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Russia – Egypt Boost Strategic Cooperation

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Abdel Fattah Saeed Hussein Khalil al-Sisi, the President of Egypt, visited Russia on August 12. The summit became a breakthrough giving a powerful impetus for development of bilateral relations. The presidents reached deals to create a free trade zone with Eurasian countries and a Russian industrial zone in Egypt as part of the Suez Canal Axis. The new segment of the canal will be 45 miles long, branching off from the current canal, which is 120 miles. The extension is needed to reduce waiting times for vessels from an average of 11 hours to three. The relationship between Egypt and the Customs Union of Russia, Belorussia and Kazakhstan is to become closer. Military cooperation will continue, including armor and air defense systems deliveries to Egypt. The two countries join efforts in space research. In April 2014 a Russian rocket carried an Egyptian satellite into orbit. Egypt is to increase exports to Russia. Tourism is also to get a new impulse for further progress. The international agenda of the talks included such burning problems as the crises in Syria, Iraq, Libya and the aggravation of the stand-off in the Gaza Strip between Israel and Palestine. Radical Islam exercises growing influence using terror as an instrument of political struggle. Egypt and Russia have rich experience of facing Islamic radicals. The majority of Egyptians perceive al-Sisi as a national leader who has saved the country from plunging into the quagmire of civil war. An internal conflict was brewing in the days of Islamist President Mohamed Morsi's tenure. Al-Sisi was Defense Minister in July 2013. He had the support of left-wing and liberal political forces, the Salafist al-Nour political party, the Constitutional Court, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Grand Mufti of Egypt, Al-Azhar

Muslim University and the patriarch of Coptic Orthodox Church. With this wide backing behind him al-Sisi deposed then President Morsi who represented the Muslim Brotherhood. Those events went down in the history of Egypt as the «Revolution of June 30» (on June 30, 2013 the army sent an ultimatum to Morsi).

Al-Sisi won the presidential election in May 2014. The Muslim Brotherhood were excluded from the country's political life as a terrorist organization, according to the new constitution approved by 98% of voters at the January 2014 referendum. Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the Minister of Defense and the head of security services won over 96% of the vote. The victory was unprecedented in the 60 year history of Republican Egypt. The country became a republic in 1953. Moscow was the destination of his first foreign trip in the capacity of Defense Minister when he met President Putin in February 2014. On the part of his people the Russian President wished Egypt's top military officer «success» in the nation's presidential run. The relationship between the two countries has historic roots. Abdel Fattah al-Sisi enjoys strong support among those who stick to the legacy of former President Gamal Abdel Nasser, for instance: the National Salvation Front, including Al Wafd (Delegation Party), one of the oldest and most influential Liberal Democratic parties, the Arab Nasserist Party and the Tamarod (Rebellion) grassroots movement representing left-wing and Liberal Democratic forces. In Egypt al-Sisi is often compared to Gamal Abdel Nasser who ruled the country in 1954-1970.

The Nasser's socialism-oriented policy was aimed at maintaining the Egypt's leadership in the Arab world and countering the neo-colonial pressure of the West being an ally of the Soviet Union. The bright examples of bilateral cooperation are the construction of Aswan dam and the support rendered to Egypt by the USSR in the days of Great Britain, France and Israel's intervention against this country in 1956. The attack was stopped upon the demand of the Soviet Union stressing its right to intervene and strike the aggressors. The people of Egypt remember the support rendered the USSR those days. Quite often demonstrators on the streets of Cairo carry together three pictures of al-Sisi, Nasser and Putin.

The world has greatly changed since the times of Nasser but neo-colonialism is still alive. For instance, the United States stopped military and financial aid to Egypt after Morsi was overthrown, The former President implemented pro-Western foreign policy, especially towards Syria. The departure of Morsi did not meet the US interests, so it labelled his deposition as a «violation of democracy and military coup». The African Union terminated Egypt's membership in the organization. No matter that Egypt is adamant on the way of restoring its position as the leader of Arab world and a regional center of power.

As a result of the events in Crimea and Ukraine Russia faces a stand-off with the West. The international events make one presume it's not the last confrontation. To counter the challenge Russia needs allies outside the Western world – in Asia, Latin America and Africa. With its long history of ties with Russia, Egypt, a leading Arab nation, can become a Russian ally.