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Evolution of the Saudi-Egyptian Relations

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^a Ural Federal University, Yekaterinburg, Russia

ORCID: 0000-0001-5389-23034; Ahmedkhalfa94@gmail.com

Abstract. This article delves into the evolving relationship between Saudi Arabia and Egypt under the leadership of Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, particularly focusing on recent developments since 2022. It argues that a notable systemic shift has occurred, transforming the previously symmetric interdependence between the two states into an asymmetric dependence, which now favors Saudi Arabia. By comparing past instances of Saudi-Egyptian interactions during conflicts such as the Syrian crisis in 2016 with their current disagreements over the Palestinian-Israeli question, the article illuminates the primary catalyst behind Egypt's current posture of appeasement towards Saudi Arabia.

The analysis underscores how this new alignment configuration has markedly restricted the maneuverability of Egyptian elites in their engagements with Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, it highlights Saudi Arabia's proactive efforts to leverage its enhanced bargaining power vis-à-vis Egypt, strategically influencing the latter's foreign policy decisions to better align with Saudi interests.

This shifting dynamic carries significant implications for regional geopolitics, signaling Saudi Arabia's rising dominance and its assertive approach in shaping Egypt's foreign policy trajectory. As such, it signifies a notable alteration in the power dynamics within the Middle East.

Keywords: Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, Middle East, asymmetric dependence

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INTRODUCTION

A comprehensive analysis of Saudi-Egyptian relations necessitates an evaluation that goes beyond their direct interactions. It should encompass how each entity interacts with other players in the system, along with the dynamics among those additional actors [1, p. 17]. Additionally, it is crucial to recognize that the interactions among Middle Eastern states are intertwined with the structure of the international system and the policies of major powers in the region. To fully understand the nature of Saudi-Egyptian interactions during a specific timeframe, one must scrutinize domestic factors, politics within Saudi Arabia and Egypt, regional factors involving the politics among Middle Eastern states, and global factors, including the policies of external powers in the region [2; 3; 4; 5].

In January 2023, interactions between Saudi Arabia and Egypt under Abdel Fattah El-Sisi experienced heightened tensions. The crisis began when the IMF requested Saudi Arabia and other Arab Gulf States to contribute more funds to the Egyptian economy to address a funding gap¹. Notably, Saudi Arabia did not participate in the Abu Dhabi conference on January 18 in the UAE, aimed at raising an emergency fund for Egypt, as organized by Arab Gulf States and Jordan². On the same day, Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed Bin Abdullah Al-Jadaan, at the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos, announced a shift

¹ Egypt needs 'critical' Gulf deals to cover funding gap, IMF says. <http://bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-01-10> (accessed 22.01.2024)

² <http://arabic.cnn.com/middle-east/article/2023/01/19/saudi-uae-mbs-not-attending-summit-social-reactions> (accessed 22.01.2024)

in Saudi Arabia's approach to supporting allies, specifically moving away from the previous practice of providing direct grants and unconditional deposits; in a direct, albeit tacit, reference to Egypt³.

Furthermore, Saudi journalists, close to the circle of Saudi decision-making, launched a significant offensive criticism against the Egyptian military's heavy involvement in the Egyptian economy and politics. They maintained that this military involvement was a source of Egypt's current economic crisis⁴. Moreover, Saudi state-owned channels ceased their favorable stance towards the Abdel Fattah El-Sisi regime, especially since 2023, and even opened a space for a limited amount of criticism towards his regime, particularly regarding domestic politics and economic management.

The stance of Saudi elites continued to be critical as Egypt hosted an international conference on 21 October 2023 to address the escalating conflict between Israel and the Palestinian group Hamas in Gaza. Notably, significant regional and global players attended the conference with high-level diplomatic representation, such as the Jordanian King, Qatari Emir, United Arab Emirates President, Kuwaiti Crown Prince, Turkish, French, and German Foreign Ministers⁵. However, Saudi Arabia did not send any Saudi officials to the conference.

The Abdel Fattah El-Sisi regime, on the other hand, was careful not to provoke Saudi Arabia. For instance, when the Egyptian writer Abdul Razzaq Tawfiq, closely associated with Egyptian authorities, launched a vehement and aggressive attack on Saudi Arabia after the Saudi elites refused to unconditionally fund the Egyptian economy, and Saudi writers attacked the Egyptian regime⁶. The article was not only quickly removed, but the Egyptian president, in public, asked the Egyptian media and Egyptian journalists not to insult the Arab brothers; a tacit reference to Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, while Saudi officials were absent from the international conference on October 21 hosted by Egypt (see above), Abdel Fattah El-Sisi himself attended the Arab-Islamic summit held in response to the Israeli onslaught on Palestine, hosted by Saudi Arabia on 11 November 2023.

This study analyzes the current relationship between Saudi Arabia and Egypt under Abdel Fattah El-Sisi. It explains the sudden changes in their interactions that took place since 2023 and the fundamental shift in their alignment management. The author concludes that, despite this radical shift, describing the current Saudi Arabia and Egypt relations as the end of an alliance is inaccurate [6]. Instead, the author shows that Saudi Arabia and Egypt still share complementary, albeit not common interests, to maintain their alignment. Nevertheless, the current shift in the nature of their alignment has altered the symmetric dependence of Saudi Arabia and Egypt which characterized their alignment since its formation in 2013, into an asymmetric dependence in favor of Saudi Arabia. This shift has led the Saudi elites to exploit their newly acquired relative bargaining power in their relations with Egypt, striving to influence the behavior of Egypt under Abdel Fattah El-Sisi to coincide with that of Saudi Arabia.

In this article, the author, first, demonstrates the factors that led to the formation of the alignment of Saudi Arabia and Egypt under Abdel Fattah El-Sisi. The author then shows the changed dynamics that have altered the configuration of their alignment from symmetric dependence to asymmetric dependence in favor of Saudi Arabia since 2022. Last but not least, the author explains the impact of this new alignment configuration on the current interactions between Saudi Arabia and Egypt under Abdel Fattah El-Sisi by comparing the Saudi-Egyptian interactions during their clash of interests over Syria in 2016 and their current clash of interests concerning the Palestinian-Israeli question.

THE INITIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE ALIGNMENT

Since the 1990s, Sunni political Islam has posed a significant threat to Saudi elites, both domestically, manifested in the indigenous Saudi Sahwa movement, and regionally, such as the Muslim Brotherhood [7].

³ Saudi finance minister says kingdom changing no-strings aid. <https://arab.news/nrare> (accessed 23.01.2024)

⁴ Unprecedented Saudi attack against Sisi and the Army. What's behind it? <http://Arabi21.com/story/1491260> (accessed 23.02.2024)

⁵ Cairo peace summit on Gaza conflict: Who is attending? <http://reuters.com/world/cairo-peace-summit-gaza-conflict-who-will-attend-2023-10-20> (accessed 23.01.2024)

⁶ Sharp criticism by an Egyptian writer following Saudi criticisms of Sisi and the Army. <http://Arabi21.com/story/1491792> (accessed 24.01.2024)

The Arab Spring further increased the influence of Sunni political Islam in the region, mainly the Muslim Brotherhood, and heightened its perceived threat in the eyes of Saudi elites. The Arab Spring provided Sunni political Islamic movements, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood, a golden opportunity to seize political power in many Arab states, some traditionally considered Saudi allies, especially Egypt. The Saudi elites turned furious about the loss of Egypt, reaching a point where they even questioned the utility of their alliance with the United States, which they held responsible for the fall of Mubarak [8, p. 484].

Simultaneously, Saudi Arabia was extremely concerned about a potential rapprochement between Egypt, when the Brotherhood was in power, and its main regional rivals – Iran and the so-called Axis of Resistance⁷. Lastly, the waning of American hegemony, which became a fait accompli since the advent of the Obama administration, left Saudi Arabia in crucial need of a regional ally [9].

Thus, after the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood regime, the survival of the Abdel Fattah Sisi's regime became a crucial element in Saudi national security, as the Saudi elites had strategic interests in keeping the Egyptian state outside the sphere of influence of Sunni political Islam and impeding any rapprochement between Egypt and Iran [10; 11].

Upon Abdel Fattah El-Sisi's assumption of power, Egypt was grappling with an economic crisis characterized by severe fiscal challenges. The situation demanded a substantial 7% economic growth merely to stabilize the persistently high unemployment rate, exacerbated by the consequences of Egypt's baby boom. Nearly half of the Egyptian population was experiencing poverty, and there were issues such as food inflation⁸. The Abdel Fattah El-Sisi's regime in Egypt saw Saudi Arabia as the sole regional entity capable of furnishing the necessary financial resources to stabilize the new government. Recognizing Saudi Arabia's strategic interest in ensuring the survival of the Abdel Fattah El-Sisi's regime, alignment with Saudi Arabia emerged as the regime's only viable option for survival [12].

In summary, the alignment between Saudi Arabia and Egypt under Abdel Fattah El-Sisi did not hinge on shared interests but rather on complementary interests. Saudi Arabia aimed to secure the survival of the Abdel Fattah El-Sisi's regime, ensuring Egypt maintained distance from Iran and the so-called Axis of Resistance. This alignment also sought to counter the influence of Sunni political Islam within Egypt. Meanwhile, Egypt relied on Saudi financial and economic support as a crucial lifeline for its survival. In other words, symmetric dependence characterized the alignment between the Saudi elites and the Abdel Fattah El-Sisi's regime in Egypt.

FROM SYMMETRIC TO ASYMMETRIC DEPENDENCE IN FAVOR OF SAUDI ARABIA

Since 2022, new systemic effects have reduced Saudi Arabia's dependence on its alignment with the Abdel Fattah El-Sisi regime in Egypt. Saudi Arabia's reliance on the survival of his regime has decreased. Conversely, for the Abdel Fattah El-Sisi regime in Egypt, as in the case of Saudi Arabia, new systemic effects that emerged since 2022 could have led to a decrease in Egypt's dependence on its alignment with Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, Egypt's internal characteristics have made the Abdel Fattah El-Sisi regime even more dependent on Saudi Arabia than before.

SAUDI DECREASING DEPENDENCE ON ITS ALIGNMENT WITH EGYPT

First, the political influence of the Sunni political Islam coalition dwindled further in the region. The last remaining Muslim Brotherhood branch, which held political sway in an Arab state and represented the final glimmer of hope for Sunni political Islam's participation in the political landscape of Arab states, was ousted from power. This happened when the Tunisian president dissolved the parliament controlled by the

⁷ The Egypt of the Muslim Brotherhood has made a careful rapprochement with Iran since they took power, and aimed to include Iran in the Syrian peace process along with Saudi Arabia and Turkey and in which the Saudi elites expressed their reservations by not attending the conference. Also, the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt established contacts with the Iranian revolutionary guards to build a similar revolutionary institution in Egyptian which increased Saudi concerns (*author's notice*).

⁸ <http://theguardian.com/world/2013/may/16/Egypt-worst-economic-crisis-1930s> (accessed 24.01.2024)

Brotherhood in March 2022 and initiated an investigation into the Tunisian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood⁹.

Second, following the Russian Special Military Operation in Ukraine, the structure of the international system has witnessed increased polarization. The United States, Russia, and China have demonstrated heightened eagerness to engage in competition for influence over Middle Eastern states, intensifying their commitments to the region. This dynamic has broadened the maneuvering space for Middle Eastern states, enabling them to enhance their bargaining power in relations with major global powers. This is particularly notable for critical regional players like Saudi Arabia [13, pp. 181–234; 14, pp. 169–216; 15; 16], given its de facto hegemony within the OPEC.

Certainly, in July 2022, President Joe Biden, during his visit to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, aimed to solidify U.S. influence in the Middle East by engaging with crucial regional figures, including Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. He reassured these leaders that his administration remained committed to active participation and regional security. The primary objective was to prevent China and Russia from swiftly exploiting any potential leadership vacuum, as reported by CNN¹⁰. This marked a noteworthy shift in the Biden Administration's offensive criticism against Saudi Arabia just one year ago¹¹.

Third, the evolving dynamics among the great powers have prompted China to recognize the importance of increasing its engagement in the regional security agenda. This strategic move aims to enhance China's leverage in its dealings with Middle Eastern states, often at the expense of the United States. The objective is to diminish U.S. influence over these states, preventing the United States from shaping policies that could potentially undermine Chinese interests¹². The active involvement of China in the regional security agenda since 2022, and as the sole great power with sufficient leverage to influence Iran, has facilitated a détente between Saudi elites and Iran [17].

Despite the decreasing systemic effects that have reduced Saudi Arabia's strategic dependence on Egypt, resulting in a shift away from unconditional economic assistance – see above, Egypt remains a pivotal factor in Saudi national security considerations. The Saudi elites are deeply influenced by historical memories, particularly recalling the downfall of the First Saudi state (1727–1818) orchestrated by the de facto ruler of Egypt, Mohamed Ali Pacha, with support, assistance, and directives from his patron in Istanbul [18, pp. 140–157].

Saudi Arabia continues to prioritize the maintenance of Egypt as an ally, or at the very least, ensuring its neutrality, recognizing Egypt's significance in its national security strategies. For instance, Saudi Arabia could not allow the UAE to have too much influence on the Egyptian economy entirely, as this control would enable the UAE to influence Egyptian behavior in ways that may be detrimental to Saudi interests [19].

The historical apprehension among Saudi elites about potential threats in the event of Egypt becoming an adversary, coupled with the considerable influence of the Egyptian state in the region, has instilled strategic awareness within Saudi Arabia. This awareness underscores the imperative need to formulate and execute a strategy aimed at preserving the relationship with Egypt. This is particularly crucial, given the possibility that new systemic or internal factors could once again increase the Saudi elites' dependence on Egypt, as exemplified by the problems of the Saudi-Iranian détente.

To sum up, the decreasing influence of Sunni political Islam, Saudi Arabia's increasing bargaining power with its relations with the great powers, and the Saudi-Iranian détente have decreased Saudi strategic interests in its alignment with Egypt. Nevertheless, Saudi still holds strategic interests in its alignment with Egypt. In other words, Saudi Arabia still perceives Egypt as a strategic ally, but its dependence on the Egyptian position in the region has become less crucial than it has been in the past.

⁹ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/31/tunisian-crisis-escalates-as-president-dissolves-parliament#:~:Text=tunisia> (accessed 24.01.2024)

¹⁰ <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/07/16/politics/biden-last-day-middle-east-trip/index.html> (accessed 25.01.2024)

¹¹ http://foreignpolicy.com/2020/11/05/mohammed-bin-salman-should-be-very-worried-about-biden/#cookie_message_anchor (accessed 25.01.2024)

¹² For instance, the Biden administration's request for Saudi elites to boost oil production to harm the Russian economy and its military-industrial complex illustrates this approach. See: Biden will visit Saudi Arabia to ask for an increase in oil production. <http://npr.org/2022/06/25/1107628743/biden-will-visit-saudi-arabia-to-ask-for-an-increase-in-oil-production> (accessed 26.01.2024)

THE EGYPT UNDER ABDEL FATAH EL-SISI'S DEPENDENCE ON SAUDI ARABIA

On one hand, akin to Saudi Arabia, Egypt holds a pivotal role in the Middle East, not only due to its standing as the strongest Arab conventional military power, second in the Middle East subsystem, but also owing to its strategic geopolitical location and substantial economic potential [20]. The polarization within the international system has provided room for maneuver for the Abdel Fattah El-Sisi regime, augmenting its bargaining power in dealings with great powers. This has also led the great powers to seek the support of his regime in their global power struggles¹³.

Additionally, Egypt, under Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, has improved relations with Turkey and particularly with Qatar, leveraging the latter's substantial economic wealth¹⁴. However, despite these developments, neither the great powers nor other regional actors have matched the significant assistance previously provided by Saudi Arabia. The Abdel Fattah El-Sisi regime in Egypt continues to depend on Saudi Arabia, as the increased economic challenges faced by the Abdel Fattah El-Sisi regime could pose a threat to its very survival¹⁵.

THE IMPACT OF THE NEW ALIGNMENT CONFIGURATION

The alignment between Saudi Arabia and Egypt under Abdel Fattah El-Sisi has been built upon complementary interests rather than common interests, making the possibility of a clash of interests not just conceivable but also likely. The alignment's foundation on complementary interests implies that each ally aims to maximize the advantages gained from the alliance while minimizing associated risks. Additionally, as the extent of a state's dependence on its alignment with another state determines the latter's ability to influence the former's behavior, states actively strive to reduce their dependence, the perception of their dependence on the alignment, while increasing their ally's dependence or the perception thereof. This strategic maneuver is undertaken to enhance their bargaining power and exert influence over the actions of the ally [10; 11].

THE CLASH OF INTERESTS OVER SYRIA IN 2016

The clash of interests between Saudi Arabia and Egypt under Abdel Fattah El-Sisi over Syria and the fate of the Bashar regime has led to a struggle for influence within the Saudi Arabia and Egypt under the Abdel Fattah El-Sisi alignment.

In October 2016, Egypt diverged from Saudi Arabia's position by supporting Russia's proposed resolution at the United Nations, advocating for an immediate cessation of hostilities in Syria and emphasizing the separation of moderate Syrian opposition forces from Jabhat Fatah al-Sham¹⁶ (formerly al-Nusra), a designated terrorist group. This move contradicted Saudi Arabia's primary interest on the fall of Bashar Assad as the central objective in addressing the Syrian crisis. Abdullah Al-Muallami, Saudi Arabia's delegate to the United Nations at the time, voiced disappointment with Egypt's stance, noting that the positions of Senegal and Malaysia seemed closer to the Arab consensus than those of an Arab delegate¹⁷.

Tensions escalated further as each ally sought to increase the perceived dependence of the other within the alignment, aiming to gain more bargaining power and influence their behavior, as discussed earlier. Less than a month after Egypt's vote, Saudi Arabia sent a clear signal to the Egyptian elites about their dependence on Saudi financial support by indefinitely suspending anticipated shipments of oil products, part of a \$23 bln aid agreement¹⁸.

¹³ US allows much of Egypt military aid despite human rights concerns. <http://reuters.com/world/US-allows-much-Egypt-military-aid-despite-human-rights-concerns-2023-09-14/> (accessed 27.01.2024)

¹⁴ <https://aawsat.com> (accessed 27.01.2024)

¹⁵ Explainer: How deep are Egypt's economic troubles? <http://reuters.com/world/middle-east/how-deep-are-egypts-economic-troubles-2023-03-03/> (accessed 28.01.2024)

¹⁶ An organization prohibited in Russia.

¹⁷ Saudi Arabia's delegate to the UN. <https://arabic.cnn.com/amhtml/middleeast/2016/10/09/saudi-ambassador-un-egypt-supporting-russia-resolution-syria> (accessed 29.01.2024)

¹⁸ Saudi oil shipments to Egypt halted indefinitely, Egyptian officials say. <https://reuters.com/article/us-egypt-saudi-oil-idus-kbn1320rq> (accessed 29.01.2024)

Meanwhile, Egypt under Abdel Fattah El-Sisi cautiously approached Iraq, an Iranian ally in the region. This strategic maneuver served a dual purpose: first, it aimed to decrease Egypt's dependence on Saudi Arabia's financial resources by seeking alternative sources like cheap oil from Iraq. Second, by aligning with Iraq, part of the so-called Axis of Resistance, Egypt could potentially increase the dependence on the perception of it of Saudi Arabia's strategic interests in preventing any Egyptian-Iranian rapprochement¹⁹.

In other words, in the previous symmetric dependence's configuration of the Saudi Arabia and Egypt under the Abdel Fattah El-Sisi alignment, the two states pushed to increase the perception of dependence of their ally on the alignment to influence its behaviors. Nevertheless, due to their symmetric dependence on the alignment (see above) the Saudi threat of abandoning Egypt by withholding assistance and the Abdel Fattah El-Sisi regime's maneuvering turned to be quiescent.

THE STRUGGLE FOR ARAB LEADERSHIP AND THE CLASH OVER ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

With the decreasing dependence on its alignment with the Abdel Fattah El-Sisi regime in Egypt, Saudi Arabia is striving to grab the Arab leadership role from Egypt to advance its interests. Saudi Arabia has already demonstrated its de facto hegemony in the Arab League and its ability to exploit the Arab League to push its regional agenda and state's interests. Just two months after Saudi-Iranian normalization, Syria was readmitted to the Arab League²⁰; a move that, although not against the Abdel Fattah El-Sisi regime's interests, demonstrated that Saudi Arabia, not Egypt, could now boost or threaten the legitimacy of Arab regimes.

Furthermore, Saudi Arabia imposed the presence of V. Zelenskyy at the Arab League summit on May 19, 2023, albeit against the desires of some Arab states²¹; a clear sign to the great powers that Saudi Arabia, not Egypt, may now hold the key to the Arab world. As the threats of the Iranian and the so-called Axis of Resistance have decreased through the détente, and with the waning influence of the Sunni political Islam in the region, Saudi Arabia can focus on other threats that still destabilize its internal and external security; the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Saudi Arabia has long relied first on the United States and then on the Arab concert, through the Arab League, to push for a just diplomatic solution to the Palestine question. However, Saudi Arabia, for the first time, practiced a unilateral foreign policy through its partial normalization of relations with Israel in hope for establishing the two-state solution²².

Egypt has long strived to monopolize the Israeli-Palestinian conflict resolution for its interests and has consistently thwarted any initiative coming from another Arab state²³.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is only a part of a larger Israeli-Arab conflict [21]. Saudi Arabia, by pushing for the resolution of the conflict through linking its normalization with Israel to forming an independent state with the Palestinians, would not only downplay any Egyptian role in future Israeli-Palestinian peace resolutions but also, if successful in forcing a settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict that opens the door for an Arab-Israeli peace process, it hopes that Saudi Arabia's prestige and influence in the region would become indisputable. Furthermore, when a war broke out in Gaza between the Palestinians and Israelis on October 7, 2023, not only did Saudi Arabia not attend the Cairo summit (see above) but it also hosted an Arab-Islamic summit attended by the highest diplomatic representation of the majority of countries, including the Presi-

¹⁹ Iraq is courting Egypt into joining the axis of resistance. <http://Enterprise Press/stories/2017/01/22/iraq-is-courting-egypt-into-joining-the-axis-of-resistance> (accessed 29.01.2024)

²⁰ Arab league readmits Syria as relations with Assad normalize. <http://reuters.com/world/middle-east/arab-league-set-readmit-syria-relations-with-assad-normalise-2023-05-07> (accessed 01.02.2024)

²¹ https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/05/20/arab-league-summit-bashar-al-assad-overshadowed-by-volodymyr-zelensky_6027345_4 (accessed 02.02.2024)

²² The author demonstrated this point in RIAC (Moscow). <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/blogs/a-khalifa/evolution-of-saudiisrael-relations-unveiling-the-shift-from-quiet-dipl/>

²³ Episode 21 of His Excellency Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassem in 'the black box' series. <https://alqabas.com/watch/5839001> (accessed 03.02.2024)

dents of Iran and Turkey, Emir of Qatar, and the President of Egypt himself as a clear show of force by the Saudi elites of their privileged role as the new Arab leader.

However, the Egypt of Abdel Fattah El-Sisi has nonetheless resisted, albeit tacitly, the Saudi initiative. Firstly, Egypt has delayed the transfer of Tiran and Sanafir islands from Egyptian sovereignty to Saudi sovereignty, just after the Biden administration had completed an agreement, which reportedly involved Riyadh granting access to its airspace for Israeli airliners²⁴, aiming to inhibit Saudi's new approach in the region, given the islands' importance to Israel's national security [22], and any future Saudi-Israel normalization²⁵. Furthermore, Egypt held a summit in August 2023 with Jordan and the Palestine Liberation Authority in response to the ongoing Saudi-Israel normalization. It stressed that the Arab Peace Initiative in 2002 is the only process that could end the Israeli-Palestinian/Arab conflict²⁶.

CONCLUSION

Since 2022, the waning influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in the region, the increasing bargaining power of Saudi Arabia vis-à-vis the great powers, and the Saudi-Iranian détente have decreased Saudi Arabia's dependence, albeit not eliminating it entirely, on its alignment with Egypt. On the other hand, the deepening Egyptian economic crisis has further entrenched Egypt and the Abdel Fattah El-Sisi regime's dependence on Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia's diminishing reliance on this alignment and its growing bargaining power in its relations with Egypt have partly affected the interactions between the two states under the Abdel Fattah El-Sisi regime.

From 2013, since the formation of the alignment between Saudi Arabia and Egypt under Abdel Fattah El-Sisi until 2022, Saudi Arabia's crucial need to preserve the Egyptian state from falling back under the influence of Sunni political Islam and to hinder any Egyptian-Iranian rapprochement made the Saudi threat of abandoning Egypt by withholding assistance short-lived when their interests clashed in Syria. However, since 2022, Saudi Arabia, cognizant of its newly acquired influence, has altered its previously unconditional financial assistance to Egypt to increase its bargaining power in its relations with Egypt, thereby influencing the latter's behavior to align more closely with Saudi interests. Saudi Arabia has pursued a strategy to wrest the Arab leadership role from Egypt and to decrease Egypt's monopoly over the resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Conversely, Egypt, aware of its extreme dependence on Saudi Arabia and unable to leverage the Iranian card for political maneuvering as it did in 2016, has diplomatically appeased the latter while tacitly resisting Saudi Arabia's approach to increase its role in the resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

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²⁴ Egypt said stalling implementation of the Red Sea island transfer to Saudi Arabia. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/Egypt-said-stalling-implementation-of-red-sea-island-transfer-to-saudi-arabia/> (accessed 03.02.2024)

²⁵ <https://france24.com/en/live-news/20220715-the-red-sea-islands-caught-between-egypt-saudi-and-israel> (accessed 03.02.2024)

²⁶ Egypt, Jordan voice “full support” for Palestinians, Slam Israel. <https://jpost.com/middle-east/article-754727> (accessed 03.02.2024)

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Khalfa Ahmed, Post-graduate student, Ural Federal University (UrFU), Yekaterinburg, Russia.

Халфа Ахмед, аспирант, Уральский федеральный университет, Екатеринбург, Россия.

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