

Xi's Carefully Calibrated Egypt Trip

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Brief Analysis

The visit will probably confirm the growth trend in Egypt and China's economic, technological, and perhaps even defense relations, though Cairo is unlikely to get the help it wants on regional security threats posed by Iran and the Houthis.

Chinese President Xi Jinping is [visiting \(https://alhurra.com/en/36836\)](https://alhurra.com/en/36836) Egypt this week for the first time since 2016. With the exception of a brief stop in Morocco in 2024, this is his first visit to the Middle East since he chaired the China-Arab States Summit in Saudi Arabia in 2022. His agenda likely includes grand announcements of investment and cooperation, particularly in the technological and economic realms. Some of these may even come at the expense of further cooperation with the United States; the question for American policymakers is whether and how to respond.

Beijing [has declared \(https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/fyrbt/lxjzh/202608/t20260826_12010897.html\)](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/fyrbt/lxjzh/202608/t20260826_12010897.html) that its relationship with Egypt is “at its best in history,” and this claim is hard to dispute. In the decade since Xi's previous visit, China has poured [billions of dollars \(https://www.aei.org/china-global-investment-tracker/\)](https://www.aei.org/china-global-investment-tracker/) into local investments and construction projects, from the Central Business District in the new administrative capital east of Cairo to the “Suez Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone,” a joint commercial park in Ain Sokhna. Annual bilateral trade [increased \(https://english.ahram.org.eg/UI/Front/Inner.aspx?NewsContentID=575311\)](https://english.ahram.org.eg/UI/Front/Inner.aspx?NewsContentID=575311) to nearly \$20 billion in 2025, and the pace of their joint military drills has accelerated as well, including the [recent \(https://english.aawsat.com/arab-world/5307449-egypt-china-consolidate-cooperation-holding-air-combat-maneuvers\)](https://english.aawsat.com/arab-world/5307449-egypt-china-consolidate-cooperation-holding-air-combat-maneuvers) “Eagles of Civilization” air exercise. Reports have swirled for years that Cairo is [interested](#)

<https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/10/egypts-purchase-chinese-fighter-jet-reminder-cold-war-tactics-are-back-middle-east>) in purchasing China's J-10 fighter jet, which would mark the first sale of this system to an Arab nation. The two countries are also poised to expand their cooperation in the technology realm, with telecommunications giant Huawei recently [bidding \(https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-08-26/huawei-egypt-ai-ascend-chips-test-us-tech-diplomacy-nvidia-amd-microsoft\)](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-08-26/huawei-egypt-ai-ascend-chips-test-us-tech-diplomacy-nvidia-amd-microsoft) to construct artificial intelligence data centers in Egypt.

Indeed, Xi's destination for this rare regional visit is no coincidence. From a historical perspective, Egypt was the first country from either Africa or the Arab world to formalize diplomatic ties with the People's Republic back in 1956. More important, the timing (Xi's first Middle East trip since the Iran war) and choice of Egypt (whom China perceives as more neutral than the Gulf states in the U.S.-Israel-Iran contest) suggest that the visit is being carefully calibrated to advance Beijing's interests without upsetting any of its other ties in the region. Xi's arrival also follows his trip to Kyrgyzstan to open the annual summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), where Egypt and several other Arab states are "dialogue partners."

While in Cairo, Xi will likely tout China's economic prowess, technological capabilities, and flurry of diplomatic efforts to restore stability to the region, including its recent promotion of yet another [Gaza peace proposal \(https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyxw/202608/t20260824_12009388.html\)](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyxw/202608/t20260824_12009388.html). For his part, President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi will likely seek assurances from Xi regarding Cairo's most crucial regional issues: maintaining the free flow of commerce in the Red Sea and restraining any further disruption by the Yemeni Houthis. He may even air some frustrations with Xi, as Beijing's arrangements with the Houthis have thus far been [limited \(https://www.newsweek.com/houthis-attacking-red-sea-ships-but-letting-chinas-through-12233601\)](https://www.newsweek.com/houthis-attacking-red-sea-ships-but-letting-chinas-through-12233601) to protecting Chinese commercial assets. Sisi might also ask for more Chinese help with reining in Iran, especially after an Egyptian gas facility [was hit \(https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/drone-hits-gas-storage-tanker-egypts-mediterranean-port-2026-07-29/\)](https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/drone-hits-gas-storage-tanker-egypts-mediterranean-port-2026-07-29/) by a probable Iranian drone strike in July. On these counts, he is likely to be disappointed.

As potential U.S. responses coalesce, the Trump administration is [reportedly \(https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-08-26/huawei-egypt-ai-ascend-chips-test-us-tech-diplomacy-nvidia-amd-microsoft\)](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-08-26/huawei-egypt-ai-ascend-chips-test-us-tech-diplomacy-nvidia-amd-microsoft) compiling a counteroffer to Huawei's bid to build AI data centers in Egypt. Yet China has generally been much more willing to offer larger amounts of investment, construction, and advanced technologies to Cairo, as well as military platforms with far fewer restrictions than their American competitors. So long as the United States is unwilling or unable to pressure Cairo against deepening ties with Beijing or provide viable alternatives to Chinese offers, Egypt will likely continue to accept.

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