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Russia Under the Pyramids. The Significance of Russia-Egypt Relations Under Vladimir Putin

Rosja pod piramidami. Znaczenie relacji rosyjsko-egipskich za rządów Władimira Putina

· Abstrakt ·

Przedmiotem naszego zainteresowania jest znaczenie relacji rosyjsko-egipskich za rządów Władimira Putina. Głównym celem rozważań jest przedstawienie najważniejszych uwarunkowań i zależności charakteryzujących stosunki polityczne, ekonomiczne oraz militarne między oboma krajami.

Na wstępie chcielibyśmy omówić historię relacji rosyjsko-egipskich jeszcze za czasów istnienia ZSRR. Kluczowe w tej materii będzie opisanie kontaktów dyplomatycznych między oboma krajami w trakcie rządów w Egipcie Gamala Abdela Nasera oraz Anwara Sadata, po których to na długie lata – aż do przełomu XX i XXI w. – doszło do zamrożenia wzajemnych stosunków. W dalszej części rozważań przedstawiamy najważniejsze cele i założenia relacji politycznych między Moskwą a Kairem, realizowane od początku rządów Putina w 2000 r. oraz przez kolejne ekipy rządzące w Egipcie. Mamy na myśli głównie zagadnienia stopniowego odwracania się strony egipskiej od Stanów Zjednoczonych, powolnego powrotu Rosji na Bliski Wschód, konfliktu w Libii, Syrii oraz napięć pomiędzy władza-

· Abstract ·

The subject of our interest is to analyze the significance of Russia-Egypt relations under Vladimir Putin. The main purpose of our studies is to present the most important conditions and dependencies that characterize political, economic and military relations between the two countries.

In the beginning, we would like to discuss the history of relations between the abovementioned states, dating back to the times of the USSR. The key issue is the description of diplomatic relations between the two countries under the rule of Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt and Anwar Sadat, after which for many years there had been a freeze in mutual relations up to the turn of the 21st century. In the next part of the discussion we present the most important goals and assumptions of political relations between Moscow and Cairo, implemented from the beginning of Putin's rule in 2000 and by subsequent ruling elites in Egypt. We are mainly talking about Egypt gradually turning away from the United States, Russia's slow return to the Middle East, the conflicts in Libya, Syria and tensions between the rulers

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mi w Egipcie i Katarze, w którym to ukrywają się prześladowani przez Kair stronnicy Bractwa Muzułmańskiego. Ponadto prześledzimy znaczenie kwestii ekonomicznych w relacjach bilateralnych, zwracając uwagę na rosnącą kooperację w dziedzinie energetyki. Dodatkowo przybliżmy aspekt wojskowy i związaną z nim doktrynę morską Federacji Rosyjskiej, w której to Egipt został wymieniony jako jeden z najważniejszych partnerów Rosji na Bliskim Wschodzie.

W podsumowaniu przedstawiamy możliwe prognozy na przyszłość w obustronnych kontaktach, jednocześnie próbując odpowiedzieć na pytanie, na ile realne jest w przyszłości znaczące osłabienie więzi egipsko-amerykańskich i zwrócenie się władz w Kairze w stronę Moskwy.

Słowa kluczowe: Rosja; Egipt; USA; Putin; Sisi; Trump; piramida

of Egypt and Qatar, which harbors followers of the Muslim Brotherhood persecuted by Cairo. In addition, we examine the importance of economic issues in bilateral relations, focusing on the growing cooperation in the field of energy. We also describe the significance of military aspect and the related maritime doctrine of the Russian Federation, in which Egypt was mentioned as one of the most important partners of Russia in the Middle East.

In the summary, we present possible forecasts for the future in mutual relations, at the same time trying to answer the question of how real is the significant weakening of the Egyptian-American relations and Egypt's turn to Russia in the future.

Keywords: Russia; Egypt; USA; Putin; Sisi; Trump; pyramid

Introduction

The growing role of the Russian Federation due to the long-standing Syrian conflict and international events related to them ask about Russia's main political goals in the Middle East. These days, theoretical-explanatory studies assume an opinion that Russia regained and consolidated its influences in this region only in Syria. However, from a practical perspective, we also need to notice the countries of the region in question, which are a subject of Russia's increasing interest. One of them is undoubtedly Egypt, which six years after the Arab Spring continues to be immersed in internal conflicts and has problems with a democratic transition. These difficulties – combined with the struggle of Western countries with the refugee and migrant crisis as well as turbulences regarding the eurozone's future – contribute to neglecting by these countries and the US the traditional allies in the Middle East, which will unavoidably lead to filling the political void by Russia in the country, which from the Camp David Accords signed between Israel and Egypt in 1979, has been in the sphere of western influence.

In our article we want to trace the most important implications of the current Russia-Egypt relations during Putin's presidency in political, economic and military dimensions, and also to present the activity of diplomacy of both countries from a broader perspective, after the takeover of power by president Abdel Fat-

tah el-Sisi.¹ In addition, we want to determine how the Russia-Egypt relations can contribute to a violation of political order in the region and change of relations between Cairo and the United States of America. The introduction will serve as a historical outline regarding relations between both countries during the Cold War.

Issues Related to the History of Relations between the Soviet Union and Egypt

When discussing the current Russia-Egypt relations, we are convinced that we need to go back to 1952, when a group of young military men under the command of Gen. Mohammed Naguib² launched a military coup in Egypt, removing from power the corrupt king Farouk I. The new government, in which the leading role was played by the future ruler of the country, who since 1954 served as Prime Minister, Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918–1970), intended to perform a sudden transition in political and social life of Egypt in many areas. The Egyptian society, which had for centuries been under British colonial rule, strived to remove any remains of foreign domination, thus G.A. Nasser took immediate steps to remove the British armed forces from the Suez Canal region. As early as October 1954, the head of state of Egypt and British Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anthony Nutting signed an agreement on withdrawing the British army from Egypt (Wołoszański, 2003, p. 296). It led to increased tensions between both countries and deterioration of relations between Egypt and the United States of America. There were several reasons that contributed to this condition. The Egyptian leader, who wanted to highlight his independence in international policy, refused to join the Baghdad Pact and recognized the People's Republic of China, which caused great dissatisfaction in both Anglo-Saxon countries. Considering the situation, the Egyptian authorities wanted to reach an agreement with the Soviet Union in 1954-1955. This task, however, was not so simple in the beginning. The Kremlin during the times of J. Stalin and the beginning of rule of N.S.

¹ Abdel Fattah el–Sisi, born in November 19, 1954 in Cairo. Egyptian serviceman and politician. He served as Minister of Defense in 2012–2014 and Prime Minister in 2013–2014. He led the coup in 2013 and became the commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces. President of Egypt since June 8, 2014.

² Naguib Mohammed (1901–1984), Egyptian politician and general. In 1952, he took part in a coup d'état of the Free Officers to depose the last king of Egypt, Farouk I. In 1953–1954, he served as President of Egypt. He was removed from power by G.A. Nasser. In 1954–1960 he was placed under house arrest.

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Khrushchev treated the Middle East region, including Egypt as irrelevant in the Soviet global policy. The Soviet opinion on events in this region was described in an article of the Soviet newspaper published in English under the title "New Times" released on April 17, 1953. The article emphasized that the situation in this area indicates three types of contradictions, which are the natural consequence of crisis of the capitalist system. Firstly, discrepancies between interests of Western powers and the countries of this region that depend on them politically and economically. The second inconsistency was demonstrated by the fight of Western powers for dominance in the Middle East. The third one regards contradictions escalating social conflicts inside Middle East countries. The "New Times" claimed that the first group of conflicts is the most noticeable. Quoting the newspaper, we read that increasing national resistance can be proved by "the stubborn fight led by Middle East nations over the imperialists' plan to establish the Middle East Command – a plan that in practice is designed for occupation of these countries." The article also indicated that the second group of contradictions can be confirmed by the fierce competition between the USA and Great Britain over exploitation of oil (Ginat, 1991, p. 220).

The opinion above expressed by the Kremlin was reflected in the initial reticence of the Soviets toward G.A. Nasser. Gen. M. Naguib and G.A. Nasser were called enemies and fascists, despite the announcement of neutrality by Egypt during the Cold War (Zubok, 2010, p. 108). After the death of J. Stalin, in particular after another activity of Israel in the Gaza Strip, G.A. Nasser decided to establish enhanced cooperation with the Soviet Bloc. According to Alexandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, the authors of a monograph on Khrushchev's foreign policy, the change of the policy of the Soviet Union toward Egypt took place when in the end of September 1955, G.A. Nasser revealed that Egypt would purchase weapons from Eastern Bloc countries (Fursenko, Naftali, 2007, p. 61). In exchange for weapons, it will provide cotton to the USSR (H. Kissinger, 1996, p. 571). Initially, G.A. Nasser, who strived for unification of the Arab world under the Egyptian leadership, was not a proponent of establishing close relations with the Soviet Union due to the possibility of using the Arabs by the Soviets to pursue their own interests and weakening America's position. In the beginning of his time in office, he expressed a view on not engaging Egypt on either side of the Cold War. His opinion was clearly expressed during his conversation with Raymond A. Hare, when he openly said that the approach taken toward the Soviet Union is the same as toward the United States, and that he wanted to stay neutral. He also said that he wanted to have proper relations with Moscow, retaining official visits between both countries, stating also that "If they (the Soviets - P.B., A.P.) ever interfere with Arab politics, they will hear from us (the Arabs – P.B., A.P.)" (*The Suez Crisis* — *And A Different Side of Nasser*, 2013). Considering the growing financial problems of the country and reduction of sales in American weapons to the Middle East, G.A. Nasser decided to ask the USA for financial support to major projects carried out by Egypt, including the Aswan Dam (Kissinger, 1996, pp. 63–64). The Egyptian leader, having in memory results of the Palestine War in 1948–1949, was aware that the weapons owned by the Egyptian Army, in comparison with the Israeli arms, are obsolete and one shall take concrete steps toward their thorough modernization. His efforts were rejected by the USA, which contributed directly to deterioration of relations between Cairo and Washington, leading in October 1956 to the Suez Crisis, which meant reassessment of Egypt's foreign policy to pro-Soviet orientation.

One shall remember that the relations between the USSR and Egypt, in accordance with American intentions, were used for the necessity of financial support of Cairo by Moscow, and during the next decades - also other Third World countries, such as Cuba, Angola and Ethiopia. Egypt served as the key stronghold for the Kremlin, making possible development of influence in the Middle East. It was noticed by the Americans during the presidency of D. Eisenhower, who said "If Egypt finds herself thus isolated from the rest of the Arab world, and with no ally in sight except Soviet Russia, she would very quickly get sick of that prospect and would join us in the search for a just and decent peace in that region" (Gaddis, 1998, p. 222). Counting on the growing economic problems of the USSR, we are justified to assume that the Americans wanted to link more closely the Middle East with the Soviet Bloc in order to lead to the ultimate collapse of the Soviet Empire by dragging it into conflicts far away from its borders. Although the Suez Crisis had formally ended with the victory of the Arab countries and Russians, over the time Moscow was forced to spend more money on immediate needs of Egypt and its agency, which also included Sharaf, Minister of State for Presidential Affairs. This state of affairs had continued until the end of presidency of G.A. Nasser. His successor, Anwar Sadat from the beginning of his term in office wanted to stop the Soviet expansion in Egypt. Being disappointed with - according to his opinion - limited financial assistance for Egypt and technologically obsolete Soviet weapons – in March 1976 he decided to renounce the Soviet-Egyptian Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, which sparked a furious outcry at the Kremlin toward the Egyptian leader. It was noticed even in 1988 in the speech of Andrei Gromyko, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Soviet Union, who said "He has been called "the Egyptian darkness," after the biggest dust cloud in human history, which settled on Egypt 3,500 years ago when the volcanic island of Santorini erupted. All his life he had suffered from megalomania, but this acquired pathological proportions when he became President" (Andrew, Gordievsky 1999, p. 478). In the beginning of the 1980s, Soviet embassy personnel were expelled from Egypt. The relations between these countries were restored only in 1984. During the next decade, the relations between Russia and Egypt were not tight. It was related to the fact that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, both countries, in particular Russia, were immersed in their internal disputes and had no realistic political instruments to return to the Middle East, including Egypt. Only the takeover of power by V. Putin started a period of intensified cooperation between the countries, in terms of politics, economy and culture. It should be noted, however, that Moscow placed greater emphasis on its alliance with Libya that had natural resources. Only after breaking its alliance with Libya, Moscow decided to resume and improve its political relations with Cairo. Their most important implications are described below.

Political Instruments of Russia-Egypt Relations

From the very beginning of V. Putin's rule at the Kremlin, the necessity of Russia's return to the Middle East was noticed, and Egypt was supposed to be one of the key countries in this new geopolitical strategy. Several essential factors had an impact on this assumption. For the Russian Federation, Egypt is one of Middle East countries that can be used to subordinate the Islamic world and to pursue their own interests in this region, related also strictly with economic conditions and its intention to strengthen exports and economic position on markets of energy resources. It was supposed to be facilitated by the bilateral military-technical cooperation between both countries. An additional purpose of Russia's expansion of presence in Egypt was also to establish closer cooperation between Orthodox and Muslim worlds. It was not possible to fulfill these intentions in full until Egypt had been led by the people of Hosni Mubarak. Only the takeover of power by Mohamed Morsi³, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood (see Purat, 2014,

³ Mohamed Morsi, born on August 20, 1951 in Sharqiya. A member of the Islamic religious-political organization known as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Freedom and Justice Party until 2012. As a result of elections in Egypt ending the Arab Spring in Egypt, he has been serving as president of Egypt between June 30, 2012 and July 3, 2013. He was removed from office by armed forces during a coup. It was provoked by earlier protests taking place in 2012. He was tried in an Egyptian court on November 4, 2013. Morsi was accused of inciting his supporters to kill ten people, who died during the protests of November 2012. The people of Egypt rejected decrees issued

pp. 215–229) in 2013, marked a new stage in Russia-Egypt relations. There are no doubts that one of the reasons for the readiness to establish relations between the Kremlin and the new Muslim government was its authoritarian character. For the Russian authorities it has always been easier to find an agreement with authoritarian countries, striving formally to specific national sovereignty, since Moscow had seen in them not only its own reflection, but it also counted on the fact that the authorities in those countries strive for political independence from the West and can fall easy prey to the dismantling of Western alliances in the Middle East. These days, one shall remember that the Russian diplomacy is guided by two political goals in Egypt. The main intention is to show to the public that the image of the Kremlin as a pariah state in the international community, which had been assigned to Moscow after its annexation of the Ukraine, is no more valid. Egypt as a country with ties to Moscow and special privileges during the times of G.A. Nasser, serves as a perfect launching pad for Russia's return to the Middle East. Egyptian analyst Bessma Momani, professor at the Balsillie School of International Affairs and the University of Waterloo, admits that Russia's attitude toward Egypt and the Middle East results from the will to be recognized in the region. He suggests that from the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia in the global safety system was a minor player and now it wants to regain its lost status of superpower, but the truth is that the current position of Russia is not even close to the Soviet time besides its rhetoric in the global scene and veto power at the UN Security Council. B. Momani claims that Russians in the Middle East are nothing more than a middle power in international relations. According to his opinion, Russia's rising role in the region can be possible in the coming years, since the Russians enjoy dealing with authoritarian or military-backed regimes, such as Egypt's, because it reminds them of their own government, which is more stable in comparison with democracies, where political currents change quickly with the takeover of power by different regimes (Halawa, 2013). Minister Shoigu told his Egyptian counterpart, Col. Gen. Sedki Sobhy about Russia's intentions toward Egypt: "Egypt is a most important strategic partner of Russia in North Africa and the Middle East. We are interested in the leading role of Cairo in strengthening security and stability in the region. The topic of "jointly combating terrorism" dominated the talks, and Russian ministers were eager to ensure that Moscow gets a "priority partner" status infighting terrorism alongside Cairo, which was confirmed in Sergey Lavrov's

by then president M. Morsi. On June 18, 2016, M. Morsi was found guilty of spying for Qatar and sentenced to life in prison. On September 16, 2017 in another trial regarding spying for Qatar, passing state secrets and classified documents, he was sentenced to 25 years in prison.

words, to help "block the channels used to deliver financial support, weapons and recruit new fighters" (Sukhov, 2017). Aiman Samer, an Egyptian expert on international relations, told "Sputnik" that Russia and Egypt are committed to fight extremism in the Middle East, since both countries see how "militants return home and undermine security. Russia has urged the international community to support Egypt's initiative at the UN Security Council aimed at cooperating and sharing intelligence data on the militants who return home from Syria and Iraq. Egypt has already had an experience of working with fighters who came back from Afghanistan." For the Kremlin, the mentioned visit of head of diplomacy in Egypt, which should be emphasized, is only one of the steps of the Middle East policy. It is no coincidence that the meeting between S. Lavrov and Shoigu in Egypt took place during D. Trump's visit to the Middle East and receiving of other leaders of the region by V. Putin, including Mohammad bin Salmana, Deputy Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia and most likely the successor of the current ruler in Riyadh. One shall not forget that in the face of the possibility of D. Trump's return to traditional alliances - with Israel and Saudi Arabia - Moscow will try, also through Egypt, to balance American political influences in the Middle East. For the Russians, this new strategy of the American president will surely pose a certain challenge and an opportunity to restore the situation that took place in the 1960s and 1970s, when there was a clear division that lasted until the end of the Cold War, to the American-Jewish and Russian-Arab alliances. Russia thus became an attractive partner because its history of non-involvement in the internal politics of its allied states, with the exception of post-Soviet states. In the same time, Moscow can fill the security void left by the West in the Middle East, which is currently demonstrating in Syria. From the Russian perspective, Egypt represents yet another bulwark of security against Western encroachment, a symmetric response of NATO expansion, "Eastern Partnership," and support by these forces "color revolutions" in Eastern Bloc countries (Hawk, Deiss, Watson, 2016).

In the context of Russia's policy in Egypt, one shall also remember Russia's policy in Libya. Considering the diarchy reigning in this country after the fall of M. Gaddafi, all important players in the international arena, in particular Russia, try to win something for themselves. The international community was greatly concerned after finding out that Russia deployed armed forces on the western border of Egypt in order to support Mohamed Manfour, commander of an air base in the proximity of Benghazi. In its multifaceted game with Libya, in all likelihood, the Russians support General Khalifa Haftar, whose army defeated radical Islamists in Libya in 2014. K. Haftar is also supported by Egypt and the Uni-

ted Arab Emirates, since militants loyal to the general control Cyrenaica, which has rich resources of crude oil and natural gas, refineries and trafficking routes (see. Russian specialists operate in Libya, 2017). Another reason to improve Russia-Egypt relations is abandoning by Cairo Syrian refugees staying in Egypt. Representing his nationalistic pragmatism, President Fattah el-Sisi and his top officials believe that it is better to establish relations with Moscow and improve relations with Iran than to support the Syrian opposition, which has frequently been backed by groups and states hostile to Egypt, such as Turkey. Such attitude of the Egyptian authorities is caused by recognizing the Muslim Brotherhood as the main enemy of the military government in Egypt (Dergham) and focusing their attention on propaganda campaign in Qatar, which actively supports the Brotherhood that is persecuted in Egypt in both material and logistic aspects. Development of Russia-Egypt relations is worth analyzing since contrary to Russia-Egypt and Russia-Iran relations, until 2013 Egypt represented pro-Western foreign policy. It seems probable that in an age of Western structural crisis and reluctance of the new American administration to solve political problems in the Middle East and shifting the center of gravity of its policy to the Pacific region and US domestic issues, Russia serves for Egypt as an opportunity to improve its own negotiating position in discussions with the United States and other countries. It is also worth remembering that in an age of the migrant crisis, the Western countries are not able to fully support the Middle East region, including Egypt, which is related to the declining interest in Cairo. It seems justified a statement that the Western politicians understood that the Arab Spring of 2011, at a long perspective was conducted in an unsuccessful and ineffective way, not changing a lot in global safety architecture, frequently contributing to increasing poverty in the region (see The Arab Spring, 2011). One of the best examples of disappointment with Western countries is Egypt, whose people, manifesting in 2011, hoped for radical improvement of living standards, believing that Western countries would launch a special support program for the country. It did not happen in real life. Consecutive changes of governments and return to military rules after M. Morsi's overthrow led also to change of foreign priorities among the top ruling officials of President Fattah el-Sisi.

Despite many opinions among Egyptian ruling and social elites, eager to reach an agreement with Russia, there are also opinions that Russia is not a proper partner for Egypt. Such view is expressed by, among others, analyst Mohammed Nosseir. He is convinced that the downing of the Russian plane in the Sinai in October 2015 clearly confirmed to Egypt and the world that V. Putin plays politics at the expense of its own innocent citizens, and Russia's claim that it maintains its re-

lationship with other countries that experienced similar terrorist attacks on its people, its claim that it is protecting its citizens' safety is patently ridiculous. In addition, according to the analyst – Russia's lethal policy has a negative impact on Egypt's revenues from tourism due to permanent terrorist threat. He is convinced that the foreign policy of Egypt should search for opportunities to develop its relations with countries with developed economies and infrastructure, anti-bureaucratic and anti-corrupt values, and not with Russia, where bureaucracy and corruption are common denominators, just like in Egypt. El-Sisi's policy eager to improve relations with Russia is hasty and focused only on temporary political advantage. The author also has concerns that thanks to Egypt, Russia will be back for good in the Middle East, where it is widely present only is Syria. He estimates that the increasing position of Russia will be also unfavorable for the Egyptian society, since it will sense deterioration of living standards and increase in military spending, closely tied with "improvement" of relations with the Kremlin (Nosseir, 2017).

Partial reorientation of Egypt's policy to Russia seems also relate to the frustration of the authorities in Cairo regarding America's foreign policy, supporting the rich countries from the Persian Gulf, in particular Qatar. The last severance of diplomatic relations between both countries, due to support offered by the Sunni monarchy to the Muslim Brotherhood and insufficient reaction from D. Trump's administration, from the point of view of Egypt, was a cause of frustration among Egyptian elites, which want to prove not only to the nation, but also to themselves that Egypt is able to change its international priorities, not waiting for approval from the United States. The situation was deteriorated by the fact that Egypt was the target of ISIS jihadists and the authorities from Cairo demanded from Washington the same support as provided to Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Israel. In Egypt alone it is known that the American administration is both reluctant and ineffectual to stop a possible intrusion of Daesh members to the Egyptian territory (Hawk, Deiss, Watson, 2016). It seems justified a statement that President el-Sisi takes revenge on the Americans for their reluctant attitude to include the Sinai to the anti-terrorist campaign within the fight with Islamic State, making a turn toward Russia and states with certain independence from the USA. The Egyptians, struggling with terrorist problems, believe that American support is scarce and thus they look for other allies. The authorities in Cairo do not reflect in this way their willingness to fight against ISIS in Syria and Iraq, not only due to internal reasons, but also – as it seems – due to reluctance to enhance the tension with Israel, as a result of possible change of power in Egypt to one that is unfavorable to Israel as a result of Egypt joining the war against ISIS in these countries. There is no

doubt that the takeover of power by President el-Sisi strengthened the position of advocates of continuation of Egypt's policy friendly to Tel-Aviv and unwillingness to change the Camp David Accords negotiated between both countries. President Morsi, who was removed from power, was very critical about the terms of the Accord, believing that it was unfavorable to Egypt. Just before his fall, he decided to go on a trip to Teheran (Tisdall, 2012), which possibly led to his ultimate withdrawal and stopping of more extensive political and economic reforms in the country.

In the context of these deliberations, one shall remember that the current Egyptian diplomacy in development of its political relations with Moscow is guided by two goals. The first one is an attempt to suggest the new American administration the self-assurance of Egypt in the international arena, and the second one – the will to force it to pursue certain postulates – including joint activity in solving the Arab-Israeli conflict, providing better conditions to the safety of the Persian Gulf and proper coordination and cooperation between the intelligence. For Cairo, preventing the reinforcement of the position of the rich countries in the Persian Gulf, in particular Saudi Arabia and Qatar (in the case of the former country, the emphasis is placed on the fight for economic influences, and in the case of the second one - Qatar's long-lasting cooperation with the Muslim Brotherhood, not supported by Egypt) (Bielicki, 2017) -is fundamental and thus the Egyptians expect greater involvement of Washington in solving these problems. Considering that D. Trump's administration is involved in many global issues, Egypt unambiguously suggests its closer ties with Russia. However, despite the Russian-Egyptian cooperation dating from June 2009 thanks to a meeting between President H. Mubarak and his Russian counterpart D. Medvedev who signed a 300-page document detailing a 10-year strategic partnership between the signatories, Egyptian political circles notice that cooperation with the Russian Federation will not replace the actual relations between Cairo and the United States, in particular in the scope of military support. Let's remind that ever since the signing of the peace treaty with Israel in 1979, Egypt has received military and financial aid from the US that totals \$1.3 billion yearly, coming in the shape of weaponry, specialized equipment, spare parts and technical training in US training centers and military bases. The US military has achieved tight control over the supplying of weapons to the Egyptian army. Possible Russian supplies in similar quantity and technology are more modest. Therefore, we should agree with the statement made by North Africa Project Director of the International Crisis Group, Issandr El Amrani, who claims that "A more accurate description would be that Egypt is sending a warning to its original ally that other cards could be played to push toward the resumption of military aid." Despite his pro-American at-

titude, the Egyptian diplomat notices the need to establish with Russia a closer cooperation in solving Middle East problems, saying that: "Russia is interested in finding regional allies that will support or at least accept its position on the Syria conflict and generally expanding its diplomatic cloud in the region." He also says that Egypt's declining interest in the Syrian crisis will make possible cooperation with Russia, which should be treated with some understanding, because it has been fighting a Muslim insurgency in its own territory for two decades, including Chechnya, has a large Muslim minority and borders many Muslim-majority countries. Due to this reason, the Kremlin should have an interest in good relations with the Islamic world and in preventing international networks of support for its own Islamists from opening. I.E. Amrani underlines that we have to wait for possible results of increased cooperation between Russia and Egypt (Halawa, 2013). Syria is for Egypt only a peripheral problem, but the Civil War in Libya, where Islamist formations, including ISIS, take advantage of support coming from Persian Gulf states, constitutes a direct threat due to several reasons. Libya can be used as a starting point for attacks on the West, and the long-term goal of ISIS can be the takeover of control over Egypt and the Suez Canal. Norhan al-Sheikh, political science professor at Cairo University and an expert on Egyptian-Russian relations, expresses his doubts regarding the necessity of establishing cooperation between Cairo and Russia. He said "I can't figure out the reasons for the exaggerated media hype over this visit (between V. Putin and Fattah el-Sisi), as it's merely a step with in the 2009 agreement. Why do some people insist that it means Egypt has abandoned alliances and dependency on Western forces and returned to the Eastern side?" According to the professor, the US-Egypt relations cannot be somehow replaced by the Russia-Egypt relations due to the limited financial and economic possibilities of the Kremlin, considering - for instance - the negotiated funds for the supplying of weapons" (Halawa, 2013). Despite the closer cooperation between Russia and Egypt, there is no doubt that President el-Sisi will make sure that Egypt will be wholly independent of the Russian Federation. Referring to establishing of a Russian military base in Sidi Barrani, he said - "Unfortunately, some Egyptian media gave this news without checking its validity. There never has been and there never will be any Russian military bases or foreign military bases in Egypt." This statement was in contradiction with opinions presented by Russian media, including Izvestia, writing that talks on this matter move in the right direction (see: *Egypt says "no" to Russia*. *There will be no military base*).

In this analysis we should consider the fact that Egypt and Russia also share increasingly convergent views on key regional issues or terrorism. The once friendly policy of the Kremlin to terrorist groups, such as Hamas or equally radical or-

ganizations was aggravated, and Moscow does not support them in the same way as during the Cold War. What's interesting, the election of Donald Trump was warmly embraced by Cairo with hope that his strong presidency will be conducive to reach an agreement with the authoritarian rule in Cairo. Moreover, the development of Egypt-Russia relations is perceived by Washington with certain satisfaction, since the Americans want to prevent any destabilization of the Egyptian state, and cooperation with the Kremlin can contribute to certain strengthening of its status in international relations. Being aware of the declining role of human rights in the strategy of American diplomacy and D. Trump's return to George W. Bush's policy, Egypt can become a valuable partner for the Americans in solving Middle East problems in the future, despite repressive measures against fundamentalists taken by President Fattah el-Sisi and more liberal political opponents. In addition, Egypt can be one of the potential common points of the American-Russian cooperation in the Middle East (M. Wahid-Hanna, 2017). Syrian defense analyst Hasan Hasan, claiming that Egypt is a leader in the region, said that "Egypt's capabilities are affected by its struggling economy. At the same time we can point to Russia's new role in the region. The state of affair on the Syrian battlefield and recent victories have an immediate impact on politics. Russia has demonstrated its readiness to take responsibility for what is happening. Hasan further said that Donald Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia would not help to tackle terrorism since some of Washington's allies sponsor armed radical groups." He also adds that the Egypt-Russia alliance is a challenge for the United States policy and its rapprochement with Saudi Arabia (see: Russia and Egypt committed to counter US-Saudi policy in Mideast). Therefore we should agree with the suggestion mentioned above that despite contracts for ammunition signed between Cairo and Moscow, there can be no question of the end of American dominance in Egypt, and making such claims is premature, also due to Russian entanglement in Syria and Ukraine as well as economic problems of the Kremlin. The most probable scenario features Egypt's willingness to maintain the good relations with both the United States and Russia (Chęć, 2014).

The three existing problems in Russia-Egypt relations apply to the fight with terrorism, situation in Libya and Syria-Saudi relations, in which the Saudi position is in contradiction with B. Assad's regime, supplying weapons and money to insurgents fighting with him, which is in conflict with the stance of Moscow and Cairo, supporting the Syrian president. According to political scientist Gevorg Mirzayan, establishing of Russia-Egypt cooperation regarding reconciliation between these countries will improve their mutual relations and contribute to solve their disagreements, including the issue regarding resuming flights to Egypt.

According to G. Mirzayan, there seems to be an impasse in this matter, since Cairo regards the presence of Russian security experts as a breach of its sovereignty (see Russian-Egyptian relations experiencing renaissance). Political tensions, however, do not interfere with gradual intensification of mutual relations in economic and military aspects.

Economic and Military Aspects of Russia-Egypt Relations

Economic issues play an interesting role in bilateral relations. According to Anna Maria Dymer, an analyst from the Polish Institute of International Affairs, thanks to a growing rapprochement between Egypt and Russia, the latter wants to gain additional raw material markets facing the declining role of Gazprom in Europe. She said that in 2016, Rosneft supplied to Egypt some LNG, purchased on the global market, and is supposed to send additional ten LNG carriers based on a contract signed with the Egyptian Natural Gas Holding Company EGAS. What's interesting, the Russian company is supposed to cooperate in Egypt with the Italian ENI company on gas exploration at Egypt's Zohr gas field (Dymer, p. 1). Facing Russia's problems related to raw material supplies and falling oil prices (currently, the price of oil is 62.73 U.S. dollars per barrel) (Crude oil. Quotations of raw materials, (2017) Moscow searches for new energy markets, and Egypt seems to be a good fit. More concrete issues were discussed during the meeting between Fattah el-Sisi and V. Putin in Sochi in June 2014, including the project "New Suez Canal," involving the construction of a route connecting the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea and establishing of an industrial zone in its proximity, in which the Russians will have their share (see: New, better Suez Canal. Historic investment reaches end of project, 2015). In addition, a free trade agreement was signed and an intention to increase trade turnover between both countries, estimated at about 3 billion dollars. The main strength of Egypt is the fact that it holds sea, land and air pathways of great international importance. It is expected that cooperation with Egypt would help Russia to pursue its interests in the Middle East region. Interactions between the two countries could contribute to the sustainability of Russia's position in the Islamic world, the creation of favorable conditions for the development of Russian regions with high Muslim populations, the preservation and strengthening of Russia's interests in the world energy market. It could also serve as an opportunity for acquiring by Moscow new technologies as well as aiding the exports of goods and services within the framework of bilateral military-technical cooperation, and in the field of aerospace (Issaev, 2017).

We should remember that Egypt's main trading partners are still EU countries, which account for 30.3% of the foreign trade turnover, while Arab countries represent 22.9%, other Asian countries – 19.6%, and the US accounts for 7.6%. In turn, Russia was only the seventh most important trade partner for Egypt in 2015, even below Turkey, whose relations with Cairo severely deteriorated after the coup that removed M. Morsi from power. For internal reasons, based on militarization in both countries, military-technical cooperation continues to form the basis of Russian-Egyptian cooperation, despite not the best economy (Issaev, 2017).

On the other hand, military deals in Russian-Egyptian relations constitute the fundamental attempt to understand the growing expansion of Moscow. It should be emphasized that in recent years financial support from the United States has significantly deteriorated. Although Washington is officially favorable to the rule of Fattah el-Sisi, already during B. Obama's presidency the bone of contention was Cairo's unwillingness to engage in democratization of the country and clear persecution of the Muslim Brotherhood. During that time the Operation Bright Star was canceled along with the decision to give to Cairo \$300 million in a loan. Obama also cut supplies of M1A1 Abrams, F-16 fighters, anti-ship Harpoon missiles and Apache attack helicopters (Chęć, 2014). B. Obama was also dissatisfied with Cairo's fierce opposition to an opening to Iran. Facing the declining financing from Washington, estimated at \$1.3 billion (Cheć, 2014) and increasing terrorist threat in Egypt (for instance, Sinai attacks), the authorities faced the necessity of opening to other countries, including Russia. Being aware of the situation, the Kremlin seized the opportunity. Based on the arrangements of the meeting between both leaders, the Russian enterprise Rosoboron export received an order to supply military equipment, contributing to strengthening of Russia's position on the global market of arms exporters (Cheć, 2014). What's interesting, such increase means the return to the Soviet times, when the USSR - particularly starting from the second half of the 1970s – started to play an increasingly important role in this matter, exporting weapons to the countries with ties to terrorism, including the PLO and Libya. Therefore, there is no doubt that Egypt can constitute in this regard a considerable opportunity for the Russian Federation to restore its position of one of the leaders in production and export of a wide variety of weapons and ammunition. Cairo, sending to Moscow yet another order regarding additional weapons for its fight with terrorism, will in all likelihood obtain Mi-35 and Mi-17 combat helicopters, as well as S-300 missile systems, Kornet anti-tank missile systems, MIG-29 fighter aircraft and radar equipment to defend the coast of Egypt. It is also probable that the Russians will conduct training for Egyptian soldiers as well as cooperation between the intelligence of both co-

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untries (Cheć, 2014). In addition, it is worth mentioning that in September 2014 a \$3.5 billion arms contract was signed. It was finalized after the election of Fattah el-Sisi as president and his first trip abroad to Moscow. Let's remember that the Kremlin, signing new arms contracts, tries to prove to public opinion in the West that despite the sanctions Moscow is still able to enter to military alliances and continues to modernize its own defense potential. Referring to the earlier dominance in arms trade in the Soviet political and military reality, Russia still senses the need of selling these types of products in order to stimulate its own economy, searching for new outlets. The Middle East is perfect for this purpose. The cooperation between Russia and Egypt now includes the possibility of establishing a Russian airbase in Egypt and sending Russian paratroopers to Egypt, who would provide training to their Egyptian counterparts. Egypt is also shifting its military procurement plans toward Russia. The two Mistral-class ships that have been recently acquired by Egypt will receive the originally planned Russian electronics suite and will carry Russian helicopters. There are discussions of MiG fighter sales to Egypt, and the country has already received a Molniya-class missile boat (Hawk, Deiss, Watson, 2016). Finally, we need to remember that armed forces of both countries systematically take part in military exercise "Protectors of Friendship," which recently involved about 500 soldiers from both countries. According to Dymer, the area of joint training encompassed the desert. Thanks to this military exercise, Egypt acquired fifty Ka-52K combat helicopters, stationing on two Mistral ships, designed earlier for the Russians (Dymer, 2017, p. 1).

However, the most important role in the context of military relations between Russia and Egypt is played by the 2015 Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation, which was adopted, according to Deputy Prime Minister Rogozin: "because of changes in the international political situation and the objective strengthening of Russia as a great naval power. [...] When we speak about priority setting in the new doctrine, the main emphasis is placed on the Atlantic Ocean and Arctic territories. It involves primarily the Northern Sea Route, which is gaining in importance and requires from Russia building of a fleet of nuclear-powered icebreakers. Our attention to the Atlantic is justified by NATO's eastward expansion" (Muczyński, 2015). It is accurately indicated by Prof. Piotr Mickiewicz who said that the maritime doctrine in Russia's policy anticipates implementation of two objectives. The first one is to assure safety to the country, taking into consideration its maritime territories and protection of national interests on marine waters, which is particularly reflected in Russia's political strategies towards NATO, regarded as the main enemy of the country (Bielicki, 2016, p. 75, see: Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation Approved by President of the Russian Federation V. Putin on 12 February 2013 Russian General Calls for Preemptive Nuclear Strike Doctrine Against NATO). The second objective is to strengthen the position of naval power and to assure pursuing of Russia's maritime interests in the form of unlimited use of the concept of "freedom of the seas" at every water body having this status, guarantee full sovereignty on internal waters and territorial seas, and to maintain full jurisdiction and the right to exercise sovereign rights on the continental shelf of Russia, particularly the right to recognize resources, their exploration and extraction, and to conduct ecological undertakings in these water bodies. According to the author, it is also important to create conditions that allow to utilize maritime resources and transportation advantages of water bodies in the economic policy of the Federation and its individual regions. He believes that the last component of Russia's expansion on seas is to assure safety to navigation and communication and to develop a system preventing marine pollution (Mickiewicz, 2016, p. 73).

Summary

Summarizing the analysis above we have to state that the Egypt-Russia relations will gradually improve in the near future. Nevertheless, we should not expect a return to the close alliance like during the times of G.A. Nasser. The current configuration of the international system in the Middle East does not allow to form a strong alliance by Moscow, since it has to take into account other players from the Middle East, and above all it has many other problems to solve. In addition, the interdependence system disables Cairo from breaking its strategic ties with Washington, without which it would stop to play an important role in the region in the longer term. The current policy of D. Trump toward Egypt is, in general, vague. It is not known if the American president would want to strengthen his relations with Cairo, which despite the above mentioned capabilities does not have significant petroleum resources, like Saudi Arabia or Qatar, and has weaker economy than the mentioned countries. The new American administration, based on the priority of economic factor that is required to restore the dominating position of the United States in the world, can ignore Cairo, which undoubtedly will lead to reassessment of alliances, like it was before 1991. It seems, however, that in an age of escalating tensions in Middle East countries and the growing role of China, the probability of such clear division like during the times of the Soviet Union is rather low. On the other hand, prioritizing the rich countries on the Persian Gulf in American policy can lead to establishing of an alternative political-military bloc in the Middle East, encompassing – for instance – Egypt, Turkey or Iran, which is under a hidden Russian protectorate, creating a competition for the United States and Sunni powers in the region. Therefore, infiltration of Russia-Egypt relations in the near future can become very useful in a proper judgment of the actual, although concealed goals of both players of international policy.

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