

Challenges Facing Egypt's Foreign Policy in Africa

*By: Tawfiq Noffel
Political Researcher
State Information Service*



Egypt's foreign policy has recently been on a low profile, with many circles of action having been neglected and with numerous threats to national security having arisen, the most important of which are those facing Egyptian policy in Africa.

The former regime acted condescendingly and with remiss to most African issues. Cooperation with the black continent was dismissed as unfruitful, economically, politically and in the field of security.

Importance of Africa to Egypt

- To Egypt, Africa represents a strategic, security depth of major importance especially now that Nile water factors in as an element of Egyptian national security and that Zionist presence has been growing in the Horn of Africa in a way endangers Egypt's interests.
- Africa also constitutes a major voting bloc in international forums. Most of the 54 African countries basically support Arab rights, particularly when relevant to the Arab-Israeli conflict.
- Africa is rich in natural resources; it holds 12% of the world's oil reserves, 40% of its gold reserves; and 52% of its cultivable land. In addition, it possesses great quantities of wood and an untapped consumer market, the value of which is estimated at \$1.4 trillion by 2020, according to the Mackenzie Financial Corporation figures.

Challenges and Threats

- Water security is the gravest threat facing post-Revolution Egypt especially with 6 Nile-basin countries, namely Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, Kenya and Burundi having signed the Nile Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA) known as Entebbe agreement. Egypt and Sudan have refused to sign over CFA articles they believe would

harmfully affect their water quota, particularly that the CFA gives upstream countries the right to building dams.

- Meanwhile, Egypt is currently feeling the crunch of water scarcity. According to a report published by the Cabinet's Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC), the annual volume of Nile basin rainfall is estimated at 1660 billion cubic meters, of which only 4% (the equivalent of Egypt's established water quota of 50 years) is used, while the rest is lost to vaporization, to swamps and marshes or to the ocean. The report also notes that Egypt's water needs are expected to reach 86.2 billion cubic meters in 2017 as opposed to the current figure of 71.4 billion cubic meters.
- Egypt is facing major competition in Africa from economic heavyweights such as China, the US and European countries whose products are available at affordable prices to African consumers. Egypt has problems moving, promoting and introducing its products to Africans. In addition Egyptian commodities are expensive due to difficulties

in shipping and storing and to high risk trade factors.

- Egypt's declining role has provided Israel with the opportunity to strengthen its presence in the black continent.

Israel uses a three-pronged strategy to fan the fire of the water crisis between upstream and downstream Nile-basin countries through:

- Inciting upstream countries to use a greater water share and cutting down the flow to Egypt.
- Using defense and security agreements recently concluded with Kenya, South Sudan, Uganda and Ethiopia to create some sort of military balance with Egypt.
- Financing and using Israeli technology and companies to construct water projects and dams in upstream countries.

Recommendations for Confrontation

1. Reformulating the strategic objectives of Egypt interests in Africa and developing a mechanism to achieve them.
2. Developing a new approach to Nile water issues based on the concept that sharing should lead

- to cooperation not to conflict, while refraining from threatening to use force in resolving conflicts.
3. Increasing the number of scholarships granted to Africans to study in Egypt, and establishing cultural offices throughout Africa in general and in Nile-basin countries in particular.
 4. Vetting Egyptian educational curricula, with the purpose of highlighting Africa's importance to Egypt.
 5. Developing a trade and investment policy that recognizes opportunities and potentials on both sides, and aims at overcoming obstacles.
 6. Underlining the importance of the Egyptian commercial offices in Africa, given that they represent a major source of information on investment and trade opportunities.
 7. Assisting in the reformulation of African stances with the aim of reconciling between the interests of the two sides on such issues as economy, environment, fighting poverty, human rights and refugees.
 8. Using the media to correct the negative African image of Egypt, damaging to cooperation.