



Egypt-Russia Strategic Cooperation Goes Nuclear

OE Watch Commentary: Russian-Egyptian strategic cooperation continues to deepen, most recently with a December 2017 agreement for Russia's state-owned nuclear power company Rosatom to build Egypt's first ever nuclear power plant in al-Dabaa, along the Mediterranean coast. The accompanying excerpts highlight foreign perspectives on the impact of deepening Russian-Egypt strategic cooperation and the nuclear agreement in particular.

The first article, from the Saudi daily *Elaph*, notes Israeli concerns with Egypt's nascent nuclear program, which some in Israel fear could eventually become weaponized. However, the article also cites two Arab experts, one of whom downplays Israeli concerns as "not based on reality," while the other points to a plan by "regional and international powers [who seek] to plunge the region into an arms race in order to exhaust its resources."

The second article, from the magazine of Egypt's semi-official daily *al-Ahram*, is an enthusiastic overview of the burgeoning strategic alliance between Egypt and Russia. The article characterizes the al-Dabaa nuclear deal as the start of "100 new years of strategic partnership." The article adds that Egypt chose Rosatom from among 6 bidders because "the Russian offer stated that al-Dabaa remained the property of the Egyptian Arab Republic and that Egypt had the right to collaborate with other countries in the subsequent stages for the plant," in addition to the fact that "the Russian offer did not impose any political conditions on Egypt to build the nuclear plant." More broadly, the article celebrates Russian support for Egypt and argues that the countries face similar foreign and domestic challenges "targeting their political stability and threatening their national security."

The third article is written by Abdel-Halim Qandil, a prominent Egyptian intellectual who was among the most outspoken critics of ex-president Hosni Mubarak. Qandil praises the deepening strategic cooperation with Russia as a way for Egypt to free itself from "the shackles of American occupation... on [Egypt's] political, economic and military decision-making." For the past four decades, he argues, Cairo's regional policies "were nothing but a translation from English to Arabic of Washington's decisions." He claims that the past four years have changed this and that we are now in the "heart of the American autumn in Egypt," with the al-Dabaa nuclear plant project marking a major turning point in America's fading influence in Egypt.

End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)

"...Russia helped Egypt return with strength to the regional and international stage and supports its participation in all regional initiatives while also fighting against any attempts to marginalize Egypt's role..."

Source:

البرنامج النووي المصري يثير قلق إسرائيل

Sabri Abdel Hafidh. "Egyptian Nuclear Program Worries Israel," *Elaph*, 11 January 2018. <http://elaph.com/Web/News/2018/1/1185489.html>

Israel expressed concern with the possibility of Egypt expanding its nuclear program beyond the reason for its establishment - electricity generation - and to include nuclear weapons. According to Rafael Ofek, an Israeli nuclear technology expert, "Israel's intelligence agencies have had doubts, for several years, that Egypt does not only seek to possess nuclear energy but wants to secretly build nuclear military capabilities, especially since Cairo has allocated enormous sums to strengthening and arming its military"... Egyptian production, in particular the military, has progressed significantly in recent decades. Nuclear weapons are back on the agenda for Egypt and Saudi Arabia, after the agreement with Iran in July 2015... Military expert, Gen. Fouad Hussein, said that Israeli concerns are not based on reality, noting that the Egyptian nuclear program has well known goals ever since the agreement was signed with Russia... Dr. Mohammed Yosri, an expert in nuclear engineering... said that Egypt has fought against the spread of nuclear weapons and adopted an initiative for the Middle East to be a nuclear weapons-free zone. However, several regional and international powers seek to plunge the region into an arms race in order to exhaust its resources. Egypt will not fall into this quagmire... This is not the first time Israel has expressed concern regarding Egypt's nuclear program, which is to be established with Russian help.

Source: من السد العالي إلى محطة الضبعة النووية: 100 عام من التحالف الإستراتيجي بين روسيا ومصر
"Ayman Samir. "From the High Aswan Dam to the al-Dabaa Nuclear Plant: 100 Years of Strategic Alliance between Russia and Egypt," *al-Ahram al-Arabi*, 13 December 2017. <http://arabi.ahram.org.eg/News/129443.aspx>

The Egyptian-Russian "Achievements Summit" which brought together Russian President Vladimir Putin and President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi launched 100 new years of strategic partnership between the two countries, following the signing of the Dabaa Agreement which is in force for 90 years beginning 2026. This adds to more than 250 years of strong relationships between the Egyptian and Russian people... Russia helped Egypt return with strength to the regional and international stage and supports its participation in all regional initiatives while also fighting against any attempts to marginalize Egypt's role... Russia sees Egypt as an "Axis of Stability" in the Middle East and investing in Egypt as "Investing in Stability" ... Egypt chose the Russian offer out of 6 offers, considering that the Russian offer stated that al-Dabaa remained the property of the Egyptian Arab Republic and that Egypt had the right to collaborate with other countries in the subsequent stages for the plant. It also lines up with Egypt's political, technical and social interests... The Russian offer did not impose any political conditions on Egypt to build the nuclear plant... The political relationship between the two countries has boomed since the 30 June Revolution, resulting in visits by Russia's foreign and defense ministers to Egypt on 14 November 2013 and a visit by Egypt's foreign and defense ministers to Russia on 12-13 February 2014. The political discussions took place under the "2+2" model, making Egypt the only Arab country with which Moscow follows this model, which it employs with five other countries: the United States, France, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Japan... a commitment by both countries to support one another politically at the regional and international levels, in light of the foreign and domestic challenges faced by both countries targeting their political stability and threatening their national security.

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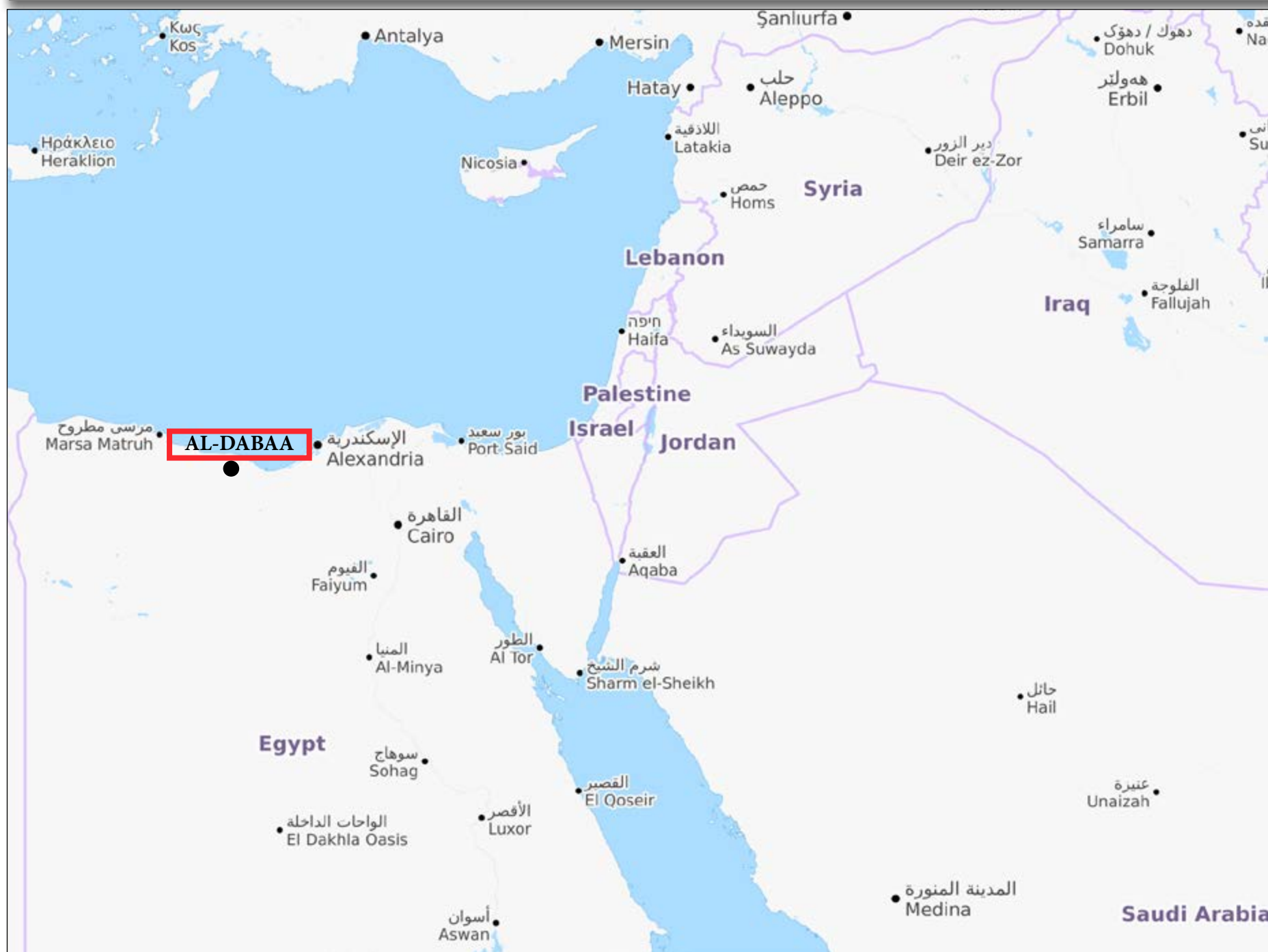
Continued: Egypt-Russia Strategic Cooperation Goes Nuclear

Source:

Abdel-Halim Qandil. "America's Autumn in Egypt," *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 18 December 2017. <http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=846230>

خريف أمريكا في مصر

... the shackles of American occupation for four decades on our political, economic and military decision-making are being broken... Relations with the United States became a heavy burden and have been lightened to the extent possible over the past four years. All that remains of them are ghostly shadows and persistent crises... the years of flourishing Egypt-US relations were also years of Egyptian decline... Cairo became nothing, a lost echo without a voice of its own. Its regional policies were nothing but a translation from English to Arabic of Washington's decisions... Today we are in the heart of the American autumn in Egypt. The launch of the al-Dabaa nuclear plant, in collaboration with Russia, may constitute the fall of the major autumn leaf in the American tree in Egypt... It is no coincidence that the political environment that led to the al-Dabaa project resembles in many ways what happened in Egypt in the mid-1950s, when the monopoly of Western weapons for the Egyptian military was broken and weapons procurement was diversified, including an increased reliance on Soviet weapons... something similar has happened over the past four years, with Egypt breaking its near-total reliance on American weapons and the development of a comprehensive policy of diversified weapons sources and a major leap in local military production capabilities... Egyptian interest in the Palestinian issue has increased, with "Tight Link" policies with all Palestinian factions. This bothers Israel and angers Washington, which attempted to punish Egypt by withholding aid and limiting the weapons provided to the Egyptian military and opening its appetite to put additional pressure on Egypt. This does not seem to have had an effect for Washington, as Egypt made its decision and appears more committed than at any point in the past to end the American occupation on Egyptian decision-making.



Location of El Dabaa.

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