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## Israeli Assessment of Egypt's Foreign Policy

Dr. Adnan Abu Amer



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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](mailto:info@eis-eg.org)

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At the height of polarization in the Middle East region, attention is drawn to the existing Egyptian foreign policy and its complicated alliances, both with the Gulf states and Israel, in order to ensure the regime's stability amid domestic and foreign challenges.

Israeli forums that closely track developments of Egyptian political performance realize that the current Egyptian regime is involved in a number of outstanding regional problems, including the power struggle in its southern neighbor, Sudan; Sisi's military support to General Khalifa Haftar in the country's western neighbor, Libya, for strengthening his position; and a likely Egyptian mediation between Saudi Arabia and Iran in the Gulf region.

The current Egyptian regime and its allies, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, are engaged in a strong struggle to install an affiliated government in Sudan, in light of their political, diplomatic and security assistance to the Sudanese military, who have learned from Egyptian officers how to disburse civilian sit-ins.

Cairo, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi exercise pressures on Sudanese generals to avoid succumbing to demonstrators, and to disperse them by force, following the approach adopted by General Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi to consolidate his rule in Egypt, given that the three countries have an interest in maintaining the rule of the Sudanese military junta.

In Libya, Egypt is working with Riyadh and Abu Dhabi to stabilize the position of General Haftar, who has failed to occupy the Libyan capital, Tripoli, although the Egyptian and UAE military advisers keep operating alongside his forces. Haftar frequently visits Cairo for consultation with al-Sisi; and Cairo has become the central destination for receiving the messages that the West wants to deliver to Haftar.

Thus, amid the ongoing internal conflicts in the region – such as the civil war in Syria and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict – which are distracting Arab states, the Arab Troika of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have apparently established a center of influence in the region, although they are not considered permanent political and military allies to the United States in the Middle East.

However, Cairo is economically dependent on Riyadh and Washington, although it has recently started to buy weapons from Moscow; and Beijing is heavily investing in major Egyptian projects. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia suffers at present from its shaky relations with Washington, especially the Congress and US public opinion, which led Riyadh to establish growing relations with China and Russia. The UAE seeks competition with Qatar in the United States although it does not seem to trust US President Donald Trump very much.

It is true that Donald Trump is an excellent president to Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. However, the three countries are apparently preparing for the day when Trump leaves office following the upcoming US presidential election.

But it is remarkable that in terms of the Saudi, UAE tension with Iran, the Egyptian policy seems to be inadequate from their point of view. This requires a serious consideration of the circulated reports on a likely Cairo-led mediation between Riyadh and Tehran, but this depends on the Saudi desire.

It is clear that the Egyptian role in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has significantly shrunk in recent years, being limited to the shuttle consultations between Cairo and Tel Aviv every now and then on truce agreements between Hamas and Israel. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia is leading efforts in the region to create an environment conducive to the success of the 'deal of the century' in settling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – through exercising pressures on the Palestinians to accept the deal, and trying to recruit Jordan for its benefit through participation in the Manama workshop in late June.

With the passage of time, the US-led "Peace to Prosperity" workshop in Bahrain has turned to be a show event of little importance, taking into account that the Palestinians refused to attend the workshop and that Jordan is experiencing growing public pressure.

However, Egypt remains as a significant partner in this process. Egypt's approval to attend the Bahrain summit was a breakthrough for the US tremendous efforts in the preparations for the workshop. Israel was also part of these efforts – in working to persuade Cairo of the necessity of attending the summit that was proposed by the Americans, being of great significance to the US administration. Indeed, the position of President Trump would have been questioned if Cairo had decided to boycott the Manama conference. However, the presence of Egypt was a new American achievement, which revealed the depth of its influence on Egyptian politics.

August 1, 2019

As for the Egyptian internal affairs, the death of former President Mohamed Morsi, whom the Egyptian regime feared would constitute a situation similar to the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, in which Sisi's allied regime in Saudi Arabia was involved – amid the silent funeral for the late president that was imposed by the Egyptian authorities. The consequences of Morsi's death prompted Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry to become a spearhead in attempting to refute international accusations against the regime in this regard.

Had there been evidence on the assassination of Morsi, Egypt would have found itself falling under sanctions similar to those that Saudi Arabia has been facing since Khashoggi's murder in Saudi consulate in Istanbul, including a ban on arms sales imposed by some Western countries; and probably many international donor institutions would reconsider their assistance to the Sisi regime in this case.

As for Egypt's foreign relations in the Middle East region, there is a tripartite alliance between Tel Aviv, Cairo and Abu Dhabi. The UAE, a close ally to the existing Egyptian regime, and mostly Israel, are Cairo's partners in the battle against militant groups in Sinai. This means that the close relations between Sisi and Netanyahu are really existing, and the security cooperation between Cairo and Tel Aviv is ongoing despite absence of guarantees for the continuity of Egyptian-Israeli relations, particularly security communications, in the future.

In fact, there is no real peace existing between Egypt and Israel, but only hopes of optimism, taking into consideration that the history of Egyptian-Israeli mutual relations is simply a long history of wars. Nevertheless, the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) continues its field coordination with the second and third Egyptian armies in Sinai, lest the militants should fire their rockets at Israel. On the other hand, Israel continues to rely on the Egyptian role in maintaining the truce with Hamas. This explains why Sisi and Netanyahu maintain their direct communication.

The Israeli reading of the Egyptian political performance: both internally and externally, indicates a relative reassurance that it is consistent with the main headlines of Israeli network of interests, which may be close to or somewhat away from Israeli details, but in general it is a source of comfort for Israel on its southern border.