

Turkey-Egypt rapprochement: A forced pragmatism



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OPINION EXCLUSIVE

The events known as the Arab Spring, or the Islamic Awakening, created new regional alignments that had no precedent. Turkey, due to its support for Islamist groups in the region, especially the Muslim Brotherhood, incurred the wrath of many Arab countries. However, Erdogan's strategy was successful in one country: Egypt. In Cairo, Mohamed Morsi, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, came to power and convinced the leaders of Qatar and Turkey that despite the failure in cases like Syria, the Egypt issue had been resolved successfully and in the interests of these two countries. However, Turkey's success in Cairo did not last long, and after a short time, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the current president of Egypt, came to power through a military coup. This event marked the beginning of a period of tension in Egypt-Turkey relations. In the following years, Ankara's continued financial and military support for various branches of the Muslim Brotherhood in the region deepened the rift between the two countries. Additionally, General Sisi's actions in establishing close relations with Greece and Cyprus, which are enemies of Turkey, were seen as driving a final nail into the coffin of the two countries' relations.



Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi (L) greets Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan at Cairo Airport, Egypt, on February 14, 2024.
● REUTERS

The Libyan issue is another point of contention between the two countries. Turkey has supported the Government of National Accord (GNA) in western Libya, led by the Libyan branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, and has provided them with military drones on numerous occasions in recent years. However, the party led by Fayed al-Sarraj uses these weapons against the eastern Libyan government led by Khalifa Haftar, who is supported by Egypt. Therefore, it can be argued that the conflict between Ankara and Cairo in Libya has even reached the stage of military confrontation.

Gradual demise of an ideology
Now, after more than a decade of tension between the two countries, Recep

Tayyip Erdogan visited Cairo last week. This move is seen as the final step in normalizing Turkey-Egypt relations after the exchange of ambassadors last year and the meeting of the two countries' leaders on the sidelines of the Qatar World Cup opening ceremony. Such a clear shift has occurred following multiple events. With the continuation of Israeli attacks on Gaza, regional alignments are once again transforming, and this is considered to be against the interests of many countries, including Turkey. Turkey is one of the biggest losers of the Gaza war, and if it is unable to compensate for the losses of such an event and adopt an appropriate foreign policy approach, it will experience a shaky regional position in the long run. The situation for Egypt is not much

different. In addition to the unstable regional situation, Egypt is experiencing one of the most serious economic crises in its recent history. This makes it even more focused on attracting investments from any possible country, even Turkey, which was previously considered an enemy and rival. In the current regional equations, the two countries are forced to put aside the ideologies that have caused a decade of tension between them. Now, a logical foreign policy is one based on pragmatism, so that in a situation where the war by Israel is destroying all the infrastructures that have been formed in the regional balances over the years, countries do not suffer further. The improvement of relations between

the two countries will also have other consequences. Given the high capacity of Egypt and Turkey in regional relations, their cooperation in the field of negotiations with Israel may, along with the mediation efforts of Qatar, lead to a cease-fire in the ideal case, or a short-term break in the war. On the other hand, since humanitarian aid to Gaza only passes through a crossing in Egypt, the improvement of Ankara's relations with Cairo will increase Turkey's ability to send humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip. In the field of energy as well, the improvement of Egypt-Turkey relations can lead to changes in the Eastern Mediterranean. Turkey is seeking to play a role and exploit the oil and gas resources in the Mediterranean, and it is

unlikely that such a factor did not influence its decision to normalize relations with Egypt. We may witness a decrease in the level of Egypt's relations with Greece and Cyprus in the Mediterranean in the short term. Overall, it seems that the two countries are serious about improving their relations. This can be inferred from the statements of the Turkish foreign minister about negotiating with Egypt to export Turkish Bayraktar drones. While the normalization of relations between the two countries can lead to peaceful events in the Palestine and Libya issues, it should be noted that the Islamic Republic of Iran should be more aware than ever and not cause the country's isolation in regional events with a passive foreign policy.



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan shows the Rabia sign at a rally in Samsun Cumhuriyet Square, Turkey, on February 15, 2024, symbolizing solidarity with the toppled Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt.
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From enemy to 'brother' Erdogan's reconciliation with Sisi causes a stir

TURKISH MINUTE—Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has turned his back on years of harsh criticism and extended an olive branch to Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, marking a significant turning point in diplomatic relations between Turkey and Egypt. Erdogan, who once labeled Sisi a "murderer, oppressor, and putschist" for his role in the 2013 military coup that ousted the Muslim Brotherhood

from power in Egypt, called Sisi "my brother" during a landmark visit to Cairo after an 11-year hiatus. This diplomatic U-turn comes after a decade of strained relations following the coup, which Erdogan vehemently opposed and often used the Rabia sign—a four-fingered gesture symbolizing solidarity with the toppled Muslim Brotherhood government—as a symbol of his government's opposition to Sisi's regime.