

After decades of anti-Israel incitement, Egypt must now try to reverse it for Trump

written by Ruth Wasserman Lande | 16.10.2025

As we mark the second anniversary of October 7 – and as we go to print – there appears to be a potential breakthrough in efforts to end the ongoing war in Gaza and secure the release of the remaining hostages.

US President Donald Trump has demonstrated firm commitment, resolve, and consistency in pushing for an end to the war and the return of hostages, both living and deceased. The fact that he managed to galvanize support from a respectable list of Arab and Muslim countries for this endeavor is in itself no small feat.

However, it is crucial to view what is unfolding in the region with a discerning eye. In the Middle East, the truth is rarely found in plain sight. Instead, it lies buried between the lines, inside innuendos and euphemisms.

Softened tone

Egypt is an interesting and important case in point.

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has recently leveraged the anniversary of the 1973 war with Israel – referred to in Egypt as the October 6 War – to remind his people that what followed that conflict, the real victory, was the 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty, which allows for the continued stability and prosperity of the Egyptian Republic.

This appears to be a deliberate effort by Egypt's leadership to de-escalate the intense anti-Israel rhetoric that surged after the attacks of October 7, 2023. In the aftermath of the attack, Egypt's public discourse about Israel turned sharply hostile, with Sisi himself referring to Israel as “an enemy” – a term notably not used even in the context of Ethiopia, despite a bitter years-long dispute over Nile River waters.

In recent days, Sisi's tone has notably softened. The shift closely followed a high-level visit to Cairo by US Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee, a trip made to impress upon the Egyptians that Trump would like such war-mongering declarations to be toned down ahead of his anticipated 20-point plan to end the Gaza war.

Experience in Gaza

Despite the positivity of a shift in Egypt's tone, it must be understood within a broader context. Cairo's unease following the October 7 attacks was not merely about regional instability. There was panic in the Egyptian establishment that, in light of the war, hordes of Gazans would flee into the Sinai Peninsula, creating a serious internal security terrorist threat.

The memories of Egyptian involvement in Gaza still loom large in the country, despite the external facade. Following the British Mandate in 1948, Egypt occupied Gaza until 1967 and became all too familiar with the inherent dangers and challenges that ruling it entailed.

So traumatized was Egypt by this experience that in 1979, when it signed its peace treaty with Israel, the government flatly refused to take back the Gaza Strip or take responsibility for its population.

Tension with Hamas

In addition, Egypt has long been following the rise of extremism in Gaza, particularly the Hamas movement, which emerged in the 1980s as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood. Cairo has historically viewed the group as a domestic threat, well before Israel fathomed what might unfold in Gaza.

While in those early years Hamas took the form of social welfare (dawa), Cairo was quick to recognize the group as a radicalizing force. Yet, despite this inherent distrust and hatred, Egypt has tolerated Hamas and even helped it by overlooking weapons smuggling into Gaza via underground tunnels – so long as the terrorist group refrained from collaborating or assisting the extremist Islamist elements operating in the Sinai Peninsula.

Help from Israel

At the same time, successive Egyptian governments, including Sisi's, have nurtured anti-Israel sentiment through education, media, professional unions, and cultural institutions. Antisemitic tropes and conspiracies remain common in textbooks and public discourse.

This duality – strategic military coordination with Israel behind the scenes on one hand, and public hostility for domestic consumption on the other – was the almost uninterrupted policy of successive Egyptian regimes, until the military coup of

2011, when the Muslim Brotherhood briefly took power, shaking the very core of the military Egyptian establishment.

During that time, Hamas terrorists were able to cross more easily from Gaza into Egypt, carrying out attacks against Egyptian soldiers, and creating close ties with Islamist cells in the Sinai.

After Sisi gained control, he acted in no uncertain terms against this threat, fortifying the Gaza-Egyptian border, destroying many of the tunnels, and creating a deadly no-man's zone between the two.

He even made the unprecedented request that Israel assist Egypt in conducting military operations in Sinai against Islamist terror cells threatening the regime. Israel not only accepted the challenge but also allowed Egypt to fortify its forces and military equipment in the Sinai Peninsula above and beyond what was agreed upon in the peace treaty.

Excellent intelligence cooperation ensued, and Israel was often instrumental to Egypt in terms of providing information pertaining to potential extremist threats against the Egyptian regime within its borders.

No leverage

However, Israel never leveraged this to demand that Egypt's state-sponsored incitement, indoctrination, and hatred against it be stopped. That incitement continued in varying degrees, and lowered at some points, such as following the signing of the Abraham Accords.

The result of decades of official and unofficial incitement is deeply embedded public hostility in Egypt toward Israel. In a country of more than 120 million people, this creates a serious constraint on the Egyptian leadership's ability to openly support or normalize relations with Israel – even when doing so aligns with its strategic interests. Cairo has become a prisoner of its own narrative, fearing backlash from a public that it helped shape.

It is undeniably in Israel's interest for Egypt to remain stable and prosperous. Proposals to resettle Palestinians from Gaza into Sinai are impractical and counterproductive, effectively relocating a volatile situation from one Israeli border to another.

The value of continuing a strategic partnership between Jerusalem and Cairo is huge, even without genuine people-to-people cooperation, which Egypt adamantly refuses to foster.

But several troubling developments cannot be ignored. Egypt's incitement against Israel continues in various public domains. Its military presence in the Sinai has grown far beyond what the peace treaty originally permitted. And, most concerning, since October 7 the international oversight mechanism designed to

monitor compliance with the treaty has been obstructed from fully performing its duties.

Even with Trump's regional plan clearly in the works, these issues must be central to any future dialogue, since they form the foundation for evaluating Egypt's long-term interest in maintaining peace and preventing regional escalation.

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