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FOREIGN POLICY OF THE ARE UNDER PRESIDENT ABDEL FATTAH EL-SISI (2013- 2020)

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Abstract

The article deals with the determinants, foundations, principles, and priorities of Egypt's foreign policy under President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. Based on geopolitics and cultural and historical heritage, in the field of public diplomacy of Egypt, a special place and role of the country is declared. The Islamic factor, the geographical position of the state, the features of its history, the colonial past and relations with such powers as the USA, the USSR / Russia, Great Britain, and France, the presence of the Suez Canal, and the problem of distributing the water resources of the Nile River are the determinants that predetermine the main directions of its foreign politicians. The basic principles of Egypt's foreign policy are a traditional set of provisions, characteristic of many states, adjusted for the geopolitical situation and developmental features.

The geopolitical features of the ARE, its identity, and the tasks of ensuring national security necessitate the existence of various "circles" of national interests. The "Arab circle" includes a broader understanding of national security based on the security of its Arab and African periphery. The "African Circle" is determined by the desire to strengthen its relations with the countries of the continent in the economic and cultural fields, taking into account the special importance of the states of the Nile basin as the "strategic depth" of the ARE. The "Islamic circle" for Egypt means finding and working out solutions to the problems of the Islamic world, spreading the values of moderation and tolerance of Islam, and encouraging interfaith dialogue. The "Asian circle" includes strengthening relations with the leading Asian powers to become part of the coming "Asia Age". The "European circle" concerns relations with the European Union. Within the framework of the "international circle", Egypt's relations with the leading world powers are being built.

Keywords The foreign policy of the ARE, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, the Constitution of the ARE, Islamic factor, geopolitical features of the ARE, "Arabic circle", "African circle", "Islamic circle", "Asian circle", "European circle", "international circle".

INTRODUCTION

The presidency of A.F. el-Sisi is characterized by the return of the country's traditional foreign policy after the difficult final stage of H. Mubarak's rule, the "Arab Spring" and the short, but greatly changing, rule of M. Morsi. The rise to power of A.F. el-Sisi in the official chronicle of the ARE is characterized as the "revolution of June 30", since on this day in 2013 the military removed M.Morsi

and his supporters from power (Egyptian Policy Foundations). Moreover, the Constitution of the ARE notes the "Revolution of January 25 - June 30", which is comparable to the revolution of 1919, which liberated the country from British rule, and the revolution of 1952, which overthrew the monarchy (Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt, 2014).

At the same time, the military coup that ousted the democratically elected government was condemned by the international community, and solving this problem was one of the first problems that the military faced when they came to power. The issue of the legitimacy of the ARE government was resolved during the 2014 presidential elections (Ardovini L., 2018).

However, international recognition has become only one of the problems in the country's foreign policy. The new leadership of the ARE has made drastic changes in its foreign policy, affecting, first of all, relations with the region's countries and the approach to a new interpretation of the role of the Islamic factor.

According to the Italian expert A. Meringolo, the actions of the ruling regime of A.F. el-Sisi are due to the need to consolidate society and the survival of the political elite. The drastic changes in foreign policy were due to the desire to mobilize public support and protect the regime from criticism, including from outside, identifying opponents both within the country and internationally as a threat to national security (Meringolo A., 2014).

In this regard, it can be added, using the examples of M.Morsi and A.F. el-Sisi, that in both cases the national interests of the ARE were replaced by the interests of the ruling regime. If M.Morsi expressed the point of view of the Muslim Brotherhood, including in foreign policy, then A.F. el-Sisi expressed the position of the military-political elite of the country. And since the interests here were largely opposite, accordingly, Egypt's foreign policy course underwent significant adjustments in a short period.

DISCUSSION

Based on geopolitics and cultural and historical heritage, a special place and role for the country are declared in the sphere of public diplomacy of Egypt. According to the Russian researcher

A.Poida, the geographical position of the state, the peculiarities of its history, colonial past, and relations with such powers as the USA, USSR/Russia, Great Britain, and France, the presence of the Suez Canal and the problem of distribution of water resources of the Nile River serve as those determinants that predetermine the main directions of its foreign policy (Poida A., 2018).

It seems that the Islamic factor should also be included here, among the determinants of the ARE's foreign policy, which is especially relevant in light of the confrontation between the army and Islamists and the violent removal, and then the court decision on life imprisonment of former President M.Morsi.

The confrontation between the government of A.F. el-Sisi and the Muslim Brotherhood and their allies has moved to the regional level and has affected relations with other states of the Middle East and North Africa, as well as with the Palestinian movement Hamas (Haddad J., 2018).

Meanwhile, the government of A.F. el-Sisi has formulated the foundations of the country's foreign policy. To date, according to the Prime Minister of the ARE M.Madbouli, the goals of foreign policy include the following areas:

- maintaining a balanced policy with all world powers;
- ensuring security and stability in the Persian Gulf region;
- ensuring national security in the regional and African arenas;
- activating the role of the Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping, and Peacebuilding (Egyptian Policy Foundations).

The principles of Egypt's modern foreign policy include the following:

- maintaining peace and stability at the regional and international levels;
- mutual respect between countries, observing the principles of international law, respect for international treaties and international organizations, strengthening solidarity between states, and promoting UN reform;
- active attention to the economic dimension of international relations;
- a balanced foreign policy linked to strategic goals and interests, and relying on its own, independent decision-making;
- priority to Arab countries as the main direction of foreign policy, in close connection with the Islamic and African directions, as well as with an emphasis on Egypt's association with the countries of the Nile basin;
- the relationship between Egypt's foreign and domestic policies, in which foreign policy should be aimed at promoting the creation of a modern democratic system that ensures full equality of citizens before the law, combined with the fight against terrorism, and mobilizing political and economic support by attracting foreign investment and tourism to improve the standard of living of Egyptian citizens (Egyptian Policy Foundations).

The Basic Principles of Egypt's Foreign Policy

It seems that the basic principles of Egypt's foreign policy represent a traditional set of provisions typical of many states, adjusted for the geopolitical situation and development features.

The goals of Egypt's foreign policy are as follows:

- protecting Egypt's national security and supreme interests;
- achieving comprehensive development in its various dimensions, which means achieving the goal of protecting the country's national security and supreme interests;

- strengthening security, and stability, striving for a "just peace" in the Middle East, and freeing the region from weapons of mass destruction;
- countering terrorism at the international level through the implementation of a comprehensive strategy and striving to put it at the forefront of regional and international priorities;
- strengthening international economic relations, ensuring cooperation and exchange of experience in the field of development, as well as attracting resources to achieve common interests between various international structures;
- strengthening relations with leading powers to ensure Egypt's national interests (Egyptian Policy Foundations).

"Circles" of Egypt's National Interests

According to official Cairo, the geopolitical characteristics of Egypt, its identity, and the tasks of ensuring national security necessitate the existence of various "circles" of national interests.

The "Arabic circle" includes a broader understanding of national security based on the security of its Arab and African periphery. This also includes strengthening Arab solidarity, concerning the ability of all Arab states to more effectively counter external challenges and threats, such as terrorism, as well as supporting stability in the Arab states after the "Arab Spring".

An important dimension is assistance in preventing and resolving crises. In this area, Cairo's historical obligations are superimposed on the direct tasks of ensuring national security. Egypt seeks to actively participate in joint international projects to resolve these crises, primarily under the auspices of the UN, where Egypt ranks third on the list of the largest donor countries to peacekeeping operations (State Information Centre, Egypt).

The principle of peaceful settlement is combined

with the traditional strategy of helping Arab countries overcome crises, including on such pressing issues as Palestine (State Information Centre, Egypt).

Egypt views the possibility of the disintegration of the region's national states as a threat since this would create a favorable environment for terrorism and undermine the position of the Arab states. Cairo advocates for the preservation of territorial integrity and a peaceful settlement of the conflicts in Syria and Yemen.

In Syria, Cairo opposes any foreign intervention and military solutions. The country's active position is evidenced by its initiatives for a peaceful settlement, as well as its support for local peace agreements on ceasefires concluded with the mediation of Russia (State Information Centre, Egypt).

At the same time, a characteristic feature of the current course of President A.F. el-Sisi is that Egypt rejects the possibility of participation of radical Islamist groups in the peace process.

In Yemen, the armed forces of the ARE took part in military strikes against the main opposition force to the government, the Houthis, in cooperation with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, based on their interests in ensuring security in the areas of the Bab al-Mandab Strait and the Persian Gulf (State Information Centre, Egypt).

Egypt's Libyan policy occupies a special place. Libya directly borders the ARE, and Cairo views the armed conflict in this country on several levels, positioning itself as an actor playing a central role in supporting efforts to restore the state and fight terrorism. For the ARE, the resolution of the Libyan crisis concerns the security situation in general, as well as the security of border areas, and countering the activities of terrorist organizations. The protection of state borders also includes ensuring "strategic depth" by helping to strengthen the

security of Libya's border areas (State Information Centre, Egypt).

In the armed conflict, Egypt supports the Libyan National Army and its commander H.Haftar, hoping with his help to unite Libya (State Information Centre, Egypt) and prevent the formation of a state that shares the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood and relies on external assistance from Turkey and Qatar, which at one time acted as allies of M.Morsi.

The "African Circle" is defined by the desire to strengthen its relations with the countries of the continent in the economic and cultural fields, taking into account the special importance of the Nile basin states as the "strategic depth" of Egypt, working with all African peoples in their movement towards democratization, achieving comprehensive development and activating multilateral partnerships.

The central place is occupied by the problem of water resources of the Nile River and the construction by Ethiopia of the largest Renaissance dam in the region. For Egypt, the water resources of the Nile are the main source for hydropower, agriculture, and domestic needs. Therefore, in many ways, access to these water resources means problems of survival of the country's population (Sharp J., 2020).

Egypt and Sudan are taking the position of maintaining the current regime of transboundary water use, while Ethiopia, together with the completion of construction and the launch of the dam, will be able to control the water flow and, accordingly, the ability to change the water use regime. The situation around the construction of the Ethiopian dam is still far from being resolved, and Cairo is counting on international assistance to solve this problem (State Information Centre, Egypt).

For Egypt, the "Islamic Circle" means finding and

developing solutions to the problems of the Islamic world, spreading the values of moderation and tolerance of Islam, and encouraging interfaith dialogue (State Information Centre, Egypt).

It seems that limiting interests in the “Islamic Circle” to promoting moderation, tolerance, and dialogue expresses, first of all, the position of the current leadership of Egypt, representing the military-political elite of the country, which came to power against the backdrop of confrontation with the Muslim Brotherhood and their ideology both within the country and at the international level.

Egypt’s traditionally active position on Palestine and other pressing issues reflecting the problems of the development of the Islamic world and the resolution of conflicts is reflected in the general formulation of the search for their solutions.

The “Asian Circle” includes strengthening relations with leading Asian powers in order to become part of the coming “Asian Century”.

The “European Circle” refers to relations within the framework of the Association Agreement with the EU (Euro-Mediterranean Agreement), which entered into force in 2004, the Action Plan of the European Neighbourhood Policy, according to which cooperation is carried out in the framework of economic modernization, sustainability in the field of energy and environmental protection, as well as social development and social protection. Cooperation is also focused on issues of governance, strengthening stability, building a modern democratic state (An official website of the European Union), and the principles proposed in the Barcelona Process of Euro-Mediterranean participation (Barcelona declaration, 1995), according to which a comprehensive partnership is established between the participants of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership by strengthening political dialogue regularly, developing economic and financial cooperation and increasing emphasis

on the social, cultural and human dimensions, which are the three aspects of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership (Barcelona Declaration, 1995).

“International Circle” in which Egypt’s relations with the world’s leading powers are built. Cairo seeks to achieve balance after the revolutionary period by developing its relations with Western partners such as the US, EU, Japan, Russia, China, and other leading powers and rapidly developing countries. This cooperation aims to open up new opportunities while respecting the principle of balance between the leading centers of power (State Information Centre, Egypt).

Features and changes in Egypt’s foreign policy

In our opinion, one of the features of Egypt’s international position and foreign policy is the contradiction between the ideas about its role in the region and the world, reflected in its principles, goals, and directions, and its place in the system of regional and international relations that the country occupies.

If Article 1 of the Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt affirms the country as part of the Arab nation and the Muslim world, belonging to Africa and Asia, making a “contribution to the development of human civilization” (Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt, 2014), and the principles and goals affirm Egypt as a strong regional state, then in practice the country is far from, for example, heading any regional alliance. In those unions in which Egypt participates, it occupies a subordinate position. In contrast to what was possible during the reign of G.A.Nasser, A.Sadat and, partly, H.Mubarak, during the reign of A.F. el-Sisi of Egypt is unable to lead any regional initiative, occupying a de facto subordinate position in the coalition-led by Saudi Arabia.

As researcher H.Darwisheh notes, the primacy of a particular power is reflected in the formal

designation of a particular alliance, for example, Saudi Arabia and its allies, Turkey and Qatar and their allies, Iran and its allies, etc. (Darwisheh H., 2014). After the “Arab Spring”, Egypt participated in coalitions, but never headed them.

The changes in foreign policy introduced by A.F. el-Sisi affected bilateral relations and predetermined the new place of the ARE in regional and international processes.

First of all, the changes affected Egypt’s role in the regional balance of power. One can note a sharp improvement in relations with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Both Persian Gulf monarchies actively supported the removal of M.Morsi and the coming to power of A.F. el-Sisi. Riyadh welcomed the exclusion of the Muslim Brotherhood from Egypt’s political life, and in 2016 A.F. el-Sisi publicly promised to “return” the disputed islands of Sanafir and Tiran to Saudi Arabia, which provided them to Egypt at the height of the Suez Crisis of 1956 for use as military bases (Haddad J., 2018). Egypt took a direct part in the military operation of the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen, and again, as it was before M.Morsi, criticized Tehran’s policies, calling on it to stop its policies directed against the security of the Arab region (State Information Centre, Egypt). At the same time, the KSA and the ARE retain some contradictions, in particular, regarding the Syrian conflict. Cairo and Riyadh differ in their assessments of Russian participation and the possibility of involving Islamic radicals in the settlement process. Also, Egypt has effectively withdrawn from the Saudi Arabia-led coalition in Yemen, leaving its ally to independently resolve the issue of conflict resolution (Abougabal H., 2016). Nevertheless, in the main thing for the ruling regime of A.F. el-Sisi, the positions of the two countries remain close - both Cairo and Riyadh regard the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization (Abougabal H., 2016).

The changes affected the relations between Egypt and Russia. Since 2014, both countries have improved cooperation in almost all areas, including arms supplies and cooperation in ensuring regional security. Egypt has become one of the largest regional buyers of Russian weapons, significantly modernizing its air force and air defense systems. A new area was cooperation in the field of nuclear energy - the two states agreed to build a nuclear power plant in Dabaa, northeast of Cairo. In addition, Russia and Egypt take similar positions regarding the conflicts in Libya and Syria (Sharp J., 2020). As noted by the expert from the UAE H.Abougabal, despite the popular comparison of Egyptian-Russian cooperation under A.F. el-Sisi with the period of G.A. Nasser, there are no signs of a radical change in the country’s foreign policy vector. Rather, cooperation is aimed at making Cairo’s policy more balanced and less dependent on the traditional arms supplier Washington (Abougabal H., 2016).

This opinion is also supported by the strengthening of military-technical cooperation between Egypt and France. During the presidency of A.F. el-Sisi, assets were purchased for the air and naval forces of the ARE, including aircraft carriers (Sharp J., 2020).

It seems that one of the main reasons for the desire to rebalance relations with the leading powers was the sharp weakening of US influence in the Middle East. Nevertheless, Cairo remains one of the major buyers of weapons and partners of Washington in the Middle East.

Military supplies serve as the basis for bilateral cooperation, and the Trump administration has emphasized Egypt’s contribution to the fight against terrorism, while the Obama administration prioritized democratization processes, where Cairo was noted to have significant shortcomings. The Trump administration’s discussion of including the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist

organization could serve as a significant factor in strengthening bilateral relations in the context of how acutely the threat posed by this movement is perceived by the Egyptian political elite (Sharp J., 2020).

CONCLUSION

Thus, the conducted analysis allows us to formulate the following conclusions.

1. The general principles of the ARE's foreign policy are based on its determinants, including geopolitics and the Islamic factor, belonging to the Arab world and Africa, the presence of the Suez Canal and belonging to the Nile River basin, as well as the dynamics of relations with the great powers.

The main directions of foreign policy are presented in the form of "circles" - Arab, African, Islamic, Asian, European, and international - which give an idea of the priorities of the country's foreign policy strategy.

2. The foreign policy course of the ARE under President A.F. el-Sisi is determined primarily by the interests of the ruling elite, and not by national and state interests, in this regard, the change of the country's leadership entailed fundamental changes in the country's foreign policy.

The specifics of A.F. el-Sisi's rise to power and the interests of the military-political elite he represents formed the basis for the transformation of the country's foreign policy during his reign. The catalyst for foreign policy changes was the confrontation with the Muslim Brotherhood, its ideology, and its allies both within the country and at the regional level. The perception of the Muslim Brotherhood's ideas as terrorist predetermined intolerance towards radical Islamist organizations. Relations with the leading countries of the region changed - there was a rapprochement with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, relations with Turkey and Qatar became confrontational, and tensions with Iran increased. Given the

weakening influence of the United States in the region, Cairo began to build a more balanced interaction with other great powers, primarily with Russia and France.

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