***Hero of the Crossing: How Anwar Sadat and the 1973 War Changed the World.* Thomas W. Lippman. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2016. Pages 366. \$34.95. ISBN: 978-1-612-34702-8 (hbk.)**

Anwar Sadat, Henry Kissinger wrote in his memoirs, initially appeared to him as nothing more than ‘a political clown.’ This was neither the first nor the last time the Egyptian President had been referred to disparagingly. Such opinions accompanied Sadat throughout his political life as one of the Free Officers working in the shadow of Gamal Abdel Nasser and, following Nasser’s death, as Egypt’s second President. They have even endured long after his October 1981 assassination. But how did a man that Egyptians referred to as a *nukta*, or a joke, manage to succeed Gamal Abdel Nasser after his death in September 1970, to spearhead the 1973 Yom Kippur War against Israel, to move Egypt away from the Soviet sphere of influence, and to re-align the country’s economic and foreign policies with the United States? How did Sadat achieve the unthinkable by negotiating, and concluding, a peace treaty with Israel? The constant tension between expectations and reality, or between moments of apparent triumph and despair, form the basis of Thomas W. Lippman’s recent book on the *Hero of the Crossing*, the name Anwar Sadat fashioned for himself following the Egyptians’ crossing of the Suez Canal during the 1973 military operations.

Middle Eastern politics is by no means a new research area for Lippman — the former Middle East bureau chief for the *Washington Post* has witnessed first-hand many of the key events across the region during the 1970s and 1980s. His nuanced understanding of elite politics, careful selection of English-language archival material, and journalistic eye for detail contribute to a refreshing narrative that brings to life events that transpired some forty or so years ago. The first three chapters of the book focus on the early years of Sadat’s Presidency. They detail the 1973 War, which Lippman terms the ‘War of Redemption,’ Egypt’s shift away from the Soviet sphere of influence, and the intricacies behind the first oil embargo. Lippman appears enthralled by the potential of Sadat, who is about to ‘engineer a seismic shift in the global balance of power’ (p. 54). The first half of the book makes for a fascinating read about Sadat’s political manoeuvring, characterised by catching everyone by surprise: his domestic political rivals, adroitly defeated through Sadat’s 1971 ‘Corrective Revolution,’ the Soviet leadership that never expected to be so swiftly marginalised by one of their key Arab allies; the Israelis, who came close to a devastating military defeat; and Washington, where the Nixon

administration never foresaw Egypt's realignment towards the West.

The remainder of the book recounts the latter half of Sadat's Presidency: Lippman devotes two chapters to Sadat's post-war negotiations with Israel that culminated in the 1978 Camp David Accords and the 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty. He continues to examine Sadat's impact on Arab nationalism and the rise of Islamist forces within Egypt and the region, before concluding with a chapter on Sadat's 'tarnished legacy.' The narrative here becomes more somber, as Lippman recounts the President's controversial — for some, catastrophic — policy decisions: his *rapprochement* with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood; the abandonment of pan-Arabism, namely the political project aiming for Arab unity that his predecessor put forth; his intent to travel to Jerusalem and address the Knesset, thereby offering a *de facto* recognition of the Israeli state, that led his foreign minister, Ismail Fahmy, to resign in protest; Sadat's well-known contempt for 'haggling over minutiae' (p. 167) as Cyrus Vance termed it, in negotiating the Camp David Accords with Israel that resulted in the resignation of a second foreign minister, Muhammad Ibrahim Kamel.

It is in recounting moments of political tension that Lippman's book is at its finest: the Nixon administration's confusion around Sadat's unexpected decision to declare war on Israel in 1973, Sadat's gradual distancing from Moscow, or the panicked hurry in concluding the Camp David Accords afford Lippman the freedom to exercise his vivid writing style. Of course, the subject matter itself is enthralling, as Anwar Sadat has been a uniquely polarising figure: his decision to seek a *rapprochement* with Israel has been a perennial topic of debate, aided by the fact that both Fahmy and Kamel published scathing accounts of their collaboration with the President. Importantly, both men acknowledged that they often could hardly understand what Sadat had in mind. Sadat 'never got rid of the mentality, methods and techniques commonly associated with a member of an underground organisation secretly scheming to carry out a plot either for the assassination of a traitor, or for the overthrow of a regime,' Kamel argued in his memoirs. 'This trait continued to largely dominate his character, even after he became President' (Kamel, 1986, pp. 121–2). The controversy around Sadat was also driven by the extent to which he differed from his predecessor: Nasser's distrust of the United States was replaced by the President's fascination with the West (going so far as to time his televised speeches to coincide with American networks' prime time programming), and his insistence that his wife, Jihan, adopt the title of First Lady, or *al-sayyida al-ula*. Nasser's modesty was replaced by Sadat's love for the limelight and penchant for economic excesses: "Sadat dressed in the latest fashion, while we

slept ten in a room” went one of the slogans of the 1977 Bread Riots.

Yet here also lie the book’s few shortcomings. For one, the ambitious scope of the book means that key aspects of Sadat’s Presidency are not addressed in detail. This is not surprising, given the multiplicity of issues to be analysed within the 1970-1981 period — world events during 1973 alone have provided, for instance, enough material for Alistair Horne to produce a fascinating biography of Henry Kissinger (*Kissinger: 1973, The Crucial Year*). That said, Lippman’s book would have benefitted from a more sustained discussion of Egypt’s economic policy: Sadat’s engineered shift towards economic liberalisation, or *al-Infatih*, has shaped the country’s political economy to this day and deserve more attention. For this, the reader would need to refer to Lippman’s earlier book on the topic, *Egypt After Nasser* (1989), which had highlighted these issues in more detail. More broadly, the book does not engage sufficiently with the legacy of Anwar Sadat - there is much more to be said about the impact of the 1970s upon Hosni Mubarak’s rule, upon Egypt’s domestic and international policies, as well as upon the workings of the 2011 events. Finally, as with other accounts of the President and its era, Sadat’s thinking remains an enigma: had he formed a coherent plan of action, or were his domestic and foreign policies a result of improvisation? We cannot know for sure; Lippman believes that Sadat constitutes a Hegelian ‘world historical individual’ (p. xvii), but the details remain unclear — the reader would need to combine this book with other accounts of the Sadat years by insiders such as Ismail Fahmi, Mohammed Ibrahim Kamel, Mohamed Hassanein Haikal, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, as well as with Sadat’s autobiography, *In Search of an Identity*.

Overall, Lippman achieves an enviable balance between extremes: he goes beyond derogatory accounts to bring forth Sadat’s strong personality of a man driven, by sheer determination and political instinct, to secure his position domestically against remnants of the Nasserite era; to regain the Sinai peninsula from the Israelis; to achieve economic prosperity for the Egyptian people and to include Egypt in the American sphere of influence. At the same time, Lippman unapologetically highlights Sadat’s contradictions, errors, and lapses of judgement that plagued Anwar Sadat, particularly in the latter part of his Presidency. The book also provides a much-needed, long-overdue re-assessment of the post-Nasserite era in Egyptian politics. *Hero of the Crossing* is destined to be included in a list of high-quality accounts of key personalities of Arab politics penned by journalists with an intimate knowledge of the region, including Robert Stephens’ biography of Gamal Abdel Nasser or

Patrick Seale's account of Hafez al-Asad.

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