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Egyptian Diplomacy and International Relations

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Summary

Foreign policy is an essential component of Egypt's general state policy. Together with its traditional diplomatic and political functions, and given that development policy is considered a key objective, the Egyptian Foreign Ministry participates in the country's development effort by trying to attract foreign investment, obtain economic assistance and facilitate technology transfers. Egyptian diplomacy also seeks to maintain strong bilateral and multilateral relationships, which is another essential goal of Egypt's general policy. Strengthening traditional friendly relations as well as building new relationships enables Egypt to exercise influence and pursue its national interest all over the globe.

Introduction

Foreign policy is an essential component of Egypt's general state policy. It serves its goals and objectives, particularly in the areas related to diplomatic functions.

Together with its traditional diplomatic and political functions, and given that development policy is considered a key objective, the Egyptian Foreign Ministry participates in the country's development effort by trying to attract foreign investment, obtain economic assistance and facilitate technology transfers.

To accomplish this, specialised departments for international cooperation have been established within the Foreign Ministry, which coordinates and cooperates with other Egyptian ministries and institutions working in those domains. 'Diplomacy for Development' is thus one of the main objectives of the Egyptian Foreign Ministry.

Egyptian diplomacy also seeks to maintain strong bilateral and multilateral relationships, which is another essential goal of Egypt's general policy. Strengthening traditional friendly relations as well as building new relationships enables Egypt to exercise influence and pursue its national interest all over the globe. Traditional relationships, such as those with African and Arab countries, are maintained primarily through interaction within regional organisations, such as the African Union and the Arab League. Bilateral relations with Arab and African countries are also promoted through continuous consultations, widening the scope of cooperation in various fields and exchanging expertise in the different areas of development. The Foreign Ministry is also committed to boosting Egypt's strategic relationships, such as those with the US and Europe, which

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helps Egypt in its sustainable development efforts and promotes its role in the international arena, as well as serving its strategic regional objectives.

Table 1. Egyptian Diplomatic & Consular Missions

	Number of missions
Arab countries	23
African countries	36
Asian countries	22
European countries	44
Americas	19
Total	144

Note: to these should be added Egypt's delegations to the UN & UN Agencies and the EU and non-resident diplomatic representations.

Since the domestic and international have become increasingly intertwined, the Foreign Ministry has been cooperating with the international community through international organisations such as the UN. Transnational threats, such as global terrorism, international organised crime and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, have emerged and spread widely over the past few years and can only be addressed through collective action. Hence, Egypt is playing an active role in the UN and its specialised agencies, as well as in various other international institutions to foster international peace, security and development.

Promoting understanding and appreciation for Egypt's culture is another prime objective of the country's foreign policy. The cultural sector at the Foreign Ministry, along with the Ministry of Culture, make a significant contribution to enhancing the cultural relationships between Egypt and other countries worldwide. The Al-Azhar University, the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education offer scholarships and training courses to African, Asian and Arab students. Cultural events, folklore programmes and opera exchange shows are organised with other countries to help bring diverse nations closer together.

Egypt's Foreign Policy and Decision-Making

The Foreign Ministry is entrusted with conducting Egypt's foreign relations. Its function is to plan and implement the country's foreign policy and to coordinate with the other ministries and institutions concerned. The Ministry also plays an essential role in collecting and evaluating political, economic, cultural and scientific information that might affect foreign relations.

In light of the challenges currently facing the world, and given the number of conflicts in various vital regions, particularly the Middle East, decision-making has become more complex, with more consultations and discussions being necessary before any crucial

decisions are made. This has also heightened the role of qualified experts and think tanks, such as the Information and Decision Support Centre that advises the Egyptian cabinet. The Parliament is the final reference as regards approving foreign relations and treaties.

Furthermore, a new method has been devised by which direct contact is made with Egyptian public opinion regarding foreign policy issues, such as the Arab-Israeli conflict regional disarmament and other fundamental issues which are of importance on the national regional and international levels. The Public Opinion Poll Centre of the Cabinet Information and Decision Support Centre plays an important role in this regard through its polling activities on internal and international issues. To carry out its work, cooperation agreements have been signed with several centres in Spain, the US, Germany and other countries. Political parties, NGOs and the media are also involved in dealing with foreign policy issues together with the Egyptian Council for Human Rights, headed by Dr Boutros Ghali, the former UN Secretary-General. Thus Egyptian foreign policy has become a combination of institutional and democratic models of decision-making. Egypt's political leadership has paved the way for the Foreign Ministry and other institutions to participate actively in the decision-making process proposed by these institutions to the leadership.

Egypt's Arab Policy

Egypt has played and still plays a leading role in supporting Arab policies, foremost among which are those concerning issues such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, Iraq and the Sudan. Egypt, along with the Gulf countries, is promoting joint Arab action under the following guidelines:

- Drawing up a joint vision for maintaining Arab national security.
- Mutual respect for the sovereignty of Arab countries and non-interference in their internal affairs.
- Maintaining the independence of Arab decision-making.
- Enhancing the ties of solidarity between Arab countries by peaceful means in solving Arab disputes.
- Preserving Arab resources and boosting development in Arab countries.
- Respecting Pan-Arab treaties such as the Arab League Charter and the joint Arab defence treaty.
- Mediating in disputes between Arab countries to regain peaceful Arab co-existence.
- Boosting the economic and trade ties between the Arab countries with the ultimate goal of establishing a common Arab market.
- Establishing good and balanced relations with non-Arab countries in the region based on the principle of mutual respect.

Egypt and Arab-League Reform

As the centre of the Arab world and the headquarters of the Arab League, Egypt has been seeking the reform of the Arab League to enhance joint Arab action. In this regard, it proposed an initiative in July 2003 to restructure the pan-Arab organisation, including:

- Changing the voting system and amending the League Charter, originally drafted in 1946.
- Suggesting the creation of new bodies such as a Crisis Prevention Council, an Arab Court of Arab Security Council (ASC) and an Arab National Security Forum (ANSF). The ASC and the ANSF would serve to map out an effective Arab national security strategy. The (ASC) would be able to move rapidly to take definitive decisions without being hampered by veto overrides. It would also have the power to follow up and implement its decisions.
- The creation of an Arab Parliament which would add legitimacy to the League's decisions. It would oversee Arab League organisation and budgets and assist in drafting general policies.

Egypt's President, Hosni Mubarak maintained that these initiatives primarily aim to clear the air among Arab states, denounce the use of force in inter-Arab tensions, promote the role of the Arab League in activating joint Arab action and emphasise the importance of a common Arab market. Mubarak noted that the private sector would also play a major role in developing Arab economies and promoting Arab economic integration.

Egypt-Israel Relations

War between Egypt and Israel broke out in 1948 when the latter occupied Palestinian territories. After wars in 1956, 1967 and 1973, a visit by Egyptian President Sadat to Jerusalem led to the Peace Treaty of 1979, a year after the Camp David Accords. Since then there have been diplomatic relations between the two countries, with respective embassies in Cairo and Tel Aviv.

Being a pioneer peace-maker in the region and driven by the belief that a peaceful Middle East is the best solution for the development of all parties. President Anwar El-Sadat's groundbreaking trip to Israel, the 1978 Camp David Accords and the 1979 Peace Treaty represented a fundamental shift in the region's politics, away from a strategy of military confrontation to one of peace as a strategic choice. Egypt was subsequently ostracised by the other Arab States and ejected from the Arab League from 1979 to 1989, when they approached Egypt to resume diplomatic relations and returned the Arab League's headquarters to Cairo. Dr Esmat Abdel Mageed, Egypt's Foreign Minister, was then elected Secretary General of the Arab League. An international conference on Middle-Eastern economic cooperation with the participation of Israel was held in Cairo, followed

by the partial normalisation of trade and bilateral relations between Israel and some of the Arab countries, namely Jordan, Qatar and some of the Maghreb countries.

Despite Egypt's efforts and its mediation between the Palestinian Authority and Israel – together with other involved Arab parties and the US and the EU–, the latter hindered the peace process by refusing to move towards a final peace based on UN resolutions and its withdrawal to its 1967 borders and a halt to new settlements. Israel's occupation of Gaza and its aggressive policy towards civilians and its attacks and destruction in Lebanon encouraged a return to terrorism in the area. Nevertheless, Egypt is still patiently continuing its role and maintaining its dialogue with all the parties concerned to secure a permanent peace and enduring security.

Egypt and Iran

Since the Khomeini Revolution, Egypt's diplomatic relations with Iran have been limited to the level of 'Interest Sections'. Relations have often been strained, with Iran rejecting the Camp David Accords with Israel, Egypt supporting Iraq in its eight-year conflict with Iran and the latter hailing Khaled El-Islambulli, President Sadat's assassin, as a religious hero, with both a street and mural named after him (although later substituted by Mohamed Al-Durrah, the Palestinian 12-year old shot dead by the Israeli army in the invasion of Gaza). Iran also rejects Egypt's close relations with the US and Europe.

Despite some unofficial dialogue between the two countries, including the visit of the Iranian Parliament's Speaker Ali Laregani in December 2009 and his meetings with President Mubarak and other senior officials, resuming diplomatic relations is not feasible in the near future if an agreement is not reached first on certain bilateral and regional issues.

Egypt and Europe

Egypt has always maintained relations with Europe. In the 1970s Egypt made a considerable effort to consolidate its ties with European countries, both bilaterally and regionally, and a cooperation agreement was signed in 1977 with the European Economic Community (EEC). Bilateral relations with European countries, especially in the political, economic and cultural fields were rapidly developed under President Hosni Mubarak, Egyptian policy on Europe has been based on:

- (1) Encouraging European countries to play a more robust role in the Middle East peace process.
- (2) Gaining European support for Egypt's development.
- (3) Establishing a strategic political dialogue.
- (4) Fostering economic cooperation. President Mubarak has made repeated visits European countries, reciprocated by those of European leaders to Egypt, with a flurry

of agreements having been reached, including an accord with Paris Club creditors in 1992, by which around half of Egypt's debt was written off and the remainder rescheduled.

The EEC and its member states have played a vital role in supporting Egypt's three-phase economic structural adjustment programme, that successfully ended in the transition to a free market economy.

Egypt and the European Partnership

One of the instruments for cooperation between Egypt and Europe is the partnership agreement process, that began in the mid-70s and includes the Cooperation Agreement of 1977 and the Association Agreement of 2004 (as part of the Neighbourhood Policy). The partnership's objectives are to:

- (1) Provide an appropriate atmosphere to open a political dialogue to allow the development of strong relations between the two parties.
- (2) Prepare for the liberalisation of goods, services and capital.
- (3) Provide support for promoting balanced economic and social relations between the two parties.
- (4) Contribute to Egypt's economic and social development.
- (5) Encourage regional cooperation to ensure peaceful coexistence and economic and political stability.
- (6) Develop cooperation in matters of common interest.

On a bilateral level, Egypt has active relations with most European countries, especially those of the Mediterranean. The last visit of Spain's Prime Minister to Egypt in 2009 is an example.

Egypt and the EU Political and Security Framework

The Barcelona Declaration of 1995 is an ambitious document which will remain in modern history as the first attempt to create durable and strong bonds between the two shores of the Mediterranean as it is based on political dialogue to:

- (1) Strengthen traditional ties as well as common values, UN principles and democratic and human rights.
- (2) Promote regional security and stability by encouraging common initiatives and supporting the Middle East peace process.
- (3) Open a political dialogue between the Egyptian People's Assembly and the European Parliament.
- (4) Enable each party to consider the other's stances and interests.
- (5) Maintain a political dialogue around issues of common interest.

- (6) Take into consideration the difference in level of development between Egypt and the EU.

Egypt as an EU Trade Partner

Egypt is a major trading partner for the EU in the southern Mediterranean and has played a significant role freeing up trade in the area. EU exports to Egypt totalled €10.3 billion in 2007, while its imports from Egypt had a value of €7 billion. Direct EU investment in Egypt amounts to €1 billion out of the total stock of €5.3 billion.

Egypt and the Union for the Mediterranean

The union for the Mediterranean was officially launched at a summit of 44 leaders held in Paris on 13 July 2008, jointly presided over by Presidents Sarkozy and Mubarak. Years after the Barcelona Process was launched in 1995, the EU is still seeking a successful formula to help integrate the Mediterranean region into its Neighbourhood Policy through a Union.

From the EU's point of view, the new body gives a strong boost to the relations with its Mediterranean partners by vastly improving the quality of political dialogue. Regional projects are useful to peoples on both sides of the Mediterranean and Egypt is a leading and active member of the Union for the Mediterranean.

Egypt and Africa

Africa has been a prime objective for Egyptian foreign policy especially since the 1952 revolution, when Egypt mobilised its potential for achieving the liberation and independence of the African countries then suffering under the yoke of imperialism.

Following the independence of African countries, Egypt intensified its efforts to group them into a single body to serve the interests of the African people. This resulted in the establishment of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 and since then both Egypt and the other African nations have been working together to seek the best means to promote the aspirations of their peoples.

Under the chairmanship of Hosni Mubarak in 1998, the OAU succeeded in establishing a mechanism for the peaceful resolution of disputes in the continent. Egypt established a centre to train African cadres to resolve African disputes and carry out peacekeeping operations in the African continent. In November 1995 it played host to a summit at which Uganda, Ruanda, Burundi and Tanzania were given the opportunity to achieve peace.

Under the Egyptian Foreign Ministry, an 'Egyptian Fund for Technical Cooperation with Africa' was established years ago, devoting millions of dollars in training Africans in

areas such as diplomacy, development studies, medicine, journalism, police, security, agriculture and information Technology. Scholarships in universities are granted and experts sent to different African countries to provide technical assistance for development projects. Egyptian investments have been made in several African countries and joint projects established.

Egypt also joined the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF) as a representative of the North African countries during a summit held in Benin. The organisation's present Secretary General is Dr Boutros Ghali, the former UN Secretary General and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs specialised in African and Latin American Affairs.

While Egypt has a senior position in the OAU through Ambassador Ahmed Haggag, Deputy Secretary General, it has also played a prominent role in establishing the African Union to replace the OAU in a serious effort to solve the political, economic and social problems of Africa and build up a modern and workable organisation.

In the economic field, Egypt is particularly interested in:

- Encouraging the establishment of joint businesses and investments.
- Supporting development projects.
- Promoting trade and playing an active role in African economic organisation (eg, Comesa and NIPAD).
- Playing a role in solving the issue of African debt. Egypt has presented a number of proposals to write off part of the debt and to reschedule the remainder, while urging the World Bank to play a more robust role in promoting economic development in Africa.

Egypt and Asia

Egypt and the countries of Asian countries have maintained close relations based on their struggle in the 1950s and 60s against foreign imperialism. Such strong ties were manifested in the establishment of the Non-aligned Movement masterminded by Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser along with the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Ghana's Nkrumah, Sukarno of Indonesia and Tito of Yugoslavia to fight against the ideological confrontation between East and West. But since the end of the Cold War, Egypt has spared no effort in enhancing bilateral relations and coordinating multilateral policies. Economic cooperation has also flourished, leading Asia to rank as Egypt's third-largest trade partner after the EU and the US. Egypt has also maintained strong cultural relations with Asia.

Over the past few years, bilateral relations between Egypt and Asian countries have developed rapidly, including a strategic alliance with China through a process of political

consultation meetings. Economic cooperation through Chinese investments and gradually increasing trade is being fostered, while Egypt is playing a leading role in establishing Chinese-Arab and Chinese-African dialogue.

Modern Egyptian-Indian relations go back to the contacts established between Saad Zaghloul, the Egyptian leader, and India's Gandhi regarding the common goals of their respective independence movements. In 1955, Egypt and India were among the founders of the Non-Aligned Movement. In 1977 India described the visit of President El-Sadat to Jerusalem as a 'brave' move and supported the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. Trade relations between the two countries have been rapidly developed: in 2008 Egyptian investments in India totalled US\$750 million.

Other Asian countries, especially Japan, Korea, Singapore and Malaysia are also among the priorities of Egypt's foreign policy.

Egyptian-US Relations

Within the Egyptian revolution of 1952, Egypt and the US became linked through President Nasser's desire to modernise the Egyptian army and build the High Dam in Aswan. The US was initially favourable to both requests and also supported Egypt against the French, British and Israeli aggression in 1956. Nasser wanted to depend on the US to develop the country but a negative turn in relations came about as a result of the withdrawal by the US Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, of aid for the dam and the Egyptian army. In reaction, Nasser's ambitions switched over towards the Soviet Union, with which he signed an agreement to supply Egypt with modern military equipment. Although cooperation with the Soviets and the Eastern Block prospered, Nasser kept Egypt firmly in the non-aligned camp. He had never been a communist beyond his desire to modernise the country. Until the collapse of the Soviet Union, the communist bloc considered Egypt to be firmly on the road to socialism, but this was fundamentally at odds with the feeling of the Egyptian public that the US was a country closer to its aspirations.

Despite permanent US support for Israel, Egypt sought to re-direct the situation to try to establish a permanent peace based on the principle of land for security for both Palestinians and Israelis.

After the 1973 war, Egypt's President Sadat decided that was to be the last war in the region and he then paid his historical surprise visit to Jerusalem, which was followed by the Camp David peace accords.

This led to closer relations and a strategic alliance with the US and the consideration of Sadat as a man of peace, receiving the Nobel prize along with Menachem Begin. He

dismissed thousands of Soviet military experts from Egypt and promoted relations with the US. However, inevitably, there were differences, especially under the Bush Administration in the US.

President Obama's historical speech in Cairo University made a lasting impression on both the Egyptian government and people, but US double standards regarding Israel and the Palestinians continue to be unfavourably considered by Egypt's policy makers, who are playing an active role as mediators to lead the region towards peace. Egypt hopes that President Obama's initiative will lead to real action.

Conclusion: in summary, Egypt's foreign policy goals include:

- Non intervention in other countries' internal affairs.
- Solving problems by peaceful means.
- Working and calling for an international stand against terrorism.
- Maintaining the present policy of internal stability and economic progress to counter the international financial crisis.
- Balanced relations with all countries to ensure the attainment of Egypt's foreign policy goals.
- Protecting national borders and the state itself.
- Promoting economic resources through foreign investment, tourism and trade, based on both international cooperation and internal policies.
- Developing and supporting democracy, human rights and transparency.
- Maintaining Egypt in the Arab mainstream to maintain its regional position as a powerful force in the area.
- Combating religiously-inspired terrorism.
- Supporting the UN Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), calling on Israel to join the treaty and to submit all its nuclear facilities to the IAEA Safeguards System.

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