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Egypt and Africa: Searching for a role

Dr. Jamal Delh

The post-cold war era is considered one of the most crucial times in the process of change within both regional and international orders. That era witnessed ideological changes that amplified the hegemony of the western liberal ideology and dedicated the decline of the eastern Marxist ideology; not only in the African continent, but also all around the world. All these facts lead to changes in the African affairs, internally regionally and internationally. In the light of such changes, the Egyptian policies and inclinations remained more busy with the internal affairs and more concerned with many other remote external affairs at the expense of the African file. This led to a decline in the effective Egyptian role inside Africa.

This study focuses on three major factors that overlap and interact with each other to clarify the reality of such threats and challenges affecting the Egyptian role, and explain how regional and international changes can help Egypt to play an effective and leading role in the African continent. The first factor discussed is the international changes in the post-cold war era. The second factor is the international threats and challenges affecting the efficient Egyptian role in Africa. The third factor is the suggested Egyptian strategy to deal with the threats and challenges of the international changes.

The study concluded some key facts as follows:

Firstly: decision making regarding the conduct of the Egyptian foreign policy must not be dominated (neither in the present time nor in the future) by the approach of one and only political party, no matter how big and influential this party is on internal levels. Instead, it is crucial to start a broad national dialogue that discusses all the important issues and reach a mutual understanding about the available choices. Such dialogue is a real necessity to enhance the mechanisms of political decision making on different national levels. The dialogue also will serve as a guarantee that the foreign policy will be conducted on all political, diplomatic, military, security and economic levels with the highest level of awareness, confidence and credibility.

Secondly: the future plans must not be confined to raising the efficiency of the foreign policy and improving its conduct and its negotiating skills. There is also an urge to admit that providing the appropriate resources is a real tool in determining the success or failure in achieving the set goals and interests of the Egyptian state. Many countries, like the Far East countries, Turkey and Iran managed to take noticeable steps towards success in regional and international affairs after building a solid economic and commercial foundations that enabled them to achieve considerable economic gains. These economic foundations encouraged them to successfully expand internationally because



their ambitions were no more confined to only searching for a role that should have direct economic benefits for their countries.

Thirdly: It is necessary, if not imperative, to stress that the international de facto acts objectively and seriously only with strong and powerful parties. Thus, if the Egyptian government is looking forward forging a strong international status and playing an efficient regional role, it is inevitably necessary to develop its military potentials and improve their professional capabilities to meet the international standards. This seems to be the most relevant alternative at the present time in the light of the economic conditions that Egypt is living nowadays. In other words, any effective investment in Egyptian military capabilities might be a first step towards regional and international efficiency.

Fourthly: Any attempt to play an effective regional role in Africa will be counterproductive unless there is a well established Egyptian economic foundation that would be invested in the relation with the African states and would serve as an attraction and containment factor for these countries.

Fifthly: Egypt must consider seriously building and consolidating regional and strategic alliances with a group of countries with in the five African regions: the north, the west, the middle, the east and the south. Such ambition requires political and democratic efforts on decision making and taking levels within the Egyptian government. It also requires preparation, coordination and cooperation and acting within a frame work of actual strategic partnership with the influential countries that have the same concerns and interests in the African file, like U.S.A, UK, France and China.