

Strategic Intelligence Report

EGYPT-TURKEY RELATIONS

The End of a Decade-Long Cold War



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Executive Summary

On the backdrop of deep-seated diplomatic hostilities that spanned over a decade, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's landmark visit to Turkey symbolizes a crucial turning point in Egypt-Turkey relations. The visit reciprocates President Erdogan's previous trip to Cairo, solidifying the reconciliation efforts that had begun in recent years. With the signing of 17 cooperation agreements, this diplomatic renewal is seen as a pivot toward long-term strategic and economic collaboration, potentially reshaping the regional geopolitical landscape.

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi attend a signing ceremony after their meeting in Ankara, Turkey September 4, 2024



Context and Background

The diplomatic rift between Egypt and Turkey was rooted in President Sisi's 2013 ousting of Mohamed Morsi, an ally of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Turkey, a vocal critic of the military coup, gave refuge to Egyptian dissidents and supported the Government of National Accord (GNA) in Libya, backing factions opposed to Egyptian interests. Both countries engaged in political, military, and economic clashes throughout this period, with Turkey establishing a military presence in Libya and supporting the Muslim Brotherhood.



Reconciliation Dynamics

The shift in Turkey's regional policy in 2020, which aimed at repairing strained relations with Egypt, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, opened the door for reconciliation. Since then, Egypt and Turkey have moved progressively toward restoring diplomatic relations, initially reappointing ambassadors and engaging in exploratory talks. President Sisi's visit marks the institutionalization of normalization through the establishment of a Strategic Cooperation Council between the two nations, designed to oversee and guide mutual engagements.



Key Developments

1. Economic Cooperation:

- The countries signed 17 memorandums of understanding across various sectors, including energy, defense, health, tourism, agriculture, and finance.
- Turkish investments in Egypt are projected to reach \$3 billion by the end of 2024, with bilateral trade expected to rise from \$7 billion to \$15 billion within five years.
- Egypt's strategic location as a gateway to Africa and Turkey's position as a bridge to Central Asia and the Balkans create lucrative trade opportunities.

2. Energy and Defense Collaboration:

- Energy Cooperation: Turkey aims to increase its imports of Egyptian liquefied natural gas (LNG), and discussions of a potential maritime boundary agreement in the Eastern Mediterranean are underway.
- Defense Collaboration: Egypt expressed interest in acquiring Turkish drones and other military equipment. A high-level Egyptian delegation visited Turkish defense manufacturers, including Baykar and TAI. While no formal deal has been confirmed, drone sales would mark a major strategic shift and could see Turkish military trainers deployed in Egypt.





3. Geopolitical Considerations:

- The two countries are looking to bridge their divergent interests in Libya, where they have backed rival factions for years. Turkey's deepening relationship with both sides in Libya signals its intent to de-escalate regional tensions.
- Egypt and Turkey are also seeking joint diplomatic efforts in Gaza and other conflict zones, suggesting growing cooperation in peacebuilding initiatives across the region.

4. Challenges and Potential Complications:

- The potential sale of Turkish drones to Egypt could complicate Turkey's ties with Ethiopia, which has been at odds with Egypt over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD).
- Eastern Mediterranean tensions remain delicate, as Egypt is unlikely to support Turkish maritime claims that conflict with its alliances with Greece and Cyprus.
- Libya continues to be a contentious point. Despite mutual efforts to find common ground, Turkey's military presence in Libya and Egypt's historical backing of General Haftar will remain areas of strategic sensitivity.

Outlook and Strategic Implications

The normalization between Egypt and Turkey underscores a pragmatic recalibration of foreign policies aimed at fostering economic growth and addressing mutual regional security concerns. However, key issues such as Libya, the GERD dispute, and Eastern Mediterranean maritime claims remain potential sources of friction.

Moving forward, both nations are likely to prioritize economic cooperation, leveraging their geographic advantages to enhance trade and energy links. Defense collaboration could also deepen, with drone sales serving as a litmus test for the durability of this rapprochement. Nevertheless, maintaining balance in their respective regional alliances, particularly with Greece and Ethiopia, will require careful diplomacy.



Conclusion

The end of the decade-long cold war between Egypt and Turkey marks the beginning of a new strategic partnership, driven by economic incentives and regional security concerns. The success of this rapprochement will depend on both nations' ability to manage longstanding geopolitical rivalries while capitalizing on newfound opportunities for cooperation.



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