

Russia and Egypt signed a "comprehensive cooperation and strategic partnership agreement"

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Abstract

President Putin and President El-Sisi signed an agreement on comprehensive cooperation and strategic partnership following a summit in Sochi. The two presidents have also discussed regional issues, economic cooperation and the implementation of joint projects

President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi arrived in Moscow on October 15, 2018, for a three-day official visit. Ahead of flying to Sochi, El-Sisi met with Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, where they discussed trade, investment, tourism and other issues of mutual concern.

In Sochi, President El-Sisi and his Russian counterpart President Putin signed the agreement on comprehensive cooperation and strategic partnership.¹ The meeting was attended by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, First Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Anton Siluanov, Presidential Aide Yuri Ushakov, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, and Industry and Trade Minister Denis Manturov. The Egyptian side was represented by Minister of Foreign Affairs Sameh Shoukry, Minister of Electricity and Renewable Energy Mohamed Shaker, Director of the Egyptian General Intelligence Service Abbas Kamel and Vice Minister of Finance Ahmed Kouchouk.²

The October 17, 2018 meeting between the two leaders marked their third official bilateral summit since the Egyptian president assumed office in 2014.

Putin's aide, Yuri Ushakov, said that this document "will not only record the achieved level of cooperation and partnership, but will also set tasks of boosting an entire range of bilateral ties in the future."³

Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev said the agreement "will mark a new stage in the development of Russian-Egyptian relations, which are friendly regardless of it."⁴

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi have discussed regional and bilateral issues:⁵

The economic ties - In May 2018, Egypt and Russia signed a 50-year agreement to build a Russian Industrial Zone in the new Suez Canal Economic Zone. The zone, built on an area of 5.25 million square meters at a cost of \$7 billion, is at the forefront of plans to increase trade and economic cooperation between the two countries.⁶

Russian investments in Egypt by the end of 2017 reached \$4.6 billion, with more than 60 per cent in the oil and gas sector.⁷ According to the Russian Federal Customs Service, the volume of bilateral trade between January and April 2018 reached \$2.163 billion, a 49 per cent increase on the same period last year.⁸ President Putin stated that the economic ties between the two countries are successfully developing. "Last year we stated a sharp 62% growth in the trade turnover, plus 28% in the first six months of this year." The Russian state leader stressed that it is the result of the diversification of bilateral ties. "They are rather diversified. They include agriculture, industry, equipment and vehicles," he specified.⁹

El-Sisi encouraged Russian investors to explore the opportunities Egypt offers, highlighting the country's modern infrastructure and access African markets, and stressing Egypt's chairmanship of the African Union in 2019 and the free trade agreements it shares with regional economic blocs.¹⁰

The Al Dabaa nuclear plant - Negotiations to build the plant, which will consist of four 1,200 megawatts reactors, began in 2015. In May 2016 President El-Sisi approved an agreement under which Moscow provides a \$25 billion loan to finance the construction of the seven-year project, to be paid off over 35 years.

During the visit, officials from Egypt's Ministry of Electricity and Russia's State Atomic Energy Corporation (Rosatom) updated El-Sisi and Putin on progress in constructing the nuclear power plant at Dabaa on Egypt's North Coast. El-Sisi's meeting with Putin included a follow-up on project specifications and discussions of the timetable for the construction of the nuclear plant.¹¹

Tourism - Russian tourists made up 30 per cent of all incoming visitors to Egypt before the downing of a Russian flight in October 2015. Following the tragedy Russia imposed a ban on all flights to Egypt. Earlier this summer the ban on flights to Cairo was finally lifted, though it remains in place on flights to the Red Sea resorts of Sharm El-Sheikh and Hurghada.¹²

On Syria - Putin affirmed that he is working closely with his Egyptian counterpart to aid efforts to reach a political solution and rebuild the war torn country. "I informed president El-Sisi about Russia's steps regarding this issue, especially concerning Russian agreements with Turkey on Idlib," Putin said. "We agreed to continue our fruitful cooperation in this issue during the upcoming period," he added.¹³

On Syria, Egypt and Russia agree there can be no regime change under the sway of protests or militant opposition groups. President Bashar Al-Assad should remain in office pending the elimination of all militant groups and the establishment of a plausible political succession, even if that is later rather than sooner.¹⁴

Cairo has also been clear about the urgent need to establish the composition of a political coalition representing civil and unarmed opposition groups to negotiate with the Assad regime on future power-sharing in Syria, well away from any radical militant groups, especially those close to Turkey and Qatar.¹⁵

El-Sisi said the UN sponsored political process for Syria needs to be stepped up so a new constitution can be drafted as a first step towards the resumption of political negotiations to end the crisis in “a way that protects the unity and safeguards state institutions”.

Regarding Libya - the talks touched on the political and security developments in the country. The Russian president affirmed that the strategic partnership between Egypt and Russia helps maintain safety and stability in the Middle East and North Africa. "Russia and Egypt will continue coordinating efforts to reach a solution to the crisis in Libya," Putin added.¹⁶

El-Sisi said Cairo’s vision is based on the full implementation of the holistic political approach proposed by the UN last year but which has not yet moved forward, complemented by ongoing work to unify the Libyan military so it can serve its role in protecting Libya and combating terror threats.

There is a shared understanding that in Libya Khalifa Haftar, who controls much of eastern Libya, must be a leading, if not the leading, figure in any future political dispensation. During talks in Cairo with Ghassan Salamé, the UN envoy to Libya, Egyptian officials made no bones about the need for the UN mission to secure a leading role for Haftar.¹⁷

Both Cairo and Moscow want Haftar to be head of a unified national army and they want the army to oversee the political structure, not the other way round. And they want the arms embargo imposed on Libya to be removed to allow supplies of weapons to Haftar’s army.

The Russian president also expressed hope that Egypt's chairmanship of the African Union can open up new horizons for cooperation between Russia and African nations.

On Palestinian issues - El-Sisi said that he and Putin strongly agree on the necessity of reaching a comprehensive solution to the Palestinian issue based on a two-state solution along the 1967 borders, the provisions of international law, as well as the Arab peace initiative.¹⁸

On counterterrorism, El-Sisi said he and Putin agreed on the importance of exchanging information between security bodies, especially with regards to the transit of terrorists from areas of instability to other states. “We stressed the need to prevent the movement of terrorists to other territories,” El-Sisi said.¹⁹

The president also said that he briefed his Russian counterpart on the latest results of operation Sinai 2018 and Egypt's efforts to counter terrorism.

Summary

Russian President Vladimir Putin and President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi signed a Comprehensive Partnership and Strategic Cooperation Agreement. The Sochi summit marked their third official bilateral meeting since the Egyptian president assumed office in 2014 and coincided with the 75th anniversary of relations being established between Egypt and the Soviet Union.

"The signing of the strategic partnership agreement marks a shift in relations between the two countries," El-Sisi said, noting that the signing of the agreement crowns the rapidly developing relations between the two countries, especially over the last four years. "This momentum has been crowned by the start of work on the Dabaa nuclear power plant in December 2017, with Russia providing funding and technical expertise," the Egyptian president said.

The two presidents have also discussed economic cooperation and the implementation of joint projects as well as ways to build on the two countries' growing military cooperation. The Russian president highlighted the significance of the decades-long military cooperation between Egypt and Russia. The summit witnessed the signing of a number of mutual cooperation agreements involving trade and industry as well as a discussion on the resumption of Russian flights to the Red Sea resorts of Hurghada and Sharm El-Sheikh.

Moscow and Cairo are sharing strategic and political interests to promote regional stability based on strong national states. Egyptian-Russian cooperation over Syria and Libya goes beyond any narrow definition of joint interests to encompass stability across the Middle East. It is also about opening up economic avenues for the eventual reconstruction of both countries, in terms of infrastructure and in terms of armaments.²⁰

The situation in Libya, for Egypt it is a direct security issue, given the more than 1,000km western border Egypt shares with Libya and Cairo's ongoing war with militant groups in Sinai. Egypt is naturally concerned about preventing an influx to the peninsula of any militants displaced from Sinai. For Russia it is a matter of expanding its strategic presence across the Middle East in countries that Moscow traditionally considered part of its sphere of influence in a region that has a considerable Western presence.²¹

Notes

- ¹ Putin, al-Sisi sign strategic cooperation treaty, TASS, October 17, 2018.
- ² Russian, Egyptian presidents discuss regional problems, TASS, October 17, 2018.
- ³ Putin, al-Sisi sign strategic cooperation treaty, TASS, October 17, 2018.
- ⁴ Putin, al-Sisi sign strategic cooperation treaty, TASS, October 17, 2018.
- ⁵ Sisi, Putin sign comprehensive strategic cooperation agreement in Sochi, Ahram Online, October18, 2018.
- ⁶ Egyptian-Russian relations: Seventy-five years on, Ahram Online, October18, 2018.
- ⁷ Egyptian-Russian relations: Seventy-five years on, Ahram Online, October18, 2018.
- ⁸ Egyptian-Russian relations: Seventy-five years on, Ahram Online, October18, 2018.
- ⁹ Russian, Egyptian presidents discuss regional problems, TASS, October 17, 2018.
- ¹⁰ Reem Leila, Long-term allies, Al Ahram Weekly, Issue 1415, (25 - 31 October 2018).
- ¹¹ Egyptian-Russian relations: Seventy-five years on, Ahram Online, October18, 2018.
- ¹² Russian, Egyptian presidents discuss regional problems, TASS, October 17, 2018.
- ¹³ Sisi, Putin sign comprehensive strategic cooperation agreement in Sochi, Ahram Online, October18, 2018.
- ¹⁴ Dina Ezaat, Agreeing on regional stability, Al Ahram Weekly, Issue 1414, (18 - 24 October 2018).
- ¹⁵ Dina Ezaat, Agreeing on regional stability, Al Ahram Weekly, Issue 1414, (18 - 24 October 2018).
- ¹⁶ Sisi, Putin sign comprehensive strategic cooperation agreement in Sochi, Ahram Online, October18, 2018.
- ¹⁷ Dina Ezaat, Agreeing on regional stability, Al Ahram Weekly, Issue 1414, (18 - 24 October 2018).
- ¹⁸ Sisi, Putin sign comprehensive strategic cooperation agreement in Sochi, Ahram Online, October18, 2018.
- ¹⁹ Sisi, Putin sign comprehensive strategic cooperation agreement in Sochi, Ahram Online, October18, 2018.
- ²⁰ Dina Ezaat, Agreeing on regional stability, Al Ahram Weekly, Issue 1414, (18 - 24 October 2018).
- ²¹ Dina Ezaat, Agreeing on regional stability, Al Ahram Weekly, Issue 1414, (18 - 24 October 2018).