



PROPELLING AHEAD: DEVELOPMENTS IN PAKISTAN- EGYPT TIES

By
Arhama Siddiq
Research Fellow

Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East & Africa (CMEA), ISSI

Edited by
Amina Khan

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



On June 16, 2021, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJSC), General Nadeem Raza, visited Egypt for the second round of Defence and Security Talks between the two countries.¹

On his tour, he met with President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi where matters of mutual military collaboration, including security, counter-terrorism and issues pertaining to the prevailing regional environment were discussed. During the meeting, the CJSC underlined the positive role Pakistan is playing in counteracting violent extremism as well as his country's efforts towards regional stability and building connectivity. Here he specifically shared Pakistan's efforts for peace and stability in Afghanistan. During the course of his visit, he also had meetings with Minister of Defence and Commander-in-Chief of Egyptian Armed Forces and Chiefs of the Tri-Services General Mohamed Ahmed Zaki.²

¹ "General Nadeem Raza, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, who is on official visit to Egypt, called on General Abdel Fattah Elsis (Retd), President of Egypt," *ISPR*, June 15, 2021.
<https://www.ispr.gov.pk/press-release-detail.php?id=6192>

² Ibid.



Earlier, on May 26, Pakistani and Egyptian air forces held their first joint military exercise, Sky Guardians 1, in Egypt.³ The fortnight long exercise focused on integration, synchronization, information gathering and decision making of committing the Air Defence assets during war so that an effective and prompt response to hostile air threat could be presented.

Present vectors between Pakistan and Egypt indicate how Islamabad is trying to re-engage with Cairo at all levels since the start of 2021 when Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi visited Egypt in what he stated was an effort to ‘promote relations and economic cooperation with an important country.’⁴ Relations between Pakistan and Egypt are based on bonds of common faith, culture and values and a similarity of perception on many regional and global issues. Over the past 70 years, Pak-Egypt relations have grown steadily, with institutional mechanisms set up gradually to foster cooperation in all fields. The two sides support each other on multilateral fora such as support at United Nations (UN) and Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Political engagement with Egypt which had remained minimal since 2013 was revived by Prime Minister Imran Khan’s government soon after it came to power in August 2018. Prime Minister Khan met his counterpart President Sisi on the sidelines of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation summit in 2019 as well as during the UN General Assembly Meeting in the same year. In 2020, Egypt also supported Prime Minister Imran Khan’s “Global Initiative on Debt Relief” for developing countries.⁵

During the recent escalation in Palestine in May 2021, the two sides also restated their support towards working together towards cessation of violence. In the field of cultural and educational cooperation, Egypt also provides 50 fully funded scholarships annually to Pakistani students to study in Al Azhar Al Sharif, in addition to 50 seats for training Imams, scholars and preachers. Moreover,

³ “Egyptian-Pakistani air defense forces begin 'Sky Guardians 1' exercises,” *Egypt Today*, May 26, 2021. <https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/1/104360/Egyptian-Pakistani-air-defense-forces-begin-Sky-Guardians-1-exercises>

⁴ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1607673>

⁵ “Egypt backs Pakistan’s debt relief initiative for developing countries,” *Express Tribune*, April 30, 2020. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2210831/1-egypt-backs-pakistans-debt-relief-initiative-developing-countries>

Egypt provides scholarships to Pakistani doctors to attend short training courses in Egypt on combating tropical diseases.

Foreign Minister's trip to Egypt (16-18 February, 2021)



Shah Mahmood Qureshi visited Egypt from February 16 to February 18, 2021. The focus of the trip was on the situation in Kashmir, increasing trade as well as people to people contacts and establishing sustained engagements particularly in arenas of security, economic cooperation, trade, and investment exchange. The discussion also concerned examination of prospects for cooperation between Gwadar Port in Pakistan and the Suez Canal Economic Zone to establish industrial projects.

During the trip Mr Qureshi also met the Secretary General of the Arab League, Ahmed Aboul Gheit⁶ where he reaffirmed Pakistan's support to the organization and stated that Egypt is an "important country of the Muslim ummah".⁷ Discussion also pertained to religious discourse and methods of properly spreading the Islamic religion. The Foreign Minister went on to interact with the Pakistani diaspora in Cairo and commended their role as pillars of their community during the Covid19 pandemic.

Probably the most important aspect of the tour was the Foreign Minister's meeting with prominent Egyptian businessmen and entrepreneurs where he apprised them of the ample business opportunities in Pakistan and invited them to invest in his country particularly in line with Pakistan's efforts to increase its economic diplomacy footprint. Here the Foreign Minister also highlighted how Egypt has great potential under Pakistan's 'Engage Africa Policy'.

⁶ "Foreign Minister meets the Secretary General of the Arab League in Cairo," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan*, February 18, 2021.

<http://mofa.gov.pk/foreign-minister-meets-the-secretary-general-of-the-arab-league-in-cairo/>

⁷ "FM Qureshi leaves for 2-day visit to Egypt," *DAWN*, February 16, 2021.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1607673>

Prospects in Pak-Egypt Ties

Pakistan attaches great importance to developing trade and economic cooperation with Africa which it considers an emerging economic bloc with immense potential to contribute to global trade and economy. In line with the Pakistan Government's Engage Africa Policy, the current government has, on many occasions, expressed its desire to enrich financial relations with countries in Africa by exploring its markets and increasing economic diplomacy.

In terms of trade and investment opportunities, Pakistan and Egypt have numerous possibilities. Presently, the volume of bilateral trade between Pakistan and Egypt constitutes less than 0.12% of their cumulative foreign trade.⁸ In 2019, the Ministry of Commerce organized a Pakistan-Egypt Trade Conference in Islamabad which was the first of a series of conferences planned with African countries under the ministry's 'Look Africa Policy Initiative'. On the occasion, the Ministry of Commerce and the Egyptian Commercial Service also signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for the establishment of a Pakistan-Egypt Joint Working Group (JWG) on trade.



Egypt can help Pakistan enter North African markets for the promotion of items where the two countries do not compete such as in pharmaceutical products and textiles. Egyptian multinational electrical company, Elsewedy Electric has also expressed its keen desire to invest in the energy sector in Pakistan.⁹

While Egypt is a pier on the maritime Silk Route, Pakistan has also established a deep-sea port at Gwadar, which is ready to contribute positively to regional trade. There is enormous potential for the two countries to collaborate under the umbrella of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Cairo has

⁸ "Proceedings of the two-day Envoys' Conference," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan*, November 27, 2019. http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/ENGAG_AFRICA_Nov_27-28_-2019.pdf

⁹ "Egyptian companies keen to invest in Pakistan's construction, energy sectors," *Business Recorder*, February 17, 2021. <https://www.brecorder.com/news/40064954/egyptian-companies-keen-to-invest-in-pakistans-construction-energy-sectors>

time and again assured Islamabad of its desire to cooperate in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). In April 2021, Pakistan and Egypt also discussed a joint working mechanism and prospects for an MoU between Gwadar Port Authority and Suez Canal Authority.¹⁰

Moreover, development of the tourism industry is a domain where Pakistan can learn from Egypt since for the latter, the travel and tourism industry is one of the country's leading economic sectors. In fact, the tourism sector has been quoted as the main reason for Egypt's economic resurgence over the last five years. In the period 2018-2019, the Egyptian tourism sector recorded its highest ever revenues, a signal of increased stability in the country.¹¹

In the arena of counter terrorism, the two countries have tremendous scope. While Pakistani security forces have successfully fought a war against terror on home soil, Egyptian forces are tackling terrorist groups in the Sinai. Hence, in light of their large, professional armed forces, both sides can cooperate in areas of defence production as well as collaborate to enhance their counterterrorism capabilities through increased intelligence sharing and training exercises.

Conclusion

It goes without saying that a new warmth and desire to expand the scope of bilateral relations is now clearly visible between Pakistan and Egypt. A progressive relationship between the two sides augurs well for regional peace and will open new vistas of not only bilateral but also regional cooperation. It will also help bolster Muslim unity as a whole and will help spur on Pakistan's Engage Africa endeavors as well as Islamabad's geo-economic outreach.

¹⁰ "MoU likely between Gwadar Port Authority, Suez Canal Authority," *Express Tribune*, April 16, 2021. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2295103/mou-likely-between-gwadar-port-authority-suez-canal-authority>

¹¹ "Economic impact of COVID-19 on tourism and remittances: Insights from Egypt," *International Food Policy Research Institute*, 2020. <https://www.ifpri.org/publication/economic-impact-covid-19-tourism-and-remittances-insights-egypt>