

Sadat's Peace Legacy and Hopes for Arab Liberalism

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Brief Analysis

During those periods when modern Egypt was occupied by foreign powers and governed by regimes subservient to those powers, many Egyptians found themselves attracted to extremist ideas and organizations. Beginning in the 1920s, all sorts of secret revolutionary and extremist organizations began to expand throughout the country. Whether secular or not, all of these organizations descended from the same forebear: extremism. In fact, even the late President Gamal Abdel Nasser himself had once been a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and had sworn to obey its leaders.

Extremists and revolutionaries alike have no interest in pursuing reform within a given system. Rather, they seek to destroy the present world and build their own on its debris. Yet, some individuals within revolutionary movements carry the potential to shake off extremist thoughts and open up to liberalism. Such was the case with the late President Anwar Sadat.

After the death of President Nasser -- a time when Sinai remained under occupation and most Egyptians were unable to see any light at the end of the tunnel -- Sadat still held hope for the future. He succeeded in liberating Sinai, signing peace agreements with Israel, and bringing political pluralism to Egypt. Only after these steps were taken was Egypt ready to join the modern world.

Even while working toward these achievements, Sadat was able to secure the approval of the Egyptian people. Upon his return from Jerusalem, one million Egyptians greeted him at the airport in Cairo. Following his assassination, fear alone kept Egyptians from attending his funeral en masse or taking to the streets, as they had done for President Nasser. Initially, the people did not know what had taken place; many had seen soldiers killing Sadat and had assumed it was a coup d'etat. Well after the assassination, battles were still being fought between the police and the Muslim Brotherhood in Asiout, and reinforcements were being sent from Cairo. Many people feared that masked men would show up at Sadat's funeral and attack those attending.

Peace and Liberalism

Achieving Arab-Israeli peace and fighting extremism are important if positive trends such as liberalism are to develop further in the Arab world. In the case of Egypt and Israel, peace was tied to Egypt's fight against extremism. Moreover, this peace was achieved between two states. Without the hierarchy and ingredients of a state, peace becomes more elusive. Such is the case with the Palestinians today.

In order for Israeli-Palestinian peace to be achieved, there must be some sort of recognition of a Palestinian state. Peace endures between Egypt and Israel in large part because Egypt is a state. In contrast, there is no one to talk to on the Palestinian side today, just gangs and clans. Consequently, extremists have surged to center stage on both sides. These types of ideologies must not be allowed to prevail. Fear breeds hate, and people in the Middle East today are afraid.

Even in a state, however, conflict is inevitable if the stage is left to extremists. In fact, only after Sadat's successful peace efforts was Egypt able to transform itself from an extremist, revolutionary, totalitarian state into a country

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