

BOOK REVIEW

Egypt's Diplomacy in War, Peace and Transition

By Nabil Fahmy

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Biographies, autobiographies, memoirs and the diaries of political leaders are essential sources for Foreign Policy Analyses (FPA), in particular those based on the individual level. Although it is uncertain whether such narratives reflect the truth, they do provide firsthand, insightful accounts regarding the foreign policy of the relevant country. The Arab World regrettably lacks personal reviews, memoirs and autobiographies written by presidents, foreign ministers and other senior career diplomats. Egypt provides the exception to this rule, with several significant writings regarding Egyptian foreign policy produced by former foreign ministers. Nabil Fahmy, a senior Egyptian diplomat, Foreign Minister between 2013 and 2014 and faculty member of The American University in Cairo, presents valuable accounts regarding Egyptian foreign policy in his book *Egypt's Diplomacy in War, Peace and Transition*.

The book consists of ten chapters divided into four distinctive parts. Since there is no introductory chapter, the author explains the reasons, motivations and processes that gave rise to the publication in the preface. In chapter 1, Fahmy explains his personal and professional alignments. The son of Ismael Fahmy, himself a senior diplomat and Foreign Minister of Anwar Sadat (1973–1977), Fahmy explains how diplomacy and international relations attracted him to become a member of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 are mainly related to the challenges and opportunities Egypt has confronted in its foreign policy. In these chapters, Fahmy analyzes the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli Wars and their consequences, 9/11 and its impact

on the Middle East, the Middle East Peace process, the problem of nuclear weaponry in the Middle East, the re-engagement or re-orientation of Egypt's foreign policy and bilateral relations between the U.S and Egypt. Chapters 8 and 9 mainly deal with the country's domestic transition between 2011 and 2013. Fahmy analyzes the toppling of the Mubarak regime in 2011, the presidential elections in 2012 and the removal of Mohamed Morsi from the presidency in 2013. He describes both January 25, 2011 and July 3, 2013 as "revolutions." In Chapter 10, Fahmy thoughtfully considers the question of how to establish better a Middle East in the future.

As a senior diplomat and ambassador to Japan (1997–1999) and the U.S. (1999–2008), Nabil Fahmy witnessed a number of significant developments in Egypt's foreign policy, specifically those having to do with Egyptian-American relations. After attending The American University in Cairo, Fahmy was offered the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs by the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) and the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) government. However, he rejected these offers in the belief that his foreign policy insights were not aligned with the views of the MB, which were based on a "religious index" rather than "national security" (p. 17). Fahmy believes that Egypt lost its direction in terms of national identity during the MB government. Therefore, when he was again offered the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs in the post-military coup period, Fahmy did not decline the request. He believes that his mission was to achieve a more assertive and independent Egypt in foreign policy, as desired by the Egyptian people themselves (p. 18). Thus, the "Fahmy Doctrine" describes Egypt's new, multidimensional foreign policy in the aftermath of the military coup.

Before analyzing Egyptian foreign policy in the post-military coup period, Fahmy shares his views regarding the historical developments in the Middle East. According to Fahmy, the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait and the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 ushered in a new political paradigm in the Middle East. These three geopolitical upheavals resulted in the death of Arab nationalism, the end of the Arab unity and regional, geopolitical imbalances. Iran and Türkiye, as non-Arab neighbors of the Arab countries, increased their impact in the region as a result (p. 23–36).

Unfortunately, Fahmy mainly focuses on the role of Iran and its sectarianism in the region, and does not provide equally valuable insights about Türkiye. Moreover, he generally focuses on external dynamics and influences regarding the geopolitical transformations in the region, and does not assess intra-Arab rivalries such as the Baath competition between Syria and Iraq and Syria's support to Iran during the Iran-Iraq War. Perhaps most surprisingly, the popular democratic uprisings called the "Arab Spring" that shook the Arab World, constitute a significant geopolitical upheaval in the Middle East that is disregarded by Fahmy.

Egypt had waged several comprehensive wars against Israel alongside other Arab countries such as Jordan and Syria. As one of the leading Arab countries during the Arab-Israeli wars, Egypt later played a crucial role in the Arab-Israeli Peace Process. Egypt was the first country to recognize Israel with the Camp David Accords (1978–1979). Fahmy believes that Israel had many more achievements compared to Egypt, and that Egypt made a lot of concessions to Israel (p. 64). Although Egypt was suspended from all Arab and Islamic organizations in the wake of the Camp David Accords, once Mubarak re-activated Egypt's role in the Arab world, the country again became an influential actor in the Arab-Israeli Peace Process during the 1990s. As a career diplomat, Fahmy witnessed several peace initiatives between the Arabs and Israelis, and he explains several crucial dialogues that took place between them at the negotiation tables, including those between Yasser Arafat and Fahmy himself. Arafat's dependence and reliance on Egypt demonstrates the role of Egypt in the peace negotiations (p. 85–90). Focusing on the approaches of various U.S. presidents, such as Clinton, Bush and Obama, toward the Middle East Peace process, Fahmy analyzes their similarities and differences regarding their dealings with the issue, and concludes that it was the U.S. presidents' consistent mistake to believe that once the parties met they could find a solution (p. 108).

While discussing the issue of nuclear weaponry in international politics, Iran and its nuclear program has been one of the dominating agenda items of Middle Eastern politics. However, Fahmy analyzes nuclear programs and facilities in the Middle East in the context of the Arab-Israeli Peace Process. By doing so, he reminds readers of the nuclear threats and imbalances in the region, which create an "ominous security environment" (p. 128).

One of Nabil Fahmy's major contributions to Egyptian foreign policy itself and to the literature in general is to overturn Egypt's disregard for and neglect of relations with Russia, as well as African countries such as Libya, Sudan and Ethiopia; and Asian countries such as China and South Korea. Based on the "Fahmy Doctrine," Egypt has developed crucial and friendly relations with these countries in the post-military coup period. In this regard, Fahmy clearly explains Egypt's priority regarding Libya, saying that since Egypt's western border was "unstable and insecure," it has supported Haftar's forces in the Libyan civil war (p. 133). Since Sudan is a crucial country for Egypt in terms of border security, water security and economic security, it was the first country Fahmy visited as Foreign Minister. Although Sudan was determined to side with Ethiopia in the context of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), Fahmy explicitly underlines the importance of Sudan for Egypt (p. 134–136).

Although it is itself an African country, Egypt's foreign policy toward Africa and its role in the African Union (AU) have always remained uncertain. Fahmy pays great attention to the continent. As Foreign Minister, he pressed for the lifting of Egypt's suspension from the AU (p. 140). Regarding Egypt's role and its water security in Africa, Fahmy portrays the Nile River and GERD as an "existential issue" (p. 142). In this context, as a foreign minister, Fahmy explains how he urged international actors to not to support the GERD project unless Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan reached an agreement. Fahmy believes that signing the Khartoum Declaration of Principles in 2015 diminished Egypt's negotiation power and opened the way for the GERD project to be supported by international donors (pp. 144–145). However, in this regard, Fahmy disregards the role of Sudan's support for the GERD project. In truth, Egypt's lack of strong ties with the African countries as well as Sudan's support for Ethiopia resulted in the signing of the declaration.

More generally, Egypt's new engagement with the Asian countries and Russia is crucial to understand its new diversified foreign policy. Fahmy explains the country's historical relations with China, South Korea and North Korea, and their impact on Egyptian-American relations. Having visited Russia in 2013, Fahmy realized that Russia had begun to be a more proactive player in the Middle East. Therefore, Egypt worked to

develop bilateral relations with Russia without alienating the U.S. (p. 158). Fahmy describes the long-term American-Egyptian relations as “indispensable but uncomfortable” (p. 161). He clearly underlines how the U.S.’ democracy promotion policy influenced bilateral relations along with the political transformations in the Middle East.

Although *Egypt's Diplomacy in War, Peace and Transition* provides insightful and valuable accounts regarding Egyptian Foreign Policy, the book is also open to criticism. First, since it has both analytic and memoir characteristics, readers should deal with it very carefully, as it contains several exaggerations. Second, in connection with the first critique based on the memoir feature, Fahmy uses few citations except for the full texts of certain agreements. However, full texts of the “Fahmy Doctrine” and Sisi’s first speech in the African Union are notably missing from the appendix. Finally, the book reveals the differences between academics and practitioners in international relations. For example, Fahmy mostly focuses on very deep details regarding the Middle East Peace Process, and pays great attention to each initiative as if they were all highly critical. Such an approach complicates the reading process and draws readers into details that may not be that relevant.

To conclude, providing both an analysis and a memoir, Fahmy makes a great contribution to the literature on Egyptian foreign policy. He provides critical analyses of Egypt’s past and present foreign policy miscalculations. As the son of Ismael Fahmy, Nabil Fahmy offers valuable insights into his father’s views and opinions regarding Egyptian foreign policy. Finally, one can easily understand Egypt’s proactive and assertive foreign policy in the post-military coup period by reading *Egypt's Diplomacy in War, Peace and Transition*.

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