

# “Peace in the Middle East” (2)

## Is the peace with Egypt an encouraging example for Israel?

Egypt is one of only two countries (the other is Jordan) with which Israel has formal peace agreements. Egypt is the largest and most important country in the Arab world. Its influence and support in bringing the current upheaval of the Palestinians to an end would be of greatest value. But does Egypt play any role at all as peacekeeper? And is the peace with Egypt an encouraging example for Israel as to what to expect in any possible peace with the Palestinians?

### What are the facts?

**Peace with Egypt is the coldest possible.** For its agreement to make true peace with Israel, Egypt received the huge Sinai Peninsula in which Israel had invested over \$10 billion. It had created flourishing cities, some of the most advanced military and naval installations in the world, and had developed oil fields that would have made it energy independent for the foreseeable future. Without firing a shot, Egypt received all of this, plus generous grants from the United States -- over \$50 billion to date. What Egypt gave in return was a piece of paper. And even that was hedged. It would allow Egypt to join in an "Arab War" against Israel. The peace between Israel and Egypt, which the Israelis had envisioned to be like the peace between Germany and France, turned out, unfortunately, to be the "coldest peace" possible. It is less of a peace than a de facto state of non-belligerence. The Israeli ambassador in Cairo is totally isolated and blacklisted and does not participate in any official functions of the Egyptian government. There is practically no trade between the two countries and no cultural exchange. The public sector of Egypt, which constitutes 80% of the total economy, is forbidden to do business with Israel. Private enterprises are actively discouraged and often threatened when they try to become engaged with Israeli firms in any way. Israeli firms are barred from submitting tenders for local projects for "security reasons" and they are not allowed to participate in trade fairs. Although quite a few Israelis visit Egypt, hardly any Egyptians go to Israel, since those who do wish to visit are summoned to the security police for severe harassment and lengthy interrogation.

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**Not forthcoming on diplomatic front.** More Israelis have been killed in Egypt or on the Egyptian border than even on the Syrian border. Egyptian media, including the official press, are full of anti-Israel and anti-Jewish venom, preaching hatred and prejudice. There have been numerous instances of "crazed" Egyptian soldiers shooting up Israeli buses traveling along the border highways, to the general applause of the media. In one especially gruesome instance, an Egyptian police officer machine-gunned seven Israeli tourists, who had inadvertently ventured into Egyptian territory; his colleagues stood around preventing medical help from reaching the victims, all of whom bled to death. Among the seven were four children. The media hailed the killer as a national hero. On the diplomatic front, the Egyptians aren't any more forthcoming. Egypt

spearheaded the campaign to keep the "Zionism is racism" resolution alive in the U.N. When it was finally repealed, Egypt walked out. Egypt also exerted and still exerts much effort to prevent African countries from establishing or renewing diplomatic relations with Israel. Egyptian diplomats, including Butros-Butros Ghali, former secretary general of the United Nations, lobbied fervently against the loan guarantees that Israel needed in order to absorb and settle the hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees, who had already arrived and are still arriving, from the former Soviet Union. Hosni Mubarak, who has been president of Egypt since 1981, has not once deigned to set foot in Jerusalem, nor has he made any other friendly gesture towards Israel in those twenty years.

Egypt is armed to the teeth with the most advanced weapons in the world -- most of which (sad to say) have been provided by the United States. Egypt is not being threatened by any of its neighbors -- and that includes Israel, whose fervent desire is to live in peace with the Arab world. The enormous accumulation of weaponry by Egypt is for one purpose only -- namely to be able to strike at Israel when the occasion is deemed to be propitious. The only saving grace is that, contrary to the situation on Israel's northern and eastern fronts, the vast Sinai, which serves as a buffer zone, is provided with early warning systems and Israel is therefore not subject to surprise attack. But if the peace with Egypt is any example of what could be expected from a peace with the Palestinians (if such a thing could ever be brought about), it is certainly most discouraging. Peace can come to the area only if and when Egypt and the other Arab countries truly accept Israel as part of the Middle East. Israel's government must be commended for proceeding with the greatest caution in its dealings with the Arabs, and especially in any possible peace negotiations with the Palestinians.

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