

Refugees in Egypt and Türkiye ... Internal Concerns May Outweigh External Disruptions

Dr. Ahmed Metwally Abdalla

In recent years, both Egypt and Türkiye have witnessed a significant influx of refugees, particularly from Syria and Sudan. Türkiye has become a primary destination for Syrian refugees, initially treating them similarly to Turkish citizens, even fast-tracking the process of granting citizenship to a large number of them. In contrast, Egypt allowed Syrians to own property, start businesses, and pursue education in its universities.

In Türkiye, Syrian refugees were granted numerous rights, such as acquiring citizenship and owning property. Over time, however, new social issues emerged, with instances where Syrian nationals owned property while Turkish nationals rented from them. Given the strong sense of nationalism among the Turkish people, this situation has led to increased tensions between some Turks and Syrian refugees, bringing the term "racism" into the public discourse in Türkiye.

On the other hand, following the Sudanese crisis, a significant number of Sudanese refugees fled to Egypt. Historically, conflicts between Egyptians and Sudanese have been rare, given the historical and cultural ties that bind the two peoples. However, the influx of Sudanese refugees has coincided with rising rent prices in Egypt, exacerbated by an ongoing economic crisis, leading some Egyptians to blame Sudanese refugees for these increases.

These events raise important questions: Are the recent social and economic crises in Egypt and Türkiye a direct result of the presence of refugees, or are they natural reactions to the economic and political circumstances in these countries? Is there a deliberate effort by some to use refugees to destabilize these nations internally? Are the conflicts between some locals and refugees being artificially inflated? What will happen to refugees if public pressure increases? What is the fate of Syrian refugees after the anticipated meeting between Erdoğan and Assad?

Refugee Policies in Egypt and Türkiye:

Initially, the Turkish state welcomed Syrian refugees in a manner that reflected their inclusion as part of Turkish society. They were granted many privileges, including Turkish citizenship, work rights, and property ownership. These policies were an expression of Türkiye's open-door policy at the onset of the Syrian crisis, rooted in both humanitarian and political considerations, as Türkiye sought to position itself as a key supporter of refugees in the region.

However, as the number of refugees increased, social and economic challenges began to surface due to this large influx. Among these challenges were pressures on local resources and increased competition for job opportunities, leading to rising tensions between Turkish citizens and refugees. As a result, the Turkish government's policies shifted, with some factions adopting

stricter measures towards refugees, including the deportation of some Syrian refugees for various reasons, such as non-compliance with local laws or due to growing political and social pressures.

In contrast, Egypt adopted a different approach in dealing with refugees. From the outset, the Egyptian government set a ceiling on the number of refugees accepted, balancing humanitarian needs with internal pressures. Unlike Türkiye, Egypt did not take extensive steps towards granting citizenship to refugees, making it difficult for Syrian and other refugees to obtain Egyptian citizenship. This approach helped mitigate social issues related to refugees, as Egyptian citizens did not perceive refugees as a significant threat to their resources or job opportunities.

Thus, it can be argued that the refugee policies of the two countries have diverged significantly. While Türkiye's open and rapid approach led to subsequent challenges, Egypt's more cautious and restrictive approach allowed it to avoid some of the social crises that Türkiye faced.

The Misuse of Refugees is More Dangerous than External Wars:

Recently, both Türkiye and Egypt have experienced increasing social crises due to escalating tensions between local citizens and some refugees. In Türkiye, the racist rhetoric against Syrians has deepened, with some even extending their animosity to all Arabs. This crisis was further exacerbated by news of a forthcoming meeting between the Turkish and Syrian presidents, leading to opposition from the Syrian community and escalating anger, with some Syrian refugees going so far as to burn the Turkish flag, an act that poses a threat to Türkiye's national security.

In Egypt, dissatisfaction among some citizens towards Syrian refugees has intensified, along with demands for the deportation of Sudanese refugees. These demands have grown following attempts by some Sudanese refugees to assert that the Halayeb and Shalateen regions belong to Sudan, prompting the Egyptian government to intervene and halt this phenomenon.

If these tensions continue and escalate, they could pose a significant threat to the stability of both countries, more so than the threat of engaging in an external war. These internal tensions could lead to serious social and political divisions, making nations more vulnerable to external influences and security risks.

The "divide and conquer" theory suggests that internal divisions can be exploited to weaken states, and this theory has proven successful in many historical cases. If these tensions are not addressed wisely, Türkiye and Egypt may find themselves facing internal crises that threaten their social fabric and national security, making the misuse of refugees a more dangerous threat than any potential external one.