

## **Courting the “Traitor to the Arab Cause”: Egyptian-North Korean Relations in the Sadat Era, 1970-1981**

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### **Abstract**

This article analyzes the diplomatic aspects of Egyptian-North Korean relations, with a brief overview of the era of Gamal Abdel Nasser and with a focus on Anwar el-Sadat’s presidency. On the basis of Hungarian, U.S., and Romanian archival documents, it investigates why the post-1973 reorientation of Egyptian foreign policy toward a pro-American position did not lead to a breakdown of the Egyptian-North Korean partnership. The article describes such episodes as North Korea’s military contribution to the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, Egyptian-North Korean cooperation in the Non-Aligned Movement, Kim Il Sung’s equivocal reactions to the Egyptian-Israeli peace process, and the militant Arab states’ dissatisfaction with Pyongyang’s unwillingness to condemn the “treacherous” Camp David Accords. It concludes that the main pillars of the Sadat-Kim Il Sung partnership were their simultaneous cooperation with China, their shared enmity for the USSR, and their fear of diplomatic isolation. Still, the North Korean leaders, anxious as they were to prevent an Egyptian-South Korean rapprochement, were more often compelled to adapt to Egypt’s diplomatic preferences than vice versa. The ambivalence, vacillation, prevarication, and opportunism that characterized Pyongyang’s interactions with Cairo belied the common image of North Korea as an iron-willed, militant state cooperating with other revolutionary regimes on the basis of equality, mutual trust, and anti-imperialist solidarity.

Keywords: Egypt, Anwar el-Sadat, North Korea, South Korea, Cold War, Arab-Israeli Conflict, Non-Aligned Movement

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## 1. Introduction

In the growing literature on the interactions between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, the history of the Egyptian-North Korean partnership has attracted far less attention than Pyongyang's cooperation with the "rogue states" (Iran, Syria, Iraq, and Libya). Despite the fact that Egypt has traditionally occupied a position of primacy among the Arab states and played an important role in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)—a situation keenly recognized by the North Korean leaders, whose persistent efforts to gain Cairo's friendship were influenced by the consideration that it might enable them to make further inroads in the Middle East and the Third World—, only a handful of publications examined Egyptian-North Korean relations in detail. Their authors usually concentrated on certain specific aspects of military or economic collaboration, such as the involvement of North Korean pilots in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, Pyongyang's assistance to Egypt's ballistic missile program, or the investments that Orascom Telecom Holding made in the DPRK (Bermudez 1990; Bermudez 1994; Miyamoto 2010; Kirk 2011; Pollack 2011). In comprehensive works on DPRK-Middle Eastern relations, Egyptian-South Korean interactions, Pyongyang's non-aligned policy, and inter-Korean competition in the Third World, one can find valuable snippets of information about the diplomatic dimension of the Egyptian-North Korean partnership, but their space limitations precluded an analysis in depth (Moon 1987; Hong 1995; Gills 1996; Levkowitz 2017).

This article seeks to fill some of these gaps in the academic literature by analyzing the diplomatic aspects of Egyptian-DPRK relations, with a focus on Anwar el-Sadat's presidency (1970-1981). I selected this era on the grounds that Sadat achieved a fundamental reorientation of Egyptian foreign policy—from cooperation with the USSR, confrontation with Israel, and hostility toward the U.S. to a breakdown of relations with Moscow, a peace treaty with Jerusalem, and an alliance with Washington. From Pyongyang's perspective, this trend potentially threatened to disrupt the Egyptian-DPRK partnership, since the leaders of the Korean Workers' Party (KWP) regarded both the U.S. and Israel as implacable

enemies. Still, the Sadat-Kim Il Sung partnership survived the strain—a rather surprising development, particularly if one takes into consideration that Pyongyang’s militant Arab allies did their best to persuade Kim to condemn the “treacherous” Sadat. In many respects, this partnership, in which Egypt’s comparatively stronger bargaining position often compelled the KWP leaders to adopt an opportunistic and prevaricating attitude, belied the common image of North Korea as an iron-willed, militant state cooperating with other revolutionary regimes on the basis of equality, mutual trust, and anti-imperialist solidarity, yet it also stood at variance with Sadat’s public stance as a Western-oriented, anti-Communist statesman.

To find an explanation for the peculiar adaptability of the two autocratic leaders, I examined a combination of archival sources. In the 1970s, the Egyptian government still maintained contacts with the Soviet bloc, and it was not yet fully aligned with the U.S. Under such conditions, both the Soviet bloc diplomats and their American counterparts had considerable insight into Sadat’s Korea policy, yet neither side could fully grasp the situation. The Soviet bloc states had diplomatic missions in Pyongyang but not in Seoul; the U.S. was a close ally of the Republic of Korea (ROK) but lacked contacts with the DPRK. Therefore, I analyzed Hungarian diplomatic reports (which reflected the observations of the Soviet bloc, as the various East European diplomats regularly exchanged information both about Korea and the Middle East) in tandem with the telegrams sent by the U.S. embassies in Cairo, Seoul, and elsewhere. I also utilized the Romanian files available in Woodrow Wilson Center’s Digital Archives, whose chief value lay in the fact that in the 1970s, the independent-minded Ceaușescu regime was on better terms both with Cairo and Pyongyang than the pro-Soviet East European states.

## 2. Nasser’s Legacy: The Origins of the Egyptian-North Korean Partnership

It would be plausible to assume that the DPRK maintained closer relations with Gamal Abdel Nasser (1952-1970), a leader strongly committed to militant

anti-imperialism, pan-Arabism, and Arab socialism, than with Sadat, who gradually reversed the radical policies of his predecessor. In the opinion of Moon (1987, 380), “the DPRK virtually swept the entire Middle East in the 1950s and 1960s. The region, especially its radical Arab countries, became staunch supporters of, as well as spokesmen for North Korea in international councils.”

Actually, the North Korean leaders showed far more interest in establishing contacts with Nasser’s Egypt than vice versa. In the wake of the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company (July 26, 1956) and the Suez Crisis (October 29–November 7, 1956), the DPRK authorities issued official statements of support, and even sent a small amount of financial aid to Cairo (Gills 1996, 64). In June 1957, they invited the cultural attaché of the Egyptian Embassy in Beijing for a two-week visit, treating him with extreme hospitality. In a striking contrast with the strict system of diplomatic protocol that North Korea imposed on the Soviet bloc embassies, the Egyptian diplomat—“a mere attaché,” as a Hungarian official critically remarked—was warmly received by such high-ranking leaders as Deputy Premier Hong Myŏnghŭi and Foreign Minister Nam Il (Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, July 15, 1957).

Judging from Egypt’s voting record during the annual UN disputes over Korea, Pyongyang’s ostentatious solidarity with Cairo made little, if any, impact on Nasser’s stance. From January 1957 to December 1961, the Egyptian delegates consistently abstained on the question of whether both Koreas or only the ROK should be invited to participate in the UN discussions. Actually, most of the Arab states either adopted the same position (Libya, Morocco, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Yemen) or tended to side with Seoul (Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia). In 1960–1961, only Iraq supported the Soviet-inspired draft resolutions on behalf of the DPRK.<sup>1)</sup>

In July 1961, North Korean Minister of Education Yi Ilkyŏng visited Egypt to establish ambassadorial-level relations, only to be told by Minister of Presidential Affairs Ali Sabri that the Egyptian government did not want to forge diplomatic relations with divided countries. In the end, the Egyptian leaders reluctantly allowed the DPRK to set up a consulate-general in Cairo, but soon afterwards they

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1) The UN Yearbooks were accessed on their homepage: <https://unyearbook.un.org/>.

granted the same diplomatic status to the ROK (Hungarian Embassy in Cairo, August 15, 1961).

Cairo’s attitude toward Pyongyang started to change only on December 11, 1962 when the Egyptian UN delegation, for the first time, voted in favor of a Soviet draft resolution on inviting both Koreas. Notably, Algeria, Iraq, Morocco, Syria, and Tunisia acted likewise, while those Arab states that had hitherto supported the pro-ROK resolutions now switched to abstention (Yearbook of the United Nations 1962, 123). The collective nature of this shift indicated that it was triggered by South Korea’s decision to establish diplomatic relations with Israel (April 9, 1962) (Podoler 2014, 524). In other respects, Nasser still adopted a cautious approach toward the Korean problem. In 1962-1966, Egypt did not follow the USSR’s example by openly rejecting the U.S.-sponsored UN resolutions on Korea (as the more radical Algerian, Iraqi, and Syrian leaders occasionally did) but preferred to abstain from voting.

On August 24, 1963, the Egyptian government elevated its diplomatic relationship with the DPRK to ambassadorial level, presumably to reciprocate Pyongyang’s public support to the Egyptian-backed Yemeni Arab Republic (YAR). Anxious to gain international recognition, the embattled North Yemeni military regime was the first ruling government in the Arab world to establish full diplomatic relations with North Korea (March 9, 1963)—a decision facilitated by the fact that the Middle Eastern states with which the ROK had established diplomatic relations in 1962 (Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Iran) refused to recognize the YAR—, and its example probably induced its Egyptian patrons to act likewise (Hungarian UN Delegation in New York, November 9, 1962; Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, January 4, 1964). Nevertheless, Nasser still tried to pursue an even-handed policy. In 1963, he offered to establish full diplomatic relations with Seoul, too, but the South Korean government, unwilling to enter into diplomatic relations with states that recognized the DPRK, rebuffed his initiative (Hong 1995, 87).

The real breakthrough in Egyptian-North Korean relations occurred in the wake of the Six-Day War (June 5-10, 1967), which ended in disaster for the Arab states. At the UN meetings held in October-November 1967 and afterwards, Egypt

actively supported the Soviet position in nearly every Korea-related dispute, not only on the question of inviting the DPRK but also on the proposed withdrawal of UN forces from South Korea and the rejection of U.S. draft resolutions (Yearbook of the United Nations 1967, 140-150). While the war-torn Egyptian government must have appreciated the emergency aid (5,000 metric tons of cereal) which it received from Pyongyang (Hungarian Foreign Ministry, July 25, 1967), this single North Korean gesture would have been probably insufficient to bring about such a drastic change in Nasser's attitude. In all probability, the Egyptian leader took this step to please the USSR, whose military and economic assistance he desperately needed to recover from the disaster. The Six-Day War built new bridges between the militant Arab states (Egypt, Algeria, Iraq, and Syria) and the Soviet bloc, as the former severed diplomatic relations with the U.S. and the latter with Israel. Notably, Algeria, Iraq, and Syria also adopted a consistently pro-Soviet stand on the Korean question, in the same way as they followed Nasser's January 1968 initiative to offer facilities to the Soviet navy (Nutting 1972, 431-446; Aburish 2004, 292).

Paradoxically, the North Korean leaders, though they evidently benefited from this process of Soviet-Egyptian rapprochement, were not necessarily satisfied with the approach that Nasser and his Soviet allies adopted toward the problems of the Middle East. For instance, on July 24, 1970 Nasser announced his readiness to accept a ceasefire plan proposed by U.S. Secretary of State William P. Rogers. The Kremlin promptly hailed his decision as a "constructive position" but Syria, Iraq, and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) decried it as an act of treason (Nutting 1972, 467; Dawisha 1979, 51-52). Notably, the North Korean press pointedly ignored these Soviet-Egyptian efforts to find a negotiated solution to the crisis, in the same style as the KWP leaders expressed their disapproval of Soviet-U.S. détente and the Vietnam peace talks. Instead, Pyongyang's propaganda concentrated on the armed struggle of the Palestinian guerrillas (Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, January 20, 1971).

Actually, the Palestinian group with which the DPRK forged the closest contacts—George Habash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)—had formulated its leftist ideology after its profound disillusionment with

Nasserism. In September 1970, when a civil war erupted between the Jordanian army and the Palestinian guerrillas, both Cairo and Moscow sought to put an end to the fighting as soon as possible, and Nasser successfully brokered an agreement between King Hussein and PLO leader Yasser Arafat. In contrast, the DPRK singled out the Jordanian ruler for vituperative condemnation, not the least because Habash visited Pyongyang shortly before the fighting (Nutting 1972, 470-475; Amos 1980, 74-78; Bermudez 1990, 75; Ginat *et al.* 2007, 267-268).

Notably, Pyongyang’s hostile attitude toward the Rogers Plan and the Jordanian government had much in common with the views the Chinese leaders held about these issues (Shichor 1979, 149, 176). That similarity was hardly accidental, since in 1970, Kim Il Sung dynamically reoriented his foreign policy from Moscow toward Beijing (Hungarian Foreign Ministry, November 17, 1970). These factors—North Korea’s divergence from the Kremlin’s Middle Eastern policy, its preference for armed struggle, its close cooperation with China, and its contacts with various militant Arab states and groups—would greatly influence the evolution of Egyptian-DPRK relations during the Sadat era, both in positive and negative respects.

### 3. Egyptian-North Korean Rapprochement at the Expense of Moscow and Seoul

The death of Nasser (September 28, 1970) and the inauguration of Sadat (October 15, 1970) did not lead to an immediate change in Cairo’s cautious approach toward the Arab-Israeli conflict. On the contrary, Sadat and the Soviet leaders continued to show interest in the revived Rogers Plan, which called for a partial Israeli withdrawal for the territories occupied in 1967. In February 1971, Sadat affirmed that “he would be prepared to terminate the state of belligerency and respect Israel’s sovereignty and right to live in peace,” provided that Israel first withdrew from the occupied territories and the Palestinian problem was solved in accordance with the UN resolutions (Dawisha 1979, 56-57; Tal 2016, 741). Unacceptable as these conditions were from an Israeli perspective, Sadat’s proposal

was strongly at variance with the standpoint of the militant Arab states. For instance, on March 3, 1971 a high-ranking Iraqi leader declared that “Egyptian and Jordanian willingness to conclude a peace agreement with Israel ‘brought the Arabs to a plight worse than their plight in 1948’ and said only armed struggle would eliminate aggression” (Chronology 1971, 372).

Facing this inter-Arab dispute, North Korea (which, unlike the USSR or China, did not recognize Israel’s right to exist: Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, January 20, 1971) tended to sympathize with the militant regimes, possibly also because it wanted to outbid the South Korean government, which had recently started to endorse the demand for an Israeli withdrawal from the Arab lands occupied in 1967 (Gills 1996, 164). In May 1971, a DPRK delegation headed Deputy Premier Pak Sŏngch’ŏl visited Syria and Iraq, both of which rejected the Rogers Plan. During their visit in Iraq, the North Koreans and their hosts alike condemned “Zionism” and “U.S. imperialism” in the sharpest terms possible, expressing their full support for the Palestinian resistance. At a mass meeting held in Baghdad’s Khuld Hall, the delegates followed the Iraqis’ example in denouncing the Rogers Plan. These North Korean statements were definitely out of tune with Sadat’s approach, all the more so because Pak Sŏngch’ŏl assured the Iraqi leaders that Pyongyang firmly supported Baghdad in its territorial dispute with the Iranian government (with which Egypt had recently normalized its relations: Parsi 2007, 32). Still, the joint Iraqi-DPRK communiqué (June 2, 1971) was of a more moderate tone; instead of condemning the Rogers Plan, it sidestepped this thorny issue. These changes suggested that the North Koreans wanted to avoid offending the Egyptian government. They had to pay a price for their caution, since their hosts retaliated by refusing to denounce Japan in the communiqué (Hungarian Embassy in Baghdad, July 21, 1971).

The contrast between Pyongyang’s militant, China-oriented stance and Sadat’s more flexible tactics (which were at least partly compatible with Soviet aims) may have played a role in that in early 1972, perceptible friction occurred in Egyptian-DPRK relations. On January 13, Sadat made a speech in which he explained that Egypt could not afford to attack Israel as long as its military capabilities were insufficient to gain a victory (Zayed *et al.* 2016, 9). His



statements triggered massive student demonstrations at Cairo University. The students called for war against Israel, denounced the Egyptian-U.S. dialogue, but also criticized the USSR's "tutelage" over Egypt and questioned the reliability of Moscow's commitment to Cairo (Hungarian Embassy in Cairo, January 21, 1972). In the light of these slogans, Sadat had good reason to suspect the involvement of ultra-leftist forces. In his January 25 speech, he alleged that the protests were fomented by "external forces" and "red turbans" (Hungarian Embassy in Cairo, February 2, 1972). Citing a "reliable source," the Hungarian Embassy in Cairo reported that China exerted influence on the protests through the Palestinian students (Hungarian Embassy in Cairo, January 24, 1972). In an informal manner, the Egyptian officials expressed their disapproval of the conduct of the North Korean and Chinese embassies, which, they claimed, had provided financial support to the ultra-leftist student activists (Hungarian Embassy in Cairo, April 21, 1972). According to Bermudez (1994, 8), the authorities even "deported North Korean diplomat Kim Young Soon on charges of instigating and aiding anti-government student demonstrations at Cairo University, and conducting operations against Israel from Egyptian territory."

Nevertheless, the Egyptian leaders seem to have wanted to avoid an escalation of the dispute. As early as February 2, 1972, the Hungarian Embassy reported that the authorities started to wave aside the earlier stories about North Korea's interference (Hungarian Embassy in Cairo, February 2, 1972). Their tactfulness proved justified, for in March 1972, Deputy Premier Chŏng Chunt'aek travelled to Egypt, where Sadat reciprocated his call for an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories by demanding the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the ROK (Gills 1996, 133). In the subsequent months, the reorientation of Sadat's foreign policy toward a confrontational strategy suddenly elevated the Egyptian-DPRK partnership to new heights.

By April 1972, Sadat's growing dissatisfaction with Moscow's reluctance to provide Egypt with advanced offensive weapons led him to the conclusion that the Soviet leaders, preoccupied as they were with Soviet-U.S. *détente*, wanted to perpetuate the state of "no peace, no war" between Israel and the Arab states, instead of assisting the latter in regaining the occupied lands by military means

(Dawisha 1979, 62-63). In the face of Soviet obstruction, the Egyptian president found China's militant approach increasingly attractive. In March 1972, Mahmud Riyad, Sadat's special adviser, travelled to China, where his hosts "advised him that Egypt should not rely on superpower-sponsored negotiations ... but should rather change the situation by force" (Shichor 1979, 167-168). From this perspective, Pyongyang's China-oriented, militant Middle East policy started to appear a diplomatic asset, rather than an obstacle to Egyptian-DPRK cooperation.

On July 7, 1972, Sadat decided to expel the bulk of Soviet military advisers from Egypt. Predictably, the Chinese leaders enthusiastically welcomed his action (Dawisha 1979, 63; Shichor 1979, 168), and their North Korean comrades seem to have shared the view that Sadat's step heralded a new, more independent, and more confrontational policy toward Israel. In August 1972, a high-ranking Soviet Foreign Ministry official told a Hungarian diplomat that the North Koreans strongly doubted if the Middle Eastern crisis could be solved by peaceful means. Their preference for a hard-line approach manifested itself with regard to the expulsion of the Soviet advisers. Pyongyang's Middle East policy created difficulties for the USSR, the Soviet official complained (Hungarian Embassy in Moscow, August 16, 1972).

In any case, the expulsion of the Soviet advisers enabled North Korea to gain a new foothold in Egypt. During the visit of a DPRK delegation headed by Vice-President Kang Ryang'uk (On March 1-7, 1973), Egyptian Chief of Staff Saad el-Shazly asked the North Koreans to send an air force unit to train Egyptian fighter pilots. The North Korean trainers arrived in June 1973, i.e., early enough to assist the Egyptian air force in preparing for the Yom Kippur War (October 6-25, 1973) (Miyamoto 2010, 349-351). Their contribution enabled Pyongyang to gain a propaganda victory over Seoul, all the more so because the ROK Foreign Ministry felt it advisable to adopt a cautious attitude during the war, resisting the requests of its ambassadors "to authorize them to give public support to the Arabs." North Korean propaganda promptly exploited this opening, depicting South Korea as a supporter of Israel (U.S. Embassy in Seoul, November 2, 1973).<sup>2)</sup>

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2) All U.S. archival documents cited in this article were accessed on the Access to Archival Databases (AAD) website: <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/index.jsp>.

Nevertheless, Pyongyang’s militant approach was not always advantageous to the Egyptian government. On October 22, 1973, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 338, which reflected a shared Soviet-U.S. determination to ensure a cease-fire as soon as possible. Having suffered serious military setbacks after his initial successes, Sadat was eager to comply (Lippman 2016, 21-22). In contrast, both China and North Korea were critical of the resolution. In November 1973, Mikhail S. Kapitsa, the head of the Soviet Foreign Ministry’s Far Eastern Department told a Hungarian diplomat that the North Koreans “hoped that there would be a confrontation between the two ‘superpowers’” (Hungarian Embassy in Moscow, November 19, 1973).

Since Egypt started co-sponsoring pro-DPRK draft resolutions as early as 1969 (Yearbook of the United Nations 1969, 161), Pyongyang’s contribution to the Yom Kippur War may not have influenced Cairo’s voting record in the UN as strongly as Miyamoto (2010, 351-352) suggests. Still, Egyptian diplomats must have found it useful to invoke the memory of this military partnership if they had to explain why Sadat’s post-1973 rapprochement with the U.S. made no impact on Egypt’s pro-DPRK stance. Describing how the Middle Eastern states voted on the Korean question at the UN meetings of October 1975, a U.S. Department of State memorandum wryly remarked: “Egypt voted against us all the way, but had said she would do so from the beginning because of what she considered a special debt to North Korea” (U.S. Department of State, November 8, 1975). Actually, this “special debt” meant not only that the DPRK had assisted Egypt against Israel but also that it sided with Sadat against the Kremlin.

#### 4. Egyptian-DPRK Cooperation in the Non-Aligned Movement

From the very beginning, the KWP leaders showed strong interest in the 4th non-aligned summit (Algiers, September 5-10, 1973). In the preparatory stage of the conference, they strove hard to gain the goodwill of those countries that wielded substantial influence in the NAM (like Yugoslavia, Algeria, and Egypt). This strategy did yield certain results, for Pyongyang’s allies managed to achieve

that a pro-DPRK resolution be passed about the Korean question. Still, North Korea was not yet able to gain admission to the NAM, not the least because the ROK also made an attempt to approach the movement. Under such circumstances, the KWP leaders felt it necessary to make even more intensive efforts to recruit as many supporters as possible. Predictably, they paid strong attention to the Arab countries, which had played a very active and successful role at the Algiers conference (Hungarian Embassy in Belgrade, September 20, 1973; Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, September 27, 1973). But since the various Arab states were often in disagreement with each other, the North Koreans had to maneuver with great caution if they wanted to avoid falling between two stools.

For instance, on January 18, 1974, Egypt concluded a military disengagement treaty (known as the Sinai I Agreement) with Israel. Brokered by U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, the agreement effectively bypassed and hence displeased the USSR. Initial Syrian reactions were similarly negative, but the Syrian leaders eventually followed suit by signing their own disengagement agreement with Israel (May 31, 1974), which was in turn denounced by Iraq (Dawisha 1979, 71-72; Karsh 1991, 85-86). Judging from the fact that the North Korean media pointedly ignored both agreements, and instead unequivocally called for the armed liberation of the occupied Arab lands, this regional peace process was hardly to the taste of the militant KWP leaders (Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, July 17, 1974). Still, the very fact that they expressed their reservations by staying silent, rather than through open criticism, helped them to remain on relatively cordial terms with Egypt, Syria, and Iraq alike. On April 19-24, 1974, Deputy Premier Kim Yŏngju visited Egypt (where he assured his hosts that the DPRK “would do everything in its power” to fulfill Cairo’s requests for industrial raw materials and foodstuffs), then departed for Syria (U.S. Embassy in Cairo, April 25, 1974). The Hungarian embassy to Pyongyang reported that in confidential conversations, North Korean officials professed their readiness to support “any step” which the Arab states considered “appropriate” (Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, July 17, 1974).

The KWP leaders had good reason to tread cautiously, because in this period, Egypt, Syria, and Algeria were all members of the NAM’s Coordinating Bureau, which possessed the authority to hold preliminary discussions about the admission

of new members. Thanks to their support, in March 1975 the Bureau approved the DPRK's application, but the final decision was to be made at the next conference of Non-Aligned Foreign Ministers (Lima, August 25-30, 1975) (Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, February 27, 1975). Once again, North Korean diplomacy swung into action. In July 1975, Deputy Premier Pak Sŏngch'ŏl visited Egypt, where his hosts duly assured him that Cairo would support the DPRK's efforts to join the NAM and block South Korea's application (Hungarian Embassy in Cairo, July 15, 1975). In the end, Egypt adopted a relatively passive attitude at the Lima Conference. On the basis of information received from South Korean diplomatic sources, the U.S. Embassy to Peru reported that "Egypt, heretofore a supporter of North Korea against South Korea, was notably silent at the August 24 Coordinating Bureau meeting" (U.S. Embassy in Lima, August 25, 1975). Saudi Arabia strongly promoted the admission of both Koreas, but Algeria, Yugoslavia, and India ensured that only the DPRK be admitted. Among others, they argued that Pyongyang's security treaties with Moscow and Beijing were less incompatible with non-alignment than the U.S. troops stationed in South Korea, since Egypt had also signed a similar treaty with the USSR without forfeiting its non-aligned status (Hungarian Embassy in Algiers, September 23, 1975; Hungarian Embassy in Havana, September 30, 1975; Hungarian Embassy in Belgrade, August 6, 1975).

At the Lima Conference, the Arab countries still managed to adopt a joint position on the problems of the Middle East, but this fragile consensus was soon shattered by the U.S.-brokered Sinai II Agreement (September 4, 1975), in which Egypt and Israel pledged to resolve their disputes by peaceful means, rather than by military force. The Soviet bloc and the militant Arab states (Syria, Iraq, Libya, Algeria, South Yemen) were equally displeased by Cairo's action, regarding it as a disproportionate concession to Israel in exchange for a minor territorial gain (Dawisha 1979, 75-76; Karsh 1991, 92-96). To counter Soviet pressure, Sadat curtailed cooperation with those East European countries that shared Moscow's reservations about Sinai II but demonstratively engaged the independent-minded Romanian and Yugoslav leaders who expressed approval of the agreement. The Egyptian president made it unmistakably clear that he would pick or discard his foreign partners on the basis of their attitude toward Sinai II (Hungarian Embassy

in Cairo, December 18, 1975). In this tense situation, North Korea felt compelled to take a stand, all the more so because as early as September 5, 1975, the ROK Foreign Ministry publicly welcomed Sinai II “as another important step to improve the situation in the Middle East area” (U.S. Embassy in Seoul, September 18, 1975). Seoul’s announcement effectively forced Kim Il Sung’s hand, as he could not afford to appear less supportive than his South Korean rivals. Still, the risks of supporting the agreement had to be carefully balanced against the risks of opposing it.

Pyongyang attempted to solve this dilemma by telling both sides what they wanted to hear. Seeking to outbid Seoul, Kim Il Sung sent a congratulatory message to Sadat (U.S. Embassy in Seoul, September 18, 1975). On September 22, 1975, Foreign Minister Hō Tam told the Romanian Ambassador that Sinai II “has many advantages. The DPRK supports the interim agreement ... because it constitutes a step forward toward a final solution. The good thing is that the parties are negotiating, rather than shooting. [The North Koreans] do not publish this standpoint, because [if they did so], they might make enemies of those who oppose the interim agreement.” Since the UN General Assembly was to discuss the Korean question in October, “now the DPRK needs support from every side,” Hō Tam explained, mentioning Egypt in particular. His words astonished the Romanian diplomat, who knew very well that in conversations with Syrian and Palestinian diplomats, the North Korean officials had criticized Sinai II (Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, October 6, 1975).

Predictably, the Egyptian government soon became aware of Pyongyang’s penchant for double-dealing. In early 1976, an Egyptian diplomat informed a Hungarian colleague as follows:

Due to its shiftiness with regard to the Middle Eastern question, the DPRK is not particularly popular in several of the Arab countries, including theirs. ... Furthermore, several [countries] have found out that the Koreans are extremely selfish. As an example, he mentioned that in Lebanon, the DPRK Ambassador asked for a high-level audience to inform his hosts about the current difficulties of solving the Korean question – precisely at the time when the fighting [the Lebanese Civil

War] reached its most destructive stage. (Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, March 25, 1976)

Preparing for the 5th NAM summit (Colombo, August 16-19, 1976), the KWP leaders found it increasingly important, but also increasingly difficult, to balance between the competing interests of their various Arab allies. Under the strong pressure of the Algerian government, on March 16, 1976 North Korea recognized the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), but by doing so, it promptly alienated Morocco and Mauritania. Since the Egyptian leaders, who were on good terms with Rabat but at odds with Algiers, refused to recognize the SADR, Pyongyang's action may have created friction in Egyptian-DPRK relations, too (Hungarian Foreign Ministry, April 27, 1976; Hungarian Embassy in Cairo, April 29, 1976; Hungarian Foreign Ministry, May 7, 1976). But if the North Koreans had taken a step to the left to please *Houari Boumediène*, they soon took another step to the right to woo Sadat. On April 22-24, 1976, Deputy Premier Kong Chint'ae visited Cairo, assured the Egyptian president that the DPRK fully supported his policies, and offered generous military assistance. On May 18-25, 1976, Minister of Defense Abdel Ghani el-Gamasy visited North Korea to obtain special steel for the Egyptian defense industry as well as spare parts for the Soviet made military equipment possessed by the Egyptian armed forces. His hosts adopted an attitude of ostentatious helpfulness, and Kim Il Sung personally assured him that the military assistance the DPRK had provided in 1973 incurred no financial obligation for Egypt. "Please consider it a gift," Kim declared (Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, June 15, 1976).

These gestures stood in a sharp contrast with the Kremlin's reluctance to reschedule Egypt's mounting debt and fulfill Cairo's demands for arms. As such, they must have made a favorable impression on Sadat, who became so exasperated by Moscow's conduct that on March 14, 1976, he unilaterally abrogated the Soviet-Egyptian Treaty of Friendship (Dawisha 1979, 74-77). Similarly to China (Shichor 1979, 169), the DPRK went so far as to publicly support Sadat's action. The Egyptian government cited this example of North Korean solidarity to rebuff

Washington's attempts to dissuade Cairo from taking Pyongyang's side in the UN. On May 3, Foreign Minister Ismail Fahmi told the U.S. Ambassador that a change in Cairo's pro-DPRK position "would open Egypt to charge of being [an] U.S. lackey" (U.S. Embassy in Cairo, May 20, 1976).

In this respect, Egyptian-DPRK solidarity vis-à-vis Moscow proved advantageous to both governments, but this strategy carried considerable risks, too. At the Colombo conference, both Egypt and North Korea incurred the displeasure of those non-aligned states that were more or less favorably disposed toward the USSR (Iraq, Vietnam, Cuba, India), though for different reasons. Outcompeted by their Soviet-friendly rivals (Algeria and Vietnam, respectively), they failed to gain a seat in the Coordinating Bureau (Hungarian Embassy in Cairo, October 13, 1976; Hungarian Embassy in Ulaanbaatar, December 15, 1976).

While the Egyptian government felt obliged to provide support to the DPRK at the Colombo summit, the conference's radically anti-American resolution on the Korean question was hardly in accordance with Cairo's own attitude. Actually, Sadat's partnership with Pyongyang was only one dimension of his multifaceted Korea policy. In parallel, he sought to explore the chances of a diplomatic rapprochement with Seoul. Laboring under the burden of high military expenditures and a mounting debt, the Egyptian economy was in great need for aid and foreign investments. Seeking to exploit Seoul's diplomatic competition with Pyongyang, Sadat attempted to coax the increasingly prosperous ROK into making a contribution, but to no avail. On October 5, 1976, the South Korean Consul-General in Cairo told the U.S. Embassy that the Egyptian government "has consistently sought to obtain ROK economic assistance in return for diplomatic recognition, but that his govt has refused to accept any such equation" (U.S. Embassy in Cairo, October 5, 1976). And even if Seoul had agreed to meet Cairo's conditions, an aid-for-recognition deal with the ROK would have surely alienated the DPRK. To reconcile the Egyptian-North Korean partnership with the planned rapprochement with South Korea, Fahmi explored yet another option. On September 2, 1976, he informed the U.S. Ambassador about his intention to arrange a dialogue between Pyongyang and Seoul, preferably in the form of a high-level North-South meeting to be held in Cairo (U.S. Embassy in Cairo,



September 2, 1976). Once again, the ROK government turned down his initiative, this time on the grounds that Egypt was “too committed to [the] DPRK to play a genuine mediator role” (U.S. Embassy in Cairo, October 5, 1976).

## 5. Sadat in Jerusalem—North Korea’s Dilemma

As noted before, the North Korean leaders seem to have tacitly disapproved of Egypt’s initial attempts to find a negotiated solution to its conflict with Israel, but they prudently refrained from making any public comment on these efforts. Since the Rogers Plan and the Sinai I-II agreements were focused on the technical aspects of military disengagement, rather than calling for a comprehensive political settlement, Pyongyang’s evasive and low-key approach was a more or less feasible diplomatic strategy. In 1977, however, Sadat’s peace policy entered a new phase that was so spectacular that the DPRK could no longer ignore it. On November 19-21, the Egyptian president took a step that no Arab leader had taken before: he paid a formal visit to Israel, conducted negotiations with Prime Minister Menachem Begin, and even delivered a speech to the Knesset. Although Sadat still emphatically called for “Palestinian self-determination,” his taboo-breaking visit immediately triggered violent opposition among the militant Arab states (Syria, Iraq, Libya) and the Palestinian organizations (Jiryis 1978, 26-27; Stein 1999, 226).

In this superheated atmosphere, both Sadat and his detractors were strongly motivated to press Pyongyang for a public statement, either in favor of the visit or against it. While the radical Arab states tried to isolate the “treacherous” Sadat by every means possible, the Egyptian president sought to demonstrate that his initiative was not unanimously rejected abroad. In this diplomatic game, North Korea’s position was of some significance, because the militant Arab regimes regarded the DPRK as their long-standing ally, whereas Sadat evidently calculated that the more non-aligned countries supported his peace policy, the easier he could refute the charge that his actions merely served the aims of “American imperialism.” Since the Soviet bloc was just as critical of his initiative as the

radical Arab regimes were, Sadat had a stake in ensuring the approval of at least a few Communist states (Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, February 21, 1978).

Judging from their long-delayed reaction to Sadat's visit in Jerusalem (which stood in a marked contrast with the immediate protests of the militant Arab states), the North Korean leaders were acutely aware of how thorny the issue was. It occurred as late as December 2 that *Rodong Sinmun* finally published a short news report about Sadat's trip. Written in an objective and non-committal tone, the article noted that Sadat "held discussions with the Israeli leaders, and made a speech in the Israeli parliament," and quoted him as saying that "his visit was aimed at achieving a lasting peace." The Arab diplomats accredited to the DPRK promptly drew the conclusion that the article, devoid as it was of any criticism, must have indicated Pyongyang's approval of Sadat's initiative (Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, March 20, 1978). Actually, this interpretation may have over-simplified the situation, since the DPRK's long procrastination and the absence of explicit support implied certain reservations or reluctance on the part of the KWP leaders. In all probability, the North Korean authorities published the article at the request of the Egyptian government, for Sadat did make strong efforts to influence their stance.

Not long after the president's visit in Israel, the Egyptian Foreign Ministry effectively pressured the DPRK to receive Deputy Prime Minister Hassan Tuhami, the special presidential envoy whose secret talks with Yitzak Hofi and Moshe Dayan in Morocco had prepared the ground for Sadat's Jerusalem trip and whom Sadat now entrusted with the task of explaining his new foreign policy to the Chinese and North Korean leaders. Tuhami asked the DPRK for economic and military assistance, and emphasized the necessity of holding a Sadat-Kim Il Sung summit (Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, February 21, 1978). Returning to Cairo on February 14, 1978, Tuhami was quick to tell the press that Kim Il Sung had accepted Sadat's invitation to visit Egypt. The North Korean leader, Tuhami claimed, had expressed "full trust and admiration for Sadat's courage and prudence," saying that "the whole Third World backed [Sadat's] peace initiative" (U.S. Embassy in Cairo, February 15, 1978).

Taking into consideration that Sadat's Jerusalem trip stood at variance with

Pyongyang's militant approach in general and with its long-standing non-recognition of Israel in particular, North Korea's flexible attitude toward Sadat's initiative appeared a fairly peculiar phenomenon. One factor that possibly influenced Kim Il Sung's position was China's favorable assessment of Sadat's peace policy. Notably, China's response to the start of the Egyptian-Israeli dialogue showed various similarities with *Rodong Sinmun's* article about Sadat's visit. The Chinese leaders expressed support for Sadat's peace offer only after a period of reflection, and when they did so, their reaction was relatively restrained, lest their relations with the militant Arab states be adversely affected (Shichor 1979, 170; Harris 1980, 369). Still, China's standpoint was motivated primarily by its desire to exclude the USSR from the Middle Eastern peace process, whereas the North Koreans seem to have been concerned mostly about the competition posed by South Korea's diplomatic presence in Egypt.

The North Korean leadership "knows that Sadat is ready to improve his relations with South Korea at the DPRK's expense at any time," the Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang reported in February 1978. The Egyptian president did have several irons in the fire, and he may have purposefully played the South Korea card to enhance his bargaining position vis-à-vis Pyongyang. In parallel with Sadat's efforts to coax North Korea into expressing support for his peace initiative, an Egyptian parliamentary delegation visited the ROK to discuss issues of economic cooperation and the question of diplomatic relations. Among others, the delegation asked the South Korean authorities to build jointly owned industrial plants in Egypt, and to provide Egyptian students with technical training (Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, February 21, 1978; Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, June 9, 1978). In 1978, the Korea Exchange Bank and other South Korean banks made a contribution worth 17.8 million Egyptian pounds to the newly established Cairo-Far East Bank, while Doosan Engineering and Construction Co. invested 3.5 million into a new construction firm (Selim 1995, 49-51). Compared with South Korea's lucrative deals with oil-rich Saudi Arabia and Iran, these ventures were of a modest scale, but they still presented an economic challenge that the DPRK could not match.

As noted earlier, the Egyptian government showed considerable interest in

arranging an “aid for recognition” deal with the ROK. Paradoxically, Pyongyang’s best hope for preventing such a deal lay in Seoul’s reluctance to fulfill Cairo’s economic demands, rather than in Sadat’s fidelity to his North Korean comrades-in-arms. As the U.S. Embassy in Cairo reported, the Egyptian government knew that the “ROK did apparently provide some kind of economic aid to Sudan in connection with establishment of diplomatic relations. It expects no less favorable treatment. The name of the game these days in Egypt is economic assistance. Those offering it are favored; those not offering it tend to be downgraded. In absence some such ‘sweetener,’ GOE is perfectly content keep situation as it is” (U.S. Embassy in Cairo, October 30, 1978).

Thus the KWP leaders found themselves in a precarious situation, since either an increase of South Korean generosity or a reduction of Egypt’s demands could have potentially broken the deadlock between Sadat and Park Chung Hee. Under such circumstances, the North Koreans could hardly afford to offend Sadat by criticizing his peace initiative. They must have keenly remembered how their decision to recognize the SADR resulted in a breakdown of relations with Mauritania, and they had every reason to expect the mercurial and temperamental Egyptian president to act likewise (Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, March 20, 1978). On December 2-5, 1977, the Libyan, Syrian, Iraqi, Algerian, South Yemeni, and PLO leaders held a conference in Tripoli to impose sanctions on Egypt, whereupon Sadat promptly severed diplomatic relations with the participants of the meeting (Jiryis 1978, 33-34).

Apart from the evident risks of a critical approach, the North Korean leaders may have had some other reasons to put a good face on Sadat’s peace initiative. The Hungarian diplomats in Pyongyang speculated that the DPRK possibly wanted to learn from Egypt’s experiences to craft a diplomatic strategy toward the Carter administration. Since neither Egypt nor North Korea could gain a military victory over Israel and South Korea, respectively, they switched to a peaceful approach and attempted to reach out to the U.S. The Hungarian diplomats suspected that the DPRK expected Sadat to play a mediating role between Carter and Kim Il Sung, in the same way as it asked various other friendly leaders (like Yugoslavia’s Josip Broz Tito, Pakistan’s Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and Romania’s Nicolae Ceaușescu)

to convey Kim's messages to the White House (Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, February 21, 1978; Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, May 5, 1978). This was a reasonable assumption, since in 1976, Henry Kissinger did ask Sadat to arrange a secret meeting with Kim Il Sung. In 1979, Sadat told Hearst correspondent John Wallach that "Pyongyang had agreed, and that a date had been fixed, but the Ford administration's loss of the election caused the initiative to be scrubbed" (U.S. Department of State, May 23, 1979).

In May 1978, the North Korean Ambassador to Cairo succinctly expressed Pyongyang's complex and ambivalent feelings about Sadat's foreign policy when he told a Romanian diplomat the following:

President Sadat's peace initiative is regarded by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as a positive, courageous and realistic act. President Sadat decided to move to direct negotiations because the resolution of the crisis in the region according with the help of previous methods reached a standstill. It is not true that Sadat is trying to strike a separate peace with Israel, those who assert such things are gravely mistaken. ... There are very good, friendly bilateral relations between the DPRK and Egypt. Economic relations are developing well and there is a strong and deep military collaboration between the two countries. ... However, North Korea is displeased with the fact that Egypt is developing its relations with South Korea, not only economically but also politically. ... North Korea is not raising this issue with Egyptian decision-makers, but it takes action to develop and diversify bilateral relations between the DPRK and Egypt to prove the solidarity and the serious nature of these relations. (Romanian Embassy in Cairo, May 13, 1978)

## 6. The Camp David Conundrum

In the end, however, the North Korean leaders could not draw any concrete benefits from the Egyptian-Israeli peace process. On the contrary, their situation became increasingly uncomfortable, because the Camp David Accords (September 17, 1978) and the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty (March 26, 1979) created an even

deeper rift between Egypt and the vast majority of Arab states than Sadat's visit in Jerusalem. On November 2, 1978, an Arab League summit held in Baghdad sternly warned the Egyptian government against ratifying the Camp David Accords. Sadat refused to take heed, whereupon on March 31, 1979, a meeting of Arab foreign and economic ministers suspended Egypt's membership in the Arab League, and moved the League's headquarters from Cairo to Tunis. Of the twenty-one League members, only Oman, Sudan, and Somalia refrained from severing diplomatic relations with Egypt (King 1991, 126-129; Stein 1999, 258-259; Podeh *et al.* 2002, 1-3).

Under these conditions, both Sadat and his detractors predictably stepped up their efforts to win over the DPRK. The KWP leaders once again had to maneuver between the Scylla of support and the Charybdis of criticism—a situation further complicated by the fact that China cautiously welcomed the Egypt-Israel treaty, whereas the USSR condemned it (Harris 1980, 369-370; Karsh 1991, 122). The Camp David negotiations (September 5-17) were still in progress when, on September 11, Kim Il Sung told an Egyptian government delegation that North Korea “supports any peace initiative launched by Egypt, including the tripartite high-level meeting in Camp David ... but it cannot publicly express this for the moment,” as it “wishes to be in good relations with the other Arab countries, including those that are against the direct dialogue between Egypt and Israel.” To reciprocate Kim's gesture, Egypt cancelled its planned participation in an international shooting championship in Seoul but continued to press Pyongyang for a public statement (Romanian Embassy in Pyongyang, September 22, 1978). Soon after the conclusion of the Accords, the Egyptian Foreign Ministry told the North Korean Ambassador that it would appreciate “if the DPRK government adopted an official declaration in support of the Camp David Agreements” (Romanian Embassy in Cairo, September 20, 1978).

The KWP leaders would not budge, however. Unwilling to fulfil Sadat's request, they tried to mollify their Egyptian partners by emphasizing that they similarly refrained from any public expression of disapproval. On some occasions, the North Koreans directly linked the issue of Camp David with the question of Egyptian-ROK relations. In January 1980, when Vice-President Hosni Mubarak

visited the DPRK, his North Korean counterpart Pak Sŏngch’ŏl asked him not to establish diplomatic relations with South Korea. Mubarak promised that the Egyptian government would not take such a step, whereupon Pak assured him that the DPRK would not criticize Camp David (Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, February 12, 1980). This gesture evidently fell short of Sadat’s expectations, but it still indicated a substantial North Korean commitment to Egypt, since the DPRK adopted this position in defiance of its militant Arab partners who made sustained efforts to persuade Pyongyang to condemn the Accords. For instance, on June 24, 1979 the head of the Egyptian interests section in Amman informed an American diplomat that during the recent visit of a Jordanian delegation in North Korea, the “Great Leader himself expressed disapproval of [Palestinian, Iraqi, and Syrian] attempts to expel Egypt from NAM” (U.S. Embassy in Amman, June 25, 1979).

On November 26-December 4, 1979, a PFLP delegation visited North Korea at the invitation of the KWP leaders, who wanted to persuade the Front to issue a statement that the PLO would not establish contacts with South Korea. They failed to achieve their aim, because the delegates refused to issue a joint PFLP-DPRK statement unless it condemned Camp David—a price their hosts were unwilling to pay. The DPRK did not want to interfere in inter-Arab disputes, Kim Il Sung told the Palestinians, but if Cairo ever established ambassadorial-level diplomatic relations with Seoul, Pyongyang would also revise its attitude toward Camp David (Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, December 11, 1979).

The PLO diplomats accredited to North Korea were just as dissatisfied with Pyongyang’s attitude toward Camp David as their PFLP rivals. They frequently harped upon the theme, only to be told by their hosts that if the DPRK criticized the Accords, it would lose Egypt’s support to its unification policy. When the North Korean press published a telegram that Yasser Arafat sent to Kim Il Sung, it took care to omit those parts that complained about Camp David. Worse still, the KWP leaders became temporarily unwilling to fulfill the PLO’s requests for military equipment. It occurred only in mid-October 1981, during Arafat’s three-day state’s visit to the DPRK, that Kim Il Sung finally made a promise to renew arms shipments to the PLO. During his conversation with Arafat, Kim also had some harsh words about the “reactionary” Egyptian leadership and its collusion

with “American imperialism.” These signs of change were probably influenced by the fact that a few days before, on October 6, Sadat had been assassinated by a group of Islamist terrorists. Nevertheless, Kim Il Sung still clung to the position that the DPRK could ill afford to condemn Camp David. The Egyptian government, he told Arafat, would retaliate by closing down the North Korean Embassy in Cairo, and other African countries might also follow suit. “This is exactly what South Korea wants to achieve,” Kim pointed out (Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, June 12, 1981; Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, October 19, 1981).

Pyongyang’s relations with the radical Arab states were also adversely affected by the Camp David conundrum, all the more so because the latter regimes proved quite willing to take retaliatory measures against the DPRK. For instance, the Algerian leaders expressed their displeasure by repeatedly postponing an international political conference that the North Koreans wanted to hold in Algiers (Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, March 6, 1981). In January 1980, the Iraqi Ambassador to Pyongyang told his Hungarian counterpart that North Korea’s persistent entreaties notwithstanding, the Iraqi government firmly refused to sell oil to the DPRK at below-market prices. This preferential treatment was reserved for those Asian countries that showed readiness to condemn Sadat’s policies, and as such, it was inapplicable to North Korea, whose leaders maintained amicable relations with Egypt (Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, January 8, 1980).

Disagreements of this kind continued to occur even after Sadat’s demise. In December 1984, the Syrian Ambassador to Pyongyang told a Hungarian diplomat that in the recent years, no high-ranking Syrian leader had visited the DPRK, because whenever the North Koreans proposed a visit, the Syrians invariably raised the issue of Camp David, and the discussions ended in a deadlock. The frustrated ambassador remarked that in the face of Pyongyang’s uncooperative attitude, it might be advantageous for Syria to soften its hostile stance toward the ROK (Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, December 5, 1984). Still, a political rapprochement between Seoul and the Soviet-backed, radical Arab states seemed a less likely scenario than the further growth of South Korean influence in Western-oriented Egypt. Possibly this is why Kim Il Sung appeared more willing



to run the risk of Algerian, Iraqi, and Syrian disapproval than to offend Sadat and his successor, Mubarak.

## 7. Epilogue and Conclusion

In the last years of the Sadat era, the cautious solidarity between Cairo and Pyongyang vis-à-vis the Soviet bloc and the militant Arab states was not limited to the question of Camp David, though the two leaders expressed their critical opinion about the USSR and its allies in considerably different ways. For instance, at the Belgrade Conference of Non-Aligned Foreign Ministers (July 25-30, 1978) Egypt and other conservative Arab and African countries attempted to prevent Cuba from hosting the 6th NAM summit (September 3-9, 1979). On that occasion, the KWP leaders, critical as they were of Cuban military operations in Africa, adopted a somewhat evasive attitude (Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, February 12, 1979; Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, May 29, 1979). In contrast, they condemned the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in the sharpest terms possible (Hungarian Foreign Ministry, February 20, 1979), whereas the Egyptian government found it prudent to call upon "all parties to respect the principles of nonintervention and the right of peoples to choose their own régime freely" (Yearbook of the United Nations 1979, 275). Still, at the 6th NAM summit both Egypt and the DPRK demanded that Cambodia be represented by the delegates of the fallen Pol Pot regime, rather than the Vietnamese-backed People's Republic of Kampuchea (Chaudhary 1988, 191).

During his January 1980 talks with Pak Sŏngch'ŏl, Mubarak complained about the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan for nearly two hours, while Pak voiced his own opinion in a far more indirect form. As he put it, the DPRK supported the armed liberation of occupied countries but opposed those military interventions that served only purposes of "dominationism" (Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, February 12, 1980). In retaliation for the Soviet invasion, Sadat vociferously supported the U.S.-led boycott of the Moscow Olympics (Eaton 2018, 210-212); North Korea attended the Games, but its Olympic team was much smaller than

expected, and Pyongyang informed the Soviet authorities about its decision as late as May 23, 1980 (Hungarian Embassy in Pyongyang, June 2, 1980).

These episodes once again revealed that the overlaps between Egyptian and North Korean diplomatic interests were significant enough to render cooperation possible but not so extensive as to create an all-round alliance. Both leaderships greatly needed external recognition and approval (Sadat faced accusations of treason from the other Arab states, while the two Korean governments were locked in a perennial competition for national legitimacy), and the threat of diplomatic isolation induced them to cling to each other, but their other aims were not necessarily in sync. Kim concurred with Sadat's negative opinion about Soviet "dominationism," but he regarded Washington, rather than Moscow, as the chief obstacle to his ambitions. In Sadat's eyes, America evolved from a hostile power into an attractive partner and a much-needed mediator between Egypt and Israel, but from Kim's perspective, it remained Public Enemy No. 1.

One factor that helped Kim and Sadat to bridge this chasm was China's simultaneous cooperation with Cairo and Pyongyang. As far as Washington was concerned, the two leaders could not see eye to eye, but both could accept Beijing as a partner. North Korea's support for Sadat over such issues as the expelled Soviet advisers, the abrogated Soviet-Egyptian treaty, the Jerusalem visit, and Camp David was largely in concord with China's position. Similarly, Kim's disapproval of Cuban and Vietnamese "dominationism" was strongly influenced by Beijing's standpoint. The North Korean leader had no incentive to confront Moscow, Havana, and Hanoi for the sake of gaining U.S. goodwill (as Sadat did) but he was willing to take such steps in the context of Sino-DPRK cooperation.

Sadat, on his part, evidently realized that his partnership with North Korea was a fly in the ointment of Egyptian-U.S. cooperation, for Washington repeatedly asked him to reach a rapprochement with Seoul and keep a distance from Pyongyang. Still, he maintained at least a limited commitment to the DPRK, not the least because the Chinese leaders presumably encouraged him to do so. In 1972, China joined those countries that regularly sponsored pro-DPRK draft resolutions in the UN (Yearbook of the United Nations 1972, 150-152), and thus an Egyptian attempt to leave the group of sponsors would have incurred Beijing's

disapproval. Moving away from the Soviet bloc but not yet integrated into the U.S. alliance system, Egypt was in great need for alternative partners, and Sadat must have appreciated China's support vis-à-vis the USSR. In this precarious situation, he could ill afford to be perceived as an "U.S. lackey." Pulled in different directions by Washington and Beijing, Sadat tried to have his Korean cake and eat it, too. At the UN and NAM meetings, the Egyptian government upheld a formally pro-DPRK stance but did not champion Pyongyang's cause as actively as Algeria or Yugoslavia did, nor did it close the door on cooperation with Seoul.

Actually, the South Korean factor seems to have influenced the nature of the Egyptian-North Korean partnership to an even greater extent than the China factor. Due to the element of inter-Korean competition, the Egyptian-DPRK relationship was hardly a partnership of equals. Determined to outbid Seoul at any cost, the KWP leaders made more intensive efforts to please Egypt than vice versa, and the success (or failure) of these efforts depended not only on their own diplomatic skills but also on Cairo's fluctuating relations with the ROK. Overshadowed as it was by North Korea's full-fledged embassy, the South Korean Consulate-General in Cairo gave the Egyptian government a leverage over the DPRK. In essence, Sadat could purchase Kim Il Sung's solidarity vis-à-vis the Soviet bloc and the militant Arab states at a relatively low price, i.e., by keeping South Korea in a subordinate position and occasionally making such symbolic gestures as cancelling Egypt's attendance at the 1978 shooting championship. But if Sadat was reluctant to provide full support to Pyongyang vis-à-vis Seoul, Kim also resorted to various techniques of evasion and prevarication to remain on good terms both with Sadat and his Arab detractors.

During the Yom Kippur War, the contrast between Pyongyang's direct military assistance and Seoul's cautious neutrality put the ROK on the defensive, but once Sadat started to pursue a peace policy, the tables were turned. South Korea found it easier to adapt to the U.S.-brokered Egyptian-Israeli agreements than the DPRK, yet the North Koreans could not afford to be less supportive than their southern rivals. Their cooperation with Cairo brought them into hot water in Algiers, Baghdad, and Damascus, but they still could not take it for granted that Egypt would reciprocate their solidarity. Ironically, the factor that prevented the

establishment of full diplomatic relations between Egypt and South Korea was Seoul's reluctance to fulfill Sadat's economic demands, rather than Sadat's loyalty to the DPRK.

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