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Egypt and Turkey Issues and Problems

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Egypt and Turkey: Issues and Problems

Dr. Essam Abdelshafy

Anadolu Agency's Interview with Dr. Essam Abdelshafy on the Eastern Mediterranean Developments

[Anadolu Agency](#) has conducted an interview with Dr. Essam Abdelshafy, the chairman of the International Relations Academy and director of the Egyptian Institute for Political and Strategic Studies, on the developments in the Eastern Mediterranean, especially the functional role played by Egypt's Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi's regime there. The interview that was run by Busranur Begcecanli came under the title: "Al-Sisi used as pawn against Turkey in East Med: Expert", going as follows:

Sisi government chooses to protect regime, not Egyptian people's interests by opposing Turkish vision in East Med: expert

The United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia and Israel, which have given support to Cairo since the military coup in 2013, are using Egyptian President Adel-Fattah al-Sisi as a political tool against Turkey for East Mediterranean energy resources, according to Prof. Essam Abdelshafy, the chairman of International Relations Academy and the Egyptian Institute for Political and Strategic Studies.

The hostility to Turkey over developments in the Eastern Mediterranean escalated in 2013 when the Egyptian regime signed a maritime demarcation agreement with the Greek Cypriot administration of Southern Cyprus, he said.

With this aim, Cairo has also inked multiple agreements in favor of Israel, ceding large areas of its gas-rich maritime zones.

"After leaving them to Israel, a gas deal worth \$15 billion was drawn up [supplies starting from January 2020] for Egypt's gas purchases from Israel through a company affiliated with the Egyptian intelligence service," he said.

Furthermore, al-Sisi participated in the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum along with the Greek Cypriot administration, Egypt, Israel, Italy, Jordan, and Palestine in January to draw their own Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) in the Eastern Mediterranean to enable the start of the own

exploration. According to Abdelshafy, these efforts were meant to besiege Turkey in the region, and on Aug. 6, al-Sisi liaised with Greece to demarcate the maritime borders, giving up more than 11 thousand square kilometers.

When Turkey and Libya signed a maritime deal in November amid the exploration row, there was much criticism and backlash, as it put the collaboration from the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum into disarray.

However, Abdelshafy said, "the Turkey-Libya maritime deal greatly supports Egyptian economic interests in the Mediterranean, and gives Egypt about 15 thousand square kilometers, which the Committee of Experts at the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs also admits."

Therefore, the Egyptian regime is willing to ignore the economic gains it would obtain in the Turkey-Libya maritime deal if it sides with Turkey.

He maintained that the Sisi government chose to protect his regime, not the interests of the Egyptian people by opposing Turkey's vision in the region.

Role of Eastern Mediterranean energy in Morsi's fall

However, relations between Tel Aviv and Cairo have not always been so amicable. When al-Sisi's predecessor Morsi was first elected president, he declared his position on Israel as a strategic enemy and formed his East Mediterranean policies on this basis, Abdelshafy contended.

"He [Morsi] was trying to strengthen the relations with all regional and international parties, especially Turkey and Gaza, in pursuit of independence and in defense of Egyptian national security," he said.

As a result, he said that Morsi's position on Israel and Egypt's oil and gas wealth, and his refusal to cooperate with Israel were the most divisive reasons for the coup staged against him.

"At the point we have reached today, Greece and Israel will not stop bribing al-Sisi to sign more agreements on the Mediterranean and to violate larger areas of Egypt's economic zone," he said.

'Greece and Israel use al-Sisi for agreements with Libya and Syria'

Seeking to use al-Sisi as a tool in their struggles against Turkey, Greece is pursuing a maritime agreement with Libyan warlord Khalifa Haftar, leader of the illegitimate armed forces in eastern Libya, to thwart the Turkish agreement with the legitimate government of Sarraj, which is recognized by the United Nations, according to AbdelShafy.

There are many reports about Egypt's hosting of negotiations between Greek and Israeli parties with Aqila Saleh, speaker of the eastern-Libya-based assembly, in the city of Tobruk, regarding the demarcation maritime zones, he explained.

Abdelshafy said the Greeks are also chasing deals with Syria to demarcate maritime borders, and to determine exclusive economic zones, making use of al-Sisi's good relationship with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Russia.

He argued that the matter is greater than Sisi's withdrawal from large parts of Egypt's economic zones, but includes a strategic plan involving all countries in the region to block Turkey and prevent it from benefiting from its wealth in the Mediterranean, he said.

"There has to be a counterplan in answer to such a scenario and to prevent them from signing agreements similar to those that took place during and after the First World War," he concluded.

Egypt's losses in the Mediterranean

Under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), international law is based upon the principle that a median line is drawn considering the coastlines of both parties, which means countries with longer coastlines will be entitled to larger exclusive economic zones.

However, in 2003, Egypt, having 400 thousand nautical miles of Mediterranean coasts, and the Greek Cypriot administration, controlling 197,000 nautical miles, signed an agreement that divides the maritime jurisdiction among them equally.

At the end of the deal, Cairo lost 11,500 square kilometers (3,352 square nautical miles) giving its zones to the Greek Cypriot administration.

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Furthermore, Egypt on Aug. 6 signed a bilateral agreement with Greece on the delimitation of maritime jurisdictions between the two countries, resulting in Egypt forfeiting about 15 thousand square kilometers.

Should Egypt reach an agreement with Turkey, it stands to gain 21,500 square kilometers of its north-sea border.

