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The Role of Israel in Ayman Nour's Liberal Vision for Egypt

OFIR WINTER*

ABSTRACT *In recent years, Ayman Nour has emerged as a prominent leader of the Egyptian liberal opposition. Although Israel is not at the focus of his discourse, it is, nevertheless, not entirely ignored. This article examines Nour's attitude toward Israel by analyzing his views on three inter-connected issues: (a) his views on the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty and normalizing relations with Israel; (b) the distinction between his approaches to the United States and to Israel; (c) his vision for the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the future of Israeli-Egyptian relations. In his public activity, Nour embodies a unique case study for Israel's role in the overall political agenda of a liberal oppositionist in contemporary Egypt. This article argues that understanding Nour's motives allow us to interpret his positions toward Israel as part of a broader line against the Egyptian regime, and not necessarily as reflecting a systematic ideological doctrine.*

Introduction

In recent years, Ayman Nour has emerged as a prominent leader of the Egyptian liberal opposition and as a symbol of a younger generation that yearns to promote democracy throughout Egypt and the Arab world. He is regarded by many in the Arab world and in the West as a liberal democratic alternative to Husni Mubarak's deposed authoritarian regime, as well as a moderate secular alternative to the Islamist opposition, the Muslim Brotherhood.

While Israel is mentioned in Ayman Nour's speeches, articles and interviews, it is worth noting that domestic issues, rather than foreign affairs, are the focus of his interests. And while the platform of his Tomorrow Party does not include a clear statement concerning the future of the Egyptian peace treaty with Israel, the Jewish state is referred to in the party's platform and in a significant number of its official statements. These sources are important indicators of Nour's attitude toward Israel. This article examines this attitude through analysis of three issues: (a) his views on the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty and normalizing relations with Israel; (b) the distinction between his respective approaches to the United States and to Israel; (c) his vision for the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the future of Israeli-Egyptian peace relations.

Analyzing Nour's attitude toward Israel is important for several reasons. First, as a prominent Egyptian oppositionist with aspirations to power, it is interesting to examine what kind of alternative, if any, Nour offers concerning the Israeli issue.

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Second, in his intensive public activity over the past years, Nour embodies a unique case study for Israel's role in the overall political agenda of a liberal oppositionist in contemporary Egypt. Third, Nour's case may shed some light on the possible implications concerning the Egyptian peace treaty with Israel of a hypothetical scenario in which a liberal leader of his kind will come to power.

Biographical Background

Nour was born in 1964 in Mansurah. His father was a lawyer and a member of the Egyptian Parliament and his mother established and supervised a number of charity projects in his hometown. During the 1980s, after graduating from the Faculty of Law at Mansurah University, he started his career as a lawyer and a journalist in the opposition newspaper *al-Wafd*. In 1992, Nour wrote a book entitled *al-Liberaliyya hiya al-Hall* ("Liberalism is the Solution", a paraphrase of the famous Islamic slogan "Islam is the solution"). In 1995, Nour earned his Ph.D. in the History of Law in Russia. That year, he was elected to the Egyptian People's Assembly, where he served for two terms between 1995 and 2005.¹ Until 2001 he represented the liberal party *al-Wafd*, but following disagreements with the party's chairman, Na'man Jum'a, in 2003 he established "The Tomorrow Party" (*Hizb al-Ghad*), Egypt's first new opposition party in more than half a century. The party was not formally recognized by the Egyptian government until 27 October 2004; Nour was elected chairman at the first party convention held immediately afterwards.² The party promotes a bold public agenda, addressing issues such as human rights, freedom of speech, reform of the legal code, free elections for the presidency and restrictions on presidential power, as well as domestic policies on issues such as job creation, social welfare programs and education.

In July 2005, Nour announced his candidacy for the Egyptian presidential election, scheduled for September 2005. In the election, Nour came second to Mubarak, receiving 7% of the total vote (approximately 540,000 votes), although foreign political observers claim he received as much as 13% of the vote.³ Earlier that year, his candidacy had been jeopardized by his 30 January arrest for allegedly falsifying signatures on his party's registration papers. Nour was released six weeks later, only after the American Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, expressed concern regarding his arrest and cancelled her planned visit to Cairo in protest.⁴ Following the elections, in December 2005, Nour found himself again entangled in the Egyptian court system, presumably because the regime feared his growing oppositional power. He was sentenced to five years in prison on forgery charges. Due to health problems, Nour was released in February 2009. One month later, he announced his intention to run in the next presidential election, originally scheduled

¹ Ayman Nour, 'Ayman Nour Biography', <http://aymanoormasr.blogspot.com/2009/12/my-biography.html> (accessed 9 December 2009).

² Suzanne Gershowitz, 'Dissident Watch: Ayman Nour', *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. XII: No. 3 (summer 2005), p. 96.

³ Jeremy M. Sharp, 'Egypt: 2005 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections', *CRS Report for Congress*, http://digital.library.unt.edu/govdocs/crs/data/2006/upl-meta-crs-10216/RS22274_2006Jan15.pdf, (accessed 15 January 2006); Alon Levin and Yuval Bustan, 'Sheat Mivhan LeMubarak', <http://www.sikurmemukad.com/sikurim/muslimworld/egypt2.html> (accessed 12 June 2006).

⁴ Middle East Media Research Institute (Memri), 'Memri Special Dispatch No. 881: Growing Egyptian-U.S. Tensions: Egyptian Press Attacks President Bush', <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP88105> (accessed 18 March 2005).

for September 2011, even though the state had banned him from engaging in political activity for five years after his release.⁵ In February 2010, Nour was officially nominated by his party's council as its candidate for president.⁶

Since his release, Nour has made significant efforts to strengthen his position, both within the Egyptian political arena and internationally. In early April 2009, he launched the "Cairo Declaration," a document issued in cooperation with other Egyptian opposition leaders in which they called for democracy and political reforms in Egypt.⁷ Nour's campaign to draw public attention to the document included visits to most Egyptian governorates where he met with youth, non-governmental organizations, and ordinary Egyptians. Throughout this campaign, he tried to convince audiences to sign the "Cairo Declaration" and support the Tomorrow Party.⁸

Likewise, Nour intensified his activity within the Egyptian opposition movement, voicing opposition to Gamal Mubarak's possible inheritance of Egypt's presidency from his father. Indeed, in October 2009, Nour became the driving force behind the establishment of a new oppositional group, the National Front Against the Succession.⁹ A few months later, in February 2010, Nour collaborated with former Director General of IAEA, Dr. Muhammad al-Barada'i, alongside other oppositional leaders, in establishing the National Association for Change, an umbrella organization calling for the promotion of "real democracy and social justice" in Egypt.¹⁰ Following a decision made by this organization, the Tomorrow Party boycotted both rounds of the elections for the People's Assembly of 2010, held on November 28th and December 5th respectively. Although the party won one seat, which was the same result as the elections of 2005, Nour refused to recognize its "fake" results, and expressed his support for the initiative to establish a shadow parliament, aiming to challenge the legitimacy of the newly elected one.¹¹ It is worth noting that Nour's cooperation with other opposition forces is not restricted to his liberal counterparts, but also includes cooperation with the Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt's most powerful opposition group. Despite deep ideological differences, he has found it necessary to

⁵ Arian Fariborz and Mahmoud Tawfik, 'Interview with Ayman Nour: I Won't Wait for the Regime to Give Me Its Blessings!', http://www.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/_c-476/_nr-1125/i.html, (accessed 20 March 2009); Joshua Muravchik, 'The Trials of Ayman Nour', http://www.aei.org/docLib/20060602_20190.pdf (accessed October 2006).

⁶ Los Angeles Times, 'Egypt: First presidential Candidate Announced', <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/babylonbeyond/2010/02/egypt-first-presidential-candidate-announced.html>, (accessed 17 February 2010).

⁷ Mawqi' al-Duktur Ayman Nur, 'I'lan al-Qahirah', http://aymannoor.net/ar/?page_id=152, (accessed 6 April 2009).

⁸ Mawqi' al-Duktur Ayman Nur, 'Ayman Nour Yadhhabu li-Tajamu'at al-Shabab li-Sharh al-Matalib al-'Asharah', <http://aymannoor.net/ar/?p=173> (accessed 11 April 2009); Mawqi' al-Duktur Ayman Nur, 'Duktur Ayman Nour fi Ziyarah lil-Iskandariyyah', <http://aymannoor.net/ar/?p=429> (accessed 4 July 2009).

⁹ Mawqi' al-Duktur Ayman Nur, 'Ar-Rabi' 'Ashar min Uktubir Maw'id In'iqad al-Jabhah al-Qawmiyyah did at-Tawrith', <http://aymannoor.net/ar/?p=475> (accessed 5 October 2009).

¹⁰ Al-Dustur, 'Nur: Insihab al-Ghad min al-Jam'iyyah al-Wataniyyah lil-Taghyir Ghayr Warid', <http://dostor.org/politics/egypt/10/april/14/13114?c=61877> (accessed 15 April 2010); Muhammad al-Barada'i, 'Ma'a Sanughayyir', <http://www.taghyeer.net> (n.d.).

¹¹ Imam Ahmad, 'Hizb al-Ghad Yu'lin Muqata'atahu al-Intikhabat al-Barlamaniyyah al-Muqbilah', http://www.masrawy.com/News/Egypt/Politics/2010/september/14/elect_boycott.aspx, (accessed 14 September 2010); Ayman Nur, 'al-Ghad Yu'ayyid Insihab al-Mu'aradah min Jawlat al-I'adah wa-La Ya'tarif bi-Barlaman al-Tazwir', http://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=471813452698 (accessed 6 December 2010); Mira Tzoreff, 'De-Democratizing Egyptian Elections', *Tel-Aviv Notes*, <http://www.dayan.org/pdfim/Tzoreff%20egypt%20elect.pdf> (accessed 20 December 2010).

maintain a tactical dialogue with the Islamist opposition around their common political goals.¹²

On 14 April 2009, Nour made an international appearance when he spoke in front of the European Parliament in Brussels, calling upon its members to cease “supporting the tyranny” in Egypt.¹³ During his stay in Europe, he met with Edward McMillan-Scott, a British member of the European Parliament and one of its vice-presidents, as well as with a number of Members of Parliament from Belgium and Italy.¹⁴ On 7 May 2009, Nour delivered a speech to the American Congress via video conference, in which he asked the United States for “help supporting the democratization process and social development in the Middle East.” He argued that his party's successful performance in the 2005 elections “provided practical and shocking evidence that a civilian liberal oppositional party may succeed at becoming a third player between an oppressive state and [Islamic] fundamentalism [...] without compromising the principle and prioritization of stability.”¹⁵ At the end of 2009, the Egyptian authorities issued a travel ban against Nour and did not allow him to travel to The United States.¹⁶ The ban was lifted in October 2010 prior to his trip to a conference in Holland, following the intervention of the Dutch embassy.¹⁷

Egyptian Liberals' Approach to Israel

The topic of liberalism in Egypt has gained considerable scholarly attention. Several books and articles have reviewed the state of liberalism in Egypt in different periods since the late 19th century and onwards.¹⁸ Other studies have focused on the ideas and the particular circumstances of individuals within the liberal Egyptian circles.¹⁹ The specific attitudes of Egyptian liberals toward Israel have also been discussed in

¹² Ayman Nour, ‘al-Ghad wal-Ikhwan bayan Sikkat al-Salamah wa-Sikkat al-Nadamah’, <http://www.dostor.org/authors/11/51/10/april/26/14492> (accessed 27 April 2010).

¹³ Mawqi‘ al-Duktur Ayman Nur, ‘Nour lil-Barlaman al-Urubi: Takhallu ‘an Da‘m al-Istibdad’, <http://aymannoor.net/ar/?p=199> (accessed 15 April 2009).

¹⁴ Mawqi‘ al-Duktur Ayman Nur, ‘Ayman Nour Yujri Thalath Jirahat bil-‘Ayn fi Biljika wa-Yusafir al-Arba‘a’ li-Landan wa-Kanada’, <http://aymannoor.net/ar/?p=248> (accessed 25 April 2009).

¹⁵ Mawqi‘ al-Duktur Ayman Nur, ‘Bayan Suhufi bi-Sha’n Kalimat Duktur Ayman amam al-Kunjris’, <http://aymannoor.net/ar/?p=282> (accessed 9 May 2009).

¹⁶ Al-Jazirah Nit, ‘Man‘ Ayman Nour min al-Safi’, <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/C7799385-1A7D-4E32-B922-5F523A203179.htm> (accessed 5 November 2009).

¹⁷ Abir Sarra, ‘Egypt's Ayman Nour: We Will Win Even in Unfair Elections’, <http://www.rnw.nl/english/article/egypts-ayman-nour-we-will-win-even-unfair-elections> (accessed 7 November 2010).

¹⁸ For instance: Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939* (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1962); Faruq Abu Zayd, *al-Fikr al-Librali fi al-Sahafah al-Misriyyah* (Cairo: ‘Alam al-Kutub, 1997); Roel Meijer, *The Quest for Modernity: Secular Liberal and Left-Wing Political Thought in Egypt, 1945-1958* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002); Eberhard Kienle, *A Grand Delusion: Democracy and Economic Reform in Egypt* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000); Raymond A. Hinnebusch, ‘The Reemergence of the Wafd Party: Glimpses of the Liberal Opposition in Egypt’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 16 (1984), pp. 99-121; Shimon Shamir, ‘Liberalism: From Monarchy to Postrevolution’, in *Egypt from Monarchy to Republic*, ed. by Shimon Shamir (Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press, 1995), pp. 195-212.

¹⁹ For example: Joshua Muravchik, *The Next Founders: Voices of Democracy in the Middle East* (New York, London: Encounter Books, 2009), pp. 153-200; David Govrin, ‘Hala Mustafa and the Liberal Arab Predicament’, *Middle East Quarterly*, vol. XVII, no. 2 (Spring 2010), pp. 41-52; Meir Hatina, *Identity Politics in the Middle East: Liberal Thought and Islamic Challenge in Egypt* (London, New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007); Aaron Mannes, ‘Reformer in Egypt’, *Policy Review*, 116 (December 2002/January 2003), pp. 80-85.

several studies, particularly in the literature concerning the signing of the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel in March 1979, and the question of normalization of Israeli-Egyptian relations.²⁰

Understanding the current state of liberalism in Egypt requires a brief historical overview. Liberalism was the unifying element of the constitutional monarchy period (1923-1952). This Egyptian “liberal age” (to borrow Albert Hourani’s term) was characterized by lively intellectual discourse, as well as a multi-party political system which represented mainly the rural and the urban elites. Nevertheless, it worked to promote changes in all spheres of life, including the foundation of constitutional structure, legal reform, schooling and university systems and economic entrepreneurship. Amongst the most prominent liberals of that era were Muhammad Husayn Haykal, Ahmad Amin, ‘Abbas Mahmud al-‘Aqqad and Taha Husayn. Their thought was dominated by the principles of reason, rationalism, scientific spirit, separation of religion and politics, critical reexamination of the Islamic law and critical borrowing from the Western culture, and by dedication to the values of progress, freedom, pluralism, democracy and humanism. Since the 1930s, in the face of growing social tensions and the rise of competing Islamic and Arab Nationalist ideologies, Egyptian liberalism experienced a gradual process of decline both politically and ideologically. The Egyptian liberal age came to its end with the Revolution of 1952 and the dismantling of the ruling al-Wafd party.²¹

Under Nasser, many liberals backed the revolution in the hope that it would provide for revival and modernity, although a minority among them engaged in rather feeble protests in the form of allegorical plays or limited demonstrations. In the early 1970s, after almost two decades of relative absence from the Egyptian public arena, liberalism reemerged as a part of Anwar al-Sadat’s de-Nasserization campaign. The remaining veterans of the old liberal age, such as Egypt’s greatest writers, Tawfiq al-Hakim and Nagib Mahfuz, were once again at center stage, leading the revival of the liberal trend. Since the 1980s, new generations of “neo-liberals” have grown, including Farag Foda, Husayn Ahmad Amin, Sa‘id al-Naggar and others. Although the post-revolution liberals shared most principles and values with the pre-revolution generation, they operated in an entirely different social, cultural and political climate. In particular, they had to face the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, and most importantly, unlike their predecessors, they constituted a small minority which was not a part of the ruling elite.²²

Under Sadat’s rule, the proclamation of *infītāḥ* initiated the liberalization of the economic structure and reestablished a dynamic free-enterprise sector. These developments were accompanied by a small measure of political pluralism, which was manifested by the establishment of a limited and supervised party system. During Mubarak’s era, there has been a substantial expansion of free speech, alongside greater permission for the registration of new political parties. Electoral politics have been conducted according to a “restricted party plurality” system that relies on a strong ruling party surrounded by small opposition groups.²³ However, the evolution of liberties in Egypt over these years has always been interrupted by heavy

²⁰ For instance: Fouad Ajami, *The Dream Palace of the Arabs* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), pp. 253-312; Shimon Shamir, *Mitsrayim Behanhagat Sadat* (Tel-Aviv: Dvir, 1978), pp. 181-246; David Sultan, *Between Cairo and Jerusalem: The Normalization between Arab states and Israel* (Tel-Aviv: The University Institute for Diplomacy and Regional Cooperation, Tel-Aviv University, 2007).

²¹ See Shamir, ‘Liberalism: From Monarchy to Postrevolution’.

²² Ibid.

²³ Tzoreff, ‘De-Democratizing Egyptian Elections’.

authoritarian restrictions; that is to say, trials of civilians by military courts, growing numbers of political prisoners, attempts to muzzle the press, limitations on institutions of civil society and widespread official interference in the elections.²⁴ A recent example of such de-liberalization steps taken by the authorities was provided in the 2010 elections for the People's Assembly, in which the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) and affiliated independents won 93% of the seats, while a heavy-handed strategy was implemented to defeat opposition candidates.²⁵

In contemporary Arab debates liberals are usually defined broadly as "scholars and activists whose main concern is the introduction of Western-type democracy in Arab countries."²⁶ The Tomorrow Party, which defines its line as "socialist liberal democratic,"²⁷ has indeed made the liberalization of the Egyptian regime through free and fair elections its main political message and leading demand.²⁸ The party's political platform defines "liberal democracy" as a "peaceful format for managing disagreements and conflicts in accordance with principles which are accepted by all parties [involved]." It sets the target of "struggling for [...] the creation of democratic society based on the participation of all nationalities, groups and classes in determining the fate of their homeland".²⁹ In September 2009, during a visit to the Suez Governorate, Nour elaborated that "liberalism means the acceptance of the other, religious tolerance and citizenship rights."³⁰ As regards economic policy, the party's platform calls for "economic liberalism based on the freedom of possession, fair competition and encouragement of innovation and creativity, while setting [appropriate] regulations."³¹

During the monarchy period, Egyptian liberals were hardly troubled with the appearance of the Zionist movement. Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid, for instance, attended in 1925 the opening ceremony of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem as an official representative of the Egyptian government, despite criticism by Palestinian Arabs.³² Al-Sayyid and many other liberals sought to establish the Nile Valley as the sole basis of modern Egyptian national identity. As such, they did not feel so committed to the relatively distant Arab-Jewish conflict in Mandatory Palestine, but were rather indifferent about it.³³ This type of liberal discourse was still evident even on the eve of the Egyptian invasion of Israel on 15 May 1948; in a closed session held by the Egyptian parliament's upper house, the former Egyptian prime minister, Isma'il Sidqi Pasha, called on his country in vain to avoid war, saying that Egypt does not have "a major share in the Palestine conflict" and its "supreme interest lies in the establishment of stable peace."³⁴ Accordingly, it is no wonder that during the 1970s,

²⁴ Kienle, *A Grand Delusion: Democracy and Economic Reform in Egypt*, pp. 1-16.

²⁵ Tzoreff, 'De-Democratizing Egyptian Elections'.

²⁶ Uriya Shavit, 'Is Shura a Muslim Form of Democracy? Roots and Systemization of a Polemic', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 3(May 2010), p. 362.

²⁷ Hizb al-Ghad, *Barnamij Hizb al-Ghad* (n.d.), p. 14.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 16; Uriya Shavit, *The Wars of Democracy* (Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University, 2008, in Hebrew), p. 270.

²⁹ Hizb al-Ghad, *Barnamij Hizb al-Ghad*, p. 47.

³⁰ Mawqi' al-Duktur Ayman Nur, 'Ziyarat d. Ayman Nour lil-Suways wa-Ijtima'uh bil-Qiwa al-Siyasiyyah bil-Muhafazah', <http://aymannoor.net/ar/?p=466> (accessed 13 September 2009).

³¹ Hizb al-Ghad, *Barnamij Hizb al-Ghad*, p. 31.

³² Haggai Erlich, *Students and University in 20th Century Egyptian Politics* (London: Frank Cass, 1989), pp. 63, 88.

³³ For more see: I. Gershoni, *Egypt between Distinctiveness and Unity: The Search for National Identity 1919-1948* (Tel-Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuchad, 1980, in Hebrew), p. 305.

³⁴ Itamar Rabinovich, 'Egypt and the Palestine Question Before and After the Revolution', in *Egypt from Monarchy to Republic*, ed. by Shamir, pp. 327-8.

some liberals, such as Mahfuz and al-Hakim, were amongst the most devoted advocates of a separate peace with Israel, urging their country to favor its own particular interests over Arab ones. At the same time, liberals who were considered proponents of the Pan-Arab ideology, such as Yusuf Idris and al-Sayyid Yasin, were far more reluctant to accept a partial settlement of the conflict.³⁵

The positions of liberals toward Israel in contemporary Egypt are varied. Some of them see peace with Israel as an essential component of Egypt's transition from what they perceive as a reality of backwardness and oppression towards a future of progressiveness and freedom. Peace with Israel, in their view, is a precondition for the promotion of political, economical and cultural liberalism in their country. Moreover, they tend to portray Israel as sort of a "role model" for democracy, pluralism and freedom in the region.³⁶ While the vast majority of these liberals call for an Israeli withdrawal from Arab territories occupied in 1967, many of them support a "warm peace" with Israel, including normalization in different fields, such as economic cooperation, intensive people-to-people interactions, tourism and cultural exchange.³⁷ This group includes, among others, Tariq Heggy, Amin Al-Mahdi, 'Ali Salem, Sa'd al-Din Ibrahim, and Muhammad Sa'id al-'Ashmawi. Heggy, for instance, has published an article encouraging the Egyptian media to promote what he called "the culture of peace" with Israel. "A war culture," he argued, "[...] will divert our energies from what should be our main target at this juncture: building up a strong society capable of facing external challenges effectively by using the same tools as those used by advanced, successful societies, not those of a Bedouin mentality used by people addicted to failure."³⁸

On the other hand, contemporary liberalism in Egypt is not always accompanied by pacifist attitudes toward Israel. There are many Egyptian liberals who do not consider peace with Israel an integral part of their agenda, and strongly object to any form of normalization with Israel. Objection to normalization usually belongs to one of two categories – conditional or categorical: some insist that normal relations with Israel must be avoided so long as Israel occupies Arab territory, while others deeply believe that Israel is imperialist by its very nature, and warn against the dangers of an Israeli cultural invasion and its expansionist ambitions. Many liberals who belong to the latter group have Islamist orientations,³⁹ as is the case with Gamal al-Bana and Hasan Hanafi,⁴⁰ or Arab nationalist tendencies, as in the case of 'Abd al-Halim Qindil

³⁵ For more about the debate on Egypt's Arab identity, see: Sa'd al-Din Ibrahim (ed.), *'Urubat Misr: Hiwar al-Sab' inat* (Cairo: Markaz al-Dirasat al-Siyasiyyah wal-Istiratiyyah bil-Ahram, 1978); Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice Since 1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 124-138.

³⁶ Shimon Shamir, 'Hayesh 'Atid liMgamot haNeorut ba'Olam ha'Aravi', *Alpayyim* 31 (2007), pp.156-7; Shimon Shamir, preface in: Amin Al-Mahdi, *Hadeah Haaheret* (Tel-Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuchad, in Hebrew, 2001), pp. IX-XVIII.

³⁷ For the definition of "warm" and "cold" peace see: Benjamin Miller, 'The Global Sources of Regional Transitions from War to Peace: The Case of the Middle East', *Davis Occasional Papers*, No. 75 (October 1999), p. 4-6.

³⁸ Tarek Heggy, *Culture, Civilization and Humanity* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003), pp. 65-68.

³⁹ It should be noted in this context that The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt see Israel as illegitimate Jewish state in Islamic territory and oppose the peace treaty with Israel for religious and political reasons. See for example: 'Abd al-Fattah Muhammad al-'Awaisi, *Tasawwur al-Ikhwan lil-Qadiyyah al-Falastiniyyah* (Cairo: Dar al-Tawzi' wal-Nashr al-Islamiyyah, 1989).

⁴⁰ See for instance: A. Dankowitz, and Y. Feldner, 'Sheikh Gamal Al-Bana: Social and Religious Moderation Vs. Political Extremism', <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/1827.htm> (accessed 16 March 2007); Hasan Hanafi, 'al-Tatbi' Jahra', <http://www.alittihad.ae/wajhatdetails.php?id=9555> (accessed 29 January 2005).

and George Ishaq.⁴¹ Qindil is one of the founders of Enough Movement (Harakat Kifaya), also known as the Egyptian Movement for Change, a group that promotes democracy and reforms. Qindil has suggested conducting a referendum on the “freezing or cancellation of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty” as a necessary step in order to liberate Egypt from “the dictations of American-Israeli colonialism.”⁴²

Egyptian liberals also disagree about the relationship between democratization and the peace with Israel. While democratic peace theories argue that liberally constituted states tend to be more peaceful in their dealings with other countries,⁴³ some Egyptian liberals, such as Qindil, see future democracy in their country as a means of liberation from the “chains” of the Camp David Accords.⁴⁴ Other liberals, on the other hand, see democracy not just as a guarantee for the absence of war with Israel, but also as a prerequisite for the creation of a warmer peace in the future. Amin al-Mahdi, for example, distinguishes between the desired “democratic peace” and the current “cold peace” with Israel: “True peace can only be democratic, whereas a peace that was made with no [democratic] choice is not a true one. It can [only] be a peace of surrender, an imposed peace, an official peace and so forth.”⁴⁵

Nour and the Peace Treaty with Israel

On 1 November 2009, Nour published an unusual letter in the *Wall Street Journal*, in which he responded to an article which accused him of being anti-Semitic. This article quoted Nour's speech at a conference in the city of Port Said, emphasizing “the value of standing up to this enemy [i.e. Israel], behind which lies all evils, conspiracies and threats that are spawned against Egypt.”⁴⁶ In his response letter, Nour rejected the accusation and tried to explain his words:

[...] Anyone examining my record can easily discern that I have always supported and upheld Egypt's peace treaty with Israel, and have strongly opposed calls of aggression against Israel. I have also consistently called for a peaceful and just resolution to the Arab Israeli conflict. [...] I would like to conclude that the "anti-Semitic" label is one that I strongly reject. My critiques pertain to the conduct of the state of Israel in certain contexts and not to the Jewish people as a whole. The history of Egypt is replete with contributions from Jewish Egyptians, and that history of pluralism that once defined Egypt is one that I recall fondly and deeply respect. Principles of religious pluralism and mutual respect and tolerance are principles that I strongly advocate not just in my position as a political activist, but as a human being.⁴⁷

⁴¹ For instance: Mashahed, ‘Bayan li-Harakat Kifayah bi-Sha’n Hudur Munassiquha li-Mu’tamar bi-Turkiya’, http://mashahed.blogspot.com/2006/06/blog-post_115110512645472020.html (accessed 24 June 2006); Muhammad Hamidah, ‘Muthaqifun: Qarar Husni Mughazalah 'Sakhifah' li-Isra’il min ajl al-Yunasku’, <http://www.elaph.com/Web/Culture/2009/6/450717.htm> (accessed 13 June 2009).

⁴² ‘Abd al-Halim Qindil, ‘Khuttah li-Kifayah Thaniyyah’, <http://www.harakamasria.org/node/9764> (accessed 20 September 2007).

⁴³ See for example: Ronald Paris, *At War's End: Building Peace after Civil Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 6.

⁴⁴ ‘Abd al-Halim Qindil, *Kart Ahmar lil-Ra’is* (Cairo: Dar al-Thaqafah al-Jadidah, 2009), p. 100, 248.

⁴⁵ Al-Mahdi, *Hadeah Haaheret*, p. 117.

⁴⁶ Amr Bargisi and Samuel Tadros, ‘Why Are Egypt's 'Liberals' Anti-Semitic?’, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704335904574497143564035718.html> (accessed 28 October 2009).

⁴⁷ Ayman Nour, ‘I Reject Anti-Semitism and Respect Egypt's Pluralism’, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703792304574503831810437644.html> (accessed 1 November 2009).

Systematic study of Nour's speeches on Israel in various contexts over the past decade reveals a multifaceted picture. On the one hand, Nour speaks of Israel as an enemy of Egypt and the Arab world. He has adopted a hostile tone against it, and expressed his support for Palestinian and Lebanese acts of violence. In addition, he refuses to meet with Israelis and strongly objects to any kind of cultural or economic normalization with Israel. On the other hand, Nour does not call for the annulment of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, and is not interested in resuming warfare against Israel, but rather accepts the existence of Israel alongside Palestine in the 1967 borders. Likewise, his objection to normalization with Israel is conditional, not categorical, and may possibly be lifted in the future, as political circumstances change.

Nour's conflicting positions toward Israel in the *Wall Street Journal* may be partly attributed to the different audiences he addressed, namely Egyptian public opinion in the first case, and American public opinion in the other. However, considering the fact that similar duality is evident also in other of Nour's speeches, as well as in official statements of the Tomorrow Party, further explanation is required. As I shall argue, understanding Nour's motives allows us to interpret his position toward Israel on three different levels: First, these statements obviously reflected something authentic and genuine in his point of view. Second, his position toward Israel was sometimes a part of a broader line against the Egyptian regime, and did not necessarily represent a systematic doctrine; it reflected a tactical position rather than an ideological one. Third, another factor most likely motivated Nour to adopt a hostile tone against Israel was the popular appeal of this position. Presumably, by utilizing the strong anti-Israel sentiment in Egypt, he attempted to expand his political base as well as promote his broader liberal messages among wider audiences in Egyptian society.⁴⁸

The Tomorrow Party's political platform (which is based on a book written by Nour in 2002) highlights the value of peace. It opens with a statement on its belief in "peace, friendship and interaction with all peoples of the world";⁴⁹ likewise, without explicit mention of the name of Israel, the foreign policy section in the platform begins by emphasizing the "principle of resolving disputes between countries in peaceful ways."⁵⁰ In the section describing its principles, the party declares that "Peace based on justice will enable the peoples of the region and the world to achieve comprehensive development, prosperity and welfare, and will enable Egypt to actively participate in the formation of the global culture and the world order, by dialogue and cooperation with other civilizations and countries."⁵¹

Despite the aforementioned peaceful rhetoric, the rest of the platform raises doubts whether these principles apply to Israel. Its general foreign policy section calls upon Arab countries to reunite "against the Zionist enemy."⁵² Regarding the situation in the Middle East, and, more precisely, the second Intifada, the platform criticizes the "official Arab stance" that relies on "condemnation and censure, without [the use of] effective mechanisms, in order to stop Arab bloodshed on the Palestinian lands."⁵³

⁴⁸ An Egyptian government poll in 2006 found that 92 percent of Egyptians consider Israel an enemy: AFP, 'Egypt Poll: Israel, Denmark, US – Enemies', <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3322428,00.html> (accessed 1 November 2006).

⁴⁹ Hizb al-Ghad, *Barnamij Hizb al-Ghad*, p. 14.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 211.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 19.

⁵² Ibid, p. 212.

⁵³ Ibid, p. 29.

Furthermore, the platform supports the use of different forms of force against Israel, including “martyr operations”, namely suicide attacks, in the Palestinian and the Lebanese contexts:

The Second Intifada, and the success of the Lebanese resistance [i.e. Hezbollah] in forcing Israel to evacuate [its army] from south Lebanon, are giving hope to all forces of justice and peace in the Arab region [...] Israeli soldiers and settlers were subjected to approximately 5,000 firearms attacks and 250 grenades throwing since the beginning of the Intifada. Not to mention the recent martyr operations, which not only put an end to the [Israeli] arrogance, but also raised doubts whether the [Israeli] use of force and violence against the Palestinians is the shortest way to end the intifada and achieve security.⁵⁴

Beyond its belligerent tone, the Tomorrow Party's official statements also fuel hostility against Israel and what they describe as Israeli government actions. The party's political platform refers to Israel as “the Zionist enemy.”⁵⁵ Moreover, former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is described as implementing a “Nazi policy which was manifested in [the] oppression, killing and murder” of Palestinians during the Second Intifada.⁵⁶ Similarly, in response to the Gaza War (Operation Cast Lead) in December 2008, the party accused Israel of committing a “racist immoral Zionist crime.” Nour himself blamed Israel in one of his articles for committing an “inhumane massacre.”⁵⁷ Somewhat oddly, the platform even calls upon Egypt to fight against the alleged Israeli conspiracies “to incite the African countries to attack on Egypt's profits and its historical right to the Nile water.”⁵⁸

Nour is also known as a critic of normalization with Israel, which constitutes – de jure, at least – an integral part of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. In a recent article, Nour stressed that his objection to normalization may be lifted only by “Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and a fair final solution for the Palestinian problem and for Jerusalem.” He explained, “indeed, we have an official peace treaty [with Israel], but sentiments are not controlled by treaties nor by the authority of the government.”⁵⁹ As a parliament member, Nour founded the Egyptian parliamentary committee to promote the boycott of Israeli goods.⁶⁰ Likewise, he blatantly refuses to meet with Israelis.⁶¹ His deep commitment to the Egyptian anti-normalization movement was again revealed in July 2009 after his release from prison. After a four year hiatus, he resumed his “Wednesday Meetings,” a weekly conference held at the Nour Culture Center in Cairo. Symbolically, the first such meeting was dedicated to what was defined as the “crime” of exporting Egyptian natural gas to Israel at a cheap price. Although Nour explained his objection to the Israeli-Egyptian gas export

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 28.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 212.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 28.

⁵⁷ Hizb al-Ghad, ‘Bayan Hizb al-Ghad bi-Khusus Ahdath Ghazzah’,

http://news.elghad.org/news/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=345&Itemid=29

(accessed 30 December 2008); Ayman Nour, ‘Fashl wa-Laysa Ta’ammura’,

http://news.elghad.org/news/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=360&Itemid=5 (n.d.).

⁵⁸ Hizb al-Ghad, *Barnamij Hizb al-Ghad*, p. 266.

⁵⁹ Ayman Nour, ‘Ta’dib Faruq Husni wa-Ikhtiyar Ubama’,

http://news.elghad.org/news/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=356&Itemid=5 (n.d.).

⁶⁰ Himam Sarhan, ‘Min Huwa Ayman Nur?’,

<http://www.swissinfo.ch/ara/front.html?siteSect=105&sid=5674336&cKey=1236067777000&ty=st&rs=yes> (accessed 11 April 2005).

⁶¹ Gateway Pundit, ‘Rice Pushes Egypt towards Democracy’,

<http://gatewaypundit.blogspot.com/2005/06/rice-pushes-egypt-towards-democracy.html> (accessed 20 June 2005).

agreement primarily on the grounds of economic considerations, his emotional resistance to normalization may also played an important role.⁶²

At times, Nour's anti-Israeli attitudes should not be taken at face value; such rhetoric was a way for him to criticize the Egyptian regime. For example, during the aforementioned "Wednesday Meeting" concerning the export of gas to Israel, Nour proposed the compilation of a blacklist of names that "will be chased by the shame of wasting Egypt's resources." This list included former President Mubarak, his son Gamal and other high-ranking officials.⁶³ Likewise, in response to the Gaza War, the Tomorrow Party released a statement that "the party condemns the despicable Zionist offensive against the brother Palestinian people, and condemns with the same harshness the helplessness and the absence of strategic vision, which has become synonymous with Egyptian foreign policy during the last years."⁶⁴ Following the events of the Gaza flotilla raid on 31 May 2010, Nour condemned the "Israeli bullying of civilians." Concomitantly, he called for protest marches against the "Arab silence" which, in his opinion, "reached the level of a shameful conspiracy".⁶⁵ The frequent use of anti-Israeli rhetoric as leverage against the authoritarian regime was repeated by Nour in other speeches. For instance, in an article commemorating the 41st anniversary of the 1967 war, he blamed the Arab defeat on the dictatorial Arab regimes:

How can someone who is defeated from within win?! How can he fight when he is hand-cuffed, oppressed by all the [security] apparatuses, worthless and lacking an opinion?! How can he win when he is denied the minimum right to choose who will rule [his country] and who will represent him?! [...] Despite this, we decided not to learn the lesson and not to face the origin of the disease. [...] After 'some' of the Arab territory had returned, isn't it our right to ask when we will get back 'some' of our democratic rights?⁶⁶

Anti-Israel, Ambivalence toward America

In contrast to many Egyptian liberals with nationalistic tendencies, Nour distinguishes between his approach to Israel and his approach to the United States. This distinction was made explicit in June 2005, when the High Council of the Tomorrow Party discussed whether to approve a meeting between Nour and American Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, during her upcoming visit to Cairo. The party spokeswoman and Nour's wife, Gamila Isma'il, announced that "it has been decided that the Tomorrow Party will accept to enter into a dialogue or exchange ideas with any

⁶² During his speech, Nour boasted that as early as 15 January 2000 he had requested in Parliament a clarification from Egyptian Petroleum Minister, Samih Fahmi, as to how exporting gas to Israel is in accordance with Egyptian "sentiments and causes". See: Ahmad Ghanim, 'Mu'tamar La li-Tasdir al-Ghaz li-Isra'il', <http://aymannoor.net/ar/?p=450> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Hizb al-Ghad, 'Bayan Hizb al-Ghad bi-Khusus Ahdath Ghazzah'.

⁶⁵ Ayman Nour, 'Bayan Suhufi', http://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=398803267698 (accessed 31 May 2010); In the same vein, the General Committee Chairman of The Tomorrow Party in Beheira Governorate, Ahmed Melad, praised countries who expressed their protest against the events of the Gaza flotilla raid, while criticizing Egypt's lack of response. Ahmed Melad, 'Ustul al-Huriyyah wa-Mastul Abu Hums', http://news.elghad.org/news/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=438&Itemid=99999999 (accessed 1 June 2010).

⁶⁶ Ayman Nour, 'Am Ba'd 40 'Ama', http://news.elghad.org/news/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=124&Itemid=29 (n.d.).

person from within Egypt or from outside of Egypt, whether a governmental official or not, except for people from, or representing, Israel.” She concluded, “As such, we welcome discussions with any American or non-American official.”⁶⁷

The party's hesitation before the meeting with Secretary Rice illustrated Nour's ambivalent position toward the United States during the Bush administration years. On one hand, Nour's run for the presidency in 2005 was partly inspired by President Bush's call for democracy in Egypt. On the other hand, Nour strongly opposed the American invasion of Iraq in 2003,⁶⁸ and spoke against “the American hegemony in the region” and its “pro-Israel bias.”⁶⁹ Furthermore, Secretary Rice's public support following his arrest contributed to the regime's portrayal of Nour as an American collaborator; he was labeled with insulting nicknames such as “Condoleezza's friend” or her “common law husband.”⁷⁰ Hence, despite Secretary Rice's important role in obtaining his release, Nour felt embarrassed by her involvement in his case and renounced her support. “I did not ask anyone to defend me,” he stressed. “I am in favor of international empathy, but against international intervention.”⁷¹ In the same vein, he was reluctant to meet with her, presumably out of fear that such a meeting might cost him votes in the September 2005 election. Yet during his subsequent imprisonment, Nour was apparently once again looking for American aid, despite its undesirable potential side effects. Furthermore, he was disappointed at President Bush's lack of commitment to his freedom agenda. “I can't say that the American administration has always been serious in pushing for my release,” he said at that time. “Sometimes it gave priority to principles, but more often interests prevailed.”⁷²

The discrepancy between Nour's approaches to the United States and to Israel grew wider after Barack Obama entered the White House in January 2009. Nour responded enthusiastically to Obama's election, and suggested that pressure from the new American administration played a role in his release.⁷³ During his May 2009 speech to Congress, Nour expressed his “high expectations” of President Obama.⁷⁴ Even before the American elections, when Obama was still only a presidential candidate, Nour sent him a warm open letter from his prison, ending as follows:

Senator Obama, We await much from you as a Democratic candidate and president expected to lead the whole world towards a real and fair change. Your generation and all the powers of reform, democrats and liberals in Egypt and the Arab world, hope that January 20 [2009] becomes a day of freedom and democracy not only in the United States of America but in the whole world, primarily by rectifying the wrongs caused by

⁶⁷ Gateway Pundit, ‘Rice Pushes Egypt towards Democracy’.

⁶⁸ Ayman Nour, ‘Ayman Nour Biography’.

⁶⁹ Hizb al-Ghad, *Barnamij Hizb al-Ghad*, pp. 28-29, 212.

⁷⁰ Shabakat al-Nab' al-Ma'lumatiyyah, ‘Thawrat al-Nil al-Zarqa’: Misr ‘Ala Safih Sakhin’, <http://www.annabaa.org/nbanews/45/354.htm> (accessed 7 April 2005).

⁷¹ Sarhan, ‘Min Huwa Ayman Nur?’; for more on Nour's embarrassment by the American and European role in his release, see: Democracy Now, ‘Enduring Jailings and Attacks, Dissident Ayman Nour's Ordeal Exemplifies US-Ignored Egyptian Repression of Political Opposition’, http://www.democracynow.org/2009/6/4/anajali_interview (accessed 4 June 2009).

⁷² Nadia Abou el Magd, ‘Dissident fights on from prison’, <http://www.thenational.ae/article/20080727/FOREIGN/454868021/1040/ART> (accessed 27 July 2008).

⁷³ Arian Fariborz and Mahmoud Tawfik, ‘Interview with Ayman Nour: I Won't Wait for the Regime to Give Me Its Blessings!’.

⁷⁴ Mawqi' al-Duktur Ayman Nur, ‘Bayan Suhufi bi-Sha'n Kalimat Duktur Ayman amam al-Kunjris’.

long years of supporting dictators under the pretext of protecting interests at the account of principles. Please accept my sincere wishes for your success.⁷⁵

Yet, even after President Obama took office, Nour has been careful not to be overly identified with the United States. In May 2009, he refused an invitation to visit Washington, including both a private lunch with President Obama and an appearance before the American Congress. Instead, he limited himself to a live video conference speech from Cairo, in which he called for an expansion of American foreign aid to Egypt, while restraining his criticism against the Mubarak regime. He was determined not to fall into another trap that would enable the Egyptian regime to portray him as a traitor serving American interests. On the contrary, in an interview with the Egyptian daily *al-Masri al-Yawm*, he stressed that his speech to the Congress meant “to explain [the Egyptian] point of view to the world”.⁷⁶

Obama's Cairo speech on 4 June 2009 provided another example of the basic ambivalence underlying Nour's position concerning the United States and its desired role in the region. A few days before the speech, he urged President Obama to try to balance “between amicable relations with existing regimes ruling Muslim countries and long-term friendship with the people who regard these regimes as oppressive and corrupt,” and “between regional stability and demands for reform and democracy.”⁷⁷ After hearing the speech, however, Nour did not hide his disappointment, saying that “what touched on democracy and human rights in the speech was far less than what we wanted.”⁷⁸

To conclude, while taking a hostile stance toward Israel, Nour sees the United States as a potential partner in promoting democratization in Egypt; at the same time, he does not fully trust its intentions and strives to keep a safe distance from its patronage.

Nour's Vision for the Future

In light of Nour's hostile stance toward Israel, it is interesting to investigate how he envisions the future of relations between Egypt and Israel. Does he support the continuation of the peace treaty, or perhaps a return to a state of war? This question became more urgent in light of the Gaza War during the winter of 2008–2009, as Nour wrote in one of his articles: “There is a question that doesn't stop bothering me, what should we do?! Will we protest, condemn, burn cloths with drawings of the Star of David, threaten, be silent, drown in shame, spit in the faces of our regimes?! [...] Is there a reasonable Egyptian with good intentions who expects Mubarak to declare war on Israel?!” Nour's answer was very decisive: “I believe that ‘no’ is the only answer to all the aforementioned questions.” After rejecting all these militant reactions to the Gaza War, Nour offered his own solution. As usual, he quickly diverted all his arrows from Israel toward the Egyptian regime, criticizing it for “failing” to use its influence

⁷⁵ The quotation is presented in the original English as posted on: Ayman Nour, ‘Nour's Letter to Obama’, <http://www.freeaymannour.org> (accessed 15 June 2008).

⁷⁶ Mahmoud Jawish, ‘Ayman Nour: Rafadtu Da‘wah li-Hudur Jalsat al-Kunjris wa-Talabtu Ziyadat al-Mu‘awanah’, <http://www.almasry-alyoum.com/article2.aspx?ArticleID=210304> (accessed 9 May 2009).

⁷⁷ Ayman Nour and Wael Nawara, ‘Obama Egypt Speech: Will Obama The Man Keep Up With Obama The Legend?’, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/06/01/obama-egypt-speech-will-o_n_209932.html (accessed 1 June 2009).

⁷⁸ Michael Slackman, ‘Varying Responses to Speech in Mideast Highlight Divisions’, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/05/world/middleeast/05reax.html?_r=1, (accessed 4 June 2009).

in order to prevent " Hamas's mistakes" and "Israeli aggression. [...] The only solution," Nour stressed, "is to change the hands that took care of this issue, starting with [Egyptian foreign minister, Ahmad] Abu Al-Gheit." "The most trivial response to this failure," he continued, "is a consistent opening of the Rafah border crossing and a declaration by President [Mubarak] that he is committed to the verdict of the gas exporting trial [which stated the freeze of natural gas export to Israel]." ⁷⁹

Nour, therefore, is encouraging neither a return to a state of war with Israel, nor a reversal of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. ⁸⁰ Nevertheless, as an Egyptian leader, Nour has been attempting to put forth an alternative to the official Egyptian approach regarding the nature of relations with Israel. In one article, for instance, he hints that Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is the public figure he most admires, for his policy on Israel as well as on other foreign and domestic affairs. While this article was seemingly written for the sake of glorifying Erdoğan's anti-Israeli position during the Gaza War, Nour peppered it with references to the many similarities between Erdoğan's biography and his own. ⁸¹ First, Erdoğan is young, 55, and quite unlike politicians of the 'older generation' Second, Erdoğan was imprisoned in 1998 because of 'the fear from his increasing popularity and public influence pushed the Turkish state to fabricate a ridiculous prosecution against him'. Third, in 2007 he formed a new party 'in order to fight against poverty, hunger and corruption, and to change the social and the political reality in Turkey.' ⁸²

Nour appears to have used his article to co-opt Erdoğan's increasing popularity following the Gaza War, due to his anti-Israeli positions, in order to legitimize and promote a much broader message. At the end of his article, Nour praised Erdoğan's domestic and foreign achievements in Turkey, hinting at his own desire to implement a similar vision in Egypt:

Within a very few years, Erdoğan succeeded in creating a new Turkey, while making the dreams of his people come true and strengthening the domestic political and economical abilities of his homeland. Then, after his genuine domestic achievements, Erdoğan had to rehabilitate the Turkish role in the foreign arena, by strengthening its eligibility for European Union membership and playing important roles in the Middle East and in the Islamic [world]. That was the real beginning of Erdoğan's role in the Gaza crisis, which gained – as most of his positions – the overwhelming support of the people in Turkey. ⁸³

Another political figure deeply appreciated by Nour is the Palestinian leader and Fatah senior official, Marwan al-Barghouti, who has been imprisoned in Israel since 2002 on charges of ordering the murder of Israeli civilians and attacks on Israeli soldiers. Nour believes that Egypt must help the Palestinians find a successor to President Mahmoud 'Abbas, whom he sees as "outdated." This successor, he claims,

⁷⁹ Ayman Nour, 'Fashl wa-Laysa Ta'ammura'; In November 2008 an Egyptian court ordered a freeze in exports of natural gas to Israel, stating that the 15-year deal with the Jewish state should first be approved by parliament. This verdict was overturned by a higher level court in February 2009.

⁸⁰ It should be noted that a call for carrying out a referendum on the annulment of the treaty did not deter Nour from signing the founding declaration of the Coalition for Change, formed by the Enough Movement in April 2008. In light of his aforementioned personal statements, however, it seems that he prefers preserving the treaty. For the declaration and the list of signers on it, see: 'Abd al-Halim Qindil, *Kart Ahmar lil-Ra'is*, p. 247-58.

⁸¹ Erdoğan was one of the only world leaders to support Hamas during the Gaza war – alongside the Presidents of Iran and Syria – as opposed to the so-called "moderate Arab camp", led by Egypt.

⁸² Ayman Nour, 'Limadha Fa'alaha Ardughan? Wa-'Ajaza 'Anha 'Amru Musa?!', http://news.elghad.org/news/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=399&Itemid=5 (n.d.).

⁸³ Ibid.

should be “a middle of the road person, who is not from Hamas, but at the same time, accepted by it. [...] Marwan al-Barghouti,” he assumes, “is the best one to lead the Palestinians through this era, because he is a symbol of struggling and is also a young charismatic man, who is accepted by all [Palestinian] parties.”⁸⁴ Nour's preference of al-Barghouti over ‘Abbas does not necessarily indicate his objection to the moderate, compromising line that ‘Abbas represents, but rather his belief that achieving peace requires an attractive successor to ‘Abbas, one who is capable of competing with Hamas's popularity. In fact, Nour attributes great importance to the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which he believes has “consumed the blood and capacities of the people and opened the door to fundamentalism, terrorism and oppression” in order to weaken radical Islamic forces like Hamas.⁸⁵ According to his open letter to Obama, as well as to the Tomorrow Party political platform, Nour accepts the two state solution; in other words, the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel, according to the borders of 1967. In this respect, Nour's view is in accordance with the mainstream international position, including United Nations resolution 242 and the principle of “land for peace.”⁸⁶

Conclusion

This article has analyzed Ayman Nour's position toward Israel based on his articles, speeches and interviews, as well as official statements of his party. Although Israel is not at the focus of Nour's political discourse, he has mentioned Israel in a variety of contexts, including the Second Intifada, Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon, Egypt's export of natural gas to Israel, the Gaza War and the Gaza flotilla raid.

Nour capitalized upon each of these to promote his line against the Egyptian regime. He has repeatedly criticized what he views as the regime's helplessness in the face of Israeli military operations and, moreover, its readiness to foster cooperation and normal relations with Israel. This kind of criticism was intended to portray Mubarak's regime as weak, subordinate and betraying Arab national interests by obeying the dictates of Israel and the United States. At the same time, this line also enabled Nour and his party to emerge as an honorable, patriotic alternative.

The recent events of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution have made the scenario of a liberal candidate coming to power much more realistic. While Nour did not initiate the demonstrations of 25 January, he played an active role by leading his supporters in the streets of Cairo and urging Mubarak to depart from his office.⁸⁷ Although the revolution was fueled by domestic demands, the future relations with Israel were on the agenda of most Egyptian political actors. Some liberal activists, such as the blogger, Maikel Nabil Sanad, saw the democratization of their country as a “chance to end cold peace between the two states [i.e., Egypt and Israel] and to begin a new era of real peace.”⁸⁸ The Egyptian Armed Forces, which took over the government during the transition period, announced that Egypt will remain “committed to the treaties and

⁸⁴ Ayman Nour, ‘Shubak Nour Iyakum wa-Abu ‘Ala’’,

http://news.elghad.org/news/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=389&Itemid=5 (n.d.).

⁸⁵ Ayman Nour, ‘Nour's Letter to Obama’.

⁸⁶ Ibid; Hizb al-Ghad, *Barnamij Hizb al-Ghad*, p. 28.

⁸⁷ Imam Ahmad, ‘Ayman Nour Yaqud Shabab al-Ghad min al-Sha‘riyyah ila al-Tahrir’, http://www.masrawy.com/News/Egypt/Politics/2011/january/25/aymanoor_tahrir.aspx (accessed 25 January 2011).

⁸⁸ Maikelnabil, ‘Message to Israel Calling for solidarity with the Egyptian Revolution’, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UdZjRHjlsck> (accessed 4 February 2011).

agreements to which it is a party", implicitly referring to the peace treaty with Israel.⁸⁹ Nour, for his part, called for a referendum to amend the Camp David Accords:

Some people believe that this agreement is a thing of the past, and that it must be developed in a correct manner. They believe that some of the terms are humiliating to the Egyptian side. I belong to this group of people. Other people believe that the Camp David accords give Egypt certain guarantees on the ground, and that these must not be jeopardized at present. I don't maintain this position, but at the end of the day, my opinion is not the only one that counts. We should hold a referendum.⁹⁰

The case of Ayman Nour indicates that the democratization of Egypt may undermine the stability of the Israeli-Egyptian peace; the threat may come not only from the rise of political Islam in the form of the Muslim Brotherhood, but also from some of the liberal forces with aspirations to power. Indeed, Nour's populist use of anti-Israel rhetoric indicates that if a liberal leader of his kind comes to power, we may very well see the "cold peace" between Egypt and Israel turn even colder.

⁸⁹ Husayn Tantawi, 'I'lan Dusturi', <http://www.mmc.gov.eg> (accessed 13 February 2011).

⁹⁰ Memri TV Monitor Project, 'Egyptian Opposition Leader Ayman Nour Calls for Referendum on Camp David Accords', <http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/2807.htm> (accessed 14 February 2011).