

## PREFACE

My involvement with the question of normalization between Israel and her neighbors began at the time of my first assignment as an envoy at the Israeli Embassy in Cairo. I later continued this involvement as head of the Middle East department at the Foreign Ministry, and again as Israel's Ambassador to Egypt in the years 1992-1996. The first conclusion reached by anyone who comes into contact with this matter is that it is both a complex and sensitive issue, for a variety of reasons – some obvious, others less so. Nevertheless, this matter is of paramount importance to us, since it pertains to our own integration in the region, as well as the possible of carrying on healthy and productive relations with our neighbors – for it is our fate that we must live together.

President Sadat's visit to Jerusalem and address to the Knesset in November 1977 touched off a sense of euphoria, that *here, in the blink of the eye and wave of the hand, as if with a magic wand, all of the obstacles can be broken down, and decades of animosity and bitter, bloody conflict can be exchanged for warm relations and close cooperation*. Many in Israel were parties to this perception, illusory as it may have largely been. Is the return of the Sinai alone enough to bring about a sea change in the reality up to this point? Many Israelis believed it was. Even among Israel's leadership, many believed that Egypt had made a separate peace with Israel, in order to protect its own interests, and that all of Egypt's talk of solving the outstanding issues in Israel's conflict with its neighbors – including the Palestinians – were nothing more than an Egyptian fig leaf. This reading of Egyptian policy was more fantasy than a carefully-read interpretation of Egypt's policies. While Egypt did break ranks with the Arab consensus by spearheading a peace treaty with Israel, by many accounts, it did not wish to divest itself of its commitment to the other elements of the conflict, particularly the Palestinian one, and probably could not have done so even it had wanted

to. After all, this had been Egypt's original reason for going to war with Israel, sacrificing vast human and economic resources over the course of several decades – even at the expense of its own social and economic development. For Egypt to make a separate peace with Israel without addressing the other elements of the conflict would mean giving up its central role as a leader of the entire Arab camp, or at least its aspiration to play such a role. There is no evidence that Egypt was at any point prepared for such a concession – even in theory. As the initial euphoria dissipated, Israel woke up to a harsh reality, in which normalization could not be achieved “with a magic wand,” merely by withdrawing from the Sinai. Rather, normalization would require goodwill and sustained effort on both sides, along with each side's correct reading of its counterpart's policies and mutual sensitivity. Did the sides live up to these demands? This book will attempt to answer this question.

This book is based, to a large extent, on my own personal experience, amassed during the years in which I was directly involved with this issue. The most important of these were the years 1992-1996, in which I served as Israel's Ambassador to Egypt; this also largely coincided with the Rabin and Peres governments. Therefore, this book focuses chiefly on those years. This time period is suited to a thorough look at the issue of normalization of relations, since it was marked by conditions that could have been expected to ensure smooth progress in Egyptian-Israeli relations. On the Palestinian front, Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) recognized each other for the first time, an interim accord was reached, and implementation began. A Palestinian Authority was established, which took over a variety of powers from the Israelis; it began to exercise its authority in all of the Palestinian cities from which Israel withdrew, and later in other territories. At the same time, Israel and Jordan signed their own peace accord. These circumstances could have been expected to have a positive effect on Israel's relations with Egypt; they could expect to experience a renaissance after a prolonged period in which they had been stripped of all but the bare essentials. This, in any event, was the expectation in Israel. The Egyptian side, too, was prepared to somewhat loosen the reins of its relations with Israel in light of the new circumstances.

This book will attempt to explore the way in which Israeli-Egyptian relations actually developed during this period of time. The goal is not so much to gain a better understanding of the past – an important enterprise unto itself – but rather to provide material upon which to reflect *vis-à-vis* weighty issues, including the question of normalization and fuller relations between Israel and

Egypt, and more generally between Israel and its Arab neighbors. Under what circumstances and conditions might normalization be achieved? For the reasons I have already outlined, the period of the Rabin and Peres governments seems best suited for this kind of analysis. What I have attempted to put forth in this book is the product of my personal experience in the field, directly involved in the normalization effort, confronted with the difficulties which must be overcome on the long road to its realization. Since much of the information presented in the volume is based on personal knowledge and experience, the reader will not always find a specific citation or document to which to refer. In most cases, Arabic names have been transcribed according to common phonetic convention; in those cases in which the persons referred to have chosen a different preferred spelling, this has been preserved.

A look at the Egyptian attitude towards relations with Israel begs a number of questions: who sets Egypt's policy *vis-à-vis* Israel, and according to what factors? What has Egypt's policy regarding Israel been? Does Egypt harbor certain fears regarding normalization with Israel? Are there "red lines" in terms of progress in this field, or could there be a positive dynamic, affected by changing circumstances, such as progress in the peace process? Has Egypt really used the issue of an Israeli-Palestinian settlement and other matters of disagreement between the two nations, such as the nuclear issue, in order to arrest or slow the process of normalization? How have the Egyptian public and its various sectors responded to normalization? How have Israeli (in)actions served to promote or inhibit the process? These are some of the questions this book will attempt to address.

The term "normalization" as used in this volume comes from the Israel-Egypt peace negotiations. This is the expression both sides had used to describe the relations that would emerge between the two nations in a wide range of fields following the signing of the peace treaty and a full Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai. This was also the expression used at the time by the High Committee for Normalization of Egyptian-Israeli Relations, the subcommittees of which would later draft all of the normalization agreements. The Egyptians, who used the term "normalization of relations" in English, used the Arabic term "*tatbi'a al-'alqat*," which implied making the relations between the two nations "natural" or "regular," like those that existed between nations in a state of peace. In the years which followed the peace treaty and normalization agreements, the Arabic term would take on certain negative connotations. These connotations stemmed from the claim that normalization was something that

had been forced upon Egypt as part of the peace treaty, rather than of its own accord. Opponents of normalization used the term "*tatbi'i*" as a pejorative, which they applied to all those who supported normalizing Egypt's relations with Israel. This volume uses the term in its original, positive sense, of normal or natural relations between nations.

Some readers may question the need to delve into the issue of Israeli-Arab normalization at the present juncture, when the peace process has been on hiatus for many years. Despite current conditions, it is likely that the experience that has been amassed on both sides regarding the limitations of force as a means of attaining their goals in a satisfactory way may contribute to an approach that could benefit the efforts to find a solution in the future. In any event, I believe that, at some point, both sides will tire of years of mutual bloodletting, and will have no choice but to find a way of coexisting; this will entail some degree of cooperation and normal relations. Far off as that day may be, and although some will believe it to be no more than an illusion, it will come. This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of President Sadat's historic visit to the Knesset in Jerusalem. It should not be forgotten that up to the moment of the visit, many thought that such an event was unrealistic. And yet it happened.

I would like to thank Professor Moshe Semyonov and Sefi Cohen-Benaim of the Institute for Diplomacy and Regional Cooperation, who accompanied the book's publication from the earliest. Furthermore, many I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Itamar Rabinovich, who read my manuscript and offered important insights, and Yaacov Setty, who reviewed large portions of the original text and offered helpful advice. I would also like to thank Ayelet Yehiav, particularly for her contribution to Chapter Seven, which looks at more recent developments, as well as Ovadia Danon and Shirli Bakshi, for their assistance regarding the Egyptian press.

Finally, I am indebted to Aviah Morag, who both edited the Hebrew edition of this book and translated it into English; his efforts have helped to make this project a reality.

Jerusalem, April 2007