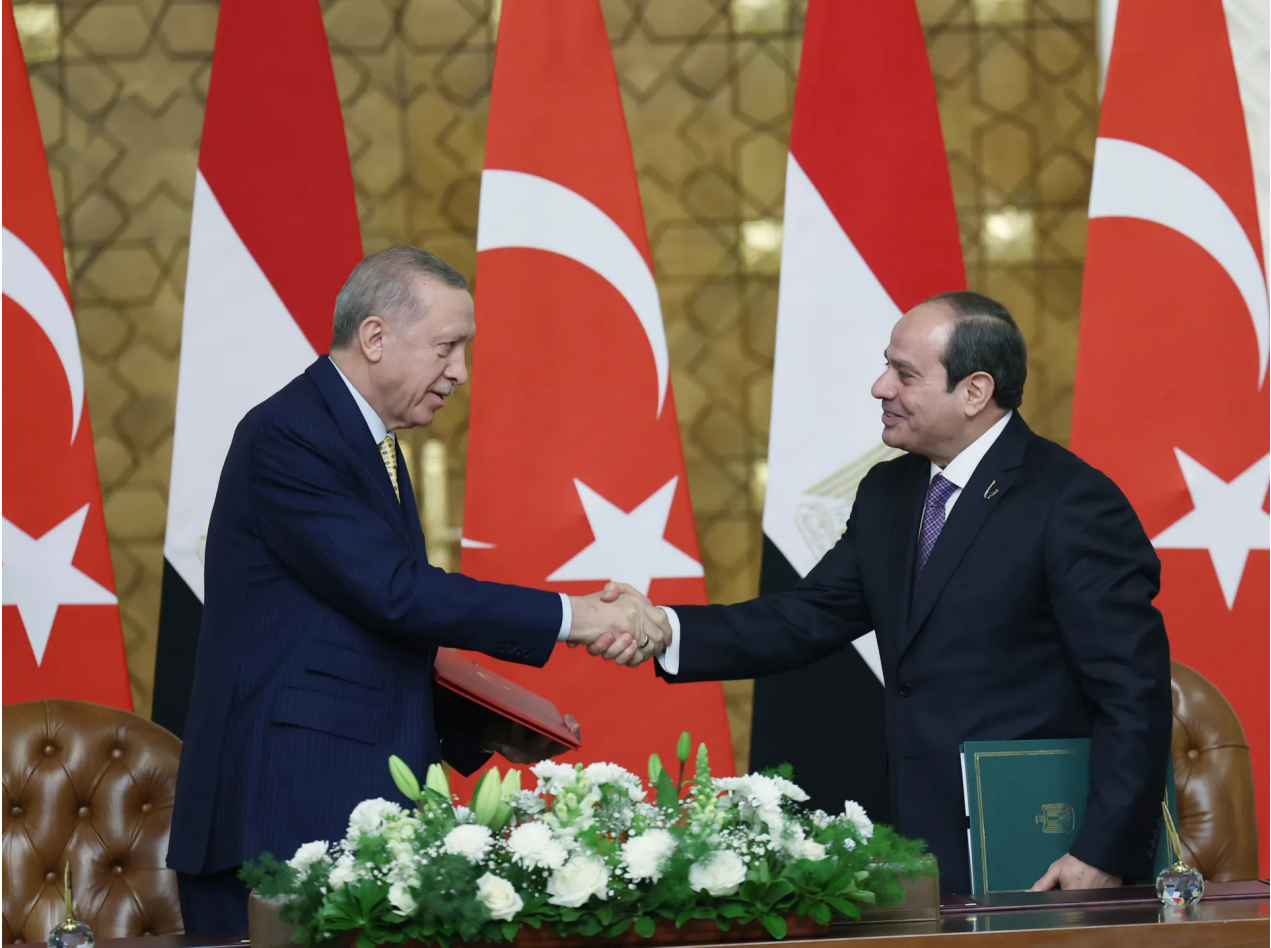


The Egyptian-Turkish rapprochement: Why it worries Washington and “Tel Aviv”



A sense of concern is hanging over decision-making circles in Washington and “Tel Aviv” over the growing military and security cooperation between Egypt and Türkiye. That is the message conveyed by reports published by international and Hebrew-language media outlets, which indicated that the path of rapprochement between Cairo and Ankara is no longer limited to repairing political relations, but is moving toward a more sensitive level involving defense and security coordination, at a pace that appears faster than usual in recent years.

These reports revealed that US intelligence agencies have detected signs of increased coordination between the two countries in military and security fields, prompting the US State Department to request information from its embassies in Cairo and Ankara to assess the nature of this rapprochement, its limits, and its potential impact on the balance of power in the eastern Mediterranean a region that is, of course, highly sensitive in American and Israeli calculations.

Since the Gaza war, and the subsequent US-Israeli escalation against Iran, the

region has been undergoing a broad reshaping of the geopolitical map, as successive shifts have pushed many regional powers to reassess their positioning, interests, and tools of influence. In this context, the Egyptian-Turkish rapprochement stands out as one of the notable shifts, especially since the two countries possess military, geographic, and political weight that cannot be ignored.

But the most important question remains: If both Egypt and Türkiye maintain good relations with the United States and are not in direct confrontation with Israel, why does the growing defense cooperation between them provoke so much concern in Washington and Tel Aviv?

Cairo-Ankara: a rapprochement of necessity

After years of tension that had overshadowed Egyptian-Turkish relations since 2013, Cairo and Ankara began gradually moving toward easing the strain, reducing areas of confrontation, and stepping back, each from its side. It became clear that maintaining the rupture was no longer a low-cost option, and that opening new pages of joint cooperation had become more realistic, especially given the influential regional weight both countries carry in the equations of the Middle East and the eastern Mediterranean.

This Egyptian-Turkish rapprochement has therefore been driven by a set of motives, factors, and developments that have cast their shadow over the region and forced many parties to reconsider their positions and alignments. Rapid developments no longer allow for the continuation of a break between two major powers with military, demographic, and geographic weight that cannot be ignored.

For that reason, this rapprochement does not appear to be a full-fledged alliance in the traditional sense so much as an attempt to recalibrate calculations and move from the logic of open hostility to the logic of managing interests and minimizing losses.

The first of these drivers lies in the changes produced by the Gaza war, which upended many calculations and exposed the fragility of regional balances for all to see. Tensions in the Red Sea and the eastern Mediterranean, especially with the widening scope of regional escalation and the war against Iran, added a new source of pressure on the global maritime and commercial economy, with direct repercussions for countries in the region foremost among them Egypt and Türkiye, both of which were affected, to varying degrees, by disrupted trade routes, rising shipping costs, and market instability.

Then comes the energy file and the eastern Mediterranean as one of the central drivers behind this rapprochement. Cairo and Ankara have realized that their old

competition over gas, maritime delimitation, and naval alliances has not produced clear gains for either side, and that continued exclusion or confrontation opens the door for other parties to expand their influence at their expense.

Accordingly, an understanding — even within minimum limits — could give both countries greater ability to influence the equations of energy and maritime transport and restore to them broader room to shape regional arrangements linked to the Mediterranean.

Linked to this file is the economic factor, as one of the strong incentives for rapprochement. Türkiye is looking for a broad and promising market for investment and trade, while Egypt sees Türkiye as an opportunity to strengthen its economy and attract diversified investments in energy, technology, and various industries.

In light of the economic pressures facing both countries, rapprochement appeared to be a practical option that would allow previous disputes to be turned into opportunities for cooperation and open the door to mutual interests more worthwhile than continued tension.

From this perspective, Cairo and Ankara are moving with clear pragmatism, based on setting aside differences as much as possible and prioritizing shared interests and challenges over a fraught political memory. Each side sees the other as a necessary partner, or at the very least a regional power that cannot be ignored, at a moment that no longer tolerates isolation or gratuitous hostility.

In this sense, the return of warmth to Egyptian-Turkish relations appears to be part of a broader regional repositioning, not merely a passing bilateral reconciliation.

Growing defense cooperation

The Egyptian-Turkish rapprochement has not been translated only in political and economic terms; it has also extended to a more sensitive level in the form of deepening military and defense cooperation an indicator reflecting the two countries' desire to move relations into a more cohesive and solid phase, based on a shared awareness of the scale of mounting regional challenges and the need to possess broader tools to deal with them.

This defense cooperation has taken more than one path, most notably the resumption of joint naval exercises between the two countries in the eastern Mediterranean, known as “Sea of Friendship,” after a 13-year hiatus. The resumption of these exercises was not merely a protocol military measure; it carried a clear political significance regarding the scale of the shift in relations

between Cairo and Ankara. Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan expressed this when he said that relations between the two countries had reached their best levels in modern history.

Several reports indicate that Egypt has shown notable interest in a number of advanced Turkish defense products, including the TRLG-230 missile, MAM-C, MAM-L, and MAM-T smart micro munitions, as well as anti-tank missile systems such as the laser-guided L-UMTAS. The display of Bayraktar drone models during the EDEX 2023 defense exhibition in Cairo also drew attention, especially as the aircraft and munitions appeared bearing the Egyptian flag, which was seen as a symbolic message about the level of defense openness between the two countries.

In the same context, Egypt and Türkiye signed an agreement last year for the joint production of vertical takeoff and landing drones, while production of unmanned ground vehicles began as part of a partnership between Türkiye's Havelsan and Egypt's Kader Factory. Some indicators suggest that cooperation may go beyond the level of buying and selling to joint manufacturing and the transfer of expertise, giving the defense relationship between the two countries a more strategic dimension and making it part of a broader equation aimed at developing self-reliant capabilities and diversifying sources of military technology.

In a notable development, Turkish media previously indicated that Ankara had approved Cairo's joining the fifth-generation fighter program KAAN, while The National Interest reported that Egypt had officially joined the program, describing the move as a significant development in the trajectory of defense cooperation in the Middle East. It said Egypt's participation in the program could help reshape air power dynamics in the Middle East and North Africa, given Cairo's military weight and Ankara's efforts to expand its partnerships in advanced defense industries.

The KAAN program, led by Turkish Aerospace Industries, aims to produce a twin-engine fifth-generation fighter capable of operating in all weather conditions and equipped with advanced stealth capabilities, high maneuverability, sophisticated sensor fusion, and systems linked to the concept of network-centric warfare. Accordingly, any Egyptian involvement in this program — whether at the level of partnership, manufacturing, or transfer of expertise — cannot be read as a passing military deal, but rather as an indication that Egyptian-Turkish defense cooperation is moving into deeper territory, one that could have important implications for the regional balance of power.

Why the American-Israeli concern?

It has become clear that Washington does not view the Egyptian-Turkish rapprochement as merely a natural restoration of relations between two countries that went through years of political tension. Rather, it approaches it from a broader angle tied to its potential repercussions for the Middle East map and the balance of power within it.

The American view — and behind it the Israeli one — sees this rapprochement as a shift that may go beyond bilateral relations, extending its impact from the eastern Mediterranean to the Red Sea, and from Gaza to Libya, amid fears that the region may begin gradually slipping out of the traditional American rhythm that governed its balances for decades.

From this perspective, the reasons for American concern can be understood, foremost among them the weight represented by the two countries. Egypt possesses a unique geostrategic position linking the Suez Canal to the Red Sea and the eastern Mediterranean, in addition to its direct connection to highly sensitive files such as Gaza, Libya, and Sudan. Türkiye, meanwhile, has growing military and industrial power, influence within NATO, and an active presence in Libya, the Horn of Africa, and the eastern Mediterranean.

If these two powers move closer to one another, even without reaching a full alliance, they could form a significant regional equation that Washington would find difficult to ignore or handle with the same old tools.

American concern increases with the expansion of defense cooperation between Cairo and Ankara, as this path could reduce Egypt’s relative dependence on US weapons, or at least give it broader alternatives in armament and military technology. Over recent years, Türkiye has made a clear leap in drones, smart munitions, defense systems, and joint military manufacturing. As a result, Egypt’s opening to these capabilities could limit Washington’s ability to use the arms card as a tool of political pressure and diminish its traditional stock of influence in Cairo.

Among the files that also raise concern in Washington and Tel Aviv is the possibility of old arrangements in the eastern Mediterranean being shaken, many of which were built in large part on the reality of Egyptian-Turkish tension. Greece, Cyprus, and Israel all benefited from that distance in building tracks of cooperation and alliances linked to energy and maritime security.

Today, however, the growing relationship between Cairo and Ankara may impose a new equation that weakens the room for maneuver these parties have enjoyed and pushes Athens, Nicosia, and Tel Aviv to recalculate their positions on gas, maritime delimitation, and naval alliances.

Logistically and strategically, this rapprochement could affect files that are highly

sensitive to US interests, from Libya, Somalia, and the Horn of Africa to the Red Sea and Sudan. These areas are already witnessing intensifying competition among international and regional powers, including Russia, China, and Iran. Accordingly, any broad Egyptian-Turkish coordination could create an independent regional margin that does not necessarily align with American approaches and could obstruct some of Washington’s arrangements or limit its ability to manage those files on its own.

From the Israeli perspective, the concerns appear more direct. Tel Aviv sees the Egyptian-Turkish rapprochement as potentially narrowing its room for maneuver in multiple arenas, especially Gaza, Syria, the eastern Mediterranean, and the Red Sea. It also closes the door on a policy that long benefited from the differences between Cairo and Ankara to bolster its regional influence.

If this rapprochement develops into more regular political and security coordination, Israel may find itself facing a new reality in which it can no longer play on the contradictions among the region’s major powers as it did before, but instead confronts two regional powers capable of influencing files that touch its security and direct interests.

In sum, it can be said that American concern over the Egyptian-Turkish rapprochement — though Israel is feeding it and pushing to amplify it — has not yet reached the level of acute alarm or direct danger. Egypt and Türkiye remain, after all, important partners of the United States and have not, to this day, stepped outside its umbrella. Nor has their rapprochement yet turned into a solid alliance or a fully formed axis capable of directly challenging American arrangements in the region.

But the level of this concern is likely to rise if coordination between Cairo and Ankara moves from managing interests and opening channels of cooperation to unifying visions and building common positions on files that intersect with US interests, especially in the eastern Mediterranean, the Red Sea, Gaza, Libya, and the Horn of Africa. The picture could become even more sensitive if this rapprochement is accompanied by openness from other powers, such as some Gulf states or Pakistan, potentially creating a broader regional space that moves, relatively speaking, outside the traditional American framework.

Even so, the central dilemma remains that any serious path of Egyptian-Turkish cooperation will not move in a vacuum. It will most likely face external attempts to contain it, dismantle it, or slow it down. Here the decisive question emerges: Can Cairo and Ankara protect this rapprochement from pressures and traps and turn it into a stable partnership based on mutual interests?

Or will old calculations, external interventions, and the sensitivity of regional files



return the two countries to the square of suspicion? The answer will depend on the two sides' ability to manage differences pragmatically and not allow others to write the boundaries of their relationship on their behalf.

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