Egypt and Russia are actively attempting to broker a peaceful solution to the war on Syria. Egypt has faced armed insurgencies since the 2011 Arab spring which increased after the ousting of Mohamed Morsi. Attacks by Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, however, increased significantly since the Al-Sisi administration consolidated an anti-terrorism effort that sidelines the US-led “Coalition against ISIS” and Egyptian - Russian attempts to broker a peaceful solution to the war on Syria via a return to Geneva. Is Egypt being targeted for an Arab Spring version 2.0?

During the night between January 29 - 30 the ISIS affiliated Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM) carried out a large-scale assault against Egyptian military forces in the North Sinai town of Arish. The attack cost the lives of at least 29 Egyptian soldiers and was one of the most serious attacks by ABM. Although the exact genesis of the insurgency is somewhat unclear, it arose and gained momentum as interface between Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood militants, elements of the Palestinian Hamas, as well as ISIS, a.k.a. ISIL or Islamic State. ABM’s declared goal is the establishment a Wilayat Sinai or State of Sinai. ABM would state that it launched the attack as revenge for increased anti-terrorism operations carried out in the North Sinai province.

On Friday, January 30 the Supreme Council of Armed Forces convened to analyze the attacks which cost the lives of at least 29 soldiers. The Cairo Post's Hanan Fayed quoted Egyptian President Abdel Fatah Al-Sisi as commenting:

*Egypt is fighting the strongest secret organization established in the past couple of centuries. ... Secret arms, secret ideas, secret tools, many things. And Egyptians rebelled against them. ... there is a price we are paying. ... There is a much higher price that Egypt would have had to pay if that continued for two, three or four months*.

While the attack came against the backdrop of increased anti-terrorism operations it also came against the backdrop of an evolution in Egyptian domestic and foreign anti-terrorism policy. The most recent one is the Egyptian Foreign Ministry’s sharp criticism of the U.S. administration with regards to hosting a Muslim Brotherhood meeting in the United States. As the attack in Arish was still ongoing, and during the African Union conference on Libya in Addis Ababa, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shourky described the U.S. State Department’s explanation about hosting a meeting of the Muslim Brotherhood-linked Freedom and Justice Party as “not understandable”.

U.S. State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki, for her part, told the press that a “delegation of former Freedom and Justice Party members” had organized a meeting at Georgetown University and added that this “was routine at the State Department as they meet political party leaders from across the world”. Psaki also added that the delegation didn't discuss the ousting of Mohamed Morsi. It is noteworthy that Morsi and 35 co-defendants soon will face the court’s verdict in Egypt's largest espionage trial. It is also noteworthy to recall the word's of Al-Sisi during a 2013 interview with journalist Larry Weissman.

“The people of Egypt are aware of the fact that the USA has stabbed Egypt in the back with the Muslim Brotherhood and Morsi. It is nothing that Egypt will easily forget, or forgive”.

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Both the Egyptian administration of President Abdel Fatah Al-Sisi and the administration of Russian President Vladimir Putin are actively involved in an attempt to broker a peaceful resolution to the war in, or on Syria. The next round of talks with the foreign-backed opposition is likely to be held in Moscow. On January 24 a delegation of the Syrian “opposition” gave a press conference after meetings with the Al-Sisi administration in Cairo. The Russian and Egyptian initiatives succeeded in eliciting the opposition's willingness to return to the negotiation table and continue the process that began during the Geneva 1 Conference on Syria. One of the major obstacles that is yet to be overcome is the “opposition’s” insistence on a “transitional government” while Syria’s domestic opposition as well as Parliamentarians and the administration of President Bashar Al-Assad stress that all who denounce violence are welcome to participate in Syria’s political discourse on equal terms with everybody else. Moreover, the Syrian government stresses that it has no constitutional mandate to agree on the formation of any government in which the electorate of Syria has not had a say. Needless to say that the Russian and Egyptian success in eliciting an agreement to return to the negotiating table in Geneva is inconsistent with the United States' regional ambitions and the “Assad must go” position.

A third point of contention between Egypt and the United States is Egypt's successful anti-terrorism lobbying and cooperation with Mauritania and most noteworthy, with the United Arab Emirates. In November, the UAE issued a revised list of terrorist organizations which included CANVAS a.k.a. DEMOZ. That is, one of the most precious bits in the U.S. State Department’s regime change toolkit. The UAE’s revised list of terrorist organizations includes organizations who are operating legally in NATO member States including Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, the United Kingdom and the USA. The Egyptian – Emirati cooperation is, arguably, nibbing NATO's covert infrastructure in the but.

It is also noteworthy that there has been a convergence in Japanese, Egyptian and Russian anti-terrorism policies with regards to the situation in the Middle East. During a joint press conference at the Egyptian – Japanese Business Council in Cairo in mid-January, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his Egyptian counterpart Ibrahim Mahlab jointly announced Japan's commitment to fighting the root causes of terrorism in the region, saying:

“The government of Japan will carry out assistance of 2.5 billion dollar in non-military fields including humanitarian assistance and infrastructure development, intended for the entire region”.

It is noteworthy that threats, allegedly originating from ISIS, to murder the Japanese journalist Kenji Goto followed Abe’s statement. Kenji Goto was captured and has been held hostage since October 2014. On Saturday, January 31, a video, allegedly released by ISIS showed the murder of Kenji Goto. The “terrorist”, easily recognizable by being dressed in black and speaking perfect English delivered a message to “the people of Japan”, saying:

“Because of your participation in this war, this knife will not go to behead Goto only, but all of your kind, wherever they exist”.

Egypt is also facing increased activities by Muslim Brotherhood, ISIS and Al Qaeda linked insurgents along the northern section of its border to Libya. Arguably, the US administration is attempting to stab Egypt in the back in an Arab Spring version 2.0.

With regard to Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis affiliation to ISIS one may recall that a person from within the inner circle around former Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri stressed that the final decision to invade Iraq with ISIS brigades fell on the sidelines of The Atlantic Council's Energy Summit in November 2013 in Turkey and that the insurgency is organized via the US Embassy in Turkey. It is also noteworthy that Turkey-based TV channels with alleged links to Turkey's intelligence service MIT repeatedly encouraged violence against the Egyptian government.

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