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Prospects of Egypt-Turkey Relations Amid Mutual Statements

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Recently, several media outlets have raised a substantial controversy about positive statements made by the Turkish side about the relationship between Egypt and Turkey and the tracks that pushed towards rapprochement between the two countries. However, the remarkable thing in this regard was the Egyptian regime's lack of seriousness for improvement of diplomatic relations with Turkey, especially that General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has supported fronts hostile to the Turkish regime (Cyprus, Greece, Israel and the UAE).

Therefore, it is not possible to determine indicators of relations between the two sides without going through a review of the key issues affecting the entire Arab region, given the fact that Egypt is present in most of the region's political files.

Key indicators of rapprochement

The relationship between Egypt and Turkey cannot just be described as ranging between ebb and flow, or that the escalating statements and responses disseminated via various media outlets and platforms move at the same pace. Rather, it is a relationship governed by tensions and changes in international politics and the reality of the current stage imposed on both countries.

Therefore, disputes between the two sides should be resolved regardless of their conflicting interests, as the simultaneous developments in light of the US President Joe Biden's access to the White House push all regional parties to conduct continuous contacts and discussions to achieve bilateral agreements that guarantee cooperation and coordination, reduce tensions, and contain the likely pressures that they could be exposed to from the Biden administration, especially as the current American president had made negative statements during his electoral campaign against the Egyptian, Turkish and Saudi regimes, against the backdrop of several issues and conflicts experienced by the three regimes.

In the context of the Egyptian-Turkish relations, positive statements were exchanged between the two countries; then joint talks were reportedly launched, most prominently on the issue of the maritime borders, economic free zones, and the eastern Mediterranean gas, in light of Turkish-Greek

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competition, has been met by official Egyptian-Greek coordination and agreements, which were signed on the sixth of August 2020.

The Turkish side welcomed dialogue and cooperation with Egypt so that relations between the two countries would return to normal, as they used to be in 2013. However, the Egyptian side in turn, as it was reported by its pro-channels, set some preconditions for the restoration of relations with Turkey, as promoted by Sisi's supporters and pro-media outlets for purposes of external propaganda consumption, such as demands for withdrawal of the Turkish forces from Libya, closing the Egyptian opposition TV channels broadcasting from Turkey, handing over the wanted leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood, ending Turkish violation of the territorial sovereignty of both Iraq and Syria, and stopping violation of the maritime sovereignty of Cyprus and Greece.

In fact, the reaction that Turkey finds from the Egyptian side is not surprising, because the reasons for their disagreement trace back to the period of the military coup in Egypt in 2013 led by then Minister of Defense Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, against the late President Mohamed Morsi, given the fact that Turkey does not support military coups for reasons related to the fact that coups violate democracy and do not represent the will of the peoples, as they (coups) are usually driven by external forces that target dismantling societies and weakening them via stripping away their capabilities and wealth. Therefore, Turkey chose to back the Egyptian people, and aligned itself with their options over the past seven years, expressing this on more than one occasion.

In fact, a lot, if not all, of the reports that were circulated by the pro-Sisi media outlets have been unrealistic and having no value, because the Turkish stances towards various regional issues have always been consistent; as Turkey has not only welcomed the Egyptian opposition, but the Turkish territory has also been an incubator for all Arab opponents.

The most prominent transformation in the relations of the two countries has been in the Libyan file. Following the Turkish position of supporting the internationally recognized legitimate Government of National Accord (GNA) led by Fayeze Al-Sarraj; signing several security, economic, and military agreements; and stopping the expansion of Haftar's forces; the Egyptian regime reconsidered its orientations that were strongly supportive of Khalifa Haftar to stand in the end with the same Turkish orientations in support of a political solution, where the ceasefire between rival Libyan parties were backed by both Egypt and Turkey.

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The issue of maritime borders represents an extended strategic conflict between Turkey and Greece, but the Egyptian regime has placed itself in the Greek trench to spite Turkey. On 6 August 2020, Egypt and Greece signed an agreement to demarcate the maritime borders between them, which appeared to contradict the Egyptian national interests, compared to the demarcation lines established by Turkey which saves about 25 thousand km² of exclusive economic zones to Egypt.

Paths and Prospects

The future of relations between Turkey and Egypt is mainly related to the economic dimensions, which in turn can enhance political understandings.

Although Egyptian parliamentarians had called for suspension of the free trade agreement with Turkey that was signed in 2007 and entered into force in 2013, the Egyptian parliament has not yet voted for canceling the agreement. In fact, there are voices inside the Egyptian regime that call for not rushing in taking such a step, on the basis of taking into account the Egyptian interest first; and that such a step must be studied well and creating alternatives before deciding on it; as abandoning international agreements without creating appropriate economic alternatives is not easy, and ultimately requires paying the price.

On the other hand, the bilateral understandings between Turkey and Egypt revolve around maritime issues in the eastern Mediterranean, the Libyan issue, the Palestinian issue and the peace process. After Libya's ceasefire agreement that was backed by Egypt and Turkey, the situation there has been moving towards a political solution under the auspices of the United Nations. Recently, a national government was formed, headed by Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh, bringing together all Libyan political forces, which could constitute an important step for pushing all the conflicting countries to withdraw their military forces from Libyan territories.

As for the Palestinian issue, it has taken a transformed course with respect to some Arab governments, in light of the recent move for normalization of relations with Israel. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) was the first to justify its normalization with Israel by raising slogans of tolerance with the Israelis. Indeed, more than that, the UAE supported the tyrannical and military regimes against their peoples, and was a direct cause of instability in the region.

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As for Egypt, it continued to play a mediating role among the Palestinian political forces themselves on the one hand, and between the Palestinians and Israel on the other hand, almost functioning as the general security coordinator there, especially with regard to the so-called 'Deal of the Century', the dimensions of which have not fully been known, whether it was a new border demarcation deal that would allow more Zionists to settle in occupied Palestinian territories, or that it came within the framework of an updated version of the well-known Sykes-Picot Agreement.

Conclusion

In the context of Turkish-Egyptian relations, there are several files that constitute an obstacle to the progress of understandings between the two countries, which requires sufficient time to resolve their outstanding issues. Egypt should regain its regional position, avoid getting involved and exhausted in the region's crises, and move to repair its relations with Turkey away from setting unrealistic preconditions as the pro-Sisi regime media used to advocate from time to time.

In this regard, the Egyptian opposition media outlets based in Turkey are likely to be subjected to severe pressures as a direct consequence of this rapprochement, because this file causes severe inconvenience to the ruling regime in Egypt, which makes it one of the most important negotiation cards between the two sides.

Accordingly, the opposition media outlets may be driven to reconsider its policies and editorial orientations, albeit temporarily, until the dimensions of the complete picture related to the contacts between the Egyptian and Turkish parties and the extent of their likely understandings become clear. This, of course, will require the Egyptian political opposition in Turkey to anticipate likely consequences and arrange future strategic alternatives for them, whether politically and in the media file.