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Standing with Egypt just makes sense

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The signals could not have been stronger. Days after Saudi Arabia's King Salman flew into Cairo and addressed the Egyptian parliament, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, followed up with a friendly visit to Egypt's president Abdel Fattah El Sisi. The message was unmistakable: the Gulf is firmly behind Egypt.

Egypt remains the pivotal Arab state. When it comes to some of the most difficult problems that the Arab world faces, particularly on economic challenges and what is sometimes called regional security threats – meaning the rise of Iran – Egypt is both indispensable and essential.

Indispensable because making sure Iran hears the message that the Arab world is united against its interfering hand can only be done if Egypt, the region's most populous country, is involved. The country has the necessary military and political heft to be an important ally to the GCC countries as they seek to end Iran's meddling in this region.

But essential too, because Egypt's challenges will be the challenges of the wider region. The underlying problems of providing jobs for hundreds of millions of young Arabs, of building the necessary infrastructure for the 21st century and of making sure countries are able to meet the intellectual and security challenges of extremist groups such as ISIL, are all being confronted in Egypt today – as they will be confronted across the Arab world.

A strong, stable and prosperous Egypt will be a genuine beacon across the whole of North Africa and the wider African and Arab region. It will provide an example from Libya to Yemen of what can be achieved through partnership and sound policies. Because of that, the billions that the Gulf is putting into Egypt – the UAE pledged \$4bn (Dh14.7bn) last week, just the latest in largesse – represents an important investment in the North African region and the Arab world. That it comes so soon after Barack Obama visited Riyadh is also no coincidence. The GCC's disagreements with the US president are well known, and until the next president can put relations on a firmer footing, the Gulf wants to ensure it has given sufficient attention to its other allies in the Middle East.

Aid to Egypt is smart politics. It shows in hard currency how important the Arab world's biggest country is to the Arab world's most prosperous members.