Egypt and Iraqi Issue:
Dilemmas and Misdemeanors

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ملخص:

يتناول هذا البحث القضية العراقية كانشغال هام بالنسبة لمصر. إذ تواجه هذه الأخيرة فاعل إقليمي أساسي معضلة صعبة في محاولتها التوفيق بين تحالفها مع الولايات المتحدة وسعيها للاستقلالية ولعبها دور إقليمي. ومع الوضع الجديد المفروض بالقوة، تسعى للعب دور في العراق عبر إعادة إدماجه في "العائلة" العربية. وترى أن الدور العربي في العراق سوف يكون خير سبيل لمساعدة العراقيين في استرجاع سيادتهم. لكن المصالح الوطنية للدولة المصرية تحث أيضا على هكذا نهج.

إن أهم ما يستخلص من هذا البحث هو أنه بالنسبة لمصر يبقى العراق منافسا قويا على الزعامة الإقليمية. وإذا كان التنافس العربي-العربي حول الزعامة الإقليمية قائماً على الشعارات العروبة، فإن موضوع الإصلاح وقضية الديمقراطية قد تصبح اليوم الرهان الأساسي لنوع جديد من التنافس الإقليمي المتحدي للدور المصري. ووفق هذا المنظور، فإن العملية السياسية الحالية في العراق قد تقود إلى ظهور عراق ديمقراطي، بينما مصر سائرة في اتجاه معاكس (تدعيم النظام التسلطي وتوريث السلطة). وعليه، فإن التصدي لهذا التحدي العراقي الناشئ يكون بدور مصري رائد في الإصلاح الديمقراطي عربياً.

Abstract:

This Article tries to deal with the Iraqi issue as a major concern for Egypt. This main regional actor faces a difficult dilemma in trying to conciliate its alliance with the US. While seeking autonomy and a regional role for itself. With the new status quo imposed *manu militari*, it seeks to play a role in Iraq through its integration in the Arab "family". From the Egyptian perspective, the Arab role in Iraq would be the best way to help Iraqis recover their sovereignty. However, the Egyptian state's national interests also motivate this approach.

The main conclusion of this article is: for Egypt, Iraq still perceived as serious rivals for Arab regional leadership. If the inter-Arab rivalry for the regional leadership was based on the Pan-Arabism slogans, the thematic reform and the question of democratization can now be the major stake of a kind of regional rivalry which is challenging the Egyptian role. From this perspective, the current political process can give rise to a democratic Iraq, while Egypt is taking an opposite direction (consolidation of the authoritarian regime and inheritance of power). The response to this emerging Iraqi challenge is the Egyptian leading role in democratic reform in the Arab World.

Introduction:

The Iraqi issue has been a major concern for Egypt since the 1991 war. It joined the US-led coalition to free Kuwait, but Egypt has progressively distanced itself from American policy, especially that of the Bush administration. It supported the prevalent international stance that Iraq respect relevant Security Council resolutions including its full cooperation with U.N. inspectors for eliminating weapons of mass destruction. However, America opted for a muscular and illegal agenda; the overthrowing manu militari of Saddam Hussein. With the excuse of the alleged weapons, the U.S. attacked Iraq and ousted Hussein. Thus, Egypt found itself in an uncomfortable posture. Obviously, it has had to deal with the new status quo. However, how has it dealt with this highly destabilizing situation, domestically and regionally? What were the main determinants and sources of its conduct during the pre and post-war periods? Was it facing an unmanageable dilemma: alliance with the U.S. while maintaining autonomy and seeking a regional role? How did it perceive Iraq in this new regional context?

Specificity of the Arab system, regime dilemmas and heterogeneity of the regional configuration:

As observed by Paul Noble, the "relations between Arab societies differ in kind" from those of other developing states. This particularity still has, as observed in the Iraqi crisis, a significant implication for policy-makers. The high degree of homogeneity (linguistic, cultural…) among the Arab peoples and its elites has generated a strong sense of common identity transcending individual national identities and strong political and societal links making the Arab system "closely interconnected and permeable". These factors have had two major impacts on policy-makers. First, it has led to pressures for solidarity in cases of conflict with non-Arab agents. The state that wants to achieve – or to maintain – a regional prominence

must highly support the Arab causes. Second, it has generated a strong sense of vulnerability for ruling elites.[1] Thus, when a government develops a domestic policy it has to be equally justifiable in the name of an Arab nation's interest to be considered legitimate, as shown by Egypt's stance in the Iraqi crisis. *The Arab Unity slogan/dream has been, in this context, mobilized and used as a political pretext to justify the persistence of the Arab failed regimes.*

This singularity of the Arab world corresponds to what Bahgat Korany has called the "dialectic of raison d'état/raison de la nation" which triggered the coexistence of the Pan-Arabist logic and the raison d'état (of territorial state) influencing the states' regional conduct.[2] This singularity is marked by an "enormous gap" between "theory" and "practice" in the policies of the Arab states. "Moreover, it is impossible to separate the question of the unification of Arabs from the political and material interests of the states calling for this unification. For instance, in the second half of the 1950s, Nasser's leadership of the Arab unity was closely linked to the prevailing role of Egypt".[3] This analysis is appropriated to the current Arab regional configuration (ideologically de-radicalized). These structural vulnerabilities persist as shown by the Palestinian and Iraqi issues perceived as (qawmi) core issues despite the specific status of the Palestinian question in the Arab politics. These two causes have a high impact in Arab societies and have become an internal concern. In the

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[1] Paul. C. Noble, "The Arab System: Pressures, Constraints and Opportunities", in: Bahgat Korany and A. E. Hillal Dessouki (eds)., **The Foreign Policies of Arab States: the Challenge of Change**, 2nd ed., (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), PP. 55-57.

[2] Bahgat Korany, "La nation dans tous ses Etats: dialectique unité/diversité", in: Maurice Flory and Bahgat Korany (eds), **Les régimes politiques arabes** (Paris: PUF., 1990), P. 149.

[3] Fawaz Gerges, **The Arab Regional System and the Superpowers: a Study on the Inter-Arab and Arab-International relation**s (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 1997), P. 191 (*in Arabic*).

view of the Arab populations, the two tragedies are due to the inappropriate strategies of the Arab states. This high linkage between domestic and regional issues still has a significant impact on national policies. It is difficult to distinguish domestic choices from the regional agenda. The Egyptian attitude regarding Iraq, at both state and popular levels, is influenced by this perpetual inference between domestic and regional concerns. It seems that the prevailing Arab's inter-penetrated system is going to be more influent on choices of policy-makers in the future because of the growing contribution of the Arab media to the making and orienting of public opinion.

The Arab political landscape is marked by the existence of four distinct camps defined according to the nature and the degree of their relations with U.S. and which defines the pattern of regional behavior. The first camp is formed by those states, which are allies of America and maintain a close relationship with it. Five of them (Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Kuwait) are principal U.S. allies outside of NATO. This status means a significant alliance in strategic terms. The second camp is composed of states having traditional somewhat inter-dependent relations with U.S., whose security depends on the American umbrella (the Gulf countries in particular). The third group is constituted by those states that maintain a good relationship with the U.S. but without strategic alliance (Tunisia, Yemen, Algeria…). The fourth is composed of those states (Syria, Lebanon, Sudan and Libya before the renouncement of its rudimentary WMD program) targeted as suspect, if not hostile, by the U.S. Moreover, this heterogeneity of political configuration and external "alliances" is also observable within at least one "camp". It is easy to distinguish among the American allies between two types of conduct; the states that offer military and logistic bases supporting the U.S. war (Qatar, Kuwait…) and those who (Egypt) refuse to offer any assistance to America, but at the same time refrain from causing difficulties for it in Iraq.

Consequently, Arab "verbal consensus" is a collective comedy meant for domestic public consumption. It is impossible to reconcile the rejection of war with assistance to the Americans. The prevailing atmosphere has been one of self-help in the rush toward being agreeable to the Americans. Some Arabs tried to prove their utility to them by providing assistance and facilities, or by de-radicalizing other Arabs and softening domestic opposition to the war. The interests of Arab leaders were very divergent and many of them considered the invasion as a "golden opportunity" to get rid of Hussein and to remove any Iraqi regional leadership. Despite the fear of being the next target, there would be a regional relief if Hussein were removed. Therefore, the September 11, attacks obliged Arab regimes to adopt a low profile to avoid being targeted under the counterterrorism pretext, all the while dreading U.S plans. In fact, the ideal position for autocratic Arab regimes would be an American failure in Iraq bringing with it a post-war era with reduced claims and pressures on issues of democracy. However, neither do these regimes want to see Iraq sink into total chaos, which would equally destabilize their domestic powers.

Egypt's dilemma: alliance with U.S/nationalist autonomy

Egypt has usually been faced with the "dilemma of maintaining a balance between reliance on foreign aid assistance and protection of the country's independence". [1] Obviously, since Anwar Sadat's alignment with U.S, Egypt has chosen the economic benefits over autonomy. In return for American aid and security coordination, it has offered U.S. "a key door into the Arab world" through its role as a "force for stability against anti-Western radicalism" and as a pivotal

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[1] A. .E. Dessouki, "The Primacy of Economics: the Foreign Policy of Egypt", in: Korany and Dessouki,"**The Foreign Policies of Arab States**," *Op .Cit.,* p. 157.

state "in getting the Arabs to accept Israel".[1] In the Iraqi crisis, Egypt's main dilemma is how to reconcile this "strategic alliance" with its desire for autonomy combined with a growing anti-American popular feeling.

During this crisis, Egypt has maintained permanent contacts with the Americans. The discussion has revolved around three highly sensitive questions: military facilities claimed by U.S; economic assistance to Egypt (to compensate for the impact of the war) and finally the Israeli-Palestinian issue.[2] Domestically, these questions have triggered a heated debate, particularly the U.S. war ships' crossing of the Suez Canal. These contacts and the delicate balance of Egypt's regime have provoked another controversy: pieces of information have emerged according to which Egypt has given facilities and assistance to US-led coalition's forces in exchange for urgent aid. In response, Mubarak has asserted that "Egypt never did participate in any war against Iraq or any Arab state. It has not happened and it will not happen". The American aid to Egypt is not linked to any participation in the war, he added.[3] In fact, "Egypt's utility" to the U.S. depends for the most part "on its centrality in the Arab world". Yet, this strategic alliance is a very ambiguous asset for a country that seeks a "Pan-Arab stature". Therefore, "Egypt's military dependence on America has circumscribed" its potential role "in protecting Arab security against Israel" or other threats coming from the U.S. or their allies.[4] Egypt suffers from a fundamental

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[1] Raymond Hinnebusch, "The Foreign Policy of Egypt", in: Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami (eds)., **The Foreign Policies of the Middle East States** (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), PP. 97& 108.

[2] "Egyptian Diplomacy and the War on Iraq" egyptwindow.net/articles/?DPage=details&ArticleID={EB27AFBD-D5A2-4229-8C3A-90517B44A457 (*in Arabic*).

[3] *Al-Gomhuria*, March 28, 2003.

[4] R. Hinnebusch, "The Foreign Policy of Egypt", P. 109.

contradiction: on the hand, it maintains close links with the U.S. and on the other hand, it seeks an Arab role that requires a solid autonomy, even independence, from foreign diktat.

After the September 11, the U.S. openly adopted the option of changing the Iraqi regime. Egypt consistently stressed that the crisis resolution be within the UN framework including any military action. When the U.S. will to overthrow Hussein was confirmed, Egypt stressed that any regime change should only be affected by action of the local population. However, from January 2003, its attitude began to change and Egypt became more critical towards Hussein. Despite its diplomatic activism with influential powers (U.S, Britain, Russia, China, France and Germany) and regional meetings with Iraqi neighbors to prevent war, the change was underway. It was confirmed a few weeks after the Ankara meeting (January 2003) when Egypt considered Hussein as the only agent responsible for the situation.[1] Hence, it supported the U.S. position. This shift may have been explained by Egyptian policy-makers' perception of the determination of the American war machine. Therefore, they tried to readjust their arguments to minimize the war's consequences stressing their solidarity with the Iraqi people. In the same time, they avoided causing any obstacle to U.S. military intervention. In fact, they maintained minimal solidarity with both the U.S. and Iraq. Therefore, Egypt's blaming of Hussein and its alignment with the American position constituted a way of giving the U.S "legitimizing cover" in its war and a kind of gradual arabization of their claim about Hussein's oust. Meanwhile, Egypt stressed that a serious U.S. step towards the Palestinians would absorb the high tension in the region, popular anger about the war being closely associated with the Palestinian issue.

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[1] "Egyptian Diplomacy and the War on Iraq", *Op. Cit.*.

At the Arab level, Egypt was active in the Arab League whose foreign ministers declared (16 February) what had happened as "aggression". This hard rhetoric was dictated by domestic constraints. The main concern for Egypt was a balancing act between avoiding a clash with the U.S. and calming domestic anger. Two weeks later, an Egypt-inspired summit is held in Sharm al-Sheikh in a heated climate. In their summit statement, the Arabs "totally rejected any attacks on Iraq" and called for the resolution of the crisis peacefully within the UNSC framework. Despite the deployment of U.S. troupes in Iraqi's Arab neighbors, the text urged Arabs to "not participate in any military action" aiming at Iraq's "safety and territorial integrity" (sic). The Arabs, in fact, were divided: between 1) the pro-U.S. war hardest line presented by the Gulf countries agreeing with the U.S.'s call for Hussein to be ousted; 2) the moderate line led by Egypt and Saudi Arabia urging war to be avoided; and 3) the anti-war hardest line presented by Syria which was opposed to any military option without UNSC authorization. At this summit, some states supported implicitly the idea of Hussein's oust to avert a war, which was suggested officially by the UAE few days before. The Arabs did not adopt such a suggestion but they did not denounce it officially. This stance would have compromised the troika. To appear less divided, they formed an Arab troika. Nevertheless, it was quickly paralyzed by the U.S. rejection to meet it and by inter-Arab divergences. Irritated by such a suggestion, Iraq refused to receive it. In response, Egypt blamed Hussein and accused Syria of having short-circuited the Arab initiative.

In fact, Egypt was worried about three main questions. It was very sensitive to any forcible regime change for political reasons regarding its own regime future. It insisted on the safety of the Iraqi people for internal popular reasons. It was concerned about the influence of Turkey and Iran in a post-war Iraq, which could explain its mobilization on the Middle-eastern framework (with Turkey and

Iran) more than on the Arab level. For these reasons, it predicted and hoped that war would be over quickly and limited to Hussein's regime.

Egypt and the war: a cautious position

Few hours before the invasion of Iraq, President Hosni Mubarak addressed Egyptians through a televised speech 1 in which he emphasized the importance of domestic stability. Indeed, he called for the "protection of the domestic front" and "Egyptian national security". Mubarak reiterated and clarified Egypt's position through six principles. 1) Dealing with the Iraqi issue in accordance with relevant UNSC resolutions. 2) The principle that should guide international actions should be "the preservation of Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity, of Iraq as an integral part of the Arab nation" and the search for ways to end the sufferings of its people. 3) The necessity of providing adequate means and duration to complete the arms verification and their dismantling in accordance with UNSC resolutions. 4) The dismantling of Iraq's capabilities for WMD as an integral part of the international effort to turn the entire Middle East into a region free of such weapons. 5) The rejection of the regime change through force; the system of government is a domestic concern of the local people taking into account their cultural, religious, and social specificities, as well as their political and economic progress without foreign intervention to impose a pre-determined model. 6) Middle East issues, the paramount one being the Palestinian question, should be addressed in a comprehensive manner. Putting the Palestinian question and its resolution according the international legitimacy - as a top priority on the Arab agenda - would contribute to reduce international tension in the region.

According to Mubarak the major reasons that led to war are: mistakes by different parties, mainly the invasion of Kuwait which

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[1] *Al-Ahram,* March 20, 2003.

made several countries feel insecure and opened the door to foreign forces; the lack of any real Iraqi effort to deal with the "confidence crisis resulting from this aggression" (Kuwait invasion) and rebuilding confidence with its Arab neighbors; the international diplomatic efforts have failed.[1]

In fact, Egypt had adopted a cautious position: rejecting war, avoiding any implication in the troubled Iraqi situation and staying away from American policy. Thus, it did not assist the U.S. in its war, without, however, setting any hurdles for U.S. actions. Deep down, Egyptian leaders hoped that the American project in Iraq would not succeed; however, they did not wish that such failure would translate into victory for the terrorists.[2]

However, why did Egypt take such cautious and often untenable position? The following points summarize the main determinants of this stance. First, the alliance with the U.S. dictated a kind of "minimal solidarity". From the regime's point of view, no strategic reason could justify imperiling this alliance for the sake of the Iraqi (Hussein) regime. In fact, for Egypt as well as other U.S. Arab allies, the predominance of the rapport with Washington over Arab solidarity is a strategic choice. Therefore, Egypt allowed American troops to use Egyptian airspace and the Suez Canal. The "minimal solidarity" with the Iraqi people thus resulted in this "minimal solidarity" with the U.S. This kind of solidarity with Iraqis has in part been imposed by domestic public opinion, which requires Egypt to support the Iraqis. Second, the adoption of the principle of change of regime by force has been motivated by accordance with international legitimacy by the interests of Mubarak's own regime (and other Arab regimes). After Hussein's overthrow by the US, who will be the next in the Arab

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[1] *Al-Ahram,* March 20, 2003.
[2] W. Abdul Majid, "Sharm al-Sheikh Conference: Did Egypt's Position Towards Iraqi Issue Changed?" **al Hayat**, November 18, 2003.

world? This question still dominates the spirits of ruling elites and peoples in the Arab world. Third, the high linkage made by the Americans between the invasion of Iraq and the re-foundation of the Middle East has frightened Egypt. In case of U.S. success, in the post-war era, Egypt would be more vulnerable to American pressures and would thus likely be undermined in its regional role. Fourth, the weight of the Palestinian issue and the question of international legitimacy were decisive. Egypt tried to avoid any inconsistency in its attitude, stressing the importance of the UN role for a just and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Therefore, it cannot obscure this legitimacy regarding Iraq. Fifth, the economic imperative (U.S. aid, security and remittances of Egyptian workers in the Gulf States, need of stability for tourism and Suez Canal) was decisive in Egypt's conduct in the 1991 war as well as in the 2003 war. All this explains why Egypt did not criticize the support provided by these states to the US-led war and why it was less critical towards America. Nevertheless, the impact of the war was limited and U.S. aid compensated some of the losses. Egyptians were also hopeful that the rest would be compensated through Egyptian participation in rebuilding Iraq.

From the Arab reintegration of Iraq to the international consensus:

The occupation of Iraq imperiled Egypt's regional role and interests. Because its own status was at stake, it got conscious that it could not isolate itself from events in Iraq, and it had an interest in assisting the Iraqis in recovering their sovereignty as soon as possible. All this posed the question of how to deal with occupation authorities. Shortly after the occupation of Iraq, Egypt opened relations with the former Iraqi opposition, which is now in command in Baghdad. This openness poses major questions for Egypt (and other Arab countries)

about the appropriate approach for dealing with this new emerging Iraqi authority.[1] Consequently, Egypt proposed that the reintegration of Iraq into the Arab family be conditional upon the end of the occupation. However, this stance will undoubtedly change due to Egypt's fear that the ongoing civilian conflict will be exploited by anti-war regional actors (Turkey, Iran and Syria) to aggravate U.S. difficulties or simply to obtain political advantages. With the occupation, the main axis of Egypt's policy is the recovery by Iraqis of their sovereignty and its own role in the new era. It would seem to fear the transformation of post-Hussein Iraq into a new Afghanistan - a privileged area of Arab Jihadists - and Shiite power in Iraq. This perspective was confirmed by the recent events in the occupied Iraq. A terrorist group affiliated to al-Qaida acting is – since the U.S. invasion – acting in this country and it assassinated the Egyptian ambassador[2].

In fact, Arab attitudes have been inconsistent; there has been the explicit desire to thwart the war and the implicit common position of avoiding any positive action to stop the U.S. precipitance towards war. Some Arabs have kept away from confrontation with the U.S. on differing levels: political, diplomatic or in the media.[3] The attitude vis-à-vis the Iraqi interim council has also been characterized by inconsistency. In summer 2003, several Arab states had reiterated their rejection of both the occupation and recognition of the interim council. However, eventually, they (except Libya) recognized it as a representative of Iraq on September 2003 at a meeting of the Arab League. It was an important shift in dealing with occupied Iraq because they recognized this council as the only legitimate authority

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[1] Arab Strategic Report 2002-2003, Cairo, al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies (ACPSS), 2004 - ahram.org.eg/acpss/eng/ahram/2004/7/5/ARAB14.HTM

[2] They also assassinated other Arab diplomats such the two Algerian diplomats.

[3] Samih Rashid, "The Arab League and the Occupied Iraq', **al-Siyassa al-Dawliya,** 38/54 (2003), P. 107 (*in Arabic*).

representing the Iraqi people. This shift was linked to a U.S. request. Nevertheless, some Arab states stressed that it was dictated by the desire not to isolate Iraq and to maintain its links with its Arab environment. Egypt had been one of the main states defending this position before the League meeting. For Mubarak, this new way of dealing with occupied Iraq presented the best way to improve the internal situation of its people and to contribute to the political process and the election of the Iraqi government, itself the best tool for ending the occupation. According to him, the isolation of Iraq would deprive Arabs of the opportunity to influence the evolution of events.[1] In fact, the Arabs have satisfied the U.S. demands because the recognition of the Iraqi interim government involves the de facto de-legitimizing of the resistance against the U.S.-led occupation.

However, despite its rapprochement with the interim council and its desire to play a role in post-war arrangements, Egypt has still been opposed to the idea of sending Arab forces to Iraq as requested by the U.S. in June 2003. However, this has not been a definitive position. It depends essentially on the evolution of the regionalization-internationalization of the Iraqi issue and on Egypt's own interests in the economics of the rebuilding of Iraq. There is a curious configuration of historical déjà vu. The reintegration of occupied Iraq in the "Arab family" is like that of Egypt after the Camp David agreements. At that time, the Arabs had excluded Egypt, making its return among them conditional to its abrogation of the accords. Finally, they did deal with the "fait accompli" and readmitted Egypt. Therefore, they had arabized Camp David. In the current crisis, they had made the return of Iraq into the Arab fold conditional to the end of

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[1] Khadher. A. Atwan, "A prospective vision for the Arab-Iraqi relations", in: M. al-Huzatt *et al*, **Occupation of Iraq: Objectives, Results, Future** (Beirut, Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 2004), PP. 314-315 (*in Arabic*); Rashid, "The Arab League and the Occupied Iraq", PP.107-109.

the occupation, but they have also finally had dealt with the "fait accompli" and cooperate with the pro-U.S. authority. This trend would be definitively confirmed with the international conference on Iraq (November 2004).

Despite some divergences and the fact that the majority of participants were opposed to the war, the Sharm al-Sheikh conference finally set an international consensus on the Iraqi issue. It may have been a turning point in its evolution. All participants agreed to support the holding of elections and the interim government toward re-establishing peace and rebuilding the country. After U.S unilateralism, the issue has been regionalized because the stabilization of the country is a shared concern. According to Egypt, this conference has been one of the main stages for the recovery by the Iraqis of their sovereignty. The success of Washington has been highly significant. On one hand, it succeeded in organizing a meeting with wide participation including the former "anti-war camp" states. On the other hand, the conference's statement did not refer to "occupation" or to a calendar for the withdrawal of occupation forces (as demanded by France, Syria…). On the contrary, it declared resistance to the occupation as "terrorism" (as demanded by the Iraqi authority and the U.S.). The occupation forces have been transformed into "multinational forces"! However, the meeting has failed because it reflected an international prise en charge of the Iraqi issue. Thus, the meeting has had four major outcomes: a definitive erosion of the former "anti-war camp" whose states assume the consequences of a war that they didn't approve; it deprived the Iraqi resistance [1] of any Arab legitimacy; the U.S.

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[1] By Iraqi resistance we mean in this text groups fighting against American occupation which are not necessarily linked to the ancient regime and did not share the agenda of the Iraqi al-Qaid. Regarding the heterogeneity of the armed groups operating in Iraq and their unstable alliances, it not easy to identify the resistance groups.

renounced some aspects of their unilateral control over Iraq and the rebuild process (economically and politically) and recognized its incapacity to manage, single-handedly, the post-war era; the recognition by several states that the immediate danger of instability combined with the generalization of resistance and growing terrorism is a collective concern.

America has forced several states to adopt the counterterrorism imperative; terrorism generated by invasion. Certainly, the major American purpose in Afghanistan was to deprive the al-Qaeda network from a territorial base. However, with the invasion of Iraq, the Americans have given it a new more interesting operational theatre because it is located in the heart of the Arab world. However, the Arab states have to be cognizant that the "war on terror" has been elevated by the Americans to a position of supreme ideology justifying anything, anywhere. The counter-terrorism struggle has become a policy in itself, a stake of world power, and a tool by which the U.S. and Israel have been given the absolute right of legitimate defense and with which they refuse the same right to the Palestinians and the Iraqis!

There are major connected interests between Washington and Cairo. Egypt needs to reduce sole U.S. control over Iraq by internationalizing-regionalizing the situation and by establishing channels of official and cooperative contacts with the Iraqi authority. In addition, it does not want to be excluded from the vast economic opportunities of the Iraqi rebuild. Egypt has consistently urged a greater involvement by the UN and the necessity of the transfer of sovereignty to the Iraqis in order to soften U.S. unilateralism and assure a key role for Cairo in the post-war era. For its part, America needs the participation of other countries in the post-war crisis management, and as some kind of possible a posteriori "legitimization" of its war.

The international "consensus" has indicated "a turning point" in Egypt's attitude. Some serious elements suggest a strategic shift. The link made by the U.S. between the invasion of Iraq and the re-foundation of the Middle East was of primary concern to Egypt. Therefore, with the erosion of this link, notably after the American failure to transform Iraq into a democratic model for the region, it is possible to envisage a stepping back from Egypt's cautious position. In such a context, there is no justification, from Cairo's view, to sacrifice Iraq in order to counter a U.S. project that did not get off the ground.[1] Egypt's mobilization, before and after the Sharm al-Sheikh "consensus", was motivated by two major concerns. First, the fears and mutual suspicions between Arabs and Iran which are illustrated by the uncertainties of a possible victory of Shiite forces in Iraqi's elected government and the establishment of a Shiite alliance extending from Iran through Iraq to Syria and Lebanon's Hezbollah. The second concerns limiting the spillover of explosive ramifications from the Iraqi quagmire in Egypt. As we argued above, the domestic legitimacy of the Arab regimes also depends on the way the Iraqi issue is resolved.

Last December, Mubarak clarified his conception of the Iraqi issue asserting that only a new substantial Iraqi military and police forces "can stabilize the country", and that "the Americans are simply unable to do this". Major U.S. military offensives, which cannot bring security, "incite feelings of revenge and hate". However, he recognized that the withdrawal of U.S. forces would now lead to chaos and everyone would suffer, including Egypt. They "can only withdraw once they've made sure the Iraqis can manage their security problems on their own" he added.[2] Therefore, he reverts to a familiar

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[1] Abdul Majid, "Sharm al-Sheikh Conference", *Op. Cit.*
[2] See its interview to *Dier Spiegel* Magazine –
service.spiegel.de/cache/international/spiegel/0,1518,333689,00.html

Egyptian stand; that foreign forces should withdraw as soon as possible.

U.S. and Egypt's role: the primacy of pragmatism on the rhetoric of reform:

With the growing violence, which has been made more evident by the radicalization of the Iraqi resistance on one hand, and the multiplication of terrorist acts on the other hand, Bush needs Egypt's role domestically (within Iraq) and regionally (among Arabs). He has become cognizant of its key role in bringing consensus to the post-war era. The re-admission of Egypt is happening in parallel with U.S. back-pedaling on its demands for reform. Is there an important deal going on inside Arab-U.S. relations: Iraq for reform? During Mubarak's visit to Washington, on April 2004, Bush congratulated him for reform and declared that "just as Egypt has shown the way towards peace in the Middle East, it will set the standard in the region for democracy by strengthening democratic institutions and political participation". This statement reflects the U.S. perception of Egypt's regional role. Paradoxically, many Egyptians share such a perception but according to their own agenda. They have stressed that the democratization of the region will begin with Egypt and consider their country as the leading one on several issues including democratization. The Ros El-Youssef magazine wrote that Egypt is a model for others because it was first to begin national liberation, put forth economic overture, take the initiative of peace and begin the war on terror "and now its responsibility is to promote democracy from Egypt", not from elsewhere.[1]

Bush's speech on Egypt's reform is one way to use his Arab allies to help get himself out of the Iraqi mess. Having waded deeply into Iraqi troubled waters, he has to mute his discourse on democracy

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[1] **Ros el-Youssef,** January 9, 2004.

and support Egypt's official position on (minimal) reform in exchange for obtaining its assistance with post-war arrangements. He knew that pressures on reform make his allies domestically more vulnerable. Conscious of Egypt's influence on the other Arab states, he needs it to moderate Arab politics and to arabize the post-war status quo. Bush needs Egypt not only in Iraq but also in Palestine for the concretization of the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. For his part, Mubarak recognizes that the occupation of Iraq enhances hostile anti-U.S sentiment that is growing with the continuing deaths of Iraqi civilians. In fact, during his visit Mubarak has realized three main objectives: the demonstration of Egypt's usefulness to the U.S, the tempering of U.S. demands for reform and the guarantee of economic aid.

Arabs maintain the "legitimate" right to refuse foreign demands for democracy in Iraq and elsewhere. However, even the legitimate denunciation of U.S. partiality for Israel cannot justify the maintaining of authoritarian Arab regimes. Not all things coming from the U.S. are necessarily harmful to Arabs. It is their duty to take advantage of any proposal for reform no matter what its origin. These regimes have to be cognizant that their lack of democracy makes them more vulnerable to foreign pressures, which can be fatal if they are combined with domestic discontent. To protect Arab interests, the only response to foreign projections for democracy is a genuine endogen democracy. However, it is probable that these regimes will sell off cheap Arab interests, domestically and regionally, just to stay in place. For its part, the U.S. democracy slogan suffers from lack of credibility. Washington uses it to justify anything (occupation of Iraq, oppression of the Palestinians…). Nevertheless, the freedom of the Iraqi people is neither more pressing nor superior to the freedom of the Palestinian people. Moreover, U.S. dealings with its Arab authoritarian allies only serve its own interests.

Egypt and Iraq: new ancient rivalry

Iraq has always been a serious rival of Egypt for the Arab leadership as illustrated by the struggle over the Pact of Baghdad in the 1950s. Strongly opposed to this alliance, Nasser considered the Arab leadership as a natural right of Egypt and succeeded in undermining the Pact. However, conservative or revolutionary (after July 1958), Iraq has been a serious challenger to Egypt Arab pre-eminence.[1] During the monarchy era, Irak has been a serious rival of Egypt in the light of Arab ideological and political confrontation between the radical and conservative camps. This ideological shift of Iraq after the revolution of 1958 has not altered this pattern of relations between Baghdad and Cairo. What is new is the rivalry for the Arab leadership was within the radical camp, between the two opposed perspectives baathist and nasserist. The emerging power of Irak during after Camp David agreements has been designed by the ruling elites in Bagdad in the light of the regional rivalry with that of Cairo, Riyad and Tehran.

More recently, Hussein has threatened Egypt's role. The invasion of Kuwait was a perfect opportunity to get rid of a traditional rival. He has also tried to alter Egypt's domestic equilibrium using the Arab core issues.

This ancient rivalry is renewed today but on new terms; democratic and economic success. Indeed, Egypt still fears Iraq despite its occupation. Many Egyptians consider that not all the results of the war are necessarily negative for their country. Wahid Abdul Majid, an Egyptian analyst, agrees with this idea and asserts that these results have been greyer than black does and that their gravity will depend on how Egyptians deal with them. In its view, one of the positive war consequences could be the establishment of a "new

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[1] Gerges, *Op. Cit.,* pp. 53-55 & 179-185.

democratic Iraqi system" able to presents a model to be emulated throughout the region and containing elements and features of a "leading Iraqi regional role". This will put Iraq in a direct rivalry with Egypt. Because it is a big and rich country, Iraq is equipped to play an influential Arab role if it manages the building of a democratic regime and economic success. Iraq would then be transformed into the model that Egypt should have been for many years but failed to be because of the deceleration of the necessary political and economic reforms.

Egypt is now obliged to anticipate the rising Iraqi model by accelerating certain reforms. "It is natural that Egypt fears a negative impact on its regional role because the foundation of a new Iraqi regime representing a model at the Arab level". The position of role/model is perhaps, he added, the most important (coming) loss. Unlike the loss of the regional role, economic damages can be compensated for. Yet, the decline or ascent of Egypt's role depends on its political performance. It is possible for it to accelerate the rhythms of domestic reform to rival those of Iraq.[1] Mohamed Kadry Said contends that "Egypt should be ready to lead changes in the region and to provide a model in democracy… and a free economy".[2]

Conclusion:

The Egyptian regime has successfully managed its misdemeanors: alliance with U.S/ autonomy and internal constraints. However, the price of this political performance has been the aggravation of its domestic legitimacy-deficit. In fact, the Egyptian regime's misdemeanors will be untenable because of the conflicting regional agendas of the United States and Egypt regional ambitions

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[1] Abdul Majid, "Egypt's Role is Likely to Decline if Reform is not Introduced", al **Hayat,** March 26, 2003.

[2] Mohamed Kadry Said, 'Political Egyptian Contribution to a Security Framework in the Gulf', **Middle East Policy**, 11/3 (2004), P. 70.

despite cooperation between the two allies. The American readiness to unilaterally impose a pre-determined agenda for the Middle East makes Egypt weaker regionally and more vulnerable domestically. Such agenda did not take into account its search for a prominent regional role. Consequently, the regime is more exposed to the growing domestic contest, which denounces its inertia to preserve the Egyptian role regionally, a role that the regime uses precisely to justify its foreign policy choices. That said Egypt is dealing with the new status quo imposed manu militari through rapprochement and integration of the new Iraqi power in the Arab environment. In this perspective, it has played a major role in the arabization of the status quo made in U.S. This Egyptian approach aims to achieve some major objectives. Firstly, contribute to reduce the U.S domination on Iraqi politics paving the way to an Egyptian role in this country. This is a best manner to avert any emerging of Iraqi regional leadership. Secondly, avoid the transformation of Iraq into a kind of al-Qaid Land threatening the all Arab regimes. Thirdly, counterbalance the growing Iranian influence in Iraq. The two last Egyptian objectives constitute in fact the heart of the American strategy in Iraq showing the connected interests between Washington and Cairo. Thus, these three major objectives demonstrate again the Egyptian misdemeanors.

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