



The Impact of the Palestinian Resistance on Egypt-Israeli Occupation Relations (2021)

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Summary

This paper addresses the impact of the Palestinian resistance's growing power on the bilateral relations between Egypt and the Israeli occupation, which is in need to calm the situations in the Gaza strip after the failure of its military options. Thus, if Egypt and Hamas invested in this, there would be a vital, positive phase of relations between Egypt and Hamas to serve their national issues. Mainly, the lift of the Israeli blockade, the achievement of the Palestinian reconciliation, and the strengthening of Egypt's regional role.

Introduction

This study comes in light of the interrelated relations between Egypt, the Israeli occupation, and the Palestinian resistance in Gaza, headed by Hamas. It also focuses on to what extent the increasing power of the Palestinian resistance can improve their relations. Moreover, it determines how the Palestinians and the Egyptians can benefit from those relations in a way that serves their mutual interests, mainly the Palestinian issue that includes the lift of the blockade and the end of the inner Palestinian division. Following are three main topics this essay covers:

1. Overview of the Egypt-Israeli Occupation Relations.
2. Stronger Relations between Egypt and the Israeli occupation.
3. The Palestinian Resistance and the Improvement of the Egypt-Israeli Occupation Relations.
4. Conclusions and Recommendations.

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First: Overview of the Egypt-Israeli Occupation Relations

The Egypt-Israeli occupation relations are essential for both sides, especially for the Israeli occupation as Egypt has a prominent international, regional, and political role. Although David Ben Gurion, who proclaimed the establishment of the Israeli occupation's entity, relied on the States Parties like Iran and Turkey, the Israeli occupation considered Egypt as the most important among its international relations in the region. This is called "parties' creed to combat the Arab nations, particularly the ones surrounding Palestine".

In light of the normalization agreements and Abraham Accords, the Israeli occupation, as a colonial state that seeks regional and international legitimacy, considered its relations with Egypt as an important basis for its relations with the Arab states, which improved unprecedentedly. This came in the visit of Tarek Al-Molla, Egypt's Minister of Energy, to the Israeli occupation in February 2021, during which Netanyahu said that "this began with the historic peace treaty between Egypt and the Israeli occupation but now it is becoming something that can better the lives of the people in economic terms and we think that this is a great opportunity for regional cooperation between Egypt, the Israeli occupation and the other countries."¹

The current Israeli occupation's foreign policy towards Egypt is no different than it was in Benjamin Netanyahu's time in office. During his meeting with Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi in Sharm Al-Sheikh on September 13, 2021, PM Naftali Bennett described this meeting as "important and very good" as it helped create " a foundation for deep ties in the future between Egypt and the Israeli occupation, which seeks to open up to the region's states throughout Egypt."²

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This relationship enabled the Israeli occupation to achieve a certain extent of what it has been always seeking; to "secure and preserve its international legitimacy widely."³ Moreover, it enabled it to reach the core of international political relations so it can confront "its growing feeling of isolation and any attempts to de-legitimize it."⁴ Therefore, the Israeli occupation could surpass some determinants of its relations with the Arab nations that were deemed as important in the past. Basically, the development of the Palestine-Israel peace process, and the people's reactions in the Arab world.⁵

The Israeli occupation seized its relations with Egypt to confront the Arab and Palestinian resistance. Hence, Egypt achieved fewer gains than Israel did as a result of the Egyptian inner factors such as the economy and political stability, and other international and regional ones like the American support. This means that if Egypt could overcome some of those factors, it would achieve more gains, mainly in the Palestinian issue.

Second: Stronger Relations between Egypt and the Israeli Occupation

⁶During the past two years, especially the last months following Operation Al-Quds Sword 2021, the Egypt-Israeli occupation relations went through a phase of development as a result of the increasing mutual interests between them in general, and the Israeli occupation's special interests to calm the Palestinian resistance in Gaza in specific. Several observers saw that Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi's term, which started in 2014, was distinguished by the publicity of relations and "the widespread strategic and security cooperation stemming out from the harmonious strategic vision regarding Iran and the radical Islamic organizations as a mutual threat to both sides."⁷

During his interview with 60 Minutes Program via CBS channel in January 2019, President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi confirmed that the Israeli occupation helped the Egyptian army unprecedentedly in order to combat terrorism in Sinai so the Egyptian airplanes cannot enter the Israeli occupation's airspace until they gain its approval.⁸

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Apparently, the Egyptians succeeded to combat terrorism in Sinai, especially after they had guaranteed the cooperation of the Palestinian Resistance in Gaza, which is an uncontrolled area located in the northeastern borders of Egypt. Furthermore, the gas deal⁹ (2018) constituted the culmination of the development of relations between Egypt and the Israeli occupation, indicating that the Arab-Israeli occupation relations are no longer confined to "strategic and security frameworks. Instead, they expanded to include the economic, diplomatic, and cultural relations, reaching a level that is like being involved in normalization deals with the Israeli occupation in several developments and economic fields."¹⁰

According to the Israeli occupation's perception, the gas deal can be observed as a symbol of the success of its policy, in which the economic cooperation "creates an encouraging environment to cooperate and motivate the other countries. Thus, this leads to a mutual dependency that can be used politically to achieve trade-offs, and make a class consciousness that exceeds the national borders of the Palestinian and Arab elites in order to assimilate conflicts."¹¹

Within this context, Tarek Al-Molla's visit to the Israeli occupation last February gave a lot of vital political connotations, mainly the confirmation of the mutual coalition between Cyprus and Greece to confront Turkey's increasing influence.¹²

Iran is not an only threat to Egypt's national security; instead, Turkey can "secure this coalition's consensus to combat its power."¹³ Egypt is in an undesired situation, as it faces several challenges like the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and terrorism in Sinai. Thus, its need for the Israeli occupation, which has an extensive influence in the region and the US administration, is clear. In addition, there are other determinants to improve the relations with the Israeli occupation like the American pressures, demands of globalization, conditions for admission to international treaties, foreign funds, and loans.¹⁴

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In contrast, it is imperative to recall some indicators that confirm Egypt's numerous conservations to open up in its relations with the Israeli occupation, lest their views differ. For example, Israel is concerned about Egypt's commitment to Camp David deal, as it wanted to guarantee its capabilities will not increase in a way that affects its presence in Africa. It also refused to sign the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Accordingly, estimates that the relations with Egypt will stay "confined to the official level, far away from the popular one" raised.¹⁵ Moreover, there are sub-indicators, which might be symbolic like the place, date, and nature of the official meetings between the officials of both states.

Consequently, the relations between Egypt and the Israeli occupation, represented in publicity and celebrations, started between 2018-2019 with Egyptian mutual interests. Israel's interests might be the greatest motivation, supporting the hypothesis that its need to the Arabs is bigger than the Arabs' need, even in the concept of the political pragmatism."

However, according to principles, ethics, and humanitarian justice, Israel must be dealt with as an apartheid state.

Third: the Palestinian Resistance and the Improvement of the Egypt-Israeli Occupation Relations

The Palestinian resistance in Gaza has appeared as one of the determinants of the Egypt-Israeli occupation relations since Operation Al-Quds Sword 2021. Its growing capabilities mainly Hamas', and the failure of Israel's policy to comply the strip with its military and security conditions, played a prominent role to strengthen the relations between Egypt and the Israeli occupation, which is in need to calm the situation in Gaza. This appeared on different occasions, mainly:

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1. PM Neftali Bennett's meeting with President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi in Sharm Al-Sheikh in September 2021, which Amos Gilead¹⁶ commented on as "such public, unique meetings are required to strengthen the strategic cooperation with the Arab states."¹⁷ He said that this meeting was deemed in Israel as a prosperity of the bilateral relations between Egypt and the Israeli occupation, meaning that the hot peace process or "the covering up of their relationship during the past years" has ended. ¹⁸

Gaza was at the top of the priorities of that meeting. PM Bennett asked President Al-Sisi to increase the Egyptian supervision over Gaza and the prevention of smuggling¹⁹, which means restraining Hamas' abilities, weakening the Palestinian resistance, and reducing the Israeli occupation's need to Egypt. This clarifies that the more the resistance's power increases, the more Israel needs Egypt to undermine this growing power. Accordingly, Israel will pay the price in favor of Egypt, and the Palestinian issue.

In addition, the Israeli occupation is aware that the Egyptians are the most capable to deal with Hamas. It also knows that it will pay for them for achieving peace with the Palestinian resistance, even if it is temporary.

"The Egyptian delegation came to meet Bennett, who held a lengthy list of demands, including the improvement of relations with the United States, the exploitation of Egypt's relations in the crisis of Ethiopia's Renaissance Dam, and the strengthening of the economic relations between Cairo and the Israeli occupation."²⁰ In order to indicate the importance of the Palestinian resistance in the Egypt-Israeli occupation relations in general, and in the Sisi-Bennett meeting in specific, Yedioth Ahronoth, one of the most important Israeli newspapers, published a caricature representing the two Presidents Al-Sisi and Bennett while sitting on a chair on a pan that boils, where Gaza was written on the photo.²¹

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As it failed to achieve its violent policies against the Gaza Strip, represented in the military and security operations, the Israeli occupation's need to Egypt regarding Gaza's issue increased. Thus, talking about its inability to conduct a wild military maneuver in the strip has become ordinary, apparently because of the absence of any military objects behind and the inadequate allocation of resources to rehabilitate this option. "At the political and strategic level, it is apparent that the Israeli occupation's policy towards Hamas failed, and requires new calculations for this path."²²

Furthermore, the Israeli occupation does not apparently look for political intermediate solutions such as the end of its occupation of the 1967 occupied Palestinian territories. It instead continues its colonial policies, including the continuity of its blockade over Gaza even amid the new US administration, presided by Joe Biden,²³ meaning that the current situation in Gaza and the West Bank will remain.

2. Yedioth Ahronoth's interview with Egypt's Minister of Intelligence Abbas Kamel, held in Glasgow in Scotland on November 4, 2021, is one of the indicators of the close relations between Egypt and the Israeli occupation. It showed how the Israeli occupation is keen on satisfying the Egyptian side by achieving peace with Gaza. Therefore, the title of the meeting was written in bold on the first page of the newspaper "Abbas Kamel: Work day and night to reach a deal in Gaza that includes the return of Israeli soldiers' bodies and the release of the Israeli captives held by Hamas."²⁴

Nadav Eyal, a correspondent, described Abbas Kamel as "the man sent by Al-Sisi to meet Bennett, the man that is always in touch with Yehya Al-Sinwar in Gaza, and the man that hosts Saleh Al-Arouri and Khaled Mashal when visiting Cairo".²⁵

During this interview, Kamel emphasized the strong relations between Egypt and the Israeli occupation. "Relations with Israel are excellent," he said, clarifying Egypt's approach to change the situations gradually, and urging the Israeli occupation to activate the political negotiations with the Palestinian Authority. However, that was an elusive goal for Neftali Bennett's fragile government. Yet, Egypt still works "to persuade the Palestinian Authority to reappear on the political scene in Gaza, and to re-bring legitimacy and power it lost for the sake of Hamas."²⁶

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Kamel is unlikely to succeed in "persuading the Palestinian Authority as his speeches indicated that the Palestinian resistance in Gaza is not the only obstacle to achieving reconciliation and re-bring the Palestinian Authority. Instead, it is the official Palestinian leadership, presided by Mahmoud Abbas."

Thereafter, mutual, indirect interests appear between Egypt and the Palestinian resistance in Gaza. The resistance's ability to stand firm and confront the Israeli occupation will empower the Egyptians to compromise the Israeli occupation in several issues.

Shedding the light of those interests might enter the Hamas-Egypt relations into a different, important phase of cooperation and understanding despite "the tensions the relations between Hamas and Egypt witnessed during the first period of Al-Sisi's term."²⁷ That would serve national interests like the lift of the blockade imposed on Gaza, the end of the Palestinian division, the end of the Israeli occupation, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

Two other points must be mentioned:

- **First:** The mutual military meeting between the Israeli occupation's army and the Egyptian one on Sunday, November 7, 2021. It was marked by the Egyptian's acceptance to publishing an official picture for this meeting, during which the Israeli occupation decided to allow Egypt to reinforce its troops in Rafah, by a clear security breach of the Egypt-Israeli occupation peace deal. Thus, does this meeting indicate the price Israel will pay for Egypt in return for its positive intervention in front of the Palestinian resistance to achieve peace and calm in Gaza?

It can probably be, according to this article's assumptions.

- **Second:** The discreet signs of Egypt in its relations with the Israeli occupation. Following are the most prominent signs:

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1. Egyptians' refusal of the Sisi-Bennett meeting to be held in Cairo. Instead, it was held in Sharm Al-Sheikh, far away from the capital.
2. The continuing decline in the civil relations between Egypt and the Israeli occupation as the Egyptians refused to allow High Tech's staff to enter smart Egypt,²⁸ despite 40 years of a peace deal. Therefore, this might be what made important Israeli sources lessen their expectations for the Egypt-Israeli occupation relations, saying that "peace with Egypt is peace between leaders, not nations. It is doubtful there are Egyptian intentions to increase the number of tourists and business."²⁹ Thus, does that mean the decision-makers in Egypt still believe that the Israeli occupation is an occupying entity? Or Is it a policy to compromise and achieve more gains for Egypt? Or both? The suggests the last.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

1. The Palestinian resistance's power is a power for Egypt as well, Therefore, it is necessary to enhance the cooperation between both sides in favor of their national issues' interests.
2. The Palestinian resistance's increasing power serves the Palestinian national issue specifically, and the Egyptian national issues generally. So, the process of supporting the resistance's abilities is a vital Palestinian, Egyptian, Arab, and Islamic mission.



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¹ Egyptian Minister's First Visit to the Israeli Occupation in 5 Years.

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² Yedioth Ahronoth, September, 14, 2021, p. 6

³ Ayman Yousef and Muhannad Mustafa, Israel's Foreign Policy Towards the Growing Power of India, China, and Russia, Palestinian Forum for Israeli Studies (Madar), Ramallah, 2011, p. 20.

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⁶ Hunaida Ghanem, Madar's Strategic Assessment 2021: Israeli Occupation's Scene 2020, Ramallah, Palestinian Forum for Israeli Studies 2021, p. 134.

⁷ Look at Haaretz Newspaper, January 6, 2019, p. 4

Look at Haaretz Newspaper, January 9, 2019, p. 7.

⁸ Signing the gas deal was proclaimed on February 18, 2018 by announcing that Noble Energy and DELEK Group Company will supply Egypt with 7 million cubic liters of fuel per year.

⁹ Fadi Al-Nahas, The Military and Security Institute in Munir Fakhr Ad-Din's article: Israel's Guide 2020, Institute of Palestine Studies, Beirut, 2021, p. 732.

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¹¹ For more: Look at Adnan Abu Amer: Israeli Comparison between Egypt and UAE, April 30, 2021.

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