

Egypt's Security Policy in the Post Arab-spring Periods: Pragmatism and Fluidity in the Wake of Renewed Regional Security Threats

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Abstract: This article investigates the Egyptian security affairs in the post-Arab Spring periods. It focuses on the new policies adopted by the Al-Sisi government to safeguard the state security against volatile circumstances, particularly in response to the renewed security threats along its land borders during the Arab Spring and beyond. Furthermore, this article will also analyze the implication of those changing policies not only for the Egyptian security affairs, but also for regional security involving the Saudi as well as Israeli security interests. In the wake of complex nature of such regional security threats, this article poses the questions as to what are the security threats faced by the Egyptian government along its land borders and what strategies adopted by the Al-Sisi government to overcome those threats. Employing regional security complex theory, this article identifies security threats emerged in the Egyptian land borders in the post-Arab Spring periods. The changing strategy of transferring Tiran and Sanafir islands in 2016 from the Egyptian government to Saudi Arabia and the improving bilateral relations between Egypt and Saudi Arabia will be discussed. The article will also analyze how those strategies employed by the Al-Sisi government influence Egypt's relations with Saudi Arabia and also with Israel, considering the security interests vested in Israeli foreign policy with regards to development in Sinai which is linked to Gaza

1 INTRODUCTION

Egypt has been witnessing another series of multifaceted instability in its history following the victory of the Tahrir revolutionary forces. The implications of such massive domestic turbulence have been widespread not only for the Egyptian political landscape but also for other multi-dimensional sectors and beyond Egypt's domestic affairs. At this juncture, the security problems which are particularly related to Egypt's land and sea borders have been at the utmost concern, due to Egypt's strategic position in the Middle East.

Several geographical spots have been prone to security threats, particularly with the increasing role of the actors involved and their complex interactions. This article focuses on Egypt's land border which could be considered as the buffer zone for Egypt, for it is connected directly to its unstable neighbors; Palestine and Israel.

Sinai has long been a point of 'tradeoff' between Egypt and Israel, not only because it historically recorded the 'ups' and the 'downs' in the relations between Egypt and Israel, but also because it

inevitably linked to political dynamics in Gaza. In the post Arab Spring Periods, the region has become a breeding ground for non-state armed groups to pose security threats for Egypt's adjacent cities along the Suez Canal up to Cairo and also for the global trade and peace on the Egyptian-Israeli borders (Eilam, 2014). Similarly, the post Arab Spring political dynamics in the Gulf of Aqabah had also forced Egypt to reconsider its treaty with Saudi Arabia, regarding the possession of the two Islands, namely Tiran and Sanafir.

Against this background, this article seeks to identify security threats faced by the post-Mubarak government in Sinai and the changing strategies employed to address those threats in the light of regional security complex theory. This article unfolds into three major sections. The first section highlights the theoretical explanation of Regional Security Complex adopted to analyze the issue at hand. The second section explores security problems emerging along the Egyptian land borders in Sinai. The second section elaborates policies adopted by the al-Sisi governments particularly during the periods of 2016-2017.

2 REGIONAL SECURITY COMPLEX THEORY AND SECURITISATION AND DESECURITISATION OF EGYPTIAN LAND BORDER

In "People, State, and Fear", Barry Buzan defines the regional security complex (RSC) as a condition when several countries are mutually connected due to common security problem emerged in their defined territory. In this context, the security problem perceived by a particular country links to security affairs of others. The connection that bind several countries in a security complex can take the form of geographical, political, economic, historical, cultural and strategic interests (Buzan, 1983).

Buzan and Waever then redefined the RSC as a situation in which a group of units perceive the same securitization, desecuritization, or both processes. In this context, the national security problems of one group member could not be resolved separately. With this also, the focus which is previously linked to the state-centric and military-centric approach become much broader. However, the main ideas of this concept remain part of the process of securitization and desecuritization (Buzan & Weaver, 2003).

Securitization is a statement (speech act) carried out by securitizing actors to convince the public that a referent object is facing a serious security threat. Referent objects in securitization itself experience an expansion of security issues, from being initially limited to security issues that tend to be militaristic, then expanding and then covering security issues that are non-military in nature. (Buzan & Weaver, 2003).

Securitization is often used by the ruling elites or the state to gain control over a security issue. A particular issue will also become a security issue depending on the perception of the country's elite on the issue. Therefore, the threat of security that drives the process of securitization is basically not only objective but also has a subjective element. For this reason, in this securitization process, the statement made a state's leader imply security affairs accepted by the public internally or externally (Buzan & Weaver, 2003).

After a security threat can be overcome, security actors (elite or state) generally carry out the process of desecuritization by returning an issue to the normal level. The process of desecuritization itself can be done in four ways, namely *change through stabilization*, *replacement*, *rearticulation*, and *silencing* (Hansen, 2012).

Change through stabilization is the conversion of a security issue into a non-security issue. Then *replacement*, is the replacement of a securitized security issue by replacing the position with other security issues. *Rearticulation* is the conversion of a securitized security issue into a political issue, in this way the political path is taken to be a solution to security threats and dangers. Finally, *silencing* is a process of depoliticizing the issue by marginalizing the issue (Hansen, 2012).

In the context of Egypt security policy after the Arab Spring, the emergence renewed and complex security threats such as terrorism in its land border in Sinai, the destruction of some of economic infrastructure such as gas pipes or the assault of Tourists on the Sinai coast, piracy and arms smuggling in the Red Sea have prompted Egypt issued several security policies to reduce these threats.

Nevertheless, the increased security problem in Egyptian land borders in Sinai in the 2011 post-revolution has not only threatened the security of Egypt, but also become security concern for other countries that are geographically close to Egypt such as Israel and Jordan.

The escalation of terrorist acts in Sinai which was marked by the mushrooming and the strengthening of several militia groups were able to cause threats to Israel which controlled area bordering Sinai. Jordan, which geographically locates near Egypt, also felt security threat stemming from Egyptian borders, especially with regards to the possibility of expanding security threats from Sinai.

The emergence of various threats in this region then led to a security complex for Egypt and several countries neighboring it. So it is not surprising that Egypt then issued a security policy that should take into account its positions to face countries such as Israel or Jordan. In this context, contrary to the common attitude of defending territorial integration, Egypt acted controversially to issue policy of surrendering the Tiran and Sanafir islands in the Tiran strait to Saudi Arabia in 2016. In light of this case, this article analyze why did Egypt made such controversial policy amidst its unstable security and economic condition after the removal of President Mubarak in 2011.

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3 EGYPT AND THE BORDER SECURITY CRISIS IN SINAI

Since the establishment of the Republic of Egypt, the country had persistently faced continuous Security challenges due to its geographical position bordering Israel in the one hand, and connecting to the Arabian Peninsula on the other hand. Consequently, national security interests have become a major concern in both Egypt's domestic and external affairs, for it determines its survival in volatile neighbors and its power relations with both regional and external competitors.

The biggest major security challenges faced by Egyptian new administration after the downfall of Mubarak in 2011 was along its land border in Sinai. It was the first spot witnessing the escalation of security threat in Egypt following the 2011 the *Tahrir* revolution. Although Sinai has experienced security problems prior to the Arab Spring, yet instability increases significantly afterwards, particularly after it was left 'vacuum'. Limited number of security forces was posted in Sinai during the Mubarak administration, despite the increasing security problem there since 2004.

To the surprise of many, the Mubarak regime might consider Sinai and its inhabitants as the second priority in his development plan. This was partly due to the prevailing perception that the Sinai Bedouins maintained cordial relations with Israeli government (Siboni & Barrack, 2014). Such a discriminated view was also linked to different historical and cultural backgrounds between the Sinai Bedouins and most Egyptians. Economic marginalization has only exacerbated the tension between the Sinai Bedouins with the Egyptian government and eventually triggered the emergence of radicalization among them. Throughout the periods of 2004- 2006, a series of bombing attacks targeting foreign tourists had been common in Sinai (Mäkelä, 2014).

This serious security problem gained more currency in 2011 when a group of radical Bedouins attacked the police stations in Rafah and Sheikh Zuwayed. This group also targeted Egyptians military and the government offices in North Sinai. In April 2011, the trans-Sinai pipeline was also hit by the sabotage and attacks which continued until 2012 (Siboni & Barrack, 2014).

Under President Morsi, these security problems were addressed through a dialogical approach involving the Sinai Bedouin communities through the new development plan replacing the earlier failed plan. At least, this strategy was temporary successful to reduce terror attacks in Sinai (Siboni & Barrack, 2014).

However, the ousting of Morsi has once again created instability in Sinai. A month after the removal of Morsi from the presidency, the situation in Sinai has been more unpredictable. A series of attack hit back

several objects, most government offices, and military posts, in North Sinai, SheikhZuweid and Rafah causing 30 people killed and approximately 150 injured (Swale, 2015).

Another serious security problem in Sinai was related to illegal arms trade in cooperation with Rashaid traffickers among the Bedouins. Although most Bedouins involved in arm-trade have been economically motivated, yet the impacts of such illegal actions have been far-reaching. The arms were brought to Egypt through the Sinai Peninsula by ships, often with the help from the bribed Egyptian security officers (Zohar, 2015).

These smuggling activities have contributed to a wider instability not only in Sinai but also in the region. Some important neighboring areas have been involved in the smuggling route. Generally, Sinai and Gaza are major areas destined for the smuggled weapons; and this has dragged Yemen and Sudan into the smuggling route. Most weapons were brought in the beginning from Yemen before they were shipped through the Red Sea to Sudan. From Sudan, those weapons were then dispatched via the land route to the Egyptian border (Zohar, 2015).

Apart from this smuggling issue, more alarming security problem for Egypt in the context of Sinai has been the emerging of multiple actors and their cross-cutting links. *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya* (Hamas) for instant has allegedly made intense contacts with the radical group of Bedouins in Sinai. The group has played an important role in the recruiting the Bedouin youth into extremist activities (Ronen, 2015). the recruiting the Bedouin youth into extremist activities [5]. Another actor who has also posed security threat by the Egyptian government was the Muslim Brotherhood (IM). Since the removal of President Morsi in 2012, this organization turned into an opposition group.

IM has long been historically associated with Hamas. The latter is known as the offspring of IM, for it was established with the help of IM. The early figures of Hamas were also members of the Brotherhood, [6]. IM allegedly made links with other radical groups based in Sinai known as Salafi-Jihadi. Their relationships have been increasingly more intense since the overthrowing of Mubarak's rule in the recent Egyptian revolution. For this reason, IM often expressed their sympathy for this militant Salafi group on several occasions through their affiliated media channels such as Misr al-An or Rabiah TV (Ranko & Nezda, 2016)

Another security threat which Egypt concerned much in Sinai was Israel. Although the two countries have signed the peace agreement, but mistrusts often emerge between them. On 2012, Israel built a 240-kilometer security fence from the Rafah border to Eilat through Sinai. At the same time, Israel also increased the number of its Defense Forces (IDF) along the

border (Mäkelä, 2014). This naturally sent an alarming signal for Egypt. The increased Israeli security activities can be interpreted as a form of threat for Egypt. This raises a security dilemma, because the uncertainty of the intentions of states will lead other states to take security measures with the aim of protecting themselves from the perceived threat, particularly in the wake of a growing mistrust and lack of understanding between states.

Not only that, Egypt is certainly still wary of the Sinai region, which once had been occupied by Israel for fifteen years starting in the 1967 war. Indeed, the occupation was a historical defeat for Egypt which was at that time held strong position in the region. The Sinai occupation ended in 1982 after the two countries agreed to sign a peace agreement in 1979. Egypt gave official recognition for the state of Israel thereafter (Brecher, 2018).

Sinai's occupation by Israel caused historical trauma to Egypt which eventually led to a "cold peace" between Egypt and Israel. Apparently Egypt's decision to accept peace from the the Sinai agreement in 1974 until the 1979 Camp David agreement was significantly affected by the US which rewards aid as a condition to stop the hostility with Israel (Aran & Ginat, 2014). Nevertheless, resistance to Israel continues to occur in the social context. This was demonstrated among others for instance by the prohibition of Egyptian parliamentarians from visiting Israel during Mubarak's reign, the difficulty for entrepreneurs to establish economic cooperation with parties from Israel and the critics from domestic media for whatever Israel did. Cairo has been also unwelcome to the ascendancy of Israel as the central force in the Middle East, for it challenges Egypt's leadership position in the region (Aran & Ginat, 2014). Egypt's suspicious attitude towards Israel has been strongly influenced by the past events; and it has been understandable. Because history, both explicitly and implicitly can influence a country's policies. Particularly in the security aspect, Eliot Cohen argues that history is a lesson for strategic considerations in security matters (Cohen, 2005). Cohen also added that history can influence the establishment of a military or security decision.

Sinai itself is an area that has the potential to be a place of battle between Egypt and Israel should the two countries are in conflict. Therefore, securing Sinai for Egypt is about maintaining the pride or self-respect of the state, in addition to national security. Furthermore, Egypt has also wished to abolish the demilitarization of the region which has been in place for decades as one of the points stipulated in the agreement between the two countries (Eilam, 2014).

However, despite being in a bond of peace agreements, both Egypt and Israel do not relax the strength of each country's military and are prepared to anticipate possible security threats from one another.

One form of preparedness was demonstrated by Egypt in 2012 as they held military exercises at Sinai. According to General Mohammed Hegazy, the exercise was meant to get the Egyptian army prepared if Israel attacked the Suez Canal. In October of the same year, the Egyptian military chief at the time, General Abdul Fattah As-Sisi stated that military activity in Sinai was aimed at preparing Egypt's military readiness for various forms of threats, including those from Israel (Eilam, 2014).

Israel also showed the same level of alert tone, as one of the country's top military officials, Oded Tira, stated in April 2013 that Egypt was a "possible enemy" or a party that could potentially threaten Israel (Eilam, 2014). The country even established a military base in the Negev which is located near Sinai. The military base is the largest in Israel (Hareetz, 2012).

The establishment of the Israeli military base could pose a threat to Egypt. Particularly, considering the background of the establishment of the military base. Its construction has been prepared since the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Sinai, following the peace agreement between the two countries (Claiborne, 2018). Such threat could be even more visible by the disclosure of Israeli nuclear weapons. Various media reports, analysts, writers and think tanks were convinced that Israel has nuclear weapons which the number of warheads most likely reaches 80.

Overall, the geographical complexity combined with socio-political dynamic of Sinai are most likely to pose security threats for Egypt. It is the Egyptian strength and weak points at the same time. The Sinai geographical position connects Egypt with its important neighbors but equally exposes it to the unpredictable circumstances exploding particularly in the wake of new emerging actors.

4 REDUCING RESISTANCE STRATEGY: THE MAKING OF SAUDI ARABIA AS THE MAJOR SPONSOR IN THE SINAI DEVELOPMENT

Egypt are aware of its unstable circumstances, particularly after the removal of Mubarak in 2011. To defend the country in such conditions, the state must strengthen their security. This is a rational choice for a country to avoid potential threats from other countries. The behavior of this country is termed Alex Mintz as deterrence. In this context, the state blocks or prevents possible security hazards from any potential threats that could weaken the national security. In this case, Egypt tried to minimize the potential threat by carrying out development in Sinai, a place that became their weak point. Because a country's insecurity is a combination of various threats and vulnerabilities of a

country. Therefore from the very beginning, Post-Administrations in Egypt has given priorities for developments in Egypt. Both Morsi and Al-Sisi government paid more attention for administrations.

In the context of the Sinai development, Al-Sisi government has taken important step of the making of the Saudis as the major sponsor for development project in Sinai (Sanger, 2014). From the regional security complex theory, this article argues that such policy can give positive outcomes for Egypt in wider aspects.

Saudi is a country that recently made a good relationship with Israel. Although in history it is often in conflict with Israel and both have no history of diplomatic relations, but in recent years Saudi appear to have made clandestine relations with Israel. This can be seen, for example, at the meeting of two important figures from both countries in Washington in June 2015. Anwar Eskhi from Saudi is a former Military General, and Dore Gold from Israel is a former Ambassador to the United Nations who is projected to occupy the position of director general in the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Sanger, 2014).

The Saudis and Israel have been in a relationship since 2014. In that period the two countries have held five meetings. Both often discussed Iran's nuclear program which is seen by both as a threat. In addition, they have an interest stemming from the strengthening of Iran's influence in the region. It is this similarity of interests that makes Saudi and Israeli relations soften.

However, this articles also argues that the cordial relations between Cairo and Riyadh and the making of Saudi as the major partner for economic development in Sinai cannot be isolated from the the security factors Egypt faced in its land border after the Arab Spring.

More specifically, the decision to transfer the two islands; Tiran and Sanafir by al-Sisi government to Saudi administration, though controversial, can be understood from regional security complex theory. From the position of the island, both are located in the intersection of the four countries namely Egypt, Saudi, Israel, and Jordan. The Gulf of Aqaba, the water area in which the two island is located is a strategic point. Any geopolitical clash in the region, involving one country will drag another countries into conflict.

It is important at this point to see the history of the islands of Tiran and Sanafir as it is also necessary to look at the history of the founding of Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Because on the historical journey of these two countries, the two islands located at the entrance of the Gulf of Aqaba were not infrequently considered as an important element in the attitude of the two countries at the beginning the period of determining the territorial line of each region. Thus, historical lines that are quite relevant to be drawn as a starting point to see the dynamics of two countries related to these two islands can be started in 1906, when the

administrative line Turco-Egyptian was proposed by the British (Enazy, 2017). The relevance between the 1906 boundary line and Tiran and Sanafir Islands lies in the fact that the line was used by Egypt as a tool for claiming the two islands. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia also has claims on the two islands on the grounds that the two islands are actually part of the Hijaz Kingdom, which is an embryo from the country of Saudi Arabia (Enazy, 2017).

Then in every subsequent chapter of history, these two islands are often included in the dynamics of relations between Egypt and Saudi Arabia. But the most decisive period of the history of the two islands occurred in the 1950s. The recognition of the Egyptian claim to Tiran and Sanafir began during the Arab-Israeli war in 1948. In March 1949, Israel succeeded in occupying the Ummu Rashrah port and continued to occupy the Eilat area in the Gulf of Aqaba. Egypt planned to prevent Israel from widening its territorial gains, and to do so Egypt needs to occupy Tiran Island as the most strategic place, as they locates the entrance to the Gulf of Aqaba. To carry out this strategy, Egypt requested permission from the Saudis to place military forces on Tiran Island (Enazy, 2017).

Saudi then responded Egypt's request positively by allowing Egyptian to take necessary actions. Through a telegram from King Ibn Saud on January 17, 1950, the Saudis openly granted permission to deploy troops to Egypt (Enazy, 2017). Upon the licensing, the Egyptian government through their Ministry of Defense instructed the occupation of the two islands and placed weapons and raised the Egyptian flag on the islands of Tiran and Sanafir (Enazy, 2017).

Then in 1954, Egypt confirmed its claim to the island of Tiran and Sanafir in the eyes of the international community. The claim is based on historical data that the two islands were once included in the Egyptian administration in 1906. This claim is also based on the Saudi agreement that freed Egypt from occupying the two islands in 1950 (Enazy, 2017). After 1954, officially Tiran and Sanafir were under Egyptian rule. The long historical value possessed by the islands of Tiran and Sanafir is in line with the strategic value inherent in these two islands for the Egyptian defense line, even more than that the two islands also have strategic value in the economic aspect.

Strategic values from the economic aspects of Tiran and Sanafir Paul A. Porter's work entitled "The Gulf of Aqaba: An International Airway, Its Significance to International Trade" explained that the location of the island at the entrance of the Gulf of Aqaba made the two islands important to the world trade route. There are four countries around the island and the bay which have mutual interests, they are

Egypt, Israel, Jordan and Saudi Arabia (Porter, 1957). In line with Porter, Abir (2005) also mentioned that the water area had become a pathway for Israel to establish trade relations with East Africa and Asian countries. Israel was particularly concerned with any activities which could disrupt its way to advance its energy projects in these areas. For instance, Israel had difficult times to build an oil pipeline from Eilat to Haifa to supply the country's energy needs at when the six-day war broke out in 1967. This war made the Israeli economic activity stalled (Abir, 2005).

What Porter said about the strategic value of the Gulf of Aqaba is indeed relevant if related to the current context. Now, Israel does have vested interest in the Gulf. The official website of the country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs mentioned specifically an explanation of how important the area is for Israel. It highlights the strategic position of the Gulf of Aqabah as a strategic shipping route for several countries around it (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017). Israel also has several strategic planning in the economic sector in the region. One of them is the agreement between Israel and Jordan, in which the two countries are committed to cooperate in economic and cultural aspects in the Eilat (Israel) and Aqaba (Jordan) regions. Israel also has a Taba-Eilat-Aqaba Macro Area (TEAM) Working Group program consisting of Egypt, Israel and Jordan. The program aims to increase development in the area around the Gulf of Aqaba (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017).

The description above shows that the Gulf of Aqaba is a place of intersection for strategic interests of several countries in the region. Therefore, Tiran and Sanafir Islands which are located at the entrance of the two islands also become very important. So it is not surprising that the Israeli Minister of Defense, Moshe Yaloon, issued a statement about the Saudis regarding the transfer of the sovereignty of Tiran and Sanafir (Wagner, 2016).

The strategic value of the actual political aspects of the two islands is in their second position in the geopolitical map of the surrounding countries. This geographical position is indeed very important, because the geographical location of a region from a country will be able to influence the behavior of a country and be taken into consideration from its government in determining a policy or political decision (Ayorloo & Turk, 2015).

Geographical factors like this can be an advantage because the waters area is a strategic place if there is a geopolitical conflict that occurs between countries around the waters such as Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia alone. The two islands can be one of the strongholds in the ocean (Ayorloo & Turk, 2015).

Egypt actually possesses its own interests in the two islands. Apart from the location of the islands'

strategic position, it is also due to the strategic value the Egyptian could gain by controlling them. In addition to control over the Suez Canal, which is one of the most strategic waterways in the world, the ownership of these two islands will strengthen Egypt's position in controlling international trade routes (Ayorloo & Turk, 2015). Control over the Suez Canal coupled with control of the Tiran Strait will make Egypt the most dominant country in controlling the waterways in the area. However, this did not happen because the Camp David article 13 agreement between Egypt and Israel stated that the waters of the Tiran Strait must be open to all ships from various countries (Ayorloo & Turk, 2015).

Historically the two islands possess more strategic value for Egypt. It had been an important battleground in the six day war in 1967. During this time, Egypt, which had earlier obtained authority over the occupation of the island, was displaced by Israeli military forces occupying the repelling Egyptian military power in the strait of Tiran. With its strategic value and historical facts, the two islands are an important element in Egypt's national security. Nevertheless, this strategic aspect could not be fully utilized by Egypt because it was entrenched by the Camp David agreement with Israel. One of important point stipulated in the Agreement is forbidding the establishment of Egyptian military power in the region (Ayorloo & Turk, 2015). With such conditions, Egypt had limited capability to protect its security from the possession of Tiran and Sanafir Island.

From this perspective Al-sisi decision to transfer the two islands to the Saudi government was plausibly understood as it could give Egypt better position in dealing with Israel. In this context, the transfer of the two island ownership, will change the authority which administer them. The two islands will be under Saudi Arabia. It was Saudi Arabia which would directly face Israel in Tiran and Sanafir islands, should a tension arises with Israel in the Gulf of Aqabah. Israel is seen as a country that provides continuous threats to the security of the Middle East region, Since the first Arab-Israeli war (Korany, 2012). In this context, the conflict has been a driving force for the emergence of regional militarization. Other benefit that could Egypt enjoy was the deterrent effect stems from the Saudi military. Although Saudi military strength is not as strong as Israel, its strong alliance with America can be a factor that can reduce the threat from Israel, for Israel itself is another major US alliance in the Middle East. This could also serve to rectify the ties between Egypt and the US which has loosened in recent years. So the attitude of Egypt here can be understood as a rational tactical step. This at the same time confirms the tendency of state to increase its national security or political power. Egypt acts rationally in this case to issue policies that could guarantee its security and

strengthen its position vis a vis stronger toes in its neighborhood.

Military capability and alliance patterns are fundamental factors in security. Both can serve as the triggers and deterrents from conflict. The policy of the two island surrender by Egypt demonstrated strong intention from the Egyptian part to build strong relations with the Saudis, restore security stability and avoid the potential additional threats that could come from Israel.

5 CONCLUSION

This study focuses on Egyptian land border security threats emerged in the post 2011 revolutionary era. The period limit analyzed in this study began in 2016 until 2017. During this period, Egypt carried out several important policies to safeguard its land borders and stabilize its internal security in Sinai. In this context, Cairo moved to intensified its relations with Saudi Arabia which subsequently became its major sponsor in economic development in Sinai. Nevertheless, Egypt also made controversial move of transferring the two Islands: Tiran and Sanafir in 2016.

This article argues that the policies of taken by Cairo were made in regional security context. Egypt's security problems in Sinai has considered wider regional security repercussions. In this context, Egypt needed to control the Bedouins in Sinai and their networks to Israel and radical groups emerged in the post-Arab Springs. The inclusion of Saudi Arabia as major economic partner in Sinai to stabilize economic development in Sinai. economic stability in Sinai would in the long run reduce security problems in Sinai. the stable Sinai would also beneficial for Israel, as Israel. Additionally, Egypt acted to transfer the two islands to Saudi government due to its regional interests. The geostrategic positions of Tiran and Sanafir islands which is at the gates of Gulf of Aqaba has benefited in Egypt for it would get a better position vis a vis Israel, for it is Saudi now which should face Israel should the tension arises in the region.

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