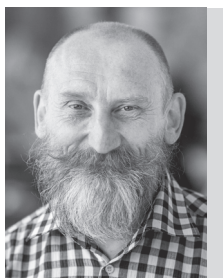


ОТНОШЕНИЯ САУДОВСКОЙ АРАВИИ И ЕГИПТА В 2010–2021 ГГ. (НА ОСНОВЕ ПУБЛИЧНЫХ ЗАЯВЛЕНИЙ И ПО МАТЕРИАЛАМ АРАБОЯЗЫЧНЫХ СМИ)



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Аннотация

Статья показывает восприятие отношений между Саудовской Аравией и Египтом в 2010–2021 гг., выраженное в официальных дискурсах политических © Победаш Д. И., Халфа А., 2024



элит обеих стран. Поскольку эти две страны являются ключевыми игроками как на Ближнем Востоке, так и в арабском мире, их взаимодействие всегда было крайне важным для региональной политики. Хотя обе эти страны не являются мировыми державами, они обладают чрезвычайной значимостью для мировой экономики в отношении запасов нефти и контроля торговых путей. Понимание нюансов их взаимоотношений при этом важно не только для ближневосточной политики, но и для анализа глобальной политики и интересов великих держав. Авторы прослеживают эволюцию отношений Саудовской Аравии и Египта от «арабской весны» 2010 г. до катарского кризиса 2021 г. Статья разделена на три основные части. Авторы описывают реакции саудовских официальных лиц на первую египетскую революцию, помещая их в соответствующий исторический контекст. Во-вторых, рассматриваются описания прихода к власти египетского правительства под руководством «Братьев-мусульман» и его отношений с правительством Саудовской Аравии. В-третьих, рассматриваются описания отношений Египта с Саудовской Аравией после второй египетской революции и прихода к власти нового египетского правительства под руководством Абеля эль-Фатха Си-си. Опираясь на заявления официальных лиц обеих стран, статья представила официальные нарративы как саудовцев, так и египтян, описывающие отношения двух государств. Авторы приходят к выводу, что официальные дискурсы обеих стран рисуют почти идентичную картину их двусторонних отношений.

Ключевые слова:

Саудовская Аравия, Египет, Лига арабских государств, ближневосточная политика, глобальная политика, поставки нефти, торговые пути, сотрудничество, конкуренция, военная поддержка

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SAUDI ARABIA AND EGYPTIAN RELATIONS IN 2010–2021 (AN ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC STATEMENTS AND ARABIC MASS-MEDIA)

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Abstract

This article provides an image of the Saudi Arabia and Egypt relations in 2010–2021 constructed from the elites' official discourses of the two countries. As both countries are crucial players in Arab and Middle Eastern affairs, their interaction has been a central focus of regional politics. While limited in their capabilities, both states possess critical importance to the global economy, particularly in terms of oil supply and trade routes. Understanding the nuances of their relationship is thus vital not only for Middle Eastern politics but also for global politics and the great powers' interests. The authors trace the evolution of Saudi-Egyptian relations, according to the official discourses of the elites of both countries, from the Arab Spring to the end of the Qatar crisis (2010–2021). The story is divided into three main parts. The authors delineate the reactions of Saudis officials to the Egyptian revolution of 2011, placing them in the historical context. Next, the authors provide the discourses depicting the Egyptian government under the Muslim Brotherhood and Saudi Arabia relations with that Egyptian regime. Finally, the authors deal with the descriptions of the new Egyptian government under Abdel el Fatah Si-si and Saudi-Egyptian relations. Relying exclusively on primary sources mostly from official statements of the states' elites and Arab Media, this article analyzes the official narratives of both the Saudis and Egyptians concerning relations between the two states. The authors conclude that the official discourses of the two countries present almost identical depiction of their bilateral relations.

Keywords:

Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Arab League, Middle Eastern politics, global politics, oil supply, trade routes, cooperation, competition, economic and military support

Introduction

Since the end of the Second War World and the start of the wave of decolonization in the Middle East, relations between Saudi Arabia and Egypt have been the central focus of Arab politics. The interaction between the two states has never been static but switched from cooperation to competition as their national interests and their positions in the Arab system and Middle Eastern politics dictated. However, as these two states are crucial players in Arab and Middle Eastern affairs, their interaction has always been one of the main pillars of the region's stability. Although Egypt and Saudi Arabia are regional powers that, due to their limited capabilities, operate only in their region, they are of a critical importance to the global economy and thus are significant for the great powers.

As Malcolm Kemp argues, any long-term interruption in the supply of oil from Saudi Arabia, the world's largest exporter, would have a significant impact on the oil market. If it coincided with a widespread conflict in the Gulf that would shut down supplies from other regional producers, the problem would assume grave proportions and would be likely to trigger a major intervention by the US and other outside powers (Kemp, 1998).

Similarly, 12% of global trade and 30% of global container traffic traverse the Suez Canal, transporting over USD \$1 trillion worth of goods annually. While the US share of the Gulf oil import is decreasing, supplying the allies of the United States, especially in Asia, makes it vital to protect the flow of oil through the Suez Canal.

Other great powers also have much at stake in this region. China is the largest importer of oil from the Middle East. Russia as a member of OPEC+ has a significant economic interest in maintaining a foothold in the Middle East to have leverage on the Middle Eastern states. Indeed, the Middle East, as an Oil River and a trade route, is likely to preserve its significant place in the great powers' calculations for decades. Thus, a better understanding of relations between two of most critical players in the region is vital not only for the Middle Eastern politics but for global politics as well. This article provides a brief overview of Saudi Arabia-Egypt relations in 2010–2021 from the elites's official discourses.

A brief historical overview

Since 1945, regional politics regained its place in the Middle East after centuries of Ottoman hegemony followed by and overlapped with European colonization. Egypt and Saudi Arabia were the main players in constructing the Arab League in 1945, and the Palestinian issue made the two states cooperate and launch a war against Israel in 1948.

After the coup d'état of the Free Officers Movement in 1952, the new revolutionary Egyptian regime headed by Gamal Abdel Nasser and Saudi Arabia maintained their cooperation due to their common interests in balancing against the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq which strove to gain hegemony in the Middle East under British auspices (Al-Rasheed, 2010; Gerges, 1994).

Convergence of interests continued to define relations between the two countries until 1958. The coup d'état in Iraq in 1958 and the new revolutionary regime which came to power there, made Saudi Arabia feel encircled by a number of powerful, revolutionary regimes. That brought about the so-called Arab Cold War; the term was originally used by Malcolm H. Kerr in his seminal work *The Arab Cold War: Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958–1970*. Now this term is widely accepted to describe the conflict in 1958–1970 between the conservative states under the Saudi leadership and the revolutionary regimes which came to be dominated by Egypt, led by Nasser who gained immense popularity in many Arab countries (Kerr, 1967; Dawisha, 1980).

The Arab defeat by Israel in 1967 and the death of Gamal Abdel Nasser in September 1970, led to the end of the Arab Cold War and to a weakening of Arab nationalism. The coming of Anwar Sadat, a state-centrist, conservative leader in Egypt, combined with the threat of Israel to the Arab system, made Saudis and Egyptians cooperate against the status quo that Israel aimed to legitimize after its victory in 1967 (Mansfield, 2019; Хайруллин, 2019). Cooperation between King Faisal and Sadat was crucial in the October war of 1973. Indeed, the Saudi military and economic assistance to Egypt and the kingdom's strong voice in the defense of the Arab and Islamic cause under Faisal (Ас-Самак, 2016) made Saudi Arabia one of the strongest pillars in the defense the Arab national security which was inextricably linked with gaining back the lands lost in the 1967 war.

However, that cooperation did not last too long. When Sadat signed the Camp David Accords with Israel in September 1978, Saudi Arabia with the majority of the Arab states cut their diplomatic relations with Egypt (Dawisha, 1980).

However, the importance of balancing together with Egypt rather than against it turned obvious to the Arab states in the Iraq-Iran war of 1980–1988, as both the Iraqis and Saudis benefited from the Egyptian military support to Iraq (Hunter, 2010). A wave of diplomatic normalization with Egypt thus took place in the last year before the end of the long Iraq-Iran war and Egypt regained its position in both the Arab system and in the Saudis' national security calculations.

The invasion of Kuwait by Saddam in 1990 made Egypt more crucial than ever for Saudi national security. Egyptian role in the liberation of Kuwait and in legitimizing the Saudis invitation to foreign troops to deter the threat posed by Saddam turned Egypt under the Mubarak regime into one of Saudi Arabia's main allies in the region (Faksh, 1992; Mūsá, 2017). The Saudis and Egyptians maintained their close cooperation in the region from the liberation of Kuwait until the Arab Spring in 2011, as their national security interests were congruent to a large degree (Murphy, 2011).

Summarizing the above, we could describe the 'checkered history' of Egyptian-Saudi relations from 1948 to 2010 as fluctuations between cooperation and confrontation depending on the two countries' understanding of their security concerns.

The Arab Spring and the Saudis' reactions

The Arab Spring, a series of anti-government protests that first started in 2011 in Tunisia and then spread over most of the Arab world, was a watershed event in Saudi-Egyptian relations. The President of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak, had been quite successful at normalizing and improving Egyptian-Saudi relations for three decades, as *The Times of Israel* put it, "He engineered Egypt's return to the Arab fold after nearly a decade in the cold over its 1979 peace treaty with Israel"¹. During the Arab Spring, Mubarak was both under internal and external pressure to put an end to his long power monopoly on Egyptian politics. Mubarak had maintained absolute control in Egypt for three decades without any real opposition. Like in Tunisia, the first outburst of the protests in Egypt was triggered by socioeconomic grievances but within days the protests turned into a call for regime change and for Mubarak's removal.

Saudi Arabia backed the Egyptian regime from the very beginning of the social unrest. In a communiqué, the Saudi King, Abdullah bin Abdel Aziz el Saud, expressed his concern about the development of the situation in Egypt and strongly supported the Mubarak regime. King Abdullah asserted that the Arabs and Muslims could not bear to see Egypt, a stronghold of Arabism and Islam being manipulated in matters of its security and stability by some infiltrators in the name of freedom of expression and been exploited through sabotage, intimidation, burning, plundering².

To diffuse American pressure on Mubarak, Saudi Arabia warned Barack Obama, the then president of the United States not to humiliate Mubarak and also pledged to support Egypt economically if the United States cut its economic assistance³. Nonetheless, Mubarak stepped down and ceded his power on February 11, 2011, to the Egyptian military council under the leadership of the field marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi Soliman. Saudi Arabia then released the following joint communiqué supporting the peaceful transition of power in Egypt:

"The government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia welcomes the peaceful transfer of power in the brotherly Arab Republic of Egypt. The Kingdom expresses its hope that the efforts of the Egyptian armed forces will be crowned in restoring peace, stability, and tranquility in the brotherly Arab Republic of Egypt, in preparation for the establishment of a national government that achieves the hopes and aspirations of the brotherly Egyptian people towards security, stability, and economic prosperity"⁴.

¹ *Egypt's Hosni Mubarak: a survivor comes undone* (2011, February 11). Retrieved October 10, 2023, from <https://nypost.com/2011/02/11/egypts-hosni-mubarak-a-survivor-comes-undone/>

² Аль-Эхиви Ф. (2022). Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.alwatan.com.sa/article/77994>

³ Thomson R. (2011). *Хайфа: саудовский монарх*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.reuters.com/article/oegtp-saudi-egy-mm6-idARACAE71909520110210>

⁴ Аль-Авваль Н. (2011). *Передача власти в Египте*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.alwatan.com.sa/article/80013>

Saudi Arabia and revolutionary Egypt

The positive public statements of Saudi Arabia toward the new development in Egypt, however, did not correlate with its grievances about the ongoing situation in the largest state in the Arab system. Former US secretary of defense, Robert Michael Gates confessed in his memoirs that Saudi Arabia was bothered by the actions of the United States and concerned about the actual situation of Mubarak in Egypt after he had been put on trial (Gates, 2014).

Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia and Egypt under the military council continued their cooperation, especially in the military sphere. Thus, in May 2012, Tabork 3, a joint land military exercise, was held in the northwestern Saudi⁵. Ahmed Katan, the Saudi Ambassador to Egypt at that time, described the deep ties that he had with the military of Egypt, especially their leader, the field marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi Soliman, the de facto ruler of Egypt from the fall of Mubarak to the 2012 election. He stated that the Saudi government had very strong ties with the Egyptian military in general⁶.

Moreover, in 2012, Saudi Arabia gave 2.5 billion dollars to Egypt as financial assistance which was 1 billion as a deposit for the central bank to increase its foreign currency reserve after its deterioration due to the revolution, 500 million to subsidize development projects, 750 million to support Egyptian import from Saudi Arabia and 200 million as a grant to subsidize medium and small Egyptian companies⁷.

Yet, a major crisis in the Egyptian-Saudi relations manifested itself in April 2012, after the detention of Mohamed Tharwat el Said, an Egyptian lawyer accused of drug smuggling in Jeddah airport. Many Egyptians claimed that Saudi Arabia had detained the Egyptian lawyer for political rather than criminal reasons and a number of Egyptian media severely criticized Saudi Arabia. Protesters burned the Saudi flag in front of the Saudi Embassy and tried to break into it. Saudi Arabia then recalled its ambassador and closed its embassy and consulates in Egypt. After that, the Egyptian government denounced, in a joint communiqué, the protests at the Saudi embassy. In the joint communiqué, Egypt expressed its regret over the individual incidents committed by some citizens against the embassy of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Cairo, and claimed that those actions expressed only the opinion of those who committed them. The Egyptian government condemned those irresponsible and uncalculated actions, which were said to harm the deep Egyptian-Saudi relations rooted in history⁸.

⁵ Gate.ahram (2013). *Совместные военные учения египетско-российских и египетско-саудовских военно-морских сил, ворота Аль-Ахрам*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/419233.aspx>

⁶ Саламе, А. М. (2021). *His Excellency the Minister of State for African Affairs, Mr. Ahmed Qattan, was a guest on the 'In the Picture' program with Abdullah Al-Mudayfir*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fu3VhvUo_io

⁷ *Саудовское финансирование*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://elaph.com/Web/Economics/2012/4/730483>

⁸ Alwatan (2012). *Cairo describes the attack on the embassy as "irresponsible"*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.alwatan.com.sa/article/135650>

Moreover, Egyptians made further steps to remedy the relations. Tantawi, the de facto ruler of Egypt, called the king of Saudi Arabia on July 3, and tried to diffuse tensions as they both emphasized the strong historical relations between the two states⁹.

On May 5, 2012, a week after the recalling of the Saudi ambassador, a large number of politicians, intellectuals, religious figures, and artists led by the Speaker of the Egyptian People's Assembly, Dr. Muhammad Saad Al-Katatni, and the Speaker of the Egyptian Shura Council, Dr. Ahmed Fahmy went to the Saudi King to persuade him to reopen the Saudi embassy in Egypt. The delegation stressed the strong amity of the Egyptian people to Saudi Arabia. The Saudi King then ordered to open back the embassy and send his ambassador to Egypt, stating that "Our common history is not a fleeting page, and no one can tamper with it"¹⁰. The Saudi Arabian ambassador in Egypt, Ahmed bin Abdulaziz Kattan, also asserted that, "As long as the kingdom remains in its place and Egypt is in its place, no one will be able to separate us unless we allow him to do so, and this will never happen, God willing"¹¹.

Power politics in Saudi-Egyptian relations manifested themselves not only on the arena of interstate interactions, but also in dealing with powerful non-state actors.

Saudi Arabia and Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood Cold War

On 30 June, 2012, Mohamed Morsi became the president of Egypt as the first Islamist president, and a member of the Muslim Brotherhood organization. The Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist organization, had been under the Saudis' protection since the days of Nasser in the 1950s and 1960s. At that time, Saudi Arabia played a vital role in mediating between President Sadat and the Brotherhood after the death of Nasser. The Muslim Brotherhood, however, although enjoyed the protection of the Al Saud, they nevertheless penetrated the Saudi society and launched their propaganda inside the kingdom to turn the Saudi population both against the concept of monarchy in general and against their legitimate rulers, the Al Saud.

While the Saudi elites avoided an open confrontation with the Muslim Brotherhood until 2014, Prince Naïf bin Abdulaziz bin Saud, the Saudi interior minister (1975–2012) and crown prince (2011–2012), in 2002 already openly criticized the Muslim Brotherhood in an interview, "But I say it without hesitation that all our problems and secretions, and label them as you like, came from the Muslim Brotherhood.

⁹ Al-Arabiya (2012). *Saudi Arabia closes its embassy in Egypt following an attempted breach*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2012%2F04%2F28%2F210862>

¹⁰ Al-jazirah (2012). *Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques: Our shared history is not a passing page, and no entity can tamper with it*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.al-jazirah.com/2012/20120505/ln36.htm>

¹¹ Al-jazirah (2012). *The Egyptian delegation: The relationship is deep-rooted, unaffected by individual events*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.al-jazirah.com/2012/20120505/ln40.html>

What can I tell you? We have endured many of them, and we are not the only ones who have endured many of them. They are the cause of problems in our Arab world, and perhaps in our Islamic world”¹².

Those words did not go unnoticed by Egypt. Ten years after Prince Naïf bin Abdulaziz bin Saud’s statement, Mohamed Morsi, a presidential candidate at that time, met a former Saudi Arabia’s Ambassador, Ahmed Katan. Morsi told Katan that they heard what the Saudi prince Naïf had said about them but Egyptians decided that they would not reply. The then Saudi Ambassador replied that, “It is better for them that they did not make any reactions because they would hear something more aggressive”¹³.

After the 2012 presidential elections, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia sent a letter to the new elected Egyptian President, Mohamed Morsi, and congratulated him and the Egyptian people for his selection as a president. The king asserted his hopes that Egypt would continue to play its role as a source of stability and bear its Islamic and Arab responsibilities.

The first official visit of Morsi as the President of Egypt was to Saudi Arabia on July 7, 2012. The then Egyptian Ambassador in Saudi Arabia emphasized the reason behind choosing Saudi Arabia, as the first destination of the Egyptian President, was due to the status of the Saudi Arabia in the Islamic and Arab world, to its international importance, to its political weight, and to the historical relations between Egypt and Saudi Arabia¹⁴. According to Sky News Arabia, the President of Egypt, Morsi, assured the Saudi leadership during his visit that Egypt was working to restore Arab solidarity, especially in light of “Iranian threats” to the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and that the talks with Saudi King, Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, were fruitful and constructive for the benefit of Egypt, the Kingdom and the peoples of the region¹⁵.

Pragmatism in official diplomatic discourse dominated the relations between Saudi Arabia and the Egyptian regime under the Muslim Brotherhood. Yet, although the interests of both countries were largely complementary, their positions were different on the Syrian question. Throughout the history of Saudi Arabia, its rulers seldom publicly criticized the leaders of other states, especially in the Arab world. However, when Morsi proposed to hold a meeting in Cairo between the four critical regional players in the region – Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, and Iran – to find a po-

¹² Aawsat (2002). *Rumors about the cohesion of the Saudi leadership are baseless. The Muslim Brotherhood has wreaked havoc on the Arab world*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?issueno=8435&article=138584#.ZBGN6HZBzIX>

¹³ Ротана, Г. (2022). *His Excellency the Minister of State for African Affairs, Mr. Ahmed Qattan, is a guest on the 'In the Picture' program with Abdullah Al-Mudayfir*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fu3VhvUo_ю (дата обращения: 22.03.2023).

¹⁴ Al-jazirah (2012). *The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and Morsi discuss bilateral relations and the latest developments*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.al-jazirah.com/2012/20120711/fr2.htm>

¹⁵ Skynews (2012). *Morsi concludes his first official visit to Saudi Arabia*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.skynewsarabia.com/amp/middle-east/33302>

litical solution to the Syrian crisis, the foreign minister of Saudi Arabia did not attend the meeting in September 2013¹⁶. Saudi Arabian media also supported the protests against the regime of the Muslim Brotherhood. Saudi media even tried to legitimize the protests against the regime of Morsi by labeling it as the Second Revolution¹⁷. Nevertheless, the Saudi-Egyptian military cooperation remained at the same high level and had not changed since the Muslim Brotherhood took power in Egypt¹⁸.

The Muslim Brotherhood did not succeed in stabilizing the country, major protests has been held in Egypt during the one-year rule of Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood, and a potential civil war between the protesters and the supporters of Morsi threatened Egypt. The Egyptian military thus declared that it could no longer be neutral. Morsi was deposed by the military and Adly Mansour, President of the Supreme Constitutional Court, became the interim president¹⁹.

The Saudis backing of the new Egyptian regime

The development of events in Egypt was moving at an unprecedented speed, Morsi stayed in power for slightly over than one year, from 30 June 2012 to 3 July 2013, and the main players in the Middle East had different opinions about the ongoing situation. Turkey labeled the appointment of a new president in Egypt and the removal as a military coup²⁰. Iran also criticized Morsi's removal by the military²¹. The Saudi King, Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, however, sent a congratulatory telegram to the newly appointed president of Egypt, Adly Mansour, and strongly supported the Egyptian Army under the leadership of Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, the de facto ruler of Egypt²². Moreover, just one week after Morsi's removal, Saudi Arabia provided Egypt with 5 billion dollars²³.

¹⁶ France24 (2012). *Why was Saudi Arabia absent from the 'Quartet' meeting in Cairo on Syria?* Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://amp.france24.com/ar/20120918>

¹⁷ Ahram (2013). *Arab News TV rivals Al-Arabiya, Al-Jazeera draw up Egypt Battle Lines - region – world Ahram Online*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/76974/>

¹⁸ Gate.ahram (2013). *Joint military exercises between the Egyptian-Russian and Egyptian-Saudi naval forces – Al-Ahram Gate*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/419233.aspx>

¹⁹ BBC (2013). *Egyptian Army Statement on the Removal of President Mohamed Morsi*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from https://www.bbc.com/arabic/multimedia/2013/07/130703_egypt_alsisi_announcement

²⁰ Alrai-media (2013). *Turkey condemns the “military coup” in Egypt*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.alraimedia.com/article/429205>

²¹ Watanksa (2013). *Egypt condemns Iran's “interference” in its affairs*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.alwatan.com.sa/article/190924>

²² SPA (2013). *In a cable, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques congratulates Chancellor Adly Mansour, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.spa.gov.sa/1126330>

²³ Aljoughouria (2013). *12 Billion Arab Support to Egypt Within a Week*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.aljoughouria.com/ar/news/82467/12>

Domestic unrest in Egypt did not stop after the removal of Morsi. Civil unrest and instability turned more salient as the supporters of Morsi did not acquiesce to the Egyptian army's interference and decided to launch an unlimited wave of protests until the coming back of the legitimacy as they understood it. The Egyptian army gave a last warning to Morsi's supporters that they should evacuate Rabaa al-Adawiya and al-Nahda squares where the majority of supporters of Morsi assembled. A large number of the protesters decided to challenge the authority and a violent clash between the army and the protesters led, according to a conservative estimate, to more than 500 protesters dead and more than 4,000 injured²⁴.

At the international level, the European Union condemned the "disproportionate use of force by the Egyptian security forces"²⁵ and the Obama administration canceled a planned joint military operation in protest over the violent clashes²⁶. China and Russia, on the other hand, called for restraint to diffuse the tension²⁷.

At the regional level, Turkey and Iran condemned the Egyptian authority and took the side of the protesters²⁸. However, Saudi Arabia provided unconditional support to the Egyptian authorities. King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz called on Egyptians, Arabs, and Muslims to confront anyone who tries to destabilize Egypt's security, considering that those who interfere in Egypt's internal affairs from abroad want to trigger Fitna (an Arabic word that means discord among the Arabs and Muslims). King Abdullah called on the Arabs to stand together against attempts to destabilize Egypt's security, "and against anyone who tries to destabilize a state that has, in the history of the Islamic and Arab nation, the foremost place with its honorable brothers"²⁹. Saudi Arabia blamed the social unrest in Egypt after the removal of Morsi on Muslims and

²⁴ Al-Masry (2013). *The toll of Wednesday's clashes rises to 578 dead and 4,201 injured so far*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://web.archive.org/web/20131206043450/http://www.almasryalyoum.com/node/2035081>

²⁵ *European Parliament Texts adopted situation in Egypt* (2013). Retrieved March 22, 2023, from https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-7-2013-0379_EN.html

²⁶ *Obama condemns Egyptian violence, cancels joint exercise* (2013). Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.cnn.com/2013/08/15/obama-condemns-egyptian-violence-cancels-joint-exercise.html>

²⁷ Writer S. (2013). *China calls for restraint in Egypt*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.morocoworldnews.com/2013/08/101017/china-calls-for-restraint-in-egypt; Russia urges political forces in Egypt to show restraint>. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://tass.com/russia/699010>

²⁸ Al Jazeera (2013) *Solidarity in Turkey with the victims of the Raba'a massacre*, News. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from [https://www.aljazeera.net/amp/news/2013/8/22; Almasryalyoum \(2013\). Iran condemns the dispersal of the Rabaa and Nahda sit-ins, describing what happened as a "massacre"](https://www.aljazeera.net/amp/news/2013/8/22; Almasryalyoum (2013). Iran condemns the dispersal of the Rabaa and Nahda sit-ins, describing what happened as a). Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/249017>

²⁹ Alarabiya (2013). *The Saudi monarch calls on Arabs to stand against those who threaten the security of Egypt*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.alarabiya.net/amp/saudi-today/2013/08/16>

backed the new Egyptian government³⁰. Indeed, Saudi Arabia not only openly backed the new government of Egypt politically and financially but also used its global influence to change the narrative about the current situation in Egypt.

To do so, just after five days of Rabaa al-Adawiya and al-Nahda squares' violent clash, Saudi Arabia sent its foreign minister to France to defend the new Egyptian regime. Saudi Arabia's ambassador in France put the blame for the al-Adawiya and al-Nahda squares' violent clash on Morsi supporters and argued that the Muslim Brotherhood regime had lost its legitimacy after 30 million protesters took to the streets against its rule³¹. The then de facto ruler of Egypt and the actual Egyptian president, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, argued in an interview that the support of Saudi Arabia and its King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz in 2013 must be not forgotten and when all major powers were against Egypt, King Abdullah defied all the major powers and backed Egypt³².

After the removal of Morsi, the new government designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization³³ and less than three months later, Saudi Arabia followed Egypt in designating the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization³⁴.

Saudi Arabia and SiSi's Egypt relations

In May 2014, Colonel General Abdel Fatah Sisi became the President of Egypt. The King of Saudi Arabia congratulated him and gave strong support for the new president, saying, "The next stage is laden with great responsibility, which necessarily requires every man and woman among our brothers, the people of Egypt, to be of one spirit, to be responsible, aware and vigilant, to be patient, and to bear in the next stage all difficulties and pitfalls, to be of help to their president after God (emphasis added). He whose despair precedes his patience will sit on the side of the road afflicted with heartbreak and remorse, God forbid that this be the case. The awareness of the people of Egypt is capable – God willing – to cross all obstacles and difficulties, to achieve what we all aspire to in terms of security, which is the pillar of stability for Egyptian brothers, after God"³⁵.

³⁰ Al-jazirah (2013). *The Muslim Brotherhood calls for a week of protests, while the government confirms facing a terrorist plot*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.aljazeera.com/2013/20130817/du16.htm>

³¹ Gate.ahram (2013). *Saudi Embassy in Cairo: Al-Faisal's visit to France aimed at revealing the full facts, unifying efforts, and providing support to Egypt*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/385455.aspx>

³² Elbalad S. (2013). Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://youtu.be/1Eh9sNPYJ1U>

³³ Alarabiya (2013). *Egypt declares the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist group subject to the law*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.alarabiya.net/amp/arabandworld/egypt/2013/12/25>

³⁴ Aljazeera (2014). *Saudi Arabia declares the Muslim Brotherhood a 'terrorist organization*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.aljazeera.net/amp/news/2014/3/7>

³⁵ Alarabiya (2014). *King Abdullah: Those who hesitate to support Egypt have no place among us*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.alarabiya.net/amp/saudi-today/2014/06/03>

Moreover, Saudi Arabia called for a conference of donors to help Egypt economically³⁶. To demonstrate his good will and support, on his first visit to Saudi Arabia on 10–11 August 2014, King Abdullah decorated President Sisi with the King Abdulaziz Necklace, the most prestigious Saudi gift to foreign leaders³⁷. The death of King Abdullah bin Abdel el Aziz in January 2015, did not impede further rapprochement of Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

Crown prince Salman of Saudi Arabia became the king of Saudi Arabia and continued the legacy of his predecessor. A conference of donors was held as King Abdel Abdullah's wish two months after his death in March. President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi in his speech at the opening of the economic conference praised King Abdullah for his calling to the conference and the support of Saudi Arabia in his reign, and praised Saudi Arabia under the current King Salman Abel Aziz for its unconditional support to Egypt. Saudi Arabia announced that it would provide 4 billion dollars to Egypt at the conference³⁸.

On March 26, 2015, Saudi Arabia launched its Decisive Storm operation in Yemen to support the legitimate government against rebels in the north³⁹. Egypt strongly supported the Saudi operation diplomatically and politically and provided 16 combat aircraft and a naval frigate as military support⁴⁰. President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi confirmed during a phone call with King Salman bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud that Gulf security was a red line and an integral part of Egyptian national security⁴¹. Egypt, however, did not send military land forces to Yemen but only supported a naval blockade in the strait of el Mandab⁴².

In his speech at the Arab assembly on March 28, 2015, which was held in Sharm Sheikh in Egypt, just after days launching the Decisive Storm operation, the King

³⁶ Reuters (2014). *The Saudi monarch calls for a donor conference to economically assist Egypt*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://ara.reuters.com/article/topNews/idARAKBN0EE1V620140603>

³⁷ Almasryalyoum (2014). *King Abdullah awards Sisi the "Abdulaziz Al Saud" necklace*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.almasyalyoum.com/news/details/498959>

³⁸ Al-jazirah (2015). *The Kingdom offers 4 billion dollars in aid to Egypt, including 2 billion as a deposit, and the remaining as developmental assistance*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.al-jazirah.com/2015/20150314/ln39.htm>

³⁹ Alarabiya (2015). *King Salman launches the 'Operation Decisive Storm' against the Houthi rebels*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.alarabiya.net/amp/saudi-today/2015/03/26>

⁴⁰ Alarabiya (2015). *Egypt participates with 16 fighter planes and a naval frigate*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.alarabiya.net/saudi-today/2015/03/26/>

⁴¹ Al-jazirah (2015). *Gulf security is a red line and an integral part of Egypt's national security*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.al-jazirah.com/2015/20150328/av28.htm>

⁴² Ahram Online (2015). *There are no Egyptian ground troops in Yemen: Saudi-led coalition*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/140274/Egypt/Politics-/There-are-no-Egyptian-ground-troops-in-Yemen-Saudi.aspx>

of Saudi Arabia blamed the current instability in Yemen on Houthi Movement and highlighted the Arab and international support for the Saudis operation. The King emphasized that the military operation was the last resort of the kingdom after it already had used all other measures, and praised all the countries that supported the kingdom in its defense for its security⁴³.

By the same token, in his Sharm el Sheikh's Speech President Sisi emphasized the need for Arab unity, especially under the current threat that the Arab system was facing. President Sisi claimed in his speech that foreign powers were taking advantage of the Arab states' current situation to interfere in their domestic politics and destroy their Arab identity. Sisi stressed that united Arab actions against the threats that they face had to be taken⁴⁴.

At the Sharm Sheikh assembly, the Arab states announced adopting of the principle of establishing an Arab military force under the supervision of the Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Member States⁴⁵. In May 2015, Egypt and Saudi Arabia announced the Cairo declaration that institutionalized the political, military and economic rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

The Cairo declaration presented six areas for joint work. First, Saudi Arabia and Egypt needed to enhance their military cooperation and to establish the joint Arab force. Second, they should aim to enhance their joint cooperation and investments in the fields of energy, electrical connectivity and transportation. Third, they should start a process for an economic integration between the two countries and work to turn Saudi Arabia and Egypt into a major hub in the global trade movement. Fourth, they should expand Saudi and Egyptian mutual investments with the aim of launching joint projects. Fifth, Saudi Arabia and Egypt should enhance their political, cultural and media cooperation between to achieve the desired goals in light of the common interest of the two countries and to confront the challenges and dangers posed by the current stage. And finally yet importantly, the two states should determine the maritime borders between the two countries⁴⁶.

The Egyptian-Saudis political and military rapprochement was presented to be serving the national interests of all Arab countries. However, Saudi Arabia and Egypt aimed to turn the Arab system into their dual hegemony. The Saudi-Egyptian alliance was presented as the two pillars on which the Arab order rests. As it was portrayed by both countries, only through Saudi Arabia and Egypt cooperation,

⁴³ *Выступление короля Саудовской Аравии Салмана бин Абдель Азиза на открытии саммита арабских государств в Шарм-эль-Шейхе...* (2015, March 28). Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCDUVvFzLYE>

⁴⁴ Mehwar TV (2015). *The speech of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi at the Arab Summit*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://youtu.be/N-BFwRnEmag>

⁴⁵ Al-jazirah (2015). *Adoption of the principle of establishing an Arab military force under the supervision of the Chiefs of Staff of the armed forces of the member states*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.al-jazirah.com/2015/20150330/av23.htm>

⁴⁶ Аль-Гали, М. (2015). *The Cairo Statement issued regarding the visit of Prince Mohammed bin Salman to Egypt*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.youm7.com/amp/2015/7/30/>

the national interests of all Arab states could be protected. As Abel Fattah Sisi described it to the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohamed ben Salman, “Egypt and the Kingdom are the wings of Arab national security, and Egypt and Saudi Arabia are a safety valve for the Arab nation”⁴⁷.

To promote their joint work, Saudi Arabia and Egypt set up the Saudi-Egyptian Coordination Council, which was established on June 11, 2015, headed by Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, and Egyptian Prime Minister Sherif Ismail, to implement the “Cairo Declaration”. Five meetings were held in Riyadh and Cairo, which resulted in agreements for several investment projects worth 30 billion Saudi riyals, and to provide Egypt’s oil needs for the next five years, on soft terms and a grace period for repayment that lasts at least three years.

On March 20, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Ministry of Investment in Egypt and the Public Investment Fund in the Kingdom, on three agreements, including an agreement worth 1,5 billion dollars between the Ministry of International Cooperation and the Saudi Fund for Development, to finance development projects in the Sinai Peninsula, such as the establishment of Bedouin communities, building water desalination plants, and establishing a university⁴⁸.

Moreover, in his visit to Cairo in April 2016, King Salman bin el Abdel Aziz and the President of Egypt, Abdel Fatah el Sisi, signed 17 new agreements in multiple fields, such as the construction of a land bridge linking the Kingdom and Egypt under the name of King Salman’s Bridge, establishment of a free trade zone in Sinai, and the establishment of an investment fund of 60 billion riyals. Yet another agreement was on transfer of Tiran and Sanafir Islands from the Egyptian control under the Saudis sovereignty⁴⁹.

Despite all those positive achievements, Saudi-Egyptian relations faced serious tensions concerning the Syrian political crisis. In October 2016, Egypt voted in favor of Russia’s draft resolution in the United Nations that urged the parties involved in the Syrian domestic struggle to immediately cease hostilities and to ensure the separation of the moderate Syrian opposition forces from Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (formerly al-Nusra), which was classified as terrorist, as a major priority.

Saudi Arabia, however, perceived the highest priority in the current domestic crisis as the removal of Bashar Assad. The then Saudi delegate to the United Nations, Abdullah Al-Muallami, criticized the Egyptian position and argued that it was painful that the Senegalese and Malaysian position was closer to the Arab consensual position than the position of an Arab delegate⁵⁰. Tensions did not stop only at the diplomatic

⁴⁷ Омран, С., Заид, Х. (2015). *Riyadh and Cairo look forward to the future*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.alwatan.com.sa/article/268735>

⁴⁸ Alwatan (2016). *Saudi hands are open, and continuous financial support from Saudi Arabia*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.alwatan.com.sa/article/297473>

⁴⁹ Омран, С., Заид, Х. (2016). *A Saudi-Egyptian investment fund of 60 billion Saudi Riyals*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.alwatan.com.sa/article/297586>

⁵⁰ *Делегат Саудовской Аравии в ООН* (2016). Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://arabic.cnn.com/amphtml/middleeast/2016/10/09/saudi-ambassador-un-egypt-supporting-russia-resolution-syria>

level as Saudi Arabia informed Egypt, after less than one month of the Egyptian vote, that shipments of oil products expected under a \$23 billion aid deal were halted indefinitely⁵¹. In addition, the Arab army initiative that would, if implemented, further enhance the military cooperation between the two states, did not get past the phase of emotional speeches onto the one with ink on the paper⁵².

Yet, deep cooperation between the Saudis and Egyptians manifested itself again in the Qatar crisis in June 2017. Both Saudi Arabia and Egypt cut their diplomatic relations with Qatar on the same day, June 5, 2017. Tensions between Saudi Arabia and Egypt with Qatar, however, were not something new. Indeed, Saudi Arabia recalled its ambassador from Qatar on March 5, 2014. Saudi Arabia accused Qatar of not following the foundations contained in the Statute of the Cooperation Council and in the agreements signed between them, including the security agreement, and adherence to the principles that guarantee non-interference in the internal affairs of any of the GCC countries, directly or indirectly, and not supporting anyone who works to threaten the security and stability of the GCC states, whether organizations or Individuals, whether through direct security action or by attempting political influence and not supporting hostile media⁵³.

Egypt and Qatar relations however were tenser since the removal of Morsi. Thus, following Saudi Arabia, on March 6, Egypt recalled its ambassador to Qatar and accused Qatar of supporting the Muslim brotherhood⁵⁴.

However, while Saudi Arabia sent back its ambassador to Qatar after 8 months⁵⁵, Egypt and Qatar tensions did not wane even after the coming back of the Qatari ambassador to Egypt, after the Arab assembly in Sharm Sheik in 2015. When, in the same year, Egypt's permanent representative to the Arab League accused Qatar of supporting terrorism, Qatar recalled its ambassador to Egypt and the GCC countries including Saudi Arabia took the side of Qatar by describing Egyptian claims as false accusations against Qatar⁵⁶.

In 2017, however, Saudi Arabia's and Egypt's positions toward Qatar turned identical. Both Saudi Arabia and Egypt cut their diplomatic relations with Qatar

⁵¹ Thomson, R. (2016). *Saudi oil shipments to Egypt halted indefinitely, Egyptian officials say*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-saudi-oil-idUSKBN1320RQ>

⁵² Alwatannews (2015). *The Arab League postpones the meeting for approving the Joint Force*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://alwatannews.net/ampArticle/100855>

⁵³ Al-jazirah (2014). *The Kingdom, the Emirates, and Bahrain withdraw their ambassadors from the state of Qatar*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.al-jazirah.com/2014/20140306/fe19.htm>

⁵⁴ Аль-Ватан, Р.Д. (2014). *Egypt withdraws its ambassador from Qatar*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.alwatanvoice.com/arabic/news/2014/03/06/504591.html>

⁵⁵ Amp. Dw (2015). *Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE return their ambassadors to Qatar*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://amp.dw.com/ar/> (дата обращения: 22.03.2023).

⁵⁶ Alghad (2015). *Qatar withdraws its ambassador from Egypt, and the Gulf condemns Cairo's stance*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://alghad.com/>

on the same day and under the same justification. Both Saudi Arabia and Egypt accused Qatar of interfering in their internal affairs, destabilizing their domestic politics, and supporting terrorism⁵⁷.

Saudi Arabia and Egypt, with United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, constructed the Arab Quartet by emphasizing that restoring their diplomatic relations with Qatar had to fulfill the conditions that the Arab Quartet had stipulated. Saudi Arabia and Egypt asked Qatar to reduce the level of diplomatic relations with Iran and expel any element of the Revolutionary Guards present on its soil. They maintained that Qatar had to bind itself to the US sanctions imposed on Iran on its territory.

According to the conditions, Qatar also had to close the Turkish military base on its territory and cancel its military cooperation with it. The Arab Quartet stressed the importance of shutting down Al-Jazeera which was responsible, according to the Saudi Arabia and Egypt, of fomenting unrest in the region and supporting the Muslim Brotherhood. Egypt and Saudi Arabia insisted that Qatar had to cease interfering in their internal and external affairs. In the conditions, Qatar was also required to stop the naturalization of citizens of these countries and had to expel those who had previously been naturalized. Saudi Arabia and Egypt maintained that Qatar had to extradite the persons accused of terrorism who were present on Qatari soil and refrain from supporting or financing associations and organizations classified as terrorist by the four countries and the United States. Qatar also had to sever relations with the Brotherhood, Hezbollah, Al Qaeda and ISIS, including them as terrorist entities in accordance with the lists of terrorist organizations announced by the four countries and the United States. In addition, Qatar should provide detailed information related to the dissidents who were on Qatari soil and had received support from it and who are citizens of these four countries. Finally, Qatar needs to pledge to coexist in harmony with its Gulf and Arab surroundings and must pay compensation to these countries for any damage or expenses it has incurred during the past years because of its policy⁵⁸. For almost four years, Saudi Arabia and Egypt insisted that the settlement of the Qatar crisis had to be done under the Arab Quartet. Indeed, cooperation between the two states has not been altered concerning the issue although several Arab and international players aimed to diffuse the tension and act as mediators⁵⁹.

Yet, on January 5, 2021, Saudi Arabia and Egypt on the one side, and Qatar on the other, alleviated their tensions under the auspices of the GCC by signing Al Ula

⁵⁷ Alarabiya (2017). *Saudi Arabia announces the cutting of ties with Qatar and closes all borders*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.alarabiya.net/amp/saudi-today/2017/06/05>

⁵⁸ Арафа А. (2018). *We republish the 13 conditions of the Arab Quartet to resolve the crisis with Qatar*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.youm7.com/amp/2018/11/12>

⁵⁹ Sputnikarabic (2020). *Have the differences between the Arab Quartet and Qatar returned to square one?* Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://sputnikarabic.ae/2020.07.16/1046020548.html>

Accord. Saudi Arabia resumed diplomatic relations with Qatar on the same day, while Egypt resumed diplomatic relations with Qatar only on January 20⁶⁰.

Conclusion

Relying exclusively on the public statements from both Saudi and Egyptian elites, the article shows that the interaction between the two states was unstable and depended both on the nature of their domestic politics, and the ongoing situation in the Middle Eastern politics.

We would like to suggest breaking down the Egyptian-Saudi relations in 2010 into the following tentative periods:

The Arab Spring and Mubarak's regime (25 January 2011 – 11 February 2011): When the wave of the Arab Spring hit the Mubarak regime, Saudi Arabia backed Egypt of Mubarak with political, diplomatic, and economic support. Indeed, Saudi Arabia, as demonstrated in the article, was under grave concerns about the risks of the fall of Mubarak.

Saudi Arabia and revolutionary Egypt (February 2011 – 3 July 2013): Even after the fall of the Mubarak regime, in 2011, the Saudis continued to portray their approach to cooperating with the Egyptian military as "business-as-usual" even though they were suspicious both of the revolutionary climate in the Egyptian society and of the Egyptian government under the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Saudi's backing of the new Egyptian regime (July 2013 – May 2014): After the second revolution, in 2013 Saudi Arabia provided unlimited support to the new Egyptian regime which followed the Muslim brotherhood's fall. Indeed, Saudi elites have used their financial resources and influence to sustain the new regime in Egypt against, what they perceived to be, a muslim brotherhood's threat to the stability of Egypt.

Saudi Arabia and SiSi's Egypt relations (May 2014 – January 5, 2021): Saudi Arabian official discourse depicted Egypt as a potential ally against the rise of political Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood; accordingly, financial aid from Saudi Arabia increased significantly. Nonetheless, tensions, especially concerning the political situation in the Syria, surfaced. However, recent tensions between Saudi Arabia and Egypt on one hand, and Qatar, on the other hand, made Egypt and Saudi Arabia cooperate on an unprecedented level; this cooperation was unambiguously demonstrated in the official discourses of both countries. Overall, relations between Saudi Arabia and Egypt after the second Egyptian revolution, despite some disagreements – especially concerning the political situation in Syria – reached a high level of cooperation while the official discourses of the two countries present almost identical depiction of their bilateral relations.

⁶⁰ Swissinfo (2020). *Saudi Arabia announces the full restoration of relations between the boycotting countries and Qatar*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.swissinfo.ch/ara/afp>; Skynewsarabia (2021). *Egypt announces the resumption of diplomatic relations with Qatar, according to Sky News Arabia*. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.skynewsarabia.com/amp/middle-east/1408940>

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