

Domestic opposition poses scant threat to Egypt's economic progress

by Thierry Lalevée

Reports from many Western journalists try to cast Egyptian politics as a set of age-old, mutually antagonistic political institutions, including the government, the National Democratic Party (the main political party established by Anwar el Sadat), the opposition parties, various fundamentalist groupings, and, to some degree, the general population.

But during our two-week trip to Egypt, it did not take long to realize the fallacy of such reporting. The Egyptian political scene is boiling over, as never before, in a healthy debate which leaves nothing untouched. Indeed, Egypt is at one of those rare moments in a nation's history in which everything is possible—good or bad. Several years of rule by President Nasser saw the beginnings of an industrial revolution which had long been prevented by decades of British rule.

This industrialization did not go very far, as Egypt was engulfed in several wars with Israel, and forced to deal with fundamental national problems from a different approach. Now, Egypt can look forward to a real future. The question remains, however, how that future will be concretized politically. Although certain analysts would prefer to characterize the situation in such simplistic terms as a mixture of "Nasserism" and "Sadatism," evolving into some kind of "Mubarakism," reality is far more complex.

Since 1956 Egypt has been contained by the issue of war with Israel. Egypt became the center of Arabism. Later, after Camp David, the issue became Pharaonism, a policy of returning to pre-Arab Egypt, which means prior to the 10th century A.D.

As most Egyptians would recognize, both movements were extreme. Egypt could concentrate exclusively on its Arabism only at the expense of a greater role it could play in Africa. The same could be said of Pharaonism. Self-consciously, President Sadat titled his autobiography *In Search of An Identity*, something he did not have the time to find. Egypt right now is in the process of defining that identity, which is the fundamental issue of the ongoing political debate. As underlined in the introduction to this report, this cannot be dissociated from the basic issue of Egyptian economic development, and the fight rages between those who,

ultimately, are against such development and those who understand that only through such a process will Egypt be able to renew its history, and find its own identity as a fiercely independent nation.

Mubarak's policies

Egypt has been ruled by martial law since October 1981, and this can be seen by the way public buildings are protected, and in the regular army patrols in the street. But from all evidence, in particular Mubarak's decision to release political prisoners of all factions from jail if they were not implicated in any violent actions, this will not last much longer. Meanwhile, martial law or not, Egypt has seen in the past year and a half the most open political debate it has ever had. For non-Arabic speakers, this is summed up every morning in the columns of the English or French press. The subjects range from Egypt's peace treaty with Israel to its relations with the United States, the need to restore relations with the socialist countries, heavy criticism of the open-door policy implemented since 1974, and criticism of various aspects of obvious mismanagement.

There was never any direct attack against President Mubarak in this criticism, not because such criticism would bring heavy jail sentences on the offenders, but because for even the hard-core opponents—excluding a minority of Islamic fanatics—it is difficult to find something to criticize. However, some extremists have gone so far as to criticize Mubarak on the grounds that his decision to allow criticism is in fact a trick aimed at neutralizing the opposition. At this game, as we shall see, the "opposition" may well neutralize itself.

President Mubarak has his own style. He is less vocal than his predecessors and has a lower profile, but things are getting done. In a year and a half since he became President, much has changed in Egypt in all fields. Each time, developments were announced in a government or presidential declaration, and people are growing accustomed once more to believing that words can mean action.

On the foreign-policy side, there has been a slow but certain redefinition of priorities which were described to us as concentric circles. At the center, or first circle, would be

a redefinition of Egypt's relation with the superpowers, moving away from the one-sided relationship with the United States. Ultimately, this will mean the re-establishment of relations with the Soviet Union, with which Egypt has kept cultural relations. It will also mean that when President Mubarak arrives in the United States Jan. 26 Egypt will demand to be treated as a partner and not as a mere subordinate whose role is strictly military. Once again, economic issues will be at the center of that change, as Cairo seeks more flexibility in deploying U.S. economic aid and more productive investment in big projects. (The State Department's AID agency prohibits the use of U.S. funds on large modern projects.) As Minister Wali, quoted below said, "We have to think big," and the United States is needed for that, but Washington has to understand that "it cannot afford another failure in the region, like Iran."

In the second circle is Egypt's relation to the Non-Aligned movement which Nasser helped build. For years, even before the Camp David treaty, Egypt had abandoned that key element in its foreign policy. It has been one of Mubarak's first tasks to renew discussion of leadership of the Non-Aligned with Yugoslavia and India, as he did during his trip to New Delhi last autumn.

Immediately connected to this is the so-called third circle, Egypt's relations with Africa. Relations with Sudan are exemplary, and a model for cooperation for the rest of the continent, but Egypt can and will have a much greater role to play in the continent to which it belongs.

In the third circle as well are relations with the Arab nations, now being renewed after they had been frozen in 1979. Ties with Iraq, of strategic importance to Egypt, are in the process of official re-establishment after the meeting between Iraqi Vice-President Tariq Aziz and Egypt's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Butros Ghali the first week of January. De facto relations also exist with Saudi Arabia, because of its strategic importance. A component of relations with the Arab nations is the large Egyptian presence in these countries. More than 6 million Egyptians live abroad, of whom 3 million are in Iraq and another million in the Gulf states. These Egyptian nationals, an important source of income for their families at home, are also a factor in the stability and development of other Arab nations.

One could be surprised that Europe has so far not been mentioned in any such circles, but Egypt doesn't really play a "European card" against the United States, realizing such an attempt would be based on sheer delusion. Egypt does, however, have a French card, and relations between the two countries are an example of what the United States could or should do in the political and economic field. Visits of Egyptian officials to Paris are continual, and the extent to which Mubarak is utilizing officials of the Paris Egyptian embassy in his administration indicates the importance of such relations. In early January, a pro-French official was appointed to head the Cairo-based Office of General Information, an

important government public relations outfit. The new head was the press attaché in Paris for 16 years. Similarly, the former Paris cultural attaché was appointed some time ago a minister in Cairo and the military attaché is the new head of military intelligence. These appointments may have provoked some anger at the Washington embassy.

These are fundamental changes. How are they being accomplished? Ironically, few really know the small group advising Mubarak on his policies, and many doubt in fact that such a group does exist. Mubarak listens carefully to his ministers, but in the same way he willingly accepts the advice of many other people. Again in contrast to both Nasser and Sadat, he cannot really be identified as associated with one party, even the National Democratic Party of which he is nominally chairman. Most ministers come from the NDP, but they are encountered as ministers, and Mubarak appears and acts as President of Egypt, not as the chairman of a party. This provokes a lot of unease in certain strata who would like him to make a decision on the issue of the "Sadat mafia," as some dubbed the NDP; to renounce his chairmanship or even to create his own new political party, as has been done each time the Egyptian leadership changed policy. Such layers fail to realize that the issues with which the government is dealing are issues across parties, and above parties—up to the point where some NDP members act as if the NDP were an opposition party, and are very nervous about Mubarak's commitment to fight the Mafia.

The on-going corruption trial of Esmat Sadat, the late President's brother-in-law, is only the tip of the iceberg. Hundreds of less important people have been tried or in the process of being tried. Their crimes have not been as great as those of Esmat, but these were the constant, petty crimes of corruption which had poisoned Egypt's atmosphere for years if not decades. Small land speculators or even school directors who are deliberately sabotaging public education to force their students to take private lessons are under attack. This sweep is doing much to restore public confidence in the administration, showing that though the Esmats will be put on trial, crime will also be followed up at each level.

All these moves would not lead to anything but for the major plans for development that the government is committed to realize, as the interviews and other articles in this report make clear.

The 'opposition'

The main opposition to these perspectives is not really those generally considered "opponents of the regime," but groups of "thinkers" whose main crime, fundamentally, is their failure to think. This group could be defined as "Islam-Marxists" who are combining left-wing, Tavistockian political structuralism with ideology coming straight from the Malthusian Club of Rome. Club of Rome policy is mediated through the Egyptian member of that group, one Abdur Rahman, who apparently wants to remain in the shadows. With

that dogmatic personality, as described to us, are associated various think-tank activities, including "Future Studies," and "Egypt 2000" whose main object is "to think small." Using as pretext that Mafia-linked Osman Ahmed Osman's control of Arab contracting is the prime mover in the big projects in the desert, they are opposing all big projects because "they benefit the Mafia!" In turn, the left wing is advocating a "revitalization of the small village," childishly refusing to consider the ultimate consequences of such policies for a population of 44 million which now can inhabit to live only 4 percent of the nation's territory. It comes as no surprise to discover that such institutions around the planning institute are taking advice or orders from Britain's Sussex University or from the "Oxford Marxist" group via Warsaw's Central University of World Economics.

Nor is it a surprise to hear such people bluntly advocating an "Islamic way of development for Egypt"—though what is meant by that is quite another matter. As we repeatedly asked proponents of this policy for a more precise definition of that concept, little explanation was put forward. Instead, the formula was simply that "the Western model of development" had to be rejected, which means that this group may soon become the core of an anti-nuclear movement when Egypt begins to receive its first nuclear plants this year. Marxists advocating Islamic development are, after all, no more surprising than a leading economist and former minister, now in the opposition, telling us very seriously that as far as he was concerned Egypt's national number-one problem was Cairo's sewer system. A pipe had broken some days earlier in the Giza quarter, which had made the front page of the *New York Times*.

These elements have little capability to disturb Egypt's march toward progress. They talk about the need to satisfy the "masses," but their ultimate card is the passivity of the population. Nasser complained frequently about Egyptian passivity, the direct result of centuries of government in which the population could do little but follow while nothing changed. This has indeed created resistance to development and to a new way of life. Centuries of repression have inhibited the population's ability to aspire to the kind of future its leadership wants for the nation—and "intellectuals" have an easy game rationalizing it, unable or unwilling to see that by using that passivity as a means to undercut the government's present policies, they are playing with fire, as did many Iranian intellectuals, under similar ideological influence, did before them. The engineer in charge of the El Salhia project, more political than any such left-wing opposition, concluded his guided tour by stressing that what Egyptian youth really need is a real challenge, in response to which it would have to fight for the country's future in this most important war of all, the war against the desert! Mubarak's leadership is providing this challenge, and that is also a challenge to the opposition. Perhaps it has grown so used to functioning as impotent critics, the opposition does not know how to stop. Now is the time or never.

Interview

Maher Abaza, Egypt's Electricity Minister

The following is an interview with Maher Abaza, Egypt's Minister of Electricity, conducted in Cairo on Dec. 17, 1982 by EIR Editor-in-Chief Criton Zoakos and Middle East Editor Thierry Lalevée.

EIR: What percentage of energy goes to what sectors of the economy, and what percentage is produced by what sources?

Abaza: The production of energy is now 22 gigawatts—60 percent for industry; 35 percent for households, shops and offices; and 5 percent for agriculture. We will increase energy production by the end of the century up to 100 gigawatts, because we are increasing industrial consumption each year.

At the end of the century, hydro-power will be the source of 10 to 15 percent of energy, 10 to 15 percent will be gas-powered stations; 15 percent will be coal-powered stations and 15 percent will be diesel-powered stations. The rest, which is 40 percent, we expect to be nuclear power stations. we do not want to have all our eggs in one basket.

EIR: Do you include the Qattara Depression project in the future 15 percent of hydro-power?

Abaza: No. The Qattara project is now under study, and we are going to finish the report at the end of 1983. The Swedish are looking very hard at this study.

EIR: Didn't you have a German group studying the project? What was their conclusion?

Abaza: The conclusion was that the cost is very expensive if you are not going to make a tunnel using nuclear explosives.

EIR: You're not considering using nuclear explosives?

Abaza: No.

EIR: Nuclear explosives have been used in certain countries for this kind of thing.

Abaza: They were used in the United States and in the USSR for a very short period, and then they stopped using them.

EIR: What was the cost estimate that the Germans gave you?

Abaza: \$3 billion for the nuclear excavation, and about \$6 billion for the tunnel project.

EIR: But the point is that financing is not forthcoming from foreign sources.

Abaza: That is right.

EIR: We are exceptionally interested in the Qattara project because of its larger implications, not only for energy but also for the transformation of the climate and so forth.

Abaza: That is why we are waiting until the end of this year, because we have two committees now studying all the possible implications, applications, and implementations of this project and the effect it will have on its surroundings. The Ministers of Industry, of Petroleum, of Electricity, of Agriculture, of Tourism are all members of these committees.

EIR: You seem to have had success recently in concluding deals to acquire nuclear plants.

Abaza: We only have agreements, signed with different countries like the United States, Germany, and France. These are all political agreements only, no commissions to buy any kind of equipment.

EIR: What are the obstacles so far?

Abaza: No obstacles. We are now just starting with the French government, and we are proceeding with them.

EIR: Are there any problems in the financing of these nuclear plants?

Abaza: We have an agreement with the European Community that they are going to finance a special organization in Egypt for new energy.

EIR: Is Egypt itself maintaining its own nuclear research programs?

Abaza: We have no research programs, only very simple things concerning some vegetation, as it pertains to agriculture, medicine, but nothing sophisticated.

EIR: You have projected an increase in energy production from 22 gigawatts to 100 gigawatts. Will there be any obstacles to achieving this objective, in terms of financing?

Abaza: It's possible we will have some delay in financing, but I feel that we are going to have enough money for that.

EIR: I have a specific reason for asking about financing problems. There are numerous countries experiencing debt problems, such as Mexico, Brazil, and so forth. And the IMF and the World Bank are going in with certain demands. They impose conditionalities. That is, if these nations want their debts to be refinanced, they must cut existing programs, impose domestic austerity, etc. Since Egypt's foreign exchange needs, in terms of debt and so forth, might go up in the next year to \$15 billion, there might be, in my understanding, some attempt by the IMF to impose the reduction of certain programs.

Abaza: If that occurs, we will see to it at that time, but until now we have had no problems.

EIR: Have you signed a political agreement with the United States regarding nuclear energy?

Abaza: Yes. In June 1981, we signed an agreement with Mr. Haig, who was Secretary of State at the time, for cooperation around nuclear energy.

EIR: Will energy issues—specifically nuclear—be discussed when President Mubarak goes to the United States this month?

Abaza: No, I don't think so. That's not going to be the main topic. He's going to the United States mainly for political reasons. Generally, discussions will be about the situation in the Middle East.

EIR: When President Mubarak was in India three or four weeks ago, there were talks on developing some kind of Egyptian-Indian nuclear cooperation.

Abaza: We have had cooperation between India and Egypt for years. It's a very old relationship.

Egypt expects 40 percent of its energy to come from nuclear plants by the turn of the century. Hydro-power from the Quattara Depression project, now under study, would also be a major energy source. Western Europe is interested in financing Egypt's energy development, and since mid-1981 there has been a nuclear power cooperation agreement with the United States. Egypt has no nuclear research programs, but its engineers benefit from Indian training.

EIR: Since when, approximately?

Abaza: Going on 15 years. We send engineers there to train—technical engineers, electrical engineers, mechanical engineers, and power engineers. We have an agreement between the two Ministers of Energy. I personally have visited India twice. Also, we sometimes send people to train in the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

Youssef Wali, Egypt's Agriculture

The following is an interview with Egypt's Minister of Agriculture Dr. Youssef Wali. The interview was conducted in Cairo on Dec. 23, 1982.

EIR: We were very impressed by the El Salmia land reclamation project, which we visited last week.

Wali: Unfortunately, certain interest groups in Egypt oppose, to a certain extent, what El Salmia means. However, since being appointed Minister of Agriculture last January, I have given the project my support in order to facilitate the development of the area. The people working on the project are farsighted concerning the future of agriculture in Egypt.

EIR: We would like to know as much as possible about the overall land reclamation programs in Egypt. What we saw in El Salmia was very impressive and the rest of the world must know about it, to give them hope.

Wali: After the 1973 war, there was an increase in the standard of living in Egypt. This increase was also related to the Open Door Policy. There was a large migration of people out of the countryside. There is now a shortage of labor in agriculture, even though the statistics show that there is sufficient labor. So, for the future, we must emphasize labor as a major component of the economy.

In El Salmia, it is the first time we have had such a huge area irrigated with a pivot system. I think that those who are opposed to the project are those who in general are against everything that is new.

Some who oppose land reclamation from an intellectual point of view think that its feasibility must be calculated on the basis of energy consumption. It has been agreed that the pivot irrigation system uses more energy than the sprinkler system, which uses more energy than the drip irrigation, so perhaps when we repeat this project we will use drip irrigation instead of the pivot system.

One of the good things about the Salmia project is that it is the first farm with complete mechanization, for potatoes, tomatoes, maize and so forth. We can set up the same kind

of project in Sudan, where there is no pivot irrigation, no drip irrigation, no sprinkler system. We can take our trained personnel and give them machines to train others.

EIR: Basically, what you are saying is that you can lead all of Africa in agricultural development.

Wali: That's right. It is along the same lines that your magazine has written its recent cover story: "Egypt's Fight to Become the Japan of the Middle East." I agree with that concept. It is a very smart approach to take. We have to fight, though, to become the new Japan. It is not an easy game. Our transformation into a new Japan will not be served to us on a golden platter. We will have to work hard; we must be organized; we will have to avoid mismanagement, to avoid corruption, to avoid miscommunication, to become the Japan of the Middle East. I agree 100 percent with your vision.

The Ministry of Agriculture is now running an experiment with 1,000 acres for rice production. For the first time we have full mechanization for the transplanting and the harvesting of this rice, and we are increasing the production of these 1,000 acres by one ton per acre. That means we can increase the production of one million acres of rice by one million tons, which equals on the international market 2.5 million tons of wheat. Comparing us to Japan is very appropriate, because things are small and limited here in Egypt, like in Japan. Some of the fanatics think that we must have huge collective farms, but this is not necessary. There is equipment that can be handy for the small farmer, like what is done in Japan, in the Philippines, in China, in Thailand, and in Taiwan.

EIR: What are the government's current plans for future land reclamation projects?

Wali: For future land reclamation projects, we have three major areas. First, to increase productivity in old reclaimed land, approximately 912,000 acres. We are trying hard to put this area under the proper cropping system, the proper management, to reach the maximum productivity. We welcome the participation of investors, from the United States, from Europe, from the other Arab countries and even from inside Egypt. Second, we wish to reclaim virgin land. We hope to reclaim 650,000 acres within the current five-year plan. This is 12 times larger than the area of El Salmia. To do this, we are using drip and pivot irrigation. We plan to cultivate high-cash crops, which will be sold to other Arab countries for hard currency. Third, we have what we call the triangular development approach. We have combinations of countries working together: Egypt, France, and Sudan. We have Germany, Egypt, and Sudan and we have Egypt, Sudan, and multinational companies working together in Sudan, where we have a pilot experiment. We are leasing one million acres, and we have cultivated 75,000 acres in four years.

EIR: How many projects are included in your plan to reclaim 650,000 acres of virgin land?

Wali: It is a lot of projects! In the area of El Salhia, we have no less than 250,000 acres. On the west side, we have another 250,000 acres. The other areas lie within the New Valley and Upper Egypt.

EIR: What is the profitability of these projects?

Wali: The expenses are about 4,000 Egyptian pounds per acre. Profitability is reached within no less than 5 to 6 years, perhaps 10.

EIR: We have been looking at the Qattara Depression project from the standpoint of agricultural development as well as energy. Also, we have been receiving reports over the past year and a half about massive fresh water deposits in various locations in the Western Desert. The estimates we have seen, so far as scientists know, is that this water may last 100 years, but there is the possibility that it may be an underground river.

Wali: I am of the opinion not to contaminate the Qattara Depression with salt water by a canal from the Mediterranean Sea, because the hydrostatic pressure may affect the delta area and the cultivated areas. If we want to use the Qattara Depression for electricity, it is better to fill it with water and use it either for agriculture or for fish.

EIR: Where would you get the fresh water from?

Wali: That is easy. Because we already have the seepage of water from the canals, it can be oriented toward the Qattara Depression. This drainage canal will not exceed 1,000 per million salinity. It is not like the water from the Mediterranean Sea. Perhaps we can mix this drainage water with the fresh water from the Nile.

EIR: Earlier you said that people are raising the issue of the energy intensity of the land reclamation projects. Our view of economics is that a successful economy is one that uses a lot of energy, and highly organized forms of energy, and the net measure we use for economic success is how much free energy an economy ultimately creates. In other words, we do not believe that energy saving is an economically successful concept.

Wali: No, you are not right. For any country, any society, any family, there are five major problems: food, energy, population, inflation, and pollution. So it is not a matter of energy, it is energy as related to these four other factors.

EIR: There are international organizations, like the Club of Rome, which are trying to present a pessimistic outlook for the future of the world. And they are trying to apply pressure through various financial instruments to force the world to adopt traditional types of agriculture, which would imply a reduction of world population. *EIR*'s philosophy is that we can improve things qualitatively throughout the developing sector by a massive exportation of technology from the advanced sector.

Wali: I am a believer of the ideas of your group. Definitely, I am against those of the Club of Rome and others—they are very shortsighted. To stop fanaticism—religious fanaticism, or communist fanaticism—you have to develop a country, you have to make sure that country has food. If people don't have food, they lose hope, they can be disoriented, they eventually lose their independence. I myself am a firm believer in the transfer of technology from the United States.

EIR: California is very similar to Egypt, because the Imperial Valley was developed out of desert.

Wali: That is true. The Imperial Valley is a depression in the desert. We have the same thing here in Egypt, in Fayoum. It is a depression also.. It too can become an area for the cultivation of winter vegetables, for lettuce, for all the crops which are grown in the Imperial Valley. It is the same for the artichoke, a Mediterranean crop which is cultivated in California on the basis of very up-to-date knowledge. It can be cultivated here, too, because we have the same ecosystem. Olives—the same ecosystem. Asparagus is an Egyptian vegetable. It is cultivated nowadays in the United States. Egypt is not cultivating asparagus, and Egypt is where it originated!

EIR: Is it your opinion that you are getting enough from the United States or could you use more, in terms of technology?

Wali: I believe that in the United States there are two groups. One wants to help the United States and to help Egypt by making sure that both have very strong agricultural and industrial sectors. These are very wise and farsighted people. At the same time, you have the other group, which thinks that Egypt must only be helped bit by bit, with little pieces of aid just to keep us happy. This approach will only mean failure, and the United States cannot afford another failure in the Middle East after Iran. It would be a disaster, especially since Egypt provides equilibrium to the area.

EIR: In the case of a number of countries, such as Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, and virtually every African country, the IMF has posed some very tough conditionalities. The IMF has forced these nations to reduce the size of their development programs, to shut down the investment part of their budgets.

Wali: Mexico now is on its knees, from the United States. Mexico is offering the United States oil for 10 years, for debt payment. However, it is not a matter of the IMF being a magic stick. It is stupid to follow the IMF's orders like the Bible or the Koran. Everything must be discussed. There are many countries that are not directly following what the IMF wants. We in Egypt are following the formula of the IMF, but according to our own environment. For example, we increased the prices of agricultural commodities, but not for sensitive items that could lead to strikes or something that the government cannot contain. Why do that? It's not right. We can move, slowly but surely. And where there's a will, there's a way.

Mohammed Abdellah, Foreign Affairs Chairman of the Egyptian National Assembly

The following is an interview with Dr. Mohammed Abdellah, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Egyptian National Assembly, conducted in Cairo on Dec. 23, 1982.

EIR: What is Egypt's orientation right now to the Non-Aligned movement?

Abdellah: Egypt is one of the three founders of the Non-Aligned movement, along with India and Yugoslavia. After Camp David, there was a kind of counterattack for a short while from within the movement to try to freeze Egypt's membership, but it did not succeed. When President Mubarak came to power, he emphasized the role of Egypt in this movement and tried to coordinate his efforts with Yugoslavia. He went to Yugoslavia, and, with India, assumed responsibility for the three countries in taking lead of the movement. This has been one of the main lines of Egyptian foreign policy since the July Revolution in 1962. It is not a new phenomenon. We are now continuing the same line, but emphasizing a little more the role of Egypt.

EIR: What do you see as the principal objective of the Non-Aligned movement in the context of world politics and the two superpowers?

Abdellah: Since the creation of this movement, our objective has been to find a means for the Third World to try to express themselves, away from the Cold War confrontation between the two superpowers.

EIR: We see in the North-South relationship two situations of adversity. We see economic pressures coming from certain interests in the North against the South, and we also see the potential for military threats—for example, out-of-area NATO deployments. Do you think the Non-Aligned movement will take these issues up for discussion?

Abdellah: Since the beginning of the movement, the main goal was to find ways and means for the countries of the Third World to move out from under economic pressures and military repression. There is coordination among the countries of the Third World that could give them more bargaining power. It's nothing in comparison to the power of the big

powers, but it is more bargaining power.

EIR: We now believe that unless debt renegotiation occurs, the existing debt structure is going to collapse, and there will be catastrophe for the debtors. However, the creditors do not seem willing to reorganize. We consider this to be one of the primary problems that the Non-Aligned movement should address and try to resolve.

Abdellah: I do not know the agenda of the Non-Aligned summit to be held in New Delhi in March. I believe that this is a very important subject and that the movement must study this issue because it is a big concern for all the Third World countries, not only Latin America. What Latin American nations are facing today, other countries of the Third World will face tomorrow.

EIR: What is your evaluation of current U.S. policy toward the Middle East?

Abdellah: I believe the United States has been playing an active role since Camp David and is a full partner in the agreements of Camp David, despite all the obstacles that Israel is putting in the path of peace.

EIR: Do you think the United States' role is positive?

Abdellah: There are three important facts. First of all, the right of Israel to survive, to be recognized and live inside secure borders. Second, the acceptance by Israel and by the international community, and by the United States mainly, of the fact that the Palestinian problem is the core of the Middle East problem. A lasting peace will not prevail except by finding a just solution to the Palestinian problem. The third fact is that Israel must understand quite well that nobody can accept a flexible definition of security—which could be used as an umbrella to achieve expansionism, to annex Arab lands, which is what is happening now on the West Bank; which gives them the excuse to attack the Iraqi atomic plant in Baghdad; which could be used to morally justify aggression against any neighboring country. We have to start from these three points, and these could lead to peace. It is not an easy or short road, but it could lead to peace.

EIR: What is the attitude of the Israeli government, the U.S. government, and the principal European governments to these points? Are they acceptable bases for negotiations?

Abdellah: I think that if you go back and look at the evolution of the United Nations, and the European Parliamentary Union, and UNESCO, and all kinds of international forums, you will find that these principles are accepted. If you review Camp David, you will find these principles clearly. That is the spirit of Camp David. All the United Nations resolutions contain the same principles. The Egyptian-French initiative was founded on the same principles.

EIR: Where does the Egyptian-French initiative stand at this point?

Abdellah: For the time being, we are keeping it on the side, to give a chance to the Reagan initiative, and this is by agreement between Egypt and France.

EIR: Was this discussed with the United States?

Abdellah: No, this came from the Egyptians and the French. We are giving the Americans a chance to try to act on the basis of the Reagan initiative.

EIR: So this posture is going to be maintained until President Mubarak goes to the United States, and then you are going to renew the French initiative?

Abdellah: We are not putting a deadline on it. We want to give the Reagan initiative enough time to move.

EIR: How about the other Arab nations and governments? Some of them have difficulties giving Israel the right to live in secure borders?

Abdellah: I think that if you go back to the Fez resolution, it is clear that acknowledging the right for all countries in the area to live in peace includes Israel.

EIR: Why is Israel refusing to respond to the Fez resolution?

Abdellah: Because I believe that some people in power in Israel still don't want to see the real facts of the Palestinian problem.

EIR: Do you see a future role for the Soviet Union in Middle East peace negotiations?

Abdellah: I think that for the time being we are working on what we have in hand, and on the gains which are already on the table. My own assessment is that we cannot reach something under any initiative unless it is accepted by all parties in the area, which means Israel and the Arabs. I believe that this must be the basis for accepting any initiative. As Egyptians, we will always say that the door is open for any initiative that will provide a step forward, provided that it is in the spirit of the United Nations resolutions and accepted by all parties—Israeli and Arab.

EIR: Your government appears to be taking certain new

initiatives toward Africa. Can you give us a description?

Abdellah: Since we are part of the African continent, we were always very helpful to the African countries in their fight for independence. We were the founders of the OAU [Organization of African Unity], and we are keen to maintain the unity within this organization and to try to settle any kind of dispute in a peaceful way. Our goal is to try to maintain stability in Africa and to help Africa achieve as much as it can.

EIR: There are certain situations which are destabilizing Africa, such as the situation in South Africa, Angola, Libya. What is the Egyptian approach to such problems?

Abdellah: First of all, we are against any sort of apartheid, any sort of racism. However, we don't interfere in domestic disputes, because it opens the door to further interference. We prefer that the Africans settle their problems by themselves.

EIR: This applies to the Cuban military presence, for example?

Abdellah: It applies to any military presence. You must distinguish between when a government calls for foreign aid and when there is a foreign invasion. Basically we are against any foreign interference. But when a country asks for help, this is an action that differs from a foreign invasion. That does not mean we are happy to find foreign troops coming into Africa, however.

EIR: How do you see future relations between Egypt and the other Arab countries that were alienated from you? Will relations be restored?

Abdellah: I think there is an improvement in the atmosphere and a de facto rapprochement between Egypt and the other Arab countries. Your question is a question of formality. Relations between Egypt and the other countries were never cut. They withdrew their ambassadors, and we did the same, but the relations between Egypt and the Arab world continued. Since President Mubarak came to power, the first decision he took was to stop any kind of polemic between our media. His position was clear: We don't want to escalate any kind of campaign. Even if some official Arab media continue to attack us, we will not answer. This was a very important step to create a new climate in the area. Now we have contact with the majority of the Arab countries. We exchange messages; we receive envoys; we send envoys. So I believe that relations between Egypt and other Arab countries are good and are improving.

EIR: How do you see relations between Egypt and the PLO?

Abdellah: You know that the PLO kept its representation in Cairo. The office was never closed here. There is a tradition in the nation, a very old one between Egypt and the PLO. Since the Beirut crisis, we have had very frequent consultations on high levels between us and the PLO.