



The Egyptian Cabinet
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IDSC

Policy Perspective



Egyptian Foreign Policy: Opportunities and Challenges in 2024



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IDSC's Commentary

In light of the complex dynamics of the troubled regional and international environment, Egyptian foreign policy faces many opportunities and challenges. The importance of the Egyptian role in dealing with the surrounding tensions and conflicts is highlighted, especially in the worsening geopolitical crises in the Middle East. The most important of these crises is the Israeli aggression on Gaza, a major challenge to Egyptian foreign policy in 2024. Egypt also faces the security and economic repercussions of conflicts in neighboring countries and the challenges of the security situation in the Sahel and sub-Saharan regions, a serious threat to Egyptian national security.

Notably, Egypt is a pivotal mediator and a major player in maintaining regional stability. It seeks to find peaceful solutions to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and continues its support for political solutions in Libya and Sudan. In addition, it was able to improve its diplomatic ties, overcome differences with countries such as Turkey and Iran, and influence regional and international discussions on issues such as maritime security and combating terrorism.

Therefore, this edition of the Policy Perspective discusses and analyzes Egyptian foreign policy in 2024, focusing on its opportunities and challenges in this complex regional and international environment. It addresses several topics, the most important of which are the Israeli aggression on Gaza, the situation in Libya and Sudan, relations with Turkey and Iran, the elections in major powers, and Egypt's membership in the BRICS. This edition concludes by highlighting Egypt's diplomatic capabilities and extensive experience in dealing with crises and challenges, which will help it seize the opportunities available in 2024.

Egyptian Foreign Policy: Opportunities and Challenges in 2024

Ambassador Hussein Haridi,

Egypt's Former Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs.



In light of the wars and crises surrounding Egypt from all strategic directions, the year 2024 will be an unprecedented challenge for Egyptian foreign policy in a complex strategic environment in which contradictory interests intertwine among regional parties. This environment is characterized also by the flexibility of regional and international alliances.

The danger of this flexibility increases due to Israel's role in the Middle East, the Gulf region, and North Africa. It aims at expanding the geographical scope of what is known as the Abraham Accords. This strategy is not accompanied by a clear plan accepted by international parties to settle the Palestinian issue based on international legitimacy resolutions, particularly Security Council resolutions No. 242 of 1967 and No. 1515 of 2003. The latter adopted the two-state solution.

In the context of the Palestinian issue, the 7th October attacks launched by the Palestinian Resistance Movement (Hamas) in southern Israel and the continuous and unabated Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip since October 7, 2023 with a ferocity unprecedented in the Arab-Israeli wars, further inflamed the Middle East. In addition, these events increased the possibilities for expanding the scope of military operations to include other fronts, such as southern Lebanon. The Sana'a Houthi government also became on the front line by targeting ships heading to Israeli ports and those flying the flag of the Jewish State. These Houthi attacks, if they continue, may significantly affect international shipping traffic through the Bab al-Mandab Strait and the Red Sea, which will directly threaten the Suez Canal.

If the Israeli aggression on Gaza continues for months, it will significantly affect the region's security and stability, and it will be difficult to evaluate its repercussions on the regional situation. Therefore, Egypt is making intense and continuous efforts to reach an immediate and sustainable ceasefire to prevent the expansion of this war and its dangers for Egypt's national security.

Accordingly, the Egyptian foreign policy will focus all its efforts in 2024 on dealing with the repercussions of the Israeli aggression on Gaza. On the one hand, it will contribute to developing a unified Palestinian vision of how to manage Gaza optimally. On the other hand, it will work with all donor countries and Arab and international financial institutions to find opportunities for reconstructing Gaza, which is completely destroyed. Donors are expected to hesitate to provide the financial resources necessary for Gaza's reconstruction given the absence of the security stability required for pumping funds.

Moreover, finding promising and serious political prospects for settling the Palestinian issue will be important. Security in Gaza in the transitional phase between the end of the Israeli aggression and the start of negotiations on the arrangements for implementing the two-state solution is exceptionally important. The Israeli government's declared position of its continued dominance over security in the Gaza Strip contradicts the Egyptian position in this regard. Therefore, the Egyptian government will continue its contact with the US administration to find a compromise solution that meets the security needs of the Palestinians first.

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If the overall situation in Gaza requires, by necessity and geographical proximity, all attention from the decision-maker, in that case Egypt will continue seeking to stop the Israeli oppressive practices in the West Bank. It will also highlight the danger of settlement expansion in the West Bank, undermining the basis for the two-state solution.

While Egypt's eastern borders are in danger due to the Israeli aggression on Gaza, the political and security situation on its western and southern borders are also tense and unstable. In Libya, the UN envoy is still making all efforts to hold legislative elections so that the Libyan people can choose their representatives who will lead the country in the actual and institutional transition to a true democracy. This democracy will reflect the free will of the Libyan people in the east, west, and south of Libya, an approach that Egypt will continue to support.

In Sudan, the armed conflict that broke out in mid-April 2023 between the Sudanese army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) is still ongoing. In July 2023, Egypt adopted an encouraging Arab and African initiative by holding a summit of Sudan's neighboring countries. It resulted in a follow-up mechanism at the level of foreign ministers to follow up on mediation efforts between the two conflicting parties. In parallel, the Egyptian government supported the Saudi-American mediation and the efforts made by the IGAD - a merger of countries in the Horn of Africa. These efforts aim at reaching a ceasefire and securing a political solution consistent with the goals of the Sudanese revolution against the regime of former President Omar al-Bashir in 2019. This solution also has to meet the aspirations of the Sudanese people and various political forces that believe in the inevitability of a democratic transition in the country.

In addition, the Sahel region has seen a wave of military coups over the past years in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, which is called the Coup Belt. As a result of the accompanying international polarization among Russia, France, and other Western countries such as the United States and Germany, the armed groups – whether those affiliated with Al-Qaeda or coordinating with ISIS – have expanded geographically. They now threaten the sovereignty of these countries if this phenomenon continues, a security concern for Egypt, even if the geographical distance between Egypt and these countries is relatively large. In this context, Egypt plays a role in dealing with these groups through coordination and cooperation with the countries that are fighting terrorist groups in the Sahel and sub-Saharan region. Undoubtedly, the withdrawal of French forces participating in the military operation known as Operation Barkhane will affect regional and international efforts to control these groups and prevent their geographical expansion. This will not be easy, given the current political instability and the failure of the armies of those countries to fight these groups due to their lack of experience and capabilities in combating terrorism.

As for the Egyptian-Turkish relations, the year 2023 witnessed the return of the Egyptian ambassador to Ankara and the return of the Turkish ambassador to the Egyptian capital. This development reflected the Egyptian-Turkish will to overcome the past differences, start a new phase of cooperation in terms of strengthening bilateral ties or coordinating on various regional issues, and try to reduce tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean. This trend is likely to continue in 2024. However, it should not be interpreted as resolving all differences in the two countries' visions and regional interests in the Middle East and North Africa, specifically in Libya, and the disputed issue of defining the maritime borders between them, an issue of concern to countries friendly to Egypt such as Greece and Cyprus.

In light of the military coups witnessed in the Sahel region, the expansion of terrorist groups in this region, whether affiliated with Al-Qaeda or cooperating with ISIS, is a security concern for Egypt.

The Egyptian-Iranian relations also improved relatively following the resumption of diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran in March 2023, with a Chinese mediation. Undoubtedly, Iran has its calculations regarding its desire for further rapprochement with Egypt. While the Egyptian government does not mind in principle, some of Iran's practices and policies directly conflict with Egyptian national security in Palestine, Yemen, the southern Red Sea, and the Bab al-Mandab Strait. To name but a few, the attacks by Houthi forces on ships passing through the Bab al-Mandab Strait and heading north to cross the Suez Canal affect the number of ships passing through the canal, negatively impacting the Egyptian economy. These attacks increase the security and military tensions in vital areas to Egyptian security interests, even if the Houthis justify their strategy by targeting ships heading to Israeli ports in solidarity with the Palestinian people confronting the Israeli aggression on Gaza.

Concerning multilateral diplomacy, the cornerstone of Egyptian foreign policy, Egypt achieved major diplomatic progress at the African and international levels by officially joining the BRICS group on January 1, 2024. This achievement will enhance its diplomatic role on Arab, Afro- Asian,



or international levels and within international, European, and regional organizations. Egypt's membership in this effective group, which now includes 11 countries after it previously had only five countries, will add more vitality and influence to Egyptian foreign policy.

Furthermore, several important elections will be held in 2024, the results of which will impact Egypt's foreign policy, especially in managing its relations with major powers such as the United States, Russia, and China. The Russian elections, for which President Vladimir Putin ran, will be held this year. Next November, elections in the United States for both the White House and the US Congress with its two houses, Representatives for all its seats and the Senate for a third of its seats, will be held. In addition, elections are likely to be held in Ukraine and Israel. The overall results of such elections will affect Egypt's foreign policy, security, and economic interests.

In conclusion, the year 2024 is loaded with opportunities and challenges for all important circles of Egyptian foreign policy. By virtue of the historical experiences of Egyptian diplomacy, Egypt will deal prudently with these challenges, especially in the Middle East, the Gulf, and the Red Sea. Through its constructive capabilities, it will also be able to optimally use the available opportunities.

The year 2024 is loaded with opportunities and challenges for all important circles of Egyptian foreign policy. By virtue of the historical experiences of Egyptian diplomacy, Egypt will deal prudently with these challenges and can optimally use the available opportunities.



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