



المعهد المصري للدراسات
EGYPTIAN INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES

Al-Sisi, **Africa** and Egypt's Foreign Priorities

Dr. Badr Hassan Shafei

POLITICAL

ASSESSMENTS

5 SEPTEMBER
2017



WWW.EIPSS-EG.ORG

[f Eipss.EG](https://www.facebook.com/Eipss.EG) [t Eipss_EG](https://twitter.com/Eipss_EG)

TURKEY- ISTANBUL

Bahçelievler, Yenibosna Mh 29 Ekim Cad. No: 7 A2 Blok 3. Plaza D: 64
Tel/Fax: +90 212 227 2262 E-Mail: info@eis-eg.org



Al-Sisi, Africa and Egypt's Foreign Priorities

*Dr. Badr Hassan Shafei**

Al-Sisi's recent visit to four African countries, namely, Rwanda, Tanzania, Gabon and Chad, has raised questions not only about its timing and significance, but also about its desired goals, whether declared or undeclared, and to what extent the visit succeeded in achieving these goals.

First: Semantics of the timing

With regard to the visit's timing, there are three basic remarks:

1- Al-Sisi's visit to the four African countries came after his visit to Uganda last June to participate in the presidential meeting of the Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA) known in the media as the 'Entebbe Agreement', which Egypt refuses to accede to except after three conditions are met:

- a) Stating Egypt's historical quota of Nile waters (55.5 billion cubic meters in accordance with the 1959 Convention).
- b) Obliging upstream countries to notify Egypt of any projects on the Nile.
- c) Decisions should be made unanimously, or by a majority conditional on the consent of Egypt and Sudan, that is, enjoying the right of veto.

The Entebbe Agreement was signed by the Nile Basin countries except for the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2010, at the end of late Egyptian President Mubarak's era. Since then, Egypt has frozen its membership in the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI). However, Cairo has recently been seeking to find any acceptable compromise to join the CFA, especially after reports that Sudan intends to join the agreement.

2- Al-Sisi's visit to Rwanda, Tanzania, Gabon and Chad came after his absence from the last African Summit in Addis Ababa (from 27th June to 4th July 2017) for his preoccupation with another summit in Hungary, including Poland, Czech and Slovak. This absence raised questions about the priorities of the Egyptian foreign policy, and whether Eastern European countries are more important to Egypt than Africa, especially in light of the strained relations between Cairo and the two most important



countries – from the perspective of Egyptian security – namely Sudan, due to several issues, including Halayeb dispute, supporting the Sudanese opposition, and others – and Ethiopia, which is accelerating the construction of the Renaissance Dam to start filling the reservoir with 74 billion cubic meters of the Nile water.

Perhaps the strangest thing at the time was that Al-Sisi did not send his Prime Minister Sherif Ismail to attend the summit on his behalf, but instead, he sent his assistant for national projects, Ibrahim Mahlab. Also, the efforts of his foreign minister, Sameh Shoukry, were limited to mobilizing Africans to blockade Qatar, rather than expressing Egypt's views on African issues such as water, security, and others. So, when Shoukry failed in his mission, he only withdrew.

It is noteworthy that this is not the first time that Al-Sisi was absent from the African Summit. In fact, he did not also attend the African Summit that was held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in June 2015, despite Egypt's presidency over the AU Summit at the time. Some observers, then, interpreted Al-Sisi's absence that it was for fear of being prosecuted in South Africa for crimes he committed in Rabaa (sit-in dispersal), especially under Pretoria's membership in the International Criminal Court (ICC).

However, there is another explanation for Al-Sisi's absence; that it was for political, not legal, reasons – due to the death sentences that the Egyptian judiciary intended to issue against deposed President Mohamed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood leaders less than twenty four hours after the African Summit. In fact, these death sentences violate the Charter of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) which does not admit the death penalty. So, the ACHPR had also threatened to file a complaint to the AU Summit after a court decision to refer the defendants' papers to the Mufti of Egypt a month before the issuance of the death sentences.

The allegations that Al-Sisi's absence from Johannesburg's African summit was due to fear of being arrested for the war crimes that he committed in Egypt or even against Gaza during the Israeli aggression in 2014 and his closure of the Rafah crossing – such allegations are not based on evidence, especially since the ICC and the UN Security Council did not initiate a lawsuit against him, and that the African Union is not



concerned primarily with the issue of the Arab-Israeli conflict because it falls within the scope of the Arab League.

3- Al-Sisi's visit to the four African countries (Rwanda, Tanzania, Gabon and Chad) coincided with a visit by the Ethiopian Prime Minister to Sudan. Here, it should be noted that Khartoum and Addis Ababa have been indifferent to the issue of the Renaissance Dam issue which is troubling Egypt. Moreover, the Sudanese Foreign Minister has said that Renaissance Dam issue occupies little of the interest of Sudan and Ethiopia, adding that the Sudanese-Ethiopian relations are growing significantly.

Second: Remarks on the countries that Al-Sisi visited

However, if we discuss Al-Sisi's African tour in terms of the semantics of the place (countries that he visited) and the most prominent remarks in this regard, we can notice the following:

1- The countries that Al-Sisi visited are located in Eastern and Central Africa: Tanzania in the east and the other three countries (Rwanda, Chad and Gabon) in the middle. Moreover, two of these countries, Rwanda and Tanzania, are located in the Great Lakes region, where Egypt receives only 15% of its share of the Nile waters.

2- Al-Sisi's tour included two of the Nile Basin countries, Rwanda and Tanzania – located within the Great Lakes region – which Al-Sisi did not visit before except for Rwanda, which he visited in June 2016 to participate in the African Summit hosted by Kigali at the time. It is noteworthy, however, that these two countries in particular, as well as Ethiopia, were among the countries that strongly rejected the Egyptian conditions for joining the Entebbe Agreement. Both countries signed the agreement from the very beginning and later ratified it. Therefore, it was not surprising that the President of Tanzania demanded without hesitation, during the visit, that Egypt should join the Entebbe Agreement, in accordance with the stance of late Tanzanian President Nyerere, who did not recognize the conventions 'inherited from colonialism', which means denial of Egypt's historic rights to Nile waters.

Accordingly, Al-Sisi should have visited Ethiopia or Sudan instead, to calm down the atmosphere with them regarding the Renaissance Dam. He should have even visited



Burundi, which signed Entebbe Agreement but did not ratify it, or even the Democratic Republic of Congo, which has not signed the agreement so far. However, it seems that Al-Sisi's visit to these two countries in particular was not the best choice in our point of view.

3- Al-Sisi's African tour included Rwanda which, as stated above, was one of the first countries that signed and ratified the Entebbe Agreement. Moreover, Rwanda is a small country both in size and in influence; and the volume of trade exchange between the two countries is very limited, as Egyptian exports to Rwanda amounted to about \$14 million during 2009.

But perhaps the strangest thing about this visit is that A-Sisi was crying over the victims of Rwanda's 1994 civil war genocide when the Hutus killed hundreds of thousands of the Tutsis, which is similar, with a slight difference, to the massacres committed against Egypt's anti-coup protesters during the dispersal of the Rabaa sit-in (2013) in terms of casualties. But the reality remains the same: The Tutsis were persecuted by the Hutus in Rwanda, and the anti-coup protesters were persecuted by the military and the interior ministry in Egypt. While senior officials were brought to trial for the Rwandan massacres, none of those responsible for the Rabaa sit-in massacre have been brought to trial so far; on the contrary, the victims were exposed to (mass and unfair) trials instead.

Moreover, there is another difference: A national reconciliation was fulfilled in Rwanda after trials, but no reconciliation has been reached up to now in Egypt despite the fewer number of victims in Rabaa massacre – compared to the casualties in the Rwandan 1994 genocide. Furthermore, although Al-Sisi pledged to fulfill national reconciliation during his military coup statement, but he seems determined to liquidate his opponents completely despite his tears over the victims of Rwanda!!

4- Al-Sisi is the first Egyptian leader to visit Gabon, but the question remains about the country's foreign policy priorities. It may be important to diversify relations with African countries, but the question remains about these priorities. For example, which was more important: to visit the Democratic Republic of Congo in response to the Congolese president's visit to Egypt last April and to support its position against the



Entebbe Agreement, or to visit Burundi, which was the sixth Nile basin country to join the agreement – after Egypt’s January Revolution – making the Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA) ready for ratification and entry into force.

None of the former presidents of Egypt visited Gabon since two countries exchanged diplomatic relations in 1975, due to its limited African and regional role. It is not surprising that the volume of trade exchange between Egypt and Gabon is much less than the volume of trade with Rwanda; the volume of Egyptian exports to Gabon did not exceed \$3 million against no more than \$200,000 worth of imports.

5- Al-Sisi’s visit to Chad is particularly important. Although Chad is an indirect neighbor to Egypt, however it is a direct neighbor of Sudan, Egypt’s southern neighbor, and Libya, the western neighbor. The importance of Al-Sisi’s visit to Chad stems from the nature of Egypt’s relations with Sudan and Libya recently. The Egyptian-Sudanese relations have been clearly strained in recent times because of the Halayeb issue in particular, as well as Sudan’s anti-Egypt position on Ethiopia’s Renaissance Dam. Therefore, Cairo is seeking various means to make Khartoum pressure Ethiopia in the light of the current strong relations between Khartoum and Addis Ababa.

As for Libya, it is well known that despite Egypt’s recognition of the Government of National Accord headed by Fayeze Al-Serraj, yet it supports General Khalifa Haftar, who seeks to impose a coup against legitimacy by controlling all the Libyan territories, starting from the east and south as part of the so-called Operation Dignity. Also, President of Chad Idriss Déby reportedly held a deal with Khalifa Haftar to ensure that Chadian mercenaries from the Tubu tribe who are fighting with him will not threaten N’Djamena’s security, according to sources close to the Libyan military commander.

Other sources said that Haftar will pay, through Dubai, the salaries of soldiers of the Chadian army, which have not been disbursed for five months, in addition to payment of the monthly dues of the Chadian soldiers involved in Operation Dignity by 1500 dinars to a soldier and 2200 to an officer, in return for Déby’s support to Haftar to fulfill Operation Dignity’s objectives.

Also, Chad is important to Egypt because of its (Chad’s) historical role in supporting the Sudanese Darfur rebels, as President Déby, who belongs to Zaghawa community,



supports the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). Therefore, N'Djamena's relationship with Khartoum is strained from time to time, not to mention Deby's support for Khalifa Haftar, who seeks to control the southern regions of Libya near its border with Chad. So, Al-Sisi's visit to Chad is aimed at ensuring that N'Djamena will maintain support for his allies: Haftar in Libya and Darfur rebels in Sudan. This was revealed by Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir last May, when he pointed to the weapons that the Darfur rebels received from both Haftar and South Sudan.

It is also remarkable that there is a strong relationship between Al-Sisi and Chad after Egypt's military coup, especially in areas of defense and security. The Chadian Minister of Defense visited Egypt immediately before Al-Sisi's visit; and in September 2015, the Chadian Interior Minister visited Egypt to meet with his Egyptian counterpart Magdi Abdel Ghaffar in order to support and enhance security cooperation between the two countries.

6- Al-Sisi should have visited pivotal African countries such as Nigeria, the leading country in West Africa, or even South Africa, the giant state in the south, especially after Al-Sisi had previously apologized for not participating in the African Summit held there, which raises questions about the priorities of the Egyptian foreign policy. If we talk about the most important circles of Egypt's national security, Al-Sisi should have visited Sudan; or the most influential circles - due to the vitality of the Nile water - he should have visited Ethiopia, especially in the light of the near completion of the Renaissance Dam, which will affect Egypt significantly in various areas of life. Finally, if we talk about Egypt's diplomatic circles in Africa, Al-Sisi should have visited South Africa and Nigeria, who would probably be more beneficial at the continental level than Gabon on the one hand, and Rwanda and Tanzania, which rejected Egypt's conditions for joining CFA on the other.

Annex - Al-Sisi's visits to African countries between June 2014 and August 2017:

Country	Time	Reason of Visit
Algeria	June 2014	A one-day visit on his way to the Malabo summit in Equatorial Guinea



Equatorial Guinea	June 2014	Attending the first African summit after restoring Egypt's membership in the African Union June
Sudan	June 2014	A brief visit after his return from Malabo: The visit lasted for only three hours and was confined to talks at the airport. There may have been fears of being criticized by the opponents of his military coup, who were intending to organize protests against him in Khartoum.
Addis Ababa	Jan. 2015	The African Summit under Egypt's presidency for one year
Sudan	March 2015	Signing the Renaissance Dam agreement with Ethiopia and Sudan
Ethiopia	March 2015	The day following the signing of the Renaissance Dam agreement
Addis Ababa	Jan. 2016	African Summit
Rwanda	June 2016	African Summit
Uganda	Dec. 2016	A bilateral short visit that was held one day ahead of schedule It was considered by some observers to be proactive to a visit by a senior Saudi official to the Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.
Addis Ababa	Jan. 2017	African Summit
Kenya	Feb. 2017	Bilateral talks and consolidation of relations



Uganda	June 2017	Summit of heads of states of the Nile Basin Initiative: Egypt failed to persuade member states to agree to Egyptian conditions for joining to the Entebbe Agreement.
Rwanda, Tanzania, Gabon, Chad	August 2017	Various objectives

- The writer prepared the above table based on data available on the Internet.
- The visits include bilateral visits and visits to African groupings at the continental level, such as AU summits or even at the regional level, such as the meetings of the member states of Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA) known as Entebbe Agreement.

* Dr. Badr Hassan Shafei is an Egyptian academic. He obtained his PhD in Political Sciences from Cairo University in 2011, and he is specialized in African Studies. 'Conflict Resolution in Africa' and 'Role of Private Security Companies in African Conflicts' are among the books he has written.