once and for all, precipitating the crisis. What exactly the crisis meant was not clear. It was uncertain whether the president had to answer to the ASU for every policy move; it was unclear what ASU's disapproval meant.³⁵ In retrospect, it is clear that the president himself was not serious about the whole project of reunification with Syria and Libya; he was pursuing his own agenda. The subsequent transfer of the dispute to the National Assembly, regardless of who arranged the move, did not lead to a solution, but it did give Anwar as-Sādāt a tactical break to mobilise his reserves in the struggle with the opposition.³⁶ If the intention was to let passions cool, Anwar as-Sādāt did not admit it, and the pause only strengthened his position. It also contributed to winning an absolute majority of MPs in support of his motion in the National Assembly, which was decisive in the days that followed.³⁷ When he ascertained what support he had in the army he found that

³⁰ HAYKAL, Muḥammad Ḥasanayn. *Aṭ-ṭarīq ilā ramaḍān*, p. 118.

³¹ ANSARI, Hamied. *Egypt, the Stalled Society*, p. 161.

³² KNYAZEV, A. G. *Egipet posle Nasera, 1970 – 1980*, p. 31.

³³ MAṬAR, Fu'ād. *Ayna aṣbaḥa Jamāl 'Abdannāṣir fī jumhūrīyat as-Sādāt?* [Where Became Jamāl 'Abdannāṣir in the Republic of as-Sādāt?], pp. 27–29.

³⁴ As-SĀDĀT, Anwar. *Baḥṭ 'an ad-dāt*, pp. 231–232.

³⁵ COOPER, M. N. *The Transformation of Egypt*, p. 69.

³⁶ BEATTIE, K. J. *Egypt during the Sadat Years*, p. 61.

³⁷ COOPER, M. N. *The Transformation of Egypt*, pp. 68–69.

it was sufficient. Historically, the army had not been subordinate to the ASU and it appeared that this would continue.

The ʿAlī Ṣabrī group agreed to a modified form of the proposal as presented by the commission and subsequently to the idea of forming a Federation, reckoning that this form would do considerably less damage to Egypt than the possible split on the domestic scene. Changes to certain articles of the constitution of the Federation of Arab Republics were negotiated in an accelerated form, so that, while it was originally stated that the Presidential Council of the Federation would have supreme authority in all parts of the federal state, its functions were now limited to the right to issue decrees to give effect only to federal laws within the competence of the Federation.³⁸ Thus, with a three-day delay compared to Syria and Libya, the draft constitution of the Federation of Arab Republics was submitted to the Egyptian National Assembly on 29 April 1971, which approved it with the votes of 185 out of 360 deputies, i.e., the group on which the president could firmly rely.³⁹ At the same time, the proposal for Egypt to join the Federation of Arab Republics was also approved. The President emerged from the dispute strengthened.

The turning point in the escalating struggle in the highest spheres of power was the events of 1 May 1971 when Anwar as-Sādāt followed the traditional custom of his predecessor.⁴⁰ He made a speech at a celebration in Helwan (Ḥulwān), the country's largest industrial centre in which he stressed that after the death of Jamāl ʿAbdānnāṣir, the cause of the revolution had become the cause of all the people and not of any one group. He openly declared that as the rightful ruler he took responsibility for not allowing under any circumstances "centres of power" to operate in the country which could steal the revolution and impose their tutelage on the people.⁴¹ Such a turn of events was unexpected for ʿAlī Ṣabrī's group. There was nothing in the text of the speech that its members had become accustomed. It amounted to an open declaration of war before the eyes of the entire Egyptian people against leaders who held key positions in the state.⁴² Unleashing his attack, Anwar as-Sādāt that same evening announced the removal of ʿAlī Ṣabrī from all positions. By this move, he attempted to show that the legitimate position of his power was stronger than the influence wielded by senior ASU officials, i.e., the "centres of power", as he

³⁸ The final version of the draft Constitution was published by the Cairo daily *al-Jumhūrīya* on 21 August 1971.

³⁹ ANSARI, Hamied. *Egypt, the Stalled Society*, p. 161.

⁴⁰ MAZHAR, Sulaymān. *Qīṣṣat aṣ-ṣirāʿ bayna as-Sādāt wa rijāl ʿAbdānnāṣir*, pp. 74–75.

⁴¹ ISRAELI, Raphael. *The Public Diary of President Sadat*. Part One, p. 40–46.

⁴² ANSARI, Hamied. *Egypt, the Stalled Society*, p. 162.

called them.⁴³ When Anwar as-Sādāt decided to remove ʿAlī Ṣabrī from his position as vice-president, he signalled the beginning of a direct attack on all the rest of the collective leadership, which he had decided to remove on the grounds that its members insisted on power-sharing and prevented him from exercising his constitutional rights. The reaction of the ASU and all the leading functionaries around ʿAlī Ṣabrī was mild, which emboldened the president when he became convinced that they did not have mass support to continue the attack.⁴⁴

Anwar as-Sādāt's May Day action is linked by many scholars of the period to the anticipated Cairo visit of US Secretary of State William Rogers, which was due to begin on 5 May. The president apparently counted on Washington being pleased to register the removal of ʿAlī Ṣabrī, "the man of Moscow" in Egypt, as presidential propaganda subsequently began to call him, because of his consistent stance on the need to strengthen Egypt's friendship with the USSR.⁴⁵ The dismissal of ʿAlī Ṣabrī had no serious consequences. His group proved to be only a large bureaucratic force, extremely weak in political relations. Only the ASU organizations of Cairo and al-Jīza (Gizeh) came forward to call for the unification of the leftist forces, for the rallying of the popular masses to defend the *nāṣirist* gains.⁴⁶ This call, however, was rejected by the *nāṣirist* leadership, who ultimately considered such a course of action to be a conspiracy. A. Knyazev states that, according to the assessment of Fu'ād Maṭar and Luṭfī al-Khulī, it looked as if both sides had made a gentleman's agreement: to confine themselves within the framework of the palace coup and not to draw the popular masses into their struggle.⁴⁷ During this tense period – when on 26 April the president summoned Col. General Muḥammad Fawzī and told him that he had set 20 May as a preliminary date for the implementation of the "Granit" battle plan – his opponents lived in the belief that a new war with Israel was imminent.⁴⁸

In Cairo, they registered Washington's favourable attitude toward Egyptian conditions for reopening navigation in the Suez Canal.⁴⁹ To Anwar as-Sadat, a breakthrough in relations with the US seemed within his grasp. His diplomacy – a mixture of flexibility and stubbornness, caution and threat, a plea for Arab

⁴³ MAZHAR, Sulaymān. *Qīṣṣat aṣ-ṣirāʿ bayna as-Sādāt wa rijāl ʿAbdannāṣir*, p. 75.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 84–85.

⁴⁵ SHOUKRI, Ghali. *Egypt: Portrait of a President. Sadat's Road to Jerusalem*, p. 52.

⁴⁶ MAZHAR, Sulaymān. *Qīṣṣat aṣ-ṣirāʿ bayna as-Sādāt wa rijāl ʿAbdannāṣir*, pp. 80–81.

⁴⁷ KNYAZEV, A. G. *Egipet posle Nasera, 1970 – 1980*, p. 33.

⁴⁸ FAWZĪ, Muḥammad. *Istrāṭījīyat al-muṣālaḥa*. Part II, p. 203.

⁴⁹ Cairo daily *The Egyptian Gazette*, 3 April 1971.

unity – was fundamentally different from the unilateralist policies of recent years.⁵⁰ At the end of March, the US Deputy Secretary of State, Joseph Sisco, visited Cairo. His visit was so promising from the State Department's point of view that Secretary of State William Rogers himself scheduled a trip to Cairo for early May. Anwar as-Sādāt was so pleased that he announced this fact in his May Day speech. However, by then the Secretary of State no longer had the support of the White House and had been eclipsed by Henry Kissinger and the National Security Council (NSC) staff, so that most of the important international negotiations were handled by the White House. William Rogers, as a respected lawyer, however, believed that his experience could contribute to a settlement in the Middle East.⁵¹

William Rogers visited Cairo on 4 May 1971, as part of a Middle East tour, the second U.S. Secretary of State to do so since J. F. Dulles's visit in May 1953. Addressing the Anwar as-Sadat initiative, Rogers stated that there was a belief in the U.S. that in the present atmosphere it would be easier to reach a settlement than before, and that the only disturbing factor was the Soviet presence in Egypt.⁵² It was clear that he had not come up with any new proposals; he was still repeating the old song and dance about a "partial solution" which meant an indefinite extension of the cease-fire, resumption of navigation in the Suez Canal and a limited Israeli retreat. These terms were unacceptable to Egypt. In the Egyptian view, Israel should have responded positively to Jarring's proposals and agreed to a two-stage withdrawal. In the first stage, Israel was to withdraw behind the al-^cArīsh–Ra's Muḥammad line (the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula), after which the Egyptians would begin to clear the Canal and Egyptian troops would move to its eastern bank. In the second stage, Israel was to withdraw from the rest of the Sinai Peninsula and from the Gaza Strip. UN troops would supervise the withdrawal and would be stationed in the Gaza Strip and Sharm ash-Shaykh. Once these two stages were completed, an agreement on the demilitarised zones and the extension of the ceasefire could be agreed. If Israel did not withdraw completely, Egypt reserved the right to liberate the occupied territories by force.⁵³

Foreign Minister Maḥmūd Riyāḍ referred to Gunnar Jarring's latest proposals, according to which Egypt was to commit itself in writing to a peaceful solution and Israel was to withdraw in accordance with Resolution

⁵⁰ RUBINSTEIN, A. Z. *Red Star on the Nile*, p. 143.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 143–144.

⁵² RIYĀḌ, Maḥmūd. *Muḍakkirāt Maḥmūd Riyāḍ (1948 – 1978)*. Vol. I. *Al-baḥṭ an as-salām ... wa aṣ-ṣirāʿ fī ash-sharq al-awsaṭ* [The Memoirs of Maḥmūd Riyāḍ. Search for peace ... and the struggle in the Middle East], p. 365.

⁵³ HAYKAL, Muḥammad Ḥasanayn. *Aṭ-ṭariq ilā ramaḍān*, p. 121.

242. He pointed out that Egypt had accepted the resolution but Israel had rejected it and yet the US was supplying it with arms. Rogers stated that the administration wanted peace but was unable to put pressure on Israel. Maḥmūd Riyād replied that the only effective form of pressure on Israel would be a U.S. embargo on arms imports. As might have been expected, Rogers's subsequent visit to Israel was fruitless: because of the divergence between the negotiating positions of the two sides, he was unable to persuade the Israelis to accept a comprehensive solution on all fronts.⁵⁴ It was clear that the US had caved in to the political pressure exerted by the Jewish lobby, which was reflected in a substantial increase in US military and economic aid to Israel.⁵⁵ Anwar as-Sādāt had to admit that Egypt was left with only one reliable supporter: the USSR.

Muḥammad Fawzī visited the president on 9 May and told him that combat operations could begin on 2 June and was instructed to convene one half of the officer corps on 11 May and the other on 12 May, as part of the final military preparations. The president also mentioned the tensions in the domestic political arena and that he would have to get rid of about a hundred persons in the near future, from which the general concluded that he was referring to his opponents on the Central Committee of the ASU.⁵⁶ The president took the general to another secret meeting, which was attended by the prime minister and foreign minister and the Americans Joseph Sisco and Donald Bergus. When Joseph Sisco interpreted the Israeli response to the Egyptian peace proposals of 4 February, General Fawzī not only heard the harsh terms Israel was demanding for a preliminary agreement, but witnessed firsthand the president's almost boundless confidence that the Americans would secure it.⁵⁷ Anwar as-Sādāt then had another private conversation with Joseph Sisco, in which he admitted that the army's command would refuse an interim solution unless Egyptian troops controlled both sides of the Canal.⁵⁸

On 12 May, the president was due to travel to the Buḥayra governorate to meet with peasants about agrarian reform. Agriculture Minister Sayyid Mar'ī wanted to use this opportunity to find out how the peasants perceived the president's dismissal of 'Alī Šabrī. The minister prepared a ceremonial welcome for the president to ensure that the visit proceeded as expected.⁵⁹ At the same time, Interior Minister Ša'rawī Jum'a, Minister of Presidential Affairs Sāmī Sharaf and ASU Secretary General 'Abdalmuḥsin Abū an-Nūr met to prepare a

⁵⁴ TAYLOR, Alan R. *The Arab Balance of Power*, p. 50.

⁵⁵ KHOURI, F. *The Arab-Israeli Dilemma*, p. 367.

⁵⁶ BEATTIE, K. J. *Egypt during the Sadat Years*, p. 61.

⁵⁷ FAWZĪ, Muḥammad. *Istrātījīyat al-muṣālaḥa*, Part II, p. 206.

⁵⁸ BEATTIE, K. J. *Egypt during the Sadat Years*, p. 64.

⁵⁹ MAR'Ī, Sayyid. *Awraq siyāsīya* [Political Papers]. Vol. III, p. 650.

ceremonial welcome for the president in Damanhūr.⁶⁰ On the morning of 12 May, as Sayyid Marʿī waited for the president, he received news that the president had to cancel his visit due to reports of an impending attack.⁶¹ The president, who had learned of the secret wiretapping of telephone conversations in preparation for a showdown with the “centres of power”, left that day for a visit to military units at a camp near Suez, accompanied by Generals Muḥammad Fawzī, the defence minister, and Muḥammad Aḥmad Ṣādiq, the CGS. Lt. General Ṣādiq, who already knew something was up, took the opportunity to tell the president privately: “We understand your situation”. That was enough.⁶²

On 13 May the president summoned Sāmī Sharaf to his house, where he informed him that he had decided to dismiss Shaʿrāwī Jumʿa and asked to convey to him the decision that Mamdūḥ Sālīm would be the new Interior Minister. Sāmī Sharaf retorted that in that case he himself would also resign.⁶³ Later that afternoon, the president summoned the commander of the Republican Guard, Lt. Gen. al-Layṭī Nāṣif. When he told him that he had decided to eliminate the “centres of power”, the general announced that everything was ready according to the approved plan.⁶⁴ Late in the evening of 13 May, Cairo Radio announced the unexpected news that Shaʿrāwī Jumʿa had resigned as deputy prime minister and minister of the interior. Subsequently, Sāmī Sharaf, Muḥammad Fāʿiq, Saʿd Zāyid, and Ḥilmī as-Saʿīd also resigned in protest against the removal of the interior minister and sent letters of resignation to the president through his secretary, Ashraf Marwān.⁶⁵ The president was not informed of these resignations in advance. Shortly thereafter, news was announced of the dismissal of ʿAbdalmuḥsin Abū an-Nūr from his position as Secretary-General of the ASU, Labīb Shuqayr from his position as Speaker of the National Assembly, Ḍiyāʿaddīn Dāwūd, a member of the ASU Supreme Executive Committee, and Col. General Muḥammad Fawzī as minister of defence.⁶⁶ The President immediately appointed Lt. General Muḥammad Aḥmad Ṣādiq as minister of defence, and reactivated

⁶⁰ MAZHAR, Sulaymān. *Qiṣṣat aṣ-ṣirāʿ bayna as-Sādāt wa rijāl ʿAbdannāṣir*, p. 85.

⁶¹ MARʿĪ, Sayyid. *Awraq siyāsīya*. Vol. III, p. 650.

⁶² HAYKAL, Muḥammad Ḥasanayn. *Aṭ-ṭarīq ilā ramadān*, p. 123.

⁶³ MAZHAR, Sulaymān. *Qiṣṣat aṣ-ṣirāʿ bayna as-Sādāt wa rijāl ʿAbdannāṣir*, p. 86.

⁶⁴ IMĀM, ʿAbdallāh. *Inqilāb 15 māyū. Al-qīṣṣa al-kāmila*, p. 300.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 308–309.

⁶⁶ MAZHAR, Sulaymān. *Qiṣṣat aṣ-ṣirāʿ bayna as-Sādāt wa rijāl ʿAbdannāṣir*, pp. 110–

Maj. General Aḥmad Ismāʿīl ʿAlī, appointing him director of the secret service.⁶⁷

However, Anwar as-Sādāt reacted quickly and decisively. He appointed Muḥammad ʿAbdassalam az-Zajjāt as minister of National Assembly Affairs, who was also to act as minister of information, and put him in charge of controlling radio and television. The army's chief of general staff, Lt. Gen. Muḥammad Aḥmad Sādiq, who was loyal to the president, was appointed defence minister and Mamdūḥ Sālim became minister of the interior. Several officials who resigned or were dismissed were detained and interned. Their places were taken by people loyal to the president. According to the official version, the president was helped by chance. A security officer personally handed him tape recordings of telephone conversations made at the behest of Shaʿrāwī Jumʿa at the president's house, as well as recordings of conversations by members of the collective leadership themselves.⁶⁸

There were also speeches against the president. They were organized by the second echelon of the ASU leadership, which had limited outreach capabilities, and they quickly foundered in the absence of senior officials. Fuʾād Maṭar recalled "the Egyptian reality is that whoever is not in the power structures, his word has no weight. He is powerful only as long as he has a chair there, even a rickety one. In time it can be repaired, but once he no longer has one, that representative has no hope of strengthening his role in the power system".⁶⁹ The period of wobbling of the mellow reformers was over; they were flocking to the winner's camp. Members of the National Assembly representing the wealthy social groups of Upper Egypt and the Nile Delta rushed to express their loyalty to the president. A renegade among the *nāṣirists* of the upper echelon, Ḥāfiẓ Badawī, who held the post of minister of social affairs in the government of Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir, presided over the parliamentary sessions at which the Speaker of the National Assembly, Dr. Labīb Shuqayr, and his two deputy speakers were stripped of their parliamentary immunity.⁷⁰ Only twelve MPs dared to speak out against the condemnation of the "centres of power".

How could a group of *nāṣirists* possessing overwhelming numerical superiority in the ruling circles have suffered defeat in the struggle with Anwar as-Sādāt? It was primarily because of poor organization. Moreover, the *nāṣirists* were convinced that the president had limited options and would soon be forced to leave his high office himself. They blithely assessed the attitudes of those

⁶⁷ HAYKAL, Muḥammad Ḥasanayn. *Aṭ-ṭarīq ilā ramadān*, p. 125.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 122–123.

⁶⁹ MAṬAR, Fuʾād. *Ayna aṣbaḥa Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir fī jumhūrīyat as-Sādāt?*, p. 62.

⁷⁰ ANSARI, Hamied. *Egypt, the Stalled Society*, p. 166; KNYAZEV, A. G. *Egipet posle Nasera, 1970 – 1980*, p. 34.

class forces that had become the mainstay of the president at that time, the domestic petty and middle bourgeoisie and the corrupt section of the state apparatus.⁷¹ Characterizing the situation arising in the leadership at that time, Muḥammad Ḥasanayn Haykal pointed out that at the very beginning, the conflict that divided these officials and the president into two hostile camps was not at all about unity with Libya, relations with the USSR, or any other fundamental issue. On the part of the *nāṣirists*, it was not a question of preparing a coup to overthrow the president. It was a power struggle between the new president, seeking to strengthen his own position, and a group of his former colleagues who had decided – in the sense of collective leadership – to keep control of the state and did not hesitate to criticise the president's unilateral actions when they felt that he was deviating from the *nāṣirist* line.⁷² They tried to present themselves as the custodians of the more radical ideas and legislation put forward by the Egyptian revolution. The word coup is more suited to the act of a president who, though he flaunted democracy, had himself got rid of the opposition through a coup so that he could rule as a dictator.

Anwar as-Sādāt's tactics in relation to ʿAlī Ṣabrī, whom he – not without cause – regarded as the head of the *nāṣirist* officials, were successful. The appointment of ʿAlī Ṣabrī as vice-president of the republic was intended to curb his executive activity and not to give him the opportunity to put himself at the head of the opposition. Although ʿAlī Ṣabrī himself saw the president as a man who aimed to bury *nāṣirism* and openly called for getting rid of it, several in his circle expressed the view that there were more reactionary figures in the country than Anwar as-Sādāt, and that they needed to be prevented from strengthening their positions in the first place. It should not be thought, however, that this group was the real bearer of the progressive trend. Many of those who in the Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir period espoused the left did so for conjunctural reasons. There was a latent struggle within the group between adherents of different ideological orientations. Its leaders, who lacked any depth of political thought, were unable to promote the idea of a solid alliance of leftist forces that would rely on the support of the popular masses.⁷³ One of the decisive factors in Anwar as-Sādāt's victory in the struggle with the “centres of power” was the support of the army. The soldiers were annoyed that while they sat in the trenches, the politicians were wasting their time with power squabbles.

The army, as well as the popular masses, thought that in this struggle the victory of the legitimate authority, i.e., the president, would be the lesser evil.

⁷¹ KNYAZEVA, A. G. *Egipet posle Nasera, 1970 – 1980*, pp. 34–35.

⁷² HEIKAL, Mohamed. *Sphinx and Commissar. The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Arab World*, p. 225.

⁷³ KNYAZEVA, A. G. *Egipet posle Nasera, 1970 – 1980*, pp. 35–36.

At that time, it was not yet apparent that the president, building his legitimacy and stature by ostentatiously claiming the legacy of his predecessor, was shamelessly betraying the latter's ideals and the ideals of the 1952 Revolution.

The consolidation of Anwar as-Sādāt's position after the death of Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir was facilitated by the fact that of the well-known functionaries of the *nāṣirist* era in power in 1970, those who remained in power were essentially second-line Free Officers, from the police apparatus and the security services, etc. These leaders – Shaʿrāwī Jumʿa, Sāmī Sharaf and even ʿAlī Ṣabrī – kept a low profile and were not popular figures in the public eye. It is a fact that ʿAlī Ṣabrī compensated for his lack of popularity with extraordinary efficiency and political acumen. Unlike Anwar as-Sādāt, however, he was not a member of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) in 1952. The fact that Anwar as-Sādāt was a member of the Free Officers' first echelon – albeit not a very prominent one – and then his appointment as vice-president gave his actions the character of legality on both the political and moral levels. The liberal intelligentsia and a section of the leftist forces were carried away by Anwar as-Sādāt's slogans of the “rule of law”, of the liberalisation of social life, even though he himself showed the greatest desire to run the country by authoritarian methods, through personal power. Incidentally, when ʿAlī Ṣabrī and his group, whom the president accused of trying to usurp power, tried to make the constitutional organs work, to make sure that power was exercised not by the president personally but was shared between the ASU, the National Assembly and other state organs, they became arch enemies of him.

Putting forward the slogan of “democratisation of social life” did not at all prevent the president from dealing harshly and in an authoritarian manner with his opponents. ʿAlī Ṣabrī, Shaʿrāwī Jumʿa and others were arrested on 15 May 1971 and soon brought to trial and charged with high treason, despite their contribution to the creation and development of an independent, progressive Egyptian state, to the struggle against Israeli aggression, etc. The main evidence in the trial was the aforementioned recordings of telephone conversations between the accused. However, the content of the conversations recorded on the tapes was not sufficient to bring such serious charges. The Kuwaiti newspaper *al-Anbāʾ* (*The News*) published these tapes in full on 16 July 1983. On the basis of ʿAlī Ṣabrī's sentence “this man (Anwar as-Sādāt) may sell out the country to the Israelis or the Americans and we will find out about it from the newspapers. Prevent it, Shaʿrāwī”.⁷⁴ As Muḥammad Ḥasanayn Haykal noted, the trial documents contained no hard evidence of coup preparation. In the words of Muḥammad ʿAbdassalām az-Zayyāt, who participated in the investigation of the case, both he and the attorney general, Muḥammad Māhir Ḥasan, concluded that

⁷⁴ Quoted in KNYAZEVA, A. G. *Egipet posle Nasera, 1970 – 1980*, pp. 36–37.

there was no power struggle and there was no reason to accuse the “centres of power” of high treason. Then Anwar as-Sādāt withdrew Muḥammad Māhir Ḥasan from the investigation of the case and put Muṣṭafā Abū Zayd Fahmī, the Socialist Prosecutor General in charge of it, who charged both of them with high treason.⁷⁵ The latter later admitted that the trial, organized by the president, was not the result of an uncovered anti-state conspiracy but was fabricated.⁷⁶

Evidence that Anwar as-Sādāt urgently sought reasons to get rid of prominent figures of the *nāṣirist* era is also found in his memoirs. “From 16 October 1970 to May 11, 1971, there were many causes for getting rid of the “centres of power”. However, I had no convincing evidence. It was only on 11 May that a police officer brought me the records of conversations from which it could be understood that a conspiracy was being prepared”.⁷⁷ A week before the events of 15 May, Anwar as-Sādāt had summoned Abū Zayd Fahmī and spoken to him about the need to “ensure”, from a legal point of view, the liquidation of prominent state and political figures who were not to the president’s liking, and who had so far figured in the trial as “centres of power”.⁷⁸ And only the principled stand of the courts prevented the president from sending the accused to the gallows.

The imprisonment of the “centres of power” triggered a mass purge of the ASU, the mass information media, the cultural organs, the youth and trade union organisations from progressive elements. Many officials who had nothing to do with ‘Alī Ṣabrī were put behind bars, so that on 15 May something resembling a palace coup, i.e. a violent change carried out from above, took place in Egypt.⁷⁹ However, these events were not carried out by the president himself. Behind the coup was a considerable social force that provided it with legal and ideological cover. In assessing the events of May, Ḥusayn ash-Shāfi‘ī argues that such action by the president was to be expected because he had to make decisions on his own in order to satisfy the forces for whose benefit he was doing it. By ridding Egypt of a group of influential men, Anwar as-Sādāt was able to impose a policy on Egypt that was not open to debate.⁸⁰ According to the Egyptian left, the 15 May coup was carried out by right-wing, pro-Western forces and had in fact been long in the making. It had the same aim as

⁷⁵ IMĀM, ‘Abdallāh. *Inqilāb 15 māyū. Al-qīṣṣa al-kāmila*, pp. 376–377.

⁷⁶ Cairo daily *Al-Ahrām*, 22 February 1984.

⁷⁷ As-SĀDĀT, Anwar. *Baḥṭ ‘an ad-dāt*, p. 236.

⁷⁸ KNYAZEV, A. G. *Egipet posle Nasera, 1970 – 1980*, pp. 36–37.

⁷⁹ SALĪM, Jamāl. *Diktātūrīyat as-Sādāt* [Dictatorship of as-Sādāt]. Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī, 1983, p. 7.

⁸⁰ Al-IMĀM, Ṣalāḥ. *Ḥusayn ash-Shāfi‘ī shāhid ‘alā ṭalāṭat ‘uṣūr*, p. 178.

the Israeli aggression in 1967 – to deprive the Egyptian revolution of its independent, progressive direction.⁸¹

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