

From Cairo to Tel Aviv: Nasser's differential accumulation of power and its impact on the relations between Egypt and Israel

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Resumen

Nasser y el impacto que sus políticas han tenido en la región de Oriente Medio han preocupado a muchos autores y representa un fenómeno bien conocido en las Relaciones Internacionales. El presente artículo analiza la política exterior egipcia hacia Israel durante el periodo 1952-1970 bajo un prisma diferente, el de la "sociología del poder". Nuestro objetivo es demostrar que la política exterior del régimen naserista hacia Tel Aviv no estuvo guiada por el "interés nacional" o la causa pan-arabista, sino más bien fue el resultado del interés de los principales actores por aumentar su poder *vis-à-vis* sus competidores internos y externos. Para confirmar la viabilidad de nuestra hipótesis, reexaminamos la historia política de Egipto durante este periodo, teniendo en cuenta las dinámicas internas de Egipto, así como el contexto internacional.

Abstract

Nasser and the impact his policies have had on the Middle East region have concerned many authors and represent a well known 'phenomenon' in International Relations. The present article analyses the Egyptian foreign policy towards Israel during the period 1952-1970 under a different prism, that of the 'sociology of power'. Our aim is to demonstrate that the foreign policy of the Nasserist regime towards Tel Aviv was not guided by a 'national interest' or the pan-Arab cause, but rather was the result of the main actors' interest in increasing their power capabilities *vis-à-vis* their internal and external competitors. In order to confirm the validity of our assumption, we re-examine the Egyptian political history of this period, taking into account Egypt's internal dynamics, as well as the international context they were in during this period.

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Introduction

Nasser and his policies' impact on a regional sphere have concerned many authors and represent a well known 'phenomenon' in International Relations. The aim of this article is to analyse the Egyptian foreign policy towards Israel during the period 1952-1970 under a different prism, this of the 'sociology of power', where the actors, being exclusively physical persons, act under the rule of the differential accumulation¹ of power. The term differential, according to F. Izquierdo (2008: 52), refers to the main interest of the agents, which is not an absolute maximisation or optimisation of their power *per se*, but the increase of their power capacities in comparison to the power of their competitors, meaning the ensemble of the agents. The agents, either directly or indirectly through coalitions, intend to control different resources of power, such as institutions, capital, ideology, and information, in order to increase further their power capabilities *vis-à-vis* their competitors, rivals or allies.

The state is conceived here as a resource of power in the disposal of those who can compete for its control. Consequently, the national interest represents the cover, under which the actors manage to extract popular concession and support in order to further their interests. Therefore the foreign policies, as well as the domestic ones, are the result of the actors' efforts to expand their control over different resources of power, increasing in this way the difference in power capabilities that separates them from their competitors.

The Palestinian question has been an important one for all leaders of the region. Each one has been using this matter in order to expand his influence and territory without showing any interest for the creation of a Palestinian state that would deprive them of the accomplishment of their inspirations. Thus, 'Palestina y el conflicto árabe-israelí se convirtieron en el núcleo de las relaciones interárabes y del mundo árabe hacia el exterior' (IZQUIERDO, F., 2005: 60). At the same time, the Palestinian question has served, and is still serving, as means to disorientate the population from the internal problems².

In the case of Egypt, the geographical proximity with Palestine and Israel inevitably established the relations with the Jewish state in one of the priorities of the Egyptian agenda. Representing one of the major armies in the region and having experienced a leading role in the region of Middle East, Cairo had an active role in the Palestinian question. Consequently, the bilateral relations between Egypt and Israel have been important for each Egyptian regime³. During the period 1952-1970,

¹ The term differential accumulation is used by J. Nitzan and S. Bichler (2002) in order to define the process of capital accumulation "Now, whereas capitalist power is exerted over society, it is measured relative to the power of other owners. [...]In short, the real issue is not absolute accumulation, but differential accumulation. [...]To accumulate differentially is to increase your share of total profit and capitalisation. And to increase your distributive share of these magnitudes is to increase your relative power to shape the process of social change. The source of such power is the ability of owners to strategically limit, or 'sabotage' the process of social reproduction. [...]"(NITZAN, J. et alii., 2002: 36-37).

² Regarding the use of the Palestinian question by the different Arab leaders see Álvarez-Ossorio (1999).

³ The term *regime* here refers to the alliances formed between different elites controlling the Egyptian state.

the international and regional conjuncture, as well as the internal situation of the two countries, marked the relations between Cairo and Tel Aviv and determined the policies followed.

In what follows we are going to analyse the policies towards Israel adopted by the Nasserist regime, in order to demonstrate how these served the main interest of the actors, thus the differential accumulation of power.

Egypt's new regime: Nasser and the Free Officers

On the 23rd of July 1952, a group of officers staged a bloodless military coup that overthrew King Farouk. The introduction of the Free Officers, representing only the 6 % of the army and with the highest rank that of the colonel (BEATTIE, J.B., 1994: 67), and the establishment of their rule altered the Egyptian socio-political scene⁴.

One of Free Officers' priorities was the consolidation of their power and influence inside the army. The consolidation in their primary source of power was fundamental, as it would enable them to negotiate with other elites and form coalitions, in order to expand their power and influence in other fields. The establishment of the Officers' rule inside the army was also imposed by the fear that others could also follow their example to gain power by the effectuation of a new coup.

The modernisation and construction of a capable Egyptian army was also a precondition to achieve the British evacuation of the country. The colonial control of Great Britain was expanded to different fields of the Egyptian society and was provoking social indignation⁵ and limiting the expansion of the Free Officers' rule.

Additionally, the *Nakba*⁶ and the creation of the Jewish state was not simply a painful memory, not only for the Arab population but also for the military and political elites⁷, but were also affecting personally the Free Officers⁸ who had participated in the war. In the case of Egypt, its geographic proximity to Israel and the strong presence of the Palestinian refugees made the situation more complex. A strong Egyptian army capable of challenging Israel or, at least, being respected, would offer to the new regime popular and political legitimacy.

⁴ Regarding the internal dynamics produced after the putsch see Abdel -Malek (1967), Beattie (1994), Kemou (2007).

⁵ By the time that the coup took place, there was a strong anti British movement as a reaction to their presence in the country and their colonial policy. The presence of 80.000 British troops all along the Suez Canal, the largest military base outside the British soil and all around Egypt was difficult to oversee.

⁶ The war of 1948 was named by the Arabs as 'the catastrophe'.

⁷ It has to be mentioned that the military and political agents in power were accused by the opposition of betrayal in the war of 1948.

⁸ In Nasser's (1973: 31) own words, "[T]his story [a villain commits murder but plans his crime in such a way that suspicion is thrown on an innocent man] reminded me of the case of the Egyptian army in Palestine. A defeat had been suffered in Palestine just as a crime had been committed in the film story. [...] But in the tragedy in which we lived in Palestine the terrible incubus lasted for six years".

However, in the first period after the coup, the Egyptian junta was mostly preoccupied with its stabilisation inside the country. The 'internal' rivals⁹ were too important, thus there were not any forces left for the foreign ones. Once they felt that the internal power was, in general terms, secured, they turned their look to Israel. Or even better, as mentioned by Laurens (1991: 115), it was the foreign affairs, especially the Israeli ones that entered in the internal politics of Egypt.

On the other hand, the elites of Israel felt satisfied with the coup of the Free Officers, once they saw that Israel was not Nagib's principal preoccupation¹⁰. Ben Gurion congratulated the new regime, expressing at the same time his hopes for collaboration¹¹.

Since the beginning of the coup, the Free Officers held secret negotiations with Israel through intermediaries. The new group in power was trying by all means to avoid hostilities with Tel Aviv, knowing the costs of a second military defeat, taking into consideration the army's conditions. The secret contacts served another aim for the Egyptian side: the Israeli mediation for the American support to the British matter¹². From Tel Aviv's point of view, Egypt with the help of the Free Officers could constitute the first Arab state to make peace with Israel and in this way to recognise the Jewish state.

Tel Aviv's attitude, however, started to change once the friendly relations between the Free Officers and Washington¹³ were appreciated as threatening. Urging for a more active role in the region in order to restrain London and Paris and to reinforce its own presence in the region, Washington was more than interested to provide help to the Free Officers. From the Officers point of view, Washington, deprived of a colonial identity and representing the strongest pole of the international system, could offer them political, economic and military help, in order to consolidate their regime against domestic and foreign rivals.

⁹ The strategies followed by the Free Officers in the internal sphere as to establish their rule and the internal competition of the group are analysed in a previous work (KEMOU, A., 2007).

¹⁰ Nagib, not member of the Free Officers, was named first president of the Egyptian Republic, after the official ending of monarchy 18th June 1953. His election had been based on his popular image due to his performance on the Palestinian war. However, his presidency didn't last long, due to his rivalry with Nasser, which ended with Nagib's expulsion.

¹¹ Indicative to this is the secret telegram that the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent on September 17th 1952 to the Israeli embassies: "*Nous considérons avec du bon oeil le nouveau régime égyptien. Sa priorité c'est la solution des problèmes sociaux et la corruption en Égypte.[...]*". Quoted in ENDERLIN, C., 1997, *Paix ou guerres. Les secrets des négociations israélo-arabes, 1917-1997*, pp. 165-166.

¹² Nasser's policy towards Israel was materialised by a hard repression on behalf of the Egyptian soldiers of the efforts of any Palestinian organization, either politic or military (IZQUIERDO, F., 2005: 62).

¹³ The willingness of the new regime to collaborate with Washington was evident since its first steps. The confrontation between Nasser and Nagib found Washington on Nasser's side. The American government, as Nasser's group, was opposed to the establishment of democracy since the aim of changing the distribution of power in the country had not been accomplished yet. As a return to the Washington's support, Nasser appointed in key posts persons in accordance with the American preferences (BEATTIE, K.J., 1994: 99).

During the first two years of Eisenhower's administration, the aim of the American policy was to establish Egypt as the cornerstone of their Arab policy, getting in this way disconnected from the Franco-British colonialist approach and adopting a 'neutral' position to the Arab-Israeli conflict, which would aim at the increase of American influence to the Arab world (DOUGHERTY, J.E., 1959: 30). Tel Aviv felt it was losing its privileges being the only ally of Washington, something that could generate important alterations. The change of the American policy, in its attempt to avoid the conflict by mediating¹⁴ between the rivals and by refusing to furnish more weaponry¹⁵ to the Israeli band, came out of fear for Moscow's involvement in the region. Nonetheless, the more Nasser collaborated with Moscow the more the western support to Israel was ensured. Following Laurens (1991: 138) *"Israël pourra se présenter comme le principal atout occidental dans la région. Si paradoxal que cela puisse paraître, Israël a besoin d'une certaine menace soviétique pour assurer une sécurité fondée sur l'aide extérieure"*.

Tel Aviv's preoccupations grew further under the eventual evacuation of British troops that would boost the Egyptian air forces, as the entire infrastructure would be left to the Egyptian army. The announcement of the Czech arms deal¹⁶ preoccupied even more the Israeli authorities and the western block that felt that the balance of power in the region was in process of changing. Cairo was looking for a military supplier and the West's negation to supply the new Egyptian regime with the required military equipment forced the search of another source. Nasser, thus, turned to Moscow, which could offer him military equipment in exchange of marine facilities in the Mediterranean Sea. The arms deal provided Nasser the wanted popular acceptance, especially after the expulsion of Nagib from the Presidency. As the former was unknown to the Egyptian society, he needed a way to gain the Egyptians' sympathy.

The Israeli elections, in July 1955, and the win of Ben Gurion's group signalled a diversion of the policy towards a more aggressive one, after the 'Lavon Affair'¹⁷. The Israeli attack at the end of February 1955 after the signing of the Baghdad Pact¹⁸, which caused the death of 37 Egyptians, revealed the incapacity of

¹⁴ In the end of 1954, the Washington and London were preparing the 'plan Alpha' a pact of non- aggression between Egypt and Israel (LAURENS, H., 1991: 123).

¹⁵ The Israeli necessities for military equipment were ultimately covered by Paris by violating the Tripartite Declaration. During these negotiations, the foundations of the atomic reactor's purchasing were put and the final accord was signed in September 1957.

¹⁶ In May 1955, the Free Officers began secret negotiations which concluded to the arms sales with Czechoslovakia, as Moscow wanted to avoid jeopardising the 'esprit de Genève', an optimistic situation created among London, Paris, Washington and Moscow after their Summit, on July 1955 (HEIKAL, M., 1980: 67).

¹⁷ The 'Lavon Affair' refers to the scandal over a failed Israeli covert operation in Egypt known as Operation Suzannah, in which U.S. and U.K. targets in Egypt were bombed. It became known as the Lavon Affair after the Israeli Defence minister Pinhas Lavon, who was forced to resign because of the incident that ultimately led to the retirement of Ben Gurion from active political life.

¹⁸ In 1955, the Baghdad Pact was signed between UK, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan and Turkey, putting the region under Western control. Nasser's refusal to contract with UK in the frame of Baghdad Pact was justified by his supreme need for popular legitimacy and his efforts to avoid giving pretext to the internal rivals to criticise his policy with arguments difficult to rebut. The signing of the Pact meant the permanence of the British troops in the Egyptian

From Cairo to Tel Aviv. Nasser's differential accumulation of power and its impact on the relations between Egypt and Israel

the Egyptian army to respond to the Israeli provocations. Nasser's reply, who was still in need of support and legitimacy, was the promotion of Palestinian guerrilla operations.

The tension was further heated by the denial of the Arab League to the Johnson plan in 1955 to administrate Jordan's waters, in order to cover Israel's necessities for hydraulic resources, and by the extent of the list products considered as war material destined to Israel passing through Suez Canal¹⁹.

Nationalisation of Suez and its aftermath

The International Company of Suez was representing the enslavement of Egypt since the 19th century, because its financing became one of the essential causes of the country's indebt, representing a state inside the state and controlled by foreigners²⁰. The nationalisation of Suez and other foreign enterprises, were definitely serving the interests of the Nasserist regime. Besides the immediate gains regarding the enthusiasm coming not only from the Egyptians²¹, but also other Arab states, and the attraction of international attention, the regime was hoping to increase the public financing capacities and to reward the industrial economic elites collaborating with them and in this way to restrain the big landowners, allies of the monarchy. Furthermore, the vacancies created by the withdrawal of the foreigners along with the egyptialisation of different economic sectors, offered carrier opportunities to the retired officers, a strategy that was followed by Nasser in order to compensate the officers' collaboration and to avoid any future increase of their power.

The Nationalisation of Suez Canal signalled, among others, changes in the relations with the foreign elites. The tripartite attack from Israel, France and Great Britain a few months later determined the end of the relative pacific relations between the Egyptian junta and its aggressors.

Tel Aviv was already preparing a military aggression against Egypt. At the beginning the British did not want the involvement of Israel government, which would deteriorate even more their position. The plan of the separate attack helped them to reconsider Tel Aviv's participation. Israel was to conquest Sinai until the Suez Canal. Once reached the Suez the Franco-British armies would interfere as to

soil, a fact that could not be easily justified to the people. Any official pact with the British would be equivalent to the perpetuation of the colonial pact that had cost the demolition of the old regime. At the same time, the Pact preserved a pivot role for Iraq and Nuri Said, being friendlier to UK interests.

¹⁹ The issue went to the Security Council of the United Nations which took a decision in favour of Tel Aviv. Moscow positioned in favour of the Free Officers by exercising its right of veto.

²⁰ Since the canal's construction the western powers had managed to create an international status so as to have access in the Mediterranean Sea. The English government had an important part of the company's capital and the rest was a French property. For more information see Corm (2003).

²¹ The decision, however, was criticised by some imprisoned leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood, accusing Nasser for the new obligations of the Egyptian state as the Company was to return to Egypt in 1968 with the expire of the concession (ABDELNASSER, W.M., 1994: 58). Egypt was obliged to compensate the shareholders of the Suez Company.

protect the Canal and impose the cease fire. By this way the Europeans could regain the wanted control. After secret negotiations between Israel, France and UK the attack took place in October 29th 1956 and lasted two days. Israel occupied Gaza and Sinai.

The military aggression of 1956 had concrete objectives from the Israeli side: to neutralise Gaza and the fedayins and to achieve free navigation to Eliat and the debilitation of the Egyptian army. Additionally and more importantly, the aims of Israeli governmental elites to overpass the internal problems and reassure western friendship were also achieved.

The second military win of Israel in only eight years gave it the chance to pronounce a victorious Israeli discourse. Ben Gurion²² said “[...] *Nous sommes prêts à négocier une paix durable avec l’Égypte et chacun des autres pays arabes, mais nous acceptons sous aucune condition qu’une armée étrangère, quelle que soit, se déploie à l’intérieur de nos frontières ou dans aucun des territoires que nous occupons*”.

However, the festive atmosphere did not last long. Washington was not in favour of the aggressors, as its main interest was keeping the Suez Canal open. Not having any direct interests connected with the Company, the new status could provide Washington a larger participation, limiting at the same time British and French capacities without a direct clash.

To this, another factor, equally important, that determined the American attitude has to be added. By the time that the tripartite intervention took place there were elections in the USA. Eisenhower’s electoral campaign was built in the image of the ‘homme de la paix’ (LAURENS, H., 1991: 152). His message²³ to the Israeli Prime Minister was clear “[...] *Un refus d’Israël de se retirer du Sinaï serait interprété comme une expression de mépris de l’opinion publique américaine, et conduirait inévitablement à des mesures sévères: la fin de l’aide publique et privée à Israël, des sanctions internationales, voire l’expulsion des Nations unies*”.

The United Nations’ resolutions that were obliging the withdrawal of the Israeli army from all occupied territories gave Nasser a political win. Nevertheless, the military victory of Israel had brought the humiliation of the Egyptian army, a fact becoming more evident by the presence of the UNEF forces.

After the war of 1956, Israel was in a situation of stabilisation inside and outside the country. Israeli economy was performing well, giving the opportunity to raise the quality of life for its citizens. In parallel, since 1957 Nasser and Hussein of Jordan were exercising a tough control over the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, in order to avoid further hostilities with Israel.

On the Palestinian side, the second military win of Israel and the continuous Arab repression from the Egyptian and Jordanian armies, generated further mobilisation. Their fragility intensified the dependency of the Palestinian elites towards the foreign Arab elites and the need for a close collaboration. Nasser’s use of *umma* (nation) referring to the totality of the Arabs and not only to the Egyptians (KIENLE, E., 1995: 63), his pan Arab discourse, broadcasted from the emission ‘Voice of Arabs’ in many Arab countries, as well as his discursive campaign against Israel,

²² Quoted in ENDERLIN, C., 1997, *Paix ou guerres. Les secrets des négociations israélo-arabes, 1917-1997*, p. 203.

²³ Quoted in ENDERLIN, C., 1997, *ibidem*, p. 203-204.

Nasser's major instrument for Arab unity, obliged him to have an active role in the Palestinian question. However, he refused a strict implication in order to avoid becoming the only responsible for the matter, which would introduce further rivalries and problems mainly in the regional sphere.

On the Egyptian side, Nasser had succeeded in establishing himself as the hegemonic figure of the regime and in being recognized at regional and international level. He had managed to impose his rule by expulsing his domestic rivals, neutralising the powerful group of the Muslim Brotherhood, controlling important part of the army, receiving a limited economic support from the industrial elite and wiping out important inter-group competitors.

However, he was still in need for additional economic funds in order to put in function the state apparatus, to compete with his rivals and to buy additional military equipment. Furthermore, he was looking for a way to expand further his influence outside Egypt, a process that had started with his participation in the Bandung Conference, the Czech arms deal and the nationalisation of Suez.

Internal nuisances, external solutions

In the meanwhile, Cairo and Moscow had become close allies, something that consequently brought the coolness of the relations between Washington and Nasser. The creation of United Arab Republic²⁴ between Egypt and Syria inverted temporarily the situation, as the communist party with the help of the Soviets was preparing a coup²⁵.

Kennedy's election gave new possibilities for the development of the relations between Nasser and Washington under a 'de-politicised policy' (NEDELMANN, E., 1982: 438). Kennedy's attitude towards Nasser did not imply any deterioration of the relations with Tel Aviv, as his election was strictly related to the Jewish American lobby and Kennedy repaid them by raising the American help toward Israel. Kennedy said to Ben Gurion²⁶ *"I know I was elected by the votes of the American Jews. I owe them my elections. Tell me, is there something I can do for the Jewish people?"*.

The friendly relations between Nasser and Washington did not last long, as we mentioned, due to the Egyptian implication to Yemen's civil war²⁷, which harmed

²⁴ The two countries were institutionally unified for a limited period. However, the colonial policies from the Egyptian side and the reaction of the conservative monarchies, especially from Riyadh, ended soon the ambitious plan.

²⁵ Moscow, was trying to create a pole in the region aligned to its interest and opposite to Nasser, due to the latter's refusal to enter the communist block. Iraq and Syria were the more appropriate clients, as the communist parties in the two countries had developed strong ties with Moscow.

²⁶ Quoted in CLARKE, D.L., 1988, "Entanglement: The Commitment to Israel", in Y. Lukacs and A. M. Battah (eds.), *The Arab-Israeli Conflict. Two Decades of Change*, pp. 217-218.

²⁷ The coup in Yemen, following Nasser's steps against the regime of the theocratic model, marked the beginning of the Arab 'Cold War', dividing it between revolutionist and reactionary. Yemen's 'revolutionists' that needed principally military help and political support, turned to Nasser, being the leader of one of the most important Arab armies and a formal sympathiser of such attempts. Nasser saw his interference as an opportunity to extract petrol resources and demonstrated his commitment to the pan-Arab cause. The

the important interests of American oil sectors and the need to maintain the conservative regimes in the Gulf that guaranteed the supply of petrol.

In the meantime, Israel was building its army with international back up. Besides the American aid, Tel Aviv was also receiving military equipment from West Germany, as compensation for the Second World War crimes against the Jewish community, and from U.K. and France.

The 'pacific' relations among Israel and its neighbours began to change when, in 1965-1966, Israel started to face economic problems, regarding also unemployment, a fact that made a large number²⁸ of people to leave the country (DERRIENNIC, J.P., 1980: 183). The fact was preoccupying the government of a state, whose citizens constituted a minority *vis-à-vis* its 'enemies'. Parallel to this, there were political rivalries with Ben Gurion, who created his own political party.

Tel Aviv had already begun to provoke the Arabs by the detour of Jordan's water. The first meeting of the Arab leaders in Cairo, officially²⁹ called in order to determine the Arab policy in front of the new Israeli provocation, was transformed in a battle field. Nasser announced the creation of Palestinian Liberation Organisation that would be under his control and this of the Egyptian secret services, a fact that provoked the reaction of the Arab leaders³⁰.

During the meeting Nasser clearly defended that the war with Israel was not an option and, since Egyptian army was by far the most important one, his decision was respected. Nasser's negation for a military clash with Israel was based on his certainty for a new defeat. The split of the United Arab Republic undermined his authority not only in a regional but also in a domestic level. Abdel Hakim Amer, Commander of the Armed Forces and Nasser's closest ally, managed to disconnect himself from Nasser's authority.

Although the fraction of the regime was not widely known, Nasser had lost one of his principal sources of power. Amer had progressively gained the control of the military apparatus control and support of the officer's majority by checking the promotion process. Adopting a more corrupt profile, by taking advantage of his official post, he had managed to develop cliental relations with important agents of the political and economic field. Nasser could not afford a direct clash with Amer, as he was lacking sufficient guaranties for his victory. His self-centred policy had logically generated the indignation of certain members of his own group, who were searching for a way to increase their personal power. Moreover, an evident schism between the components of the Nasserist regime could be profited by their internal and foreign rivals. Nasser and his allies had created significant enemies, not only in

failure of the UAR and its increasing rivalry with Ba'ath over the appropriation of the pan-Arab discourse obliged Nasser to win in Yemen, in order to preserve his regional leadership image. For further information regarding the Arab 'Cold War' see Kerr (1971).

²⁸ The number of emigrants was superior to that of the immigrants.

²⁹ The meeting was principally an attempt to approach Saudi Arabia by the use of an external enemy so as to pacify the inter-Arab hostility (KEPEL, G., 2002: 144).

³⁰ For Hussein the PLO could threaten his sovereignty over the West bank and the Palestinians in Jordan. The Syrian leader opposed to Nasser's plan by proposing the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. Faisal proposed the creation of a Palestinian government on the exile. Burguiba and Ben Bella supported the creation of a movement for national liberation (NASSAR, J.R., 1991: 19-20).

number, but mostly in power capacities. Even though the group had been in power approximately for a decade, the equilibrium was fragile.

To the internal bipolarisation of the regime having repercussions in different sectors, the participation of the Egyptian army in the Yemen war has to be added, as well as the problematic relations among Cairo and Moscow, consequence of the dependency of the former in terms of military aid necessary to finance the operation in Yemen.

In 1964, Heikal had described the conditions that Nasser thought necessary, under which a war against Israel could be won: Arab unity, Arab military superiority and isolation of Israel (MOR, B.D., 1991: 364). However, none of the conditions was valid in 1967.

Nasser's aversion was proved, among others, by his passive attitude towards Tel Aviv at the attack of Samou village in Jordan, in November 1966, at the partial destruction of the Syrian air force in April 1967, despite the defence agreement with Syria and, of course, at the detour of the waters of Jordan river. Cairo's unwillingness to enter into a military class with Israel was seen also by the declaration of the Commander of the ground forces General Murtaja on May 20th 1967³¹: *"Fighting on the frontiers will not begin unless Israel launches a serious attack. Thus, action will not begin on the mere firing of a simple shot, but only with the launching of a serious attack"*.

Despite his negative position for a new war against Israel, Nasser needed the situation with different gestures. Nasser indeed asked for the removal of the UNEF forces from the Suez Canal and the closure of Aqaba³² to Israel. However, Nasser's moves were serving principally two purposes and they were undertaken by the hope for an international intervention³³ to prevent a military clash. On the one hand, Nasser did not want to see the actual Syrian regime out of scene, as he feared the establishment of a more conservative government, meaning the loss of another ally³⁴. On the other hand, he was answering to the accusations of Faisal and Hussein of having betrayed the pan Arab cause, due to his passivity towards the Israeli provocations. Moreover, the creation by the Syrians of the group Saika, formed by Palestinians to counterbalance Nasser's influence in the PLO, obliged Nasser to radicalise his discourse and to proceed in the stated actions demonstrating his commitment to the Arab cause (IZQUIERDO, F., 2005: 87).

³¹ Quoted in DAWN, E., 1968, "The Egyptian Remilitarization of Sinai, May 1967", p. 216.

³² The closure of the Eliat was important for Israel both for political and economic reasons. Its necessities for petrol were covered by importations from Iran passing through Eliat (DERRIENNIC, J.P., 1980: 187).

³³ The mobilisation of Nasser was also helped by the information offered by the Syrians that USSR was willing to help the Arabs in the case of a war (DAWN, E., 1968: 203).

³⁴ However, the relations between Ba'ath and Nasser were not friendly at the period as Ba'ath had not only accused Nasser for neglecting the liberation of Palestine but had also tried to furnish with weapons the Palestinian guerrillas.

The situation was under tension³⁵ and the young Palestinians, who were radicalised due to the propaganda of different Arab elites and the Israeli policy, destabilised the situation with their actions. To the above mentioned, Fatah's efforts to radicalise the population as to extort the Arab governments to increase their material and political support must be added. *"Now the [Arab] governments either will support us against the Israelis, or will fight us. If they fight us, the people will support us. (...) We wanted to create a climate and the atmosphere of the spirit of struggle in the Arab Nation, so that they can have the will of fighting, and I'm sorry to say that we failed"*³⁶.

The Syrian propaganda against Israel, aiming to calm down the internal crisis, was also helped by Israel's provocations, hoping to disorient the Israelis from domestic crisis. On May 11th 1967, Israel sent a memorandum to the Security Council declaring that it was prepared to answer to the Syrian attacks (DAWN, E., 1968: 209).

Six Day War: defeat and victory

The defeated Arab armies, participating on the Six Day War, were surprised by the velocity and efficiency of the Israeli army to destroy their aerial forces, a fact that provoked suspicions for an American and British participation.

Israel's victory stimulated the religious feelings, as finally the saint city of Jerusalem was under the Jewish occupation³⁷. At an international level, besides the indirect Arab recognition of the Jewish state, the Israeli military victory was seen as the 'pequeño David israelí, aliado del bloque occidental, asediado por el terrible Goliath árabe, que estaba apoyado por el enemigo soviético' (IZQUIERDO, F., 2005: 67).

In the aftermath of the war, Israel was occupying territories of Egypt and Jordan. Additionally, Tel Aviv continued to provoke the Egyptian regime, demonstrating its incapacity to respond to a fundamental task of any government: to preserve its sovereignty in its frontiers.

Two months after the official cease of fire, the Arab leaders were gathered in Khartoum to examine the situation and to negotiate in new terms. The meeting signalled the official ending of the Arab Cold War and the victory of the conservative Arab regimes³⁸, headed by Riyadh, and the demolition of the discourse

³⁵ At the time, Jordan was trying by all means to avoid the infiltrations to Israel, in such an intensity that there were more Palestinian casualties from the Jordan soldiers than the Israeli ones (IZQUIERDO, F., 2005: 65). In April 1965, Bourguiba of Tunisia proposed direct negotiations with Israel.

³⁶ Testimony to Khaled Hassan. Quoted in IZQUIERDO, F., 2005, *Guerra y Agua: Conflicto político y carestía de agua en Palestina*, p.78.

³⁷The victory had also positive results to the economic sectors on the one hand due to the confidence of the economic circles to realize investments and the cheap work force offered by the Palestinians on the occupied territories (DERRIENNIC, J.P., 1980: 191).

³⁸ One of Nasser's defeats was the removal of the Egyptian army from Yemen, which was traduced as a victory of Faisal. However, probably Nasser needed a way to unblock himself from the disastrous consequence of the Yemen war. The removal of the Egyptian army from Yemen offered him a minimal basis to negotiate with Faisal.

of the Arab nationalism with the parallel reinforcement of the official pan-Islamism (ÁLVAREZ-OSSORIO, 1999: 23). Nasser's dependency on petrodollars obliged him to change his radical discourse to an anti-Zionist one, following Faisal.

Inside Egypt, Nasser managed to transform the devastating defeat in his personal victory. Nasser's relative gain was not prescheduled. As we underlined, Nasser had tried by all means to avoid the military clash with Israel. Despite his provocative moves, the specific interests of different elites subscribed in the particular conjuncture condemned his efforts to failure. The defeat and its consequences were unquestionable facts that Nasser and his enemies could not oversee.

The aftermath of the war obliged the removal of the people responsible, one of them being Nasser himself and, of course, Amer. Nonetheless, as it is historically known, Nasser's resignation from his posts was withdrawn immediately. The fate of his rival was not the same, as he was released from his duties as Commander-in-chief, and later he committed suicide under peculiar conditions³⁹. However, the new equilibrium obliged Nasser to renegotiate with internal and external elites and oriented his policies towards a more pro-liberal approach, preparing the field for Sadat's *infitah*. But his dependency on Moscow in economic and military terms restricted his margins for collaboration with Washington, a necessary condition in order to satisfy the pro-liberal wing of his regime and to find some short of solution with Israel.

The Israeli provocations and Nasser's incapacity to act, as the international agents refused their help⁴⁰, were depriving the latter from one of his basic tools to consolidate his power in a domestic but also in a regional level, as the Palestinian question constituted Nasser's basic instrument of policy. However, the Khartoum Conference, where the Palestinian Liberation Organisation had been established as an independent agent and Nasser's previous refusal for a strict collaboration deprived him of the control over the Palestinian elites. The defeat had introduced changes inside the PLO, where Fatah and other Palestinian guerrilla groups increased their influence.

In June of 1968, the fourth National Palestinian Council in Cairo confirmed the radicalisation of the Palestinian policy⁴¹ and one year later, Arafat was elected as

³⁹ Despite the decision that Amer and Nasser had taken to accept both the responsibility for the loss, Nasser returned to his office leaving Amer to take the blame. Nasser proposed him the possibility of the exile that the latter refused and thus he was put under house surveillance until his suicide, on 14 September 1967.

⁴⁰ In this occasion Washington did not force Israel to withdraw its troops from the occupied territories, as it did after the 1956 war. Now, the American interests and priorities were different and the closure of Suez Canal was now in their benefit. This, since the Suez Canal constituted the principal way of the Soviet help to Vietnam, one of the main external preoccupations of the American government (LAURENS, H., 1991: 215). Washington had agreed to the war enterprise, partially as a way to damage Nasser's image. However, it had not agreed for Golan and West Bank occupation. The attack of the ship *Liberty* by Israeli forces, aiming at the destruction of the evidences of the Israeli provocations towards Jordan and Syrians, can be only justified as Tel Aviv's effort to avoid further complications from the American side.

⁴¹The article 9 defined "*Armed struggle is the only way to liberate Palestine and is therefore a strategy and not tactics. The Palestinian Arab people affirms its absolute resolution and abiding determination to pursue the armed struggle and to march forward towards the*

president of the PLO. The establishment of the PLO as agent in the Palestinian question generated problems to Israel, until now negotiating mostly with the Egyptian and Jordan governments and obliged Tel Aviv to deal with an interlocutor not disposed to be diplomatic, claiming the destruction of Israel and the complete liberation of Palestine.

The War of Attrition against Israel, initiated by Nasser in March 1969, taking advantage of his numerical superiority, helped Nasser's regime to recover a part of its lost prestige inside Egypt but also in the Arab region. Despite once more the military defeat⁴², Nasser won the battle at the political level. Tel Aviv's strategy that consisted on attacking civilian infrastructure in order to weaken Nasser's popular support failed, as the Egyptians were coiled to Nasser. Additionally, Tel Aviv's dependency towards the American government finally obliged it to accept the cease fire decision (BAR-SIMAN-TOV, Y., 1984: 555).

In the internal scene, Nasser regained, through the War of Attrition, the consequent rise of military expenditures and new military equipment and aid coming from USSR⁴³, the support of the officers. In the politico-economical field, however, the pro-liberal⁴⁴ wing of the state elites and the rising power capabilities of private economic sectors were pushing for a reorientation of the regime's policies and alliances. The equilibrium created after the Khartoum conference, which imitated the new petrodollar coalition, obliged Nasser to appeal to Washington. However, as a direct demonstration of Nasser's will to collaborate was not possible, due to his repeated accusations against Washington as Israel's allies, he had to find indirect methods.

In this context, Nasser's acceptance of Rogers Plan, despite the rejection of the Arab Socialist Union, was one of the many efforts he made to approach USA. His gesture deteriorated even more his relations with the PLO, since the latter conceived the plan as an effort to isolate the Palestinian question from the conflict. The Palestinian rejection of the plan and the criticism followed amplified the gap between Nasser and the PLO⁴⁵, and occasioned Nasser's approval for Hussein's attack with the Israeli and American help (IZQUIERDO, F., 2005: 96).

Nevertheless, the Israeli compromise was limited. Rogers plan, soliciting the Israeli troops' withdrawal from the occupied territories, the mutual administration of Jerusalem by Israel and Jordan and peace negotiations without territorial

armed popular revolution, to liberate its homeland and return to it [to maintain] its right to a natural life in it, and to exercise its right of self-determination in it and sovereignty over it". "The Palestinian National Covenant, 1968". Quoted in LUKACS, Y., (ed.), 1992, Israeli-Palestinian conflict: a Documentary Record, p. 292.

⁴² The war of Attrition had marked important losses to the two bands similar to these of the war of 1967 (DERRIENNIC, J.P., 1980: 197).

⁴³ Following M. Efrat (1983: 448), in the period 1967-1973 Egypt received \$894 million per year in soviet military aid accompanied by an important presence of soviet officers. The intensity of the soviet aid was so important that in a short period all loses in equipment had been fully replaced.

⁴⁴ The Nasserist regime was experiencing an important division of interest between those who wanted to continue the socialist policies and those pursuing the establishment of a liberal model. For more information see Kemou (2007: 91-95, 123-127).

⁴⁵ Nasser, to avoid further criticism, shut down the radio of PLO in Cairo.

conditions was rejected by Tel Aviv. Additionally, the absence of real American pressures gave Israel the opportunity to continue its no-compromising policy.

The Palestinians had been in this period a significant problem, especially since 400.000 refugees in Jordan became more radical after the guerrilla operations turned out to be fruitful. The creation of Palestinian military bases in the south of Lebanon, since the end of 1968, was accelerating the instability in the country. The attack on an Israeli plane in Athens, in December of 1968, provoked the reaction of Israel, which bombed the international airport of Beirut. The incident produced internal problems in Lebanon but, contrary to Israeli wishes, it reinforced the Palestinians (DERRIENNIC, J.P., 1980: 196).

Simultaneously, Fatah effectuated attacks towards Israeli targets from its military installations in Jordan. In May of 1968, Israeli attacks against Karame found a strong Arab resistance, formed by Palestinians and the Jordan army⁴⁶. Fatah and other small groups had replaced the vacuum of Nasserism that offered them a relative independency. This freedom of actuation, combined with the military capacity demonstrated by Palestinian guerrillas, generated harsh Israeli reprisals towards Jordan.

In front of this situation Amman was forced to take measures, in order to halt the Palestinian actuations inside the Jordan territory. The pretext for Hussein was given on September 6th 1970, when three planes were obliged to return to Zarka, in Jordan. For twelve days Jordan⁴⁷ was under a civil war. The Black September, when 3.000 Palestinians were slaughtered, ended with the total elimination of Palestinian guerrillas inside the country, in June 1971. The incident represented an important strike for Arab unity, mostly for the Arab people. It was an Arab state, and not the Zionist one, that caused one of the major losses to the Palestinian nation (KEPEL, G., 2002: 145). The Arab leaders officially disapproved Hussein's actions, but no state offered official help to the Palestinians⁴⁸. Nasser, as we mentioned, had given his concession for Hussein's demarche.

Nasser continued, until the end of his life, exercising his role as father of the Arab union, trying to mediate the reconciliation between the Palestinian authorities and the Lebanese and Jordanian ones. These efforts were materialised in the meetings of Cairo, in November 1969, with Lebanese authorities and Arafat, and on the 27th September 1970, with Arafat and Hussein.

Nevertheless, Nasser was conscious that a solution to the Palestinian matter was going to be late. At the end of the summer of 1970, Nasser told with irony to Arafat⁴⁹ *"Combien d'années vous faudra-t-il pour détruire l'État sioniste et édifier un nouvel État unifié et démocratique sur l'ensemble de la Palestine libre? Vous menez une politique irréaliste et un mini-État en Cisjordanie et a Gaza vaut mieux que rien"*.

⁴⁶ The incident was celebrated as an Arab victory and Hussein declared his solidarity to the fedayins.

⁴⁷ Hussein also received American help. The sixth fleet was mobilized so as to communicate the Soviets to pressure Syria not to interfere. Also Kissinger offered guarantees that Israel would not take advantage of the situation for attacking Jordan (IZQUIERDO, F., 2005: 97).

⁴⁸ However, Iraq and Syrian army interfered with their tanks having the mark of the Palestinian Liberation Army (QUANDT, W.B., 1971: 47).

⁴⁹ Quoted in IYAD, A., 1978, *Palestiniens sans patrie*, p. 130.

Conclusions

Our aim in the present article was to analyse the Egyptian policies towards Israel during the Nasserist period and under the prism of the sociology of power. In this frame, the state is not considered as an actor, whereas the attribute of actor exclusively refers to physical persons. The actors, on their turn, aspire to further their interest and intend to control different power resources, one of them being the very same institution of the state. Rejecting the qualification of the state as an agent, we discarded consequently the existence of the 'national interest', which represents purely specific interests of particular agents. Consequently, 'state policies' are the result of the agents' interest for differential accumulation of power.

In the case of Egypt under Nasser's mandate, the regime proceeded to the adoption of a series of policies and strategies towards Tel Aviv, aiming either at the direct or indirect empowerment of the group, or at the enfeeblement of its rivals. Therefore, the bilateral relations between Cairo and Tel Aviv represented the results of this dynamic, also conditioned by the regional and international conjuncture, this later representing the interest of 'external' actors for differential accumulation of power.

More specifically, we saw that the 'pacific' relations between Cairo and Tel Aviv, during the first years after the Egyptian coup, were produced by the necessity of the Free Officers to establish their control inside the country. Once a relative consolidation was achieved, Nasser promoted Palestinian guerrillas, in order to gain legitimacy inside Egypt and regional influence. The reason for his choice was that Egypt's military inferiority discouraged him from a direct military clash with Israel.

The tripartite aggression against Egypt came after Nasser's decision to nationalise the Suez Canal Company. However, as we saw, Tel Aviv was already planning a military attack, in order to secure its military superiority, to safeguard its exclusivity as Washington's ally in the region and to overpass its internal problems. Additionally, Israel's aim was to neutralise Gaza and to achieve free navigation through Eliat.

The aftermath of the aggression found Nasser's regime more consolidated, as the Egyptian side managed to transform the military defeat in a political victory through the American intervention. Consequently, the two 'enemies' entered once more in a pacific situation up to the point that Tel Aviv begun to face once more internal problems. On the Egyptian side, the fragmentation of the Nasserist regime, the growing competition on the regional scene and the devastating conditions of the Egyptian army made once more a military clash undesirable.

Despite his aversion for a war, Nasser, main promoter of pan-Arabism, was forced to respond to Israeli provocations, in order to secure his position in the internal and regional sphere. His moves, the removal of the UNEF forces from the Suez Canal and the closure of Aqaba to Israel, were responding at the Arab accusations for his passivity and were aiming the international interference.

The outcome of the war weakened Nasser's influence in the regional arena and demonstrated the military and political supremacy of Israel in the region. Nevertheless, the military defeat gave Nasser the chance to eliminate his internal rivals, Amer and his allies and establish his hegemonic rule inside the country. Later, through the War of Attrition, the Egyptian *rais* achieved to coil around him the Egyptians under the external Israeli threat.

From Cairo to Tel Aviv. Nasser's differential accumulation of power and its impact on the relations between Egypt and Israel

The international conjuncture of the Cold War, representing the competition for differential accumulation of power at international level, had an important influence to the relations between Cairo and Tel Aviv. The constant American friendship towards the latter and the ambiguous relations between Moscow and Cairo, as well as the competition between the two superpowers, determined the margins of actuations of the two regional 'rivals'.

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