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## Egypt's attitude toward Saif al-Quds Battle amid its UAE alliance

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The recent events in Palestine have been an inevitable result of the policy of accelerated normalization with Israel, in coincidence with blessing Israeli settlement and keeping countries that used to condemn Israeli practices with respect to the issues of the final solution, Jerusalem, and Judaism of the state, away from regional leadership. In this context, Cairo's flourishing relations with Abu Dhabi has led to Egypt's retraction from performing its usual functional roles in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Until 2017, Egypt and UAE shared an identical vision for the situation in Gaza and Hamas that they consider a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood that must be completely crushed by isolating it from the parent group as an initial step on the way to complete isolation and finally liquidation. In parallel with this, the UAE sought to propagandize Mohamed Dahlan for leading Fatah movement and then the Palestinian Authority as a whole, as part of the Deal of the Century, which the UAE and the Trump administration used to promote, and was a declaration of shift of regional weight towards the Gulf under the leadership of the UAE.

None of the symbols of the Mubarak regime, nor its media machine, has ever dared to extensively promote that Hamas and other resistance movements are "terrorist" organizations, and claim that they target Egyptian soldiers in Sinai. The latest of these crude propaganda that has led to Egypt's loss of much of its prestige is the drama serial titled "Ikhtiar-1&2" (The Choice), which promoted these ideas.

The Sisi regime has performed all the roles entrusted to it within the framework of the so-called 'Deal of the Century', that it blessed from its early moments. At the same time, the same regime needed Emirati mediation to communicate with leaders of Hamas and Fatah movements to play a mediating role targeting achievement of Palestinian reconciliation, things that used to be done on a routine basis since 2006 under the Mubarak regime, despite the Mubarak regime's hatred of Hamas.

The UAE has reshaped the perception of the Egyptian sovereign bodies towards the Palestinian cause, through appointing Mohamed Dahlan, the Palestinian leader that was dismissed from the Fatah

movement, as director of some of its key TV channels in Egypt<sup>1</sup>. At the same time, Egypt needed Dahlan's intervention as a mediator to enable Egypt to play a role in the Palestinian reconciliation.

The policies of the current regime have led to loss of the most significant card in the Palestinian mediation file, that is the tunnel card that the Egyptian regime was using during the Mubarak era, especially Maj. General Omar Suleiman, Director of General Intelligence Service at the time, to achieve political ends, including avoiding starvation of the Gaza Strip, and using this as a pressure card on Israel and the United States to achieve political and material gains in the Egyptian interior. It is noteworthy that the Egyptian security services at the time knew about most of the tunnels between Sinai and Gaza, and they even facilitated the import of drilling machines, with the help of Ahmed Gaddafi El-Dam, the coordinator of Libyan-Egyptian relations, according to several reports<sup>2</sup>.

The Egyptian practices after 2014 greatly contributed to consolidating the control of Israeli crossings over the reconstruction process, slowing it down and even significantly paralyzing it<sup>3</sup>.

Although there is a historical responsibility on the part of Egypt for the Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip in the June 1967 defeat, the weakness of regional coordination in favor of the Palestinian cause and the policies pursued by the Sisi regime amounted to burning all the cards that Egypt used to have, prompting Israel and the United States to accept a settlement in the lightning wars the Israeli forces led on Gaza, whether with regard to the crossings, tunnels or security coordination far from Israel and its controls, regardless of whether these settlements are in the interest of Israel or the Palestinians, disrupting billions worth of trade that used to take place through these tunnels.

The Sisi regime also made a grave mistake that some may not realize its direct impact on Egypt's national security and its role in the Arab-Israeli conflict, namely the voluntary waiver of the islands of Tiran and Sanafir to Saudi Arabia through concluding a maritime border demarcation agreement with Riyadh on April 8, 2016, as this enhanced Israel's influence in the Red Sea and the transformation of the Gulf of Aqaba into an international waterway, thus promoting Israeli strategic projects that deduct

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<sup>1</sup> Lebanese Al-Akhbar, Emirati anger at the Egyptian media: withdrawal is close?, 12 April 2019, [link](#)

<sup>2</sup> Eid Al-Marzouki, Gaza Tunnels: The breathing space of the strip suffocated by the Egyptian army, The New Arab, 21 February 2015, [link](#)

<sup>3</sup> Sultan Barakat and Firas Masri, Reviving the Stalled Gaza Reconstruction Process, Brookings Doha Institute, on 22 August 2017, [link](#)

from Egypt's share, its Suez Canal and the oil and gas transmission pipelines, such as the Eilat-Ashkelon pipeline, that the UAE has recently invested in as part of the recent normalization agreements with Israel.

In all the previous blitzkrieg wars launched by Israel on Gaza, the Egyptian initiatives were always welcomed immediately by Israel; but in the last offensive, the Egyptian mediation efforts were rejected during the first week of the aggression, until the United States pressured Egypt, Qatar and other mediators to work on reaching a settlement as soon as possible. However, the Egyptian mediation efforts faltered for another five days due to Netanyahu's intransigence and pursuit of a victory that he thought could keep him in office<sup>4</sup>. In fact, Israel would not have accepted the Egyptian mediation in the recent attack on Gaza had it not been for the United States' pressure and Tel Aviv's realization of the unlikelihood of a ground operation or continuation of the war for a longer period, due to the qualitative development of the Palestinian resistance that removed the most important Israeli strategic sites from service, such as airports and gas platforms, and forced millions of Israelis to enter shelters. However, Israel only accepted a truce without reaching a written agreement.

Egypt is seeking to ensure continuity of its role on the Palestinian cause, albeit with much greater difficulties than before and under great pressures from the Palestinian resistance, Israel and its allies in the Abraham agreements that the Egyptian regime blessed, and finally from the US administration that Sisi needed to draw its attention, which he finally achieved by receiving a phone call from President Joe Biden. The Sisi regime also tried to exploit the Palestinian file in seeking to reopen the Renaissance Dam file with the United States and restore the American position adopted by the Trump administration through the Washington agreement, which the Egyptian government has not succeeded in so far.

It is true that the Egyptian promises to spend \$500 million for Gaza reconstruction this time is an exceptional step, but this did not mean that Cairo is actively contributing to the implementation of the reconstruction plans. In fact, the Egyptian authorities are still detaining some of the most prominent activists in support of Palestinians, whether Dr. Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, or Rami

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<sup>4</sup> CNN Arabic, a Hamas leader, reveals to CNN the reasons for the faltering efforts of Egypt and Qatar to mediate a truce with Israel, 17 May 2021, [link](#)

Shaath, the Palestinian/Egyptian activist who leads a strong movement for the boycott of Israeli goods. Likewise, the authorities did not allow any protest activities to support Palestine, as many countries in the region and the whole world did. The most logical explanation of this is that the Sisi regime's reaction this time compared to its reaction during the 2014 aggression is that it is a tactical move, not a strategic move that stems from a strategic vision supporting the Egyptian national security. In fact, this move was aimed at achievement of the immediate interests of the regime, and to convince Israel, the UAE and the United States that it is an important party that cannot be bypassed in the Palestinian file, and accordingly, these parties must continue to support its survival and stability<sup>5</sup>. This view is confirmed by the strict preconditions of Blinken and Netanyahu to ensure that no aid is delivered to Hamas and the resistance factions in general, and their attempt to impose the file of Israeli prisoners of war on the Gaza reconstruction issue and continuing to deal with the file as a purely security file.

The current regional situation cannot isolate a country of the size of Egypt due to accumulation of errors on the part of the regime in the file of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), the Libyan and Sudanese files, as well as other regional files, but the shift in the pattern of Egyptian foreign policy albeit still limited and cannot be described as a strategic transformation, unless it achieves effectiveness and visible results on the ground.

The disastrous foreign policy mistakes of the Sisi regime, despite success in mobilizing the most costly international funding sources in the early years of usurping power, made Egypt a hostage of structural dependency. Therefore, the Egyptian foreign policy needs a decade of well-meditated and planned institutional amendments only to restore the situation that was on the eve of its assumption of power, which cannot be surpassed through some late movements and reactions to issues that have been deeply aggravated since the military coup of 3 July 2013.

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<sup>5</sup> Essam Abdelshafy, The Egyptian Regime and the Saif al-Quds (Jerusalem Sword) Battle: Transformations and Interpretations, The New Arab, 28 May 2021, [link](#)