

# The Evolution of Egyptian Foreign Policy in a Turbulent Regional Context

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In the aftermath of the June 30 Revolution, Egyptian foreign policy faced unprecedented challenges, imposed by the strategic fluidity that swept the Middle East, the escalation of regional conflicts, the spread of transnational terrorism, and the increasing foreign interference in the affairs of the region's countries, in addition to internal economic and social challenges that cast a shadow on the state's ability to act and exert influence externally. The Egyptian decision-maker had to deal with this complex situation wisely and rationally, balancing the necessity of defending vital national interests and Egyptian national security with adherence to the established principles that have governed Egypt's foreign policy throughout history. These principles include respecting the sovereignty of states, non-interference in their internal affairs, supporting political solutions to crises, strengthening Arab and African solidarity, and defending the just causes of peoples, foremost among them the Palestinian cause. This can be analyzed as follows:

## **Challenges and Pillars of Egyptian Foreign Policy after June 30, 2013**

The regional environment that Egypt inherited after June 30 was characterized by an unprecedented degree of strategic fluidity and fragmentation that directly impacted Egyptian national security. This was manifested in the collapse or weakening of national state institutions in several pivotal countries, such as Libya, Syria, and Yemen, and the rise of terrorist and extremist organizations that exploited the security and political vacuum to expand and threaten the security of the entire region. Furthermore, regional polarization and foreign interference in the internal affairs of Arab states intensified, as did the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) issue. The Ethiopian challenge poses an existential threat to Egypt's water security and its historical right to the Nile waters.<sup>1</sup>

Domestically, Egypt faced enormous economic challenges, including declining growth rates, rising unemployment and inflation, and an urgent need to rebuild confidence in the Egyptian economy and attract foreign investment to drive development. This internal situation had direct repercussions on foreign policy, as achieving economic stability and sustainable

development became a primary objective of Egyptian diplomacy. This required building strong economic partnerships and diversifying sources of international support and cooperation. The Egyptian approach was based on a set of fundamental principles:<sup>2</sup>

- 1- The independence of national decision-making and the rejection of any form of dependency or foreign interference in Egyptian affairs. This was linked to the pursuit of a balanced foreign policy based on diversifying international relations and partners.
- 2- A firm commitment to the principles of international law and the UN Charter, foremost among them respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, non-interference in their internal affairs, and the peaceful settlement of disputes.
- 3- Preserving Arab national security as an integral part of Egyptian national security.
- 4- Continuously defending the Palestinian cause as the central issue for Egypt and the Arab world.
- 5- Strengthening Egyptian-African relations, with particular attention to the Nile Basin countries, water issues, sustainable development, and combating terrorism on the continent.

### **Managing Regional Crises:**

The explosive crises in Egypt's regional environment, particularly in Libya, Syria, and Yemen, in addition to the ongoing challenges in Sudan, have presented a true test of the ability of Egyptian foreign policy after the June 30 Revolution to deal with a highly fluid, volatile, and dangerous environment, as follows:

#### **1- The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) Crisis:<sup>3</sup>**

The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) file is one of the most prominent geopolitical challenges that Egypt has faced in the last decade, especially after the June 30, 2013 Revolution. Egypt has managed this file based on the following approaches:

- A Water security as an existential issue that cannot be compromised.
- B- A flexible and patient negotiation strategy.
- C. Internationalizing the issue: From a technical dispute to international security.
- D. Expanding influence in the Nile Basin countries.
- E. A responsible deterrent and escalation strategy.
- D. Mobilizing Arab and international support.

#### **2. The Crisis in Palestine:<sup>4</sup>**

The Palestinian issue remains central to Egyptian national security. Egypt's position stems from historical and national principles, namely supporting the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, foremost among them their right to self-determination and the establishment of their independent and sovereign state within the June 4, 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Egypt plays a pivotal and central role in mediation efforts between the Palestinian and Israeli sides, and in attempts to bridge the internal Palestinian divide and achieve national reconciliation. Egypt also exerts significant efforts to provide humanitarian and relief aid to the

Palestinian people, particularly in the Gaza Strip, where Egyptian contributions to aid delivered reached up to 80% of the total international aid.

### **3- The Libyan Crisis:**

Given its direct geographical proximity and the more than 1,000-kilometer-long land border, the Libyan crisis posed the most significant security challenge to Egyptian national security following the June 30, 2013 revolution. Egypt adopted a comprehensive strategic approach to managing the Libyan situation, as follows:

- a- Supporting the Libyan National Army and stabilizing state institutions.
- b- The political track: from the Cairo Declaration to the electoral process.
- c- Combating terrorism and securing the borders.
- d- Rejecting foreign interference and mercenary militias.
- e- Humanitarian aid and development initiatives.

### **4- The Syrian Crisis:<sup>5</sup>**

Since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis in March 2011, Egypt has adopted a firm and clear position based on a set of fundamental principles, foremost among them preserving the unity and territorial integrity of Syria and rejecting attempts at partition or foreign domination. Egyptian interventions have been characterized by a commitment to achieving the interests of the Syrian people. We can distinguish between two phases of intervention and response:

#### **A- The phase before the collapse of the Assad regime:**

- (1) Supporting the political settlement process under the auspices of the United Nations.
- (2) Rejecting foreign interventions and the illegitimate military presence.
- (3) Engaging with the Syrian state and restoring official relations.
- (4) Restoring an effective Arab role in the Syrian issue.
- (5) Combating terrorism and supporting regional stability.

#### **B- The post-Assad regime phase:**

- (1) Preventing the collapse of the Syrian state.**
- (2) Supporting a peaceful political transition.
- (3) Confronting chaos and terrorism.
- (4) Rejecting foreign interference and attempts at guardianship.
- (5) Engaging in reconstruction efforts and the return of refugees.

## **5- The Yemeni Crisis:<sup>6</sup>**

Since the beginning of the Yemeni crisis, the Arab Republic of Egypt has sided with constitutional legitimacy, represented by the internationally recognized government, and supported efforts aimed at restoring state control over all Yemeni territory. With the escalation of Houthi attacks on shipping in the Red Sea since late 2023, Egypt has been compelled to rearrange its security and diplomatic priorities as follows:

- A- Preventing Houthi threats to international shipping and Red Sea security.
- B- Protecting vital Egyptian interests without direct involvement.
- C- Arab and regional coordination.
- D- Coordinating international positions and calls for the protection of shipping.
- E- Egyptian support for a political solution in Yemen.
- F- Avoiding the economic repercussions of the attacks on the Suez Canal.

## **6- The Sudanese Crisis:<sup>7</sup>**

Egypt has led intensive efforts at the regional and international levels to mobilize efforts aimed at ending the conflict between the Sudanese army and the Rapid Support Forces. In this context, Cairo hosted the "Sudan's Neighboring Countries" summit in July 2023, which aimed to formulate a shared vision among Sudan's immediate neighbors regarding ways to end the conflict, preserve Sudan's unity, territorial integrity, and institutions, prevent foreign interference in its internal affairs, and coordinate humanitarian relief efforts. Egypt continues its tireless efforts with all relevant Sudanese, regional, and international parties to reach a permanent ceasefire, facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid to all affected areas, and launch a comprehensive political process leading to the formation of a civilian transitional government that paves the way for free and fair elections and the achievement of lasting peace and stability in Sudan.

## **7- The Crisis in Lebanon:<sup>8</sup>**

Lebanon is suffering from a multifaceted crisis, the worst in its modern history, where economic, financial, political, and social dimensions are intricately intertwined. Egypt's position on the Lebanese crisis is characterized by its continued support for Lebanon's stability, unity, and sovereignty, the provision of humanitarian and medical aid to the Lebanese people, and its categorical rejection of Israel's repeated violations of Lebanese territory, including the occupation of parts of it. Egypt is exerting intensive efforts and maintaining contact with various regional and international parties to compel Israel to withdraw immediately and unconditionally from all Lebanese territory, respect the cessation of hostilities agreement, and fully and simultaneously implement UN Security Council Resolution 1701 without selectivity. This is essential to enable the Lebanese state to extend its sovereignty over its territory and to strengthen the role of the Lebanese army in asserting its authority south of the Litani River.

## **8- The Crisis in Iraq:<sup>9</sup>**

Egypt's position on Iraq is firm and supportive of Iraq's unity and stability. Egypt rejects any interference in Iraq's internal affairs. Cairo consistently emphasizes the importance of preserving Iraqi national identity and promoting reconciliation among all segments of the Iraqi people. Egypt actively participated in supporting Iraq during its war against terrorism and provided essential support for reconstruction efforts in liberated areas. Egypt continues to strengthen bilateral cooperation with Iraq in several vital sectors, including security, the economy, and infrastructure, with the aim of supporting Iraq in confronting challenges and achieving stability. Perhaps the most prominent manifestation of Egypt's support for Iraq is the "Greater Levant" or "New Levant" project, which aims to enhance cooperation between Iraq, Egypt, and Jordan. This project represents a significant strategic initiative that contributes to strengthening ties between these three countries and promotes cooperation in the fields of energy, electricity interconnection, transportation, and trade. Furthermore, this project reflects a shared vision for supporting regional integration in the Arab Levant.

## **The Global System and the Challenges of Balance in International Relations**

Since 2013, the world has witnessed major transformations in the structure of the international system, most notably the escalation of conflict between major powers and the changing patterns of international alliances. This has been compounded by major events such as the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian-Ukrainian war, and the rise of protectionism in the global economy. Amid these changes, Egyptian foreign policy has emerged as a balancing force seeking to preserve national interests in a highly fluid and transformative world, aiming for a "win-win" approach. Since June 30, 2013, Egypt has adopted a foreign policy based on strategic equilibrium, striving to maximize its gains from international changes without being drawn into international polarization that could harm its interests<sup>10</sup>. Among the most prominent features of this policy are:

- 1- Multi-track Action: Egypt has strengthened its relations with multiple international powers, despite conflicting interests among them, such as the United States, Russia, China, India, and the European Union simultaneously. This reflects the balanced policy it pursues.
- 2- Non-interference in the affairs of other countries: Egypt adhered to the principle of respecting sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, while focusing on international cooperation on issues of common interest.<sup>11</sup>
- 3- Utilizing international organizations: Egypt used international organizations as platforms to present its political vision, such as the Security Council, the African Union, and the Arab League, which helped strengthen its role as an influential diplomatic power. This is in addition to joining new international organizations such as BRICS, thanks to its strong relations with the founding members of the group (Russia, China, India, Brazil, and South Africa).
- 4- Establishing the principle of mutual interests: Mutual interests form the basis of economic and political relations, as Egypt was keen to achieve integration in relations with various parties to

achieve mutual interests. This partnership represents the pinnacle of pragmatism in international relations, based on prioritizing shared interests.<sup>12</sup>

## Conclusion:

It is clear from the above that Egyptian foreign policy has demonstrated an ability to adapt to the major regional and international transformations occurring within the global order, while maintaining its regional and international stability. Through strategic equilibrium, multi-pronged action, and adherence to the principles of sovereignty and non-interference, Egypt has established itself as a balanced regional player and an effective international partner capable of mediating effectively in various issues and regions. All of this is happening in a world of escalating geopolitical tensions and where nations face numerous challenges in the economic, security, and environmental spheres.

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