



**NAVAL
POSTGRADUATE
SCHOOL**

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

FOREIGN POLICY UNDER PRESIDENT AL-SISI

by

John Haddad

June 2018

Thesis Advisor:

James A. Russell

Co-Advisor:

Afshon P. Ostovar

Approved for public release. Distribution is unlimited.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington, DC 20503.				
1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)		2. REPORT DATE June 2018	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Master's thesis	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE FOREIGN POLICY UNDER PRESIDENT AL-SISI			5. FUNDING NUMBERS	
6. AUTHOR(S) John Haddad				
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A			10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER	
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.				
12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release. Distribution is unlimited.			12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE A	
13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words) <p>President al-Sisi's regional foreign policy decisions have taken a different approach compared to past Egyptian presidencies. Understanding where Egypt is headed and the backbone of al-Sisi's foreign policies is important not only for U.S. interests in the Middle East and North Africa, but for regional security and stability. This thesis attempts to explain how and why al-Sisi makes his foreign policy decisions by examining his policies on three ongoing conflicts: the Gaza Strip, the Syrian crisis, and the Yemeni civil war. Additionally, this thesis examines and compares previous Egyptian presidents' foreign policies with al-Sisi. Within these case studies, three hypotheses are tested: that al-Sisi's foreign policy concentrates on protecting the regime and supporting its interests, that al-Sisi's foreign policy concentrates on protecting national interests and improving quality of life for Egyptians, or a combination of the two. While regime and national interests differ in each case study, al-Sisi has demonstrated that he takes into account both factors in his foreign policy decision-making. The lessons learned from these case studies can assist U.S. leadership and policymakers in predicting how President al-Sisi is likely to approach new challenges in the Middle East.</p>				
14. SUBJECT TERMS Sisi, al-Sisi, Egypt, Egyptian foreign policy			15. NUMBER OF PAGES 67	
			16. PRICE CODE	
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT Unclassified	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE Unclassified	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT Unclassified	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UU	

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

Approved for public release. Distribution is unlimited.

FOREIGN POLICY UNDER PRESIDENT AL-SISI

John Haddad
Lieutenant, United States Navy
BS, U.S. Naval Academy, 2012

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES
(MIDDLE EAST, SOUTH ASIA, SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA)**

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
June 2018**

Approved by: James A. Russell
Advisor

Afshon P. Ostovar
Co-Advisor

Mohammed M. Hafez
Chair, Department of National Security Affairs

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

ABSTRACT

President al-Sisi's regional foreign policy decisions have taken a different approach compared to past Egyptian presidencies. Understanding where Egypt is headed and the backbone of al-Sisi's foreign policies is important not only for U.S. interests in the Middle East and North Africa, but for regional security and stability. This thesis attempts to explain how and why al-Sisi makes his foreign policy decisions by examining his policies on three ongoing conflicts: the Gaza Strip, the Syrian crisis, and the Yemeni civil war. Additionally, this thesis examines and compares previous Egyptian presidents' foreign policies with al-Sisi. Within these case studies, three hypotheses are tested: that al-Sisi's foreign policy concentrates on protecting the regime and supporting its interests, that al-Sisi's foreign policy concentrates on protecting national interests and improving quality of life for Egyptians, or a combination of the two. While regime and national interests differ in each case study, al-Sisi has demonstrated that he takes into account both factors in his foreign policy decision-making. The lessons learned from these case studies can assist U.S. leadership and policymakers in predicting how President al-Sisi is likely to approach new challenges in the Middle East.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
A.	SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION.....	1
B.	LITERATURE REVIEW	4
	1. Interests of the Regime vs. National Interests	4
	2. Balance of Power Theories.....	7
	3. Al-Sisi’s Foreign Policy Decisions.....	10
C.	POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES	12
D.	RESEARCH DESIGN	12
E.	THESIS OVERVIEW	13
II.	GAZA STRIP	15
A.	EGYPTIAN FOREIGN POLICY PRIOR AL-SISI.....	16
	1. President Hosni Mubarak	16
	2. President Mohamed Morsi.....	18
B.	PRESIDENT AL-SISI’S FOREIGN POLICY	21
C.	CONCLUSION	24
III.	THE SYRIAN CRISIS	25
A.	THE SPARK OF THE SYRIAN CRISIS.....	26
B.	THE SYRIAN–IRANIAN ALLIANCE	27
C.	SAUDI ARABIA AND IRAN-BROTHERHOOD TIES.....	28
D.	PRESIDENT AL-SISI FOREIGN POLICY	30
E.	CONCLUSION	32
IV.	THE YEMENI CIVIL WAR	35
A.	PRESIDENT GAMAL ABDEL NASSER AND YEMEN	37
B.	PRESIDENT AL-SISI’S FOREIGN POLICY	39
C.	CONCLUSION	42
V.	CONCLUSION	45
	LIST OF REFERENCES	51
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST	57

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

I. INTRODUCTION

Egypt's revolution in 2011 was seen by many as a major step forward in delivering democratic rule to the country. Conversely, a counter-revolution and military coup followed in July 2013 that allowed for an authoritarian rule to return to Egypt, leaving U.S. policymakers in a catch-22.¹ Egypt's regional foreign policy plays a crucial role in the stability and security of the Middle East, North Africa, and U.S. interests. Additionally, Egypt's domestic instability has the potential to influence President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's decision-making. As President al-Sisi leads Egypt into the future, an understanding of his regional foreign policy is critical.

As the Arab Spring erupted in Middle East, the world witnessed an Egyptian revolution which ousted President Hosni Mubarak ending his 30-year rule. This revolution resulted in Egypt's first free democratic presidential election. However, the newly elected President Mohamed Morsi's term lasted just over a year, ending in a military coup staged by his Minister of Defense al-Sisi in 2013. Since then, President al-Sisi's regional foreign policy decisions have taken a different approach compared to past Egyptian presidencies. This thesis will examine the backbone of al-Sisi's foreign policy through the lens of omnibalancing theory and realism in order to understand his alignment decisions. In particular, the thesis will examine how Egypt's domestic security concerns and its domestic security agencies influence al-Sisi's foreign policy approach and how he balances such interests with broader national security concerns. These issues will be explored through a study on the regional foreign policies of President al-Sisi on three ongoing conflicts: the Gaza Strip, the Syrian crisis, and the Yemeni civil war.

A. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

President Mubarak governed Egypt under an authoritarian government for nearly 30 consecutive years. Thus, most studies on Egypt's foreign policy have been observed

¹ Jeremy M. Sharp, *Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations*, CRS Report No. RL33003 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2016). <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33003.pdf>.

through a U.S., Israeli, and Saudi lens utilizing the Mubarak regime as a historical basis. However, to understand Egypt's current foreign policy it is important to first examine the worldview and goals of President al-Sisi as they pertain to the definition of Egypt's strategic interests and, on that basis, its foreign policy. That is because as states under authoritarian rule usually have their foreign policy decisions made by the head of state or an exclusive group of elites, al-Sisi's personal biases are likely to be fundamental to Egypt's overall foreign policy decision-making.²

Additionally, although al-Sisi does not have complete flexibility in making policy, he has more space to ignore or downplay national or institutional concerns than world leaders of more democratic states.³ For example, when al-Sisi is referred to as pro-Israeli or pro-American, it does not necessarily reflect the orientation of Egyptians as a whole. However, little still study exists on President al-Sisi's decision-making and foundation of his foreign policy. One argument is that al-Sisi has not been in power that long to make a strong and credible assessment. Conversely, though he has been in office for approximately 4 years, al-Sisi has made numerous foreign policy decisions. These various decisions surfaced as a result of the removal of President Morsi from office and the rapidly changing architecture of the Middle East.

Egypt holds strategic importance to the United States and to the stability of the region. It is the largest Arab country in the region and its geography is significant. Currently, Cairo is the fastest growing city in the world with an expected population growth of half a million in 2017.⁴ Additionally, Egypt has one of the largest militaries and its domestic security has been threatened by terrorism and domestic economic hardships. The future of Egypt is important for not only U.S. interests in the Middle East and North Africa, it is fundamental to regional security and stability.

² Steven R. David, "Explaining Third World Alignment," *World Politics* 43, no. 2 (January 1991): 240.

³ Ibid.

⁴ *Jerusalem Post*, "Cairo Population Set to Grow by Half a Million In 2017," March 12, 2017, <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Cairo-set-to-grow-by-half-a-million-in-2017-483953>.

In ensuring and promoting stability in an unsettling part of the world, the challenge for U.S. leadership is to anticipate regional changing events to include unrest, conflicts, uprisings, and revolutions. Not only did U.S. leadership fail to foresee the 2011 Egyptian revolution, they missed the counter-revolution and military coup as well.⁵ The United States and its allies cannot afford to be caught on its heels. Now that President al-Sisi assumed office, the direction in which he drives Egypt must be understood by the United States.

It is of interest to the United States and its allies that Egypt continues to uphold and make responsible decisions in promoting Middle East stability. One tactic the United States supports Egypt is through aid money. Since 1987, the United States has been providing an aid package of approximately \$1.3 billion a year to Egypt.⁶ In return, the United States imposes expectations on Egypt to include “maintaining U.S. naval access to the Suez Canal, maintaining the 1979 Israel-Egypt peace treaty, and promoting democracy and economic growth within Egypt.”⁷ However, though certain expectations are met such as supporting the Israeli peace treaty and keeping the Suez Canal open, al-Sisi has made decisions in his foreign policy arena that have not been aligned with the expectations of the United States and its allies.

However, al-Sisi’s decisions are only part of his foreign policy. Scholar Bahgat Korany states that “a country’s foreign policy is a continuous, wider phenomenon, embracing general objectives, stated strategy, and a series of routine actions.”⁸ Thus, the significance of this research question is to gain applicable and explicit knowledge of how President al-Sisi is making his foreign policy decisions and why in order for U.S. policymakers and leadership control and foresee the future of the Middle East, Egypt, and its interests in the region.

⁵ Walid Phares, *The Lost Spring: U.S. Policy In the Middle East and Catastrophes To Avoid* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 27.

⁶ Jeremy M. Sharp, *Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations*, CRS Report No. RL33003 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2016), <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33003.pdf>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Bahgat Korany, *Foreign Policy Decision-making Theory and the Third World: Payoffs and Pitfalls* (London, Westview Press, 1986), 41.

Studying and researching Egyptian foreign policy poses challenges. Historically, the foreign policy of Egypt has been developed and designed by the state's ruling elites.⁹ Additionally, it is difficult to study Egyptian foreign policy because official documents from the state itself on the subject are not publicly available. Currently, there are academic subjects that attempt to explain and define al-Sisi's foreign policy toward Saudi Arabia, Iran, Syria, Israel, and Yemen. However, works on explaining his foreign policy through an analysis with previous presidencies on current regional conflicts has not been done before. This thesis will undertake this study through the lens of international relations theory in order to shed light on al-Sisi's foreign policy decision-making.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Interests of the Regime vs. National Interests

The nature of President al-Sisi's foreign policy has been debated in international relations scholarship and think tanks since his inauguration. These debates can be divided into three main schools of thought. The first school of thought asserts that al-Sisi's foreign policy aims to protect the regime and its interests while sustaining internal and external state security. This regime or "deep-state" is controlled by the military, but supported by four branches: the intelligence services, the police, the judiciary, and the state media.¹⁰ The intelligence services work under the military framework in order to maintain political control and the police provide a public presence of the regime.¹¹

Additionally, the judiciary is composed of Mubarak-era judges.¹² The regime is composed of the ruling elites in the country who are networked within the state's economy, military, and security institutions. Furthermore, their mission is to maintain the status quo

⁹ Fazzur R. Siddiqui, "Changing Contours of Egypt's Foreign Policy in the Aftermath of Uprising," *Indian Council of World Affairs: Issue Brief* (September 8, 2016): 1, <https://icwa.in/pdfs/IB/2014/ChangingContoursOfEgyptIB08092016.pdf>.

¹⁰ Sarah Childress, "The Deep State: How Egypt's Shadow State Won Out," PBS, September 17, 2013, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/the-deep-state-how-egypts-shadow-state-won-out/>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

of the state and utilize the military to intervene when state leadership poses a risk.¹³ The regime's power and concern for its own survival and self-interests was evident in the removal of Mubarak and Morsi out of office.¹⁴

The second school of thought states that al-Sisi prioritizes his foreign policy in promoting national interest while sustaining internal and external state security. These national interests include protecting state sovereignty and the overall quality of life for Egyptians. Jon B. Alterman, director of the Middle East Program at CSIS, describes this school of thought regarding Egypt as "foreign policy as domestic policy."¹⁵ Essentially, al-Sisi makes decisions in favor of Egyptians and their livelihood. For example, al-Sisi continues to advocate against Ethiopia's new dam because any amount of change to the Nile upstream will have serious affects to Egypt's population.¹⁶

The third school of thought claims the al-Sisi's foreign policy foundation balances between protecting the regime and supporting national interests, while still sustaining internal and external security.

All three schools of thought agree that Sisi's foremost policy objective has been on eliminating and suppressing internal and external threats to the state. However, they differ on whose interests are central in al-Sisi's foreign policy. The first school of thought prioritizes the interests of the regime. In theory, if al-Sisi upholds the interests of the regime, it would ensure he remains in power. However, the Arab Spring in Egypt resulted in the removal of President Mubarak from office, regardless of his long-standing loyalty to the regime. Thus, this proves that the people of Egypt (in combination with outside pressure) have the potential to force the regime to implement and change policies to include state leadership. Thus, the Egyptian regime will respond to popular pressure in order to maintain the status quo and avoid a crisis as witnessed in Syria.

¹³ Sarah Childress, "The Deep State: How Egypt's Shadow State Won Out," PBS, September 17, 2013.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Jon B. Alterman, "Dynamics Without Drama: New Options and Old Compromises in Egypt's Foreign Policy," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 18, no. 3 (August 2006): 360.

¹⁶ Kieran Cooke, "Ethiopian Renaissance Dam Project Leaves Egypt High and Dry," Tesfa News, July 30, 2016, www.tesfanews.net/ethiopian-renaissance-dam-project-leaves-egypt-helpless.

The second school of thought, prioritizing national interests and quality of life, has been challenged by al-Sisi's recent decisions. For example, shortly after al-Sisi gained the presidency, he looked to openly acknowledge the return of the Sanafir and Tiran Islands back to Saudi Arabia. Essentially, he looked to hand over a piece of Egyptian sovereignty over to Saudi Arabia in return for future investment developments in Egypt worth billions of dollars.¹⁷ When Cairo publically announced their intention to return the islands to the Saudis, the streets in Egypt erupted with protests.¹⁸ Another example, are the human rights issues under al-Sisi. In 2015, the State Department reported that Egypt suffers from serious domestic and human rights issues to include the excessive use of force, unlawful killings, torture, and suppression of civil liberties."¹⁹ Additionally, the state governed by an authoritarian rule imposes restrictions on the freedoms of speech and press.

Lastly, the third school of thought, which balances the support of the regime with national interests, would appear to be most reasonable in describing al-Sisi's foreign policy. This is evident in his decision-making to satisfy the interests of both factions. For example, after ISIS militants murdered 21 Coptic Egyptians in Libya, al-Sisi ordered a bombing operation to be carried out in reprisal.²⁰ In this military order, he is ensuring and appealing to all Egyptians, Muslim and Coptic, that their lives are valued and are part of Egypt. Another example was al-Sisi reestablishing the GCC relationship by the securitization of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.²¹ This decision ensured the delivery of annual economic aid from the Gulf States, which supports all factions of the state. Thus, al-Sisi's foreign policy decision-making has been on a path which promotes and supports the interests of the regime and the nation.

¹⁷ CNN, "Egypt Court Blocks Transfer of Red Sea Islands to Saudi Arabia," January 16, 2017, www.edition.cnn.com/2017/01/16/middleeast/egypt-island-ruling-saudi-tiran-sanafir.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ U.S. Department of State and Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, *Egypt 2015 Human Rights Report*, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices (2015), 1, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/253133.pdf>.

²⁰ Fazzur R. Siddiqui, "Changing Contours of Egypt's Foreign Policy in the Aftermath of Uprising," *Indian Council of World Affairs: Issue Brief* (September 2016): 11.

²¹ Ibid.

All three schools of thought provide a unique lens in examining al-Sisi's foreign policy, however, based on his policy decisions to date, the third school of thought appears to most accurately portray al-Sisi's foreign policy. Still, why is President al-Sisi balancing the interests of the regime with national interests? What is his intent in not just choosing one faction to support? This literature review will explore three theories that attempt to explain how and why al-Sisi balances these interests: Hans Morgenthau's balance of power theory, Stephen Waltz's balance of threat theory, and Steven David's omnibalancing theory.

2. Balance of Power Theories

The concept of the balance of power is based on the realist paradigm. The foundation of balance of power theory is that an international system exists wherein states pursue their own self-interests. This concept is rooted in the realist perspective that politics, is governed by objective laws that derive from human nature.²² Hans Morgenthau's *Politics among Nations* presents six principles of political realism. In summary, these six principles assert that "the realist image of international relations is one of inevitable clashes between nation-states as they seek to maintain their autonomy and increase their wealth and power."²³ Essentially, since the international order is composed of interstate anarchy, states will look to gain alliances for survival and security. This assertion becomes the basis of the balance of power theory that Morgenthau describes. He argues that "balance of power and foreign policies which were designed to achieve or maintain it were not only inevitable, but were crucial mechanism for stabilizing international society."²⁴ Simply, states align themselves in such way where they can be protected from another state or another alliance. Additionally, this theory asserts that the determinants of alignment come mostly from the current and potential external threats existing in the international system

²² Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 6th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985), 4.

²³ Michael Sheehan, *The Balance of Power: History and Theory* (London: Routledge, 1996), 6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

towards a state.²⁵ States joining alliances between Nazi Germany and Great Britain during World War II provides credible historical evidence of the theory.

Stephen Waltz's *Origins of Alliances* reframes Morgenthau's balance of power theory to claim "states tend to ally with or against the foreign power that poses the greatest threat."²⁶ He states that states determine the degree of a threat based on four factors: aggregate power, geographical proximity, offensive power, and aggressive intentions.²⁷ Elaborating on one of these factors, geographical proximity asserts that Arab states are more concerned with threats from states that are in close proximity than the strongest powers in the international system.²⁸ This idea has been witnessed with President al-Sisi's greater cooperation and dialogue with Israel regarding the situation in Gaza and the overall Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Waltz also claims that because superpowers such as Russia and the United States oppose each other's expansion, Egypt can be less worried about the other.²⁹ Nasser once claimed that: "Egypt's great strength lay in the rival interests of America and Russia ... and that each of the superpowers would protect her from each other."³⁰ This provides a valuable argument to Morgenthau's balance of power theory because it argues that states do not seek an alliance out of fear of a superpower becoming too powerful, but out of fear of being attacked.³¹

However, as mentioned previously, Morgenthau's balance of power theory suggests that states align themselves to protect themselves and to prevent external threats. Similarly, Waltz's balance of threats theory concentrates a state's decision-making in alliances based on external threats. Though these theories in its entirety have proven to be credible, it falls short in applying itself to the Arab states because they do not take into

²⁵ Steven R. David, "Explaining Third World Alignment," *World Politics* 43, no. 2 (January 1991): 234.

²⁶ Stephen M. Waltz, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 21.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 21–25.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 158.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 163.

³⁰ Anthony Nutting, *Nasser* (London: Constable, 1972), 271.

³¹ Stephen M. Waltz, *The Origins of Alliances* (London: Cornell University Press, 1987), 163.

account the internal threats a state faces. More importantly, a major goal of authoritarian leaders in the Arab world is to stay in power at the expense of the interests of the state and the regime.³² This additional dynamic is not covered in Morgenthau's balance of power theory or Waltz's balance of threats theory.

Steven David's omnibalancing theory departs fundamentally from the understanding of realism advanced by Waltz and Morgenthau and fills the gaps therein. His theory agrees with the realist argument regarding interstate anarchy, international hierarchies, and that "politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature."³³ However, David's theory expands realism to include internal threats as well as external threats. Essentially, he states that Waltz's and Morgenthau's theory is flawed because they do not take into account the internal threats of states.³⁴

Additionally, his theory takes into account the leaders of the authoritarian state rather than the state itself because these leaders are concerned with staying in power. If the Arab Spring has taught Arab leaders anything, it is that their rule and position in power can be overthrown, especially when a state has significant domestic challenges and threats. Equally important, the Arab Spring demonstrated that when Arab state leaders were removed from office, it cost them their lives. Libya's Muammar Gaddafi and Egypt's Anwar Sadat are evident of this threat. David argues that "it is the state leadership of the state and not the state itself that is the proper unit of analysis for understanding Third World foreign policy, particularly alignment."³⁵ Thus, leaders such as al-Sisi make their foreign policy and alignment decisions based on what keeps them in power in parallel with assessing internal and external threats. For the purposes of the proposed thesis, omnibalancing theory appears to offer the most promising lens through which to

³² Steven R. David, "Explaining Third World Alignment," *World Politics* 43, no. 2 (January 1991): 236.

³³ *Ibid.*, 237.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 244.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 243.

understand how the al-Sisi regime balances regime interests, national interests, and state security in making foreign policy.

3. Al-Sisi's Foreign Policy Decisions

One example of President al-Sisi's foreign policy that conflicts with U.S. and its allies' interests was his surprising interest in Iran. After ousting the Muslim Brotherhood from Egypt's government, al-Sisi invited Iranian President Hassan Rouhani to attend his inauguration ceremony. This trip made him only the second Iranian president to visit Egypt since the countries severed diplomatic ties in 1980.³⁶ Conversely, a major objective of United States foreign policy in the Middle East has been the containment of Iranian influence. Since the days of the Clinton administration and its "dual containment" policy in the Gulf, the United States has been in the business of calling Iran to "cease its support of international terrorism and subversion, end its violent opposition to the Arab-Israeli peace talks, and halt efforts to acquire weapons of mass destruction."³⁷ However, the United States unintentionally allowed Iran to initially leap over this containment hurdle and spread its influence, which created a new security architecture dominated by Russia and Iran in the region.³⁸

Contrary to al-Sisi's welcoming attitude towards Iran, al-Sisi has vowed to maintain and support Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE in blockading Qatar, partly for Qatar's ties with Iran.³⁹ Additionally, al-Sisi has decided to intervene in the War in Yemen at a minimal scale. Later, Egypt asserted that it supports a political settlement and dialogue in

³⁶ Sami Aboudi and Raissa Kasolowsky, "Egypt Invites Iranian President to Sisi's Inauguration," Reuters, June 3, 2014, www.uk.reuters.com/article/uk-iran-egypt-idUKKBN0EE1SK20140603.

³⁷ David W. Lesch and Mark L. Haas, *The Middle East and the United States* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2014), 587.

³⁸ John Judis, "America's Failure—and Russia and Iran's Success—in Syria's Cataclysmic Civil War," Talking Points Memo, January 10, 2017, www.talkingpointsmemo.com/cafe/americas-failure-russia-success-in-syrias-war.

³⁹ Jerusalem Post, "Egypt's Sisi Vows to Keep Up Qatar Blockade," July 25, 2017, <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Egypt-Sisi-vows-to-keep-up-Qatar-blockade-500646>.

Yemen to end the conflict.⁴⁰ This decision is contrary to Saudi Arabia's goal in Yemen and it indirectly supports Iran because it supports the Houthi rebels and their cause. Consequently, al-Sisi's future with Iran is somewhat unpredictable. For example, in February of 2011 Egypt allowed an Iranian frigate and replenishment ship to transit the Suez Canal in route to Syria, marking the first Iranian Navy transit through the Suez in three decades.⁴¹ Israel viewed this Iranian transit as a provocation. Though this transit occurred under al-Sisi's predecessor, the potential for another similar transit is likely due to al-Sisi's welcoming attitude toward Iran. This decision would place the Iranian navy in Israel's backyard, which will in turn put pressure on the United States to interject on some level.

Another example of al-Sisi's unpredictable foreign policy is his individualism towards the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its ongoing jagged relationship. The Kingdom helped oust Mohamed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood out of Egypt, and put President al-Sisi into power.⁴² However, this mutual cooperation and understanding was put in question when Egypt took a stance on the Syrian crisis that directly opposed Saudi Arabia's objective to remove Syria's Bashar al-Assad from power.⁴³ Since then, these two states have continued to clash on issues such as oil supply, stances on Yemen, the Saudi invested Ethiopia dam, and the Tiran and Sanafir islands dispute. Additionally, President al-Sisi's welcoming attitude toward Iran is not helping. Conversely, Cairo's support for Saudi Arabia's continued effort to isolate and blockade Qatar is strong. Thus, it is essential that the United States gets a grasp on what exactly President al-Sisi's motives and agenda is in his foreign policy to avoid a potential conflict.

⁴⁰ Toqa Ezzidin, "Egypt Supports Political Dialogue in Yemen, Warns of Infiltration by Militants," Daily News Egypt, November 19, 2016, www.dailynewsegypt.com/2016/11/19/egypt-supports-political-dialogue-yemen-warns-infiltration-militants.

⁴¹ Associated Press, "Iranian Navy Vessels Enter the Suez Canal," Fox News, February 22, 2011, www.foxnews.com/world/2011/02/21/official-iran-naval-ships-enter-suez-canal.

⁴² David Hearst, "Why Saudi Arabia is Taking a Risk by Backing the Egyptian Coup," Guardian, August 20, 2013, www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/20/saudi-arabia-coup-egypt.

⁴³ N. Mozes, "The Egypt-Saudi Dispute Over a Resolution to The Syria Crisis Goes Public," The Middle East Media Research Institute, Inquiry & Analysis Series, October 2016, www.memri.org/reports/egypt-saudi-dispute-over-resolution-syria-crisis-goes-public#_ednref1.

C. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

This thesis seeks to explain President al-Sisi's regional foreign policy decision-making. Like the majority of Arab states, Egyptian foreign policy is in part the product of its internal fragility, external vulnerability, and economic dependency on foreign states.⁴⁴ Additionally, the makeup of the Egyptian state incentivizes al-Sisi to support and protect the regime's interests of maintaining the status quo of the country. Combining the three schools of thought with the various theories on the balance of power, three hypotheses are presented:

1. First Hypothesis: President al-Sisi's foreign policy concentrates on protecting the regime and supporting its interests in order to protect Egypt from internal and external threats.
2. Second Hypothesis: President al-Sisi's foreign policy concentrates on protecting national interests and improving quality of life for Egyptians in order to protect Egypt from internal and external threats.
3. Third Hypothesis: President al-Sisi's foreign policy balances between supporting the regime and national interests in order to keep himself in power and protect Egypt from internal and external threats.

D. RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis will examine President al-Sisi's foreign policy decisions on ongoing regional issues impacting Egypt: the Gaza Strip, the Syrian crisis, and the Yemeni civil war. The study on the Gaza Strip will include al-Sisi's stance on Hamas and the implications for the Egyptian, U.S. and Israeli relationship. The study on the Syrian crisis will examine al-Sisi's stance on President Bashar al-Assad remaining in power and the implications on Egypt's relationship with Saudi Arabia. Finally, the study on the Yemeni civil war will explain al-Sisi's decision to not send troops to Yemen.

⁴⁴ Nael Shama, *Egyptian Foreign Policy from Mubarak to Morsi: Against the National Interest* (London: Routledge, 2014), 10.

To test the above-mentioned hypotheses, this thesis will introduce past foreign policy decisions under previous presidencies. Additionally, within these case studies, Egypt's relationship with the United States, Israel, Iran, and other Arab states will be examined. From this study, this thesis will present the most up to date understanding of President al-Sisi's foreign policy.

Research for this thesis will include primary source documents and recent secondary sources. Primary sources will include interviews, speeches, and news reports from Western and Arab media. Secondary sources will include government reports, journal articles, dissertations, non-governmental organization (NGO) reports, books, and scholarly articles. Additionally, thesis research will be limited to documents in or translated to English, French, Turkish, and Arabic.

E. THESIS OVERVIEW

This thesis is composed of six chapters. The first chapter contains the thesis introduction. The second through fifth chapters comprise the regional conflict case studies of the Gaza Strip, the Syrian crisis, and the Yemeni civil war. Each chapter introduces past foreign policy under previous presidencies and explains what concerns and interests shape President al-Sisi's current foreign policy. The final chapter concludes with an explanation of how President al-Sisi implements his foreign policy for U.S. leadership and policymakers to take into account when assessing Egypt, the Middle East, and its interests in the region.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

II. GAZA STRIP

The Gaza Strip has been a fixture of Egyptian foreign policy the Six Day War in 1967, when Israel captured the territory from Egypt. However, this small strip of land between Egypt and Israel became a foreign policy priority when Israel unilaterally dismantled its settlements and retreated its military out of the Gaza Strip in August 2005.⁴⁵ Moreover, since Hamas won the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections and seized control of the Gaza Strip in 2007, security concerns over the territory have deepened.⁴⁶ Since then, Egyptian foreign policy over the Gaza Strip grew to include backing an Israeli blockade, concerns over smuggling tunnels, humanitarian aid, and border control. Additionally, since the Camp David Accords in 1978, Egypt became a main beneficiary of U.S. foreign aid and trade agreements contingent upon maintaining the peace with Israel.⁴⁷ The United States has continued to provide an aid package of approximately \$1.3 billion a year to Egypt.⁴⁸

Since Israeli's withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, Egyptian leadership has continued to calibrate the balancing of its foreign policy towards the Gaza Strip. This foreign policy balances the policing the Gaza-Egyptian borders with avoiding a humanitarian crisis within Gaza and maintaining the peace with Israel. If the Gaza-Egyptian border is closed, then resources such as food, medicine, and clothing in the Gaza Strip decline. This decline in resources could affect the livelihood of the Palestinians. Thus, Egyptian public sympathy for the Palestinian cause could trigger domestic unrest and protests within Egypt. On the other hand, if Egyptian leadership maintains loose border security, then it could inadvertently allow the flow of weapons into Gaza. This relaxed border security could not only threaten Israel's safety, but Egypt's relationship with Israel in the event it is attacked

⁴⁵ Carol Migdalovitz, "Israel's Blockade of Gaza, The Mavi Marmara Incident, and Its Aftermath," CRS Report No. RL34074 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2010), 373.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Duncan L. Clarke, "US Security Assistance to Egypt and Israel: Politically Untouchable?" *Middle East Journal* 51, no. 2 (Spring 1997): 200–214.

⁴⁸ Jeremy M. Sharp, *Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations*, CRS Report No. RL33003 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2016).

from Gaza. Ultimately, a decline in Egypt's relationship with Israel could threaten its foreign aid and trade agreements with the United States. Therefore, Egyptian foreign policy over the Gaza Strip continues to resurface in Egyptian presidencies as an attempt to balance these internal and external threats.

A. EGYPTIAN FOREIGN POLICY PRIOR AL-SISI

1. President Hosni Mubarak

As Hamas ultimately seized political control of the Gaza Strip in 2007, President Mubarak was first to take the reins of establishing a foreign policy over the territory and the situations complexity. This initial foreign policy was aimed at maintaining the peace with Israel, assuming the role of mediator between Hamas and Israel, and sustaining security in the region. By maintaining the peace treaty with Israel, Mubarak would ensure that the United States continued to provide its annual foreign aid to Egypt. Additionally, upholding the peace treaty reaffirmed Egypt and Israel's shared the common interest of containing Hamas.⁴⁹ Secondly, Egypt assuming the role of mediator between Hamas and Israel not only gives Mubarak international support and praise, but it prevents a third-party state, such as Turkey, from assuming a role at the negotiating table. Finally, Mubarak's foreign policy sustained regional security by the controlling the Gaza Strip borders.

Since Egypt assumed control of the Gaza Strip borders in 2007, Israel began to express its concern over the effectiveness of Egypt's border security.⁵⁰ In 2008, Israel asserted that Egyptians have not been adequately sealing its side of the border.⁵¹ Essentially, Israel's accusation was sparked when thousands of Palestinians crossed over the "Philadelphia Corridor," an 8.2-mile strip of land in Egypt adjacent to the Gaza Strip on January 23, 2008.⁵² Additionally, in 2008 Israel's border dilemma began to include

⁴⁹ Amnon Aran and Rami Ginat, "Revising Egyptian Foreign Policy Towards Israel under Mubarak: From Cold Peace to Strategic Peace," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 37, no. 4 (July 2014): 574.

⁵⁰ Jeremy M. Sharp, *The Egypt-Gaza Border and Its Effect on Israeli-Egyptian Relations*, CRS Report No. RL34346 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2008), 1. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL34346.pdf>.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

concern over the smuggling tunnels between Egypt and the Gaza Strip due to the imports of arms to include anti-tank weapons and rockets into Gaza.⁵³

Most of these smuggling tunnels occurred across the divided border city of Rafah. Palestinian families would utilize these tunnels to transport various goods to include gasoline, gold, cigarettes, drugs, and money as Israel sustained its blockade.⁵⁴ The World Bank estimated that 80 percent of imports into the Gaza Strip were transported by these underground smuggling tunnels.⁵⁵ The Palestinians rely heavily on these tunnels due to Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip beginning in 2007.

In order to control the free flow of imports into the Gaza Strip and pressure the Palestinians to avoid utilizing the smuggling tunnels, Mubarak ordered the opening of the Rafah border in June 2010.⁵⁶ By adopting a relaxed policy over the Egypt-Gaza border, it became evident that Mubarak wanted to avoid a humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip. A potential humanitarian crisis in Gaza could have the potential to cause domestic and international conflict for Egypt since it controls the Gaza border and assumed the role of mediator. Moreover, Palestinians and the Arab States had a shared interest of the creation of a Palestinian state and to increase the quality of life and living conditions for Palestinians. Domestically, Egyptian sympathy for the Palestinian cause could lead to protest and unrest. Internationally, specifically among the Arab States, a humanitarian crisis in Gaza could weaken Egyptian-Arab state relations. Thus, at the heart of Mubarak's foreign policy was the reality that both isolating Hamas and the Palestinians in the Gaza and collaborating with Israel weakened his rule by the rise of domestic oppositions and the hindering of Arab state relationships.⁵⁷ Consequently, Mubarak foreign policy towards the

⁵³ Jeremy M. Sharp, *The Egypt-Gaza Border and Its Effect on Israeli-Egyptian Relations*, CRS Report No. RL34346 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2008), 1.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁵ Times of Malta, "Mubarak Orders Opening of Rafah Border with Gaza," June 1, 2010, <https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20100601/world/mubarak-orders-opening-of-rafah-border-with-gaza.310055>.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ M. Serkan Taflioglu, "From Burden to Strategic Asset; The Relationship Between the Government of Hamas and Mubarak's Egypt," *Academic Review of Economics and Administrative Sciences* 6, no. 1 (2013): 4, <http://dergipark.gov.tr/download/article-file/185045>.

Gaza Strip balanced itself between the U.S.-Israeli alliance and fulfilling national interests with the goal of maintaining Egyptian stability.

2. President Mohamed Morsi

Egypt's political revolution in 2011 ended Mubarak's three-decade rule. After Mubarak's ouster, Egypt did not have a constitution or a functioning parliament.⁵⁸ Moreover, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, SCAF, granted the military more legislative powers in March of 2011 until a parliament was reinstated.⁵⁹

As Mubarak's rule and the parliament became non-existent, the army was left to lead Egypt. However, senior military leaders were inexperienced in politics, controlling the masses, and civic management.⁶⁰ Like Mubarak, senior military leadership perceived the Muslim Brotherhood to have the capacity to mobilize the masses into protest and public unrest.⁶¹ Additionally, the Muslim Brotherhood favored civilian leadership vice military in the political realm.⁶² These beliefs were resonated from Presidents Nasser's rule and contributed to why the Muslim Brotherhood was consistently suppressed. The Muslim Brotherhood was seen as a threat to the presidency and social stability of Egypt. However, as the revolution unfolded in 2011, military leaders sought out the Muslim Brotherhood's support in controlling the revolution. Consequently, major decisions by the SCAF were made only after consulting with the Brotherhood or at least taking into account their ideas. Essentially, though both entities did not share the same vision for Egypt, they relied on each other for support in the aftermath of the revolution.⁶³

Succeeding Mubarak was Mohamed Morsi, who, with the backing of the Muslim Brotherhood, won the presidential election and was sworn in as president on June 30, 2012.

⁵⁸ Nael Shama, *Egyptian Foreign Policy from Mubarak to Morsi: Against the National Interest* (London, Routledge, 2014), 222.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 223.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., 224.

Essentially, Morsi inherited a state that lacked political stability following the revolution in 2011. After assuming office, Morsi took drastic changes to purge Mubarak's security and political institutions and to regain his legislative powers. Morsi dismissed a number of senior military leaders, issued a new constitution which gave him full legislative authority, and reinstated the parliament.⁶⁴ Additionally, Morsi sought to create a healthy alliance with the army, Egypt's strongest institution. This attempt would help prevent future challenges to his authority as president.⁶⁵

Like Mubarak, President Morsi strived to maintain positive relations with the United States and Israel. This could be attributed to ensuring that economic and military aid continued to flow into Egypt. Additionally, as President Morsi succeeded Mubarak, he found himself bound to the Camp David agreements established by Mubarak's predecessor President Sadat.⁶⁶ With the backing of the Muslim Brotherhood party, President Morsi initially adopted a different foreign policy from Mubarak towards the Gaza Strip and Hamas.

Though Morsi never supported Hamas openly, he took actions to ensure his relationship with the organization was positive. At his first U.N. General Assembly speech on September 26, 2012, Morsi characterized Israel as an illegal occupier and denounced its presumed nuclear weapon stockpile being fabricated outside international institutions.⁶⁷ There was an apparent setback in Egypt-Israeli relationship as the Muslim Brotherhood assumed power in Egypt. This setback originated because Muslim Brotherhood leaders claimed that the struggle between Palestinians and Israel in the Gaza Strip is a wider pan-Islamic issue with Zionists as the enemy.⁶⁸ Consequently, Morsi, unlike Mubarak, allowed

⁶⁴ Nael Shama, *Egyptian Foreign Policy from Mubarak to Morsi: Against the National Interest* (London, Routledge, 2014), 222.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 225.

⁶⁶ Azzurra Meringolo, "From Morsi to Al-Sisi: Foreign Policy at the Service of Domestic Policy," *Insight Egypt*, no.8 (March 2015): 3.

⁶⁷ Mohamed Morsi "Statement Before the 67th Session of the general Assembly of The United Nations," United Nations Assembly, New York (September 26, 2012). https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/67/EG_en.pdf.

⁶⁸ Liad Porat, "The Muslim Brotherhood and Egypt-Israel Peace," *Mideast Security and Policy Studies*, no. 102 (January 2014): 12.

for the Muslim Brotherhood to financially support Hamas and their objective of liberating Palestinian land from Israeli occupation.⁶⁹

Morsi's heavy support for Hamas and its political aim began to throttle back as conflict in the Gaza Strip escalated. Initially, Morsi relaxed Egypt's control over the divided border city of Rafah. Essentially, this allowed the increase of goods to be traded and moved in and out of the Gaza Strip through Egypt.⁷⁰ This support also included the implementation of a relaxed policy over the smuggling tunnels. However, his relaxation of the border crossing came to a halt after Hamas launched over 100 rockets into Israel in a 24-hour period in November of 2012.⁷¹ In response, Israel launched operation "Pillar of Defense," and Morsi took on an aggressive role in controlling the underground smuggling tunnels into the Gaza Strip.⁷²

As the Hamas and Israel conflict carried on for over a week, President Morsi found himself as the forerunner in mediating a truce. Morsi helped put an end to the conflict by stepping in and negotiating a truce between Israel and Hamas. Morsi's Gaza Strip foreign policy had to balance its relationship with the established peace treaty with Israel and the goals of the Muslim Brotherhood. However, in negotiating a truce between Hamas and Israel, it became clear that Morsi's policy on the Gaza Strip was not much different than Mubarak. Even with the Muslim Brotherhood in government, Morsi still upheld the peace treaty with Israel and the occupation of the Gaza Strip remained intact. Morsi's initial international support for Hamas and the relaxation of the Gaza Strip border could have been influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood. This influence in policy would mean that Morsi's initial Gaza Strip foreign policy was only an extension of Muslim Brotherhood support for Hamas.

⁶⁹ Liad Porat, "The Muslim Brotherhood and Egypt-Israel Peace," *Mideast Security and Policy Studies*, no. 102 (January 2014): 17.

⁷⁰ Ayyam Mohammed Yaghi, "Hamas' Relations with Egypt Change with Morsi's Leadership," *Al-Monitor*, September 10, 2012, <http://almon.co/2hj>.

⁷¹ Yaakov Lappin and Tovah Lazaroff, "Gaza Groups Pound Israel with Over 100 Rockets," *The Jerusalem Post*, November 12, 2012, <http://www.jpost.com/Defense/Gaza-groups-pound-Israel-with-over-100-rockets>.

⁷² Ayyam Mohammed Yaghi, "Hamas' Relations with Egypt Change with Morsi's Leadership," *Al-Monitor*, September 10, 2012.

The Muslim Brotherhood's shift in political posture provides a secondary explanation for Morsi negotiating a truce and upholding positive Israeli relations. After the revolution, the Muslim Brotherhood became more interested in domestic competitive politics and less concerned with implementing any drastic revolutionary changes in Egypt.⁷³ The Muslim Brotherhood began to view Israel and the complexity of the Gaza Strip from the lens of the Egyptian state, rather from a religious movement.⁷⁴ Consequently, Morsi in conjunction with the Muslim Brotherhood party were unable to fundamentally alter Egyptian foreign policy toward the Gaza Strip from the Mubarak era.

B. PRESIDENT AL-SISI'S FOREIGN POLICY

After Morsi won the presidential election, the Muslim Brotherhood became less interested in implementing revolutionary change for Egypt.⁷⁵ The Muslim Brotherhood no longer shared the goals the revolution of 2011 called for. Instead, the Muslim Brotherhood appeared to be more focused on gaining and maintaining power within Egypt's government. This shift in politics began to clash with the revolutionary youth who initially envisioned a "New Egypt." The revolutionary youth longed for a democratic government where free speech and other foundations of the West would be advocated. After realizing where Egypt was headed, in 2012 the revolutionary youth accused the Muslim Brotherhood party of betraying the revolution only to pursue their own interests.⁷⁶ Thus, Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood party began to lose national support and a new wave of domestic unrest was sparked calling for the return of Egypt's national identity. To return to this identity, Egyptian looked towards an institution that they trusted, the military.

General al-Sisi, Morsi's Defense Minister, came into power following a military coup in 2013. However, this was more than just a coup. Patriotism and support of the

⁷³ Nael Shama, *Egyptian Foreign Policy from Mubarak to Morsi: Against the National Interest* (London, Routledge, 2014), 223.

⁷⁴ Nathan J. Brown, "When Victory Becomes an Option: Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood Confronts Success," *The Carnegie Papers* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012), 14. https://carnegieendowment.org/files/brotherhood_success.pdf.

⁷⁵ Nael Shama, *Egyptian Foreign Policy from Mubarak to Morsi: Against the National Interest* (London, Routledge, 2014), 223.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

military was the main driver of the protests against Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood in 2011.⁷⁷ The military supported the protests and the Egyptians supported its military. To restore Egyptian identity was to restore military leadership in government. This paved the way for al-Sisi to oust the Muslim Brotherhood and Morsi from government and become president.

In this transition to power, al-Sisi inherited the implications of the Gaza Strip and its foreign policy. He was faced with the Gaza Strip smuggling dilemma and border security, Hamas's objectives, the Muslim Brotherhood's support, national interests, and the role and importance of its U.S.-Israeli alliance. Like the previous two presidencies, al-Sisi had to be mindful of his foreign policy and its impact on national public sympathy concerning the Palestinian cause. Additionally, al-Sisi continued Egypt's role as the mediator of peace between Israeli and Hamas. These are all lessons learned from the Mubarak and Morsi presidencies.

After ousting Morsi, al-Sisi took a significantly aggressive stance towards Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Gaza Strip. Initially, al-Sisi's Gaza Strip foreign policy was aimed at crippling Hamas's economy and resources.⁷⁸ Though Egypt held itself as a mediator between Hamas and Israel, al-Sisi intended to force Hamas and the Palestinians to abandon resistance.⁷⁹ He attempted to achieve this objective by searching for and destroying smuggling tunnels. Also, he demolished thousands of Palestinians homes on the Egyptian side of the Rafah border in order to create a buffer zone between the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip.⁸⁰ Though these efforts might have decreased Hamas' economic and military power, it certainly made conditions and quality of life in Gaza much worse.

⁷⁷ Sally K. Isaac, "In Egypt It Is Not a Coup: Egyptians Restore Their Destiny," *Italian Institute for International Political Studies* (July 4, 2013), 1, http://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/pubblicazioni/commentary_isaac_04.07.2013_0.pdf.

⁷⁸ Michael Wahid Hanna, "The Sisi Doctrine," *Foreign Policy*, August 13, 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/08/13/the-sisi-doctrine/>.

⁷⁹ Patrick Strickland, "Egypt Army Destroys Dozens of Gaza Tunnels," *Al Jazeera*, November 9, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/11/egypt-army-destroys-dozens-gaza-tunnels-151109125035215.html>.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

On July 7, 2014, Israel launched the offensive “Operation Protective Edge” in response to missile, rocket, and motor fire from the Gaza Strip into Israeli civilian population.⁸¹ This conflict began as an Israeli air campaign and later turned itself into a ground fight. Egypt failed at negotiating a truce between the two factions prior to Israeli sending their troops into Gaza on July 17.⁸² Initially, al-Sisi’s strategy in forcing Hamas into a ceasefire agreement was ultimatum message, that Israel will continue its offensive operation until they ceased hostility. Essentially, this strategy was aimed at giving Hamas no concessions and allowed Israel to continue to weaken the organization.⁸³ Thus, it became apparent that the death toll was secondary to al-Sisi’s doctrine.

However, al-Sisi’s aggressive posture towards Hamas continued to increase domestic public sympathy for Palestinians as the death toll of civilians increased. It was crucial for al-Sisi that Egyptians continued to see him as a working mediator of peace for the ongoing conflict in order to appease Egyptian public sympathy for the Palestinians and avoid domestic unrest.⁸⁴ Also, internationally, al-Sisi wanted to fend off other potential brokers of peace to include Turkey and Qatar in order to maintain his influence over the politics of the region.⁸⁵ Consequently, it took time for al-Sisi to find the right balance within his foreign policy in order to meet his objectives. Unlike Morsi’s speedy truce agreement, Israeli’s offensive operation lasted 50 days until a ceasefire was successfully brokered by Egypt.

In the aftermath of “Operation Protective Edge,” al-Sisi implemented a security crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood within Egypt in October of 2015.⁸⁶ This move could be seen as an effort to eliminate broad supporters of Hamas and any future opposition

⁸¹ Israel Advocacy & Education, “Operation Protective Edge: July-August 2014,” Anti-Defamation League, <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/glossary-terms/operation-protective-edge-july-august-2014>.

⁸² Michael Wahid Hanna, “The Sisi Doctrine,” Foreign Policy, August 13, 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/08/13/the-sisi-doctrine>.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Dibia Ike Michael, “Egypt: El-Sisi Visits Trump, Requests Muslim Brotherhood Be Declared a Terrorist Group,” African News, April 3, 2017, <http://www.africanews.com/2017/04/03/egypt-el-sisi-visit-trump-request-muslim-brotherhood-declared-a-terrorist-group>.

groups from threatening his presidency and policies. This crackdown of the organization widened internationally to include al-Sisi requesting the United States to declare the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization.⁸⁷

C. CONCLUSION

Like his predecessors, al-Sisi's Gaza Strip foreign policy has had to balance the realities and complexities of the Gaza Strip. Al-Sisi shares Israel's objective of containing Hamas and destroying Islamists in the region. However, he understands the Palestinian cause and how turmoil and unrest in Gaza impacts broad domestic public sympathy, international relations, and Egyptian security. Al-Sisi does not want to create domestic unrest, which will include protests and uprisings. He wants to remain in control, support national interests, and maintain the status quo. Thus, al-Sisi avoids a humanitarian crisis in Gaza by allowing aid to flow into the territory. This has become evident in the finalizing of a new deal, which includes opening the Rafah border after being nearly closed for the last 4 years.⁸⁸ This possible new deal would shift dynamics of the region considering Qatar has been the backer of Gaza developments until its GCC blockade.⁸⁹

Also, the suppression of domestic opposition groups to include Islamists and the Muslim Brotherhood ensures his presidency's survival. Lastly, al-Sisi wants to remain involved as a successful broker of peace in order to appease national and international interests over Gaza situation. In addition to maintaining the peace with Israel, al-Sisi's role as the peacemaker of the Gaza Strip reasserts Egypt's importance to Middle East stability and the importance of its survival. This in turn ensures economic aid continues to flow into Egypt and international support for al-Sisi. Consequently, President al-Sisi's Gaza Strip foreign policy has been balancing the continuation of economic aid into Egypt, the suppression of domestic oppositions groups, and the avoidance of a humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip.

⁸⁷ Dibia Ike Michael, "Egypt: El-Sisi Visits Trump, Requests Muslim Brotherhood Be Declared a Terrorist Group," African News, April 3, 2017.

⁸⁸ John Reed, "Egypt and Hams deal on Gaza Border Reflects Shifting Dynamics," Financial Times, August 22, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/acd76b40-872d-11e7-bf50-e1c239b45787>.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

III. THE SYRIAN CRISIS

The Syrian crisis has had an impact on international relations, specifically among regional states. The spark of the Arab Spring made its way into Syria and has escalated into a brutal civil war. President Bashar al-Assad, having ruled over 17 years, intends to sustain his regime and family legacy over Syria. His relentless efforts to remain in power have introduced numerous state and non-state actors into the war. One state actor that has the most to lose, if Assad and his regime are ousted, is Iran. Iran, a long ally of the Assad regime, holds strategic interest in Syria given its geography. This relationship has become problematic and challenging for regional states, such as Saudi Arabia, who intend to see regime change. The ousting of the Assad regime would benefit the Saudi Kingdom because it would hinder Iranian influence and political power in the region. Additionally, it could cripple Iran's support line to the Shia population of Southern Lebanon and Hezbollah. Moreover, the spread of terrorism and violence from Syria to neighboring Arab states has complicated the conflict and the foreign policies of regional actors.

Under al-Sisi, Egypt has been an ally of Saudi Arabia, but has not shared the interest of removing Assad from power.⁹⁰ Egypt has made it clear that its primary objective is the stability of Syria and the control over the spread of terrorism. President al-Sisi's foreign policy on the Syrian crisis became public on October 8, 2016, when Egypt voted against Saudi Arabia's interests at the UN Security Council in Switzerland.⁹¹ President al-Sisi voted against the very state that assisted him in his military coup in 2013. His vote was a clear indication that al-Sisi's foreign policy put Egyptian welfare and security before Saudi Arabia's interests. Consequently, this disagreement over the outcome of the Syrian crisis adds another degree of complexity to regional international relations and foreign policy.

⁹⁰ N. Mozes, "The Egypt-Saudi Dispute Over a Resolution to The Syria Crisis Goes Public," The Middle East Media Research Institute, Inquiry & Analysis Series, October 18, 2016, www.memri.org/reports/egypt-saudi-dispute-over-resolution-syria-crisis-goes-public#_ednref1.

⁹¹ Ibid.

A. THE SPARK OF THE SYRIAN CRISIS

On December 17, 2010, Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire to protest his abuse by Tunisian authorities.⁹² This was the trigger that set off a wave of protests and revolutions across North Africa and the Middle East calling for reforms and the end of dictatorships. In January of 2011, President Ben Ali of Tunis resigned.⁹³ Following, in February of 2011, President Mubarak of Egypt resigned.⁹⁴ As the world witnessed the end of two dictatorships, Arab leaders began to fear similar outcomes within their own states. Unlike Mubarak and Ben Ali, President Bashar al-Assad was determined to remain in power as the Arab Spring made its way into Syria.

In March of 2011, children in the city of Deraa wrote on their school wall “It’s your turn, Doctor Bashar al-Assad.”⁹⁵ This simple act of graffiti, and perhaps what Westerners would deem innocent, put President Bashar al-Assad of Syria on the offensive. In response to the graffiti, 23 boys from Deraa were arrested and tortured.⁹⁶ This response by Assad and his regime sparked the rise of protests in Deraa which were violently suppressed causing a ripple effect of additional uprisings and protests across Syria. In response, President Assad’s security forces kidnapped, tortured, and killed protestors.⁹⁷ This violent response only fueled Assad’s opposition, to include within his own military. Additionally, regional states strived for different outcomes to the Assad regime which led to the funding of rebel groups within Syria. Consequently, Syria descended into a civil war with no end in sight.

⁹² Walid Phares, *The Lost Spring: U.S. Policy In the Middle East and Catastrophes To Avoid* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 35.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁹⁵ Dave Burke, “The Boy Whose Graffiti Changed the World,” *Daily Mail*, March 14, 2017, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4312502/The-boy-anti-Assad-graffiti-changed-world.html>.

⁹⁶ Mohsen Milani, “Why Tehran Won’t Abandon Assad(ism),” *The Washington Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (Fall 2013): 79.

⁹⁷ Walid Phares, *The Lost Spring: U.S. Policy In the Middle East and Catastrophes To Avoid* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 65.

The Syrian crisis severely undermined Middle East stability with the growing rise of refugees, terrorism, and the disruption of international relations. Adding to the complexity of the Syrian crisis are the many internal and external state and non-state actors such as Hezbollah, Iran, Saudi Arabia, ISIS, the Free Syrian Army, and Russia. This complexity has impacted the status quo of Egyptian foreign policy and international relations due to its proximity to the conflict.

B. THE SYRIAN–IRANIAN ALLIANCE

An important element of the conflict is Syria’s relationship with Iran. This relationship is a significant factor in introducing non-state and state actors into the conflict such as Hezbollah. Moreover, the Syrian conflict has become the main front of Saudi Arabia’s cold war with Iran. As the Iranian-Syrian alliance remains intact, Saudi Arabia supports the ousting of President Bashar al-Assad and the expelling of Iranian influence from Syrian sovereignty.

As al-Assad began to face uprisings, Iran came to his aid. The reasons for Iran’s support for the Assad regime can be summarized into three: First, Iran and Syria have had a strategic treaty of cooperation since the Iranian Revolution in 1979.⁹⁸ President Hafez Assad (1971-2000) looked to establish a partnership with Iran after ending his strategic partnership with Egypt. Syria no longer viewed Egypt as a strategic ally in the region after President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin agreed on a peace treaty in 1979.⁹⁹ Additionally, Syria viewed Iraq as an increasingly antagonistic in the midst of the Gulf War.¹⁰⁰ Thus, in order to counterbalance against Israel and Iraq, Syria created an alliance with Iran as they shared common enemies. This alliance was strengthened as Syria became the primary Arab state to logistically and politically support Iran during the Iraq-Iran War of the 1980s.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Mohsen Milani, “Why Tehran Won’t Abandon Assad(ism),” in *The Washington Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (Fall 2013): 79.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 80.

Secondly, Iran viewed Syria as the bridge in supporting the Shia population of southern Lebanon.¹⁰² In 1981, cooperation between Lebanese militants and Iranian leadership established a new Shia organization that was more aligned and under direct rule of the clerics of Iran.¹⁰³ During the Lebanese civil war between 1975–1990, Syria allowed Iranian Revolutionary Guards to travel to southern Lebanon through Damascus in order to train and arm its Shia population.¹⁰⁴ Both Iran and Syria had benefited from the Shia militants in Southern Lebanon and their aggression towards Israel. This new organization would later reestablish itself as Hezbollah.

Thirdly, Iran views the Syrian crisis as a major front in its cold war with Saudi Arabia and its Sunni affiliated religious groups whose hostility towards Shi'ism is seen as a threat to their faith.¹⁰⁵ Iran maintaining an alliance with Syria gives them political power and an outlet to bolster their Shia religious groups to counter this Sunni Islam hostility. This presents Syria as a crucial chess piece for both Saudi Arabia and Iran. The outcome of the Syrian crisis and future of the Assad regime will directly impact the architecture of the cold war between these two states.

C. SAUDI ARABIA AND IRAN-BROTHERHOOD TIES

The Muslim Brotherhood was established under its founder Hasan al-Banna in the early 1920s.¹⁰⁶ Since then, there have been claims of conversations and connections with various Iranian leadership. However, the most significant initial connection with Iran was sparked after the Iranian revolution of 1979. The success of the Iranian revolution encouraged and gave hope to the Brotherhood that establishing an Islamic society in Egypt was possible.¹⁰⁷ Though they are of different Islamic sects and are fundamentally different

¹⁰² Mohsen Milani, "Why Tehran Won't Abandon Assad(ism)," in *The Washington Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (Fall 2013): 80.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁰⁶ Abd al-Monein Said Aly and Manfred W. Wenner, "Modern Islamic Reform Movements: The Muslim Brotherhood in Contemporary Egypt," *Middle East Journal* 36, no.3 (Summer 1982): 339.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 355.

in political organization, the Brotherhood and Iran share common interests. Some of these shared interests are that they both support elements of a religious democratic government and Sharia law,¹⁰⁸

The Brotherhood and Saudi Arabia have had a long history of cooperation and respect for each other. Both entities are of Sunni sect. The Brotherhood saw the state of the Saudi Arabia as exhibiting a true social and political system of an Islamic state.¹⁰⁹ On the other hand, the Saudis approved of the Brotherhood's "Islamization" of Egypt and its battle to suppress the Egyptian left. This was evident in their shared interest of opposing pan-Arabism and Nasser in the 1960s.¹¹⁰

Nevertheless, their relationship began to decline beginning with the Brotherhood's acceptance of the Iranian revolution in 1979. Moreover, the Brotherhood publicly challenged the Saudis for allowing U.S. forces to operate from Saudi territory during the Gulf Wars. Later, as the Saudis and the United States cooperated on the Iraq War of 2003 and the follow-on fight on terrorism, the Kingdom opened a media war against the Brotherhood criticizing them as the cause of the Arab problems in the Middle East.¹¹¹

President Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood were viewed as a major obstacle for Saudi Arabia. Thus, the Saudis looked to replace both from Egyptian leadership. In 2013, the Kingdom helped oust Mohamed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood out of Egypt through a military coup and put the current President al-Sisi into power.¹¹² Later, in 2014 Saudi Arabia openly designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization.¹¹³ The Saudis viewed the elimination of the Muslim Brotherhood out of Egypt's government as a

¹⁰⁸ Hassan Hassan, "Iran-Brotherhood Ties: Rooted in History with Eye on Future," *The National*, January 15, 2013.

¹⁰⁹ Abd al-Monein Said Aly and Manfred W. Wenner, "Modern Islamic Reform Movements: The Muslim Brotherhood in Contemporary Egypt," *Middle East Journal*, 36, no.3 (Summer 1982): 346.

¹¹⁰ Al Jazeera, "Saudi and The Brotherhood: From Friends to Foes," June 23, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/06/saudi-brotherhood-friends-foes-170623093039202.html>.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² David Hearst, "Why Saudi Arabia is Taking a Risk by Backing the Egyptian Coup," *The Guardian*, August 20, 2013, www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/20/saudi-arabia-coup-egypt.

¹¹³ Al Jazeera, "Saudi and the Brotherhood: From Friends to Foes," June 23, 2017.

way to establish and sustain a new healthy economic and military relationship with the Kingdom. This was evident when the Saudis provided Egypt with a \$12 billion-dollar aid package in order to ensure the new Egyptian president had a successful start in his presidency.¹¹⁴

D. PRESIDENT AL-SISI FOREIGN POLICY

After President al-Sisi assumed office, he executed two policies that could be interpreted as a type of reconciliation with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. First, al-Sisi, like past presidencies, expelled the Muslim Brotherhood from government and suppressed them and other political opponents. This crackdown was evident in the 2015 State Department Egypt report stating that Egypt suffers from serious domestic and human rights issues to include the excessive use of force and unlawful killings and torture.¹¹⁵ In suppressing the Muslim Brotherhood, Saudi Arabia was able to regain their influence in Egyptian politics after it lost some traction under the Muslim Brotherhood party.

Second, al-Sisi publicly acknowledged his intention to return the Sanafir and Tiran islands back to Saudi Arabia in April of 2016. Initially, these islands were part of Saudi territory. Saudi Arabia lent the islands to Egypt in accordance with the Arab Collective Security Act in support of the 1956 Suez crisis.¹¹⁶ The decision by Saudi Arabia to lend the islands allowed Egypt to militarize them during the war against the British led operation. During and after the war, the islands came under Israeli control.¹¹⁷ Following the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty in 1979, those islands were then returned back to Egypt.¹¹⁸ However, Egypt had never publicly acknowledged that the islands were

¹¹⁴ David Hearst, "Why Saudi Arabia is Taking a Risk by Backing the Egyptian Coup," *The Guardian*, August 20, 2013, www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/20/saudi-arabia-coup-egypt.

¹¹⁵ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, "Egypt 2015 Human Rights Report," Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2015, 1.

¹¹⁶ Gawdat Bahgat, "Saudi Arabia and the Arab-Israeli Peace Process," *Middle East Policy*, no. 3 (September 2007): 49.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

originally part of Saudi sovereignty. Thus, al-Sisi attempted to publically return the Sanafir and Tiran islands back to Saudi Arabia.

Surprisingly, in the wake of the Syrian crisis, al-Sisi publicly presented an opposing stance towards the Saudis on how the war in Syria should end. After Saudi Arabia supported al-Sisi's military coup and delivered an aid package, the Kingdom expected President al-Sisi to be politically aligned and share common interests. This was evident with al-Sisi's suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood and the attempt to return the Red Sea islands back to the Kingdom. However, Egypt decided to turn its back on Saudi Arabia despite all the support and aid it received from the Kingdom.

On October 8, 2016, Egypt voted in favor of a Russian draft resolution on the situation in Aleppo at the UN Security Council in Switzerland.¹¹⁹ The language of the draft resolution was intended to implement a ceasefire and address the humanitarian crisis in Syria. Saudi Arabia did not support the resolution and instead favored a military solution with the removal of President al-Assad from power. Egypt's vote openly opposed Saudi Arabia's overall objective to decrease Iranian influence in the Middle East and to oust the Syrian dictator.¹²⁰ Although the draft resolution was not initially passed, President al-Sisi's foreign policy on the Syrian crisis became clear. Al-Sisi did not support the military overthrow of the Assad regime, but rather, such as with Iran and Russia, preferred a political solution in Syria.

Al-Sisi favored the Russian draft resolution for two reasons. First, Syria was seen as a country facing a similar threat from Sunni extremists as Egypt. Al-Sisi has made it clear that he intends to stop the increase of terrorism to include ISIS, specifically surrounding the Red Sea, the Sinai, and Egypt's borders.¹²¹ Second, was eager to support

¹¹⁹ N. Mozes, "The Egypt-Saudi Dispute Over a Resolution to The Syria Crisis Goes Public," The Middle East Media Research Institute, Inquiry & Analysis Series, October 2016, www.memri.org/reports/egypt-saudi-dispute-over-resolution-syria-crisis-goes-public#_ednref1.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Nour Youssef, "Militants Attack Police Checkpoint in Sinai, and ISIS is Suspected," The New York Times, January 9, 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/01/09/world/africa/sinai-isis-attack.html?_r=0.

any plan to stop the bloodshed in Aleppo.¹²² Like a humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, al-Sisi has acknowledged and addressed Egyptian public sympathy for the Syrian population. When the news of this UN vote was publicly released, Egyptian state newspapers participated in Saudi-bashing, playing on Egyptians' enduring aversion to the rich gulf Arabs, further aggravating the Saudi temper after the transfer of islands were denied.¹²³

E. CONCLUSION

President al-Sisi has taken an opposing stance against Saudi Arabia with regards to the Syrian crisis. His foreign policy aimed at a political solution in Syria, vice military. By supporting a political solution, al-Sisi is striving to end the Syrian crisis and its impacts on Egypt quickly. His objective to stop the bloodshed and fight terrorism has been supported nationally. This support was evident in the absence of popular protests following al-Sisi's vote at the UN Council.

Moreover, after Egypt voted in favor of the Russian draft resolution at the UN Security Council, Saudi Arabia looked to punish al-Sisi. In October of 2016, Saudi Arabia informed President al-Sisi that it has suspended its monthly deliveries of 700,000 tons of petroleum products, to Egypt.¹²⁴ This struck a serious blow to the already struggling Egyptian economy. However, President al-Sisi maintained his opposing stance to the Kingdom by stating, "There are attempts to pressure Egypt, but it won't kneel before anyone but God."¹²⁵ Thus, President al-Sisi appears to be distancing Egypt from relying on the Gulf States, especially Saudi Arabia.

¹²² Yaroslav Trofimov, "Egypt Juggles Its Friendships As Russian Influence Surges," Wall Street Journal, October 13, 2016, www.wsj.com/Articles/Egypt-Juggles-Its-Friendships-As-Russian-Influence-Surges-1476366166.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Reuters, "Saudi Aramco Informed Egypt About Suspending Oil Product Supply: Official," October 10, 2016, www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-saudi-petroleum/saudi-aramco-informed-egypt-about-suspending-oil-product-supply-official-idUSKCN12A1DH.

¹²⁵ Yaroslav Trofimov, "Egypt Juggles Its Friendships as Russian Influence Surges," The Wallstreet Journal, October 13, 2016.

Additionally, after the Kingdom's decision to seize oil deliveries, Iranian media reported that Egypt asked Iran to help it face Saudi Arabia.¹²⁶ Reaching out to Iran is not surprising considering al-Sisi has portrayed a welcoming attitude towards Iranian President Hassan Rouhani since inviting him to his inauguration ceremony in 2013. This trip made him the second Iranian president to visit Egypt since the countries severed diplomatic ties in 1980.¹²⁷ Consequently, the majority Shia state of Iraq took advantage of the Saudi and Egyptian conflict to restore relations with its neighbor. The Egyptian government and its Iraqi counterpart signed an agreement to supply Egypt with approximately one million barrels of crude oil per month starting March of 2017.¹²⁸ According to Jaafari, Iraq's foreign minister, relations between Iraq and Egypt are strategic on all levels including economic, security, and political.¹²⁹ Al-Sisi turning towards Iraq as their new supplier sends a message to the Saudi Kingdom that it can do without them and that his foreign policy towards the Syrian crisis could not be challenged.

¹²⁶ Mustafa Saadoun, "Will Egypt join Iraq in the 'Axis of Resistance'?", Al-Monitor, January 20, 2017, www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/01/iraq-egypt-iran-saudi-axis-resistance-basra-oil.html#ixzz4WkNq2gBV.

¹²⁷ Sami Aboudi and Raissa Kasolowsky, "Egypt Invites Iranian President to Sisi's Inauguration," Reuters, June 3, 2014, www.uk.reuters.com/article/uk-iran-egypt-idUKKBN0EE1SK20140603.

¹²⁸ MENAFN, "Iraq To Start Exporting 1M Oil Barrels a Month to Egypt: Iraqi Ambassador to Cairo," Daily News Egypt, January 11, 2017, DOI: 1101201701530000ID1095178158.

¹²⁹ Mustafa Saadoun, "Will Egypt join Iraq in the 'Axis of Resistance'?", Al-Monitor, January 20, 2017.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

IV. THE YEMENI CIVIL WAR

In 2011, the Arab Spring had spread into Yemen. Large protests unfolded calling for the end of President Ali Abdullah Saleh's over thirty-year rule. In order to avoid turmoil and chaos similar to Syria's civil war, Saleh resigned. However, his resignation occurred without resolving the ongoing domestic issues and intrastate conflicts between the different religious and tribal communities. The absence of resolving these issues drove Yemen into a civil war. The major actors in this war have been the Houthis and the Saudi-led coalition. Although Egypt has been part of the coalition, President al-Sisi has offered only a small hand in the participation of his military forces. In order to understand President al-Sisi's foreign policy on the ongoing Yemeni civil war, an examination of Nasser's foreign policy in the Yemeni civil war of 1962–1970 is necessary. Both presidents share similar backgrounds and leadership styles. However, their level of participation in and objectives of each Yemeni war were different. This case study will first introduce commonalities between Nasser and al-Sisi. Then, this chapter will examine and compare both president's foreign policies and objectives in their respected wars.

As President al-Sisi took office, he demonstrated strong similarities to the presidency of Gamal Abdel Nasser of 1956–1970. Nasser is regarded as a legendary figure among Egyptians and most of the Arab world. Nasser's speeches and concepts were built on unifying all Arab nations, liberating the Arab world from colonial rule, facing Zionism, and liberating Palestine.¹³⁰ He was an army officer who obtained his presidency in 1952 through a military coup.¹³¹ President Nasser was highly supported nationally and loved by a majority of his people. Like Nasser, al-Sisi obtained the presidency by a military coup inheriting a state challenged by both domestic and international terrorism and economic struggles. Due to the strong resemblance of military background and leadership styles, there was popular support for al-Sisi when he initially ousted President Morsi from office.

¹³⁰ Dalia Said Mostafa, *The Egyptian Military in Popular Culture: Context and Critique* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 22–23.

¹³¹ David W. Lesch and Mark L. Haas, *The Middle East and the United States* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2014), 185.

In the streets of Cairo, supporters have been seen carrying al-Sisi posters side by side with Nasser's, displaying both presidents in their army uniforms.¹³²

President al-Sisi has appeared to be influenced by Nasser. Though Nasser has been associated with the Arab defeat in the Six Day War of 1967, he still is honored and respected for nationalizing the Suez Canal.¹³³ These two events are remembered and felt, not just by Egyptians, but by most of the Arab World. After al-Sisi became president, he made the Suez Canal his first and top priority. This objective was evident in al-Sisi's presidential inauguration speech asserting that importance of developing the Suez Canal.¹³⁴ Under his presidency, the New Suez Canal was constructed. According to the Suez Canal Authority, it has been widened and deepened to support passage in two directions, decreasing transit time and increasing state revenue by approximately \$8 billion by 2023.¹³⁵ President al-Sisi took what made Nasser famous and "one-upped" him.

Like Nasser in 1962, al-Sisi found himself faced with a war in Yemen. Egyptian military intervention in Yemen is nothing new, but the extent of Egypt's current participation is. The Yemeni War of 1962–1970 has been repeatedly characterized as "Nasser's Vietnam."¹³⁶ Nasser's military intervention was initially expected to be short. However, his intervention kept the Egyptians fighting in Yemen for years. At the height of the Egyptian presence, there were approximately 70,000 ground troops in Yemen, which led to thousands of casualties throughout the conflict.¹³⁷ The war took place following a September 1962 coup in Yemen where revolutionaries, inspired by the Egyptians, tried to

¹³² Dalia Said Mostafa, *The Egyptian Military in Popular Culture: Context and Critique* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 22–23.

¹³³ David W. Lesch and Mark L. Haas, *The Middle East and the United States* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2014), 190.

¹³⁴ Abel Fattah Al-Sisi, "Speech at Qasr El-Qubba Palace," (June 8, 2014), Egypt. <http://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/78278?lang=en-us>.

¹³⁵ Suez Canal Authority, "New Suez Canal," www.suezcanal.gov.eg/sc.aspx?show=69.

¹³⁶ Jesse Ferris, "Nasser's Gamble: How Intervention in Yemen Caused the Six-Day War and the Decline of Egyptian Power," *The Middle East Journal* 67, no. 3 (June 2013): 479, www.muse.jhu.edu.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

oust the conservative monarchy and create a so-called pro-Nasser style republic.¹³⁸ Like Nasser, President al-Sisi finds himself and his country involved with Yemen. Unlike the Yemeni civil war of 1962, Iranian supported Houthi rebels are attempting to take control of Yemen.¹³⁹

A. PRESIDENT GAMAL ABDEL NASSER AND YEMEN

Although there are strong similarities between al-Sisi and Nasser, their objectives in the Yemeni conflicts are different. At the height of the Cold War, Middle Eastern international relations revolved around the conflict between Egypt and Saudi Arabia.¹⁴⁰ During the Cold War, the Arab world was split into two. Between 1955 and 1967, the Soviet Union backed Egypt's revolutionary military regime and the United States and Great Britain supported the conservative monarchy of Saudi Arabia.¹⁴¹ Prior to the Yemeni civil war of 1962, the Cold War among these Arab states was limited to intelligence gathering and propaganda.¹⁴² The spark of the Yemeni civil war turned the Cold War hot in the Arab World. In 1962, Yemeni leader Imam Ahmed died and his son, Mohamed el-Badr, was ousted a week later by a revolutionary coup.¹⁴³ This coup was led by Yemeni army officers in order to establish a republic.¹⁴⁴ Many tribes loyal to the royal family clashed with the so-called republicans. This clash of opposition, in combination with the state's difficult topography, tribal communities, and class lines, sparked a civil war.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁸ Jesse Ferris, "Nasser's Gamble: How Intervention in Yemen Caused the Six-Day War and the Decline of Egyptian Power," *The Middle East Journal* 67, no. 3 (June 2013): 479.

¹³⁹ Toqa Ezzidin, "Egypt Supports Political Dialogue in Yemen, Warns of Infiltration by Militants," *Daily News Egypt*, November 19, 2016, www.dailynewsegyp.com/2016/11/19/egypt-supports-political-dialogue-yemen-warns-infiltration-militants.

¹⁴⁰ Jesse Ferris, "Nasser's Gamble: How Intervention in Yemen Caused the Six-Day War and the Decline of Egyptian Power," *The Middle East Journal* 67, no. 3 (June 2013): 11.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ Nael Shama, *Egyptian Foreign Policy from Mubarak to Morsi: Against the National Interest* (London, Routledge, 2014), 33.

¹⁴⁴ Jesse Ferris, "Nasser's Gamble: How Intervention in Yemen Caused the Six-Day War and the Decline of Egyptian Power," *The Middle East Journal* 67, no. 3 (June 2013): 34.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

Saudi Arabia feared that the revolution, if successful, would find its way into Saudi Arabia.¹⁴⁶ Conversely, Nasser supported the revolutionaries in Yemen. He intervened and deployed military forces in order to control the outcome of the war and reestablish himself as a prominent figure in the Arab World.¹⁴⁷

Additionally, the revolution in Yemen gave Nasser a new opportunity to stand against his Arab rivals and regain momentum in the Cold War. In 1958, Nasser formed a political union with Syria called the United Arab Republic (UAR).¹⁴⁸ The UAR was one of the many ways that Nasser strived to achieve Arab unity. However, the UAR was perceived as an extension of Egyptian political, economic, and military control into the Levant and ultimately a threat to other Arab leaders.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, the 1956 revolution in Egypt was still fresh in the minds of the monarchs of the Arab world. Fearing an expansion of Nasserism and capacity to influence revolutionaries, states such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq were threatened by the establishment of the UAR.¹⁵⁰ However, Syria later seceded from this union with Egypt following a Syrian coup in 1961.¹⁵¹ Nasser was embarrassed and he took Syria's withdrawal from the UAR personally.¹⁵² In response, Nasser took up an aggressive posture and strived to export Egypt's revolution of 1956 to his Arab state rivals.¹⁵³ Likewise, states such as Iraq, Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco, Syria, and Saudi Arabia encouraged the regional isolation of Egypt.¹⁵⁴ Nasser saw the opportunity in Yemen to reinforce his leadership internationally following a loss of popularity and increase in resentment among other Arab leaders.

¹⁴⁶ Jesse Ferris, "Nasser's Gamble: How Intervention in Yemen Caused the Six-Day War and the Decline of Egyptian Power," *The Middle East Journal* 67, no. 3 (June 2013): 11.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

The Yemeni civil war escalated between 1963–1964, draining Egyptian military, economy, and morale. Following the outbreak of the coup, Nasser initially sent in a company of commandos to guard the capital along with aircraft for air support.¹⁵⁵ However, the fighting that spread throughout northern Yemen forced Nasser to send in armored battalions and additional troops exceeding 70,000 deployed men.¹⁵⁶ The war escalated quickly due to the ability of the Saudis to rapidly supply Imam al-Badr's fighters, the difficult topography of Yemen leaving Egyptian troops vulnerable to ambush, and the divisions between numerous strands of religious identities among the population.¹⁵⁷

Nasser began to look for a way out as the war began to take its toll on his presidency and Egypt. By 1964, Nasser sought out a way to retreat his forces out of Yemen without jeopardizing his reputation and image internationally.¹⁵⁸ By retreating, Nasser's credibility in supporting revolutionaries and supporters of Nasserism would suffer. Additionally, it would devastate his reputation as the defacto Arab unifier and leader. Thus, Nasser looked to focus his efforts onto a new and bigger objective, Israel. By October of 1967, the last Egyptian soldier departed Yemen.¹⁵⁹ In May of 1967, Nasser marched his army northward into the Sinai triggering an international crisis which ultimately led to the Six Day War. Nasser's gamble to focus on Israel ended with drastic defeat to his reputation, Egyptians, and the Arab world.

B. PRESIDENT AL-SISI'S FOREIGN POLICY

In 2011, the Arab Spring had spread into Yemen. Large protests began to unfold calling for the end of President Ali Abdullah Saleh's over thirty-year rule. As Yemen's political unrest unfolded in the capital, government authority and security throughout the

¹⁵⁵ Jesse Ferris, "Egypt's Vietnam: Lessons from the Last Time Cairo Waded into War in Yemen," *Foreign Policy*, April 3, 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/04/03/egypts-vietnam-yemen-nasser-sisi/>.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

state began to weaken.¹⁶⁰ A lack of government stability and security led to Al Qaeda-affiliated militias seizing territory of Southern Yemen.¹⁶¹ In response to rising tensions and the fear instability, a Saudi led coalition, which included Egypt, attempted to broker a political compromise in Yemen.¹⁶² However, national consensus on the new political framework was not reached and unrest began to reappear.

The return of political unrest became violent under the leadership of the Yemeni Houthis. The Houthi clan is located in the Northern Yemen and belongs to the Zaidi branch of Shia-Islam. Being a minority in a Sunni-majority state, the Houthis were faced with many grievances under President Ali Abdullah Saleh which included government corruption, lack of jobs, and unfair fuel prices.¹⁶³ Between 2004 and 2009, these grievances escalated into numerous skirmishes between the Houthi community and the Yemeni government and other tribal communities.¹⁶⁴ When the Arab Spring spread into Yemen, President Saleh resigned in November of 2011 and appointed his former vice President Abdarbuh Mansur Hadi.¹⁶⁵ Essentially, in exchange for resigning from office, Saleh avoided prosecution from the crimes and corruption committed under his rule. However, Saleh reemerged allied with Houthi rebels as they took over the capital of Sanaa in 2014.¹⁶⁶ Additionally, the Houthis, along with other Saleh's supporters, led military attacks against various tribes and supporters of President Hadi.¹⁶⁷ In the midst of the conflict, President Hadi fled to Saudi Arabia and asked for international intervention.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁰ Jeremy M. Sharp, "*Yemen: Civil War and Regional Intervention*," CRS Report No. RL49360 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2018), 2, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R43960.pdf>.

¹⁶¹ Jeremy M. Sharp, "*Yemen: Civil War and Regional Intervention*," CRS Report No. RL49360 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2018), 2.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Newsweek, "Rise of the Houthis," February 9, 2015, www.newsweek.com/photo-essay-rise-houthis-305511.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Al-Jazeera, "Yemen: Who Was Ali Abdullah Saleh?," December 4, 2017, www.aljazeera.com/indepth/spotlight/yemen/2011/02/201122812118938648.html.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Jeremy M. Sharp, "*Yemen: Civil War and Regional Intervention*," CRS Report No. RL49360 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2018), 3.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

In response, the Saudis led a coalition under Operation Decisive Storm in order to restore President Hadi's rule and oust the Houthi fighters from the capital and major cities.¹⁶⁹

In the spring of 2017, Houthi rebels accused Saleh of treason based on rumors that Saleh was having secret talks with the Saudis.¹⁷⁰ These rumors proved true when Saleh gave a speech which called for a series of compromises with the Saudis in November of 2017.¹⁷¹ And on December 3, 2017, Saleh publicly dissolved his association with the Houthis.¹⁷² The Houthis responded with the assassination of Saleh a day later.¹⁷³ Moreover, the Houthis clashed with Saleh loyalists who were initially aligned with their cause.¹⁷⁴

Unlike Nasser, the degree of President al-Sisi's involvement in Yemen suggests he is putting Egyptian interests first. This type of policy was witnessed under his predecessor President Mohamed Morsi. After Morsi assumed the presidency, Egypt was in a state of recovery following its 2011 revolution. Thus, when the Yemeni civil war broke out in 2011, Egypt's role was limited to political support for the Arab Gulf states.¹⁷⁵ Essentially, the Saudi-led coalition was not formed, and the conflict in Yemen was relatively new. After President Morsi was ousted through a military coup in 2013, al-Sisi was forced to implement a Yemeni foreign policy at the height of its conflict.¹⁷⁶ As the Saudi-led coalition got underway in 2014, al-Sisi established a foreign policy similar to his predecessor, a policy rooted in ensuring that Egyptian interests were put first.

¹⁶⁹ Jeremy M. Sharp, "Yemen: Civil War and Regional Intervention," CRS Report No. RL49360 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2018), 3.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 4.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 3.

¹⁷⁵ Abdel Monem Said Aly, "Post Revolution Egyptian Foreign Policy," *Middle East Brief*, no. 86 (November 2014): 6.

¹⁷⁶ David Hearst, "Why Saudi Arabia is Taking a Risk by Backing the Egyptian Coup," *The Guardian*, August 20, 2013, www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/20/saudi-arabia-coup-egypt.

Al-Sisi has been taking measures to ensure Egypt does not over-extend its military forces and state resources to the war in Yemen. First, Egypt has been faced with domestic terrorism. If al-Sisi were to deploy troops to Yemen, it could potentially decrease the pressure and attention on combating domestic terrorism in Egypt. Al-Sisi appears to put Egypt's domestic issues and internal threats before fully supporting the Saudi-led coalition in the Yemeni civil war.

Second, al-Sisi does not want to get sucked into another Vietnam style war in Yemen, as Nasser had. At the outbreak of the war, al-Sisi was hesitant to deploy ground forces in support of the Saudi led coalition against the Houthis.¹⁷⁷ In 2015, his commitment to and participation in the coalition efforts were limited to the deployment of naval vessels to the Bab al Mandeb strait in order to ensure freedom of navigation.¹⁷⁸ As the Saudis aim to destroy the Houthis and restore President Hadi rule, al-Sisi does not appear to share this objective. Al-Sisi's stance on the war became evident and public at the Organization of Islamic Cooperation on November 17, 2016.¹⁷⁹ At this meeting, Egypt stated that it supports a political settlement and dialogue with the Houthis in order to end the war.¹⁸⁰ His actions suggest that he does not intend to repeat the mistakes of President Nasser.

C. CONCLUSION

By taking a backseat role in the Yemeni civil war, President al-Sisi is putting regime and national interests first. This backseat role is evident by al-Sisi's hesitant posture in the Saudi led coalition. Moreover, he has taken an opposing stance against Saudi Arabia on the Yemeni civil war. His foreign policy aims at a political solution in Yemen, vice a Saudi supported military resolution. His foreign policy towards on the Yemeni civil war stems from two factors.

¹⁷⁷ Toqa Ezzidin, "Egypt Supports Political Dialogue in Yemen, Warns of Infiltration by Militants," Daily News Egypt, November 19, 2016.

¹⁷⁸ Jeremy M. Sharp, *Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations*, CRS Report No. RL33003 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2016).

¹⁷⁹ Toqa Ezzidin, "Egypt Supports Political Dialogue in Yemen, Warns of Infiltration by Militants," Daily News Egypt, November 19, 2016.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

First, al-Sisi appears to not want to repeat the loss of men, credibility, and resources that President Nasser endured. Deploying a large army to the Arabian Peninsula would overextend Egypt's army, an institution that is heavily relied upon domestically. Additionally, losing Egyptians in a war distant from Egypt and in support of the rich populations of the Gulf countries would bring domestic unrest. For example, after al-Sisi publically acknowledged the return of the Sanafir and Tiran islands back to Saudi Arabia, the streets erupted in protests opposing al-Sisi's decision with anti-Saudi sentiment.¹⁸¹ Losing Egyptians lives to a Saudi cause would only disrupt domestic stability and challenge al-Sisi's presidency.

Second, Egypt is already combating the incursion of terrorism from West Africa and within its own borders. This domestic terrorism issue has been evident with recent ISIS attacks in the Sinai and the assaults on the Coptic population. Allocating resources and military forces overseas could result in domestic terrorism gaining momentum. Thus, President al-Sisi is putting Egypt, its citizens, and his reputation first.

¹⁸¹ Middle East Eye, "Egyptians Protest Over Red Sea Islands Deal with Saudis," June 15, 2017, www.middleeasteye.net/news/protests-egypt-follow-approval-red-sea-islands-sale-saudi-95405888.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

V. CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's regional foreign policies on three ongoing conflicts: the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in Gaza, the Syrian war, and the Yemeni civil war. Within these case studies, three hypotheses were tested to determine if the primary driving factors of al-Sisi's foreign policy decision-making were regime interests, national interests, or the combination of the two. The outcome of the case study analysis revealed that the combination of regime and national interests was the most useful hypothesis. Additionally, this analysis has helped shed light on how and why President al-Sisi makes his foreign policy decisions. Utilizing this information, a more informed understanding of al-Sisi can help U.S. leadership and policy makers better anticipate al-Sisi's foreign policy inclinations as new challenges in the region arise.

The case studies revealed that President al-Sisi takes into account both regime and national interests within his foreign policy decision-making. The first hypothesis states that al-Sisi's foreign policy concentrates on protecting the regime and supporting its interests. The second hypothesis states that al-Sisi's foreign policy concentrates on protecting national interests and improving quality of life for Egyptians. An examination of the case studies has asserted that the first and second hypothesis do not operate in isolation when attempting to explain al-Sisi's foreign policy decision-making.

In the Gaza Strip case study, a pillar of al-Sisi's foreign policy is to balance regime interests with Israel. Upholding peaceful relations with Israel ensures regime support and the continuation of aid from the United States. Additionally, by positioning the regime as a credible broker between the Israelis and Hamas, al-Sisi reasserts his importance to Middle East stability, both to partners and to the international community. Additionally, al-Sisi's foreign policy has taken into account how the Palestinian cause and unrest in Gaza impacts broad domestic public sympathy. His policy on the Gaza Strip focuses on avoiding a humanitarian crisis in Gaza because a potential crisis can spark domestic unrest and opposition within Egypt. Thus, al-Sisi has allowed aid to continue to flow into the Gaza Strip by the opening the Rafah border, appealing to the national sympathy for the Palestinian cause.

In the Syrian crisis case study, al-Sisi's foreign policy directly opposed Saudi Arabia's objective of removing Assad from power calling for a military solution in Syria. This conflicting stance is significant because al-Sisi voted against Saudi Arabia, the state that has supported the regime economically and helped put al-Sisi into power through the Egyptian military coup in 2013. In response to the regime's conflicting policy, Saudi Arabia suspended its oil deliveries. However, Egypt maintained its stance on Syria and signed an agreement with Iraq as its new supplier of crude oil in order to ensure Egypt's economy goes uninterrupted. Contrary to the first hypothesis, this case study demonstrates that al-Sisi, by shifting international relations, attempts to not only protect and support the interests and policies of the regime, but of national interests as well. Additionally, by supporting President Assad, it appears al-Sisi is attempting to end regional instability quickly, to include popular movements, in order to minimize the threat of terrorism and violence flowing into Egyptian borders.

In the Yemeni civil war case study, al-Sisi foreign policy takes into account President Nasser's experience in the Yemeni civil war of 1962 where his intervention in Yemen resulted in a loss of resources and lives and ultimately ending in a military retreat. The regime does not want to lose its credibility both domestically and internationally the way Nasser had experienced. To avoid negative impacts on the regime, Egypt has taken a back-seat role in the Saudi-led coalition in the Yemeni civil war. Egypt offers just enough to contribute to the coalition and its Arab neighbors, but not enough to risk a potential blow back to the interests of the regime. Similar to the Syrian case study, al-Sisi is also taking into account national interests in his Yemeni foreign policy by not getting involved in a neighboring war. By taking a limited role in the Saudi-led coalition, al-Sisi is attempting to not over extend his resources and military in order to avoid domestic unrest. This unrest has the potential to spark if Egyptian's were to lose their lives in a distant war which appears to only favor the rich Gulf state of Saudi Arabia.

Throughout these case studies, President al-Sisi has demonstrated that he takes into account both regime and national interests within his foreign policies supporting the third hypotheses. The first hypothesis is solely concentrated on protecting the regime and supporting its interests. The second hypothesis is only focused on supporting national

interests and Egyptian quality of life. Both of these hypotheses work in combination when attempting to define how al-Sisi makes his foreign policy decisions.

The lessons learned from these case studies gives insight into how President al-Sisi is likely to approach new challenges in the Middle East. On December 6, 2017, President Donald Trump ordered the shifting of the United States Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.¹⁸² This order formally acknowledged that the contested city of Jerusalem as Israel's capital. President Trump's foreign policy decision is viewed as especially problematic by Egypt and most of the Muslim world because it crushes the Palestinian long-held hope that East Jerusalem would eventually become the capital of a Palestinian state.¹⁸³ In the days following Trump's decision, President al-Sisi publically opposed moving the U.S. embassy in Israel, but advocated to U.S. leadership that a two-state solution would ultimately bring peace between the Israelis and Palestinians.¹⁸⁴ Advocating for a two state solution after Trump acknowledged Israel's new capital, Jerusalem, is consistent with long-held Egyptian foreign policy because Palestinians have long advocated for this city as their own capital in a two state solution. Additionally, al-Sisi's actions have paralleled his foreign policy on the Gaza Strip. By balancing Egyptian interests and maintaining the peace with Israel, Egypt will continue to receive economic aid. Concurrently, by advocating for a two-state solution and publically opposing Trump's decision, al-Sisi avoids broad domestic public sympathy and unrest for the Palestinian cause.

Ethiopia's Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Nile River presents another challenge to Egypt. This dam is forecasted to be completed in 2018 and it threatens Egypt's non-renewable resource of water supply. The Nile River is the primary water supply for Egypt and it produces approximately half of the country's electricity through the Aswan

¹⁸² Mark Landler, "Trump Recognizes Jerusalem as Israel's Capital and Orders U.S. Embassy to Move," *New York Times*, December 6, 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/12/06/world/middleeast/trump-jerusalem-israel-capital.html.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ Jeff Mason, "Pence Tells Egypt's Sisi that U.S. Would Back Two-State Solution," *Reuters*, January 20, 2018, www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-egypt/pence-tells-egypts-sisi-that-u-s-would-back-two-state-solution-idUSKBN1F90YG.

High Dam.¹⁸⁵ Thus, issues regarding the Nile River are not merely a water policy, but Egyptian national security policy because it could degrade the quality of life for the inhabitants of a state.¹⁸⁶ Since the beginning of its construction in 2011, Egypt and Ethiopia have clashed on the issue due to their shared struggle for scarce water resources. Egypt's previous president, Mohamed Morsi, took a passive aggressive approach stating that "Egypt's water security cannot be violated at all."¹⁸⁷ Conversely, al-Sisi's foreign policy on the dam has been constructive and supportive of Ethiopia's national interests. He has advocated and opened successful debates with Ethiopia on how to safely fill the dam in order to minimize collateral damage downstream.¹⁸⁸ Al-Sisi's policy appears to trend away from interstate conflict. Like Egypt's policy towards the Yemeni civil war, this policy is aimed at a political solution with Ethiopia.

Egypt's 2018 presidential election and its outcome could provide greater insight on al-Sisi's desire to stay in power. On April 25, 2017, President al-Sisi publically vowed that he would step down if he were to lose the 2018 presidential elections.¹⁸⁹ Moreover, al-Sisi has stated that the next presidential elections will be free, transparent, and fair.¹⁹⁰ This suggests that al-Sisi is attempting to claim to not only Egyptians, but to the international community, that he is no dictator. However, with the March elections around the corner, al-Sisi has almost no competition.¹⁹¹ Many potential candidates have dropped out of the president race due to political pressure and fear of an unfair election.¹⁹² This may suggest

¹⁸⁵ Kieran Cooke, "Ethiopian Renaissance Dam Project Leaves Egypt High and Dry," Tesfa News, July 30, 2016, www.tesfanews.net/ethiopian-renaissance-dam-project-leaves-egypt-helpless/.

¹⁸⁶ Richard H. Ullman, "Redefining Security," *International Security* 8, no. 1 (Summer 1983): 133.

¹⁸⁷ Kieran Cooke, "Ethiopian Renaissance Dam Project Leaves Egypt High and Dry," Tesfa News, July 30, 2016.

¹⁸⁸ Al-Masry Al-Youm, "Sisi Seeks Agreement to Regulate Filling Renaissance Dam with Nile Water," Egypt Independent, April 20, 2017, www.egyptindependent.com/sisi-seeks-agreement-regulate-filling-renaissance-dam-nile-water.

¹⁸⁹ Middle East Monitor, "Sisi Vows to Step Down If Egyptians Vote Him Out," April 27, 2018, www.middleeastmonitor.com/20170427-sisi-vows-to-step-down-if-egyptians-vote-him-out.

¹⁹⁰ New York Times, "Sisi, Egypt's Leader, Will Seek 2nd Term, and the Field Is Nearly Empty," January 19, 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/01/19/world/middleeast/egypt-sisi-election.html.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

that al-Sisi is ensuring, by other means, that his candidacy for second term goes unchallenged. Article 140 of the Egyptian Constitution, passed in 2014, states that a president can only serve two-four year terms, and may only be reelected once.¹⁹³ If President al-Sisi does win the 2018 presidential election, will he step down as president at the end of his second term? And if so, what role will he play, if any, in Egypt's government? Will he advocate and ensure his successor upholds his previous policies? As the outcome of the 2018 elections begin to unfold, al-Sisi's desire to remain in power will become more transparent.

The research began in this thesis can be expanded to examine President al-Sisi with greater detail both domestically and internationally. Future studies and research on al-Sisi and his foreign policies decision-making should take into account his military network within the Egyptian government. Having been a military general, mapping out al-Sisi's military network in the Egypt's institutions and political arena could provide further insight into his supporters in the highest positions of government. Additionally, future research on al-Sisi should try to obtain knowledge, if any exists, on his possible investments abroad. This information could provide greater insight into al-Sisi's foreign policy decision-making.

Egypt holds strategic importance to the United States and to the stability of the Middle East region. It is the largest Arab country and its geography is strategically important to the United States and its allies. Additionally, Egypt has one of the largest militaries and its domestic security has been threatened by terrorism and domestic economic hardships. By understanding that President al-Sisi makes his foreign policy decisions by attempting to balance regime and national interests in order to keep himself in power is significant. Understanding where Egypt is headed is important for not only U.S. interests in the Middle East and North Africa, but to regional security and stability. It is in the interest of the United States and its allies that Egypt continues to uphold and make responsible decisions in promoting Middle East stability.

¹⁹³ Egyptian Parliament, *Egypt's Constitution of 2014*, Egypt (2014), 37, www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Egypt_2014.pdf.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

LIST OF REFERENCES

- Abdel-Gawad, G. "Egypt and the Arab World." *Egypt's Renaissance and the International System: Confrontation or Maneuver*, ed. Mohamed Al-Sayed Saeed. Cairo: Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, 1999.
- Aboudi, Sami, and Raissa Kasolowsky. "Egypt Invites Iranian President to Sisi's Inauguration." Reuters. June 3, 2014. www.uk.reuters.com/article/uk-iran-egypt-idUKKBN0EE1SK20140603.
- Al-Jazeera*. "Yemen: Who Was Ali Abdullah Saleh?" December 4, 2017. www.aljazeera.com/indepth/spotlight/yemen/2011/02/201122812118938648.
- Al-Sisi, Abel Fattah. "Speech at Qasr El-Qubba Palace," June 8, 2014, Egypt. www.sis.gov.eg/Story/78278?lang=en-us.
- Alterman, Jon B. "Dynamics Without Drama: New Options and Old Compromises in Egypt's Foreign Policy." *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 18, no. 3 (August 2006): 357–69.
- Aly, Abdel Monem Said. "Post Revolution Egyptian Foreign Policy." *Middle East Brief* no. 6 (November 2014): 1–9.
- Al-Youm, Al-Masry. "Sisi Seeks Agreement to Regulate Filling Renaissance Dam with Nile Water." Egypt Independent. April 20, 2017. www.egyptindependent.com/sisi-seeks-agreement-regulate-filling-renaissance-dam-nile-water/.
- Aran, Amnon, and Rami Ginat. "Revising Egyptian Foreign Policy Towards Israel under Mubarak: From Cold Peace to Strategic Peace." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 37, no. 4 (July 2014): 556–83.
- Associated Press. "Iranian Navy Vessels Enter the Suez Canal," Fox News. February 22, 2011. www.foxnews.com/world/2011/02/21/official-iran-naval-ships-enter-suez-canal/.
- Bahgat, Gawdat. "Saudi Arabia and the Arab-Israeli Peace Process," *Middle East Policy*, no. 3 (September 2007): 49–59.
- Beltrami, Mohammad P. "El-Sissi's Apparent Betrayal: The Ultimate Wake-up Call for Saudi Arabia," Daily Sabah. January 19, 2017. www.dailysabah.com/op-ed/2017/01/20/el-sissis-apparent-betrayal-the-ultimate-wake-up-call-for-saudi-arabia.
- Brown, Nathan J. *When Victory Becomes an Option: Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood Confronts Success*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012. https://carnegieendowment.org/files/brotherhood_success.pdf.

- Childress, Sarah. "The Deep State: How Egypt's Shadow State Won Out." PBS. September 17, 2013. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/the-deep-state-how-egypts-shadow-state-won-out/>.
- Clarke, Duncan L. "US Security Assistance to Egypt and Israel: Politically Untouchable?" *Middle East Journal* 51, no. 2 (Spring 1997): 200–14.
- CNN. "Egypt Court Blocks Transfer of Red Sea Islands to Saudi Arabia." January 16, 2017. www.edition.cnn.com/2017/01/16/middleeast/egypt-island-ruling-saudi-tiran-sanafir/.
- Constitute Project. Egypt's Constitution of 2014. 2018. https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Egypt_2014.pdf.
- Cooke, Kieran. "Ethiopian Renaissance Dam Project Leaves Egypt High and Dry." Tesfa News. July 30, 2016. www.tesfanews.net/ethiopian-renaissance-dam-project-leaves-egypt-helpless/.
- David, Steven R. "Explaining Third World Alignment." *World Politics* 43, no. 2 (January 1991): 223–256.
- Ezzidin, Toqa. "Egypt Supports Political Dialogue in Yemen, Warns of Infiltration by Militants," Daily News Egypt. November 19, 2016. www.dailynewsegypt.com/2016/11/19/egypt-supports-political-dialogue-yemen-warns-infiltration-militants/.
- Ferris, Jesse. "Egypt's Vietnam: Lessons from the Last Time Cairo Waded into War in Yemen." *Foreign Policy*. April 3, 2015. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/04/03/egypts-vietnam-yemen-nasser-sisi/>.
- Ferris, Jesse. "Nasser's Gamble: How Intervention in Yemen Caused the Six-Day War and the Decline of Egyptian Power." *The Middle East Journal* 67, no. 3 (June 2013): 451–52.
- Hanna, Michael Wahid. "The Sisi Doctrine." *Foreign Policy*. August 13, 2014. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/08/13/the-sisi-doctrine/>.
- Hearst, David. "Why Saudi Arabia is Taking a Risk by Backing the Egyptian Coup," *Guardian*. August 20, 2013. www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/20/saudi-arabia-coup-egypt.
- Isaac, Sally K. "In Egypt It Is Not a Coup: Egyptians Restore Their Destiny." Italian Institute for International Political Studies. July 4, 2013. http://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/publicazioni/commentary_isaac_04.07.2013_0.pdf.
- Israel Advocacy & Education. "Operation Protective Edge: July-August 2014." *Anti-Defamation League*. <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/glossary-terms/operation-protective-edge-july-august-2014>.

- Jerusalem Post*. "Cairo Population Set to Grow by Half a Million In 2017." March 12, 2017. <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Cairo-set-to-grow-by-half-a-million-in-2017-483953>.
- Jerusalem Post*. "Egypt's Sisi Vows to Keep Up Qatar Blockade," July 25, 2017. <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Egypt-s-sisi-vows-to-keep-up-Qatar-blockade-500646>.
- Korany, Bahgat. *Foreign Policy Decision-making Theory and the Third World: Payoffs and Pitfalls*. London, Westview Press, 1986.
- Lappin, Yaakov, and Tovah Lazaroff. "Gaza Groups Pound Israel with Over 100 Rockets." *The Jerusalem Post*. November 12, 2012. <http://www.jpost.com/Defense/Gaza-groups-pound-Israel-with-over-100-rockets>.
- Landler, Mark. "Trump Recognizes Jerusalem as Israel's Capital and Orders U.S. Embassy to Move." *New York Times*. December 6, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/06/world/middleeast/trump-jerusalem-israel-capital.html>.
- Lesch, David W. and Mark L. Haas. *The Middle East and the United States*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2014.
- Ludis, John. "America's Failure and Russia and Iran's Success in Syria's Cataclysmic Civil War." Talking Points Memo. January 10, 2017. www.talkingpointsmemo.com/cafe/americas-failure-russia-success-in-syrias-war.
- Mason, Jeff. "Pence Tells Egypt's Sisi that U.S. Would Back Two-State Solution." *Reuters*. January 20, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-egypt/pence-tells-egypts-sisi-that-u-s-would-back-two-state-solution-idUSKBN1F90YG>.
- Middle East Eye. "Egyptians Protest Over Red Sea Islands Deal with Saudis." June 15, 2017. <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/protests-egypt-follow-approval-red-sea-islands-sale-saudi-95405888>.
- Middle East Monitor. "Sisi Vows to Step Down If Egyptians Vote Him Out." April 27, 2018. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20170427-sisi-vows-to-step-down-if-egyptians-vote-him-out/>.
- Meringolo, Azzurra. "From Morsi to Al-Sisi: Foreign Policy at the Service of Domestic Policy." *Insight Egypt*, no. 8 (March 2015): 1–12.
- Migdalovitz, Carol. "Israel's Blockade of Gaza, The Mavi Marmara Incident, and Its Aftermath." CRS Report No. RL34074. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2010. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R41275.pdf>.

- Michael, Dibia Ike. "Egypt: El-Sisi Visits Trump, Requests Muslim Brotherhood Be Declared a Terrorist Group." *African News*. April 3, 2017. <http://www.africanews.com/2017/04/03/egypt-el-sisi-visit-trump-request-muslim-brotherhood-declared-a-terrorist-group/>.
- Milani, Mohsen. "Why Tehran Won't Abandon Assad(ism)." *The Washington Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (Fall 2013): 79–93.
- Morgenthau, Hans J. *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. 6th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985.
- Morsi, Mohamed. "Statement Before the 67th Session of the general Assembly of the United Nations." United Nations Assembly, New York. September 26, 2012. https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/67/EG_en.pdf.
- Mostafa, Dalia S. *The Egyptian Military in Popular Culture: Context and Critique*. United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.
- Mozes, N. "The Egypt-Saudi Dispute Over a Resolution to The Syria Crisis Goes Public." The Middle East Media Research Institute, Inquiry & Analysis Series. October 2016. www.memri.org/reports/egypt-saudi-dispute-over-resolution-syria-crisis-goes-public#_ednref1.
- Newsweek. "Rise of the Houthis." February 9, 2015. <http://www.newsweek.com/photo-essay-rise-houthis-305511>.
- New York Times*. "Sisi, Egypt's Leader, Will Seek 2nd Term, and the Field Is Nearly Empty." January 19, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/19/world/middleeast/egypt-sisi-election.html>.
- Nutting, Anthony. *Nasser*. London: Constable, 1972.
- Parsi, Trita, and Adam Weinstein. "Iran's Proxy Wars Are a Figment of America's Imagination," *Foreign Policy Magazine*. January 25, 2017. <https://www.yahoo.com/news/iran-proxy-wars-figment-america-161026769.html>.
- Phares, Walid. *The Lost Spring: U.S. Policy In the Middle East and Catastrophes To Avoid*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014.
- Porat, Liad. "The Muslim Brotherhood and Egypt-Israel Peace." *Mideast Security and Policy Studies*, no. 102 (January 2014): 5–40.
- Reed, John. "Egypt and Hamas deal on Gaza Border Reflects Shifting Dynamics." *Financial Times*. August 22, 2017. <https://www.ft.com/content/acd76b40-872d-11e7-bf50-e1c239b45787>.

- Reuters. "Saudi Aramco Informed Egypt About Suspending Oil Product Supply: Official." October 10, 2016. www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-saudi-petroleum/saudi-aramco-informed-egypt-about-suspending-oil-product-supply-official-idUSKCN12A1DH.
- Saadoun, Mustafa, "Will Egypt join Iraq in the 'Axis of Resistance'?" Al-Monitor. January 20, 2017. www.almonitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/01/iraq-egypt-iran-saudi-axis-resistance-basra-oil.html#ixzz4WkNq2gBV.
- Shama, Nael. *Egyptian Foreign Policy from Mubarak to Morsi: Against the National Interest*. London: Routledge, 2014.
- Sharp, Jeremy M. *Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations*. CRS Report No. RL33003. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2016. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33003.pdf>.
- Sharp, Jeremy M. *The Egypt-Gaza Border and Its Effect on Israeli-Egyptian Relations*. CRS Report No. RL34346. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2008. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL34346.pdf>.
- Sharp, Jeremy M. "Yemen: Civil War and Regional Intervention." CRS Report No. RL49360. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2018. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R43960.pdf>.
- Sheehan, Michael. *The Balance of Power: History and Theory*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Siddiqui, Fazzur R. "Changing Contours of Egypt's Foreign Policy in the Aftermath of Uprising." *Indian Council of World Affairs: Issue Brief* (September 2016): 1–18. <https://icwa.in/pdfs/IB/2014/ChangingContoursofEgyptsIB08092016.pdf>.
- Strickland, Patrick. "Egypt Army Destroys Dozens of Gaza Tunnels." Al Jazeera. November 9, 2015. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/11/egypt-army-destroys-dozens-gaza-tunnels-151109125035215.html>.
- Taflioglu, M. Serkan. "From Burden to Strategic Asset; The Relationship Between the Government of Hamas and Mubarak's Egypt." *Academic Review of Economics and Administrative Sciences* 6, no. 1 (2013): 1–8. <http://dergipark.gov.tr/download/article-file/185045>
- Tekmor Monitor. "Iraq To Start Exporting 1M Oil Barrels a Month to Egypt: Iraqi Ambassador to Cairo." January 11, 2017. <http://tekmormonitor.blogspot.com/2017/01/iraq-to-start-exporting-1m-oil-barrels.html>.
- Times of Malta. "Mubarak Orders Opening of Rafah Border with Gaza." June 1, 2010. <https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20100601/world/mubarak-orders-opening-of-rafah-border-with-gaza.310055>.

- Trofimov, Yaroslav. "Egypt Juggles Its Friendships as Russian Influence Surges." *The Wallstreet Journal*. October 13, 2016. www.wsj.com/articles/egypt-juggles-its-friendships-as-russian-influence-surges-1476366166.
- Ullman, Richard H. "Redefining Security." *International Security* 8, no. 1 (Summer 1983): 129–153.
- U.S. Department of State and Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. "Egypt 2015 Human Rights Report." Country Reports on Human Rights Practices. 2015. <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/253133.pdf>.
- Waltz, Stephen M. *The Origins of Alliance*. London: Cornell University Press, 1987.
- Wenner, Manfred W. and, Abd al-Monein Said Aly. "Modern Islamic Reform Movements: The Muslim Brotherhood in Contemporary Egypt." *Middle East Journal* 36, no.3 (Summer 1982): 336–361.
- Wright, Lawrence. *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*. New York: Random House, Inc., 2006.
- Yaghi, Ayyam Mohammed. " Hamas' Relations with Egypt Change with Morsi's Leadership." *Al-Monitor*. September 10, 2012. <http://almon.co/2hj>.
- Youssef, Nour. "Militants Attack Police Checkpoint in Sinai, and ISIS is Suspected." *New York Times*. January 9, 2017. www.nytimes.com/2017/01/09/world/africa/sinai-isis-attack.html?_r=0.

INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST

1. Defense Technical Information Center
Ft. Belvoir, Virginia
2. Dudley Knox Library
Naval Postgraduate School
Monterey, California