



**Dimensions**  
for Strategic Studies

Study

# How New is Egypt's "New" Foreign Policy? Transformations and Pathways

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## **Dimensions** for Strategic Studies

Dimensions Centre for Strategic Studies (DCSS) is think tank, dedicated to the study of the Middle East and North Africa affairs, provides the Arab readers with a substantive insight on the region's political, economic and social issues and dynamics.

The DCSS was founded in the United Kingdom on January 2020 ,1, and is headquartered in London.

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## Preface

Egyptian foreign policy in general enjoys a relative degree of "flexible stability" towards some countries, whether in the region or the world, and its attitudes towards some current files, especially those classified within the direct Egyptian national security services, are also characterized by a high degree of continuity, based on some constants, with limited tactical changes.

Despite this, the dramatic and geostrategic changes that the Arab region has witnessed over the past 10 years, specifically since 2011, have forced policymakers in Egypt to have a different Egyptian response to these changes; especially since some of them have directly affected Egyptian national security, whether at home or in the immediate neighborhood, or have affected Egyptian interests in indirect circles.

Given the centrality and importance of the Egyptian strategic role for many international and regional forces, whether those directly involved in the issues of the region, or ones aspiring to play a new role in it, the evaluation of Egyptian foreign policy, and monitoring the levels of change in it, are considered important research issues for our strategic studies centers.

Reviewing what has been addressed in public news sources, with regard to Egyptian foreign policy during the period between 2014 and 2021, this study will be concerned not with academic theorization, definitions, or foreign policy-making methodology, but rather with producing a solid policy paper that analyses the current Egyptian foreign policy circles, direct and indirect; and monitoring the Egyptian interests in each of them. It furthermore monitors the general and ruling lines of the Egyptian movement towards these circles, while assessing the extent of the strategic or tactical response to the developments of positions in foreign policy, both in the region and the world.



## First: The problem of the study

The Egyptian strategic environment, at its three levels (local, regional and international), has witnessed important changes during the past decade, some of which are still interacting to date. These changes include, but are not limited to:

- The ongoing conflict in Libya and the levels of Egyptian involvement in it.
- Accelerated shifts in the Sudanese file since 2019.
- The rise of the issue of the "Renaissance Dam" and the conflict over water as a governing framework for Egyptian policy, not only towards Ethiopia and the Nile Basin countries, but also towards the rest of the African continent.
- The developments of the "Palestinian-Israeli" file and its repeated crises, and the consequent political and strategic burden on Egypt.
- Variables of the scene in the Gulf region, in its local, regional, and international dimensions.
- The conflicts in both Yemen and Syria.
- The situation in Iraq and Lebanon and areas of tension and instability in the Arab region.
- The policies of the major powers in the region (frequent talk of the US withdrawal, the escalating levels of Russian and Chinese involvement, and the return of European interest in the region).

All of the aforementioned major and partial changes pose a challenge to any country in the region, especially the central countries, which play a role in shaping the shape of interactions in the region, specifically Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE; after central countries lost their being in the circle of influence such as Iraq and Syria, due to many factors that cannot be mentioned here.



The entirety of these changes has left its effects on Egyptian foreign policy, from the decision-making process (institutions), and those who participate in this process, up to the decision-maker and his nature (the variable of political leadership), then external interaction with Egyptian policy, negatively or positively (reactions of the countries of the region and the world), in terms of the rates of approach, and the formulation of alliances, in contrast to the potential ranges of tension and clashes.

Therefore, this study seeks to answer a major question: To what extent can the levels of change in the Egyptian external movement be evaluated, and what are the reasons for it? Are these changes lasting? That is to say: are they within strategic frameworks, or are they tactical changes and responses within general and well-known lines?



## Second: Method of analysis

Applying a three-level analysis approach to Egypt's foreign policy (policy-maker, decision-maker, external response, and engagement) would lead us to a deeper understanding of that foreign policy, which undoubtedly constitutes an important focal point for understanding many of the Arab region's interactions and some of the Middle East's files. This study will therefore implement the well-known foreign policy analysis approaches including decision-making theory, systems analysis, and leadership approach.

### Section I:

#### Variables in Egyptian foreign policy after 2014

The events in the Middle East, especially since 2011, have played a key role in mapping alliances in the region and have had an impact on the repositioning of some regional forces, as other forces have emerged and declined, as well as the emergence of new actors who have played an influential role in the region. In fact, it can be said that Egyptian foreign policy, over the past years, has been influenced by this complex landscape, as it has influenced it.

It is noteworthy in this context that by March 2022, a hundred years had passed since the beginning of Egyptian diplomacy, since Egypt's declaration of independence from Britain on 28 February 1922.

In recent years, that diplomacy, and behind it the Egyptian state, has gone through many challenges and changes, especially since the start of the revolution of 25 January 2011, through many developments and events, until 30 June 2013, and Egypt has entered a new phase at the internal and external levels.

Based on the aforementioned, in this study, the most important variables that have had an impact on Egyptian foreign policy in recent years, will be reviewed and analyzed.



## First: Internal variables and their impact on foreign policy

A country's foreign policy affairs are linked to a range of internal and external factors and determinants that affect them. Since 2011, Egypt has gone through a period that can be considered a watershed in its history, while the most important internal variables that the Egyptian state has witnessed in recent years are as follows:

### ■ 25-Jan-2011

There is a fundamental relationship between structural variables within political systems, especially in the event of widespread popular revolutions or protests, and the external behavior of States, whether in their regional or international environment, according to some studies that dealt with the relationship between the nature of revolutionary action and transformation in the revolutionary state and its foreign policies.

With the outbreak of the revolution on 25 January 2011, Egypt's foreign policy faced a number of new challenges as a result of the country's changing security, political and economic situations. As the "25 January Revolution" is considered an exceptional circumstance, Cairo has, throughout the years following the revolution, been keen to deal with the surrounding neighborhood, and with the international powers that have specific interests in the Middle East, in light of how transitional stages are managed. The Military Council, the regime of President Mohamed Morsi, and the regime of the current President Abdelfattah EISISI have all realized that the activation of foreign relations is vital in the context of the transition, as it gives the new regime regional and international legitimacy that would enhance its internal legitimacy.

### ■ Yelena Mizulina, July 26, 2013, Izvestia.

After the events of 30 June and 3 July 2013, Egypt's foreign policy entered a new phase, especially after Defense Minister Abdel Fattah ElSisi took office in the country, after winning the presidential election in June 2014. This stage was represented in the adoption of a number of new goals and circles, as well as the continued validity of the historical and traditional goals of Egyptian foreign policy.



That stage produced a number of other goals, including some degree of interdependence, and it has become a priority in the vision of Cairo and its external orientations, which can be summarized as follows:

**1- The first objective:** relates to the support of the national state and the preservation of its sovereignty, and this objective was clear in Egypt's position on the Syrian crisis, as it was evident in President ElSisi's vision based on five main dimensions in this regard, namely "respecting the will of the Syrian people, finding a peaceful solution to the crisis, preserving the unity of Syrian territory, disarming militias and extremist groups, reconstructing Syria and activating the role of state institutions."

**2- The second goal:** is for Egypt to play new roles, especially as it is a pivotal country in the region, due to its strategic geographical location, its historical role and its multiple cultures; which have qualified it many times to play the role of leadership. In this context, Cairo has sought to achieve its national, Arab, and African interests within the framework of cooperation in accordance with the principle of partnership.

**3- The third objective:** relates to the fight against terrorism, and it has become one of the main objectives of Egyptian foreign policy in the period after 30 June 2013, especially with the terrorist groups carrying out a number of operations targeting the Egyptian armed forces and the State vital institutions. Hence, ElSisi, in his speech before the Islamic-American Summit in Riyadh on 21 May 2017, presented his country's vision of combating terrorism at the international level, in which he pointed out that the necessary condition that provides the host environment for terrorist organizations is the disintegration and destabilization of national state institutions in the Arab region, pointing out that filling the vacuum in which terrorism grows and spreads, requires that every effort be made to restore and strengthen the unity, independence, and efficiency of national state institutions in the Arab world.



**4- The fourth goal:** is Egyptian diplomacy's keenness on international and regional cooperation, and the promotion of the principles of collective action, in order to achieve common interests; especially since Egyptian foreign policy has long called for adherence to the charters of international and regional organizations, including the principles of the United Nations related to sovereign equality, the prevention of the use of force in international relations and the peaceful settlement of disputes.

Hence, Egypt has spoken on more than one occasion about the importance of reforming the United Nations and its subsidiary organizations, especially with regard to the membership of the Security Council. Cairo has called for the expansion of its membership to make it more equitable among developed and developing countries. Egypt has also advocated, through the United Nations and other international forums, the reduction of nuclear armaments in order to preserve international security and the destiny of peoples.

## Second: New Variables and Challenges in the Regional and International Movement Circles

Starting from talking about internal variables and their impact on Egyptian foreign policy, it can be said that, although that foreign policy was linked in its course to a number of pillars and standpoints, it faced a number of challenges, at the regional and international levels, which in turn posed another challenge represented by the extent of the Egyptian diplomatic services' ability to respond and confront, which can be addressed through the following points:

**1. The proliferation of terrorist groups in the region:** The success of these groups in obtaining fertile ground for movement has enabled them to carry out quick and swift operations in a number of areas during the recent period. The spread of the arms trade has contributed, in one way or another, to the activity of these terrorist groups, especially with the spread of organizations in the region such as the Organization of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, known as ISIS, Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, and other groups of various names.



Terrorist groups have posed a direct challenge to Egyptian national security in general, because their activity is linked not only inside Egypt, but to the regional environment, in addition to the fact that there are links between these organizations.

**2. Structural changes in the build-up of the regional system:** The region has undergone a number of structural changes, with States with natural resources maintaining their position while poverty has been perpetuated in other States. Those challenges have been accompanied by challenges related to population growth in a number of states in the region, in parallel with widespread instability in many of them, where armed conflicts have directly affected the civilian population, such as in Libya, Syria, the Sudan and Somalia. These changes have been accompanied by increasing interference by some regional powers, namely Iran, Turkey, and Israel, in the internal affairs of some Arab States. This came amidst the limited mediation role of the United Nations in many regional conflicts. All those circumstances and developments have had a significant impact on Egyptian foreign policy in the past period.

**3. The growing effects of the outbreak of the "Covid19-" virus:** The spread of the virus has had economic and social repercussions that have imposed many challenges on international policy in general, including, of course, Egyptian foreign policy, as the role of the conference diplomacy has diminished, and air traffic and other measures, which most countries have witnessed as a result of the pandemic, have been suspended.

The main trends governing Egyptian foreign policy during the period of the pandemic were the provision of vaccine supplies, as Egyptian diplomacy worked to make its voice heard in international and regional forums on the possibility of international cooperation at the scientific level, in the face of a pandemic threatening humanity without discrimination, as Cairo realized that there are attempts by some governments to work on "politicizing vaccines", as the governments of countries with varying scientific capabilities entered the race in this field, seeking to achieve political gains, through monopolizing the production and distribution of the vaccine, and companies were also busy achieving economic benefits.



**4. The Turkish Challenge:** Turkish policy in the region represented a regional challenge for Egypt in intertwined regional files, in particular the Libyan file, the energy file in the eastern Mediterranean, the situation in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea, as well as Turkey's hosting of elements and groups opposed to the Egyptian political system. Cairo considered that the Turkish moves represented one of the most important challenges to its foreign policy. The alarm sounded more in Egypt with the signing by Turkey of an agreement to develop the Sudanese island of "Sawakin" overlooking the Red Sea, to establish Turkish military bases, which Cairo considers a threat to Egyptian national security from the south.

"Turkish-Egyptian" relations reached a peak of tension when Ankara intervened in the Libyan issue to implement the military agreement concluded with the Government of "National Accord" in the face of the "Libyan National Army" led by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, which for Cairo posed a threat to Egyptian national security, and this was reflected on Egyptian policy and hindered its efforts to establish security stability on the western border with Libya. Turkey's external expansion would have weakened Egypt's regional role in potential political settlements in some regional files.

**5. The Ethiopian Challenge:** Addis Ababa worked on building a series of dams on the Nile, the most important of which is the "Renaissance Dam" while following a strict and stubborn policy in negotiations with Egypt regarding the filling and operation of that dam, which affects the Nile water flows towards Egypt. In parallel, Ethiopia has been keen to diversify its regional relations and to succeed in strengthening these relations with Qatar and Turkey on the one hand, and with the UAE and Saudi Arabia on the other. Addis Ababa has also been keen to diversify its international relations, especially with the United States within the framework of the policy of combating terrorism, while maintaining close relations with China. It also succeeded in providing the necessary funding for the construction of the "Renaissance Dam", by involving Italian and Chinese companies, which posed a direct challenge to Egyptian national security, by threatening Egypt's share of the Nile water, especially after the completion of other dams.



It should be noted that there are Ethiopian proposals for the construction of three other large dams, with an estimated storage capacity of 200 billion cubic meters of water, through which Addis Ababa aims to generate electricity and expand the area of cultivation, but in the end they already affect the shares of the downstream countries, Egypt and Sudan.

It can be said that the Ethiopian strategy is based on two main axes, the first is economic to generate energy and obtain a share of water for agriculture, and the second is strategic and political, which is to seek to control the flows of the Blue Nile, while not signing any agreements that may lead to limiting its control over these waters or on how to dispose of their huge quantities trapped behind dams, by invoking the principle of sovereignty. Through the second axis, Addis Ababa works on strategic political recruitment, especially in cases of severe flooding or prolonged drought, as part of its quest for hegemony in the Horn of Africa and the Nile Basin, and also to keep open its prospects on how to use the water weapon in the future according to the new circumstances.

In conclusion, and in light of the review of all these challenges, it can be concluded that Egyptian foreign policy comes as an implementation of the program of the political system, which is translated into a supreme policy, which in turn is divided into internal and external policy, as a tool to achieve the goals and aspirations of the state internally and externally. In this context, the study seeks, in the second section, to research and analyze the levels of response in some arenas of Egyptian foreign policy, regionally and internationally.



## Section II:

### Response levels in the Egyptian foreign policy arena

In general, Egyptian foreign policy is characterized by a relative degree of "flexible stability" towards some countries, whether in the region or in the world. Its attitudes towards some of the current files are also characterized by a degree of continuity, based on some constants and anchors, which were presented in the first section of the study, with some kind of limited tactical changes.

Despite this, the dramatic and geostrategic changes that the Arab region has witnessed over the past 10 years, specifically since 2011, have forced policymakers in Egypt to have a different Egyptian response to these changes; especially since some of them have directly affected Egyptian national security, whether at home or in the immediate neighborhood or have affected Egyptian interests in indirect circles.

Based on the above, the study seeks, through this topic, to review the most important features of the transformations in Egyptian foreign policy paths towards a number of files and issues.

#### First: At the Arab level

##### ■ Egyptian Foreign Policy Pathways/Transformations in the Arab Mashreq

During the past years, Egyptian foreign policy has witnessed clear activity towards some of the region's files. This activity came with the Egyptian side's awareness of the importance and vitality of the "Arab Mashreq" region, especially in light of the changes it has witnessed in recent times, in light of the continued instability of the internal situation in Iraq and Lebanon, and the outbreak of many protest movements over recent months, which demanded structural reforms at the political and economic levels, as well as the dramatic deterioration in the economies of some countries of the region.



Another factor that emerged was the return of Daesh activity significantly, as the recent period revealed the continued ability of the remnants and cells of the organization to launch new attacks, whether in Syria or Iraq.

All these factors imposed on Egyptian foreign policy the need to deal differently with the region's crises, as Cairo worked to support the efforts of state sovereignty in the Arab Mashreq, especially in Syria.

In parallel, during the past period, Cairo has been keen to activate the tripartite partnership between Egypt, Iraq and Jordan in what has been called the «New Sham», and to develop a regulatory and institutional framework for this formula. Egypt has also sought to find a role in reconstruction efforts, while recognizing the importance of a prominent role in the coming period with regard to the reconstruction efforts of Syria, Iraq and other countries, in order to maximize the economic and political benefits during the coming period. It was agreed to sign an agreement on "reconstruction for oil", whereby Egyptian companies implement development projects in Iraq in exchange for oil, in accordance with what was agreed upon within the framework of the Egyptian-Iraqi Supreme Committee. The importance of the "Egyptian-Iraqi-Jordanian" axis is highlighted at the economic level, through the creation of potential opportunities for Egyptian investment in the various sectors related to the reconstruction process, in light of the regional and international rush to engage strongly in those efforts that are expected to be launched in the future.

## ■ **The stability of Egyptian foreign policy towards a number of Arab files**

Egyptian foreign policy has been characterized by a kind of relative stability, especially towards the Arab Gulf countries, in light of the Egyptian rapprochement in the past years with some Gulf countries, especially the UAE and Saudi Arabia, which was reflected in the coordination of the positions of the three countries towards a number of regional issues. Even if there are some different views between Egypt on the one hand and some Gulf countries on the other, this difference does not seem to affect the level of cooperation and coordination among them.



On the other hand, the Egyptian foreign policy has witnessed stability towards the Sudanese crisis, especially in light of the Egyptian side's keenness to maintain political stability in the Sudan and the country's unity and non-disintegration, in addition to maintaining the cohesion of the Sudanese military establishment, as well as the keenness to ensure stability on the southern Egyptian border in the face of any threats, such as arms smuggling, organized crime, illegal immigration, or the activity of terrorist cells affiliated with Al-Qaeda or ISIS.

Cairo was also keen to continue to gain support for the Sudanese position in favor of the Egyptian position regarding the negotiations of the "Renaissance Dam" and to preserve this position in all possible ways, while seeking to prevent the possession of hostile or competing regional forces tools that affect the Sudanese decision, which may harm the higher Egyptian interests in the Sudan, or "Egyptian-Sudanese" relations.

## Second: At the regional level

### ■ Egypt's Foreign Policy Pathways Towards Africa

The historical, cultural and geographical determinant is one of the most important internal determinants of Egypt's foreign policy towards Africa. While most of the data confirmed a clear decline in the Egyptian presence in the brown continent, since 2014, the Egyptian political leadership has accorded a special place to Africa in its regional movement, as Cairo sought to restore its role in this framework.

Following the freezing of Egypt's membership in the African Union after the events of 30 June 2013, Cairo was able to restore the situation by conducting a number of official visits and sending high-level delegations to clarify the true picture of the Egyptian reality after these events. These visits included several African States, namely Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Kenya, Chad, Nigeria, Gabon, Ghana, Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Seychelles.



Egypt also established an African Affairs Unit within the Council of Ministers as an institutional framework for coordination among official Egyptian institutions concerned with African relations, which was evident in 2014 with the adoption of the new constitution, which affirms the African identity of the country, stating in its preamble that Egypt is the head of Africa, which means that Egypt clearly and explicitly recognizes its African identity.

From the above, it can be concluded that the previous phase witnessed the restructuring of Egyptian foreign policy with regard to directions, policies and the development of tools, in order to bring about a change in the Egyptian vision of the nature of the new role towards the African continent, in order to achieve a number of objectives, perhaps the most important of which are:

### **1- Protecting Egyptian national security, especially with regard to water security:**

The issue of Egyptian water security is at the top of the Egyptian foreign policy priorities; and the outbreak of the Renaissance Dam crisis has prompted Cairo to enter the negotiating path. Despite the failure to reach an agreement among the three countries, Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia, due to the latter's intransigence; Egypt has been committed since the beginning of the crisis to the principle of negotiations in order to achieve its water security. It supports Ethiopia's special claim concerning its right to development, but without prejudice to Egypt's historical rights to the waters of the Nile.

Moreover, Egypt endeavors to protect its borders which are surrounded by instability, both in Libya and in Sudan, in addition to the emergence of the Halayib and Shalatin crises. Furthermore, Egypt is keen on protecting the eastern borders and the entrance of the Suez Canal.

### **2- Building a regional system for securing the Red Sea region, combating terrorism, organized crime and illegal migration:**

Egyptian politics operates along the African Coast, especially with the presence of jihadist groups in Somalia, which pose a threat to the navigational channel of the Suez Canal. Combating organized crime, drug and arms trafficking and human trafficking was one of Egypt's objectives on the continent, as was combating illegal migration, which had become a threat through the flow of migrants across borders.



Therefore, Egypt made a strategic move by inaugurating the southern navy; and then rebuilding and expanding the base of Bernice, as a major anchor point for protecting the security of the Red Sea.

**3- Enhancing trade and investment cooperation, especially in the area of infrastructure:** Egypt has worked to strengthen trade and investment cooperation with African countries, as it launched many initiatives and projects in the continent, including several sectors such as education, health, administrative reform and combating corruption. In addition, it works on reformulating state institutions by allocating a sector for African affairs in some ministries and government institutions. Egypt also established the African Affairs Committee in the House of Representatives along with the Egyptian Partnership Agency for Development as a mechanism to support human capacities in Africa.

**4- Support to peacekeeping and stabilization operations:** Egypt is one of the countries most involved in peacekeeping missions on the African continent, with 2,600 personnel participating in the United Nations and peacekeeping missions. It has conducted a number of training courses, in which 578 trainees from 30 African countries participated, to train on how to participate in conflict resolution and peacekeeping on the African continent.

Egypt has endeavoured not only to preserve peace and security, but also to extend it to preventive diplomacy before conflicts occur. Hence, at the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa in 2015, Egypt put forward the initiative of establishing a unit to support mediation and conflict prevention within the structure of the African Union Commission, as well as the establishment of the African Union Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development Centre.

From the above, it can be said that there is a presence and a shift in Egyptian foreign policy toward Africa, which culminated with the election of African countries to Egypt to the presidency of the African Union in 2019, which is an appreciation of the Egyptian role in the continent during the past few years.



On the other hand, despite the limited impact on Egyptian interests in Africa, the most prominent of which are Egypt's water interests in the Nile Basin countries, the Egyptian political system seeks to address the previous gaps in dealing with the continent's issues, which forces it to focus on supporting the stability of its countries, in addition to correcting the African perception about the nature of Egyptian efforts, through various media, and forming Egyptian partnerships with civil society organizations spread in African countries to secure access to various internal segments of African societies. Cairo also seeks to create a security and development mechanism linking the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Council of Arab and African States, since security in both the Red Sea region and the Gulf region are two sides of the same coin.

### ■ **Egypt's Foreign Policy Pathways/Transformations toward Turkey**

Despite the tension in the relationship between Egypt and Turkey during the past years, some features of the shift towards calm have begun to emerge during the recent period. Such a move was motivated by a number of reasons; perhaps the most prominent of which is the arrival of Joe Biden to the presidency in the United States, which prompted many countries of the region to reposition and rearrange priorities in a way that allows for some changes in their regional policies and positions. In addition, the Gulf-Gulf reconciliation, which took place in early 2021 was reflected in one way or another on the policy axes witnessed in the region since the beginning of the Arab Spring at the beginning of the last decade.

The dialogue began; and the first steps of the Egyptian-Turkish rapprochement was at the intelligence level, where more than one session and meeting were held over the past months, as many statements were issued, especially from the Turkish side, whether from President Recep Tayyip Erdogan or Foreign Minister Mouloud Zaoushglu, indicating the desire to calm relations with Egypt and reduce the size of tension and congestion between the two countries.



On the other hand, the Egyptian response came through Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry's assertion that "the negative attitudes of Turkish politicians do not reflect the relationship between the Egyptian and Turkish peoples", while he announced that if Egypt finds "a change in Turkish policy" and Ankara gives up "interfering in Egypt's internal affairs," and follows "regional policies that are in line with Egyptian policy," this may constitute a ground and starting point for normal relations between the two countries. Shoukry considered that "the statements made by the politicians in Ankara regarding the opening of channels of dialogue with Cairo are not enough, but must be accompanied by actions".

Despite the fact that Turkey has taken a number of steps, concerning media channels present on Turkish territory opposing Egyptian policy, in exchange for Egypt preventing media professionals from attacking Turkey; the rapprochement between the two sides still needs more steps, especially with regard to not interfering or influencing the internal events in Egypt in any way. Moreover; Turkey's interference in the Libyan file and that of the Horn of Africa region's, as well as political or military support directed to some parties that Cairo may see as a threat to Egyptian national security, were points of concern for Egypt's foreign policy.

In the conclusion of talking about Egyptian foreign policy at the regional level, it can be concluded that this policy has witnessed some milestones of transformation towards a number of files during the recent period, which may open the way for the expansion of the Egyptian role in the regional environment during the coming period.



## Third: At the international level

### ■ Towards the United States: Stability and Continuity

Egypt's foreign policy towards the United States has maintained the previous approach over the past decades, given the specificity of that relationship, whether in economic, military or political terms. Coordination has continued with regard to the Fight against Terrorism file, with the American side being aware of Egypt's geostrategic position and its pivotal influence in the region, in addition, of course, to its awareness of the strategic importance of the Suez Canal.

Despite the turmoil of the relationship between the two countries in the aftermath of the 30 June 2013 events, that relationship quickly returned to normal, while security and strategic cooperation between the two countries continued. In March 2015, Washington lifted the ban it had imposed on U.S. aid to Egypt following the events of 30 June.

It should be noted that despite the state of tension and confusion that may appear towards Egypt, with the change of the elected US administrations, the US Department of Defence is one of the most important pillars of the relationship between the United States and Egypt, and thus has long had a long involvement in determining the forms and dimensions of that relationship.

### ■ With Russia: Diversifying Alternatives

Over the past years, Egyptian policy has worked to uphold the principle of balance in foreign relations, as reflected in the Egyptian approach to rapprochement with Russia, in a policy that is based mainly on the principle of diversifying alternatives, and not focusing on one international actor; in other words, not relying mainly on the United States. Of course, this policy aimed at expanding Egypt's strategic independence and maximizing its geopolitical and economic returns.

In contrast, Moscow's policy towards Cairo relied on two main factors, namely security interests and economic ones; as Russia views Egypt as an important regional partner in the fight against terrorism, as well as Russia's endeavours to strengthen its position in the Mediterranean.



As for the economic field, the Russians are interested in Egypt as an importer of agricultural products, nuclear and industrial weapons and technology.

The joint interest of the two countries was reflected in the increase in visits and official meetings at the summit level, where President ElSisi made six visits to Russia, the most important of which was in October 2019, which witnessed the Russian-African summit, chaired by ElSisi and his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin; while the latter made two visits to Egypt, the first in February 2015, and the second in December 2017.

Numerous exchange visits took place, including the 2013 visit of the Russian Ministers of Defence and Foreign Affairs to Egypt, followed by the 2014 visit of the Egyptian Ministers of Defence and Foreign Affairs to Russia, during which discussions were held in the "2+ 2" format, which Moscow adopts exclusively with a limited number of countries like the United States, France, Italy, the United Kingdom and Japan.

In parallel, meetings of the "Egyptian-Russian" Joint Committee, which is an important platform for cooperation between the two countries in many fields, are held periodically, most recently in June 2021.

At a related level, Cairo and Moscow signed deals and economic agreements, the most prominent of which was the signing of a contract in 2018 for the supply of 1,300 train vehicles from Russia, as part of Egypt's efforts to develop railways, as well as agreements in 2014 for the supply of fuel to the Atomic Energy Authority for the operation of the second Egyptian research nuclear reactor, and the modernization and development of the first Egyptian research nuclear reactor, which was established by the Soviet Union.

Among the important agreements between Cairo and Moscow is the agreement to establish a Russian industrial zone in Egypt on an area of 5.25 million square meters, which is considered the largest and most important for Russia outside its borders. There are reportedly region-specific targets for attracting 7\$ billion in investment and 35,000 jobs. Russia is also interested in that project as the gateway of Russian goods and products to African markets.



It should be noted that bilateral trade between Egypt and Russia reached 6.2\$ billion in 2019, of which 5.7\$ billion is the value of Russian exports to Egypt, which is currently Russia's largest trading partner in the Middle East and Africa.

By contrast, despite Russia's interest in the stability of the eastern Mediterranean, it has concerns that the region's countries could succeed in extracting gas intensively, at competitive prices, creating an alternative to Russian gas for Europe. Thus, Moscow is likely to exploit its military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean (via the Syrian Gateway), ensuring its participation and presence in the formulation of any arrangements (security, political, military, economic) specific to the region and the management of its wealth.

In a related context, Egypt plays a key role as a regional conduit for the transportation of gas discovered by Cyprus, Greece and Israel, to Europe, through the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum, that was established in 2019, with American and European support, which threatens the supply of Russian gas to European countries. Therefore, the adoption of navigation projects such as the North Sea route may affect the future of the Suez Canal, knowing that this is threatened by the Russian war on Ukraine, and the resulting repercussions and sanctions on Moscow.

### ■ **With China: An ostensibly extended role and internally limited one**

Egypt views China more as an international developmental rather than a political actor, with Beijing cooperating with Cairo in particular in the areas of trade and economics, as well as assisting in capacity building.

Between 2016 and 2020, China provided Egypt with some 2,000 training opportunities in the areas of satellite, rail transport and fisheries. It established a vocational and technical training centre in the Suez Canal Economic Zone. In the same context, the first "Chinese-Egyptian" national laboratory for glass fibres and high-performance composites was established, as well as the "Huawei" Academy for Information and Communication Technology, which is the first national centre for digital transformation in Egypt.



Despite these steps, the political and strategic dimensions of "Egyptian-Chinese" relations remain limited, and are currently under review; especially with the growing role of China in regional areas of importance affecting the interests of Egyptian national security, especially with the increasing role in East Africa through massive investment in development projects, including water projects.

There are many challenges in the relationship between Egypt and China, including the clear trade imbalance between the two countries. With a trading volume of 14\$ billion between the two countries, which grew between 2012 and 2020, in the range of %10, the trade relationship is unbalanced, with China being Egypt's first trading partner, and the latter being the number 49 trading partner for China.

Another challenge that arises is the security risks of Chinese debt, as Beijing's financing of projects in other countries always includes harsh conditions, such as the condition of financing against the project itself. Chinese precedents in other countries have shown the seriousness of this requirement, as Chinese companies have taken over African and Asian ports, having defaulted on their project debts.

In general, the relationship between Cairo and Beijing did not reach what is known as a full partnership. Despite the two countries' signing of a strategic partnership agreement, more than 160 bilateral agreements, and the establishment of the Egypt-China Economic Cooperation and Trade Area (TEDA), in the Suez Canal Economic Zone; bilateral relations remain weaker in comparison to China's economic relations with some other countries in the region.

## ■ **Moving towards cross-border alliances: new strategic partnerships**

Egypt's approach to cross-border alliances is one of the most prominent moves in which Cairo's foreign policy succeeded, in search of a way out and collective solutions based on serving the interests and objectives of the countries of the region and Arab national security; especially those that overlap with the Egyptian security services.



Military and strategic relations with the major powers have undergone a qualitative transformation, especially with regard to their exports to Egypt. For example, in 2020, Egypt became the world's second-largest arms importer from Germany, with nearly 800 million euros.

On the other hand, Egypt was a founding member of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum in 2019, which included gas-producing countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea, with the aim of cooperating and coordinating on the huge strategic gas reserves in that region.

In addition, Egypt engaged in an alliance «New Sham», with both Iraq and Jordan, as mentioned earlier, in an attempt by the three countries to maximize common interests on an economic basis, while maintaining political, security and intelligence coordination. According to the US website Stratfor, the partnership between Egypt, Jordan and Iraq contributes to security and commercial gains, with its economic and political interests converging.

Noting that one of the most prominent challenges facing that alliance is the reliance of its countries on external support, which would restrict the speed of its formation, the American site considered that this partnership between Egypt, Jordan and Iraq provides an alternative Arab voice in the region to confront external interventions. In this context, the website pointed out that, although Egypt, Jordan and Iraq are dependent on external forces for some of their economic and security interests, the development of coordination among the three countries can contribute to avoiding the emergence of cross-border terrorist threats in the region, as well as the prospects for economic benefits in terms of energy and trade relations, can benefit all three countries.

# Summary of the study

In conclusion, it can be said that since 2014, Egyptian foreign policy has witnessed clear qualitative transformations, through which Cairo aimed to redraw its foreign policy, whether in its regional or international environments, based on relatively different determinants from those that were followed before 2014.

The main transformations were Egypt's orientation towards adhering to its independence, specifically towards the major powers, as well as working to balance its relations with these powers, in a way that achieves a high degree of flexibility in foreign policy, to achieve diversity in relations with various countries of the world, East and West, with the aim of preserving national interests.

However, despite the progress achieved by the Egyptian Foreign Ministry at various levels, it still suffers from many obstacles to its progress more broadly, which was reflected on its regional role in a number of files and issues in the region, as well as on the size of Egyptian initiatives towards those files.



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