Deploying Egyptian Military Forces: Between Protecting the State and the Regime



On 26 October 2026, the Egyptian House of Representatives—by a two-thirds majority—authorised General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to deploy military forces abroad, specifically to support the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and safeguard its security amid regional escalation in the Arabian Gulf and Yemen. In effect, the authorisation was retroactive; the General had already dispatched troops and military equipment to four Gulf states as early as the first week of rising tensions between the United States and Iran in February 2026. The stated rationale was to provide defensive and security support, secure borders, and bolster strategic cooperation with the regime's partners from the 2013 coup.

This raises a fundamental question: Who truly determines the deployment of Egyptian military forces beyond the nation's borders? What are the driving contexts and the governing constraints? To what extent has Egypt's national security criterion factored into these operations?

Historical Precedents

Since the coup of July 23, 1952—which toppled the monarchy under King Farouk—and up to the end of October 2026, Egypt has seen several official deployments of military forces beyond its national borders. These deployments encompass direct combat engagements, regional defensive alliances, and international peacekeeping missions. Regarding wars and direct combat engagements, the first occurred in 1961, when the regime of Gamal Abdel Nasser dispatched a military unit as part of a joint Arab force—organised under the Arab League—to safeguard Kuwait's independence. This followed threats by the then-Prime Minister of Iraq, Abd al-Karim Qasim, to annex the country. The deployment was based on an Arab League resolution (July 12–16, 1961) to replace British forces with an Arab contingent. The joint Arab force—comprising troops from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Sudan, and Tunisia—began arriving in Kuwait on September 10, 1961. While the force remained to maintain security, a

portion of the Egyptian contingent stayed on for training and military cooperation, whereas the other Arab forces gradually withdrew by February 1963.

Subsequently, Egypt participated in the Yemen War (1962–1967), deploying ground and air forces to support a military coup led by Abdullah al-Sallal against the Mutawakkilite Kingdom, headed by Imam Muhammad al-Badr Hamid al-Din—who, in turn, was backed by the Saudi regime. This operation was the largest overseas military deployment in Egyptian history; by 1965, the number of Egyptian troops had reached an estimated 70,000. The intervention ended after Abdullah al-Sallal was ousted in another coup on November 5, 1967. By then, the Egyptian military presence had already diminished in the wake of the June 5, 1967, defeat—known as the *Naksa* (setback)—during which the Egyptian army was defeated by Israeli occupation forces, leading to the occupation of the Sinai Peninsula. Concurrently with the war in Yemen during the 1960s, Gamal Abdel Nasser dispatched forces to support the Algerian army during the border military confrontations with the Kingdom of Morocco in October and November 1963—a conflict known as the "Sand War."

A fourth instance involved the deployment of Egyptian forces to the Syrian front during the October 1973 War—specifically air force units and military advisers—as part of a joint strategy for the war of liberation against the Israeli occupation forces.

A fifth instance was the war to liberate Kuwait—known as Operation Desert Storm (1990–1991)—during which Egypt, acting in accordance with Arab League resolutions, deployed full ground and armoured units. This was done to contribute to the liberation of Kuwait following the Iraqi invasion on August 2, 1990, and to secure the Saudi border against Iraqi threats. Egypt contributed two military divisions (the 4th Armoured Division and the 3rd Mechanised Infantry Division), in addition to special forces (*Al-Sa'iqa*). With a total of approximately 35,000 troops, Egypt became the second-largest Arab contributor to the coalition, after the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The second category encompasses what might be termed defensive operations and regional alliances between the regime and its regional partners—specifically those who supported it during the 2013 coup. Examples include the Egyptian military's aerial operations in Libya. On February 16, 2015, Egyptian fighter jets launched strikes against sites alleged to belong to the Islamic State in the city of Derna, following the group's release of a video showing the execution of 21 Egyptian Copts in that city.

Approximately one month later, in March 2015, the coup-installed regime in Egypt announced its participation in the "Arab Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen"—an alliance formed by Saudi Arabia to counter the Ansar Allah (Houthi) movement, which had seized power in Yemen and taken control of the capital, Sanaa, in September 2014. Egypt's involvement was limited to deploying naval and air force assets to secure international navigation in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and the Red Sea, with no ground troops deployed. On October 26, 2026, the regime's parliament—by a two-thirds majority—officially authorised the President of the Republic to deploy military forces abroad to safeguard national security and counter regional escalation. The decision included the dispatch of defensive support and logistical security forces to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, alongside specialised units and equipment for defensive purposes in four other Gulf states: the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, and the Sultanate of Oman. This occurred against a backdrop of intensifying military operations between Iran and the United States in the Persian Gulf, as well as escalating direct confrontations between Saudi Arabia—and its partners—and the Houthis in Yemen. The losses and damage sustained by Saudi Arabia prompted it to request support and protection from dozens of nations.

A third category comprises military participation in the form of logistical support and peacekeeping operations conducted under the auspices of the United Nations or the African Union. A historical example is the Nigerian Civil War in August 1967, when the Gamal Abdel Nasser regime provided logistical and technical military support—including pilots and technicians—to the Nigerian federal government to help preserve its territorial integrity against the separatist movement in the Biafran region.

Furthermore, Egyptian forces have participated in United Nations peacekeeping missions in Congo, Somalia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Darfur (Sudan), as well as in monitoring and stabilisation missions in the Republic of Mali and the Central African Republic.

Where are the Constitution and the Parliament? Article 146 of the 2012 Constitution states that "the President of the Republic is the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces; he may not declare war or send the armed forces outside the state's borders without first seeking the opinion of the National Defense Council and obtaining the approval of the House of Representatives by a majority of its members."

Article 152 of the 2014 Constitution provides that "the President of the Republic is the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces; he may not declare war or dispatch the armed forces on a combat mission outside the state's borders without first seeking the opinion of the National Defense Council and obtaining the approval of the House of Representatives by a two-thirds majority of its members. If the House of Representatives is not in session, the opinion of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces must be sought, and the approval of both the Council of Ministers and the National Defense Council must be obtained."

Article 146 of the 2012 Constitution was never tested, as it was overturned when the first democratically elected civilian president was ousted in the coup of July 3, 2013. The post-coup constitution, however, was "tested" in the contexts of Libya, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates between February 2015 and October 2026. In these instances, the constitution served merely to provide retroactive legitimacy to decisions and troop deployments that had already been carried out to support the allies of the regime that emerged from the 2013 coup.

This is a reproduction of events in August 1990, following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. At the time, Hosni Mubarak decided to send military forces to Saudi Arabia to help protect it against Iraqi threats. This decision followed an Arab League summit in Cairo on August 10, 1990, which authorised the deployment of Arab forces to defend Saudi Arabia; Egyptian units arrived the following day, without prior parliamentary approval.

In July 2020, the Egyptian House of Representatives granted General Sisi a mandate to deploy forces for combat missions beyond the country's borders. This came as the war in Libya intensified, with Cairo threatening intervention to safeguard what it termed its "national security" on its western front. However, this mandate was not followed by any official announcement of a large-scale Egyptian military deployment in Libya—particularly after Turkish forces were deployed to western Libya, following the security agreements signed between Turkey and the Libyan government led by Fayez al-Sarraj in November 2019.

Conclusions

Looking at historical and contemporary experiences, as well as the constitutional provisions in place at various stages, it can be argued that "Egyptian national security" has never—at any point since 1952—been the primary driver of military deployments. This is evidenced by the fact that, since the 2013 coup, Egypt's national security has

faced direct threats along all four of its borders, yet the army has not mobilised to confront any of them. Even when Egypt's water security was violated—sparking growing calls for decisive intervention—no action was taken; the regime merely issued condemnations and denunciations. The deployment of Egyptian forces abroad is not categorically rejected; it may, in fact, be necessary when there is a genuine threat to the security of the state—or to that of an Arab nation—posed by a foreign power or an invading force. However, the Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen raises the question of whether it has truly helped protect the Kingdom's security, or whether it has instead exacerbated the very dangers it sought to contain. Initiated in 2015, this intervention has only served to escalate and prolong the conflict. The Saudi leadership bears the responsibility of re-evaluating its policies regarding the war in Yemen; indeed, it has the power to end the conflict immediately, should it choose to do so. Furthermore, the enlistment of Egyptian forces should not become a means to shift the consequences of these policies onto Egypt—without an independent assessment of the necessity and limits of such participation, or the extent to which it actually serves Egyptian and Arab national security.

It must also be emphasised that the deployment of the Egyptian military is, in itself, not evidence of the military regime's commitment to safeguarding the security of its partners. Rather, it is more akin to a policy of bargaining and extortion. Various experiences and observed indicators since the 2013 coup point to a clear and decisive conclusion: those who lack the capacity to protect the national security of the state they govern cannot possibly provide security or protection to others. How could they, when—since 2013—they have been a primary partner in the very plans and policies that have dismantled national security—not only for Egypt, but for the Arab world as a whole? Such actions ultimately serve the expansionist agendas of the Zionist entity, at the expense of the resources and capabilities of all Arab states, Egypt foremost among them

Disclaimer: The articles only express the views of their authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the magazine or the Brotherhood..