One of the biggest concerns of international community after revolution in Egypt is directly related to its possible foreign policy choices. What will be the main tenets of 'new' Egypt’s foreign policy? Will the Camp David order be able to survive? Grounded in intellectual history, this book offers a different perspective to understand possible inclination of Cairo’s new orientation. It argues that Egyptian foreign policy represents a narrowing trend in terms of its horizons, thinking and implementation since 1930s; and now with the revolution, it is forced to expand it again, willingly or unwillingly. Nevertheless, the biggest challenge is intellectual and identity-related, because for the first time since the reign of Mohammed Ali Pasha, Egypt is forced to re-interpret and re-evaluate its triple identity in a coherent and consistent way: Arab, African and Mediterranean. Future stability and success of 'new' Egyptian foreign policy, both at regional and international levels, is likely to depend on this, rather than other issues.

Mehmet Ozkan is a PhD scholar at Sevilla University, Spain. After graduating from Istanbul University, he studied in South Africa (University of Johannesburg), Sweden (Linkopings University), Colombia (UPB-Medellin); and was a researcher at Institute for Defense and Security Analysis (IDSA), New Delhi, India and Cairo University in Egypt.
FOREIGN POLICY AFTER TAHRIR REVOLUTION

(Re)-Defining the Role of Egypt in the Middle East
FOREIGN POLICY AFTER Tahrir Revolution
(Re)-Defining the Role of Egypt in the Middle East

Egypt is one of the key countries in the Middle Eastern affairs. However, generally speaking in last two decades the role of Egypt in the Middle Eastern affairs has decreased not only in government circles but also in public opinion. Comparing Nasser period that Egypt was the mover-and-shaker of the region to Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mobarek periods, one can argue that it stands as a ‘declining period’ in terms of Egypt’s role. After 1930s, first through the Muslim Brotherhood’s activities, then through Arab nationalism, Egypt had gained an influential role in the Middle East, mainly because of its active support of Palestinians. After the Camp David agreement, Egypt lost Arab public support and later on it never gained the role it had before.

This book argues that the Palestinian issue is the key defining factor in Egypt’s role in the Middle East. It does not only serve as a litmus test for in favour of, or against, the Egypt’s legitimacy and support from Arab streets for its other actions in the area, but also defines the scope of influence that Cairo could have in the area. This point is articulated further in this book with an historical account of Cairo’s policy toward the Palestinian-Israeli issue from 1930s until today.
As long as the Palestinian-Israeli issue stands as the shadow issue in the Middle East influencing the politics in the region in general; it is argued that Egypt must re-arrange its own policy toward the Palestinian-Israeli issue, if it wants to be the key player again as it was in the Nasser’s period. This is not only critical for Egypt itself, but also for the future of the Middle East. After revolution, Cairo’s approach to the Palestinian issue will not only define its overall influence in the region, but also will shape how the key international and regional players look and design its policy toward Egypt.

Mehmet OZKAN is a PhD Scholar at Sevilla University, Spain. After graduating from Istanbul University, he studied in South Africa (University of Johannesburg), Sweden (Linkoping University), and Colombia (UPB-Medellin); and was a researcher at Institute for Defense and Security Analysis (IDSA), New Delhi, India and Cairo University in Egypt. His website is http://works.bepress.com/mehmetozkan/
For my Mother
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Preface and Acknowledgment

This book is an indirect result of my interest, studies, travels, talks and researches more than ten years. When I was a young bachelor student at Faculty of Political Science at Istanbul University, the usual understanding of Egypt and its role in the Middle East was not convincing to me in a way that I may use them to explain the developments there. Part of curiosity and part of a better understanding, I decided to write a paper for the 2002 Annual Student Conference at Foundation for Science and Art – Bilim ve Sanat Vakfi (BSV) on Egypt. The result was an article with some initial thoughts. Later on I have developed those ideas and the result has been my master thesis at International and European Relations program at Linkopings University, Sweden; from which this book derives. Earlier some part of this book has been presented at ISA Annual Meeting 2007 in Chicago, USA and BRISMES Annual Meeting 2007 at Oxford University, UK; a summary of chapter four has been published in Turkish in Akademik ORTADOGU (Vol 4, No 1, 2009, pp.81-101).

The idea of producing these earlier studies as a book occurred me after revolution in Egypt in 2011 when I was in Cairo as a visiting researcher at Center for Civilization Studies & Dialogues of Cultures at Cairo University. My observation of Egypt transforming itself both in domestic and international politics convinced me that Egypt is needed to understand better
its past to establish a bright future. This book should be seen as a humble contribution to this endeavor.

Many people contributed this work from the outset. I learnt a lot from Professor Ahmet Davutoglu and others by attending seminars at BSV, and the academic environment that the BSV provided us. My supervisor Professor Geoffrey D. Gooch played an important role in structuring my ideas. My classmates at Linkopings helped me to formulate my ideas that later became articles and presentations positively and/or negatively; wittingly and/or unwittingly. Each of them deserves a special mention here.

During my studies in ‘cold’ Sweden some individuals have always been with me, without them life would have been as boring as one cannot imagine. Initially Özer Yordem, brahim Arisoy, Selda Sen and Hatice Ilbay Soylemez; later on Çagatay Konuskan, Caglar Can, Erhan Inanc, Vural Aslan and many others kept me on track. My dear friend M. Talha Atik deserves a special mention here for his role during my studies and afterwards. His critical involvements at certain times cannot be forgotten. I also acknowledge thankfully the generous financial support of Swedish Institute and thank to Rita Wikander for giving me opportunity to develop my ideas.

Backbone of this book was written when I was in Seville, Spain. My dear friend/collleague Antonio Basallote, Fernando Peinado Alcaraz, Sylvia Maria Saunders, Nieves Conde and many others gave me a shelter when I needed, opened their heart
and mind when I felt alone, motivated me when I was hopeless, entertained me when I was down...I will never forget annual Thursday meetings. Muchas Gracias!

In Cairo, special thanks go to Egyptian youth who ‘provoked’ me after toppling their 30-years old president to write this book. I would also like to express my gratitude for Dr. Pakinam El-Sharkawy, Director of Center for Civilization Studies & Dialogues of Cultures at Cairo University, Aliaa Wagdy, Ahmed El-Saadany, and Dr. Tarik Abdulcelil for their helps in Cairo; and to Ali Riza Akinci, one of the brightest diplomats of ‘new’ Turkey, for his time, comments and suggestions on initial draft.

Lastly, but not least in any way, I would like to express my inner gratitude to my mom, whose love for me has never been less than anything. She has always been my inspiration and security whenever I need a break from everything.

Cairo, Egypt
June 25, 2011
INTRODUCTION

Following the developments in Tunisia, when Egyptians started to take over Tahrir Square in order to demand their democratic rights and change in the political system, one thing was clear to the world that nothing will be as clear as it was. After 18 days of demonstrations, Mobarek’s rule in Egypt over 30-years came to an end. Mobarek forced to resign. The world was watching the developments and asking to each other what would be the next? What is the future of Egypt? What does it mean to have a democratic Egypt as a key player in the region to the West and to the Middle East? What would be its repercussions on Palestinian-Israeli conflict? How will that play out in terms of western influence in the region? As the time of writing this book (June 2011), many of them (if not none!) have not been answered yet inadequately, and there is a rush to understand the fast-track developments. There are booming number of conferences in Cairo and elsewhere to evaluate the situation, mostly organized with the help of international community. At the end of every conference, one usually gets an impression that everybody is describing the elephant, but none of them catch the whole...
situation. There is also a sense that there are many talks, but less
meaning to capture the essence of the developments. Not only is
international community confused, but also Egyptians
themselves. For the first time since long time, Egyptian
intellectuals are very vibrant, talking about themselves, and
future; but mostly the difficulty for them is to be able to analyze
situation rationally without getting the emotional traps, which is
usually a difficult task. So how to make sense what is happening
in Egypt now? And what holds for Egypt?

Before offering an explanation, one should observe that
Egypt is crying as a society nowadays. People relax when they
cry, and societies relax only when they talk to each other. In that
sense, Egypt is crying by talking to each other, to outside world,
and sometimes to themselves as individuals. As part of this, there
are two seemingly contradictory, but indeed a supportive
development to each other, observations. One the one hand, there
is a growing patriotism in Egypt; national pride is increasing,
albeit as a chauvinist way sometimes. On the other hand, there
is a growing fear, sometimes paranoia that they will not be able to
succeed; or if they succeed, they will get something that they did
not seek for. This psychological mood between high optimism,
high expectation and disappointment is very much paramount
among Egyptians. Whether the fears or optimism will win is a
matter of time, but what is clear is that they are in a deep struggle
at every level: economic, social, political, self and psychological.
Most of the confusion exists in Egypt after revolution should be seen as part of these struggles and an effort to find meaningful explanations to developments. The much-debated concepts of ‘Tahrir Paradigm’, ‘Tahrir Utopia’ and ‘Tahrir Consensus’ should be understood as part of rush to explain developments in a highly emotional environment; rather than well-thought formulations.

Every revolution has at least three stages following the success. Egyptian revolution is not an exception. First period is usually emotional period that lasts around 1-2 years. During this period, revolutionaries ask (rightly) for recognition, credit for what they have done; and they are highly emotional. Most of the time, if things do not go well, they tend to complain a lot, most of the time like a child. This period is usually a time that they discover themselves and others, but cannot really evaluate things well. Revolutionaries tend to move from ultra-nationalism (sometimes ultra-humbleness!) to extreme arrogance. At the end, society goes forth and back in between the two extremes. Uncertainty, confusion and pressure cause such extreme feelings.

Second period is the time when rationality takes over extreme feelings. This is the time when real issues comes out such as building the country, what should be the foreign policy, what should be the social policy etc. Economic development, building a civil society and keeping optimism of the first period turn to be key issues. Usually they require long-term planning,
deep understanding and a strong and efficient decision-making with a public support.

Third period is usually the time to make real assessments, both in negative and positive terms. The earlier mistakes, experiences and success are usually evaluated; but also the main ideological inclination of society and state is, by and large, set. This is the time when intellectual understanding, global contribution, and influencing the global politics as an actor take place. If the earlier two periods are successful, the last period bore fruit in many aspects as a corollary result. If not, the remnants, ghosts and negative decisions of the earlier periods are likely to come back again and again.

From sociological point of view, society can change only after social dynamics change. And once social dynamics has changed, political and economic developments are only natural, not *vice versa*. Historically, two things change social dynamics: movement of people and money. In order to have a healthy transformation in Egypt, new generation of leaders are required to tackle and focus on social dynamics, if they seek for a long term change in the society. Opening Egypt to the world, not only as a touristic place, but also in an interactive way of engagement would be a key defining factor in this process. Egyptians are much better off if they could really open to the world and different cultures at intellectual, economic, political and social levels. There are things that both sides should learn.
Unfortunately, Egyptians, as many countries in the third world, were living in their own jail. Most of the time, it is difficult to get even a visa to go out of the country for a visit. If it is so, how can our societies interact with other? How can they evaluate themselves better by comparing to others? Finding ways to facilitate a true interaction with the outside world, rather than only being a passive receiver, are one of the biggest challenges of new generation of leaders in Egypt and other countries. Without this, it is highly difficult to create an alternative, let alone even understand the others.

In retrospect, Egyptian foreign policy has always faced a historical dilemma: to create coherent balance among its triple identity: Arab, African and European through Mediterranean. Since the time of Mohamed Ali Pasha, this has always been an intellectual as well as political challenge. In the early period of the 20th century, independence was the main concern. As this book shows in coming pages, independence movement and anti-colonial discourse coupled with Islam had been an important element in Egyptian understanding of the world. It was more prominent in Egypt’s approach to Palestinian issue especially in 1930s. After Nasser came to power, this triple balance changed in favor of pan-Arabism over other identities although there was an African connection through Non-Alignment Movement and anti-colonial discourse. However, this was not more than just a populist discourse. It produced almost nothing in concrete terms. During Sadat period, this shift started to focus more on the
western identity leaving slowly pan-Arabism and African elements; which has been a dominant and single-handed approach in Mobarek’s presidency. Egypt, by virtue of its location and history, do not have the luxury of choosing one over others. This has proved as disastrous by experience. Current debates on sharing Nile water with various African countries (especially with Ethiopia) is the direct result of a long term neglect of African dimension. Similarly, the relatively little influence Egypt on Palestine and inter-Arab issues are direct result of neglecting Arab dimension.

Can Egypt reconcile its triple identity in its foreign policy? It is still not clear at the time of writing this book. However there are signs that it wants to do so. Former Foreign Minister Nabil Al-Arabi’s openings to Africa, direct engagement with Ethiopia, should be seen as part of this as much as it was due to urgency in Nile basin. Similarly, reaching reconciliation between two Palestinian groups, Hamas and Fatah; strong intention to open diplomatic ties with Iran; having frank talks with Gulf partner, especially with Saudi Arabia, can be interpreted as effort to normalize its Arab identity in foreign politics.

Without Egypt, Arabs neither can have a war nor have a peace with regional or international rivals. Without Egypt’s involvement and encouragement in Africa, United Nations of Africa is just a dream. Similarly, as long as there is no active Egyptian involvement in African issues and politics; North
Africa will never be an essential part of Africa in intellectual, political and economic terms. It is time to discover for Egypt that there are more opportunities in Africa than football; there are more opportunities in Arab politics than Palestinian burden; there are more benefits than American aid with a healthy engagement with the western countries.

Beyond all of this, it is certain that there is more dignity, respect, benefit and influence (and sometimes burden too) in foreign politics; once Egyptians understand that they are much more important for regional and global politics than what they think of themselves.
As many research surveys has also found, the Palestinian issue still represents the single most important issue not only in government circles in the Middle East, but also in public opinion (Zogby, 2002:33-34). Although the Iraqi war has been added to table after US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Palestinian issue is still regarded as the shadow issue in the Middle East influencing the politics in Iraq and in the region in general (Iraqi Study Group Report, 2006:39), even after the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt.

The Palestinian issue occupies the central role in shaping Arab public attitudes toward Israel. Furia and Lucas’ study on the determinants of Arab public opinion shows that the issue of Palestine is not only ‘so important to Arabs’, but also it serves as a ‘litmus test’ for their evaluations of other countries (Furia and Lucas, 2006:596, *italics in original*). If this is indeed the case, then it would seem reasonable to expect that the perception and
understanding about Egypt in Arab public opinion, therefore the legitimacy of Cairo’s action in the eye of Arab public, can be understood by looking at how Egypt’s foreign policy toward the Palestinian issue has been from the beginning until today.

It is widely argued that Egypt was highly respected and credible in the Middle Eastern affairs in the Nasser period (e.g. Alterman, 2005:357). It was not only attributed to his championing of pan-Arabism as a solution to problems, but also his relentless support to the Palestinian cause. When then President Anwar Sadat signed peace agreement with Israel in 1970s, the response to Cairo was to exclude from the Middle Eastern affairs by expelling Egypt from the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) and the Arab League (Abadi, 2006:170).

This study intends to depict the role of Egypt in the Middle Eastern politics by looking at the single most important issue: the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Furthermore, what role Egypt has played so far in solving this acute crisis, or in changing the discourse on the issue as a pivotal middle power are the questions that will be tried to be answered. In turn, to answer of the question of how the Arab public opinion has reacted to the Cairo’s policy on the issue from time to time in terms of supporting and excluding Egypt is also critical when understanding Egypt’s role in the Middle Eastern affairs. Currently, there is an unspoken consensus that Cairo has lost its

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dominant position in the Middle Eastern affairs in terms of respect and leadership in Arab public opinion and government circles.¹ Can this be related to Cairo’s foreign policy shifts towards the Palestinian issue, or is it structural and/or temporary?

**Background & Problem Definition**

Since Thucydides, the traditional focus of international politics, as Waltz (1979:72) aptly said, has been on the great powers. This has meant that the role of middle-sized states has either been ignored or downplayed. With this in mind, this book will try to address the question of middle-sized state influence in international politics with specific reference to that of Egypt in the Middle East with regard to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Egypt can be regarded as a ‘middle-sized state’. Factors such as population size, historical events, military strength, diplomatic expertise and a strategic geographical position give Egypt extensive political influence in the Middle East and Arab world. Cairo has been a crossroads of regional commerce and culture for centuries, and its intellectual and Islamic institutions

¹ This judgment is based on my field trips and discussion with academics and diplomats from Iraq and the Gulf states since 2005, and randomly public survey in Jordan between 27 Dec 2006 and 8 January 2007. Coincidently, Saddam’s execution took place during my stay in Jordan. Most of the people I have spoken were angry about execution. When I asked why, most of the people told me that ‘he never sold out Palestinians’. This was strikingly interesting because although Saddam in Iraq and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt represent the most repressive regimes in the Middle East, the public reaction to both differs. I have heard from people in Jordan saying that ‘Mubarak betrayed Palestinians’. These findings were also confirmed in my informal field trip to Palestine in 2007 and Egypt in 2011.
are at the center of the region's social and cultural development (Kavi, 2001/2002). The Egyptian military is one of the largest military powers among the Arab states, and the second strongest in the Middle East after Israel. Egypt is the most populous country in the Middle East, with nearly 79 million people.

By virtue of its location and geostrategic importance, Cairo has an interest in every major issue in the Middle Eastern politics (Doran, 2004:97) and on many occasions it has forced the other Arab capitals to pay deference to its agenda. In general, there are three overlapping triangles that determine the regional balance in the Middle East: Egypt-Turkey-Iran the ‘outer triangle’, Syria-Iraq-Saudi Arabia the ‘inner triangle’, and Jordan-Lebanon-Palestine the ‘dependent triangle’ (Davutoglu, 2001:357). As long as the outer triangle is in balance, the Middle East see-saw will be in balance. In this triangle, whenever the three come together (which has not happened so far at par excellence), the influence of external powers on the Middle Eastern affairs are likely to be limited. Therefore, in this triangle, one of the three countries is always alienated, while the other two are always supported by the outside power in order to exert their influence in the region. In light of this, in the 1960s Egypt was kept at bay because of Nasser’s championing of Arab nationalism, while Turkey and Iran were supported by the West through the Baghdad Pact. Similarly, after the Revolution, Iran has been alienated; Turkey and Egypt have been supported by outside powers (Davutoglu, 2001: 354). Alliance structure of the
‘inner’ and the ‘dependent’ triangles have been dependent on and influenced by the position of the ‘outer triangle’.

Against this background, Egypt’s foreign policy orientation has the ability to shape the regional politics from strategic point of view. Egypt as part of the ‘outer triangle’ would not support or act neutral in the cases of creating an alliance between one or/and the other two of the ‘outer triangle’ and the ‘inner triangle’ members. It forces Cairo to take a pro-active stance. In this condition, it is likely to exist a 2+1 coalition and a 1+2 counter-coalition. For example, when the states, two from the outer triangle and one from the inner triangle, established the Baghdad Pact (2+1 coalition, Turkey-Iran-Iraq), the Middle East witnessed the immediate existence of a counter-coalition of Egypt-Syria-Saudi Arabia (1+2 coalition) (Davutoglu, 2001:356).

Throughout the history, Egypt’s foreign policy toward the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has been a product of triangles balance, domestic consideration, pan-Arabism ideology and national interest, that all have shaped Cairo’s policy to some extent. Egypt has paid special attention not only it might be the mover-and-shaker in the region, but also it has been affected directly by Israel’s involvement in Sinai. This has increased the political pressure to involve in the conflict, putting Egypt at the center of peace negotiations with Israel in 1970s.
In short, Cairo’s approach to Palestinian issue from 1930s to today can be divided into five periods that show different ways of understanding the issue. First, before the establishment of Israel in the Middle East, Egypt was busy to settle down its own domestic settings and trying to gain ‘complete independence’ from Britain (Doran, 2004:98-99). At the same time, there was an active Islamic revivalism with the leadership of Hassan Al-Banna, which was promoting not only ‘complete independence’ but also calling for a return to true Islam. Muslim Brotherhood played key role in galvanizing people and organized several protests against Jewish migration to the Palestinian area (Lia, 2006). Once the Islamists and the state elite’s policy overlapped at that time, the Palestinian issue received utmost attention until 1948 and became the ‘center of politics’ of the time in Egypt (Abadi, 2006:160).

The motto of the second period can be summarized as ‘Palestinian issue is an Islamic issue’, and it lasted between 1948 and 1957. In this period, the role of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in political affairs increased dramatically, simply because Nasser took office, in part, with the support of MB (Alexander, 2005:61-65). As a result of this, defending Palestinians had become an Islamic issue and policies defined in this context.

Third period is when Nasser took the full reign of Egyptian politics and excluded MB members (Alexander, 2007:67). Pan-Arabism defined the scope of Egypt foreign
policy toward Palestine and there was a belief that the establishment of the Arab unity would lead to liberation of Palestine. This period (1957-1967) ended after the 1967 Arab-Israel war and abandoned completely after Nasser’s death.

From 1967 to 1979, Egypt’s general approach to the Palestinian issue mostly had been defined in terms of ‘national interest’ rather than more general ideas, such a pan-Arabism or as an Islamic issue. This partly can be attributed to the structural change in the international system, but much could be found in the changes of ‘ideas’. In this period Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) was recognized as a legitimate representative of Palestinians, and Egyptian leaders thought that they could play the supportive role. Again, Egypt’s deviation from mainstream policy by signing a peace agreement with Israel in 1978, based on its own interest (Karawan, 2005), indicated a clear change in its approach to the Palestinian issue (Stein, 1997). After the Camp David agreement with Israel, Egypt experienced an exclusion from the Arab affairs, returning back only in late 1980s (Doran, 2004:117).

From 1979 until the toppling of Mobarek from presidency in February 2011, Cairo’s approach to the Palestinian-Israeli issue can be termed as cold peace with Israel and ‘impolicy’ in general. Egypt’s old active stance decreased considerably and it has become one of those countries in the region that acts when it has to.
Since the popular revolution, we entered a new period during which Cairo’s approach to the conflict seems to be changing, as it was highlighted by the opening of Rafah entrance to Gaza and other developments. It is difficult to predict and analyze the nature of such hints in changing the policy by now because until an elected president and government sworn in such policies might be misleading. However, what is clear is that Cairo’s approach to the conflict is bound to change in coming years.

**Aim and Rationale**

The aim of this book is to analyze the role of a pivotal middle power in regional politics by examining Egypt’s foreign policy towards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in the Middle East from 1930s to today by using pivotal middle power and the constructivist approach.

The rationale for this study derives from the lack of comprehensive academic research on Egypt as a middle-sized state in the Middle East. There are some articles published about Egypt as a middle power, but they generally deal with one element of Egyptian foreign policy in terms of middle power diplomacy, such as pan-Arabism, and the role of domestic policy etc. (e.g. Cooper [Ed], 1997; Alterman, 2005). On the other hand, a literature search may find only few articles on Egypt as a
key power in the discourse of Palestinian-Israeli relations. (e.g. Abadi, 2006).

There is an even greater lack of scholarly studies of the Palestine-Israeli conflict from a middle-sized state perspective. Since the peace initiatives and the discourse of Palestine-Israeli conflict are defined by super or great powers, the role and influence of middle-sized states are downplayed or ignored. Their roles have been understood as complimentary to the initiatives of the super or great powers, rather than the one that possibly can contribute to the issue independently, or even able to change the discourse of peace initiatives. Therefore, it is not surprising that the monopoly of peace initiatives is assigned to super or great power, and academics and policy-makers alike do not even think a peace-initiative can come out from other powers. Therefore, in the literature, the role of middle-sized states in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is not specifically focused on the role of such powers theoretically, but rather overgeneralises their roles in their overall foreign policy understandings.

Taking into account the lack of comprehensive study on the role of middle-sized states in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and Egypt as a middle-sized state, this study will try to make a modest contribution to the study of the middle-sized states in IR theory in the regional context, and to a better understanding of the roles of middle-sized states in the conflict in question.
Research Questions and Methodology

There are two sets of major questions that this book intends to explore. First, historically what has been the attitude of Egypt towards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict? And what are the main determinants that define Egypt’s policy to the conflict? Second, how does Egypt’s policy to the conflict, in turn, affect the role of Egypt in the Middle East in terms of its leadership and credibility? And to what extent do Egypt’s policy changes towards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict from time to time play a role in defining the overall position and influence of Cairo in the Middle Eastern issues?

The methodology of this study will be mostly of a qualitative nature. Qualitative methodology emphasizes on words rather than numbers in collection and the analysis of data. Thus, it is defined, first, as ‘an epistemological position described as interpretivist’ that stresses on the understanding of events through an examination of interpretation. Secondly, qualitative methodology is defined as ‘an ontological position described as constructionist’ which focuses on interactions among different individuals, actors and events (Bryman, 2004:266). Theoretically, this study will contain a comprehensive literature review of the pivotal states and middle power concepts, with specific reference to the role of middle-sized states in world politics. Since the research method is defined simply a technique
for collecting data (Bryman, 2004:27), in this study, qualitative data collection techniques will be utilized. The qualitative method of data collection consists of primary sources and relevant literature. Therefore, numerous research documents, books, published articles, conference papers, newspapers, statements, official publications related to the topic and official speeches by leaders of Egypt will be consulted throughout the study.

As research design, priority will be given to understand the main tenets/driving forces of Egyptian foreign policy toward the Middle East in general, and to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in particular with a special reference to its meaning within the regional context. Through the lens of constructivist and interpretivist approach, the casual connection between Cairo’s foreign policy to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and its overall influence on the role of Egypt in the region has been explored. In order to be able to detect the connection more visibly, a historical periodization of Egypt’s foreign policy to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict from 1930s to today has also been introduced. Throughout the book, neither a confirmation nor testing of a theory has been primarily aimed, however, an analysis of Egypt’s role in the Middle East through the most acute problem in the region are depicted with the theoretical guideline of the Pivotal Middle Power and Constructivist theories. By doing so, the intention is to reach some conclusions, interpretations and
comments theoretically and practically for Pivotal Middle Power and Egypt consequently.

In every research, there might be some weak points. In this study, the most important weak point is that Arabic literature would not be utilized. Since Arabic is the main language in the region and the case study country, Egypt, using Arabic journals, books and newspaper articles could have added new dimensions to the study.

Outline of the Book

Chapter three introduces the theoretical underpinning of this study. In this part, pivotal middle power and constructivist theories are explained in details first, and then a case is made as to how useful a combination of both could be for this book. It is argued that since there is no study analysis of Egypt as a pivotal middle power by using constructivism, this study could make a substantial contribution both theoretically and practically in the case of Egypt.

Fourth chapter lies down the historical background for this study. It makes a periodization of Egypt’s foreign policy toward the Palestinian-Israeli conflict from 1930s until today. In this chapter, domestic and foreign environment that has shaped Egypt’s foreign policy historically is also briefly touched when needed. Cairo’s overall role in the Middle East is discussed with

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a specific reference to the Palestinian-Israeli issue. It is argued
that Cairo’s approach to the Palestinian-Israeli issue is a product
of history and part of general foreign policy. When there is a
change in the broader perspective, there has been also a change
in understanding this specific case. Also historically, Egypt’s
approach to the most important regional issue has shaped its
regional overall influence.

Analysis and interpretation constitutes the chapter five in
this book. Using both theoretical and historical data that are
introduced in chapter three and four; this chapter tries to
understand the real reasons of the Cairo’s policy change to the
Palestinian- Israeli issue and its influence on Egypt’s overall role
in the Middle East. This chapter takes two issues specifically to
analyze Egypt’s role in the Middle East through the Palestinian-
Israeli issue: intellectual leadership and policy leadership. In line
with the constructivist theory, the role of ideas (and intellectual
leadership) in Cairo’s regional policy and influence are
discussed. Policy leadership is also scrutinized as partly result of
intellectual leadership. It is argued that Egypt has simply lost
domination in both fields and this is especially true in the most
important regional issue: the Palestinian issue. It has also found
that actually Cairo’s approach to the key regional issue itself has
a huge leverage on its relations and overall role in the Middle
East.

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In the conclusion, chapter six, after a brief summary of book, general findings of this study are explained. This chapter is divided *de facto* in several points and outlines theoretical findings, policy conclusion and suggestion for future research.
EGYPT AS A PIVOTAL MIDDLE POWER

In order to understand and locate the theory of pivotal middle power (PMP)\(^1\) within international relations, two sub-theories need to be clarified initially. Since pivotal middle power is a combination of both, pivotal state and middle power approach, with a new definition of combining both, first an outline of those concepts needs to be introduced. Then, what follow is the main features of pivotal middle power and relevancy.

**Middle Power**

In order to explain the international power dispensation, states have been categorized either to establish a useful tool for academic research or to evaluate their power in international politics. One of the categorizations is that of middle powers, which was mainly used by academics after the World War II. The term ‘middle power’ is generally used to refer to a position within

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\(^1\) This section is mainly based on my earlier writings and endeavors to formulate this theory: Ozkan 2006a; 2006b, and 2007. However, it is reformulated and re-structured for the purpose of book.
the broad or universal system based on an assumption that there is some hierarchical order of states.

A brief history of the middle power approach will present us penetrating insights in understanding the concept. In general, before 1945, middle power was a relational concept, in the sense that it has been defined with reference to other classes in the states system, especially principal powers (Holbraad, 1984:42). There was also not so much consideration of middle-sized states until the existence of the League of Nations and later the United Nations. Until then, such powers either did not really exist or were not recognized as such. After the establishment of the League, there had been a strong demand, especially from Canada, Australia and Brazil, to be formally recognized as middle-sized states and to be given a special position in the existing structure of the international systems (Holbraad, 1984:45-56). Their efforts were not successful and did not produce the reward they hoped for.

During the Cold War, the conception of middle-sized status was well suited to type of bipolar nature of the international system. Owing to the nature of the existing system, the bipolarity, middle-sized states played a limited role. Either they had to join one of the bloc alliances or choose to be non-aligned. The possibility of middle-sized states playing an important role at international level was limited.

In current literature the middle power approach refers to states’ size and rank, which place them in ‘an international
division of labour’ (Schoeman, 2003:350) in which they have the opportunity of exerting political, economic and moral influence on the international system. First of all, Cox (1989:826-827) argues that middle-sized states are to be found in the middle rank of material capabilities, both militarily and economically, and demonstrate that they have the material capabilities and the technical expertise to function as middle powers at global and regional levels. According to the middle power approach, these states are generally active in what some writers have termed low politics or second order issues on the international agenda. Among the reasons are that great powers have a virtual monopoly on first order issues; middle powers are not being directly threatened by the issues on the first agenda of global politics (Cooper et al, 1993:26), but are concerned with threats emanating from second order issues. This, however, does not mean they have no impact on first order issues. Conversely, they do have some influence such as on agenda setting and policy coordination depending on their diplomatic skills. Their impact will be constrained by structural pressures though. Moreover, their influence might vary issue by issue, by institutional arena, and by the openness and receptivity to initiatives from other sources.

There is a close affinity between the middle power approach and multilateralism (Cooper et. al., 1993:19). Essentially, middle power diplomacy gives a central role to multilateral institutions and they rely on multilateralism and networking to advance a vast array of common issues where they believe that they cannot act.
alone effectively, but may be able to have a systemic impact as part of a small group or through international institutions. Therefore, in modern times, the roles of middle power have been closely associated with the development of international organizations. Some claim that middle powers are at the same time regional powers. Cox (1989:828), by contrast, stresses that ‘middle powers had [have] a secondary role in alliances and no special place in regional blocs’, but mainly basing his analysis on Cold War experiences.

One of the most important elements in identifying middle-sized states is their international behaviour or so-called ‘middle power diplomacy’. Cooper et al (1993:19) have described middle power diplomacy as ‘the) tendency to pursue multilateral solutions to international problems, (the) tendency to embrace compromise positions in international disputes, and (the) tendency to embrace notions of ‘good international citizenship’ to guide their diplomacy’. According to them, middle-sized states help to maintain the international order through coalition-building, by serving as mediators and ‘go-betweens’ and through international conflict management and resolution activities, all of which require quality and active diplomacy. Middle power diplomacy could possibly ‘take place within, across and outside of institutions’ (Henrikson, 1997:56). It could be multilateral or based in the structures and processes of international organizations or regimes. Middle power diplomacy, moreover, could be either dependent on the interaction of members of a group of especially interested
countries or conducted unilaterally by a solitary country largely on its own motion (Henrikson, 1997:56). Over the long run, middle power diplomacy, as Henrikson (1997:61) emphasises, ‘depends on institutions’ (italics in original). Institutional membership and formal office within an organization can provide a potency, which may otherwise be lacking. An organization might create an appearance of neutrality and legitimacy for the actors too, while carrying an authority. All of these elements- potency, neutrality and authority- might help to constitute the credibility and acceptability that middle power diplomacy may need in order to be an effective player in regional and global issues (Henrikson, 1997:61).

Another important dimension of the evolving diplomatic practices of middle powers in global politics especially with the process of globalisation are that ‘the increasing importance of issue-specific, mission-oriented diplomacy’ (Higgott, 1997:37). As issue-specific diplomacy is becoming more fashionable in the post-Cold-War era, middle powers keep up with the developments and use this for cutting across the ideological, regional and developmental barriers of the world problems. As Higgott (1997:38) explains, mission-oriented diplomacy has basically three dimensions: (i) it plays the ‘functional leadership and coalition building by an active state bureaucracy’, in other words, drawing on wider elements of conflict and acting as a catalyst as well as facilitating managerial roles of states; (ii) it offers ‘space for, and indeed calling for non-traditional actors in international
affair’, by paying special attention to the roles of NGOs, social movements and especially those who have a specific interests in issues such as human rights, finance, species protection etc.; lastly (iii) it has ability to linkage issues. Relationship between gender and development; between gender and security; between trade and the environment are, to mention a few, coming to the fore in the international agenda.

The picture of middle power diplomacy after the Cold War is very different from the picture of its historical roots. The focal point of middle power diplomacy in the past was mainly centred on mediation activity. With the international agenda dominated by geo-political issues, the diplomatic efforts of middle powers were directed towards easing global tensions in general, and averting the possibility of another world war in particular. After the Cold-War, they, however, have embarked on a way not transformative but reformative in that they try to obtain some benefits for themselves. Since then the middle powers have had a greater opportunity to use their enhanced space manoeuvre to widen their repertoire of activity. Actually, what has emerged in the early 1990s in world politics is ‘not only a more segmented but a more multifaceted type of diplomatic behaviour’ (Cooper, 1997:9).

**Pivotal State**

With the advent of the 1990s- the end of the Cold-War, the subsequent search for new paradigms for understanding the new
era has come to fore. Parallel to this, the collapse of the USSR heralded the United States’ unipolar hegemony on world politics. A couple of theories have been put forward in order to understand both the politics of the new world order and the US’s role in this new situation. The concept of pivotal state should be analysed within this context (Ozkan, 2008:118-119).

The concept of pivotal state was mainly introduced as an analysis from above in examining the US strategy towards the developing world. At the beginning although it was produced for the US foreign policy decision-makers; academics from all over the world have started to utilize the notion as an academic tool for analysing the politics of the developing countries.

Its intellectual fathers argue that pivotal states are ‘a small number of countries whose future fate is uncertain’ (Chase et al, 1996:33). Today’s pivotal states are comparable to yesterday’s domino states. The domino theory was that if one state was lost in its region during the Cold War, then, the region could be lost or change its external allegiance. This was especially true during the Cold-War rivalry. Today, because of the nature of the international system after the 1990s, domino states (at least theoretically) no longer exist. The concept of pivotal states, however, could be seen as an old concept in a new era.

According to Chase, Hill and Kennedy (1996:37), states ‘ought to have important geographical locations, large populations, physical size and economic potential’ in order to be
defined as pivots. Hence, a state’s territory must have strategic significance. It could be either a borderline state or occupy a strategic position regarding international trade and politics. Moreover, the possession of a strategic strait could be enough to make a state pivotal. Large population and physical size are two necessary requirements but they are not sufficient to describe a state’s pivotness.

In defining a pivotal state, economic potential and regional importance are also critical. Chase et al. (1999:9) define a pivotal state as ‘a key country whose future may not only determine the success or failure of its region but also significantly affect international stability’. Pivotal state theorists do not emphasise the military capability of such states. Instead, their main concern is the regional and economic importance of pivotal states. States with such features are above all defined by ‘... (their) capacity to affect regional and international stability. A pivotal state is so important regionally that its collapse would spell transboundary mayhem: migration, communal violence, pollution, disease, and so on. A pivotal state’s economic progress and stability, on the other hand, would bolster its region’s economic vitality and political soundness...’ (Chase et al., 1996:37).

Chase, Hill, and Kennedy’s definition implies that pivotal states are borderline states, in the sense that they could either progress or regress. They are very important for their immediate regions as they are strong states in the regions. What makes them
even more significant is the fact that the high possibility of either plunging themselves into turmoil or carry on with advancement. They have the ability to impact on their immediate regions in doing either. In other words, pivotal states’ own development and democratisation can affect developments in their neighbouring regions positively, but their collapse could also have negative repercussions.

Chase, Hill and Kennedy stress that pivotal states are important because their fate could determine a wider region’s fate, implying that these pivots are in a way role models. A pivotal state could be seen as a country whose neighbours look to it for leadership (Ocak, 2001:15), not least in the fields of economic development and integration, and regional security.

At the international level, pivotal states can play a key role in global negotiations on crosscutting issues such as environmental accords, human rights, and population issues. Pivotal states should be encouraged to join global platforms if there is a demand for the spread of democracy and human rights across our globe. In order to maintain the World Trade Organization (WTO) regime and to open global economy further, pivotal states play a significant role. If they were excluded from such platforms, it would be expected international stability to fail.

To sum up, a pivotal state is a key country that has the potential to have a significant beneficial or harmful effect on its regions. Such states are not desperately poor, war-stricken
countries; instead, they are large, populous states, often with a substantial growing middle class. They have considerable infrastructural and educational resources. Moreover, they exercise increasing integration into the global economy with their emerging market potentials. Besides, with their ability to play key roles at regional level, pivotal states have something to contribute at international level too, such as in humanitarian matters.

**General Outline of the Pivotal Middle Power**

It should be clarified in the beginning that the concept of the ‘pivotal middle power’ is a combination of the pivotal state and middle power approach. As explained in the related section, to be pivotal, a state must, at a minimum, be physically impressive, have a large population, be strategically located, and possess economic power. In addition, a pivotal state will have the ‘capacity to affect regional and international stability’ (Chase et al, 1996:37). Its collapse would result in ‘transboundary mayhem’, but its prosperity and stability ‘would bolster its region’s economic vitality’ (Chase et al, 1996:37).

On the other hand, to be a middle power, in addition to size, population, and geo-strategic location, a state must have middle-rank economic and military capability and emphasize multilateral diplomacy and involvement in international organizations. Furthermore, a middle power could become active in second-order issues such as peacekeeping and peacemaking operations. Being a
‘good international citizen’ and complying with the general interest are also regarded as key behavioral patterns of middle powers. In world affairs, middle powers act as catalysts, facilitators and managers (Cooper et al, 1993)

Pivotal state theorists do not emphasize the military capability of such states. The middle power approach, by contrast, pays special attention to military capability because middle powers could play a leading role in security issues both at regional and global levels. Pivotal states are, by contrast, important for their regions’ economic vitality and development.

As mentioned above, the theoretical basis of this study lies in the combination of the concepts ‘middle power’ and ‘pivotal state’, to produce the ‘pivotal middle power’ concept. The lack of military power in the case of pivotal states and the regional economic importance of middle powers are one of the reasons why the two are merged. The other reason is that the pivotal states concept is mainly formulated to propose a new framework for US policy in the developing world. This concept is, therefore, an analysis from ‘above’. The middle power concept is, by contrast, based on a state centric approach designed to evaluate the role of the middle powers in the international system and to put forward an analysis from ‘below’.

In definition, pivotal middle power is more than merely a combination of two theories, it has further implications. This new definition also does not only represent merely a power that
influential in its own region, but implies a state that could play critical role in international politics where the issues are beyond the region. It is also to be noted that such states are not agents of global superpowers in their respective regions. Their interest might couple with that of superpower/s from time to time, but it does not mean, at least theoretically, that they tend to be agents. By contrast, when the superpowers need these pivotal middle powers more than normal times, they could deny the cooperation and act independently. This behavior might change from time to time and also from issue to issue depending on the responses of domestic contingencies. If regional concerns are so strong and against the interventions of superpowers, such states could undermine even plans of the superpower.²

The pivotal middle power concept might even be seen as an elaborated version of the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) developed by Buzan and Wæver (2003). Their central argument is that ‘since most threats travel more easily over short distances than over long ones, security interdependence is normally patterned into regionally based clusters: security complexes’ (Buzan and Wæver, 2003:43-44). Security complexes, they argue, ‘are regions as seen through the lens of security’ (Buzan and Wæver, 2003:43-44). Their underlying argument for focusing on region is that the RSCT, by applying to the international system, ‘offers a vision for emerging world order’

² In recent theoretical discussions, such behavior is defined as ‘soft balancing’. Due to space constraints, I will not discuss this issue here. See Paul, 2005; and Pape, 2005.
(Buzan and Wæver, 2003:40). They also convincingly assert that ‘the regional level will always be operative and sometimes dominant’ (Buzan and Wæver, 2003:52) in analyzing global politics. Buzan and Wæver (2003:52) are also of the opinion that the conditions of the post-Cold War world will enhance the salience of the regional level for security. While this argument is the basis of the pivotal middle power concept, it fills the gap that Buzan and Wæver do not touch in real and practical sense. Whereas the security complexes is very analytical, and certainly true in understanding today’s global politics, how such security complexes can contribute to global order in practical terms are not explained. Pivotal middle power aims to put this analysis into practice, by explaining/understanding the behavior of the regional key state.

The pivotal middle power approach is of the similar opinion with the RSCT in analyzing regions and global politics in broader perspective. For them, the theories are generated in the global level and the regions fitted into them, creating a top-down approach most of the time. As once Waltz (1979:72) aptly said, since Thucydides, the traditional focus of international politics has been on the great powers. This has meant that the role of middle-sized states has either been ignored or downplayed. Aware of such an approach, Buzan and Wæver (2003:85) emphasize that RSCT is a bottom-up approach in attempting to capture the particularities of regions and then assemble the global picture from these components. In that sense, PMP and RSCT are the same on the
basis that they are not top-down approaches. PMP argues that if the PMPs came together from different regions and, furthermore, were able to act together, one would see the increasing influence of regions and their ‘superpowers’, the PMPs, in global politics. This process can even be called as ‘the globalization of regionalization’ in international relations (Ozkan, 2004).

_Table 1: Main features of the Pivotal Middle Power_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PIVOTAL MIDDLE POWER</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Main Characteristics</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1-Geographical location</td>
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<tr>
<td>2-Large population and physical size (not sufficient but necessary)</td>
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<td>3-Middle rank in economic and military capability</td>
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<td>4-Capacity to affect global and regional issues</td>
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<td><strong>Behavioral Patterns</strong></td>
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<td>5-Use multilateral diplomacy and international organizations</td>
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<td>6-Play a leading role in security issues, especially peacekeeping and peacemaking, and in development issues including regional integration.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7-Act as catalyst, facilitator and manager at regional and global levels</td>
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<tr>
<td>8-They are ‘good international citizens’ and comply with the general interest</td>
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In the post-Cold War environment, pivotal middle powers increasingly have been playing critical roles in their regional security as well as global security through their contribution to peacekeeping and peacemaking process. While they are influential in their regions, their contributions are limited on the global scale. Since the 9/11, pivotal middle powers should be expected to play more influential roles globally and regionally once they have chance to do so.

This book considers the pivotal middle power as a key state that is able, and willing to project power and influence developments beyond its borders-regionally and internationally-and one to determine the fate of its region to a certain extent. This study will also identify a pivotal middle power by its active involvement in security issues such as peacekeeping and peacemaking operations and its leading role with regard to regional economic development and integration.

The distinguishing feature of pivotal middle powers is their ability to play a role at regional and international levels. Pivotal middle powers are, furthermore, regional powers. They occupy the ‘heartland’ of their regions. The role of the pivotal middle powers cannot, however, be limited to their regions. Another feature of pivotal middle powers is their ability to link between the issues of regional and international ones. They are aware of the fact that a

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3 For example, for an analysis of South Africa as a pivotal middle power within the African context and its active role in bringing peace to several countries, see Ozkan, 2006a.
regional issue could easily have repercussions at the international level and vice versa.

**Constructivism**

Constructivism is a newly emerging theory in IR with emphasizing more on the role of social interaction of actors and their identities in international relations. In his publication, *World of our Making*, Onuf (1989) introduced the first constructivist theory in IR, however, it was Alexander Wendt’s (1992) article ‘Anarchy is what states make of it’ and his subsequent book, *Social Theory of International Politics* in 1999 that popularized the constructivism approach. As Hopf (1998:172) summarizes, constructivist theory ‘offers alternative understandings of a number of the central themes in international relations theory, including: the meaning of anarchy and balance of power, the relationship between state identity and interest, an elaboration of power, and the prospects for change in world politics’. Constructivists argue that international system is ‘characterized not by anarchy, but by community’ that defines and decides about the future (Mearsheimer, 1994/5:39).

Constructivists locate the institutions at the center of their understanding of international politics, because they are central for constitutive and regulative norms of the international system. They take ideas very seriously and in fact they believe that discourse or how we think and talk about the world largely shapes
our knowledge and practice (Tickner, 1997:622). In other words, ideas are the driving force of history. According to constructivism, states behave according to the norms and institutions that they created, in turn, such norms and institutions underpin collective security (Ashley, 1987:428; and Lebow, 1994:269-277). Furthermore, states would ‘identify positively with one another so that the security of each is perceived as the responsibility of all’ (Wendt, 1992:400).

Besides accepting the ideas as driving forces in history and in understanding of international relations, the conception of identity is also another crucial element for constructivists. According to Wendt (1999:40), a state’s identity (or multiple identities) is made (or constructed) through interaction and not merely given. He defines a state’s identity as ‘relatively stable, role specific understandings and expectations about itself’ (Wendt 1992:397 and 1999:21). It has a meaning of what it (actor) represents in the world (Le Pestre, 1997:9). Furthermore, identity is being shaped and maintained by notions of the self, a perception of the stability or anarchic nature of the environment, and interactions with others. According to Wendt (1999:224), identity is ‘a property of international actors that generates motivational and behavioral dispositions’. Thus identities are significant because they provide the basis for interests. In constructivist understanding, identities are the basis of interests, therefore, they are more fundamental (Wendt, 1999:231).

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A state’s identity performs various necessary functions on the international level which could be helpful to understand their foreign policy inclinations. A state’s identity (i) tells ‘you and others who you are, and tell you who others are’ and (ii) it is often the driving force behind a state’s foreign policy inclination, as it helps to define the domestic and international parameters of what a state regards as a national, regional or international interests. A state’s identity (iii) does not only imply its motivations, intentions, preferences and consequents actions/interactions in foreign policy, but also (iv) ensures a predictable pattern of behavior, actions and interactions. Lastly, (v) depending on how a state’s identity and interest are defined and constructed, identification with ‘the other’ and the concern for the others’ welfare is possible through expressions of solidarity, community and loyalty (Hopf, 1998:174-175; and Zehfuss, 2002:14-15).

Wendt (1994:385-387 and 1996:50-54) distinguishes three state identities. The first is corporate identity, which refers to the intrinsic qualities such as resources, beliefs and norms, and human capital of an individual state. This identity of a state generates national interests such as physical security, the (un)predictability of global relationships, recognition as an international actor by other actors, and developments issues.

The second state identity by Wendt refers to is its social identity (or ‘roles’), which consists of a set of meanings that a state attributes to itself while taking the perspective of the other
into account. A constructivist reading of a state’s national interests implies that its interests define situations and conditions and determines the way that state acts, reacts and interacts internationally. Its foreign interaction is based on the meaning the country ascribes to objects, other actors and the actions and interactions taking place among them. Meaning, then, becomes the basis for all actions and is developed/constructed in the interaction with other actors through which states acquire or maintain their identities (Wendt, 1992:397).

The third state identity identified by Wendt, collective identity, is established when a social identity generates collective interests. Depending on how these identities and interests are defined, collective identification with other actors is based on feelings and expressions of solidarity, community, loyalty and concern for the other's welfare and fate. However, solidarity implies sharing burdens, risks and dangers too (Zehfuss 2002:131).

For constructivists, the rule and norms in international relations is of outmost importance. A norm is usually defined as ‘a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity’ (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998:891). In constructivist reading of international politics, both rules and norms are crucial to political action and a shared (or lack of) understanding of these rules and norms guide language (the way to communicate, hostilely or friendly), and shapes decisions. Therefore, any change on the
international and/or domestic level or in the foreign policy of a state occurs mostly when actor/s reconstruct their identity, rules and norms through their practices, and in the process, create new practices and interactions (and *vice versa*). For constructivists, rules and norms can change only when ‘beliefs and identities of domestic actors are altered thereby also altering rules and norms that are constitutive of their [international] political practices’ (Koslowski and Kratochwil, 1994:216-226).

Almost all constructivist writers agree that all human beings are social and our social interactions make and re-make us constantly, mainly through deeds such as physical actions or speech acts. However, in order to construct reality, deeds such as speech acts must have meaningful consequences. Zehfuss (2002:171) argues that speech acts have normative consequences because they both change and define situations. Through repetition, speech acts may be institutionalized into rules and, in this way, provide not only the context but also the intention and meaning of action and interaction. Therefore, Onuf (1998:59) indicates that actually we construct the world by saying things, by changing words and reformulating policies.

In short, constructivists argue that ideas, identities and social interaction among actors are elements that define/construct (and reconstruct) international relations. Anarchy is not given in international relations as realists argued, but it is ‘what state makes of it’ through interaction. Change occurs in IR and in an
actor’s foreign policy when ideas, identity or perception of the actor on the issues are reconstructed and redefined.

**Combining Pivotal Middle Power and Constructivism**

Constructivism offers a useful structural theory to analyze and explain Egypt’s foreign policy to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. First, its usefulness lies in the fact that it does explain change by focusing on ‘the power of the ideas’ (such as values, norms and rules) in defining ranges of actions and interactions with both sides of the conflict and Egypt. Second, it focuses on ‘the importance of identity in defining what actors want’. Third, it focuses on ‘the cyclical relationship between an actor’s interests, behavior and the social context in which the actor exists’ (Ba & Hoffmann 2003, 15-33).

In the past several decades Egypt experienced significant changes in all of these areas. In fact, the context of the Cold War, détente in international politics in the 1970s and the wars with Israel, mostly through which the foreign policy of Egypt emerged, shaped the country; who it is, what it wants, and how it behaved. Constructivists argue that an actor shapes its own social context (of shared values and norms), and that this context, in turn, shapes an actor's interests, identity and behavior (actions and interactions). These actions and interactions are based on international and domestic rules, norms and values.
In fact, a key element of each war with Israel was that it resulted in the reconstruction of Egypt’s foreign policy in the Middle East over the time. Constructivism offers a framework for analyzing Egypt’s foreign policy since 1930s. Egypt’s relations with Israel, be it as war or cold peace, created the context within which it reconstructed its norms, identities, interests and interactions, all of which had and still have significant meaning and impact on its policy and approach to the Middle Eastern issues.

Pivotal middle power’s usefulness comes from analyzing Egypt as a key country in defining policies in the Middle East. With its economic potential, deep civilizational history, military power and from time to time its intellectual leadership, Egypt certainly has more influence in the Middle Eastern affairs than many others in the region. As the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is the key problem in the area, Egypt’s approach is taken seriously by regional states and international actors. Pivotal middle powers have the power of being mover-and-shaker of the policies. As will be outlined in coming chapters, Egypt’s peace agreement has changed the discourse on Israel in the Middle East somehow unwittingly. It has been costly for Egypt, but at the end, it created an environment in which questioning of the existence of Israel has been debated only in radical circles, not in the government policies as it was before. One can also argue that Egypt’s Camp David move opened the phase of normalizing relations between
Israel and Arab countries, which later resulted in peace agreement between Israel-Jordan and opened the way for Oslo Peace process.

Analysis of Egypt as a key player in defining policies in the Middle East will be examined thorough the pivotal middle power theory, and its constant construction (and re-construction) of perception /understanding /approaching to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict will be explained by constructivism. The issue of how a pivotal middle power’s perceptions change or are being reconstructed is not touched in both constructivist theory and pivotal middle power. By bringing these two together, this book aim to provide not only an analysis of Egypt’s role in the Middle East, but a possible theoretical contribution to IR studies in this field.
NARROWING HORIZONS

HOW DOES CAIRO’S APPROACH TO PALESTINE INFLUENCE EGYPT’S ROLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST?

The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict as a Defining/Key Issue

The Palestinian issue is not an ordinary conflict in the Middle East. It has its own character and therefore cannot be compared to any other conflict in the world in a meaningful sense. First, it is a disputed area because, religion plays an important role both from Israeli and Palestinian sides in defining the terms and condition of a possible peace. For the purpose of the book, I will not go into the details of the religious side of the conflict, nor the political side fully, since it has been explained well in several
studies already (e.g. Fox, 2004). The country in question here, Egypt, is a Muslim country, therefore, religious importance of Palestine as a place for Muslims needs to be explained, because to some extent it affects the approach of Palestinian Islamist groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, to the issue. Political influence/counter-influence of the Palestinian issue as a conflict on regional and global politics also requires an explanation in order to locate the issue within the Egyptian foreign policy.

In Muslim understanding, Palestine has a special significance that distinguished it from the rest of the Arab world. It is a blessed land to which the Prophet had traveled by night. Palestine is where the Al-Aqsa Mosque is situated. Jerusalem is the first of two Qibla (the direction faced by Muslims at prayer), and the third holy place for Muslims after Mecca and Medina. Consequently, there is a strong feeling in the Islamic world that Palestine is part of Islamic sacred ground. As such it is not merely the property of the Palestinians or the Arabs, but rather it is the property of all Muslims. Therefore, in any peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine, Jerusalem is the key issue and whenever the situation/future of Jerusalem is discussed Palestinian Authority has little legitimacy to compromise because it represents only Palestinians, not the Islamic world at
large. Owing to possession of such a sacred meaning, Jerusalem in particular and Palestinian in general has been, and still is, very important in both historic and contemporary discourse of Islamic movements all over the world (Milton-Edwards, 2006).

Second, politically, it is often stated that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is the main obstacle to bring a permanent peace and security in the Middle East. It is also likely to create friction between regional and international actors in the wake of Arab Spring. After the revolution, at societal level it still remains a major point of difference between Americans and Egyptians. In a poll after revolution, almost 70% of Egyptians say that their opinion of the U.S. would significantly improve if it pressured Israel to halt settlement expansion (Abu Dhabi Gallup, 2011: 21).

It is also an ever-ending conflict and breeding more conflict within and surrounding areas. It is involved in almost every aspect of Arab and the Middle Eastern foreign relations and foreign policy. So far, many proposals for compromise, offers of mediation and to create an atmosphere conducive to settlement have produced but little success.

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1 In Camp David II negotiations in 2000, Palestinian Authority Leader Yasser Arafat’s insistent that he must consult with other Muslim leaders regarding the sharing of Jerusalem reinforces this point. See Brzezinski, 2007:126.
The Palestinian-Israeli issue has always had repercussions more beyond the Middle East. Terrorist groups, such as Al-Qaeda and others use the Palestinian case to legitimize their existence and activities. As Dannis Ross, the principal Middle East negotiator for President Clinton admits that ‘[N]o issue evokes more anger or a deeper sense of injustice throughout the Middle East than the Israeli-Palestinian conflict’ (quoted in Brzezinski, 2007:74). His argument can be extended to the whole Islamic world in general.

In short, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is the key issue that any international effort to bring peace to the Middle East needs to deal with. Unless a peaceful and acceptable solution is reached for both parties, it will continue to create, inspire and legitimize other conflicts, terrorist groups and their activities. Similarly, it will continue to be a litmus test for the leader in the world in general and in the Middle East in particular.

**Egyptian Approach to the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict:**

**A Periodization**

Historically, Egypt’s foreign policy toward the Palestinian-Israeli issue has not followed a liner approach. It has changed from time to time depending on different elements. In here, an effort of periodization will be introduced in line with perceptual change
of Egyptian political leadership toward the issue. Different periodization can be made according to different elements that are taken as a base (e.g. Abadi, 2006).

This book relies on the theoretical and discursive change in Cairo’s foreign policy as its departing point, since it takes the constructivist approach and the role of ideas as its theoretical framework. It might seem that the wars with Israel have actually paved the way for each change. While this is true, other social and political issues have also contributed to such changes, and this does not mean, in any way, to underestimate or downplay other elements.

The Conflict as ‘the Center of Politics’ (Before 1948)

After the Balfour Declaration in 1917, the aim to establish a Jewish state in Palestinian area has started to take concrete forms. The slow immigration of Jews from Europe to the area and starting to buy land from Palestinians accelerated the process toward the establishment of Israel in the Middle East, while creating huge controversy, debate, reaction and mass rallies against it in the area. At this time, Egypt was under British control as Palestine, and its government on behalf of ‘people’ was largely ineffective. The ground for action/re-action was, thus, dominated mostly by increasing social and intellectual movements which influenced the process and be influenced by
the process itself. The Muslim Brotherhood\textsuperscript{2} was one of such organization that played a definitive role in support of the Palestinian cause during this period. Since the 1930s, the popularity of MB as a movement increased as it took up the cause of Palestinians against Zionist ambitions and British rule (Heikal, 1983:240).

For Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood, Jewish immigration to Palestine and the eventual establishment of Israel was another version of European imperialism in the area. The leader of the MB, Hassan al-Banna first visited Palestine and met with the Mufti of Jerusalem in 1935. Thereafter, the MB started collecting donations for Palestinians and organized demonstrations in Egypt against Jewish immigration (Abadi, 2006:160). The MB leaders saw Palestine as the first line of defense of Egypt, while emphasizing the Jews’ proclaimed territorial ambitions in Sinai of Egypt because they considered it holy land.

During the 1930s, immigration of Jews to Palestine worried the Egyptian leaders too. At the domestic level, as a response to the increasing Jews immigration, first the Arab Company to Save the Palestinian Land was created and Egypt increased its involvement in its northern neighbors’ affairs. In 1936 the Palestine revolt broke out as a result of contiguity of Palestine to Egypt and of the belief that Palestinian cause that

\textsuperscript{2} Due to space constraint, I will not go into details and the nature of the Muslim Brotherhood as an organization here. For a detailed history see Mitchell, 1993.
merited supporting both on Arab and on Islamic ground. To the
credit of the MB, also a higher committee for the relief of the
Palestine victims was formed in later 1936 in which Muslim
Brotherhood leader Al-Banna was a member.

On the foreign relations level, in 1937 the Egyptian prime
minister emphasized in the League of Nations that ‘Egypt is
concerned about the Palestinian cause’ (quoted in Hasou,
1985:3), while Egypt convened an Arab parliament conference to
discuss the Palestinian issue in 1938. Until the World War II
broke out, similar Arab conferences continued to be held mostly
in Cairo. These all clearly show that the Palestinian issue was not
less important than any Egyptian domestic issue (Hasou, 1985,
3-4).

In the 1940s as the situation deteriorated for Muslims in
the Holy land, the MB members were sent in 1946 to join
Palestinian military groups. In Palestine, they allied with the
Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Hajj Amin al-Husayni and in 1947 the
MB initiated military training for volunteers who want to go to
Palestine. The MB leader Hassan al-Banna promised to send
10,000 volunteers to Palestine. The activities of the MB were not
interfered by Egypt’s King Faruk or other authorities, because
the MB was so strong and any preventive involvement might
result in a civil conflict (McGregor, 2006:242). The MB fighters
had gained a reputation as a formidable fighter and in later stages
of the conflict when the Egyptian army arrived to Palestine, MB
fighters provided ‘a great deal of tactical and strategic information’ (McGregor, 2006:242-3). Simultaneously, after 1947, the MB undertook a massive press campaign asking youth to join the armed struggle in Palestine. In November 1947, for example, the MB was the most outspoken Egyptian political force in declaring its rejection for the UN patrician resolution on Palestine. They organized mass demonstrations against resolutions and asked Arab and Muslim governments to withdraw their membership from the United Nations (Abdelnasser, 1994:40).

As McGregor (2006:247) also indicates, after the 1948 War, the volunteer unit of the MB emerged as courageous fighters and their reputation enhanced in Egypt. This made the MB a more serious political force in Egyptian domestic affairs and increased its popularity and influence (Abdelnasser, 1994:41). In December 1948, Egyptian authorities banned MB over the assassination of Prime Minister Mahmud Fahmi al-Nuqrashi, although it was denounced by MB leader Hassan al-Banna. Making things worse, government agents killed al-Banna in public on 28 December 1947 and thousands of MB members were put in prison. Most of them had to stay in prison until April 1951 when a court decided that charge was unsubstantiated.

Until the 1948 war and after, the Palestinian issue had been the main issue in the Middle East, becoming the ‘center of politics’. Especially in Egypt, it was the case, because both
Palestine and Egypt were British colonies. Anger against Britain inside the country coupled with the presumed British help of Jewish immigrants and support, intensified the debate in the country and linked these two issues, full dependence of Egypt and Palestine, together. The MB existed as an Islamic movement in Egypt as a reaction to the fall of Islamic lands to colonial powers. It aimed to create an Islamic awareness on the issues that had immediate effect on the Islamic world and Muslims through education and renewal in Islamic perspective and understanding. In a sense, the Palestinian issue was utilized as a good example of plunging the Muslims and Islamic world and urgency to act. Therefore, along with the increasing influence of the MB in society, the Palestinian issue had occupied the central place in Egyptian politics. The Muslim Brotherhood had also enhanced its influence in Egyptian society when it organized massive protests against British presence. They organized anti-British rallies that numbered in the hundreds of thousands, which shows that its power was considerable in the society (Doran, 2004:98).

In short, during this period, Egypt was still under British colony and its policy the Palestinian issue formulated mostly by the influence of societal organizations and within the broader context of eliminating British presence. As was directly linked to British colonialism too, the Palestinian issue had seen as part of the demand of independence in the Middle East. Therefore, both
at domestic and foreign policy level, the Palestinian issue played a central role, making it to be ‘the center of politics’.

The Conflict as an Islamic Issue (1948-1957)

After the 1948 war, the role and the influence of the MB in Egyptian politics had both reached at its peak and its end. Between 1948-1952, Egypt was on verge of transition because of its domestic issues. Increasing demand for full independence from Britain and the corruption rumors about the monarchy were already enough to stir the society. The loss of the 1948 War added another dimension to already existing issues that there was an urgent need to re-structure the state. In October 1951, there was a little process in shaking off the British presence in the country and the Wafd Party was again in government and again embroiled in numerous corruption scandals. The anger among the society was increasing and resulted in armed attacks now mostly on British assets and individuals. The MB members were active and most of the time led the attacks. The disorder and fighting were the main theme in the country, since the all paramilitaries and radical groups involved this with the same intention of expelling the British. At this time, the Egyptian government also encouraged an anti-British demonstration in Cairo but lost control quickly. As McGregor argues (2006:249), the political system in Egypt was actually ‘in a state of collapse’
and the army was the only power who could provide the authority to the state. On 23 July 1952, the Free Officers’ Movement (FOM) seized the power with a bloodless coup. This resulted in Nasser’s emergence as the leader of the military junta and eventually became president in 1954.

Some of the FOM members had a strong contact with the Muslim Brotherhood leadership and its military wing (Alexander, 2005:30-31). The MB supported the activities of the FOM, because the MB did not desire the political power for themselves but would support any group who ‘was prepared to restore Islamic rule’ in Egypt (McGregor, 2006:250). This created a mutual interest on both side to cooperate.

The Free Officers’ Movement made a good use of the Muslim Brotherhood in getting the power but once the power was in their hand, the situation had changed. After Nasser became president, he wanted to control all power in his hand and for that aim; he eliminated the Muslim Brotherhood and its influence in re-making the state. For an assassination attack on Nasser in October 1954, the MB was blamed and thousands of its members were put in jail again. Eventually several of them died in jail under torture (McGregor, 2006:251).

As mentioned, due to its members’ brave fighting in Palestine before and during the 1948 War and its increasing influence on the society as an organization, the Muslim
Brotherhood emerged as one of the key players in Egyptian politics. After the 1948 War, it was hoped that there would be an Islamic state in Egypt and issues such as the Palestinian one started to be seen through the lens of Islam. This hope was kept alive clearly because two future presidents of Egypt, Nasser and Sadat, came under the influence of Muslim Brotherhood at earlier stages (McGregor, 2006:230) and both of them were the key personals in the Free Officers’ Movement. At the same time, after 1952, some key supporters of the MB were initially appointed at influential positions in the government and members of the MB, who were jailed by the old regime were released (Alexander, 2005:56-57). Politically, in January 1953, all political parties in Egypt were dissolved by the new regime, except the Brotherhood. Perhaps, the most important one was the connection of Sayyed Qutb, one of the most influential Islamic thinkers of the MB, with the FOM members. He was closer to Nasser and linked with the developments of the July 1952 events. After the revolution, Qutb was even appointed as advisor to Revolutionary Command Council (Khatab, 2006:57). All of these were the developments that fed MB members’ belief of creating an Islamic state and ultimately their influence in the discourse of foreign policy making.

In this period, the approach was more Islamic oriented and necessity to help Palestinians was always emphasized within the Islamic context. Before 1948, the MB was also approached the
Palestinian issue as an Islamic issue, but it was accepted more within the MB circles rather than in a broader range of groups. The approach to the Palestinian issue before 1948 was more diverse and in general understood either within the context of British colonialism or Pan-Islamic sentiment and Arab nationalism. As the MB’s influence increased both within the society and governing elite, the influence of the MB on the discourse of approaching to the Palestinian issue increased. One should note here that the MB’s approach to the Palestinian issue was not only primarily motivated by religious and historical considerations, but also supported by economic and political arguments in order to gain the support of Egyptian bourgeoisie. For example, the MB leaders pointed out that historically the security of Egypt has always been linked to that of Palestine by arguing that any threat to Egypt had always come from beyond Sinai and Egypt’s decisive battles had always been fought in al-Sham (historic Syria) and especially in Palestine (quoted in El-Awaisi, 1991:242-3). In short, the stand of the Muslim Brotherhood on the issue was not confined in declarations and statements, rather took a concrete form in the war of Palestine 1948 and in influencing policy of Egypt. However, as an irony of history, the most influential time of the MB was ended in a dramatic decrease in influence and exclusion/cleansing from

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3 In that sense, the role of 1931 Jerusalem Islamic Congress and debates how to approach to Palestinian issue and British colonialism is a striking example of ‘clash of ideas’. See Mayer, 1982; and Matthews, 2003.

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society. Nasser was fond of changing discourse on all political issues in the Middle East. First, he eliminated his potential rivals in terms of discourse and power, and then he put forward his projects in test.

To put in a nutshell, this period was characterized with the consolidation of power and politics from an organization to the state, thus, the strength of the state. One element is that the MB was mostly concerned with the interests of the Muslim world at large and not particularly with national interests of Egypt as a political entity, because they saw Egypt as part of a big entity, namely the Islamic world. And this started to shift during this period even though foreign policy was highly influenced by the Muslim cause to a more ethnicity-based approach, pan-Arabism after the Free Officers’ Movement seized the power.

The Conflict as an Issue of Arab Nationalism (1957-1967)

After the Suez Crisis in 1956, Nasser consolidated his power as a strong Arab leader in Egypt and the Middle East. His championing of pan-Arabism was at its peak. The Suez Crisis gave an extra self-confidence to both Nasser himself and Arab nationalism. As Onuf (1998:59) indicates, our words create our world. By focusing on Arab nationalism, Nasser created his own world of understanding and policy prescription to solve problems. As a ‘big ideas and big issues’ president, Nasser’s role
perception had capitulated him onto the international stage. Being a relentless Arabist, he had reformed Egypt’s foreign policy into a one man-show. His role perception and world-view far exceeded the relative power status of Egypt at the time given the fact that the cold war was very much persistent.

In the 1950s, pan-Arabism was on the rise already and had been ‘a more or less obligatory doctrine’ of many Arab leaders and states (Tibi, 1990:203). Until then, though it was often expressed in words rather than in deeds, Nasser wanted to give a practical shape to the increasing trend of Arab nationalism. Therefore, Nasser himself introduced a stronger focus on pan-Arabism and promoted the cause of Palestinians not within an Islamic context, but rather in a pan-Arabist context. One of the overriding features of Nasser’s foreign policy was his preference for foreign affairs over domestic matters, as he focused on Arab unity and liberation of Palestine as part of his pan-Arabism. As Doran (2004:97) argues the foreign policy of Nasser was almost synonymous with the ideology of pan-Arabism.

In the domestic context of Egypt, Nasser was the president of a nationalist one-party regime and eliminated the opposition. As part of his consolidation of power in his hands, he purged the Islamist elements, imprisoned and executed them when necessary. For example, the most influential Islamist thinker Sayyed Qutb, who was member of the MB, had been put to death in 1966. The Muslim Brotherhood as an organization was forced
to live in underground, and at the same time most of its members were eliminated by Egyptian authorities.

Nasser realized that championing Arab causes was extremely popular among Arab masses. He utilized this in domestic and foreign relations. Until the mid-1960s, Nasser’s standing was very high and Arab leaders could not ignore this in their relations with Egypt. Pan-Arabism as an ideology, to which the Arab masses attached great sentimental significance, enhanced Egypt’s influence in the Middle East. It was a popular banner and Nasser became its symbol among the masses. In the Nasser period, existing anti-Israeli feeling in the Middle East was closely tied to anti-Western sentiments. Since the creation of Israel in the region, Arabs saw it as a tool of western imperialism and an offence to their pride. Nasser’s approach to the Palestinian issue as an Arab cause enhanced Nasser’s position among the Arab masses because there has been an intense emotionalism attached to it.

As the champion of the pan-Arabist cause, Nasser played a decisive role in several issues that could be regarded as part of broader pan-Arabism. The creation of the short-lived United Arab Republic, intellectually, was the result of pan-Arabism. The Syrian elites were more forthcoming to establish such a union with Egypt because of their domestic issues. It was their belief that only Nasser could save Syria from moving to turmoil. After intensive negotiations, within a month in January 1958, Nasser
became the president of both countries, Egypt and Syria (Podeh, 1999).

In 1960s there was an increasing Palestinian identity in diasporas, and it started to take concrete form in representing Palestinians. For that purpose, in May 1964, Ahmed Shukairi called a Palestinian conference in Jerusalem. All the Arab foreign ministers were present in this meeting and it gave birth to the establishment of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Its aim was to unite all expatriate Palestinians and there would be a government in exile with headquarters in Gaza. Establishing an army recruited from Palestinians refugees was also decided. Nasser’s role in this, expectedly, was none to the second (Rubin, 1994:19). He offered the PLO Egyptian instructors and the equipment that was needed. And in September 1964, at another summit in Alexandria, Nasser secured the endorsement of the PLO as the first step towards the liberation of, what he called, the Arab Palestine. His efforts to make the PLO as the sole representative of Palestinians were continued at later stages. However, as will be discussed in the next section, this ended up in an anomaly and after the 1967 war the existence of PLO had largely legitimized Cairo’s new approach in a sense that there was already an existing organization to take care of the Palestinian issue. The increasing belief was that helping the PLO would be enough and even would be seen as a help that Palestinians needed.
In short, pan-Arabism was the dominant ideology in Egypt between the Suez Canal crisis and the 1967 War. This was so strong and established itself as a key perspective in defining almost every issue. Thus, the Palestinian policy of Egypt in this period could be seen through the lens of pan-Arabism. It was the belief that pan-Arabism would eventually liberate Palestine.

The Conflict as an Issue of National Interest (1967-1979)

The Israeli victory in the 1967 War brought down the Nasser’s strident pan-Arabism and therefore marks a significant turning point in Egyptian foreign policy (Ajami, 1978/1979:355, 357). The 1967 War was mainly caused by the increasing nationalist rhetoric and propaganda on the Arab side, and the strong feeling of insecurity on the Israeli side. The war lasted less than six days and the Arabs were defeated. By the end of the war, as Fraser (2004:86) argues, Israel has been a ‘decisive military power in the Middle East’ and ‘equally Israel had changed in the process, for she was now an occupying power’.

After the war, Nasser did not proclaim the end of pan-Arabism but the sign of a significant change was obvious: a new approach to Israel. This was less obvious until Nasser’s death in 1970, but far-reaching. Before the war, Egypt had seen the Israeli issue as part of its Arab strategy. Cairo was of the opinion that pan-Arabism would eventually solve this issue and free the
Palestine. After the war, however, the question of how to handle the Israeli issue was no longer a component of the Arab strategy. It was now a problem of its own and required to be dealt specifically. Nasser was already supporting the PLO to be the internationally recognized representative of Palestinians. He increased his efforts and those efforts continued until Yasser Arafat and his PLO were recognized as the sole representative of Palestinians people by the United Nations in 1974.

In Egypt’s approach to the Palestinian issue the time between two wars with Israel, 1967 and 1973, can be considered as a transitional period. As mentioned, there was a new trend on its way, but the father of pan-Arabism –Nasser- was still in power until his death in 1970. In this transitional period, Egypt was more preoccupied to regain its own lost territory to Israel in the 1967 war than freeing Palestine (Mente, 1997:27). Quandt’s (1974:52) words summaries this period succinctly: ‘Palestinian nationalism as an idea, and the political organizations based on this sentiment, were presented with new opportunities in the aftermath of the war. (...) The old slogan that Arab unity was the road to the liberation of Palestine was reversed to read that the liberation of Palestine would be the path to Arab unity’.

To herald the changing of perspective, for example, comparison with the earlier wars, pan-Arabism played a very limited role in the 1973 war, which Cairo succeeded in calibrating its political and military goals. This time Sadat’s aim
was not to destroy Israel as proclaimed before but to win an enough victory to force Israel for concessions. While satisfying Cairo’s urgent need in legitimacy at home and abroad, the 1973 war also brought superpower involvement to the issue. After the war, Cairo had a dramatic change in its foreign policy and moved into the American camp. This did not only end up with the peace agreement with Israel later, but also satisfied urgent domestic issues by bringing financial aid from America (Karawan, 2005).

The 1967 war had left a huge imprint on the Egyptian society and politics. There had been even a divide between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ generation. The ‘old’ generation was the one who was the political and military elite of the time. The ‘new’ generation was comprised of the younger generation who grew up and politically conscious during 1960s and 1970s. For the ‘new’ generation, the 1967 defeat was not a military operation that was lost, but, according to Abdalla (2000:71), ‘rather a great psychological shock that shattered both their world view and the ideas and concepts they had been brought up on and cherished’. In terms of creating a new understanding of, perception, and perspective on global/regional issues, the 1967 war was a turning point. ‘By instigating a profound anger’, Abdalla (2000:71) argues, ‘the defeat [of 1967 war] marked a break with the past and constituted the foundation for a new and different world view, committed to absorbing the defeat on psychological and spiritual levels and bearing its consequences as well as
overcoming them by setting out *a new path for the future*’ (italics mine).

After the 1967 defeat, the confusion and frustration were the dominant theme in the country. To overcome this situation, some youth rebelled and demanded an explanation for the defeat and asked for the reconstruction of the state apparatus. The protest against President Nasser moved to streets for the first time. There were also confusion and frustration among the elites who were in shock about the devastating effects of the war. In order to settle (or to some extent satisfy their egos and society) decision-makers almost immediately embarked on reconstructing a new national and international identity for the country. At the national level, after Anwar Sadat became president in 1971, ‘a limited liberalization, political pluralism and a freeing-up of demographic immigration and travel’ were allowed in the country (Abdalla, 2000:76). At the international level, ‘a policy of regional conciliation’ was adapted and this process was enhanced by the country’s interactions with other actors in the international system especially with the United States, which ended up signing a peace treaty with Israel later.

The increasing importance of the PLO in the Palestinian-Israeli issue had also contributed implicitly in shaping Cairo’s approach in a way that it had been an unspoken legitimizing element. As mentioned in earlier sections, the PLO was established in 1964 and gradually took control of the Palestinian
affairs. The PLO was also recognized by the United Nations in 1974 as the only representative of Palestinians. Although the increasing recognition of the PLO as the only representative of Palestinians tremendously contributed to voice the Palestinian issue at the international level, it created, albeit unwittingly, a setback where the earlier key players in the issue could restrain themselves. As detailed Egypt played a decisive role in defining the Arab position to the Palestinian issue before the 1967 war, however, after the war when a new identity gradually emerged at state level, it showed its influence first on Cairo’s approach to Palestinian-Israeli issue. Cairo explicitly broke the Arab alliance of not recognizing Israel and signed the peace with Israel in 1978. The Palestinian issue has always been popular in public level in the Middle East. As part of attempts to decrease the protests and discomfort of Egyptians against Sadat’s radical decision to make peace with Israel, the mere existence of PLO as a movement to take care of the Palestinian issue could have helped Egyptians implicitly.

In short, after the 1967 war, the Palestinian issue had been subjected to national interest. It was understood that pan-Arabism had become very costly. A new trend has emerged and first defined the Palestinian issue as a first step to pan-Arabism, after the 1973 war, however, with the increasing domestic issues, national interest defined the terms of Egyptian policy to the Palestinian issue.
Cold Peace and/or ‘Impolicy’ (1979-2011)

After Camp David Accords, Egypt was regarded as a pariah in the Middle East. It is accused of breaking the alliance among Arab countries by signing a peace agreement with Israel and excluded both from the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Conference. Iraq took the lead in organizing an Arab boycott of Egypt and most Arab regimes broke off relations and the headquarters of the Arab League moved to Tunis. Realizing this fact, in the early 1980s some of the main tenets of Egyptian foreign policy appeared to be reconsidered, albeit cautiously, toward the regional states. The early years of Hosni Mobarek’s rule witnessed a rapprochement with the Palestinians and most Arab countries. During these years, Mobarek seemed to attempt to restore some type of balance in Egypt’s foreign relations. This was also helped by the Iranian Revolution in 1979 in Cairo’s favor. After the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Saudi Arabia had resorted pan-Arabism in order to prevent (and to some extent balance in regional politics) Iranian exportation of the Islamic revolution (Sheikh, 2003:64). Globally, Iran has become the subject of international isolation especially after the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Therefore, for Iran the OIC has become an arena where Iran could get legitimacy for its revolution against global exclusion from the international community (Sheikh, 2003:82).

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As mentioned above after making peace with Israel in 1978, Camp David Accord, Egypt had become the so-called pariah of the Islamic world at large, Arab world in particular. Its influence on regional politics decreased and it was even excluded from the OIC and the Arab League. Starting from this time (1978), Egypt’s role as a key state is downplayed. Therefore, even Egypt’s rejoining to the OIC at the Casablanca Summit in January 1984 was viewed as part of Saudi Arabia’s broader strategy to contain Iran, rather than Egypt’s returning to its ‘respectful and strong’ place in the OIC and the Islamic world. As a sign of this, Iran had boycotted the very summit that Egypt was re-admitted to the OIC (Sheikh, 2003:64).

Sadat’s peace deal with Israel brought Egypt closer to the United States than ever before. However, in seeking for a balance, Mubarak also tried to have a warming of relations with former Soviet bloc and non-aligned states that had been severed or neglected under his predecessor, but this endeavor had come to an end with the collapse of the Soviet Union and subsequent dramatic transformation of the international scene. This was coupled with equally dramatic changes on the regional level, resulting from, among other things, Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait and the ensuing American military intervention. However, this opened the way for Egypt playing a central role in leading the Arab side in the Gulf War against Saddam and subsequently an Egyptian peace proposal for a diplomatic
solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was accepted by Arab leaders and, it became part of the negotiations in Madrid Peace Conference.

The Arab states’ initial decision to ostracize Egypt did not shake the foundations of Cairo’s news policies in the region. Neither the assassination of Sadat in 1981 nor the tension between Israel and Egypt in 1982 over the Lebanon war did result in a change. As the time passed, Israeli-Egypt peace agreement and the American alliance have been strengthened. Naturally, Cairo’s policy to the Palestinian issue is defined within these parameters in general.

The 1980s were the tough times in the Middle East. The Iran-Iraqi war between 1980 and 1988 was the main concern of regional and international actors as a challenge to regional stability. Egypt as a key actor was ostracized from the Middle East politics as a result of its policy to Israel, and was trying to get back and establish its legitimacy again. In such an environment, the Palestinian issue was almost forgotten, since it did not occupy higher places in the global agenda. The Palestinian response to this silence came in 1987 when the first Intifada broke up. In the following years, the Palestinian issue captured the attention of the international community. With the ending of Cold War in 1990, an enthusiasm and optimist perspectives started to dominate global politics, and this was reinforced with ‘the new world order’ rhetoric. Ending of
apartheid regime in South Africa, dissolving of the USSR and announcement that human being reached at ‘the end of history’ did not only reinforce already existing optimist approach but also intellectually and practically underlined such a trend. The Madrid Peace Conference started in this positive atmosphere in 1991. It was the belief that this acute Middle Eastern problem could also be solved, optimism were high. Egypt utilized this international environment and brought itself back to Middle Eastern politics by resuming its relations with other Arab countries fully, including Syria, and relocating the headquarters of the Arab League into Cairo (Barari, 2003:88). It was also in this environment that Egypt proposed its peace initiative for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and gained the support of other Arab countries just before the Madrid Peace Conference. Madrid, and later Oslo, Process was a golden opportunity for Egypt to get back to regional politics.

Egypt’s active involvement to the Palestinian issues continued after the Madrid peace Process, albeit more cautiously. Cairo realized the need of finding a balance between its ‘firm public posture against Israel and a commitment to maintaining normal and peaceful relations with that state’ (Barari, 2003: 86). For Egypt, this has been as difficult as it created a dilemma and caution in the following years. In 2000 when the second Intifada broke up after a highly publicized and provocative visit of Ariel Sharon to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Egypt played a balancing role to
ease the tension in the region. While the public was highly critical of Israel, Cairo took a cautious and balancing position and even hosted a meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh with the attendance of Ehud Barak, Yasser Arafat, Bill Clinton and King Abdullah of Jordan in October 2000. Egypt’s involvement in ending the Intifada continued in later years, but even more cautiously. As Barari (2003:90) argues, Cairo’s main concern in formulating its policy towards the Intifada was directly related to regional stability, rather than a new approach to the Palestinian issue. Therefore, he even argued that the Intifada has ‘only underlined the limits of Cairo’s influence’ (Barari, 2003:86). In 2003 when the American invasion of Iraq started, the Palestinian issue has been again sidelined, except a US-sponsored peace process took place in Annapolis, Maryland in November 2007 without any result.

All in all, between 1979 and 2011, Egypt could not formulate a long-term approach to the Palestinian issue, except saying that its relations with Israel are based on national interest and peace-oriented (Stein, 1997). While this clearly shows Cairo’s pragmatic and national interest perspective on the issue, Egypt did not miss any opportunity through which it could play a leading role. Egypt did so in the Gulf War and with the Mobarek proposal for peace just before Madrid Peace Conference began in 1991. It should be noted here that even this approach, seizing the opportunity, was pragmatic in essence, rather than normative or
project oriented. In general, Cairo’s approach to the issue after 1979 suffered from a lack of the principled approach, in other words ‘impolicy’. Cairo takes all opportunity to express its influential role, but everybody agrees that Egypt plays a minor role.

**Tahrir Revolution and ‘New Openings’ (after 2011)**

18-days of demonstrations that toppled Mobarek in February 2011 have changed many things in the way Egypt perceives the world and herself. The change occurred not only in domestic politics but also more in regional politics. With regard to foreign policy, there have been some core changes in Egypt’s foreign policy, namely the way it operates and sees the world. This new approach is well-articulated Egypt’s transition period Foreign Minister Nabil El-Arabi (who moved to the Arab League as secretary-general after serving 4 months as foreign minister), as he announced to establish diplomatic links with Iran and open Rafah crossing in Gaza. Accordingly, the main understanding is that a new foreign policy should be drawn to represent a major regional power which wants to restore its influential role based on its capabilities and the implications of such a role.

In terms of relations with Israel, officially nothing has changed at the core; the main change though has been the aspiration of the Egyptian people for a foreign policy that befits
revolutionary Egypt an expression of the dignity of people, in other words normalizing the relations without granting any special privilege.

With regard to the Palestinian issue, Palestinian national reconciliation has been an important turning point; though not clear how long it could survive. One should note here that change occurred for all parties. Egypt was liberated from its strictly western-oriented approach to the issue; meanwhile the positions of Hamas and Fatah were transformed after the spirit of Tahrir Square swept through Gaza and Ramallah where demonstrators chanted: “The people demand an end to divisions. These are the slogans of Tahrir Square which carried a discreet threat to the rulers there, and confirmed the aspirations of the Palestinian people for freedom, democracy and ending divisions.

Hamas revised its position when the head of its Political Bureau refused Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad’s request to condemn anti-regime protests; Fatah and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas also altered their position after years of extending his hand in peace to Israel, and was repaid by humiliation and derision for being a weak president who does not have control over the Gaza Strip. Everyone changed, which made the conclusion of the Egyptian proposal possible as it stands. The parties agreed to sign and postponed many
problematic issues until the interim period although there is no guarantee they will be resolved.

The natural outcome of this climate change in the region has been re-opening the Rafah border crossing, which had been open from 2005 until Hamas took over power in Gaza in June, 2007. Egypt seems to be interested to develop a justice-based policy for Palestine-Israel, but it is likely that domestic uncertainties will prevent it to do so in a short term. Time will tell whether domestic changes will be able to lead the aspirations of people in foreign policy, especially towards Palestine, but in an early judgment it is possible to see a clear change in mentality.

Whatever the results of this change would be, what is clear is that Cairo’s approach to Palestinian issue will not be same as that of Mobarek. A new era, full of uncertainties and maybe surprises, is about to rise.

**Prospect for Future**

Undoubtedly, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is the key problem in the Middle East today. Egypt as a key country in the area

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4 It should be noted here that the naming of the conflict might also show the general trend of approaching to the issue. In 1950s, 1960s and 1970s literature, it was usually called as Arab-Israeli Conflict, however after the mid-70s; it is called as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This name change may be attributed to the PLO’s being sole representative of Palestinians and therefore being side of the conflict itself after
played the leading role in formulating the Arab policy to the issue. Egypt’s approach has changed as time passes and re-formulated and reconstructed accordingly. Between the 1930s and 1948, its policy was largely expressed itself as the center of politics in both Egypt’s domestic and foreign policies. It was strongly linked with the ending of British colonialism and full self-determination. During this time, social and religious organizations played important roles in promoting and popularizing the Palestinian issue both at societal and governmental level. From 1948 until roughly the Suez Crisis and the 1957 War with Israel, the Egyptian approach was formulated through the anti-colonial discourse and Islamic lens. This was changed when Nasser took full control of government in Egypt and as a result of his pan-Arabism; the issue was seen as an Arab cause. This lasted over a decade and, again, Cairo’s foreign policy perception was subjected to change.

After the 1967 war, it started formulating itself more in national interest terms rather than Islamic or pan-Arabism lens. After a brief transitional period between two wars of 1967 and 1973, the national interest based approach made itself more visible. In the transitional period Egypt’s approach was still

1974, but it also shows the narrowing approach that intellectual community and political leaders has taken. This is just a preliminary notice while I worked on this book and the changing of ‘discourse’ on naming the issue certainly requires further research. For a pioneering research on the naming of cities and events in the conflict see Peteet, 2005.
defined through pan-Arabism but in a different way: the liberation of Palestine would lead to pan-Arabism, not *vice versa* as claimed before. The peace agreement with Israel in 1978 and the subsequent events have resulted in Egypt’s isolation from the regional affairs until it came back at later. The Gulf War in 1991 and the Madrid Peace Conference made a turning point in Cairo’s role in the region in general and Palestinian issue in particular: Cairo is now back to regional politics again but not as powerful as it was during the Nasser era. Egypt is still struggling to get its influential place in the Middle East by trying to use each chance and opportunity to express this.

In an overall, Cairo’s foreign policy towards the Palestinian issue represents a narrowing trend of perception. During the years of 1930s and later stages, it occupied a more central place and later defined within the Islamic lens. Once it is seen in Islamic lens, it has broader implications and indicates the representation of the Islamic world. Looking at the issue from pan-Arabism in 1950s and 1960s clearly represent the narrowing vision. Before, Cairo could have claimed to represent the Islamic world in its approach to the issue, however, now it had decided to represent the Arab world, in other words an ethnicity rather than a religion. After 1970s, Egypt’s understanding of the Palestinian issue has changed again, representing a more narrowing approach. Now with the revolutions, Egypt is faced to widen its approach and develop a more multi-layered
perspective. Historically, within the wider context Cairo locates and devise policies toward the issue; the more influence she has not only in regional but also in international arena. Balancing the widening and narrowing horizons will be one of the key defining elements in Egypt’s role in the Middle East and beyond.
WHY/HOW EGYPT LOST ITS REGIONAL INFLUENCE?

Problem of Using One Dependent Variable

Any social science research is destined to fail in a way or another from the very beginning because the researcher lives in his own experiment tube. For any researcher, it is difficult to see the general picture of the river in which s/he lives and to be neutral while researching about himself/herself. Bearing this in mind, this study struggles with another issue that is important for a credible research: taking one dependent variable. In analyzing the role and influence of Egypt in the Middle East, this book considers the Palestinian-Israeli issue as a key/defining issue. Foreign policy making is composed of many involvements domestically, internationally, personally, socially and ideologically. It is the latest process of a several (or many) elements that come together to create an outcome, called foreign relations. Each of them has its own share but it does not have to be evenly shared. Departing from this point, this study considered the Palestinian issue in Egypt’s role in the Middle
East as a key issue that is regarded to having a big share, therefore requires a special attention, such as this book.

Several elements make the Palestinian issue key defining factor in Cairo’s foreign policy. First, as it is touched briefly in earlier chapters, it has a religious side in the conflict that attracts the attention of Muslims in Egypt. Palestine is also historically an Arab land; therefore, it occupies a high place at political agendas, since Egypt is regarded/considered as an influential Arab country. The second element is that unlike other Arab countries, Egypt has been part of the conflict itself through Sinai. In the 1967 war Israel captured Sinai from Egypt only returning it at later states through war in 1973 and the subsequent peace agreement. Third element that makes one to take the Palestinian issue as a key element in Egypt’s foreign relations is simple, but has implications beyond that: sharing a border with Israel. The Israel-Egypt border has always been a threat to create a possible friction and tension between the two parties. Because Egypt borders with the most resisting area of Palestine against Israel, Gaza Strip. Infiltration of Hamas and other clandestine groups from Egyptian side to Palestine has always been a concern for Israel and has been observed closely. This border has also huge importance for Egypt economically and the security of country.

Above all, Egypt’s paying special attention to the Palestinian issue comes from its ambition/belief of being the natural Arab leader. The Palestinian issue has been subjected to
competition among leadership rivals in the Arab world, especially between Egypt, Iraq (before the US invasion in 2003) and Saudi Arabia. Because at least appearing to care for the Palestinian cause will not only bring sympathy from Palestinians themselves, but most importantly from broader Arab and Islamic world, due to significance of the issue.

In a way or another, the Palestinian issue has a central place in Egypt’s foreign policy toward the Middle East historically. This does not mean that the issue alone defined Cairo’s foreign policy itself, but contributed significantly to foreign policy discourses, and forced Egyptian authorities to deal with the issue.

Why Egypt Has Little Influence in the Middle East?

A general overview of Egypt’s foreign policy in the Middle East would indicate that Cairo was the mover-and-shaker of the region in the 1950s and 1960s. This was accounted for several reasons, which will be discussed in details in the next section. Intellectual and policy leaderships were mostly dominated by Egyptian leaders in the region. Cairo championed the pan-Arabism and had a short-lived integration with Syria under the United Arab Republic between 1985-1961. Cairo used the Arab League actively as a forum to discuss the Middle Eastern issues. Cairo was the main capital for the consultation and policy formulation trips for foreign and regional leaders. Nasser was
regarded as the natural leader of the Arab world both at the public and the government levels in the region. This position both for Nasser and Egypt started to stray away after the 1967 war gradually and escalated in the mid-1970s when the then-president Sadat visited Israel and subsequently signed a peace deal in 1978.

In the Middle East, after the Iranian Revolution in 1979, to some extent Iran was excluded from regional politics. And two major powers, Iran and Iraq, were at war more than eight years between 1980 and 1988. Iraq has always wanted to be the champion of Arab leadership and in that sense Iraq was the main competitor with Egypt. In the 1980s, regional dynamics changed; there was no influential rival to Cairo. At the same time, Cairo was also excluded due to its peace agreement with Israel. Thanks to the Iranian Revolution, Cairo’s returning to both inter-Arab and the Middle Eastern political system did not take long, since it was re-admitted to organizations such as the OIC in 1984. Furthermore, at the end of the 1990s, both international and regional dynamics changed again completely: Iraq invaded Kuwait, and it followed by an American-led intervention to protect Kuwait. Iraq was no longer powerful to claim Arab leadership as the main rival of Egypt in the Middle East. Similarly, the ending of the cold war created a wide arena where Cairo could play a determining role at least in regional affairs. There were peace efforts to put an end the conflict between Israel and Palestine. In other words, there has been an arena within
which Cairo’s influence could be felt. But it did not happen. Why?

At this critical moment, an expert on Egypt’s foreign policy, Bassem Ahmed Hassan of the University of Denver asks the following questions:

‘why then, we can legitimately ask, were Egypt's policymakers caught dumb by major developments on the international and regional scenes? Why did they fail to take advantage of the decline in the fortunes of Iraq, Egypt's main competitor for Arab leadership, and of the Palestinians' decision to join the so-called peace process -- a decision that in the view of some vindicated Sadat’s separate peace -- to secure Egypt's role as the region's main power broker? Why are the makers of Egypt's foreign policy now perceived to be more helpless than ever, capable of delivering only rhetorical advice when Israel appears weaker than at any other time in two decades, and Washington’s project to transform the region has been dealt a serious blow in Iraq?’ (Hassan, Al-Ahram Weekly, 1-7 Feb 2007).

These questions, as can be assumed, are easier to ask than to answer. This book tries to answer these questions to some extent from two perspectives namely intellectual leadership and policy leadership, and its relations to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in the coming pages.

Lack of Intellectual Leadership

Egypt, by and large, is an Arab country in terms of language, history and religion, yet it has its own character that makes Egypt
different and important. Unlike other Arab lands, the Egyptian civilization is several thousand years old. The Egyptian identity *Iglimiyyah* (Egyptian nationalism) seems to come ahead of Egyptian Arab *Qawmiyyah* (pan-Arabism). However, Cairo’s involvement in Arab and the Middle Eastern affairs is inescapable. Intellectually, prior to World War I and afterwards, it led the Arab and Islamic intellectual awakening (e.g. Abu-Rabi, 1995). The Egyptian printing press, periodicals, schools, radio and cinema greatly contributed to this revival. Its impact was not immediately felt, but gradually led to an Arab cultural and political awakening in which Egypt played a leading role. Therefore, it was not surprising to see Egypt producing the Islamic revivialist intellectuals such as Muhammad Abduh, Rashed Rida and Hassan al-Banna in a time when the Islamic world was under severe attack of the West physically and intellectually in the 19th and early 20th century. To show Egypt’s intellectual importance, it was also not surprising to see arguably the most influential Islamic movement in the 20th century, the Muslim Brotherhood, originated from Egypt. Similarly, pan-Arabism as an ideology was subjected to much of discussion in Egyptian intellectual circles in late 19th and early 20th century, so that it paved the way for the realization of pan-Arabism as a defining element in policies in the hand of Nasser in the 1950s and 1960s. Egypt’s action and re-action to the issues that affects the Arab and Islamic world to same extent has been definitive in others’ positioning. For example, promoting pan-Arabism as an
ideology or signing the peace agreement with Israel for the sake of breaking the Arab solidarity was pioneering actions, creating positive and negative attitudes respectively toward Egypt from the Arab world. A renowned expert on the Middle Eastern issues Ajami (1993:89) argues this in a bit exaggerated way: ‘Egypt as state, as Arab mirror’. Throughout the history, ‘Egypt is where Arab history comes into focus. The country optimizes the possibilities and limits of Arab history’ (Ajami, 1993:17).

Egypt still occupies the intellectual center of the Arab world but the influence it has now is less than before. Why? Although to answer this question requires an extensive and long term research, several elements will be outlined here as a preliminary answer. Starting with the issue of Egypt’s still existing ‘center-ness’ but less ‘influential-ness’, one has to see the dynamics of the regional change in politics and economics. It is true that Cairo still occupies the center as printing, publishing periodicals, research centers such as Al-Ahram, the music industry and academically having one of the best universities in the area, Cairo University. Still, Egypt is the only Arab country that has one of its citizens won the Nobel Prize, and is the only country that its foreign ministers frequently held highly influential positions in global politics; for example Boutros B. Gali, Amr Moussa, Mohamed El-Baradey, Nabil El-Arabi etc.
Egypt is intellectually rich in terms of at least Islamic studies, but economically and politically poor\(^1\). Economically it does have gas and some oil, but does not have them as many other Arab countries do; politically it was regarded as one of the most repressive regimes in the world during the Mobarek era. Egypt today is the second most aid-receiving country in the Middle East from the United States after Israel. Egyptian economy is becoming dependent on foreign aid rather than using intellectual capability that it has. Historically repressive regimes have been the places where creativity could not breed and make its impact. Approximately more than $50 billion in US aid flown into Egypt since Egypt’s Camp David move in 1978. It contributed to a thorough modernization of Egyptian armed forces and supported many programs ranging from agricultural improvements to industrialization and construction (Said, 2006:6).

The role of Egypt in the politics of Arab world in particular and the Middle East in general underwent a dramatic shift between 1952 and 1967. Prior to the revolution of 1952, Egypt was not really an integral part of the Arab nationalist movement and its influence in overall regional issues was limited, although it exerted some influence through inspiration or in shaping the ideas. This was mostly the case because of domestic issues of both Egypt and other countries. They were

\(^1\) ‘Politically poor’ used here as a reference to lack of democracy, human rights and other political rights.
trying to get their independence from colonial powers and struggles were focused on domestic issues rather than international ones. However, there was an increasing degree of Egyptian influence in the Middle Eastern affairs after the 1930s to 1952 thanks to issues related to Palestine and the British support for the establishment of an Israeli state in the area. This created a high sensitivity in the society along with the already increasingly existing anti-British and anti-colonial Islamic sentiments. The major role played by the Muslim Brotherhood movement; and supporting activities to Palestinians and demonstrations against British colonialism were mainly organized by the Muslim Brotherhood too. This resulted in an unwitting influence or creating awareness of Egyptian elements in the Islamic world about the Palestinian issue, and also influenced the role, acceptability and credibility of Egypt in the Middle East issues.

As detailed, although the involvement of Egypt was on the rise in the inter-Arab politics between the 1930s until 1952, it was only in the mid-1950s that the Egyptian leaders could adopt a sustained policy of pursuing Cairo’s leadership in the region through Arab nationalism. After the 1952 revolution (most rightly after 1954 when Nasser took all control), Egypt and its leaders came to be viewed as ‘the logical and indispensable leader’ of the Arab world (Jankowski, 2002:1). This was the natural result of intellectual leadership that Egypt played through Nasser himself in formulating the policies based in pan-Arabism.
In short, Egypt underwent an identity change after the 1967 war and this change led to appraise a new identity. As Prizel (1998:14) indicates, when changes occur within a state, as in Egypt, when one government (or a president in the case of Egypt) took over from another, a state’s national identity and national interests will be redefined/ reconstructed accordingly. This formation/reconstruction of its identity, as will be outlined in coming pages, often also reshapes a state's political and economic relations and development (Cruz, 2000:277). In terms of state identity and perception, the 1967 defeat was ‘a severe blow to Arab nationalism’ (Tibi, 1990:206), which was the main dominant ideology before and contributed to the existence of the war itself. The war has changed the discourse on the Middle Eastern issues, especially the Palestinian-Israeli issue.

A state's foreign policy role, as one of its social identities, refers to policymakers’ own definitions of the general kinds of decisions, commitments, rules and actions suitable to their state, and the functions, if any, their state should perform on a continuing basis in the international system (Holsti in Le Pestre 1997:4). One of the basic objectives of any state is to define its role and have it accepted by other international actors. A state's role reflects its claim on the international system, a recognition by other actors, and a conception of its national identity. Therefore, Le Pestre (1997:5) argues that foreign policy change rests on a redefinition of a state's role. Egypt’s role changed as a result of the domestic and international changes the country was
facing after the 1967 wars. This new role definition/articulation explains its foreign policy preferences, its self-image and the image the world had of it, its expectations, its definitions of specific situations and its available options.

A change in the ideas of foreign policy shift must be strategic, not a tactical diplomatic fluctuation. It must be consistent in its direction and accompanied by significant changes in foreign relations. As Holsti (1982:2-7) argues, it also has to meet the criteria of magnitude, consistency and multidimensionality. After 1967, the departure of Egypt from the Arab policy of ‘no recognition, no negotiation, no peace’ toward Israel clearly indicates a shift that is not tactical but deeply strategic, as well as intellectual/discursive.

Egypt held the intellectual leadership in the Middle East, by large, until the mid-1970s. From the 1930s to the mid-1950s, anti-colonialism discourse along with the claim of an urgent need to revitalize the Islamic world were the main driving force intellectually that constructed the region. At this time, intellectual leadership role mostly were played by individuals such as Sayyed Qutb and Hassan al-Banna as both Islamic and anti-colonialist thinkers and by civic organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood. Influence of their ideas and intellectual leadership were even beyond the Middle East. In Africa and Asia, Islamic movements and anti-colonialist movements
spiritually benefited from the lively discussions centered in Cairo.

After Nasser became president in the mid-1950s, both intellectual and political leadership were to some extent merged. The intellectual leadership and discourse, defined through pan-Arabism at that time, had been articulated, represented and even personalized by Nasser himself. Egypt as a state was promoting an idea/discourse and defining its policies through it. This lasted until the 1967 war that was not only a blow to dominant ideology, pan-Arabism (Tibi, 1990:206), but also a defeat for Egypt’s intellectual leadership in the region. The war simply showed that pan-Arabism as a discourse and policies based on it could no longer be sustainable.

Cairo after the 1967 war had articulated/re-defined its identity and discourse on a more national interest base. This was a narrowed intellectual position in comparison to what it was before: a broader perspective either within Islamic or/and pan-Arabism. The new national interest-based discourse definition, in a sense, was a ‘voluntary’ withdrawal from the previously-held leadership position intellectually and politically. Whether this happened by the genuine intention of the Egyptian leadership or by the force of domestic circumstances is still open to debate.

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2 By writing a semi-theoretical book titled *The Philosophy of the Revolution* in 1955, President Nasser established himself as both political and intellectual leader.

3 It does not mean that before Egypt did not define its policies in terms of national interest. The difference is in articulation. Before, national interest were directly linked to general interest (e.g. Islamic or pan-Arabism) and defined within. After 1967, the definition itself has been confined within the terms of national interest.
(e.g. Karawan, 2006), but the 1967 war and the subsequent re-definition of Cairo’s discursive and policy approach to Israel in the region resulted in an immediate exclusion of Egypt.

On the one hand, Cairo still suffers, to some extent, from this new re-definition of its discursive change toward Israel, and being seen as ‘sold out Palestinians’ in the eyes of the public. On the other hand, Cairo’s radical turn to make peace with Israel created a new channel that the peace with Israel could also be an option to solve the Palestinian issue permanently. This was not even considered before, but years after the Egypt-Israel peace agreement, other players in the region seriously considered this option and some even did so. The PLO’s attendance and signing the Oslo Agreement with Israel in 1990s and several subsequent negotiations could also be seen as a corollary result of the increasing new intellectual discourse that once Cairo opened in the mid-1970s. To come closer, the attendance of many countries from the Middle East such as Syria and Saudi Arabia, who previously disdained itself even not being in the same meeting with any Israeli officials, to the Annapolis Meeting in November 2007 also shows how far Egyptian-led discourse could go.

It is interesting to note here that while Cairo’s 1970s undertaking is followed by other Arab countries in the Palestinian issue; it does not give any credibility to Egypt, or to confirm its role, as a key player in current events. Egypt still suffers and tries to get back its influential role in regional affairs,
but it is still seen as the one who committed ‘original sin’. Under this cloudy atmosphere, after the 1980s Cairo mostly has been in a defensive position rather than a pro-active one. This has become a setback in initiating new trends in the region intellectually and politically. And furthermore, the deteriorating situation within Egypt, moving to a more repressive regime day-by-day, added another dimension for limiting its role in the Middle East. This is especially true in the Palestinian case, because this case mostly related to human rights issues and economic development along with many others. The question of how Egypt can help in solving the Palestinian issue, while it is restricting its own citizens’ human and political rights at home is still occupying the minds of many in the Middle East.

**Lack of Policy Leadership on Key Issues**

In the Middle East and the international arena, general idea is that Egypt moved ‘from being a bold innovator to a stagnant backwater’ (Alterman, 2005:357). Egyptian leaders and diplomats have been invited to many major international or regional undertakings in the Middle East in last 20 years, but they are rarely seen as driving force behind any bold endeavor. Occasionally they play the key role in resolving the issues, but even those issues are not long-time oriented but short-sighted. In that sense, for example, Egypt played the mediator role in resolving the dispute between Turkey and Syria in 1998,
preventing a possible war, and led the Arab side in the Gulf War against Saddam in 1991 by contributing the second largest military contingent, 30,000 troops (Said, 2006:6). Recently, Egypt organized the first Iraqi Neighboring Countries meeting with the participants of the G-8 members, the UN and other international organizations to discuss the future of Iraq in 2004, second was held in Turkey in November 2006. This is an important contribution in bringing peace to the Middle East, but it is believed that it is not, in nature, an Egyptian-stemmed policy, rather organized by the advice of the US. Moreover, Egypt is also part of a coordinated effort of galvanizing so-called the Anti-Iranian Front consisting Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan in the Middle East, in order to contain the Shiite influence on regional politics. As Yehiav (2007:8) contends, this is too not an Egyptian-led project, but a role-playing game that led by different countries depending on time and issue. Through this and other coalitions, Egypt aims ‘to improve its status and regain influence’ in the region (Yehiav, 2007:8). In the last decade, Egypt was trying to get back to the Middle Eastern politics strongly and influentially again. These are the effort that aimed at serving to such cause.

Starting from the 1930s, Egypt played the leading role in defining the policy on the issues in the region, especially the Palestinian one, at least theoretically. This sometimes appeared within the Islamic discourse with the influence of religious organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood, or took a
concrete shape by a person in championing and defining the policy, as materialized by President Nasser himself throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Controlling policy leadership or defining policy on one issue does not imply that Egypt was the only one that defined the terms of relations or policy. However, it has implications more beyond. For example, once a state holds such a position, playing the role of policy leadership, even if that state does not involve any planning etc, the others will take into account of its position automatically, implying that such country has at least indirect influence, if not direct. Until Egypt sign the peace deal with Israel, any policy calculation toward Israel had to include Cairo’s stance. Its support was as much critical as its opposition to any policy formulated by other states. The position of pivotal middle power has some similarities with the superpower’s role in global affairs. As it is natural that any project that is formulated should seek approval or not-rejection of the superpower in global affairs, the same is true for pivotal middle power in its respective region. Egypt as a credible pivotal middle power before it ‘broke the Arab alliance’ against Israel was truly qualified for such categorization. Even for the domestic issues of Arab countries, Egypt was asked for advice or its support was sought by competing parts. The establishment of United Arab Republic between Egypt and Syria in 1958 was a result of Syrian domestic politics. And actually, to some extent, Syrians forced Nasser and Egypt for unity. For Nasser, there was
nothing left to decide but to solve the Syrian domestic *cul-de-sac* by being their president (Jankowski, 2002).

In the establishment of regional organizations, Egypt played its role as a pivotal middle power too. At the regional level, Egypt with other six Arab countries founded on March 22, 1945 the Arab League to serve Arab countries’ interests and to coordinate political, social and cultural affairs among them. Headquartered in Cairo, the Arab League was dominated mostly by Egypt in terms of personality and funding, therefore it has been subject to be ‘regional machinery’ for Egypt’s foreign policy (Hasou, 1984:176). It was used by Nasser, the champion of pan-Arabism, to legitimate his policies and argumentation and prevent other Arab states, such as Iraq to dominate over the pan-Arab leadership. The influence of Egypt over the Arab League has been eroded as the intellectual leadership of Egypt on pan-Arabism damaged. This process happened first after the 1967 war, and accelerated after the Camp David agreement by expulsion of Egypt from the League and moving headquarter to Tunis. Only after Cairo was re-admitted to the League and Arab community that headquartered has been brought back to Cairo.

Egypt's intellectual and organizational leadership was not only limited to Arab world. One of the main focuses of the Egyptian foreign policy during the 1950s and 1960s, along with pan-Arabism, was also directed to ending of the colonialism, help national liberation movements such as in Africa and
Palestine as well as working to initiate new regional and sub-regional organizations. To testify such a leadership, President Nasser along with Tito of Yugoslavia, Nehru of India, Sukarno of Indonesia, and Nkrumah of Ghana declared the founding of the Non-Alignment Movement in Bandung-Indonesia in 1955.

After Cairo shifted its foreign policy in the Palestinian issue in 1978, Cairo was no longer a capital that one must seek its advice or non-opposition. It lost its legitimacy and credibility not only in the eyes of the public but also the government circles because it was accused of something worse than anything in cultural understanding of Middle East: ‘sold out Palestinians’. The Egyptian case suggests that ‘soft power’ is as critical as military and economic power in order for a pivotal middle power to continue to exert its influence in regional affairs. As it is in the global arena, the key element of ‘soft power’ for a pivotal middle power is credibility, legitimacy and trust. This mostly defines the scope of influence in regional levels.

As Karawan (2005:326) also argues that any policy shift of Egyptian foreign policy has regional implications, showing its pivotal middle power status. Pivotal middle powers can play leading role not only in initiating a policy regionally but also by their creative ‘intellectual and entrepreneurial leadership’ (Higgott and Cooper, 1990:600), they could change the discourse on an issue. In the Arab world, Egypt had the strongest army in the 1970s along with having one third of the total Arab
population. And especially in a war with Israel, Egypt occupies a geo-strategic location. When Egypt has disengaged from, is out of, conflict, the Arab strategic options are limited. Therefore, Cairo’s shift deprived Arab actors of bargaining strength with Israel (Wurmser, 1984:65-76). One may even argue that owing to Egypt’s such a critical role in the Arab affairs and especially with regard to Israel, the Arab reaction to Egypt’s signing a peace deal with Israel was highly emotional and ‘demonizing’. This shows that if a pivotal middle power takes a radical turn in its understanding/approaching to any issue that is so sensitive and, out of expectation, to its neighbors; regional reaction initially could be bold in discourse and action but after a while they are forced to adapt or re-align themselves with the new situation that once pivotal middle power initiated.

The change in Egypt’s approach to the Palestinian issue after the 1967 war is regarded as part of its domestic reappraisal, rather than an external conflict (Karawan, 2005:332). There was an increasing strained state-society relation accelerated by economic deterioration in the country and its costly involvement of wars added other ventures. As argued, the change was launched with the same elite that took the other direction before the 1967 war, proclaiming pan-Arabism and location the Palestinian issue as part of it. However, domestic challenges that the state faced actually forced to re-consider its grand strategies and policies, because at that time, the domestic threat was more urgent than the external one. As argued elsewhere, pivotal
middle powers take initiative decisions in their understanding of any regional problem with its repercussion on other states in the region. The Egyptian case in the 1970s shows that if pivotal middle powers face an urgent domestic issue, it overshadows its own regional role/ambitious. In other words, domestic issues are so important for the behavior of the pivotal middle power that can define the scope of, or limit, its approach to any key issue in its region. Concluding on this, the domestic situation (stabilized, less-problematic or conflicting) of pivotal middle powers can be as influential as their economic and military power in their policies, projection and leadership role in their regions.

After the 1930s to the end of the 1970s, Egypt as a PMP did not only contribute defining the key policies by being the policy leader, but also shaped the discourse and identity, and constructed the regional politics/identity. With the end of the 1970s after signing the peace deal with Israel, Egypt radically shifted its foreign policy toward Palestinian issue, but this was more domestic-driven than regional one. It had regional repercussions albeit mostly negatively for Egypt. Since the Camp David Accord, the Egyptian case shows an interesting element of pivotal middle powers’ role in constructing ideas and identity. In retrospect, it is certain that Cairo brought a huge change on discourse on Israel and the Palestinian issue. What was then was unthinkable, now some states signed peace deals with Israel. This was a radical shift and an influential discourse change in the region for good, for a better or worse. This is a striking example
of Egypt’s role as acting as a PMP. However, Cairo’s radical discourse change efforts, unwittingly, negated, alienated, excluded Egypt from the Middle Eastern affairs, that cannot be explainable by pivotal middle power theory. Immediately after 1978, Egypt’s influence on regional issues was very little, if any at all. Although it has reached its balance after 1990s, its influence still lags behind as a PMP. Bearing in mind the uncertainty of when Cairo will take its ‘respectful and influential’ place in the Middle East, theoretically, one can argue following: a long term-oriented aim/role/policy of PMP in a region can seriously harm its standing in short term. How to reach a balance between long and short term aims for a PMP is the question that requires further research both theoretically and in the case of Egypt.

After the end of the Cold war, there was an optimist feeling/expectation in global politics that was intellectually declared by Fukayama (1989) that human being has reached to the ‘end of history’ in his search for the best model in the economic and political system: liberalism and democracy. In line with the global trend, there has been a serious effort to bring peace to the Middle East. Called as Oslo Process in the beginning of the 1990s, it has been so far the most serious and solution-oriented negotiations between the two main parties: the PLO and Israel. Whereas its implementation failed due to several setbacks, it was a moment for Egypt to show itself and re-gain its influence in the Middle Eastern affairs. With Saddam’s defeat in
1991, Egypt, having led in organizing the Arab side in the international coalition against Iraq, was back at the head of the Arab world. Utilizing this opportunity, in the months between the Gulf war and the Madrid peace conference in 1991, Egyptian officials laid out a plan for a comprehensive diplomatic solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Arab capitals that had never considered talking with Israel joined the process. This constructive approach of Egypt brought credibility, respect and leadership to Egypt for the first time after it signed the peace deal with Israel. This, coupled with the Gulf War, was a turning point in Egypt’s foreign relations with other the Arab countries on regional issues. Egypt played policy leadership role in both issues, but it did not continue afterwards.

Today, there is no doubt that there are two key issues in the Middle East that require urgent attention. One is the new one, and the other one goes back to decades: Iraq and the Palestinian-Israeli issue respectively. Any state who wants to play the role of policy leadership has to tackle with both. Cairo is willing to play such a role, but so far could not play leadership in defining a regional policy. Policy leadership must be based on a long-term plan and should not be reactionary. It should follow all the actions of other players, regional and international ones, and take a pro-active stance on the issues. Pivotal middle powers use active diplomacy and multilateral forums in formulating such a pro-active policy. In general, policy leadership is directly linked to the intellectual one. Since policies are stemmed from
intellectual and entrepreneurs’ leadership of PMPs in regional affairs, for Cairo it is imperative to give priority to the intellectual leadership first. In the case of the Palestinian issue, this becomes urgency, because how to bring peace to this acute conflict is still debated broadly and not all agree in one solution. An intellectual leadership played by Egypt would probably open doors for its policy leadership in the region. As a pivotal middle power, Egypt has the needed material and ‘soft’ power to do so. In the years to come, whether it will be able to do or not, depends on time and creative ability of its leadership.

**How to Bring Egypt Back to the Middle East?**

In his analysis of the possible circumstances that Egyptian foreign policy orientation might change in future, Alterman (2005:358) concludes boldly: ‘From Arab-Israeli peace issues to counter-terrorism to military readiness, any shift in Egyptian policy would force those nations [regional and international ones, MO] to rethink many aspects of their own policies in the Middle East’. Such a possibility makes Egypt as a country that needs to be observed, followed and studied. As the democratization waves, wittingly or unwittingly, hitting the coast of the Middle East, a leadership change in Egypt is a likely possibility in near future. This could also possibly pave the way for a new approach, role definition or identity of Egyptian foreign policy, positively or negatively. ‘Egypt holds the key to
the Arab world’, if Gorges’ (1995:78) argument still has some validity, a shift in Cairo’s foreign policy includes uncertainties for the Middle Eastern countries as well as global actors. Some elements of a constructivist reading of possible future Egyptian foreign policy will be outlined here.

In order to bring Egypt back to the Middle Eastern politics powerfully and influentially, the most urgent issue is to change the discourse of foreign policy. This is well articulated by Hassan (Al-Ahram Weekly, 1-7 Feb 2007) in the following lines: ‘the key component, however, to overcoming what is perceived as a crisis of Egyptian foreign policy and the decline in regional influences, is to find a new vision, or idea, that will guide relations between the various communities and states of the region, and beyond’. With regard to the nature of this new idea or vision, Hassan went on saying that ‘such a vision should not aim to entrap the people of the region in oppositional dichotomies, or regard difference as a source of threat, or reason for enmity or exclusion’ (italics are mine, MO).

In order to have such a comprehensive new vision or idea, as part of the new grand strategy, Egyptian policy toward the Palestinian issue may require some change or at least a new re-design. In the Middle East, Egypt still suffers from its loss by signing a peace agreement with Israel, at least in the eyes of public. Although, Egypt paved the way and became the example and facilitator by making possible the Israeli-PLO recognition in 1993 and the 1994 Jordan-Israel treaty (Stein, 1997); still the blamed one is Egypt. This blame is intensified by its apparent close relations with the US, mostly by being second aid receiver
from the US after Israel, and domestic consolidation of repressive one man rule. Furthermore, this perception about Egypt was also contributed by clear declarations of Egyptian leaders, saying that their relations are exclusively based on national interest, understood as if Egypt does not really pay attention to what is the situation of others in the region. As Onuf (1998:59) indicates, states and leaders create their own world and reality by their speech and word. Following this, such a constructed world also shapes others’ attitude toward and perception about the state in question. Stein (1997) argues in his research that between 1992 and 1995 pragmatism motivated Egypt’s relations with Israel and, presumably, its policy toward the Palestinian issue. President Mubarak’s following statement in an interview is explanatory: ‘if I cooperate strategically with Israel or anyone else, then it is because I have an interest’ (quoted in Stein, 1997). This understanding can be extended to whole Mobarek period.

Foreign policies today are conducted in a way that what Putnam (1988) calls as ‘double-edged diplomacy’. It is a two-way relationship between foreign policy and its domestic politics, that is, domestic developments impact upon foreign affairs and vice versa. Approaching from this perspective, Egypt also needs to include and ensure the public participation in establishing a new foreign policy discourse. This is crucial for a new and coherent vision simply because in the last decades there has been a sharp divide between the governing elite and ‘Arab
streets’ in understanding and approaching the key foreign policy issues in the Middle East. Currently, the governing elite face a huge legitimacy crisis in the eyes of its public and therefore, most of the time use harsh measures to keep itself in power. That is why democratization waves did not have any influence in the Middle Eastern countries and Egypt.

This so-called contradiction is necessary to be solved in order to create a new vision in Cairo’s foreign policy. Therefore, Hassan (Al-Ahram Weekly, 1-7 Feb 2007) argues that ‘the best means… to advocate a new vision is to practice it in domestic politics as well’. It is seen a contradiction when Egypt calls for solving regional conflicts peacefully and respect international law, while it is not followed in domestic politics. This contributes Egypt’s current role and credibility in its regional affairs negatively.

In retrospect, one can claim that Egypt’s role in regional affairs is strongly influenced by its approach to the Palestinian issue. When Cairo had defined its policy to the Palestinian issue from a broader perspective, be it Islamic or pan-Arabism, its influence on regional affairs was high. However, the more Egypt's policy to the key Middle Eastern issue is narrowed, the less Cairo could exert its influence on regional issues. Especially after 1970s, Egypt’s loss of its influence in the Middle Eastern politics could be viewed from this perspective. One should also remember here that partly it was its approach and presumably
active role in framing a peace proposal to the Palestinian issue in
the Madrid Peace Conference that brought Egypt back to the
regional politics, though not as strongly yet.

It has become a commonplace to emphasize the
importance of the Palestinian issue in the Middle Eastern
politics. As it is also shown in the case of Egypt, it is not easy for
any country who wants to play a key role to be indifferent to this
issue. If Egypt wants to come back to the Middle Eastern
politics as powerful as it was in Nasser’s period, a new re-
formulation and re-definition of its Palestinian approach is
needed. Such a process presumably could also be helpful in
efforts to bring peace and security to the region. Whether the
revolution will create a new formulation or not will be the key
defining factor in the future of Egypt’s foreign policy in post-
Mobarek era.

\[\text{Recently Turkish case also seems to confirm this. When Turkey increased its}
\text{relations with Israel after 1995, there has been almost an exclusion and isolation from}
\text{the Middle East politics. Ankara was subject to condemnation in almost every Arab}
\text{League and the OIC meetings. After realizing the importance of the Palestinian issue in}
\text{the region, in last few years, Turkey has tried to play a constructive role in finding a}
\text{solution to the Palestinian issue. At the same time, it is interesting to see the}
\text{increasing popularity of Turkey both in public and governmental circles in the Middle}
\text{East. More on Turkey’s relations with Israel and Palestine, see, among others, Walker,}
\text{2006; Yavuz, 1997; and Ozkan, 2006c.}\]

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CONCLUSION

A ‘New’ Egyptian Foreign Policy after Revolution?

Being viewed as the largest and most powerful Arab state, Egypt has always been expected to play a leading role in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Since the beginning of the conflict, the centrality of Cairo’s role has never been contested. Egypt viewed as a state without which the Arabs could neither make peace with nor wage war against Israel.

Confirming this in every war and peace with Israel, Egypt was a part. Theoretically, Egypt qualifies to be considered as a pivotal middle power. Such status would be confirmed by a thorough analysis of Egyptian foreign policy towards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict after 1930s to today. Cairo played the key role in defining the terms for making peace and war with Israel and, through which, Cairo constructed and re-constructed as the time goes the discourse on the Palestinian issue. This reconstruction process was also predicated by an identity change at home, at least toward Israel, and subsequently showed itself in foreign relations.

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In line with this, from 1930 to 1948, Cairo’s policy toward the Palestinian issue was mostly linked with gaining full independence from Britain and occupied a central place in both at Cairo’s domestic and foreign relations. From 1948 to 1957, the discourse on the issue was dominated by both societal Islamic organizations and those who had close relations with the former, and therefore Cairo’s policy was defined within the Islamic terminology. After 1957, Cairo’s Palestinian-Israeli policy was formulated through the lens of pan-Arabism. The 1967 war left a huge imprint on Egyptian society and led to reconstruction of the existing identity and discourse. This new perspective articulated in national interest terms and has become the cornerstone of Cairo’s foreign policy to the Palestinian issue until today.

Each re-construction process emanated from a discursive change first and has influenced decision-making process. Such a change in Cairo’s perspective has influenced and shaped the other countries’ policy toward the issue in the region. The reaction of those neighboring countries to a change in Cairo’s policy sometimes was easy to accept for other countries; however, sometimes it was difficult to for them to absorb in a short time, therefore, they excluded and ostracized Egypt from regional politics as happened after 1978. Notwithstanding, Egypt’s role in shaping the discourse and policies led others to follow it, wittingly or unwittingly, thus, confirming its key role in re-constructing a regional policy and discourse on Israel.
From a theoretical point of view, this study argues that first, pivotal middle power in regional politics, as superpowers do in global politics, play a leading role in defining, constructing and re-constructing the discourse in the region. This becomes so apparent and traceable in the case of key regional problems.

Second, if a pivotal middle power takes a radical turn in its discourse to any issue that is so sensitive in the region; reaction from other regional states initially could be bold in discourse and action but after a while they are forced to adapt or re-align themselves with the new situation that once pivotal middle power initiated.

Third, domestic issues are so important for the behavior of pivotal middle power that can define the scope of, or limit, its approach to any key issue in its region. Domestic stability of a pivotal middle power can be as influential as their economic and military power in their policies, projection and leadership role in their regions.

From a practical and policy orientation perspective, this study investigated the influence of Egypt’s Palestinian-Israeli policy on its regional standing and regional role. It can be argued that Cairo’s policy toward the conflict is not only very much critical for the conflict itself, but also Cairo’s overall influence in regional affairs. Whenever Cairo takes a leading role on the key regional issue, as pivotal middle powers do, its influence increased on other regional issues too. Whenever, Cairo took a
more narrowed approach, such as national interest, its credibility and influence is highly damaged. Egypt is viewed as the natural Arab leader in the region, and therefore expectations are high. Egypt, due to its weight and history, cannot afford to be sidelined from any issue, especially the Palestinian one, in the area, because it affects Egypt anyway. If Egypt wants to play a leading role in the region again, first it might start re-formulating a new discourse on the Palestinian-Israeli issue in its foreign policy. This could be very important not for finding a possible peace for the decades old conflict, but also for Egypt’s international standing.

Returning to the constructivist notion of the importance of a state's identity and its construction, it is evident that Egypt’s identity by 2007 is significantly different from that of the 1930s or the 1960s. Shaping its identity by acting and interacting in the international arena, Egypt also shaped a number of roles for itself. Some of these roles were imposed on it as the international community's expectations increased. Egypt’s pivotal middle power status is also evident as an important way to conduct its foreign relations. As Cairo realizes its own limitations in the current Middle Eastern affairs, multilateralism and creativity on Palestinian issue offers the country the opportunity to be influential in the area as it was before. It would be better if Egypt co-operate with like-minded actors on most-shared concerns, such as the Palestinian issue, in the Middle East and to work towards bringing peace to the area.

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After the revolution in February in 2011, Egypt’s new leaders will need to re-visit the fundamentalist choices that Cairo made in their foreign relations in the past, if they are serious in their efforts to regain influence and credibility in Middle Eastern affairs. An expert from a highly-credible US think thank CISS argues that ‘Egypt has a far wider array of options than is commonly admitted’ in its foreign relations, offering ‘an unusually rich range of constrains and opportunities’ (Alterman, 2005:368). The outcome of those choices and new decisions of Egypt in coming years will be as important as it is uncertain for regional and global actors. However, one thing seems clear that historically Egypt’s policy toward the Palestinian issue has been a key defining factor for Cairo’s acceptability, legitimacy and policy leadership in the Middle East. The influence of the Palestinian issue on its relations with the non-Middle Eastern countries requires further research but it is fair to say that it has an important element for ‘Arab streets’ and government circles.

As Alterman also indicates, Egypt ‘still sees its relations with Israel through an Egyptian prism’ that is based on national interest. It is also strongly linked with Cairo’s national interest-based relations with the US and being second aid receiver from the US after Israel. In the current situation, Egypt does not fully qualify as a pivotal middle power in its actions in its region, comparison to its being a full-fledged pivotal middle power after 1930s, but especially in 1960s and 1970s. While in terms of material power calculations, populations, size, strategic location,
Cairo is still a pivotal middle power, since it is sort of excluded from playing key role in regional affairs after Camp David, its actions limits its PMP status.

In terms of construction/re-construction of foreign policy Pizel (1998:14) argues that when the government and leader changes, a state identity and national interest definition will be done accordingly. This new definition might be similar to, or continuity of, its predecessor, but a new re-shape will be given. Historically, each president of Egypt has added different dimension to already existing, some being very radical in shift, some preserving the existing status quo. A new generation of leader of Egypt after revolution will certainly add new dimensions too, if s/he does not initiate a radical shift in foreign policy. While this is the case historically, for Egypt to come back to the Middle East and re-gain its influence, a discursive/identity change in foreign policy is required. The comprehensive extend and limit of such an endeavor is not the topic of this book, but by focusing on its policy on the Palestinian issue suggests that a new reconstruction of foreign policy identity towards the Palestinian issue is indispensable, if not compulsory. So long as the Palestinian issue is regarded as the key issue in the eyes of the Middle East public and elite, this in turn will continue to define the scope of influence of Egypt in the region. Egypt as a pivotal middle power needs to initiate another reconstruction effort and shift in its foreign policy if it wants to play its role as a fully-fledged pivotal middle power and leave its imprint. Unless,
there is no foreign policy reconstruction effort on the Palestinian issue, one might expect that Cairo’s standing in regional affairs will stay as it is today in near future.

With regard to future researches on the theme of this book, theoretically, the relations between the influence of PMP and its long/short term policies call for more investigation. This study contends that in the case of Egypt a long term-oriented aim/role/policy of PMP in a region can seriously harm its standing in short term. How to reach a balance between long and short term aims for a PMP is the question, which requires further research theoretically through comparative case studies. Practically, the role of Cairo’s approach to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on Cairo’s relations with other regional and global actors and institutions could add new dimensions for understanding Egypt as a pivotal middle power and its possible future inclinations in the Middle East and international politics.


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