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Egyptian allegations against Turkey

Policy Analysis Unit



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On November 22, 2017, Egypt's Prosecutor General Counsellor Nabil Ahmed Sadiq ordered that 29 Egyptians be held in custody for 15 days pending investigation by the Supreme State Security Prosecution on charges of espionage in favor of Turkey to harm the country's national interests – together with other fugitives inside and outside the country, including Egyptians and Turks, without providing any names. Authorities have also accused those in custody, and others yet to be arrested, of undermining and disrupting Egypt's state institutions, illegal wiretapping, and belonging to a terrorist organization. The defendants were also accused of money laundering, and passing international calls and trading foreign currencies without a licence.

The Egyptian General Intelligence Service, which filed the case, said that the network has been operating since 2013 in the framework of an integrated plan set up by the Brotherhood members in Egypt and MB members located on Turkish territory, under the guidance of the Turkish intelligence, with Qatari funding.

It is important to discuss the dimensions of this charge (espionage) in light of similar charges against Qatar and Hamas made by the Egyptian authorities during the period following the coup of July 3, 2013, and explore the main reasons behind this case:

First: Important details

The preparations for the espionage case began in October 2017, where many of the defendants were subjected to abductions and enforced disappearances by the Egyptian security services, most notably Ms. Sumaya Maher Ahmed. Twenty-nine people have been arrested in the case so far. The case includes other fugitives but the authorities did not provide their names, according to a statement by the Egyptian public prosecution which investigated the defendants after a period of enforced disappearance.

Following is the investigation outcome, according to a statement by the Egyptian Prosecutor General:



- 1- Agreement of the Turkish security and intelligence services with the Muslim Brotherhood's international organization on drawing up a plan to seize power in Egypt.
- 2- Passing international online calls through Turkey-hosted servers.
- 3 - Wiretapping and recording calls to monitor the country's negative and positive conditions, and explore the views of various segments of society.
- 4 - Collecting information on the internal situation using the Muslim Brotherhood members and others hired inside and outside the country.
- 5 - The establishment of media entities and platforms outside the country to fabricate news and false rumors for inciting public opinion against state institutions.
- 6 - Using the money coming from illegally passing international calls in the establishment of media entities and platforms abroad.
- 7 - Transferring information to the Turkish intelligence services to be exploited in recruiting elements inside the country to commit acts of hostility.
8. Seizures included a number of international call forwarding devices, small and micro-spy devices, electromagnetic wave transmitters / receivers and nanotubes, automated devices used in wiretapping.

Second: How pro-regime media handled the case

The espionage case (allegedly in favor of Turkey) witnessed extensive coverage by newspapers, websites, and TV programs on Egyptian pro-regime satellite channels. A media man close to the security services reported on 22 November 2017 that the Turkish intelligence collected a lot of information about the Egyptian people and institutions, stabbing the Egyptian state right in the heart. He added that the defendants supported the Muslim Brotherhood-linked TV channels based in Turkey and provided them with important information. He also claimed that the case has conclusive evidence proving the involvement of the Turkish state and the Turkish intelligence in conspiring against the Egyptian state since 2013.

The Egyptian media continued to attack Turkey even after the Turkish state announced Monday (Nov. 27) a day of national mourning and its flags flew at half-mast at Turkish diplomatic and government missions at home and abroad, in the wake of the Egypt's Al-Rawdah mosque terrorist attack in Al-Arish city, Sinai (Friday, 24 November 2017).

Furthermore Egyptian media outlets accused Turkey and Qatar of supporting terrorist operations in Egypt.

The Egyptian media outlets addressed the issue of espionage with Turkey, highlighting the following:

- Cooperation between the Turkish state and the Muslim Brotherhood's international organization,

There is a plan to harm the Egyptian national economy,

- The defendants were spying on the Egyptians for collecting political, military, economic, and social information.

- As usual, the Egyptian media continued to accuse the Muslim Brotherhood of being a non-patriotic force that conspires with the "enemies of the country"

(It is surprising that one of the defendants in the case affixed to the Muslim Brotherhood is a Christian citizen).

Third: Egyptian regime and similar precedents

This is not the first time that Egyptian authorities accuse foreign parties – which have strained relations with Egypt – of spying on Egypt. In fact, there are many precedents, including:

- a- The Egyptian regime accused the State of Qatar of spying on Egypt, and the judiciary even issued a final life sentence against President Mohamed Morsi in connection with the case of "spying for Qatar" as well as a final execution verdict against three defendants on charges of spying and disclosing documents related to country's national security and the armed forces to Qatar.

- b- The Egyptian regime accused the Palestinian Hamas movement of involvement in the assassination of Egyptian Prosecutor-General Hisham Barakat. The defendant admitted (under torture) that he had traveled to the Gaza Strip and was trained by an intelligence officer of the Hamas movement on how to manufacture Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and others. The regime also accused prominent members of the Hamas movement in the lawsuit known as "the escape from Wadi Natroun Prison, including persons who have been dead or imprisoned in Israel for long periods of time!

Fourth: Interpretations and dimensions

1) Attempt from the Egyptian regime to blackmail the Turkish state

Through this espionage case, the Egyptian regime attempts to obtain some political and media gains and concessions from Turkey. The regime also targets transformation of the Turkish leadership's position towards some political leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Freedom and Justice Party, as well as some other opposition figures living on the Turkish territory; or blocking some of the independent Egyptian opposition TV channels in Turkey, especially as some of these channels have clearly outperformed many of the pro-Egyptian regime channels in viewership ratings. (IPSOS ranked Mekameleen TV, a channel launched from Turkey and related to the Muslim Brotherhood, as the highest in viewership ratings in Egypt in 2016).

What supports this interpretation is that the Egyptian regime has made various attempts to extort the Palestinian resistance movements during the siege on Gaza after accusing names of martyrs killed a few years ago in the assassination of Prosecutor General Hisham Barakat. The Egyptian regime practiced blackmail against its allies, when the pro-regime media attacked the Saudi regime with the aim of extorting them financially.

2) Confusion within the Egyptian regime

Speaking on the Egyptian-Turkish relations, the Egyptian Foreign Minister said on October 15, 2017: "We have noticed during the previous period a decline in the anti-Egyptian rhetoric; there is economic cooperation that we seek to preserve because it is in the interest of the two countries and that he does not mind to travel to Turkey and meet with President Erdogan.

However, the practices that accompanied and followed these statements came completely on the opposite, contrary to the Foreign Minister's comments. This was possibly due to the internal imbalance experienced by the Egyptian regime as a result of the failure in the face of the armed organizations in Sinai amid a tough economic situation in the country. This appeared clearly through the conflicting statements and decisions following the terrorist attacks of western desert's Al-Wahat and Sinai's Al-Rawdhah Mosque.



3) *Just to bother Turkey*

The Egyptian regime is striving to bother the Turkish state through various means, including the recent espionage allegations against Turkey. Recently, this has clearly been observed through:

a- The joint military exercises conducted by Egypt and Greece on Rhodes Island between October 30 and November 4, known as Medusa 5, in the east of the Aegean Sea. The Turkish Foreign Ministry slammed the exercises as illegal as the 1947 Treaty of Paris prohibits any kind of military education activities on Rhodes Island which was transferred to Greece from Italy after World War II on the condition of being disarmed.

b- Al-Sisi's participation in the tripartite summit between Egypt, Cyprus, and Greece in the Cypriot capital of Nicosia, in attempt to establish a coalition to achieve common interests which are mostly conflicting with the interests of Turkey, including:

1) The file of demarcation of the maritime borders between the three countries, allowing them to explore oil and natural gas in the Mediterranean Sea, which Turkey considers a threat to its national security. This was clearly demonstrated by Ankara's declaration that the "Turkish Navy was authorized by the government for the full implementation of recently amended rules of engagement in the eastern Mediterranean in the face of growing tension between littoral countries, including Turkey, Greek Cyprus, Egypt and Israel over oil and natural gas drilling projects."

2) Preventing the passage of Turkish trucks and vessels bound for the Gulf States through Egyptian territory as the Egyptian government decided in 2015 not to renew the RO-RO agreement that it had with the Turkish government. The agreement involved the arrival of trucks filled with Turkish goods to the Egyptian ports in the Mediterranean Sea, then secure those goods when they are being transferred by land across Egypt to the Red Sea ports, and then they get shipped through a Turkish ferry to the ports of Gulf Arab countries.

3) The Cyprus issue: During the recent summit between Egypt, Greece and Cyprus, Al-Sisi pointed out that "the issues of Cyprus and Palestine are of special priority." The purpose of this statement is to refer malignly to the similarity of the status of "occupation" in both countries, supporting Cyprus politically in the face of Turkey and continuing the approach of the Egyptian regime to embarrass, harass, and pressure the Turkish side.



Summary

A- In such cases, the regime relies on some facts to build a coherent case, relying in part on real data (which may include, for example, a criminal action that is normally illegal such as passing international telephone calls, then many lies and confessions - obtained through torture - as well as other innocent people are added, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Turkey in the spying case, for example. This coincides with the promotion of the case through the pro-regime media organs intensively with the aim of creating an internal and external public opinion against opponents of the regime.

B- Egyptian regime's handling of these issues and others indicates that it aims to achieve several main objectives:

- 1) To achieve an internal media victory, which could be employed to improve the image of the regime and to highlight its strength, especially that failures in various files, most notably Sinai and the economy, are pushing the Egyptian regime to continuously strive to improve its image by raising similar issues.
- 2) To improve the image of the General Intelligence Service in competition with other security services.
- 3) To create pressure tools against opponents of the regime at home and abroad.
- 4) An attempt to find a means of political extortion against foreign political regimes.

C- An attempt from the Egyptian government to exploit the liquid situation in the region: This appears clearly through its foreign policy, as it (Egyptian regime) always seeks to exploit crises and regional files and impose itself on the negotiating table. This makes the regime engage in unstable alliances according to the state of regional files, which is sometimes reflected on its strategic alliance with Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Occasionally, we notice acts of extortion by the Egyptian regime of its allies. So, the Turkish government should take this into consideration while conducting any form of political relations with the Al-Sisi regime in the future. Turkey should also maintain the economic interests of the two countries, away from any political dispute.

Also, Turkey should not be deceived by Egypt's pro-regime media campaigns which are originally blackmail-oriented. The Turkish government should respond to any media accusations only through similar, away from the political leadership. Finally, Turkey should not respond to any Egyptian blackmail through such fabricated cases.