Egypt-Sudan: Strategic Cooperation

The just-concluded visit of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to Sudan and the positive outcome of his talks with the top leaders of the neighboring country have created a new solid political-military situation in North Africa. Unlike the West, who solve various disagreements and disputes in the foreign arena only through threats, sanctions of various kinds, the construction of dividing walls and the use of force, the two African countries conduct their relations by resolving disputes on the basis of the principles of international law, respect for each other’s rights and peaceful negotiations. This approach to solving various problems in the international arena is actively advocated by Russia and many other friendly states.

This is al-Sisi’s first visit to a neighboring country since the formation of the Sudanese Transitional Sovereignty Council (STSC) in August 2019. The last meeting between al-Sisi and STSC chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan took place in Cairo last December, when the Egyptian president affirmed Cairo’s support for Sudan’s political leadership in “shaping the country’s future,” welcoming all efforts to help the neighbor overcome its economic crisis and achieve regional stability and peace. The current visit, as both capitals acknowledged, is meant to reaffirm Egypt’s active support for Sudan at this critical moment, and is part of an effort to harmonize views and positions on various issues of common interest. The visit included an Egyptian-Sudanese summit and meetings with senior Sudanese leaders and officials. The meetings discussed forms of cooperation and development of bilateral relations at the military, security and economic levels, as well as regional and continental developments such as the issue of the Grand
Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), security in the Red Sea and Sudan’s borders.

The signing of a military cooperation agreement was quite important in strengthening the strategic ties between Egypt and Sudan. This agreement was signed amid continuing dangerous regional and international developments in the Middle East, with threats stretching from Libya to Ethiopia, Somalia, Yemen and the Persian Gulf region, as well as Syria and Iraq. In addition to the risks and threats sweeping the region, Africa has also witnessed a dramatic escalation of terrorist attacks in the Sahel region, as well as in Nigeria and the Congo. Such problems require more cooperation and coordination.

Sudan’s deep and historic regional ties have brought the country to the forefront of responding to such challenges. The military cooperation agreement concerns not only security, but also trade, railroad development, and land and river transportation, which will connect Egypt with Chad through Sudan. Egypt also has another land road project connecting the northern part of the African continent to South Africa, which will also pass through Khartoum, the capital of Sudan, thus strengthening bilateral economic cooperation between African countries and certainly facilitating trade exchange as well as the development of joint ventures. However, while the agreement on military and security issues is not directed against anyone, it is intended to serve as a deterrent to the stability and security of the two countries and the region as a whole.

As both states seek to protect their legitimate rights and territories, it is clear that the security agreement primarily targets those who might seek to destabilize or interfere with the ongoing development process. It is a preemptive step that prevents any acts of aggression. The military deal reflects the importance of cooperation between the two countries downstream of the Nile, whose rights have been violated with the creation of Ethiopia’s GERD. Both countries have shown their good intentions in favor of the Ethiopian people, who have the right to develop their country, but this should not lead to millions of casualties, drought and famine in Egypt and Sudan. Ethiopia has the right to generate electricity for its development, but it has no right to violate the internationally recognized interests of Egypt and Sudan, nor can it violate their sovereignty over their territories.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry and his Sudanese counterpart Mariam Al-Saddique Al-Mahdi reaffirmed their equal determination for the joint coordination that must take place in negotiations with Ethiopia on the construction, filling and operation of the GERD, a mega-dam built on the banks of the Blue Nile in Ethiopia without the consent of the two downstream countries, Egypt and Sudan. The two ministers called for international mediation to facilitate a legally binding agreement with Ethiopia before the second filling of the dam, which Addis Ababa plans to carry out this summer without the consent of Cairo or Khartoum, as it did last summer during the first filling of the dam. Khartoum has asked the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the current chair of the African Union (AU), to engage the UN, the EU and the US to help move the dam deal forward in the coming weeks or months.

As Cairo and Khartoum have moved closer together in recent months, they have strengthened cooperation on a number of issues critical to both countries, launching joint projects in vital areas such as trade and agriculture, transportation and communications, health care, energy and mining. The electricity and rail interconnection projects are an example of their desire to revive bilateral integration projects that were started decades ago but abandoned despite the close connection between Egyptian and Sudanese national security interests. The agreement on military and security issues between Egypt and Sudan marked the beginning of a new phase of strategic cooperation and served as an example of coordination that other parties on the continent should consider as a tool to improve and ensure security on the continent. This would open the gates for friendlier states to join Sudan and Egypt in their pursuit of their mutual interests instead of creating crises and fueling conflicts where everyone will lose dearly.

For many years now, this region has endured the long and bitter nightmare of conflict that has devastated most of the states of the Middle East and North Africa. Terrorists have found fertile ground where destruction and destruction have become the norm. There are also many rogue nations that have supported and funded terrorist groups throughout the region to wreak havoc and drain the resources of other nations. However, as the Egyptian newspaper Al-Ahram notes, it is necessary to learn this lesson by heart and ensure that strategic cooperation between Egypt and Sudan enters an unprecedented phase in which the interests and security of the peoples as well as their desire for a better future can always come first. A firm political will to resist foreign, especially Western, interference, to count on a fair basis for win-win deals, to respect the rights of other peoples and to reject attempts to foment conflicts that damage peoples’ right to stability and development — all these principles should be high on the agenda of all politicians in the Middle East and Africa.

Viktor Mikhin, corresponding member of RANS, exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern
Outlook“.