

Egypt and Israel May Be Cooperating on Gaza but ‘Normalization’ Remains Distant

Daniel Sonnenfeld / June 2, 2021

However, small steps toward increased cooperation are part of a consistent trend

Israel’s Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi arrived in Cairo on Sunday to meet with his Egyptian counterpart, Sameh Shoukry, the first such official visit of an Israeli foreign minister to Egypt in over a decade.

[...]

Dr. **Ofir Winter**, an expert on Israel-Egypt relations at **Tel Aviv University’s Institute for National Security Studies**, suggests that economic issues are a major motivator for Egypt. “I think that the economy is a central issue in Egypt and has been so for several years. The main challenges faced by the country at present are economic challenges,” he told The Media Line. COVID-19 and its limitations did nothing to help, of course. Tourism is an important industry in Egypt, and **Winter** estimates that it decreased by 75% during the pandemic. The increased cooperation with Israel, he says, may help its southern neighbor economically.

Winter adds that Cairo’s relations with Israel recently helped it score points with Washington. “Egypt very much wants to get closer to Biden ... and it’s using its role as mediator between Israel and Hamas in Gaza to show that it is an asset to the US, that it is a force for stability and peace in the region,” he said.

Winter concludes that there has been progress in the ties between the countries, and there is greater cooperation; however, the steps forward have been taken within the traditional framework of the Egypt-Israel relationship: security and some economic and tourist activity. At present, it is too early to talk of a thaw in relations that would bring Egypt and Israel closer to what was enabled by the Abraham Accords.

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