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Egyptian Rev. Forces and Iran: Disincentives of Relations

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One of the most prominent features of the current regional and global political system is the rapid increase in the size and significance of non-state entities operating on a global, transboundary basis. This poses a major challenge to the assumptions of traditional approaches to international relations which assume that States are the most important units of the international system¹.

The Egyptian revolutionary forces are regarded as non-state influential actors both on the regional and international levels. On the other hand, the Islamic Republic of Iran is one of the most influential regional powers in the Middle East. Therefore, both Iran and the Egyptian revolutionary forces are currently in dire need of each other; as Iran is experiencing a state of almost regional and international isolation, and the Egyptian revolutionary forces are at a state of “uncertainty” after they have been driven out of the Egyptian political scene in a dramatic way.

After Egyptian armed forces commanders removed the democratically-elected president, Mohamed Morsi, from power on 3 July 2013, and the subsequent most aggressive campaign against the revolutionary forces – resulting in loss of prominent figures and youth elite that were either imprisoned or killed – they have become in dire need for expanding the circle of regional and international incubators, including Iran.

إدري صافية، "تشبيك علاقات الدولة-المجتمع من منظور الحوكمة العالمية: نحو تمكين الفواعل غير الدولانية"، المجلة الجزائرية للأمن والتنمية، المجلد 7¹ ، العدد 1، ص 143-154.

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Any effective alliance or rapprochement between the Egyptian revolutionary forces and Iran can bring benefits to both sides:

1) For the Egyptian revolutionary forces: Such alliance or rapprochement can, at least, provide safe havens for some fugitives of the Egyptian revolutionary forces in Iran, especially that Iran has a former experience in this regard when it harbored a number of the opponents of the Egyptian regime and their families after the assassination of late Egyptian President Anwar Sadat on 6 October 1981 who are still present in Iran despite resentment of the Egyptian state organs.

This need, albeit simple, is of value to the Iranian Republic as well.

2) For Iran: Harboring elements of the Egyptian opposition forces can provide Iran with strong pressure cards on various anti-Iranian regional regimes, most notably Saudi Arabia and Egypt respectively. Iran can allow prominent figures of the Egyptian revolutionary forces to launch a radio station or a satellite TV station that can attack the Egyptian and Saudi regimes and thus form an alarming pressure on the [Saudi regime](#)² in particular. In addition, through such move, Iran can seek improvement of its distorted mental image in the Arab mindset after its role in Syria, which is seen by the vast majority of the Arab people as a negative role, especially that the Egyptian revolutionary forces are addressing the Egyptian street which represents a third of the Arab nation. Iran also hopes that the Egyptian revolutionary forces would establish economic projects in Iran which is living the worst economic situation in its contemporary history.

Common Ground

محمد محسن ابو النور ، هل يمكن أن تكون إيران ملاذاً آمناً للإخوان المسلمين؟!، (اسطنبول : المعهد المصري للدراسات السياسية و الاستراتيجية ،² 2015).

There are many similarities between Iran and the Egyptian revolutionary forces in general and the Muslim Brotherhood in particular, such as the common concepts on state-building and the Islamic system of governance, and their similar position on the US-led “global arrogance”. There is also a strong ideological connection between the Islamists in Iran and Egypt, as they share anti-Israel sentiment and support the Palestinian Islamic resistance movement ([Hamas](#))³.

Also, the Iranian role in supporting armed resistance movements such as [Hezbollah and Hamas](#)⁴ despite sectarian differences constitutes a great incentive for rapprochement, especially since the great military and political cooperation between Hezbollah and Hamas is undoubtedly [an encouraging model](#)⁵.

In addition, there are some Egyptian revolutionary forces with liberal orientation, such as the Ghad El Thawra Party, led by Ayman Nour, that adopt moderate concepts towards the issue of [doctrinal differences](#)⁶, which may enhance the likelihood of rapprochement between the Egyptian revolutionary forces and the Iranian Republic.

Also, the Muslim Brotherhood is the most flexible and least hard-line party towards the Shiite Muslims. A careful reading of the Muslim Brotherhood's historical mentality suggests that it can bypass all ideological barriers to religious groups in all countries of the Islamic world⁷. In addition, the Iranian regime is closer to the ‘Haraki’ (dynamic)

³ ibid.

⁴ AFSHON OSTOVAR, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Sectarian Dilemmas in Iranian Foreign Policy: When Strategy and Identity Politics Collide, NOVEMBER 30, 2016.27-2-2019.

⁵ محمد برهومة، موقع العين الاخبارية، علاقة الإخوان المسلمين بإيران: تنسيق أمني وسياسي ودعم مالي، تاريخ الاطلاع، 2019-1-16م

⁶ خالد فؤاد، ترسيخ الاستبداد: عسكرة الأحزاب السياسية في مصر، (اسطنبول: المعهد المصري للدراسات السياسية والاستراتيجية، 2015)

⁷ op. cit.، محمد محسن ابو النور ، هل يمكن أن تكون إيران ملاذاً آمناً للإخوان المسلمين؟

revolutionary system, which is very similar to the Muslim Brotherhood's access to power, and the Egyptian revolutionary forces' current way of thinking.

However, this paper assumes that there are disincentives that impede development of relations between Iran and the Egyptian revolutionary forces, including:

First: Difference of views on some regional files

With the access of Dr. Mohamed Morsi, one of the Muslim Brotherhood leaders and head of the Freedom and Justice Party, to power in Egypt in [June 2012](#)⁸, Iran was not the major winner because of his policies that conflict with the Iranian strategy in the region, especially with regard to the Assad regime and the Syrian crisis. However, after General Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi seized power after the military coup d'état there is some kind of convergence between Tehran and Cairo, especially on the Syrian issue.

The current views of Cairo and Tehran on the international military operations on the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) are almost identical. The two capitals refused to join the international coalition that is launching military attacks on areas in the Syrian governorates, a meeting point that the Iranian player - being keen on restoring ties with Egypt - can build on.

However, it has become clear that there is a central axis in the Middle East led by Iran, including the Syrian regime, the Iraqi regime, Hezbollah and the Houthis in Yemen, that is in a dispute with the Muslim Brotherhood and other Egyptian revolutionary forces, which greatly reduces the possibility of achieving real convergence in the foreseeable future between Iran and the Egyptian revolutionary forces⁹.

⁸ Bbc, Profile: Egypt's Mohammed Morsi, 21 April 2015, 26-2-2019.

⁹ محمد محسن ابو النور، هل يمكن أن تكون إيران ملاذاً آمناً للإخوان المسلمين؟، op. cit.

The Yemeni issue is also another point of divergence of views between the Egyptian revolutionary forces and the Iranian regime. Meanwhile, there are some signs of the existence of different positions between the Egyptian regime, under Sisi, and Saudi Arabia, under Mohamed bin Salman, on management of the war in Yemen, which satisfies Iran, [albeit on a limited basis](#).¹⁰

Second: the Egyptian forces fear of Iranian extortion

Despite the fact that the Iranian regime did not extort the former Egyptian refugees on its soil, those accused of killing former Egyptian president Anwar Sadat, however, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Egyptian revolutionary forces fear that they will be bargaining card in Iran's hands, especially that the Egyptian regime is still demanding the recovery of those wanted in Iran. Iran may therefore find itself facing a major tactical gain, through practicing pressure on Cairo to accelerate the pace of full restoration of relations, or even allow Tehran to engage in activities on the ground in Cairo, in exchange for preventing elements of the Egyptian revolutionary forces from access to its territory, or even extraditing them to Cairo, which could pose a threat to members of the Egyptian revolutionary forces.

In general, if the Egyptian-Iranian relations are restored at the present time, this will be considered a painful blow to many of the Egyptian forces, which will lose a regional power of the size of Iran¹¹. Although the Egyptian regime may not attempt to improve relations with Iran so as not to upset Saudi Arabia, its tendency to 'extortion' remains present in the mentality of the Egyptian revolutionary forces, especially that Iran has

¹⁰ مركز الامارات للسياسات، الدور المصري في الأزمة اليمنية: حدوده وأفاقه، تاريخ النشر 1-3-2015م، تاريخ الاطلاع، 20-10-2019م

¹¹ op. cit.، محمد محسن ابو النور، هل يمكن أن تكون إيران ملاذاً آمناً للإخوان المسلمين؟

suspended its support for the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) for differences on the Syrian crisis, which means that Iran acts according to its own interests [in the first place](#)¹².

Third: Orientations of the Egyptian revolutionary forces

The Egyptian revolutionary forces are characterized by international expansion, while the Iranian regime faces international dissatisfaction. The Muslim Brotherhood, one of the most prominent Egyptian revolutionary forces, is present in 52 countries around the world, including 13 Western countries (such as [Britain, Germany, Australia, and USA](#))¹³, the Islamic Republic of Iran, since the revolution of 1979, is one of the countries that are internationally [disfavored](#)¹⁴. Therefore, the Egyptian revolutionary forces may fear that the great rapprochement with Iran will affect its interests and its external relations, especially after US President Trump's decisions to impose new sanctions on Iran, including [companies and individuals](#)¹⁵.

This almost categorically means that the Egyptian revolutionary forces cannot adopt the slogans of the Iranian revolution, "Death to America, Death to Israel." On the one hand, leaders of the revolutionary forces reject the Iranian doctrinal role in the Arab region. In a survey conducted by the Al Jazeera Center for Studies to determine the orientations of the Muslim Brotherhood elites towards Iran and its role in the region as well as on the Iranian-Arab relations, the majority of views showed a negative

¹² The Guardian, Hamas rules out military support for Iran in any war with Israel,6-3-2012, 20-1-2019

¹³ موقع الجزيرة، الإخوان المسلمون: حضور في 52 دولة، تاريخ النشر 2016-3-21م، تاريخ الاطلاع 2019-1-16م

¹⁴ AFSHON OSTOVAR, Carnegie Endowment for International peace, Sectarian Dilemmas in Iranian Foreign Policy: When Strategy and Identity Politics Collide, NOVEMBER 30, 2016.27-2-2019

¹⁵ HFW, SANCTIONS UPDATE: US SANCTIONS ON IRAN, 8 MAY 2018,20-1-2019

attitude toward the role played by clerics in both Iran and the Arab world. The results of the survey showed that 95% of the targeted Muslim Brotherhood elite agreed to the statement: “The clerics in Iran play a major role in the Iran-Arab tense relations”, while only 3% of them were against the statement. As for clerics in the Arab world, only 54% agreed to the statement that: “The clerics in the Arab world play a major role in the [Arab-Iran](#) tense relations¹⁶.”

Fourth: Saudi relations with the Muslim Brotherhood

The history of the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the Muslim Brotherhood cannot be ignored, which was characterized with harmony most of the time. However, this changed completely during the era of King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz, although the early years of his reign did not differ from the time of his predecessors. However, over time, especially in 2011, after the outbreak of the Arab Spring events, a new stage of the Saudi-Brotherhood relations started, especially after some Saudi figures close to the Muslim Brotherhood made demands for reform. This pushed the Saudi regime to turn against the Brotherhood and oppose their rise to power in Egypt. The kingdom then blessed the ousting of President Mohamed Morsi and supported the current Egyptian regime against the [Brotherhood](#)¹⁷.

However, the Iranian government believes that if Saudi Arabia opened the door for restoration of relations with the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamic movement would easily sacrifice its relations with Iran.

¹⁶ فاطمة الصمادي، توجهات النخبة من "الإخوان المسلمين" نحو إيران ودورها في المنطقة، تاريخ النشر، 18 أكتوبر، 2016، تاريخ الاطلاع 20-1-2019م
¹⁷ محمد مختار قنديل، الإخوان والمملكة العربية السعودية: بين الماضي والحاضر، موقع معهد واشنطن، تاريخ النشر، 18-5-2018م، تاريخ الاطلاع، 16-17-2019-1م

Fifth: Turkish influence on Egyptian revolutionary forces

Despite the image of cooperation and strategic convergence that the two sides in Tehran and Ankara have been keen on keeping in the mindset of the Near East politics, however, the issues of sharp dispute are still on the table between the two sides, most notably the Turkish position on the Syrian issue, and the issue of armed Kurds on the Turkish border. These issues indirectly affect the future of relations between the Egyptian revolutionary forces and the Iranian regime, taking into consideration that the stay of the Egyptian revolutionary forces in Turkey is linked, at the very least, to the fact that these forces do not oppose the Turkish internal and external orientations and policies¹⁸. Also, there may be fears in Turkey that Iran is violating Turkey's regional role as defender of the human rights of the oppressed in the Middle East.

Sixth: The use of Iranian Shiite influence

Although Shiites represent only about 10% of the [Muslim population](#)¹⁹ all over the world, however, the doctrinal religious dimension is one of the most important tools in the Iranian strategy it applies in expanding and maximizing its influence in the region. The doctrinal dimension has evidently been exploited by Iran in its military ideology; as the Iranian moves on the ground are aimed at supporting the Shiite minorities in Arab countries, whether through political parties or military militias, such as in the case of Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen.

It has become clear that the Iranian moves in the past few years have employed the sectarian dimension in its foreign policy, trying to play the role of the leader of the of

¹⁸ op. cit.، إمام محمد محسن أبو النور، هل يمكن أن تكون إيران ملاذاً آمناً للإخوان المسلمين؟¹⁸

¹⁹ Ian Siperco, Iran: Shia Tide Rising, Middle East Policy council.17-1-2019

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the Shiites in the region and the entire world. Also, the Iranian Constitution justifies intervention to defend the Shiites anywhere in violation of the sovereignty and borders of other countries. This was stated clearly in President Hassan Rouhani's statements in March 2016, when he said: "Iran will intervene in any location in the world where there are Shiite Shrines exposed to threats by terrorists." That is the pretext through which Iran explains its intervention in Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, Syria and [Bahrain](#)²⁰. These benchmarks represent a great challenge for the Egyptian revolutionary forces, whether those of the Pan-Arab line or the Muslim Brotherhood, the unofficial representative of the Sunni forces in the world.

Seventh: Different perspectives on tools of change

Iranian literature and books have sought to emphasize that the Iranian revolution is purely white. However, the current Iranian foreign policy perspective in the Middle East is characterized by "violence", especially those carried out by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, specifically through the "Quds Force" led by Qassem Soleimani, which carries out the external operations of the Iranian regime, and is seen as the central link of Tehran's relations with the armed groups such as Hezbollah, the Palestinian Hamas movement, the Houthis in Yemen and many Iraqi and Afghan Shiite militias. Although the Quds Force's budget remains a secret that is not even reviewed by the parliament, the head of Iranian Parliament's national security committee, Alaeddin Boroujerdi, has disclosed that Tehran has allocated \$ 300 million to this military corps. In addition, the Iranian intelligence service known as "Ettela'at" plays the basic logistical role in collecting information as well as being responsible for

²⁰ فراس الياس، العقيدة العسكرية الإيرانية، معهد واشنطن لسياسة الشرق الأدنى، 15-11-2017م، تاريخ الاطلاع ، 17-1-2019م

drawing and carrying out the programs of clandestine operations [at home and abroad](#)²¹.

Despite media reports claiming that some Egyptian revolutionary leaders are not against the use of violence in confronting the Egyptian regime and that some Egyptian revolutionary forces have allegedly resorted to violence against the military institution, the Iranian perspective and its tools in dealing with foreign affairs are somehow incompatible with the vision and aspirations of the Egyptian revolutionary forces in general, which still believe in peaceful solutions, dialogues, and soft diplomacy as a major means for getting rid of their internal and external crises.

Eighth: Everyone is distressed

Both the Egyptian revolutionary forces and the Iranian political system suffer from several problems and crises, whether structural or temporary, most notably:

1- Problems related to Iran

Iran suffers from many problems: The Iranian political system faces a great challenge in the case of absence of the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ali Khamenei. The Iranian people themselves are divided: While some of them want a more conservative State, others want a more liberal State, although Iran has managed to [hide](#)²² this division from the public. In addition, there is a state of political conflict within the Iranian military institution, which has been escalating since 2015, specifically between the army and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, when one of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards commanders, Hassan Abbasi, strongly criticized the Iranian army and described it as

²¹ أذرع إيران الثلاثة للسيطرة على منطقة الشرق الأوسط، تاريخ الاطلاع ، 20-1-2019م DWمركز

²²Anthony H. Cordesman, The Crisis in Iran: What Now? Center for strategic and international studies, January 11, 2018

weak. However, the regime leaders, led by Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, quickly contained the crisis. Anyway, Hassan Abbasi's statements revealed weakness of the Iranian military doctrine, manifested in weakness of military discipline and commitment within the [Iranian security system](#)²³.

Among Iran's most serious problems is the economic problem. Some 26 million Iranians, about 33% of the Iranian population that is estimated at 80 million, suffer from poverty, including 6% that suffer from extreme poverty. According to the International Labor Office, poverty in Iran has led to the spread of child labor, where children had to work as street vendors or beg for money. According to the UNICEF, 11% of Iranians are forced to employ their children because of poverty. Also, thousands of Iranians are pushed to sell their kidneys so that they could survive and support their families.

It is estimated that 35% of Iranians live in areas that suffer from water shortage. It is also estimated that 97% of Iranian cities face some kind of [drought](#)²⁴. In addition, the economic problems aggravated in coincidence with emergence of major economic corruption issues for [prominent Iranian leaders and elites](#)²⁵.

2- Problems related to Egyptian revolutionary forces

The Egyptian revolutionary forces suffer from multiple problems, such as their fragile structure, immature political action, and weak presence on the ground. Moreover, there is no accurate estimate of the number of members of these forces; and most

²³ op. cit. فراس الياس، العقيدة العسكرية الإيرانية، معهد واشنطن لسياسة الشرق الأدنى، 15-11-2017م، تاريخ الاطلاع ، 17-1-2019م

²⁴ Mehdi Ghanbarzadeh, Quoru. What are the major problems facing Iran? 26-2-2019

²⁵ محمد عبّود، موقع الخليج اون لاين، الفساد في إيران.. شفافية غائبة ومليارات ضائعة وأحياء يسكنون القبور، تاريخ النشر 10-1-2017م، تاريخ الاطلاع 26-2-2019م

revolutionary forces suffer from absence of internal regulations governing their work despite the existence of some kind of organization such as their administrative structure. The absence of internal regulations may have constituted a key factor in the current rifts witnessed by these forces. Such situation means the predominance of personal opinions away from a binding intellectual framework, which makes it difficult to ally with them. Also, the map of political forces is still unstable, where every now and then a new bloc or group is announced. In addition, there is great intellectual and ideological differences between various Egyptian revolutionary forces, including Islamists and secularists. While secularists accuse Islamists of fascism and sectarianism, part of the Islamist youth adopt a more radical approach against the [liberal and leftist forces](#)²⁶. Moreover, the Egyptian revolutionary forces do not have a real vision to face their [internal and external challenges](#)²⁷.

Conclusion

Every State or influential group depends on building mutual relations with other regional and international parties based on achievement of interests. We hardly find that constants and principles have anything to do with relations between a State and another State; a group and another group; or even between States and groups.

The Iranian regime may be much more aware of such rule in accordance with its experience in governance for many years, while the Egyptian revolutionary forces have not yet fully realized the standards of relations between international parties. It is also important to link the international system in one form or another to the balance of

²⁶ المعهد المصري، خريطة القوى الثورية الليبرالية واليسارية في مصر، تاريخ النشر، 17-1-2015م، تاريخ الاطلاع 17-1-2019م

²⁷ محمود شاهين، مدونات الجزيرة ، أدوات الثورة المفقودة، تاريخ النشر 17-10-2016م، تاريخ الاطلاع 26-2-2019م

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power that springs from alliances between states, which are mainly based on the military, political or economic power. It is evident that both the Egyptian revolutionary forces and the Iranian regime do not have the adequate power to conduct a strong alliance between them at least in the near future.

