

INSTITUTE
ARTICALS

26 November

2020



المعهد المصري للدراسات
EGYPTIAN INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES

Horizon of Relations bet. Sisi Regime and Riyadh

Yasser Abdel Aziz



WWW.EIPSS-EG.ORG

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

Horizon of Relations bet. Sisi Regime and Riyadh

Yasser Abdel Aziz

The Saudi, UAE and Kuwaiti support to Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in the advent of his 2013 coup amounted to about \$48 billion, in addition to the fuel support provided by Riyadh in the form of regular shipments of oil sent regularly to cover the country's fuel deficit.

The Saudi support for Sisi has further increased since King Salman ascended to the throne in early 2015 and his son Mohammed later took over as Crown Prince and controlled the reins of power in the kingdom amid his full obedience to the UAE Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed.

The motive behind all provision of support to the Sisi regime was to ensure suppression of the January Revolution and eliminate political Islam in Egypt, and also to benefit from the Egyptian army's human reservoir and combat capabilities in adventures that the supporting Gulf countries would not be able to carry out alone.

Egypt's Sisi has chosen the flow of Saudi funds in return for performing the role of an obedient subordinate, where the first overseas task assigned to him was to join the Decisive Storm war launched by Saudi Arabia in Yemen as part of the so-called Legitimacy Support Forces at the time. Saudi Arabia wanted to use the Egyptian troops as fuel for these battles, but Sisi eluded in implementing the task, suggesting to take over the task of securing the Red Sea and cutting off the supply routes of the Houthi militia, which he failed to do either. However, in order to cover up this failure, Sisi unjustifiably got involved in the decision of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain to besiege Qatar and boycott it politically and economically, despite the fact that the latter's funds were still in the Central Bank of Egypt. This unjustified position on the part of Sisi was met with international ridicule, as there are no common borders between Egypt and Qatar to justify Cairo's participation in the blockade against it, and there were no economic differences between Egypt and Qatar that may justify such boycott, which led observers consider this step as unsuccessful involvement in a crisis that could have much benefitted Egypt, but unfortunately Sisi regime chose to play the role of a subordinate state and lose everything.

Although the head of the Egyptian regime obtained billions of dollars from the Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, however, most of these funds were systematically pumped into the joints

of the Egyptian economy with the aim of controlling it. In this regard, the UAE was smarter than Saudi Arabia although the latter has also had a share of the Egyptian economy cake. In the field of arming, the regime was able to draw a lot of money from the pockets of the Saudi and Emirati people, with unprecedented media support, in the hope that the Egyptian army would be a security guard at the gates of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which did not happen either – Yemen and Syria as clear examples. Even in Libya, the UAE and Saudi Arabia persistently sought to implicate the Egyptian army in the war there, but that adventure was wisely contained by the Turks who understood the game and denied the opportunity to Riyadh and Abu Dhabi.

In addition, there have been Saudi pledges to pump billions of dollars into the Egyptian economy after Sisi's waiver of the Egyptian Red Sea islands of Tiran and Sanafir - other than those funds that were transferred to the generals' accounts with the tacit approval of Saudi Arabia. However, those promises by King Salman and his crown prince have not been fulfilled up till now. The Saudi pledges included a significant share of the "NEOM" project and a large contribution to the development of Sinai, in order to solve the crisis of the economic situation in Egypt, where business and economic activity has almost stopped except for the army's economic sectors.

However, all these promises evaporated due to many factors, including those caused by the regime's policy in Egypt, those caused by the Saudi Crown Prince's policy, and those caused by various international and regional factors, which led to generation of muffled anger to the head of the regime in Egypt and his men that used to benefit from the Saudi money.

There are multiple factors that have contributed to halting Saudi projects and investments in Egypt, including factors related to the regime's policies and its view of the Gulf wealth, especially after the Sisi leaks that portrayed Saudi Arabia as a treasure and a reservoir of money that the military should scoop from until they are satisfied; and since this treasure is never emptied, the military will never be satisfied, which greatly affected the position of the Crown Prince in the Kingdom.

Also, the regime's determination to promote and propagandize that it is fighting terrorism and that the country is always in danger made Saudi investors reluctant to invest in a country threatened by terrorism, especially since the government in Egypt did not present a real vision based on development plans, and did not attempt to attract the investor with a package of facilities to encourage capitals.

The Saudi crown prince's policies also played a major role in recanting these promises to Egypt, under financial pressure on the one hand, and under re-arranging priorities on the other. The crisis of the brutal assassination of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul caused great pressure on the young prince. Also, the US President Donald Trump's blackmail of Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) was another pressing factor. In addition, MBS decision to reduce prices of oil greatly led to the turnabout of these promises. However, according to the approach of rearrangement of priorities, the Saudi government decided to turn to "Israel" and adopt an "undeclared" normalization with Tel Aviv, placing Egypt at the very end of the young prince's interests.

Sumed pipeline

The Sumed pipeline is an oil pipeline in Egypt, running from the Ain Sukhna terminal in the Gulf of Suez on the Red Sea to offshore Sidi Kerir, Alexandria on the Mediterranean Sea. It provides a safe alternative to the Suez Canal for transporting oil from the Persian Gulf region, particularly Saudi Arabia, to the Mediterranean, and then to Europe. Egypt benefits from the Sumed pipeline through the fees it receives for the transmission of oil, and through getting a share of this oil. However, according to [Bloomberg](#), oil flowing through the Sumed pipeline has declined. Also, among the problems between Saudi Arabia and the regime in Egypt, was the lack of clarity of vision regarding renewal of the agreement to supply a share of crude oil to Egypt at preferential prices since the 2013 coup. This comes in light of disclosure of an Israeli initiative to extend a pipeline parallel to the Sumed pipeline, linking Saudi Arabia with Europe through the occupied territories up to the port of Eilat, a project that is receiving great support from the Trump administration, and causing great inconvenience to the regime in Egypt. This means that the Egyptian regime is losing a big supporter in terms of investments and oil supplies, in addition to grants and gifts, namely, Saudi Arabia.

Likely collapse of the blockade front

Perhaps one of the first attempts to present itself to the Trump administration, the Sisi regime used the Palestinian issue as a tool, through adopting the point of view of Israel. During the first meeting between Sisi and Trump, the former announced his support to the deal of the century, in attempt to present himself as the godfather of normalization with Israel in the region. But later the normalization agreements concluded between the UAE, Bahrain, and Sudan (while Saudi Arabia is waiting for an opportunity to take the step) represented a scourge to the regime in Egypt. The complete rotation of

the Gulf states towards "Israel" pushed the Egyptian role out of the equation, or almost eliminated it, which, of course, was required by Israel as well as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates that have long aspired to lead the region. Perhaps the UAE's effort in pushing Sudan and Mauritania towards normalization with Israel, together with its full coordination with Israel in the face of Turkey would highly allow it take, or perhaps it has already taken Egypt's place with respect to management of the regional files. This development will certainly lead to the disintegration of the anti-Qatar blockade front, especially that the only justification for the Gulf rapprochement with Israel before the public has become confrontation of Iran, which means that warmer relations between the regime in Egypt and Qatar are underway, which exposes the Egyptian regime's ridiculous position on the anti-Qatar blockade.

An important question arises: In light of this movement and all these stances and changes, will Saudi Arabia let the Egyptian regime sink into its own problems?

The recent popular movement (in September) threatened the Sisi regime's existence with the entry of non-ideological groups to the anti-regime angry protests that erupted seven years ago. Accordingly, the regime finds itself prompted to offer concessions and bribes to the masses, including packages of support and benefits and injection of real job opportunities to silence or at least calm this movement, which, of course, requires more money.

In this case, the regime will not find any country other than Saudi Arabia to carry out this task, especially that the state of anger in the kingdom is growing, and Saudi rulers fear that the infection of revolution may reach it. Therefore, it is expected that Saudi support packages are likely to return, but this time not as generously as it had been before, during, or immediately after the 2013 coup. It has become necessary for the generals to give up the financial flows transferred to their private accounts in foreign banks overseas deducted from these packages in order to appease the angry street. But it is also expected that Saudi Arabia will keep the strings of the game in its hand with respect to giving and banning the Saudi support in order to maintain control of the Sisi regime and ensure that Egypt's generals will remain obedient.