

Border settlements in Egypt

Between trans-border cooperation & defending the sovereignty of the country

Dr. Yehya M.Serag*

Introduction

Throughout the 20th and 21st century, the border regions in Egypt witnessed both armed conflicts and political disputes with neighboring countries that questioned the state's control over its land and borders. The political relationships between Egypt and its neighbors shifted several times from being tense to becoming more cooperative and vice versa. These shifts had direct physical impacts on the planning and development of border communities, and the level of attention that these communities gain from the state.

A case oriented Study

This paper aims to look at four cases of peripheral border settlements/ regions and analyze the spatial impact of regional political stability or dispute on the human settlements of these regions. Though the paper will look at both situations, its main interest is to show how border communities are used to protect the state's sovereignty and control over its land.

The cases will be reviewed chronologically, these cases are:

- The case of Bedouin tribes coming from Libya in 1916 to invade the Southern Egyptian Oases during the relaxed control of the borders in World War One, and the factors that made such attempts easy in terms of population scarcity and settlements locations.
- Post 1973 war measures taken in Sinai after the conflict with Israel in the 1960s and 1970s, with the approach of developing Sinai and populating its land, hence transforming it into a strategic depth of the country rather than being conceived as a vulnerable desert land.
- The case of the Egyptian-Palestinian border town of Rafah which had two phases of trans-border cooperation, the first one during the Egyptian administration of Gaza strip in the 1950s /1960s which took a legal and formal mode of cooperation; while the second reflects the impact of the new political settings in Gaza strip in the form of "popular aid" but also the breach of borders due to the new political settings in the strip, which led to more segregation across the borders.
- The case of the Halayeb and Shalateen triangle in the South of Egypt, which witnessed some disputes in the 1990s between Egypt and Sudan. Until 1953 Egypt and Sudan were one country, therefore the whole territory was considered part of the united Nile Valley. However, with borders in place between the two countries, Sudan had been claiming the right to the triangular territory which was not acceptable by the Egyptian side. The attention was given at that time to stress on the identity of the existing population in that area and provide several tangible physical actions for the existing human settlements to ensure the Egyptian identity. Despite, such disputes, there are still tangible cooperation across the borders due to historical tribal ties.

State sovereignty means the exclusive right of the state to exercise its powers within the boundaries of its territories¹, while cross-border cooperation means the cooperation between adjacent areas across the

* Dr. Serag is an assistant professor of urban and regional planning at the Urban Planning and Design department – Faculty of Engineering – Ain Shams University – Cairo.

borders. This concept has existed within different countries and contexts, either in legal or illegal forms. The most common example for a formal cross-border cooperation is now in effect within the countries of the European Union and with their external partners, seeking to promote economic and social development in border areas, address common challenges, ensure efficient and secure borders and promote people-to-people cooperation².

The Egyptian cases tackled in this paper are examples of the two concepts, these can be present separately or combined. In most of the cases viewed, cross-border might have shifted from a formal and recognized form, to an illegal one. On the other hand, the issue of state sovereignty has been always facing many challenges throughout contemporary history.

1-The case of the Western Desert Oases

Egypt shares long borders with Libya, where certain tribes live across the borders. In present day, strong tribal and family ties exist among the tribes of the Western Desert, where many of them do not really acknowledge the concept of borders and nationalities.

A good example on this could be the relationship between the inhabitants of Siwa oasis in Egypt and their counterparts in Ghaboub Oasis across the borders in Libya. Both population groups have origins within the same Bedouin Arabian tribes. Initially these oases were all within the Egyptian territories.

However, because of colonial interventions, and the reconciliation between the British occupying Egypt and the Italians occupying Libya, and the alliance of the two countries within the context of World War one, Ghaboub oasis was annexed formally in 1921. This took place after a process of negotiations that started in 1916 between the British and the Senussi in Libya under the Italian occupation with the opposition of the Egyptian public opinion, yet with a vague stance from the Egyptian government (Mohamed, 1980). At this point, Egypt had no control on its territories owing to the fact that it was under British occupation and considered a British protectorate, hence no sovereignty, despite the opposition by many fractions of Egyptian politicians and few British officials. The annexation went smooth as Ghaboub was at the edge of the Egyptian borders, with low population densities and apart from Siwa with 125 Km away. No other forms of human settlements in that area had a significant existence, therefore, it was quiet easy to annex the oasis.

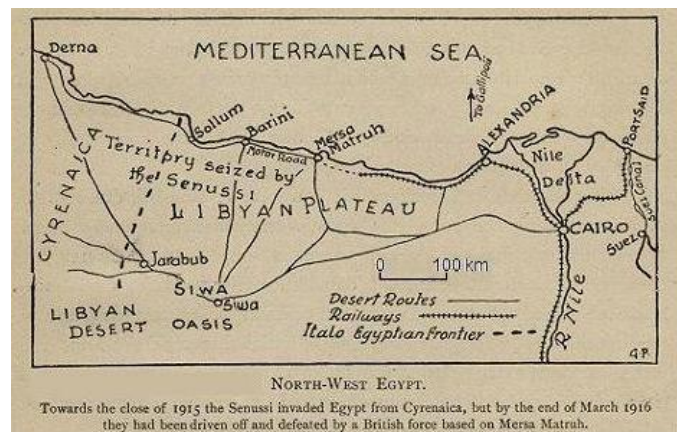


Fig.1. An old map showing the borders between Egypt and Libya in 1915 with Ghaboub within the Egyptian territories.

Source:

http://www.militaryhistorytours.com.au/site/About_Western_Desert.asp

¹ <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/territorial-sovereignty.html> , accessed January 2010.

² <http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/regional-cooperation/enpi-cross-border/>, accessed January , 2010.

peace keeping force along the borders with Israel³. Sinai was again a battleground between Egypt and Israel in the six days war of 1967, and ended up with the loss of Sinai totally until 1973, and its gradual retrieval that ended mostly in 1982⁴. The scarce population that existed in Sinai during this period was considered the main reason for having it as a battleground for three successive wars. Sinai was not considered the depth of the country. President Sadat expressed in one of his speeches the concept of the strategic depth in which he said “An Eye for an Eye, a Toe for a Toe and a Depth for a Depth⁵”. Prior to the 1973 war, the cities along Suez Canal were considered the first line of the Egyptian depth, and not Sinai because of its dispersed and low population densities. The words of President Sadat reflected his vision towards the development of Sinai and converting it into an Egyptian depth by working on the population factor. The strategic aim of this was to develop Sinai and attract further population to realize a reasonably dense populated area. Accordingly, Sinai would then be considered an interior depth of the country and making international condemnation eminent in case of any future incursion from the Israeli side. Moreover, the Egyptian state would ensure its sovereignty over Sinai.

According to a study by Abu ElSoaud, (1986), the North-East borders of Egypt, i.e. those in Sinai were still considered the most dangerous region in terms of possible future conflicts. Among the drawbacks that were highlighted: The very limited existence of human settlements at the Sinai borders and in its depth, makes it easy for the Israeli side to attack and infiltrate the Egyptian territories in Sinai. And even if there is some dispersed population in Sinai, such dispersal with low densities cannot organize any resistance or emergency measures in case of any cross-border attacks.

2-1 The New Map of Egypt

In October 1974, Sadat presented the so called October working paper, which outlined his vision for the future development of Egypt. This document introduced the open door policy that was later to work on opening up the Egyptian economy to the world economy. Yet, it also included a spatial and physical vision to the development and urbanization of Egypt entitled “The New Map of Egypt” (Attia, 1999). The new map of Egypt pivoted on two main aspects; the first was to introduce development axes in the North South- East West directions, while the second was to construct new towns and cities with different economic bases to act as growth poles along these axes. The main target was to de-concentrate the population from the Nile Valley to the new development areas by attracting a population of 18 Million Egyptian by the year 2000 (*ibid*).

The implementation of the New Map was to take place over three main phases, with the first one including the development of Sinai, the Mediterranean coast and the Red Sea Coast. The presence of the Red Sea coast was imminent since it included the cities overlooking the Suez Canal and was devastated during the war year and was subject to forced displacement of their population, hence their

³ The UN assembled a peacekeeping force to act as a buffer along the borders between Israel and Egypt. The so called United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) was deployed by February 1957.
<https://www.un.org/Depts/dhl/dag/time1957.htm> , January 2010.

⁴ The Israeli withdrawal from Sinai finished on the 25th of April 1982 with the exception of the disputed area of Taba, a small area that was subject to international arbitration and was returned to Egypt in 1989.

⁵ These words were part of a speech given by President Sadat on 16th of October 1973.

need to return. Sinai was included at this first phase to ensure its rapid development and the introduction of new human settlements to form a tangible population, hence becoming a territorial depth of Egypt.

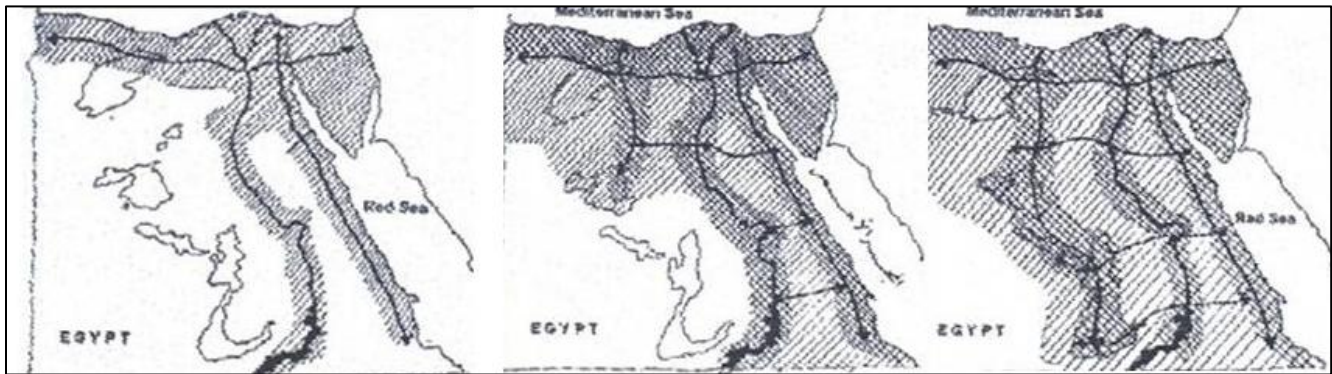


Fig.4: The three development phases for the New Map of Egypt, with Sinai being in the first phase.
Source: Attia, 1999

2-2 An unfinished development

Despite the ambition of the plan, and the focus on the postwar reconstruction of the Suez Canal cities, Sinai itself was not as fortunate as expected. With the assassination of Sadat in 1981 and the change in governments at that period, the development of Sinai faced many hurdles.

However, there had been several regional development plans that were put forward for Sinai with the first one in 1985⁶. This plan for example introduced the concepts of the Development axes, growth poles and growth points. It also recommended the construction of 18 new human settlements along the coasts of Sinai and 19 settlements in its interior, with the main aim of attracting tangible population to settle and work in Sinai, hence, ensuring the control over Sinai and furthermore ending the definition of Sinai as a battleground. The development plan also considered the regional cross-border cooperation with the neighbors in the Gaza strip.

There had been other development plans for Sinai, later in the 1990s, but most of the development intervention focused mainly on the area of Sharm El Sheikh in the South, with tourism as the main economic base. Hence the main concepts of the initial development plan of attracting a tangible population and

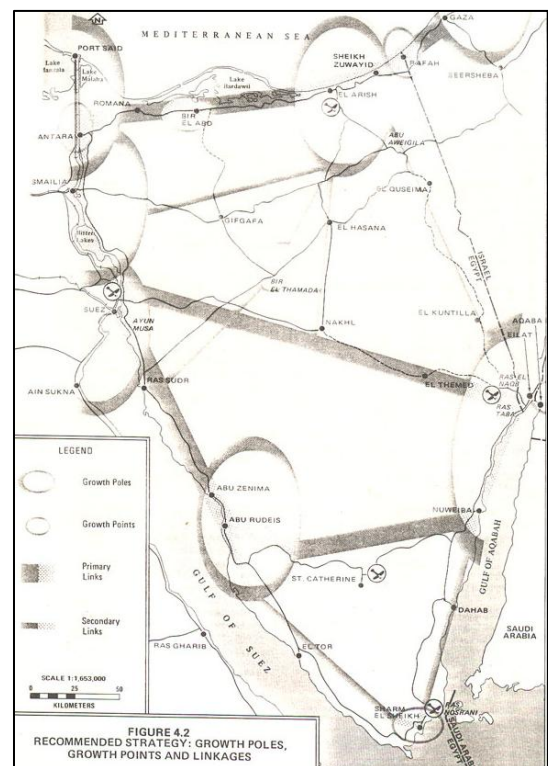


Fig.5: The strategy for the Development of Sinai
Source: Sinai Development study, 1985

⁶ The early attempt for a postwar regional development in Sinai was finalized in March 1985 through the international office of Dames and Moore and was submitted to the advisory committee for reconstruction – Ministry of Development.

establishing a critical depth were not realized. This of course led to the vulnerability of the Egyptian borders in Sinai that is currently witnessing illegal cross-borders activities including smuggling and possibly human trafficking, to the extent of a full border outbreak from the Gaza side in 2008, as will be discussed later.

3- The case of the twin cities of Rafah

The twin cities of Rafah are two cities with the same name located at each side of the Egyptian- Gaza strip borders. Rafah originally emerged as one settlement throughout ancient history at the edge of the Palestinian borders with Egypt, in most cases the city was treated as one unit under one administration. During the 20th century the city exchanged administration several times from being under British control starting from 1917 to Egyptian control since the Egyptian army entered the city during the 1948 war with Israel until 1967. Rafah exchanged hands again to become under Israeli control as a consequence of the six days war in 1967 until 1982. As an outcome of the Camp David peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, Egypt regained its control over Sinai, which led to the division of the city of Rafah into the Palestinian Rafah that remained under Israeli occupation until 2005 and the Egyptian Rafah, that was actually the city districts that fell across the borders in the Sinai Peninsula (Massry, 2009).

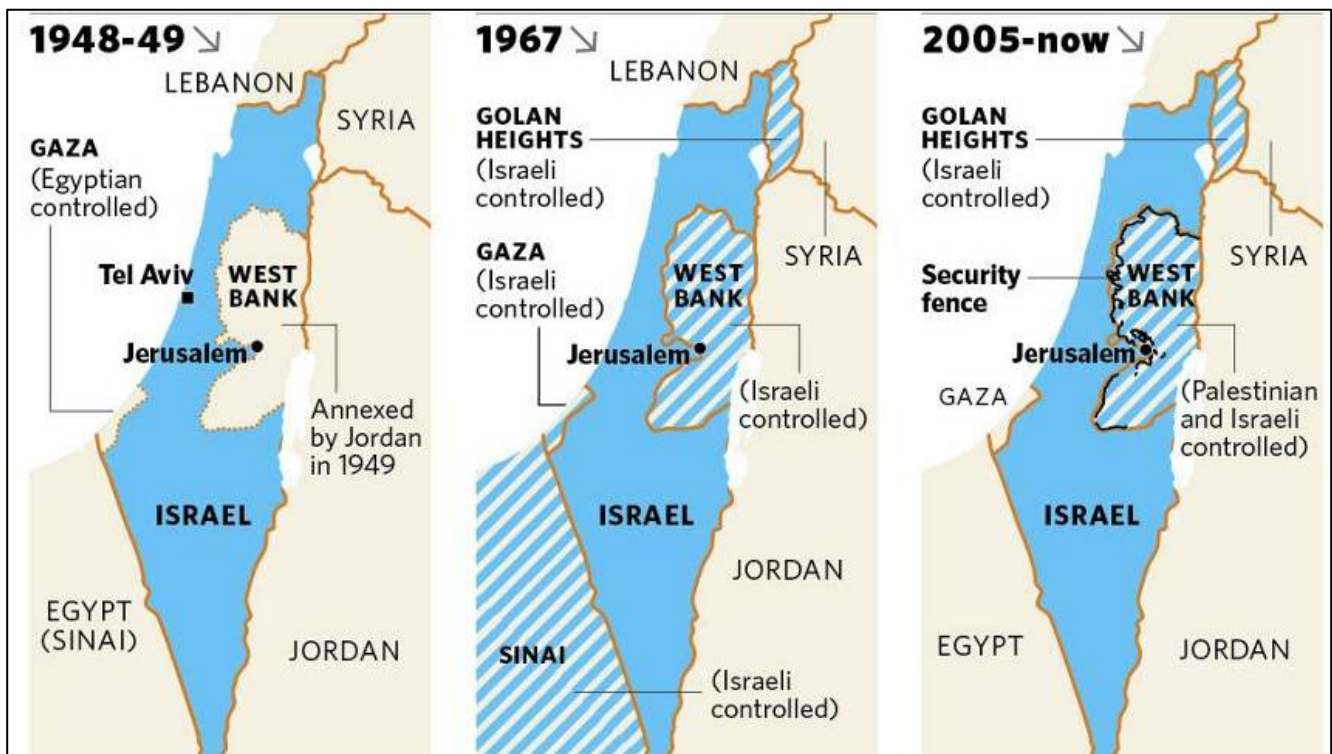


Fig.6: Exchanging control over the Gaza strip including Rafah
 Source: <http://www.sadaqathullah.com/palistr.html> , January 2010.

3-1 Rafah under the Egyptian Administration (1948-1967)

During this period Rafah was one city under the Egyptian administration except for few months when it was occupied by the Israeli army during the Suez war in 1956, but was soon to return to Egypt control in 1957. Since Rafah was one city during this period, it gained its importance as a cross road city or the gate to both Palestine and Syria. Accordingly one can argue that several aspects characterized the function of the city in terms of cross-border cooperation with Palestine and Syria.

The railway Cairo Express serving between Kantara east in Egypt and Haifa passed by the city, thus making it a transportation node linking Egypt to Palestine (DAAR, 2010). Not only railways but bus lines used to operate between Cairo and Rafah and then linking to other places in Palestine such as Jerusalem and Haifa. With such a location, commerce and trade took place between the Egyptian and Palestinian sides in Gaza strip with Rafah included as a trade spot. Daily activities of the local residents in Rafah (Sinai- Palestine) took place such as farming and sheep grazing. At the same time the education system in Rafah and the whole Gaza strip was based on the Egyptian education system and school books since 1948 (Abu Duho, 1996).



Fig7: Railways extended from Egypt to Palestine through Rafah.

3-2 Rafah under the Israeli Occupation

During the 1967 Six-Day War ,Israel captured Rafah with the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip along with other occupied Arab territories in Palestine, Jordan and Syria.

Israel (IDF) made some spatial changes in the area to create patrol routes for its troops, thus leading in some cases to the displacement of about 5000 people of the population. In order to rehouse the displaced Palestinians, Israel built two housing projects, Brazil in the South of the city and Canada across the border in Sinai. Both camps were named after the UN peacekeeping forces that used to have barracks in the same locations. Israel had also constructed 14 separate Jewish communities across Sinai, with the largest of them located in the Rafah region and known as Yamit, with about



Fig8: Yamit Settlement in Rafah was built to host 250000 inhabitants by the year 2000 .

600 houses (Rabinovich, 2005). Yamit was envisaged to become a large town and sea port to cut Egypt from the Gaza strip with a targeted population of 250000 people by the year 2000. The construction started in September 1973. By April 1981 the population in Yamit was about 2500 inhabitants. However because of the peace treaty with Egypt, Israel had to evacuate Yamit, which was razed to the ground by the Israeli army, and evacuate the other settlements. At this point, the Israeli actions were not of course

considered as cross border cooperation, rather a breach of sovereignty by the occupation army in Egypt. Israel, by constructing these settlements, was using the population factor to confirm its presence in Sinai through settlements.

3-3 The division of Rafah

According to the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel in 1979, Egypt was to gain control back over its lost territories in Sinai, but not in the Gaza strip. At that time the negotiations for the Palestinian territories were hurdled and postponed for a later phase. It is argued by Massry (2009) that Israel initially proposed to make the whole of Rafah under Egyptian control, however Egypt insisted on maintaining the original country borders delineated in 1906. Accordingly, Rafah was divided into two cities, with the largest and the main part in Gaza strip and a smaller part in Sinai under Egyptian control. The division initially took place by laying down barbed wire and later developed to constructing corrugated sheet fences and even other steel and stone walls (marefa.org, 2010). The division of the city caused a severe disruption on the social and economic aspects of the city, where families were divided across the new borders.

Some of the spatial and demographic aspects of the

above division could be listed as follows:

- The urban fabric of the city was divided by the new borders, with the main streets in the Palestinian Rafah traced throughout the Egyptian Rafah. As such the urban fabric and the street network were bisected into two.
- The evolution of the two cities, took different turns. In Egypt, Rafah is considered a peripheral border city with low population density of about 34000 inhabitants according to the North Sinai annual periodical (2010), with a small urban agglomeration. On the other side, the Palestinian Rafah, being part of the Gaza strip, has a population of about 120000 inhabitants according to the 2006 census. This is considered a high population density over a limited area of land, which is the case all over the Gaza strip as an outcome of the Palestinian displacement and refugee movements that resulted from the consecutive Arab- Israeli wars.
- A border crossing between Egypt and Palestine was constructed to regulate the movement of people across the two countries. The border gate from the Gaza strip side was controlled first by the Israeli

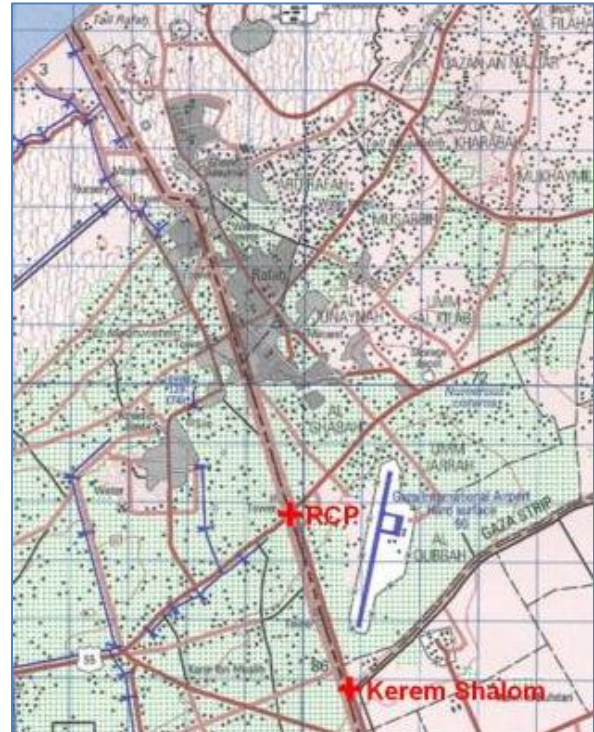


Fig9: The borders between Egypt and Israel with the partition of Rafah into two cities. With the largest part on the Gaza strip side.

Source: EUBAM Rafah , 2010



Fig 10: The high population and building densities of the Palestinian Rafah contrasted with the Egyptian one.

army until its withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, then by the Palestinian authority , yet monitored by the European Union Boarder assistance mission in Rafah (EUBAM⁷) until 2007 and since then by the Hamas movement⁸.

At this point, the main cross border relationships were only limited to the movement of people across the border crossing. However, as a result of the control seizure by Hamas over Gaza, Israel applied a blockade over Gaza that limited its international trade and source of necessary daily life supplies. Accordingly a new type of cross-border cooperation emerged.

3-4 Informal cross-border cooperation

Since the blockade was enforced on Gaza strip after the Hamas seizure of power, a new form of informal/illegal cross-border cooperation took place through tunnels. Few months after the blockade, Gaza strip faced a severe lack in basic goods. It was in January 2008 that thousands of Palestinians stormed the Egyptian borders coming from Rafah and other cities from Gaza strip into the Egyptian territories heading for the Egyptian Rafah city markets and reaching for other cities in Northern Sinai. The main purpose of the storming was basically shopping for basic needs (Fleishman, 2008).

However, since this incident could not be repeated regularly in such away and seeking for a win-win situation on both sides, Palestinian and Egyptian merchants established channels for illegal trade and smuggling of goods across borders through tunnels, which are considered an underground spatial intervention. In fact the first tunnels were built after the division of Rafah in 1982 and some were built round the year 2000 during the second Intifada (Noir et al, 2008). However, the phenomenon boomed since the Gaza blockade, over 1000 tunnels had been constructed across the border to smuggle different goods from Egypt into Gaza with thousands of workers involved in digging, smuggling and trading. Some might argue that such tunnels are established as a form of solidarity and aid, however, the state consider them a method for illegal trade and smuggling and should be stopped (Flounders, 2009). On the other hand, the presence of these tunnels have introduced an alternative underground economy and an informal cross-border cooperation that employes thousands of people specially among the Palasteniens who would had no other alternative but to make this intervention.



Fig11: Palestinians stormed across the Egyptian borders in January 2008 to shop for their needs in Sinai.



Fig12: The tunnels across Rafah are in many cases well-constructed and reinforced.

Source: <http://www.courierpress.com> , 2009

⁷ <http://www.eubam-rafah.eu/node/2296> , January, 2010.

⁸ In 2007 amid dispute between the Palestinian presidency and the Hamas government that finally ended with the sacking of the government Hamas took over control of the Whole Gaza strip after violent confrontations with the Palestinian authorities.

Since the population on both sides of the border has family ties, these tunnels are usually constructed to start from a house on the Egyptian side with the end at the Palestinian side. The depth of the tunnels can go as deep as 20 to 25 meters and length of 500 to 800 meters (Noir et al, 2008).

The construction of these tunnels varies from primitive tunnels to highly engineered tunnels with electric lights and ventilations.

The flows through the tunnels evolved to include:

- Food supplies and goods which are sent through the tunnels to merchants on the Palestinian side.
- Cattle that are escorted through the tunnels.
- Cars and motorbikes throughout some wider tunnels.
- People for social reasons, i.e. family reunions and marriages⁹.
- Construction materials such as cement.



Fig14: Different sort of goods are smuggled across the tunnels including cattle.

Unfortunately, the informal/illegal cooperation between borders evolved to include arms smuggling into the Gaza strip, hence putting the Egyptian administration under pressure to stop this act. Despite the fact that the tunnels showed one form of cross-border cooperation, it also shows one form of breaching the state's sovereignty in terms of the whole concept of smuggling either goods or arms. As such the Egyptian government started taking concrete measures to stop this activity, by building an underground steel wall that extends below the existing border fences and walls. Such wall is intended to exceed in depth the maximum depth of the tunnels to block their passages (Fraser, 2009).

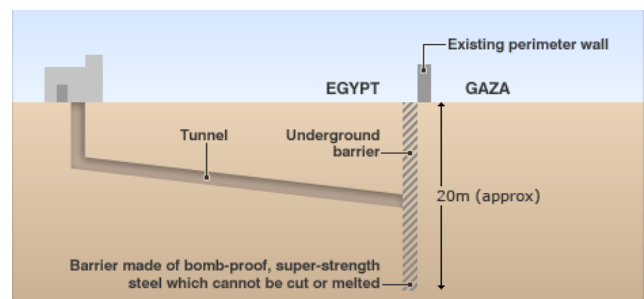


Fig15: An underground barrier is set for construction by the Egyptian authorities to stop the path of the tunnels into Egypt.

Source: <http://news.bbc.co.uk> , 2009

Despite the disappointment from the Gaza side, and the claims that such an act will cause the starvation of Gaza, It is argued that with this action, the state is attempting to gain its sovereignty over its land, by stopping all illegal smuggling activities through its borders. In this case, of course there are several other hindering reasons to maintain the sovereignty of the state, among which are the conditions of the peace treaty with Israel itself that limits the deployment of Egyptian armed forces in this area, hence it is argued that enough man power is not available to ensure a full border control. Also the sympathy and solidarity of the Egyptians in general and those in Rafah in particular with the Palasetniens in the Gaza strip as well as the guranteed profit from smuggling activities that increased by the construction of tunnels, encourage such an illegal border cooperation.

⁹ Among the stories that took place in the tunnels was the bride who crossed over into Rafah. Initially the groom lives in Gaza strip while the bride lived in the West Bank. Both of them belonged to the same family, the bride travelled to Egypt and then off to Sinai where she managed to cross through the tunnel and into Gaza.

4- The case of Ras Hederba border village with Sudan

The cross-border relationships between Egypt and Sudan had passed through different phases across history until present times. The case of the border village of Ras-Hederba reflects a recent Egyptian attempt to sustain the state's sovereignty in an area of dispute in the South –East of Egypt known as the Halayeb – Shalateen triangle. It is important to note that the attempts concerning the Ras-Hederba village are based on the personal experience of the author as a regional and urban planner expert involved in the project.

4-1 A problem from the British colonial period

Throughout the 19th century Egypt expanded its control over Sudan during the reign of Mohamed Ali Pasha. Although Egypt was nominally part of the Ottoman Empire since 1517, it became an autonomous state under the Ottomans with the accession of Mohamed Ali Pasha into power. During his reign he worked on expanding the territories under Egyptian control across the neighboring countries including the Sudan which was annexed to Egypt in 1820 seeking the unity of the Nile valley (onwar.com, 2010).

In a later phase of the 19th century mainly in 1882 Egypt fell under British occupation. In 1899 Britain and Egypt reached an agreement defining the international borders with Sudan as the 22 Parallel (US-DOS, 1962). The agreement also allowed for a joint Anglo-Egyptian rule of the Sudan which continued in different forms until 1956 when Sudan gained its independence from both countries. Until this point the flow of goods and people was maintained normally across the borders of both countries, which in principle were both under the same rule. Since the early 1920s and until the abolishment of the monarch rule in Egypt in 1953, both countries were called “The Kingdom of Egypt and Sudan”.

For hundreds or even thousands of years several Nubian tribes along the banks of the Nile in the South of Egypt and North Sudan and Bedouin tribes close to the Red Sea lived within the areas that became later the borders between the two countries. With the setting of the January 1899 agreement political borders were set for the first time between Egypt and Sudan. At that time all the town and village governors in Sudan were Egyptians, accordingly the agreement also proposed administrative borders for administration and taxation purposes to define the different jurisdiction areas (Badawey, 1993). At that time there had been some movements of families within the same tribes from the Northern part of the border at the area known as Halayeb and Shalateen to South of the border.

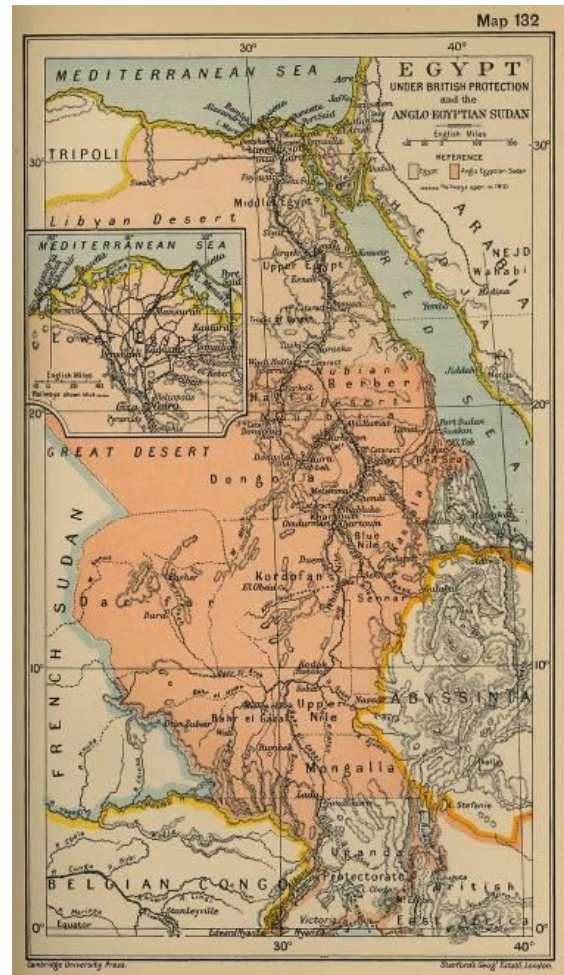


Fig.16: Map dated to 1899 showing Egypt and Sudan borders, with the Halayeb and Shalateen area included within the Egyptian soil.

Because of these settings, and because of the fact that this area is located far away from the Aswan administration, the Egyptian Minister of Interior issued a decree in March 1899 in which he set the administration of the area in Halayeb and Shalateen under the administration of the closest administration unit and Egyptian governor who was in Sudan (*ibid*). At that time this was not a problem since both countries were under the British rule, furthermore, they later emerged as one Kingdom until the mid-20th century. A similar case also existed across the borders but along the banks of the Nile between a group of Nubian Villages, and a similar decree was issued. However, after the construction of the High Dam, this area is now submerged under Lake Nasser.

During the post-independence period of both countries several tensions and disputes took place concerning the Halayeb and Shalateen triangle. Sudan claimed that this land is Sudanese despite the 19th century maps that confirmed that this triangle belonged to Egypt. Such disputes escalated at certain times in the late 1950s and later on in the early 1990s (Abdel Hakim, 1998). The second crises with Sudan took place in 1992 when Sudan asked a Canadian company to search and extract crude oil within a territory extending beyond the 22 Parallel borders to include the whole area of Halayeb and Shalateen. This act caused some critical tension in the relations between the two countries that reached the closing down of the consulates of both countries at both sides (*ibid*).

The government attempted to make some improvements at that time within the settlements of the area as well as providing daily supplies and services to the population within the disputed zone. Moreover the government at that time attempted to issue national IDs to all the inhabitants of the area, to ensure that the people living within the area are Egyptians (Baraka, 1998). The government at that time aimed for increasing the population densities in the existing settlements as well as building new settlements such as the border village of Ras Hedrba that was built in 1998.



Fig.17: Map showing the Halayeb and Shalateen triangle that is claimed to be part of Sudan.

Source: <http://www.huffingtonpost.com>

4-2 The present situation

Information and data concerning the present day situation in region are based mainly on the actual urban development project that focused on the area starting from 2009, in which several experts (among whom was the author) from different disciplines were involved. The Halayeb – Shalateen region is considered among the most remote and peripheral Egyptian regions. It has a total population of less than 9000 inhabitants, scattered across the area, with the Shalateen city being the largest human settlements over there with a population of nearly 3000 inhabitants. Most of the inhabitants belong to two main Arabian tribes the Ababda and the Basharya. Their main economic activities are sheep herding, fishing and trades (GOPP, 2010). In Several areas within the Halayeb and Shalateen region nomadism is the main characteristic of its population.

Already within such settings there are several forms of cross border relationships between the Egyptian and Sudanese sides that could be highlighted. The most important ones are:

- 1- **Social relationships:** As families from the same tribes extend across the borders, marriages and other social interactions emerged across the borders. Such marriages led to the formation of the multinational families, according to the demographic expert who participated in the project in 2009. In such a way that many families would have the parents from the same tribe but each is holding a different nationality, so as their children with mixed nationalities. This is because; nationality to the population of this area comes in the second place after tribal relationships that are much stronger.
- 2- **Camel Caravans trade:** among the historical activities that are taking place in across the boarders is the passage of the camel caravans, coming from Sudan and ending North in Cairo. Along the route from the South to the North several camel markets emerged in settlements across the borders. Such an activity is considered a tangible economic activity for some segments of the population across both sides of the border.
- 3- **Smuggling of goods and drugs:** Due to the low population densities in the area, smuggling of goods and drugs across the borders is becoming a problem with no tangible solution to stop them. Such an activity remains of course an illegal cross-border activity.

Recently, claims that the Halayeb and Shalateen region is Sudanese territory were renewed both publicly and officially in Sudan, possibly because of the mineral resources that are abundant within the triangle (Abu-Fadil, 2010). In addition to the above mentioned illegal activities, the Egyptian government considered these actions as a breach of its sovereignty and needed tangible action was required.

4-3 The Development of Ras Hederba

In 2009, the General Organization for Physical Planning GOPP, was delegated by the Ministry of Housing to make a redevelopment for the border village of Ras Hederba. The village is located few kilometers North of the Sudanese border and is considered the first Egyptian settlement after crossing the border. The village was constructed in 1998 as explained earlier, with the aim to settle the Bedouin population within it. However, 11 years after its construction, the population in the village reached only 464 inhabitants mostly living in huts with their sheep , with poor services and almost no attractive economic incentives. The GOPP formed a team to propose for the redevelopment of the village to attract more population to show that there is a significant Egyptian population in that area and as a start for further human settlements development.



Fig.17: The present situation in Ras Hederba village, with most of the population being Bedouins , with an area for sheep gazing. However, there are some attempts by the government to build new homes that are considered out of context , together with some facilities and services.

The Ministry of Housing has earlier built new dwelling units in the village with the aim of settling down the Bedouins. However, such units did not meet the necessary requirements vis a vis the cultural settings of the Bedouin population. The planning team considered to induce the needed development of the Ras Hederba village, by looking at the cross-border relationships and the possible economic activities that could be established. At this point structural plans for the village have been proposed, taking into consideration two aspects:

1-To maintain the necessary place settings for the traditional Bedouin population and their space requirements, through modifying the government building plans to suit their needs, while considering attracting other population segments to resettle in the village, hence proposing a phased housing and service development.

2- To provide strategic projects, that despite small in size could be of a tangible economic effect to the village part of which are based on the cross-border activities. Among these strategic projects is to establish a regional border market to regulate the trading activities across borders with reasonable regulations to confront the illegal smuggling. Also a camel market is to be introduced at this point as the first market on Egyptian soil taking into consideration the frequent passage of the caravan routes. Moreover, the proposals included establishing a link with the red sea coast that is only 6 kilometers away with the possibility of establishing a sea resort, or a diving center that is related somehow with accommodation in the village itself.

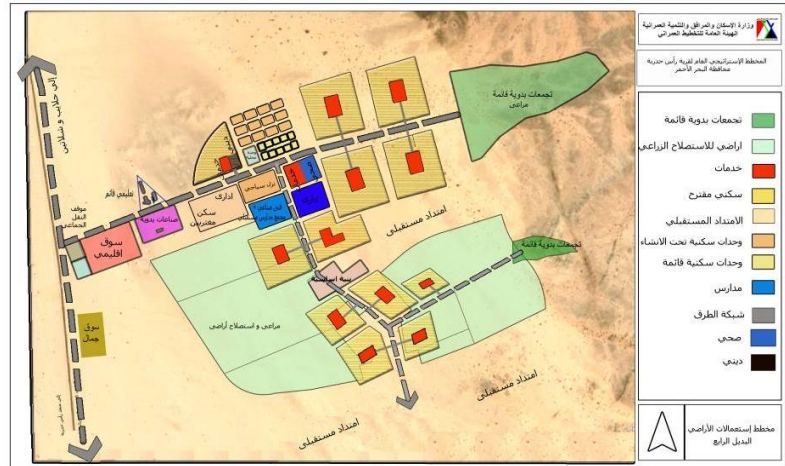


Fig.18: One of the planning alternatives for the structural plan of the Ras Hederba Village.
Source: GOPP, 2009.

However, the planning team perceived that it is not a sufficient approach to only focusing on the village itself, rather a coherent sub-regional development that would include the Red sea coast until Halayeb village with a proper hinterland should be considered as well. Accordingly a development proposal was also developed for this sub-region aiming to strengthen the development approaches on the lower levels, e.g. village levels.

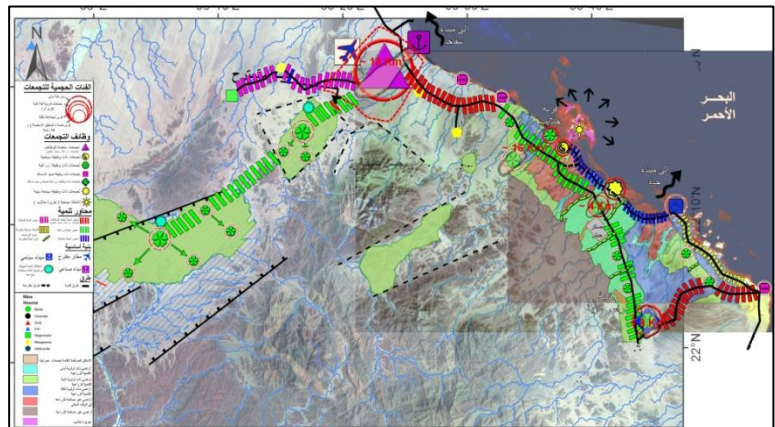


Fig.19: The regional approach for the development of the Ras Hederba area , which includes as well Halayeb and Shalateen cities.
Source: GOPP, 2009.

The project is still ongoing; as such it is difficult to reach for early conclusions at this point. However, it is obvious that the government called for this project to sustain and strengthen its control and sovereignty over this Egyptian territory, yet at the same time,

the advantages of cross border cooperation were not over ruled from the attempt.

5- Conclusion

This paper tried to understand the role and function of the border settlements in Egypt. It has viewed four cases throughout the course of modern history that are located in peripheral and border regions in Egypt. In many cases, these settlements did not conserve the sovereignty of the state. The paper was concerned with two levels, the regional level as in the case of Sinai and the Western Desert oases and the local level as in the case of Rafah and Ras Hederba. In the first two cases, the low population densities as well as the scarcity of human settlements in these regions made it an easy target for occupation by Egypt's neighbors. The importance of tangible population densities rises from their capability to show the presence on the ground, as well as establishing an early defensive front in case of foreign incursions. In both cases these aspects were not present therefore they were easily subject to acts of hostilities and occupation from the neighboring countries. Accordingly the need to induce development in such areas as well as attracting tangible population to peripheral region is imminent to sustain the concept of state's sovereignty.

In the second two cases, the border settlements played important roles in cross-border cooperation. However, such cooperation had different forms from formal to informal and illegal cooperation. In the case of Rafah, the current informal cooperation in the form of smuggling through tunnels, although is needed to establish an informal underground economy for the people in the Palestinian Rafah, come on the account of Egypt's sovereignty on its land. This led to further drastic measures through building the iron barrier to stop the tunnels.

In the case of Ras Hederba, both aspects were considered within the planning initiative, cross-border cooperation through legalizing trade and cross-border commerce by the state. This is done by constructing regional markets to regulate the flows of goods between both countries. Yet, it also emphasizes the important role of the border settlement and region in confirming and sustaining Egypt's Sovereignty in the Halayeb and Shalateen triangle. This is done by taking into consideration the population factor and providing development investments to attract other Egyptians to this border region.

Accordingly, border settlements should be looked both as being critical in terms of state's sovereignty and as a possible potential for development cooperation across borders.

References:

- Abdel Hakim, Sobhy, 1998, General overview on the Halayeb Triangle, in the Symposium for setting a comprehensive development vision to the Halayeb triangle, African research and studies center- Cairo University.
- Abu Al Soaud , Ali, 1986, The Importance of constructing cities and providing basic infrastructures on strategic axis to prepare the state for defense. Unpublished Master thesis, Naser High Military academy, Cairo.
- Abu-Fadil, Magda, 2010, Could Halayeb's Manganese Wealth Trigger A Sudan-Egypt Conflict?. Accessed through <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/magda-abufadil/could-halayeb-s-manganese-b-635023.html>, on January 2010.
- Abuo Duhou, Ibtisam, 1996, Schools in Palestine under the occupation and the Palestinian national authority, in the Palestine- Israel Journal of politics, economics and culture, vol3, no.1.
- Badawey, Nadia, 1993, Me and the Desert, Dar El Helal , Cairo.
- Baraka, Saad, 1998, Cultural characteristics of the Halayeb and Shalateen triangle, in the Symposium for setting a comprehensive development vision to the Halayeb triangle, African research and studies center- Cairo University.
- DAAR, 2010, Ottoman railways. Accessed through: <http://www.decolonizing.ps/site/return-to-the-sea/>, January 2010.
- Dames and Moore, 1985, Sinai Development Study: Phase1 – Final Report. Ministry of Development, New Communities and Land Reclamation, Cairo.
- EUBAM Rafah, 2010, European Union Border assistance mission to Rafah. Accessed through: <http://www.eubam-rafah.eu/node/2296> , In January, 2010.
- Fleishman, Jeffery, 2008, Sprung Palestinians shop till they drop. Accessed through : <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/jan/24/world/fg-spre24> , in January 2010.
- Flounders, Sara, 2009, The tunnels of Gaza: An underground economy and resistance symbol. Accessed through: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-tunnels-of-gaza> , in January 2010.
- Fraser, Christian, 2009, Egypt starts building steel wall on Gaza Strip border. Accessed through <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8405020.stm> in January 2010.
- GOPP, 2009, The strategic development plan for Ras Hederba: Project working papers, Cairo.
- <http://www.northsinai.gov.eg/home.aspx>, accessed in January 2010.
- <http://www.sadaqathullah.com/palistr.html> , accessed in January 2010.
- Marefa.org, 2010, Rafah. Accessed through: <http://www.marefa.org/index.php/%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%AD>, in January 2010.
- Massrey, Anna, 2009, Egypt's dilemma at Rafah. Accessed through: http://axisoflogic.com/artman/publish/Article_56356.shtml, January 2010.
- Noir, Heyam and Adwan, Fady, 2008, Rafah Smuggling tunnels: Life nerve for Gaza. Accessed through : http://www.palestinechronicle.com/rafah-smuggling-tunnels-life-nerve-for-gaza-i/#.Uq8_n9IW3dk in January 2010.
- Onwar.com, Egyptian invasion of Sudan. Accessed through: <http://www.onwar.com/aced/nation/eat/egypt/fsudan1820.htm>, in January 2010.
- Rabinovich, Abraham, 2005; The settlers weren't the problem. In the Jerusalem post, 23/6/2005.
- Serag ,Yehya ;Networking and Networks as Tools for Regional spatial Development and Planning ; Human Settlements Development Potentialities in the Western Part Of Egypt. PhD dissertation, Katholiek University Leuven Belgium 2008.
- Sisy, Ayman and Mohamed, Al hasanin, 2002, The New Valley: The Man, The Legend and the Development. Arab Organization for Culture and Science, Cairo.
- United States, Department of State, 1962, International Boundary study: Sudan-Egypt.
- US-Department of State (DOS), 1962, International boundary study: Sudan – Egypt, no. 18, Washington D.C.