

## Features Of The Fight Against Religious Extremism And Terrorism In Egypt's Regional Security Policy

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### ABSTRACT

At the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, the Arab Republic of Egypt, both in domestic and foreign policy, fought against religious extremism, radicalism and terrorism, which posed a great threat to the security and stability of the country. The article analyzes the features of the fight against religious extremism and terrorism in the regional security policy of Egypt during the presidency of Hosni Mubarak and Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

**Keywords:** - Religious extremism, terrorism, radicalism, Middle East, regional security, security threat.

### INTRODUCTION

The lives of innocent people being taken and the growing threats to security posed by radicalism, religious extremism, and terrorism remain a common enemy of all humankind. Today, preventing such dangers and eliminating the factors that feed them has become a shared responsibility of all nations. The President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, has stated the following about these threats: "Uzbekistan has always maintained a principled position in the fight against terrorism, extremism, and radicalism. It is necessary to combat such dangers not only through the use of force, but, above all, through enlightenment-especially among the youth-against the ignorance that breeds violence." [1]

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the problem of religious extremism and terrorism became a concern for countries around the world and became the most dangerous in terms of causing socio-political problems. In particular, terrorist attacks in the Middle East region, one of the most "painful" points in the world during this

period, became a source of great threat not only to national and regional security, but also to the global scale.

The causes and factors of the politicization of Islam and the radicalization of the population in the Arab countries of the Middle East are many and varied. The problem of terrorism that has arisen as a result of this radicalization is a serious tragedy. According to the RAND Corporation research center in the United States, 15,731 terrorist attacks were committed in the Middle East region between 1990 and 2010 [2]. This statistic alone shows how serious the situation in the region is.

### METHODOLOGY

In the foreign and regional security policy of the Arab Republic of Egypt (ARE), the issue of combating religious extremism and terrorism has been studied by numerous Arab, Russian, and other foreign scholars. It is noteworthy that a significant portion of these studies consists of academic articles devoted to the history and current state of bilateral relations between Egypt

and other Middle Eastern countries. Consequently, cooperation in ensuring regional security has often not been examined as an independent aspect but rather as part of the broader framework of political, trade-economic, and cultural-humanitarian relations.

A similar approach can also be observed in the scholarly works of researchers who have studied Egypt's foreign policy within a regional context, where issues of countering extremism and terrorism are analyzed indirectly-through the prism of Egypt's diplomatic and strategic interactions with neighboring states.

However, despite this, the studies of orientalist such as S.E. Babkin, Ya.E. Kamlevskaya, K.I. Polyakov, L.R. Khlebnikova, Fakhime Saberi, Iyman Ragab, Zaynab Kaya, Barbara Azaola Piazza have devoted a large part to the security cooperation of Egypt's foreign policy. These studies focus on Egypt's cooperation with global powers and regional partners during the era of Hosni Mubarak and Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, as well as on the issues of combating extremism and terrorism within regional and international organizations.

Among the Uzbek orientalists, the scientific works of Sh. Yovkochev and D. Madaminova can be especially noted. In particular, Sh. Yovkochev recognized that the Islamic parties and movements of the MER have political experience that allows them to influence not only the political life of the state and the regional community, but also Egypt's foreign policy views. D. Madaminova comprehensively studied the place of Egypt in the security system of the Mediterranean region.

The basis of the research is the historical-analytical, logical-historical method. Historical-comparative analyses are carried out, as a result of which general conclusions are drawn. The theoretical and methodological basis of the research is the cooperation of the Arab Republic of Egypt with the countries of the Middle East in the field of security.

## RESULTS

The Arab Republic of Egypt occupies a unique place in the Arab world. Due to its geopolitical influence, Egypt affects the general socio-political situation in other Arab countries. In this sense, the country's foreign policy in the international arena is greatly influenced by radical Islamic movements throughout the Middle East [3:124]. According to the Russian orientalist Ya.E.Kamlevskaya, "The

Egyptian method can be a unique example in the fight against religious extremism and terrorism in the Middle East. This state is one of the few countries that has seriously committed itself to fighting evil and called for the unity of the Arab East" [4:58].

The terrorist acts that took place in the Arab Republic of Egypt in the late 20th and early 21st centuries covered the entire country. As a result, the Egyptian government was forced to seriously combat this problem. The activities and aggression of radical religious extremist groups in Egypt became so widespread that the scale of the problem began to pose a major threat not only to Egypt's national security, but also to the stability of the region.

**The era of Muhammad Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011).** Thanks to the flexible and balanced foreign policy of the Mubarak government, Egypt regained its leading position in the Arab and Islamic world by the early 1990s. Egypt began to pay great attention to regional security, the fight against religious extremism and terrorism in its foreign policy. This was due to the growing radicalism and terrorist activities in Egypt in the early 1990s, which forced the government to seriously deal with this problem.

Since 1992, the main goal of the Egyptian leadership's foreign policy in the fight against extremism and terrorism has been to reach agreements with a number of countries on the extradition of Egyptian extremists hiding in their territories. In particular, such agreements were concluded with the governments of Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Yemen, which repeatedly returned Egyptian extremists to their countries [5:80].

In May 1993, Hosni Mubarak ordered the severing of telephone and fax connections with Iraq, which the Egyptian government considered to be a state that supported or sheltered extremists (a similar practice was also used against countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and Sudan) [5:81]. Although this practice was a well-thought-out measure aimed at limiting the activities of extremists, it did not have the expected effect in the security sector, as in other areas, since the Egyptian government did not have an active foreign policy with the above-mentioned countries.

Although Egypt had achieved some results in bilateral relations in the fight against extremism and terrorism by the second half of the 1990s, a number of problems hindered the establishment of

inter-Arab cooperation. This was primarily due to differences in their assessment of security priorities. However, the increased threat of terrorism in the last decade of the 20th century required Arab countries to seek ways to coordinate joint efforts to combat these phenomena.

The summit meetings held in the 1990s were of great importance for developing a common position on these issues. During the consultations held there, experts from the relevant security agencies of the Arab countries developed coordinated measures aimed at stopping the activities of extremists. In particular, the summit in Sharm el-Sheikh, held in March 1996, contributed to strengthening cooperation in this area within the framework of the League of Arab States (LAS). In 1996, the member states of the LAS adopted a code of conduct for combating terrorism, and in 1997, a common strategy for combating terrorism by the Arab states was approved [6:107].

A qualitatively new level of cooperation was reached after the signing of the Convention on Combating Terrorism at the meeting of the Ministers of Internal Affairs of the OIC member states in Cairo in April 1998. The Convention entered into force in May 1999 and provided for the extradition of criminals involved in terrorist activities to the interested states. The Convention also allowed the countries participating in the agreement to request the implementation of various legal actions in each other's territories in connection with crimes based on terrorism. In addition, the agreement provides for mutual assistance by the participating countries in conducting investigative actions and other legal processes related to the investigation of terrorist acts [7].

At the end of January 1999, the 16th session of the Council of Interior Ministers of the ADL member states was held in Amman (Jordan). At this session, a joint declaration condemning terrorism was adopted for the first time in the Arab world. The ADL Council of Interior Ministers developed a unified Arab strategy and announced the obligations of Arab states to prevent the financing and arming of terrorism, the implementation of any criminal acts and propaganda that undermines the security of the parties [6:108].

It should be noted that inter-Arab cooperation in combating extremism and terrorism was not limited to the level of law enforcement agencies. In a number of cases, other interested ministries and agencies also worked in this direction. For example, at the end of November 1998, a meeting

of the Ministers of Religious Affairs (Waqfs) of Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Iraq was held in Cairo. During the negotiations, agreements were reached on the need to use the capabilities of these ministries, including identifying sources and channels of financing Islamic groups that use Muslim charitable funds (zakat) for their own purposes [6:108].

However, the effective use of the documents signed within the framework of the OAU on combating extremism and terrorism has been hampered by differences in the approaches of the member states of the organization to these problems. For this reason, the Egyptian government has not limited itself to the OAU, but has ratified a number of conventions of regional importance against terrorism. In particular, the Egyptian side joined the Organization of African Unity Convention on Preventing and Combating Terrorism, adopted in Algiers on July 14, 1999, in 2000. Also, on December 12, 2010, in Cairo, the Egyptian capital, the Arab conventions on combating technological crimes were adopted, and on December 21, 2010, the Arab conventions on combating the legalization of criminal proceeds and the financing of terrorism were adopted [8].

There seems to be other aspects to the Mubarak regime's strong focus on regional security issues in foreign policy. According to Spanish scholar B.A. Piazza, "Mubarak designed Egypt's regional leadership based on guaranteeing regional stability against the Islamic threat" [9:406]. This situation naturally conflicted with the interests of other major powers in the Middle East.

#### **The era of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi (2013/2014-...).**

After the 30-year rule of Hosni Mubarak was ended as a result of the events of the "Arab Spring" in 2011, Mohamed Morsi, associated with the "Muslim Brotherhood", briefly came to power in Egypt. However, in the summer of 2013, M. Morsi and the "Muslim Brotherhood" were overthrown in a military coup, and the political and military elite that had ruled until 2011 returned to the top of the Egyptian government. After the administration passed to Field Marshal Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, measures to combat radicalism, extremism and terrorism were significantly strengthened in Egypt, and the "Muslim Brotherhood" was declared a terrorist organization.

Abdel Fattah al-Sisi began to pay great attention to regional security issues in foreign policy, and his initiatives were fully supported by other leading countries of the Arab world - Saudi Arabia and the

United Arab Emirates (UAE). There were, of course, specific reasons for this. The fact is that in the 1990s, the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood were banned in both countries, and these monarchies were afraid that in the context of regional political changes, their population would fall under the influence of radical Islamic ideology and rebel against their governments. The electoral success of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in 2011 practically showed that the concerns of Saudi Arabia and the UAE were not unfounded, and were perceived by both countries as a serious threat. Therefore, Saudi Arabia and the UAE needed Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to defeat the Muslim Brotherhood in the region and prevent its spread. In turn, the Egyptian president, in his first years in power, also needed external assistance-financial support from the Arab monarchies of the Persian Gulf-to restore the country's economy and strengthen his position against the Muslim Brotherhood [9:405].

The development of the processes showed that Egypt - Saudi Arabia - UAE have the same approach and views on the classification of terrorist groups, security. In particular, the Muslim Brotherhood, which the Egyptian government declared a terrorist organization on December 25, 2013, was soon included in the list of terrorist organizations by Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

The defeat of Mohammed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood on the Egyptian political scene was supported by other non-Arab forces in the region. In particular, the political changes associated with the military coup in Cairo and the rise of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to the top of the Egyptian government were very "warmly" welcomed by official Tel Aviv. Israel, which has a unique historical relationship with Egypt, was interested in developing security cooperation with the government of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. While the fight against the Muslim Brotherhood has been a prominent feature of Egypt-Saudi Arabia-UAE security cooperation, the growth of Egyptian-Israeli cooperation has been greatly influenced by the terrorist groups operating in the Sinai Peninsula<sup>2</sup>, especially Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM, which began to be called the Sinai Province in 2014)<sup>3</sup>.

After the Arab Spring, Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis has become the main threat in the Sinai Peninsula, and this armed group has undermined the security of not only Egypt, but also its neighbor, Israel. Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis has claimed responsibility for numerous attacks against Israeli interests,

including a July 2012 attack on the Sinai pipeline that exports gas to Israel and a rocket attack on the southern Israeli city of Eilat in August 2012 [10:97]. For this reason, the Egyptian government decided to cooperate with Israel in the fight against ISIL. In turn, Israel, known for its advanced military technology, has been helping Egypt strengthen its southern borders.

According to media reports, in 2015, Israel, at the request of the Egyptian government, carried out military operations to eliminate terrorists in Sinai. Successful cooperation between Israeli and Egyptian special services has led to the capture of wanted individuals in Sinai. A new brigade, Faran, is being created with the help of the Israeli army to strengthen the Egyptian-Israeli border [11:71].

## DISCUSSION

The post-Arab Spring events have revealed a lack of regional consensus among Middle Eastern countries in combating threats. There are a number of reasons for this: different approaches and views on the classification of terrorist groups, as well as the lack of a common definition of terrorism, which are the main obstacles. For example, Bahrain and Kuwait consider the Muslim Brotherhood to be a legitimate political group with representatives in their national parliaments and governments, while Qatar still has a special relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood. Therefore, these countries, along with countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, are silent on the issue of combating the Muslim Brotherhood. As a result, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE have developed their own national policies and have created limited regional mechanisms to contain the threat from the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as any potential threat from other terrorist hotspots such as Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and even Libya. These mechanisms are limited and open to countries that share the same security concepts [12:106].

In recent years, Egypt's cooperation with Saudi Arabia and the UAE in combating terrorism has taken the form of joint military exercises. In particular, the armed forces of these countries, in cooperation with the militaries of Greece and Cyprus, held the joint military exercises "Hercules-21" and "Hercules-2" in 2021-2022 [13].

In addition, in 2021, at the 37th session of the Council of Arab Ministers of Justice, chaired by Algeria, Omar Marwan, Advisor to the Minister of Justice of the Arab Republic of Egypt, stressed the



importance of taking all necessary measures to develop inter-Arab cooperation in order to prevent and combat terrorism and fill the gaps that allow any structures and organizations to spread terrorism. He also noted the need to develop a draft national mechanism to confiscate any funds allocated to terrorism and to eradicate its roots, as well as to guarantee an Arab agreement on combating terrorism [14].

Unlike other regions of the world, the Middle East region does not have a system covering regional security. The failure of attempts to create such a system is explained by the existing complexities in the region. In recent years, the idea of forming a "Middle East Strategic Alliance" (informally called "Arab NATO") to ensure security<sup>2</sup>, put forward by the administration of former US President Donald Trump, has been widely discussed by a number of research centers and some analysts. In their opinion, it is this military alliance that can serve as the most effective mechanism for combating all types of threats in the region, in particular terrorism. According to Washington's plan, the alliance should include the United States, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and Jordan. However, given that one of the main tasks of the organization to be created is "to resist Iranian aggression in the region," it becomes clear that this military alliance will serve the political interests of the United States, not the region. That is why the positions of the Arab states on this alliance, which aims to "keep Iran in check," are different. In particular, Egypt did not want tensions to arise in relations with Iran and announced its withdrawal from the alliance negotiations in April 2019 [15].

## CONCLUSION

The Mubarak regime paid great attention to regional cooperation in the fight against extremism and terrorism, and even raised this issue to the level of a priority of Egyptian foreign policy. During this period, Egypt was one of the few countries that showed determination in the fight against threats and called for unity in the Arab world. All the treaties and agreements signed by Arab states at the initiative of Egypt during the Mubarak era, as well as international documents adopted, turned regional cooperation into an effective method of combating extremism and terrorism only in theory, based on the transnational nature of extremism and terrorism. The boasting within the framework of such

cooperation did not achieve tangible practical results.

Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, as in the Mubarak era, is also seeking to strengthen regional cooperation against the threats of extremism and terrorism as a way to strengthen Egyptian foreign policy. This method, which revolves around the desire to establish an independent foreign policy and strengthen Egypt's role in the Middle East, is being implemented by the Egyptian security forces. In this way, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has revived Egypt's traditional foreign policy doctrine and is adapting it to contemporary regional challenges.

Although Egypt has been pursuing mutually beneficial cooperation with Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE in the fight against extremism and terrorism under Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, it cannot be said that similar relations have been established with other countries in the region. This is because the countries of the region have different approaches and views on security. In this situation, Egypt is forced to fight extremism and terrorism with limited regional mechanisms. Due to the lack of regional consensus in combating threats, the activity of extremist groups and terrorist organizations in the Middle East remains high.

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