The Egyptian National Security and the Situation in the Sahel and Sahara

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Stemming from the Egyptian historical constants and role on various levels, the Egyptian foreign policy has always been characterized by multi-regional and international action circles. This is crystal clear through the multiplicity and intersection of such circles on the strategic, geographical and cultural levels. Thus, stemming from the strategic, economic and demographic importance of the Sahel and Sahara, the security problems in this region in particular and in west Africa in general have never been absent from the minds of the Egyptian decision-makers. Furthermore, the hotbeds of tension in the Sahel and Sahara, especially the current war in Mali, not to mention the growing terrorist phenomenon, had represented geostrategic motives to accelerate the pace of the Egyptian action towards the issues of this area and region in general.

The latest developments in the Sahel and Sahara, especially upon the Arab Spring revolutions, has further augmented the phenomenon of terrorism. Such a phenomenon that is always characterized by the features of geographic contagiousness, and of the prevalence of terrorism through regional and international borders in a region that suffers from fragile borders between its states. In this respect, Egypt called – on the periphery of the meetings of the Extraordinary Summit of the Community of the Sahel and Sahara States in the Chadian capital N’Djamena- for the importance of facing the proliferation of the armed groups and arms and drugs smuggling. Furthermore, Egypt has presented to the Summit three initiatives concerning the establishment of a terrorism combat center in Egypt, not to mention an initiative for realizing food security and fighting drought in the Sahel and Sahara states.

Within the same context, during the 20th African Union Summit, Egypt called for the importance of adopting a preventive strategy that aims at addressing the causes of the African conflicts through: fostering the foundations of rational rule, activating the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, eliminating poverty and marginalization, fighting racism, paying due attention
to the values of cooperation, justice, peace and protecting the rights of peoples in a decent life.

The security challenges in the Sahel and Sahara make it inevitable upon the countries lying in that region to formulate a regional system that would enable them to meet such challenges. This should take place according to a comprehensive and full strategy to develop such countries on the one hand. It should also take place through exchanging intelligence information, coordinating the security of the borders, and fighting smuggling and organized crime that include drugs, human trafficking and arms smuggling on the other hand.

According to such strategic importance of this region, the 38th periodical of *African Perspectives* has dedicated a special file for “the security situation in the Sahel and Sahara in light of Mali’s crisis.” This file discussed the military intervention in Mali and the armed groups in Africa and their effect on the regional and international security. It also reviewed a study for the terrorist organizations in the Sahel and Sahara, not to mention the certain files that tackle the current discussions taking place concerning such issues in the international academic circles and the research centers through contributions from Malian, Sudanese and American experts in these fields.

On the other hand, the periodical continued monitoring the democratic transformations in the various African countries through monitoring the elections in Djibouti and Kenya.

In light of confirming the African identity of Egypt, this issue reviews the activities of the 2nd Luxor African Film Festival with the participation of hundreds of artists from 35 African countries, thus realizing the cultural and artistic interaction between Egypt and its African depth. In this respect, the festival pours in the interest of “Egypt’s Soft Power” in Africa through activating the role of the African and artistic tools so as to consolidate the Egyptian-African relations.

Finally, within the framework of the role of the “State Information Service” (SIS) on the African level, the SIS established a center for media coordination and cooperation with the African countries, aiming at consolidating the informative and media relations with these countries, thus fostering the Egyptian civilizational interaction with our black continent. The SIS had also participated in the Cairo University ceremony for Dr. Abd el-Malik Ouda – professor of political science, being a pioneer of the African studies in Egypt. In this respect, political science scholars, African ambassadors, experts, diplomats, media professionals and a vast crowd of African studies students from Egypt and other African countries had all attended this ceremony.