

Reframing Egypt-Israel Relations: A Constructivist Perspective on the Nasser and Sadat Eras*

*Mısır-İsrail İlişkilerini Yeniden Çerçevelemek:
Nasır ve Sedat Dönemlerine İnşacı Bir Bakış*

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Abstract

One of the most significant consequences of the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 was the advent of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the region. Palestine, which was already home to an Arab population, became the focus of Israeli settlements, which incited hatred and anger among the Arab states in general. The perception of Israel as the primary adversary of the Arab states reached its zenith following the Suez Crisis of 1956. This event propelled Gamal Abdel Nasser to the forefront of the Arab world as a charismatic leader, thereby giving rise to the pan-Arab ideology of the late 1950s and 1960s. Nasser became the epitome of the struggle against the imperialist West and its extension, Israel, in the Middle East. However, Anwar Sadat, who succeeded Nasser, placed Egyptian interests above those of the Arab states, thereby making Egypt the first Arab country to recognise Israel as a state. Egypt's foreign policy towards Israel underwent a significant transformation, shifting from a pan-Arab nationalist stance to one that prioritised Egyptian interests. This article explores the underlying factors that shaped this political shift, drawing upon the principles of social constructivism and the concept of identity. Through an analysis of the foreign policy actions and discourse of key leaders, it posits that the Egyptian state identity evolved from Nasser to Sadat, with this transition being shaped by a complex interplay of domestic and international factors.

Keywords: Egypt, Israel, State Identity, Foreign Policy, Constructivism

Öz

1948'de İsrail Devleti'nin kurulmasının en önemli sonuçlarından biri bölgede Arap-İsrail çatışmasının ortaya çıkmasıdır. Halihazırda bir Arap topluluğunun yaşadığı Filistin, İsrail yerleşimlerinin hedefi haline gelmiş, bu da genel olarak Arap devletleri arasında nefret ve öfkeye neden olmuştur. İsrail'in Arap devletlerinin baş düşmanı olarak algılanması, Cemal Abdülnasır'ı ezilen Arap dünyasının karizmatik lideri haline getiren ve böylece 1950'lerin sonu ve 1960'ların pan-Arap ideolojisini doğuran 1956 Süveyş krizinin ardından en yüksek seviyesine ulaştı. Nasır, emperyalist Batı'ya ve onun Ortadoğu'daki uzantısı İsrail'e karşı mücadelenin simgesi haline geldi. Ancak Nasır'ın halefi Enver Sedat, Mısır'ın çıkarlarını Arap kaygılarının önüne koyarak Mısır'ı İsrail'i resmen tanıyan ilk Arap devleti haline getirdi. Böylece Mısır'ın İsrail'e yönelik dış politikası pan-Arap milliyetçiliğinden Mısır milliyetçiliğine keskin bir dönüş yaptı. Bu siyasi değişimin nasıl ve neden gerçekleştiği, kimlik kavramına odaklanarak sosyal inşacılık ilkelerine dayanan bu makalenin ana araştırma konusudur. Liderlerin dış politika davranışlarını ve söylemlerini inceleyen bu makale, Mısır devlet kimliğinin Nasır'dan Sedat'a değiştiğini ve bu değişimin iç ve uluslararası faktörlerden kaynaklandığını savunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mısır, İsrail, Devlet Kimliği, Dış Politika, İnşacılık

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Introduction

The Middle East has historically been a region characterised by a multitude of competing interests, both within and beyond its borders, resulting in a complex web of confrontations, both military and otherwise. In addition to the inherent complexities of the region, the establishment of the State of Israel on Arab soil in 1948 served to exacerbate the already tense situation. Furthermore, it also triggered intense hatred and hostility towards Israel among Arab states, with Egypt being a particularly prominent example. The Arab military forces were repeatedly defeated in confrontation with a superior enemy, supported and equipped by Western powers, particularly the United States (US). This resulted in further enmity towards Israel. Consequently, Israel became a constant item on the Arab world's foreign policy agenda, serving a variety of political purposes.

Egypt is a country of great geopolitical importance located in the MENA region (Anderson, 1987: 1-18). It is distinguished by a number of factors, including its ancient civilisation, culture, population, and geography, as well as its claim to regional leadership. It is therefore unsurprising that Egypt has been a principal driving force behind the Arab-Israeli conflict from its inception. In this regard, the establishment of Israel in close proximity had far-reaching consequences for all segments of Egyptian society, including the military and civilian populations. The 1948 confrontation with Israel resulted in the scattering of the Arab forces, accompanied by significant internal unrest within the military and widespread demonstrations on the streets. This ultimately led to the collapse of the regime in Egypt in 1952.

The Egyptian monarchy was overthrown on the basis of two key promises: firstly, that it would avenge the humiliating defeat in the war and, secondly, that it would obliterate imperialist influence in the region. This marked the beginning of Gamal Abdel Nasser's tenure as the charismatic leader of Egypt, which saw the rise of a highly influential wave of pan-Arabism. Following the 1956 Suez Crisis, Nasser was reinvigorated as the national hero of Egypt and a prominent figure in the Arab world, effectively restoring Arab pride and dignity. His tenure was characterised by the ascendance of Arab nationalism across the Arab world, which gave rise to a more profound Arab hatred of Israel. Nasser's rhetoric was characterised by a rhetoric of vigorous statements about the eradication of imperialist influence in the region.

In the midst of the Cold War, when competing ideologies were prevalent, Nasser opted to remain neutral and even spearheaded the establishment of a platform to that end, namely the Non-Alignment Movement. Conversely, Nasser fostered close ties and joint initiatives with Moscow, leading to a shift in Egypt's foreign policy towards the Soviet Union (SU). This was accompanied by a growing dependence on the SU, reflected in the rising military budgets and challenging economic circumstances. With regard to relations with Israel, the most notable event of the Nasser period was the 1967 War, which served to exacerbate existing animosity and hostility towards Israel in the wake of the Arab forces' resounding defeat.

Throughout Nasser's tenure, Egypt defined itself in opposition to Israel. It was perceived as the primary adversary of Israel and a staunch advocate for Palestinian rights. Nevertheless, transformative shifts emerged under the leadership of Muhammad Anwar

al-Sadat, his successor. While Israel remained a predominant focus of Egypt's foreign policy, Sadat adopted distinctive approaches that ultimately steered the nation towards a new trajectory, culminating in negotiations and the signing of a peace treaty with Israel in 1979.

The 1973 War represented the final military confrontation with Israel. It was, in the words of Patrick Seale (1979:191), "a war to make peace". It was a radical move by Sadat to liberate Egyptian territory under Israeli occupation by drawing the attention of the US and compelling Israel to engage in negotiations. This remarkable strategy was subsequently complemented by even more striking actions, including his assertion of willingness to travel to Israel to negotiate a peaceful resolution to the conflict and his historic address to the Israeli parliament. Sadat placed the national interests of Egypt above all else, including collective Arab dignity. In order to achieve this, he recalibrated Egypt's relationships with the two superpowers, opting to shift alliances. He was convinced that the US was capable of facilitating peace and viewed the SU as maintaining the status quo; as a result, Sadat decided to realign Egypt's foreign policy orientation.

It would be beneficial to examine how Egyptian nationalism under Sadat replaced pan-Arabism under Nasser and how this affected Egypt's foreign policy behaviour. However, this cannot be explained by the mainstream theories of International Relations (IR), namely realism and liberalism, which attribute a static identity to actors arising from the archaic international structure. In this vein, social constructivism offers an alternative perspective on the evolving Egyptian stance towards Israel. This perspective posits that such shifts in stance can be attributed to changes in the state's identity, which can be defined and redefined through interstate interactions.

There is a divergence of opinion between scholars of constructivism and proponents of mainstream theories on a number of key issues, 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 (Hopf, 1998: 172). In contrast to the mainstream perspective, constructivists do not view the international structure as a given entity. Instead, they emphasise the interactions among states, arguing that the primary structures in the system are not material but rather intersubjective. Furthermore, they contend that the identities of states and their interests are not inherent but rather a product of social construction (Wendt, 1994: 385). In an effort to elucidate and comprehend a state's conduct in global affairs, the concept of identity emerges as a pivotal element. Identity is the manner in which states categorise themselves and others as either allies or adversaries. Consequently, they ascribe a specific identity to one another through the medium of social relations (Kubalkova, 2015: 34).

Identity constitutes a crucial element in the formulation of foreign policy. Given that it is not a material fact, it can be redefined by different leaders, institutions or generations in accordance with the evolving circumstances of politics. As identity is a product of social interactions among states, it is susceptible to change, which renders it an effective instrument for elucidating the Egyptian-Israeli relations during the Nasser and Sadat periods. It is widely accepted that an individual state's identity is shaped by a complex interplay of domestic and international factors. Constructivists, for instance, emphasise

the pivotal role of state identity in influencing a state's interests and actions (Matsumura, 2008: 3).

In this vein, the objective of this article is to examine whether the shift in Egyptian foreign policy towards Israel is indicative of a change in Egypt's state identity across the specified periods. To achieve this, a comparative analysis will be conducted, encompassing the political leaders, institutions, foreign policy behaviours and political discourses of the two terms. The data obtained will then be interpreted within the theoretical framework of constructivism. In order to ascertain whether there has been a continuity or change in Egyptian state identity during the Nasser and Sadat periods, this analysis will be conducted at three levels: the individual level, the domestic level and the international level. The individual level analysis will describe the roles of the leaders, Nasser and Sadat, in defining and disseminating state identity. The domestic level analysis will seek to identify the domestic factors that influence the formation of state identity. The international level analysis will examine the external factors that contribute to this process.

Egypt's Transformation under Gamal Abdel Nasser and Anwar Sadat

From Nasser to Sadat, there was a notable shift in Egypt's foreign policy, moving away from the principles of pan-Arabism and towards a more assertive stance of Egyptian nationalism. This shift in approach ultimately led to the Egypt-Israel peace process. In its most general sense, pan-Arabism or Arab nationalism is an idea that aims to unite Arab states around a shared goal, culture and politics. The scope of this ideology is far-reaching, encompassing a range of levels of cooperation and the unification of all Arab states to create a unified Arab nation (Reiser, 1983: 218). Consequently, it is an ideology with specific practical manifestations that reached its zenith during the tenure of Nasser, who sought to assume leadership of the Arab world. Conversely, Egyptian nationalism is primarily concerned with Egypt and gives precedence to Egyptian considerations. Following the zenith of Arab nationalism, Sadat personified Egyptian nationalism, supplanting Arab concerns with his "Egypt-first" policy (Baker, 1978: 142).

The concept of identity is inherently dualistic, encompassing both the self and the other. This is particularly evident in the context of Egyptian conceptions of self, which play a pivotal role in shaping the relationship with Israel. As posited by Ewan Stein (2011: 737), the formation of the Israeli state represented a significant geopolitical shift, becoming the "other" uniting Arab states under a common objective: combating Zionism. The foreign policy agenda of the Arab states was fixed and unwavering in its opposition to the "Zionist State of Israel." Nevertheless, Egypt assumed a dominant role in its opposition to the State of Israel, serving as the primary catalyst for the 1947, 1967, and 1973 confrontations. Furthermore, Egyptian leaders explicitly expressed their opposition to the existence of Israel, despite their inability to achieve military victory against Israeli forces. The following section will examine the relevance of these perceptions of "self" and "other" to Egyptian-Israeli relations from an Egyptian perspective, focusing on the Nasser and Sadat periods.

Individual Level

As with any other state, an understanding of Egypt's foreign policy cannot be achieved without consideration of the material and non-material factors that shape it, including geography, culture and demography (Shalaby, 1992: 107). However, above all, the actions of Egypt's leaders have been a significant influence on the country's foreign policy. It can be argued that foreign policy represents the primary instrument through which political leaders engage in the definition, reproduction, and transformation of identities (Demirtaş-Coşkun, 2008: 33). In this regard, the influence of these two leaders on the identity of the state of Egypt will be examined in the following sections.

A closer examination of Nasser's personal traits is warranted, given his significant influence on Egypt's foreign policy. He was an inspiring individual and a highly influential orator. He possessed the ability to captivate his audience for extended periods, elucidating the exploitation of Egyptian resources by the West and the potential of Arab unity under Egyptian leadership to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict and usher in peace in the Middle East (Tignor, 2010: 260). He was "the man with savage sincerity," who "comes into historical being to lead his people" and who "represents the aspirations of generations before and beyond him" (Osman, 2010: 51).

Nasser's foreign policy was predicated on a set of personal beliefs, which included anti-imperialism, Arabism, leadership, and prestige (Dawisha, 1976: 125). In particular, Arab nationalism constituted the principal ideological tenet of the Nasser era. At the outset of his tenure, Nasser did not initially pursue an "Arab nationalist project." However, what was initially a socio-economic initiative gradually evolved into a "pan-Arabic historical and transformational political vision." Nasser was almost regarded as Saladin, who fought against Crusader armies (Osman, 2010: 66).

Nasser employed the instrument of propaganda through the national radio channel, the Voice of the Arabs, which once proclaimed that "what impacted one part of this nation would by definition impact the other parts". This provides an insight into Nasser's rationale for justifying his involvement in the internal affairs of other Arab states (Dawisha, 2002: 142). In a subsequent transmission, it was stated that "Egypt is in the service of the Arab nation and its struggle against Western imperialists and its lackeys in the Arab world" (Dawisha, 2002: 147).

"Sailing from Yemen, you were crying Palestine" Nasser said in his speech of 22 October 1963 to motivate his soldiers returning from Yemen (Ferris, 2012: 262), reflecting his Arabist views that focused on Israeli enmity. According to Nasser, Arab nationalism "took precedence over any other consideration, even state sovereignty since it was the primary ideological and emotional identification of every Arab" (Dawisha, 2002: 152). In this sense, it is important to emphasise Arab nationalism because "the more pan-Arab the Arab state, the more antipathy and conflict it will express toward Israel" (Dawisha, 2002: 17-18). Therefore, it can be argued that Arab nationalism influences Arab-Israeli relations and that the Nasser era is characterised by an Arab nationalist identity.

Nasser's stance on Arab unity was not merely evident in his approach to Israel; it was also manifest in his broader efforts to challenge imperialism across the region. He once asked "why should Arab efforts to oppose imperialism be dissipated when the region is one, with the same conditions, the same problems, the same future and the same enemy.

The Arabs could be potential allies in getting rid of the remaining influence of imperialism in the region” (Mansfield, 1965: 54). This statement by Nasser is a clear manifestation of his Arab nationalist thinking.

It is argued that it is political leaders who articulate the identity of a state. Moreover, political leaders instrumentally resort to state identity in order to achieve certain foreign policy goals (Demirtaş-Coşkun, 2008: 33). Similarly, Nasser used pan-Arab identity to intervene in the internal affairs of other Arab states and to demonize Israel. All of this can be revealed by examining statements, speeches, and memoirs. In this sense, Nasser’s political discourse on Israel provides important clues about his conceptions of “self” and Israel as “other.”

Nasser’s discourse against Israel was noteworthy as he defined Egypt as the main obstacle to “the Israeli project of becoming an integral part of the Middle East,” as he strongly argued that “all Arab lands belonged to the Arabs” and that “Israel was an arrow aimed at the heart of the Arab world.” According to him, there was a “civilizational and generational war between the Arabs and Israel” and “the armed struggle against Israel was valid and necessary” and also “the struggle with Israel was not a Palestinian-Israeli struggle but an Arab-Israeli struggle” (Osman, 2010: 71).

He was convinced that Israel was a “Western military base” positioned in the Middle East with the ultimate goal of creating divisions among Arab states. In this sense, Israel was considered both an “occupier of Arab Palestine” and “the strategic enemy of the nation.” Therefore, Egypt was never completely secure in the face of an Israeli state; even the existence of Israel was intolerable and against the interests of the Arab nations (Osman, 2010: 71).

Between the revolution of 1952 and the October War of 1973 -which marks the entire Nasser period and the first years of Sadat’s tenure-, Israel was considered synonymous with imperialism. An analysis of Nasser’s major speeches revealed that Israel generally did not receive many direct references -visibly less than the references of imperialism- as Israel was generally regarded as a “child of imperialism” (Dawisha, 2002: 243).

For Nasser, Israel was a “fabricated state” (dawla mulaffaqa) after all (Stein, 2011: 740). Nasser announced in a speech that “Israel today does not represent for the Egyptians, the Arabs, the Afro-Asian bloc, nor for the world’s conscience, only a military aggression toward Egypt or the Arabs, or this region of the world. Rather, it represents something else. It represents the attempt to dominate us by way of this state. Israel represents foreign pressure on the Arabs. It represents the attempt to divide the Arab forces and spread division among them, to prevent them from joining and uniting and benefiting from the fruits of their country and their land” (Nasser, 1955).

According to Nasser, Israel “stands for imperialism. It serves imperialism and its objectives of domination and exploitation. It follows that the triumph of freedom and peace in liquidating imperialism cannot occur without affecting Israel’s existence... It is one and the same battle” (Stein, 2011: 741). He further argued that Israel is “actively aggressive and expansionist” and will not stop until it has conquered most of the Arab territories (James, 2006: 9).

In defining state identity, Marc Lynch (1999: 349) presents it as a combination of leaders' perceptions, ideas, institutions and discourse. Shibley Telhami and Michael Barnett (2002: 8) describe it as "corporate and officially demarcated identity linked to the state apparatus." In his statements, Nasser consistently characterised Israel as "hostile, threatening, deceitful and aggressive." He portrayed it as "the fundamental enemy who is a manifestation of perpetual aggression." Just before the 1967 War, Nasser described Israel as "militarily boastful, deluded by false past successes and ripe for destruction by the Arab nation" (Parker, 1993: 97-99).

Regarding a settlement with Israel, Nasser was convinced that "as long as the Israelis cannot sign a peace treaty with us, Israel will not consider that it has won the war. The Zionist strategy is to force a settlement" (Parker, 1993: 135). Nasser believed that Israel would not agree to withdraw from Sinai because the main objective of their "deceitful," "cunning," "vicious," and "depraved" enemy was "expansion at the expense of Arab territory" (James, 2006:138).

With regard to the West, and the US in particular, Nasser always urged caution and was openly opposed to US involvement in regional affairs. According to Nasser, the US was "biased in favor of Israel" and was "planning to facilitate Israel's domination of the Arab area" (Farid, 1994: 58). A Soviet ambassador reported in 1967 that he "did not trust the Americans" and described them as "crooks and thieves" (James, 2006: 141).

Apart from being the result of social construction, identity not only defines an actor, but also determines how that actor must "think, feel, evaluate, and ultimately behave" (Chafetz et.al., 1998: viii). In other words, this self-defining concept has significant consequences for a state's behaviour and thus for its foreign policy. In this sense, Nasser once said that "there is no alternative to battle. Despite his losses, the enemy continues his pressure and arrogance. The enemy's friends, with the US foremost among them, continue to give him aid, thus helping him continue his aggression" (James, 2006: 144). He did not separate Israel from the US and saw it as a single and unified struggle as follows: "The struggle with Israel is not over yet. And the struggle with the Americans also is not over" (James, 2006: 130). Even his statements in the early 1970s indicated a clear hostility towards the US, "which wanted Israel to crush the peoples of the Arab nation" (James, 2006:159). The Soviet statesman Anatoly Dobrynin once said that Nasser "would not negotiate with Israel about anything, about demilitarisation, free maritime passage or security arrangements. And he would not agree to the language on peace that the US had made a condition for its endorsement of total Israeli withdrawal from Sinai" (Korn, 1992: 163-164).

According to Vendulka Kubalkova (2015: 34), it is the states that reflect each other as friends, rivals or enemies. Thus, they ascribe a certain identity to each other through social relations. Nasser never described himself as "an anti-Semite on a personal level", claiming that his "feelings of hostility towards Israel" and his "actions against it came later from only one thing: the Zionist movement, which led to the usurpation of a piece of Arab land" (Nasser, 1962). In an interview, Nasser responded to a question from David Morgan about the "problem of Israel" as follows: "The existence of Israel in our region is impossible to accept. It is not possible for us to go back on our determination to attain the full recognition of the Palestinian rights, to return a million Arab refugees to their

homes in Gaza from which they have been evacuated. Any thought of reconciliatory negotiations with the Israelis is necessarily inconsiderable. Even if they are willing to offer financial compensation of some kind, it is impossible to buy a human beings fatherland, or spirit, or basic human rights” (Nasser, 1962).

Commenting on the likelihood of a settlement with Israel, Nasser said in the same interview: “The account will be settled one day. I believe what will help achieve this is to promote the economy of the Arab World and raise the standard of living of its people, to reach this stage where we can exert pressure upon the Israelis and those who support them, until they realize the futility of their resistance” (Nasser, 1962).

Nasser’s influence on definition of the Egyptian identity and determination of foreign policy behaviour towards Israel is profound since “the evaluation of a foreign state by decision-makers is not based on what it is but their image of a state concerning its positions, capabilities and culture” (Boulding, 1956: 6) Like Nasser, Sadat left his mark on the direction of his country’s policy towards Israel and the West, which will be analysed below.

Upon the sudden death of Nasser, Sadat ascended to the Egyptian presidency. His ascension was not anticipated to be long-lasting, and he was not expected to implement significant alterations to the country’s domestic or foreign policy. This was due to the fact that he lacked the charisma and leadership qualities that were associated with Nasser (Tignor, 2010: 274). Even some observers initially derisively referred to the new President as “Nasser’s pet poodle.” However, as time passed, even his opponents were compelled to acknowledge that Sadat had left an indelible imprint on Egypt’s domestic and international standing, just as his predecessor had done (Cleveland, 2008: 416).

“No nation has a greater stake in Sadat’s survival than Israel,” writes Henry Jackson (1981: 61) to define how Sadat’s Israel policy could end Nasser’s shadow on his leadership and transform him into a remarkable name of unexpected developments. Thus, the Nasser and Sadat periods differ greatly, among other things, in their handling of the key foreign policy issue of Israel. Nasser rejected any possibility of reconciliation with Israel, while Sadat officially reached an agreement with Israel to avoid war (Stein, 2011: 745).

Nasser’s dream of Arab identity was transformed by Sadat into an “Egypt first” policy. The two leaders differed in their responses to a common problem of sovereignty. Ending British influence was Nasser’s initial objective, while Sadat’s main concern was to regain control of Egyptian territory under Israeli occupation (Shalaby, 1992:109). In order to achieve these goals, they pursued drastically different policies both domestically and internationally.

Political leaders may choose to adopt a particular identity over the others in order to respond to some international developments or to realise their particular agendas. In this sense, Anaïd Flesken (2018: 52-54) argues that political leaders significantly influence the formation and redefinition of identities that are subsequently adopted by society and constitute a shared understanding. They have the capacity to shape and reshape the public discourse on the boundaries of self and other. It is therefore important to examine the qualities of the leader, as it has been argued convincingly that it is the leaders who have the greatest impact on the foreign policy orientations of authoritarian states. Indeed,

leaders “make decisions from among different choices, plan and conduct diverse actions and utilize their knowledge to look after their goals” (Sylvan et.al., 1990: 75). In this sense, Sadat’s concept of self and other, and his personal limitations that condition such a definition, need to be illuminated. To begin with, Sadat considered himself “an Egyptian rather than an Arab”, which allowed him to sit at the negotiating table with Israel and defend his country’s interests rather than adhere to the principles of Arab unity. He once said that “it is not conceivable that the fate of my country should be dependent on the consent of other Arabs” (Dishon, 1978: 12-15). In this way he distanced himself from Nasserist Arabism.

Sadat put his country on an “Egypt first” axis, which left Arab unity in the shadow of patriotism. This adherence to Egyptian patriotism became the dominant ideology of the Sadat era. In this context, Sadat launched the 1973 War with Israel not as an extension of Arab nationalism, but of “Egyptian patriotism and domestic unity” (Dawisha, 2002: 267).

“He (Sadat) was particularly thick-skinned when it came to Arab nationalist causes,” writes Michael Barnett (1998: 197) in explaining the peace treaty with Israel. Another note accused Sadat of abandoning the “Arab cause”, to which Sadat responded by stressing “his primary responsibility to Egypt” (Dawisha, 2002: 267). Thus, “state sovereignty” and “national interests” became the basis for Sadat’s foreign policy behaviour towards Israel, signalling a change in Egyptian identity.

In attempting to explain this structural shift in foreign policy, it can be argued that Nasser’s foreign policy choices were strongly influenced by the anti-colonial movements of his time, and also by his conception of Egypt as a leader in its region. Sadat’s policy orientations, on the other hand, were essentially driven by his goal of defending the country’s national interests above all else (Shalaby, 1992: 114). Sadat prioritised Egyptian national interests over the Arab identity glorified by his precedent, which led Sadat to approach the Arab-Israeli question from a different perspective and a new way of thinking. This is relevant to Kubalkova’s argument that “what states want to do is based on how they see themselves in relation to others” (Kubalkova, 2015: 33).

Birgül Demirtaş-Coşkun (2008: 33) argues that states can choose to maintain or change their identities through interstate interactions. In this regard, foreign policy is the main tool of political leaders in defining, reproducing or transforming identities. Sadat’s main break with Nasser’s foreign policy orientations came after the 1973 War, which changed Sadat’s position towards the two superpowers. Sadat chose to end the Nasserist hostility to the West and instead to downgrade relations with the SU. The 1973 War also marks the date of the change in policy towards Israel. “No recognition, no negotiations, no peace” became “recognise Israel, negotiate with Israel and make peace with Israel”. In this way, Sadat abandoned his longstanding policy of pan-Arabism in favour of Egypt’s national interests. The last battle with Israel was launched with the goals of recovering the Egyptian territories under Israeli occupation, ending the military confrontations with Israel because of its ruinous economic burden, restoring relations with the US because of its weighted role in Israel’s policies and improving Egypt’s economy through Western capital. These goals did not include any reference to “Arab nationalism”, “Arab unity” or “Arab revolution”, which were like the “staple diet” of Nasser’s statements (Dawisha, 2002: 265).

In 1973, Egypt and Syria were engaged in a joint military campaign with the stated objective of liberating the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights. However, it is evident that Syria's primary motivation was the retrieval of Egyptian territory, as evidenced by the fact that Sadat had no intention of ceding any territory to Syria. This priority was made evident by Sadat's acceptance of the unilateral armistice with Israel, which was only revealed to Syria during the Security Council announcement of the Egyptian government's acceptance of the ceasefire (Dawisha, 2002: 266). According to Seale (1979: 261), this marked the conclusion of Egypt's pan-Arab phase and signalled a shift in Sadat's ideological orientation, which became increasingly opposed to the principles espoused by Nasser. For some, this process would culminate in Sadat's "concessions emboldening Israel, leaving the Palestinians in the lurch, and wrenching Egypt from the community of Arab states it had previously led" (Brownlee, 2011-2012: 666).

Daniel Green (2015: 33) posits that identities, in particular, emerge as a pivotal element when they undergo a transformation, giving rise to hitherto unexperienced alternatives, behaviours and preferences that have the potential to alter the course of history. Similarly, the Camp David Accords provide clear evidence of a new approach to Egyptian foreign policy towards Israel. In lieu of the erstwhile hostile stance, the government has now acknowledged the necessity to adopt a "constructive" and "correct" approach in its relations. It is argued that Nasser's "Arabism" transformed into "Egyptian nationalism" during the Sadat period. This shift in identity was a crucial factor in enabling the conclusion of a peace treaty with Israel (Stein, 2011: 739).

The Camp David Accords pushed Egypt from the "heart and centre of Arab politics" to its "extreme periphery" (Dawisha, 2002: 268). The treaty brought back "Nile Valley nationalism" as it focused more on "domestic concerns" than on "pan-Arab causes such as Palestine". In fact, Palestine was the main issue in the Arab-Israeli conflict, but it was completely ignored in the treaty. Above all, the peace treaty was said to damage the Palestinians' "negotiating stance" (Dawisha, 2002: 195). Sadat's foreign minister, Ismail Fahmi, even accused him of being "double-faced," arguing that he was publicly supporting the Palestinians while in fact "sending different messages" to Israel (Abadi, 2019: 9).

The foreign policy behaviours of agents cannot be defined as "routinized social practices." Rather, they are "non-routine actions designed to effect or deal with change." Furthermore, foreign policy encompasses deliberate and premeditated actions based on "conscious decision making designed to achieve a specific goal which may well be a change from the status quo" (Flockhart, 2016: 90). Similarly, the October War was a "war to make peace," a strategy designed to alter the status quo in a profoundly historic manner.

As has been previously argued, it is political leaders who define a state's identity. This part of the article will analyse Sadat's discourse towards Israel by examining his speeches and statements. The speeches will be presented in chronological order, which is essential for demonstrating the evolution of Sadat's discourse on the subject of Israel and the US.

In the initial years of his tenure, Sadat espoused a rhetoric similar to that of Nasser, which subsequently underwent a transformation. To illustrate, in a speech delivered at the Egyptian Assembly in 1972, Sadat attributed the displacement of Palestinians to Israel's actions, which he characterised as "genocide and destitution." He also accused the US of

supplying Israel with resources. Furthermore, he posited that the US would be unable to impose upon the Arab people the notion of a *fait accompli* of peace. He further asserted that “We will not cede one inch of Arab land. There will be no negotiations with Israel. There will not be in Egypt and we will not allow in the Arab land anybody who would relinquish the Palestinian people’s right.” Moreover, Sadat characterised Israel as “a tool of imperialism,” a term previously employed by Nasser. This rhetoric does not bode well for the prospect of a settlement, as it positions Israel as an adversary (Sadat, 1972).

In his statement of 16 October 1973, Sadat (1973: 90-96) modified his previous stance and asserted that “when great nations confront major challenges, they are capable of setting their priorities with the utmost clarity”. He discussed the concept of “peace based on justice,” asserting that Egypt is “fighting for the sake of peace” and referred to Israel as the “Zionist state.” Furthermore, he asserted that they are not “adventurers in war” but “seekers of peace,” and that they “want the policy of detente to succeed and be fostered.” Israel is depicted as an adversary, whereas numerous references are made to the “Arab nation.” In his statement, Sadat expressed his willingness to attend an international peace conference on the condition that Israel would retreat to the lines held prior to the 1967 War.

In contrast to the previous hostile stance towards the US due to its forthright support for Israel, President Sadat welcomed President Nixon to Cairo on June 12, 1974. Nixon described this meeting as a “turning point” in bilateral relations, contrasting it with the previous period, which he characterised as “a period of misunderstanding and non-cooperation” (Nixon, 1974: 173). In a reversal of his previous stance, Sadat returned to the “pre-Nasser era,” concluding that Egypt’s “national interests could be best served under American hegemony” (Seale, 1979: 191).

Sitting down at the negotiating table with Israel was regarded as “inconsiderable” by Nasser, but just 13 years later, in 1975, Sadat told the press that “we stand at a turning point of the Arab-Israeli conflict. For the first time in 26 years, it is possible to achieve peace in the area. I quite agree with Dr. Kissinger that the position of Egypt and Israel can be reconciled” (Sawant, 1979: 29). Towards the end of the same year, Sadat expressed his commitment “to reach a final and just peace settlement by means of negotiations” (Interim Agreement between Israel and Egypt, 1975).

In support of his *infitah* policy, Sadat (1975a) delivered a speech to the Economic Club of New York on 30 October 1975, in which he sought to attract foreign investment to his country as long as it was aimed at “mutual benefit and not exploitation”. This was also a departure from the foreign policy of Nasser, who had distanced his country from the West.

In his speech to Egyptian nationals in Washington in 1975, Sadat (1975b) stated that his visit to the US had “realised a balance with the big powers and put an end to the attitude of traditional friendship and traditional enmity, and hence Egypt’s national interests have become the foremost consideration”. This focus on national interest can be seen as a harbinger of the Egyptian nationalism that Sadat would embrace throughout his presidency. On 7 November 1975, Sadat (1975c) met with British businessmen to declare his open-door policy and invite foreign capital to his country. This signalled a change in the previous identification of Britain with imperialism.

State identity has its roots in political leaders and certain state institutions and plays a decisive role in conditioning foreign policy practices through which it will show friendship, hostility or rivalry towards other states. Therefore, the redefinition of state identity basically means the redefinition of relations with other actors as friends, enemies or rivals (Altorafi, 2012:52). In one of his speeches in 1975 (1975d), Sadat said that “when I went to America and spoke before the Congress after the October War, I was addressing them as an equal, as a friend but not as an ally” and he implied his “willingness to negotiate with the US despite ideological differences”. Thus, Sadat described the US as a friend, which is a redefinition of self and the other.

At a meeting with Arab and African ambassadors, Sadat declared: “we do not have traditions of friendship nor enmity with anyone. We side with our interests, and we can never live in isolation from the world.” Sadat (1975e) went on to explain how he “used” the US “to advance the peace process”. In doing so, Sadat turned his back on the former enmity that had been vigorously maintained during the Nasser period.

In his address to the assembly in 1976, Sadat (1976a), referring to a Nasserist policy, declared that Egypt had “got rid of the categorizations which separated the Arab states, and which wasted much of the Arab and national effort in internal and secondary fights which could only benefit the enemy. When I say categorizations, I mean labels such as reactionary, progressive and the likes”. This was Nasser’s discourse for intervening in the other Arab states and supporting the revolutionary movements there. Sadat made it clear that he would not pursue such a foreign policy and would instead focus on the interests of his own country.

In his statements, Sadat (1976b) began to emphasise the benefits of ending the war with Israel, telling the German Foreign Policy Society in 1976 that Egypt wanted to “put an end to human suffering and misery” and “relieve the burden of defence budgets and military expenditures”. In terms of conflict resolution, scholars believe that identity changes of the groups involved would eventually strengthen peace processes and become a shortcut to reconciliation (Rumelili and Todd, 2018: 4).

In a statement released on 11 November 1976, Sadat (1976c) called on the US to “establish a just peace in the area and to set up new Arab-American relations.” During a visit to Ismailia in the same year, he (1976d) stated that “1977 shall be the year for exerting our utmost for the settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.” In his speech of 9 November 1977, he (1977a) asserted that he was indifferent to the procedural methods that Israel might demand in order to proceed to the Geneva negotiations. He further stated that he was even prepared to meet with Israeli representatives in the Knesset to discuss the matter.

On 20 November 1977, Sadat (1977b) delivered his historic speech in the Israeli Knesset, calling for “peace and a lasting, fair settlement”. His declaration that he could visit Jerusalem was a major challenge to a deep-rooted Arab taboo and even included tacit recognition of the Israeli state. In his address to the Knesset, Sadat called for “a comprehensive peace with total Israeli withdrawal from Arab lands and the recovery of the Palestinians’ rights, including their right to set up an independent state” (Brownlee, 2011-2012: 653). In his speech to the Knesset, he “expressly recognized Israel’s right to exist in West Asia.” Sadat further added that “Egypt would accept all international

guarantees that you can imagine and from whomever.” Before presenting his ‘five-point formula’, he asked the Israeli parliament to stop the desire for conquest and not to use force in its relations with the Arabs (Sawant, 1979: 36). On 8 February 1978, as he left the US, President Sadat (1978) promised not “to fail” the American people and referred to US President Carter as his “friend”.

In conclusion, state identity is about drawing boundaries and labelling others as friends or enemies, and therefore this concept is a very important tool for describing the nature of relations between states. By abandoning the Arab nationalist identity of the previous era and adopting a new Egyptian nationalist identity, Sadat was able to sit at the negotiating table with Israel and reach a settlement that ended in a peace treaty that was unimaginable only a decade ago.

Domestic Level

The constructivist perspective posits that agents shape their identities and make them known through their policy choices. Moreover, agents are inclined to define their identities and interests in accordance with their domestic or external circumstances (Demirtaş-Coşkun, 2005: 190). It is therefore crucial to gain an understanding of the internal and international environment in order to conduct a more robust analysis. This section of the article will examine the internal indicators that suggest the existence of a specific identity, initially Arab nationalism and subsequently Egyptian nationalism in this instance, and the domestic factors that influence such a definition.

At the domestic level, the capital sign of Arab nationalism is evidenced by the adoption of the Constitution of 1956 and the Provisional Constitution of the United Arab Republic of 1958. The Constitution of 1956 defines Egypt as “an independent Arab state that is in its essence sovereign, and it is a democratic republic, and the people of Egypt are a part of the Arab nation” (Sivak-Reid, 2016: 45). Similarly, the Provisional Constitution of the United Arab Republic (1958) resulted in a change of the state’s name. Egypt continued to use the name of the United Arab Republic until 1971. The 1956 Constitution defined Egypt as an Arab country, which subsequently influenced the country’s national position in the following years. This definition associated the Egyptian identity with a specific ethnicity, following the long-term imperial presence in the country (Alsayyad, 2013: 238). The official use of the term “Arab” in the constitution serves as a crucial indicator of the dominant ideology of Arab nationalism during the 1960s. Furthermore, Nasser employed Islam as a unifying force within the Arab world, as evidenced by the 1956 Constitution’s designation of Islam as the state religion. Nevertheless, Nasser did not invoke Islam in relation to Israel. In this sense, his struggle against Israel was essentially framed in terms of a “theft of land” rather than any religious competition (Hatina, 2007, p. 100).

Another domestic component of the state identity of the Nasserist era was an “Arab version of socialism” (Hatina, 2007: 70), which served to bind Egypt and the SU closer together despite the considerable differences in their respective ideologies. However, as this article is concerned with the role of Egyptian state identity in Egyptian-Israeli relations, and as this component did not exert any significant influence on their bilateral relations, the socialist dimension of Egyptian identity will be excluded from consideration. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the United Egyptian Communist Party

has made some statements that shed light on its understanding of Israel. In a report published by the Party in 1955, it was asserted that “American imperialism has made Israel its spearhead in its Middle Eastern policy directed against Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Saudi Arabia- a springboard for extending its influence and domination over the economy and politics of the Arab countries” (Beinin, 1990: 170).

In the following year, the Party published a report in which it was stated that “imperialism is the principal enemy.” The regime’s newspaper, *al-Misa*, described Israel as both an “imperialist base” and a “tool against the Arab liberation movement.” The Israeli attack on the Suez was primarily aimed to “break the Arab front and turn the attention of the Arabs from the direct battle with imperialism to an indirect battle with its stepdaughter (rabiba) Israel” (Stein, 2011: 740).

The media, which had a domestic base but international repercussions, referred to Israel as an “illegitimate entity” and accused it of being “behind every ill that befell the Arab world” (Dawisha, 2002: 242). Consequently, Israel was regarded as the “perceived common enemy of all Arab states, be they monarchies or republics, traditional or revolutionary” (Dawisha, 1976: 43). The state’s control of the media contributed to the consolidation of Nasser’s position as the emerging leader of the Arab world. For instance, the radio programme *The Voice of Arabs* played a pivotal role in popularising Nasser and disseminating his impassioned orations across the entirety of the Arab region, from “the Ocean to the Gulf.” Furthermore, the film and music industries were employed as a means of lauding and glorifying Nasser’s pan-Arabic perspectives (Osman, 2010: 66).

The most notable domestic factor that precipitated the ascendance of Arab nationalism in Nasser’s Egypt was the nationalisation of the Suez Canal. This subsequently evolved into an international issue following the tripartite aggression. The unexpected conclusion of the crisis marked a pivotal moment in the ascendance of Egypt-led Arab nationalism, thereby reinvigorating Nasser’s legacy as a leader who “restored the dignity of the Arab masses” (Mansfield, 1973: 675).

The poor economic situation in Egypt and the prevalence of poverty were significant contributing factors to the consolidation of Arab nationalist ideology. Egypt was expected to be able to sustain itself, particularly given the significance of the Suez Canal. However, the country’s resources had long been exploited by Britain and Western imperialism, a phenomenon that was pervasive throughout the Middle East. The shared fate of the Arab states may have contributed to the intensification of Arabist nationalist sentiments among the Egyptian populace, fostering a sense of solidarity and opposition towards a perceived common adversary. As Nasser asserted, “Arab unity was the only weapon available to fight imperialism in the Middle East” (Jillani, 1991: 79).

Nasser’s tenure is characterised by numerous socio-economic reforms, including those pertaining to the field of education. The implementation of free primary and university education served to enhance the country’s literacy and intellectual capacity (Tignor, 2010: 270). This resulted in a heightened level of awareness among the citizenry, enabling them to comprehend the ramifications of colonialism on their homeland. One might posit that such a national consciousness served to exacerbate enmity towards the West and reinforce ties with other Arab states that had similarly suffered from similar oppression.

Conversely, the tenure of Sadat was shaped by domestic factors that contributed to the rise of Egyptian nationalism. With regard to the domestic developments of the period that could be related to a new identity formation, the name of Egypt was changed from the United Arab Republic to the Arab Republic of Egypt. Consequently, the official designation of the state retained the term “Arab” but omitted the word “United”, which may be perceived as a gesture of distancing from pan-Arab ideologies. Despite Sadat’s discontinuation of the Arab nationalist identity, there was a notable increase in the prominence of Islamic identity in Egypt during the 1970s. In particular, Sadat sought to exploit Islamism and Islamists as a means of suppressing those who adhered to Nasserism and leftism. Consequently, Sadat became known as the “believer president”. In this context, the 1971 Constitution established Sharia as a “source of legislation,” which was subsequently designated as the “principal source” in 1980 (Tignor 2010: 44-45). Despite the growth of Islamic influence, it is not possible to assert that Egypt adopted an Islamic identity that would have had implications for its relations with Israel.

From Nasser to Sadat, there was a discernible shift in identity that paved the way for the establishment of a peace treaty with Israel. In this context, a number of socioeconomic factors contributed to the necessity of such a rapprochement. Firstly, negotiations were required in order to safeguard the regime from internal threats to its own stability. Exhausted from the perception of “unwinnable wars,” Egypt required a prolonged period of “retrenchment,” which resulted in a sense of emotional distance from Arab grievances. This represented a departure from the Egyptian foreign policy pursued from the end of the Second World War onwards, which had been characterised by a desire for dominance over Arab countries (Seale, 1979: 192).

Sadat had initiated the Infitah policy with the objective of improving the Egyptian economy, which was experiencing difficulties. However, the Infitah policy did not yield the anticipated results. Consequently, Sadat was convinced that he had to relieve the economic burden created by military expenditures and revive the war-torn finances of the country. Consequently, this radical move by Sadat gained some support from economically devastated Egyptians (Brownlee, 2011-2012: 653), and he was convinced that Egypt’s prosperity depended on it.

In conclusion, the war-torn economy of the country, the pressing necessity to advance socio-economic development by reducing military expenditure and securing US assistance, and the persistently declining confidence of the Egyptian populace in the regime were among the principal domestic factors influencing the redefinition of the state identity.

International Level

In accordance with constructivist theory, the international environment also serves to condition and shape a state's identity. As Martha Finnemore (1996: 128) observes, “The fact that we live in an international society means that what we want and, in some ways, who we are shaped by the social norms, rules, understandings, and relationships we have with others”. This is an important consideration in understanding the impact of external factors on state identity. Accordingly, this section of the article will concentrate on the international context of the pertinent periods in order to ascertain its influence on the formulation of Egyptian identity.

In the context of the Nasser period, the initiation of the Non-Alignment Movement under the leadership of Egypt and the foundation of the United Arab Republic represent noteworthy instances of Arab nationalism in the international arena. In the 1950s, Nasser declined an alliance proposal from US President Dulles, asserting that the defence of the region should originate from within the region itself, without the involvement of external actors (Dawisha, 2002: 161).

From the outset, the new regime was not wholly averse to the idea of maintaining normal relations with Israel. However, following 1955, there was a shift in political discourse, with the term “Zionist entity” becoming more prevalent than “State of Israel”. This new orientation was further intensified when the US was unable to provide the requisite aid and particularly when Israel joined forces with Britain and France to attack the Suez Canal. Subsequently, Israel was no longer regarded as a “sovereign actor,” but rather as a “hive of imperialism” (Stein, 2011: 740).

The 1960s saw the highest level of Egyptian enmity towards Israel since the time of the Arab nationalism doctrine of Nasser, which aimed to end the Western presence in the region, settle the Palestinian issue and topple the Israeli state. Furthermore, the 1967 War intensified this hostility. In the aftermath of the 1967 War, which resulted in a humiliating defeat for Arab forces, Arab leaders convened in Sudan and they decided “not to negotiate with Israel, nor to recognize or make peace with it” (Abadi, 2019: 6).

The definition of identity is significantly influenced by international developments. On occasion, international structures serve as a catalyst for local transformations. To illustrate, imperialism prompted discussions of self-determination. In the case of Egypt, the US’s containment policy led to the rise of Arab nationalism during the Nasser era, which reached its zenith with the Baghdad Pact (Telhami and Barnett, 2002: 12-13). It is crucial to consider the East-West struggle during the Cold War and its impact on the perception of the Middle East by the superpowers in order to gain a deeper understanding of the motivations behind the actions of both Nasser and Sadat. To illustrate, Nasser’s era was a period during which Third World countries were striving for national independence under the leadership of prominent figures such as Nehru from India, Nkrumah from Ghana, and Lumumba from Congo. These developments also contributed to the emergence of pan-Arabism.

Following the US’s decision to withdraw its financial support for the construction of the Aswan Dam and to cease supplying military equipment to Egypt, the latter turned to the SU for assistance. The competition between Washington and Moscow to expand their influence in various regions of the globe provided Nasser with an alternative financier and supplier, which effectively served to distance Nasser from the West and approach the SU, thus influencing the formation of Egypt’s state identity.

The weak position of other regional states also contributed to the ascendance of Nasser as an unparalleled figure. Additionally, revisionist movements were present in Syria and Iraq, while Lebanon was engaged in an ongoing struggle with sectarian tensions. The situation in other countries was similarly unsatisfactory. The external situation had an impact on the Arab nationalist identity of Egypt during Nasser’s tenure, influencing the development of Egyptian foreign policy.

Kuniko Ashizawa (2008: 571) posits that state identity engenders a “pro attitude toward a certain kind of action,” which in turn informs a particular foreign policy. In the case of Arab nationalism during the Nasser era, Egypt did not prioritise its own national interests; instead, it gave precedence to the interests of the Arab nation, which placed the concept of a “transnational Arab nation” above the boundaries of the nation-state (Telhami and Barnett, 2002: 17). Without consideration of this concept of identity, it would be impossible to comprehend the rationale behind Egypt’s involvement in Yemen and its union with Syria. Conversely, it is unlikely that Egypt would have been able to reach a peaceful settlement with Israel had it adopted an Arab nationalist identity. In this way, identity becomes a significant factor in determining interests. In the case of pan-Arabism, for example, it has been observed to influence “inter-Arab and Arab-Israeli dynamics” (Telhami and Barnett, 2002: 17-18).

Conversely, Sadat’s tenure occurred concurrently with the *détente* between the US and the SU. This context partially explains Moscow’s reluctance to endorse Egypt’s confrontations with Israel. Egypt’s reliance on the SU was significant, yet the lack of support during a potential military operation further estranged Sadat from the SU and drew Egypt closer to the US, which had a vested interest in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

In addition to its relations with the superpowers, Saudi Arabia played a significant role in Sadat’s efforts to achieve a settlement. Indeed, in their pursuit of peace, the three states - Egypt, Israel and the US- each pursued their own geopolitical agendas, seeking to assert their influence and gain a strategic advantage in the region. From the perspective of Egypt, the peace treaty can be viewed as a form of rebellion against the status quo imposed upon it by oil-rich states. In the context of Egypt’s historical challenges, including the dissolution of the UAR, the Yemen War, and the 1967 War, Saudi Arabia emerged as a dominant regional power. It was challenging for Egypt to accept the secondary position it was forced into, particularly given its demographic structure, industrial infrastructure and significant role in “intellectual, cultural and Islamic achievement” (Seale, 1979:192).

Sadat sought to reverse this “unnatural state of affairs,” as he believed it was the right of the Egyptians to lead the Arab world, given their role as a crucial mediator in the region. Without Egypt, he argued, there could be no peace, as their involvement was essential for maintaining stability in the region. Consequently, Sadat’s visits to Jerusalem, Camp David and Washington were not, as has been previously asserted, an act of “isolationism” from the Arab world. Rather, they were an expression of Egypt’s desire to reassert its leadership position in the region (Seale, 1979: 193).

From the perspective of the US, its involvement in the peace efforts of Sadat was driven by the alignment of its national interests with the pursuit of a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Primarily, the US sought to conclude costly and uncertain military conflicts, prevent the SU from gaining influence in the region, guarantee access to Middle Eastern oil, and, most crucially, guarantee the security of Israel, which had consistently been a priority in its foreign policy (Seale, 1979: 189). In this context, the 1973 oil crisis is of particular significance. The Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) initiated an oil embargo on Western countries in response to US support for Israel. This resulted in unprecedented chaos, prompting the US to take action to prevent a similar scenario from occurring in the future. These developments prompted the US to become

involved in the peace process, which was accepted by Sadat. According to Mohamed H. Heikal (1978: 725), Kissinger is reported to have told Sadat that while the Soviets could provide arms, which would lead to war, the US could only offer peace through the return of occupied territories.

Conclusion

The Arab-Israeli conflict is a historical issue that encompasses a vast geographical area and involves a significant number of states in the Middle East region. For an extended period, Israel was regarded as a foreign entity by Arab states. Egypt, in particular, maintained a prominent role for Israel in its foreign policy, engaging in every confrontation with Israel and serving as the primary source of hostility towards it. Despite the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict, Egypt's stance towards Israel underwent a significant transformation over the twenty-five-year period between Nasser and Sadat.

The objective of this article was to present a constructivist interpretation of the relationship between Egypt and Israel, with a particular focus on the evolution of state identity. To this end, the article compares and contrasts the approaches of Nasser and Sadat. The individual-level analysis delineated the roles of the leaders, Nasser and Sadat, in defining and disseminating state identity. In the context of social constructivism, the conduct of foreign policy is understood to be shaped by the distinctive identity of the state in question. A discernible shift in Egyptian state identity from pan-Arab nationalism to Egyptian nationalism is observable when the eras of Nasser and Sadat are compared. Egyptian state, under the leadership of Nasser, underwent a significant transformation. Initially, it espoused a pan-Arab and socialist ideology. However, over time, it became increasingly aligned with Western interests and demonstrated a growing inclination towards liberalism. A change in a state's identity will result in a corresponding change in its foreign policy behaviour and, consequently, in its interstate relations. Consequently, the relationship between Egypt and Israel underwent a transformation in accordance with the redefinition of state identity. While Israel was perceived as Egypt's primary adversary and even the legitimacy of its existence was called into question, Sadat initially recognised the state of Israel and subsequently signed a peace treaty that brought an end to the military confrontations that had characterised the region for decades.

An analysis of Egypt's state identity must consider both internal and external developments. Domestic factors have also contributed to this transformation of Egyptian national identity. These include socio-economic unrest, largely attributable to an underdeveloped and conflict-ravaged economy, as well as a decline in confidence in the regime and an urgent necessity to revitalise the country's image. With regard to international factors, developments at the regional and international levels gave rise to a transformation in Egyptian state identity. Consequently, the winds of change began to blow, resulting in the decline of Arab nationalism and the ascendance of Egyptian nationalism in Egypt.

In conclusion, this article posits that Egypt's state identity has exerted a significant influence on its relations with Israel, particularly during the Nasser and Sadat eras. A shift in Egyptian state identity has occurred as a consequence of alterations in the political landscape and interactions between states. Ultimately, shifts in state identity are

contingent upon the personality of the leader, as well as domestic developments and international factors.

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