



المعهد المصري للدراسات
EGYPTIAN INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES

analysis

17 MAY 2019

Egypt and the Arab NATO An Israeli Vision

Mohamed Abu Saada



WWW.EIPSS-EG.ORG

 Eipss.EG  Eis_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

May 17, 2019

Egypt and the Arab NATO: An Israeli Vision

Mohamed Abu Saada

Egypt has reportedly decided to pull out of the U.S. effort to forge an “Arab NATO” with key Arab allies, known as Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA) - intended to work against Iran.

The Hebrew press has been very interested in the Egyptian position. Israeli newspapers were surprised by the Egyptian decision describing it as a blow to US President Donald Trump's strategy to contain the Iranian power. “The development is a difficult setback for President Donald Trump, who along with Saudi Arabia had advanced the establishment of a coalition of Arab nations to counter Iranian expansion throughout the Middle East,” reported the Jerusalem Post.

The Israeli interest in the Egyptian withdrawal from NATO began after Cairo refused to send a delegation to attend a meeting in Riyadh early April to activate the Arab NATO, which was interpreted as a step to undermine the US-led efforts to link its Sunni Arab allies in a security, political and economic agreement to confront Shiite Iran. Cairo had reportedly conveyed its decision to Washington and other members ahead of Riyadh’s summit.

The issue of the Egyptian withdrawal from the "Arab NATO" raised different reactions, in order to explain the reasons that prompted Cairo to withdraw from the Arab regional military bloc betted on by its allies in the Gulf, in addition to the US, Egypt’s international strategic ally to address Iran’s regional ambition and expansion.

May 17, 2019

Xander Snyder, a global analyst at Geopolitical Futures, pointed out that Egypt is less concerned about Iran than Saudi Arabia, partially due to distance and geography. Snyder added that Cairo is likely wary of getting involved in more Gulf-led ventures, as Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen and the Gulf nations' interventions in Syria have proved largely unsuccessful. Providing another interpretation, Snyder said, "Egypt would undoubtedly be concerned about getting dragged into a war that drains its resources without much benefit."

The above interpretations are logical and realistic to a large extent, but there are additional Israeli media reports that provide other explanations. Haaretz referred the Egyptian withdrawal from the Arab NATO to Cairo's suspicions around the seriousness of the initiative of forming an Arab alliance, and because of the danger that the plan would increase tensions with Iran. "Egypt withdrew because it doubted the seriousness of the initiative, had yet to see a formal blueprint laying it out, and because of the danger that the plan would increase tensions with Iran," reported Haaretz citing an Arab source.

In addition, uncertainty about whether U.S. President Donald Trump will win a second term next year (2020) and whether a successor may ditch the initiative also contributed to the Egyptian decision, the Arab source said, according to Haaretz. This created a state of uncertainty on the future of Arab NATO to the Egyptian decision maker.

The Jewish Agency website has agreed with the interpretations provided by Haaretz and added another explanation: that the Egyptian decision came because it sees there is ambiguity about the role of the Arab NATO alliance toward the Russian role in the

May 17, 2019

region, in addition to the likely role of the Arab NATO in the US secret political deal, known as “Deal of the Century. The Jewish Agency website added that Egypt still refuses to engage in regional wars in the name of the United States. “We cannot conceivably be part of something that does not serve the interests of the [Egyptian] nation. ... We will not help the United States to instigate regional wars,” according to the Jewish Agency website, citing Mustafa Bakri, a pro-Egyptian regime journalist.

The last Israeli interpretation came from Yedioth Ahronoth, which saw that the Egyptian position came after leaking Saudi documents dating back to 2017, which stated that the main goal of forming the Arab NATO is to undermine the Russian and Chinese influence in the region. As for the Egyptian description of its withdrawal decision as “not final”, the Israeli newspaper explained that “it was due to Egypt's fears of diplomatic pressures.”

Finally

It is difficult for Egypt to contradict the orientations of its strategic ally, the United States. Therefore, the Egyptian announcement of “withdrawal from Arab NATO” can be interpreted in four directions:

First: The Egyptian decision was because Egypt sees that the year 2019 will not witness wars against Iran, especially in light of the US administration’s preoccupation of its political deal known as “Deal of the Century” and the preparations for the upcoming US elections in 2020.

Second: The Egyptian withdrawal decision to withdraw from the Arab NATO is seen as a declared “tactical withdrawal” in the sense that Cairo is maneuvering to consolidate

May 17, 2019

its gains, especially as it is the most important and influential regional force in the Arab NATO.

Third: The Egyptian withdrawal is a fact because Egypt believes that the Arab NATO is just ink on paper and will not see the light as a result of the absence of an Arab consensus.

Fourth: The Egyptian role is due to the difference between the Egyptian role and the Gulf role in the region. At a time when the Gulf countries are preoccupied with confronting Iran, Egypt is taking on other regional issues that are not less important than the Iranian file, i.e. the Libyan and Palestinian files.

