

Egyptian elections foreshadow a post-Camp David Middle East

by Thierry Lalevée

Two major decisions hang on Egypt's May 27 parliamentary elections: the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between Cairo and Moscow and the future of the Camp David peace treaty. Compared with Israel's buildup toward June elections, which has already given rise to internal political crisis, Egypt's campaign has been quiet. Despite the lack of international headlines, the elections are sufficiently important for the Egyptian leadership to postpone all major international decisions until the results are in.

Sour U.S.-Egypt relations

The decisions on Soviet ties and Camp David are of course closely intertwined. The chief issue is Cairo's sour relationship with the United States. Indeed, the last session of negotiations between U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz and Egyptian special presidential adviser Osama al-Baz led to shouting matches on all issues, insiders report. The issues included America's relations to Egypt under the treaty, as well as the outrageous conditions imposed by the State Department's Agency for International Development (AID) and the Treasury Department upon financial and economic assistance to Egypt, such as demanding that all food shipments be delivered only by American ships at a very special price.

Only a few weeks before the elections, the State Department network of Henry Kissinger and George Shultz zeroed in on the Egyptian authorities and threatened to stop the AID program as well as the vital food deliveries if *EIR* founding editor Lyndon LaRouche and his wife, Helga Zepp-LaRouche, chaired a conference of the Club of Life on African economic development scheduled for April 25-26 in Cairo. Cairo had to bow to the pressures.

With such treatment, Washington will have only itself to blame when diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union are fully re-established, probably very soon after the parliamentary elections. It is no secret that Cairo is already looking toward for a post-Camp David treaty era. The treaty was never ratified by the parliament; a new parliament may find it unconstitutional.

The real reasons lie elsewhere. Cairo openly hopes for a

victory of the Labour Party in Israel's elections, and it is no secret either that Labour's Shimon Peres considers Camp David a Likud creation and would be eager to scrap it in favor of a Labour Party peace initiative which, as Peres revealed last month, might involve direct negotiations with Syria, Jordan, and the Palestinians.

Wide-ranging discussions have already taken place between the Egyptians, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) of Yasser Arafat, and Abba Eban of the Labour Party during Eban's recent stay in Cairo. At the behest of the Egyptians, the PLO even presented King Hussein of Jordan with a new peace proposal "to be immediately implemented after a Labour victory." What a post-Camp David era would look like is far from being defined, but rumors are circulating that the 1973 Geneva conference for a comprehensive peace settlement would be reconvened. No matter who is in the White House in 1985, say diplomatic sources in Cairo, he won't be able to oppose such a plan, as Moscow becomes the dominant force in the region—thanks to Kissinger.

The economic dilemma

None of these issues was raised as such in the election campaign, but they have been uppermost in the minds of government leaders as well as of the numerous politicians who are campaigning. The question dominating the campaign itself has been Egypt's economic future. This was underlined in *Le Figaro* of May 4 by a cynical Egyptian businessman who commented, "we do not need elections . . . but election campaigns lasting the whole year. It is the only way to force the government to implement concretely the numerous projects it finances." This was a reference to daily inaugurations by the government of new hospitals, new public works, bridges, and plants.

Egypt's economy has had a 7.1% growth rate since the new Five-Year Plan was launched in 1982. In a recent study, Egyptian economist and government adviser Dr. Galal Amin predicted continuous high rate of growth for the next year, but warned that the services sectors would take the lead, though industry is expected to grow (from a small base) by

10% a year. Apart from its dependency on the United States for food supplies, Egypt relies on the "Big Four," as they are dubbed, for its national income: oil, Suez canal taxes, tourism, and remittances from Egyptians working abroad. Little revenue is expected from these sources, and this forces Cairo to walk on a very high tightrope; any mistake could provoke a social explosion.

Political liberalization

In order to face such problems, Mubarak took the challenge of reversing the policy of his predecessors toward parliamentary elections, and decided to allow many parties to participate and to ensure that vote fraud would be limited as much as possible. Mubarak decided that the creation of a national consensus through democratic elections was the best immediate remedy for the nation's problems. In January, the ruling party, National Democratic Party, lost in a local election to the opposition. A few weeks later, the governor of the province of Daqhaliyya was dismissed for obstructing the campaign of Ibrahim Shukri, leader of the Socialist Labour Party. Running in the elections are no fewer than six parties, including several new ones. The smallest are the Umma Party, a traditionalist Islamic grouping created by Ahmed al-Subahi Awad in late 1983; the Liberal Socialist Party of Kamel Murad, established with Sadat's approval; the Labour Socialist Party of Ibrahim Shukri; and the left-wing Unionist Progressive Party of Khaled Mohieddin. Directly competing are President Mubarak's National Democratic Party (NDP) and the new "Neo-Wafd" party of Fuad Saragheddin.

By allowing the Court of Justice last January to authorize the old royalist Wafd party to recreate itself—for the second time since 1952 after the unsuccessful experience of 1977—President Mubarak has taken important political risks. It is no secret that Mubarak's calculation was to create a new political power within the parliament which would allow him to counterbalance the influence within the NDP of the old Sadat mafia which still dominates the party and opposes the president on many domestic and international issues.

The fight between the president and this mafia is especially bitter on economic questions when it comes to the "Open Door" policy inaugurated by Anwar al-Sadat, as well as Egypt's relationship with the International Monetary Fund and the United States. The mafia, which saw a few of its members sent to jail immediately after Mubarak became president, overlaps the drug and real-estate mafia. Mubarak's new problem is the opportunism of the new leaders of the Wafd, who didn't hesitate to throw away a good part of their original party program in favor of secularism, to strike an unholy deal with the official Muslim Brotherhood of Omar al-Talmissani by accepting on the Wafd electoral list such luminaries as Sheikh Mohammed al-Ghazali, Sheikh Salah abu-Ismael and Hassan al-Gamel.

Talmissani's group has had official recognition since 1982 but is no less dangerous for that. Talmissani has made clear

that, while joining the Wafd for the elections, he was not changing his fundamentalist program. As a result, the Wafd has been immediately factionalized, and its secretary general, a Copt, resigned in protest.

Though Talmissani claims loyalty to Egyptian institutions as they exist, there is little doubt that his group represents the legal cover for more radical and clandestine groups. A recent study made by American University professor Saad eddin Ebrahim underlines that all Islamic terrorists arrested over the years have been at one point or another members of the "legal" Muslim Brotherhood. Legalization of the Muslim Brotherhood as well as the introduction within the regular columns of most newspapers of debates on Islam, has had the effect, not of taming the Islamists, as fundamentalists are called, but of giving them an official framework within which to grow further.

A wider network

The danger was underlined last Easter when security forces were forced to arrest several dozens of radicals responsible for very violent actions. One little-known group, the Al-Tawaqof wal Tabayan, created in 1980 by Mohammed Abdel Baqi, formerly a member of the Brotherhood, had committed numerous acts of arson in the region of Fayoum against Copt properties such as setting on fire cars, a movie theatre showing the life of Jesus Christ, and several religious Coptic shops, as well as an unsuccessful assassination attempt against a Coptic lawyer. At the same time some 50 members of Al-Jihad (Holy War) and of Al-Takfir Wal Hijra (Repentance and Flight) were arrested.

Investigations then picked up the trail of a wider network than usual. These groups had substantial funding supplied by the Cairo branch of a recently created Saudi bank, the United Arab Islamic Bank Ltd., among whose shareholders can be found Geneva-Muslim Brotherhood International leader Said Ramadhan, son-in-law of Brotherhood founder Hassan al-Banna. Involved in the same operations were Salem Azzam of the Islamic Council of Europe and Ismael Farouqi from Temple University in Philadelphia. A Palestinian whose family sold its lands to the Jewish Agency in the 1920s, Farouqi is a prominent ideologue on behalf of the "Islamization" of the Palestinian struggle. More ominous was Teheran's rapid publication of all the names and biographies of those arrested. In early February, members of Al-Jihad and Al-Takfir as well other Islamist groups had been present in Teheran for the creation of the Islamic International or Fifth International, reported at the time.

However impressive, diplomatic observers remarked that this was nothing unusual: "It is daily routine for the Egyptian security to round up these guys, even by dozens. They are not an immediate danger." The fact of these arrests says more about the capacities of Egyptian security than about the potential for an Islamic coup by these groups. Yet Mubarak has not yet overcome that danger.