

# From Tension to Reconciliation:

## Mapping the Future of Egypt-Türkiye Relations

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(Utku Uçrak - Anadolu Agency)

**The relationship between Türkiye and Egypt has been complex for over a decade, with recent significant events prompting both countries to reassess their stances on various matters. As regional and global dynamics continue to shift, Türkiye and Egypt are working towards realigning their strategies to adapt to the changing landscape. Türkiye and Egypt have been making efforts to repair their strained relationship, especially since the start of 2021. President Erdogan's recent trip to Egypt marks a new chapter in their relationship. This policy outlook delves into the motivations behind both countries' efforts to fully normalize their relationship, examining the potential benefits and challenges that could impact achieving fully normalized relations.**

# Introduction

For over a decade, the relationship between the two regional powers has been complex. Recent significant events, both regionally and globally, have prompted them to reassess their stances on various matters to align with the changing dynamics. Türkiye and Egypt have been making efforts to repair their strained relationship, especially since the start of 2021.

The current normalisation between Ankara and Cairo started nearly three years ago through discussions between officials. These talks laid the groundwork for the resumption of relations and marked the beginning of a new chapter in their relationship. The recent [visit](#) of President Erdoğan to Cairo in February 2024 marked the culmination of the normalisation process. The last [visit](#) of the Turkish President Erdoğan to Egypt occurred a decade earlier (November 2012). However, a significant development occurred in late 2022 when the two presidents exchanged [handshakes](#) on the sidelines of the FIFA World Cup in Qatar, marking a pivotal moment in the restoration of diplomatic ties between the two nations. By July 2023, diplomatic relations were re-established at the [ambassadorial](#) level. Subsequently, the presidents [met](#) twice more: first on the sidelines of the G20 summit in New Delhi in September 2023 and again during the Arab-Islamic Summit in Riyadh in November 2023.



President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan met and shook hands with his Egyptian counterpart, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, on the sidelines of the World Cup in Qatar on Nov. 20. (Anadolu Agency)

Ever since the 2013 military coup in Egypt, the leaders of these two countries have maintained a deeply hostile relationship. From 2013 to 2021, the conflict between Ankara and Cairo intensified due to their differing ideologies and perspectives on regional matters. One of the critical points of contention was the conflict in Libya, where both sides backed opposing factions. Another source of disagreement was the dispute over maritime boundaries in the eastern Mediterranean.

President Erdoğan's [recent trip](#) to Egypt marks a new chapter in their relationship. Both countries are re-evaluating their ties due to geopolitical changes and shared challenges. The visit aims to promote normalisation and enhance cooperation in various areas, potentially leading to improved diplomatic relations between Türkiye and Egypt.

These developments mark a significant shift in diplomatic relations between Türkiye and Egypt, as both countries work towards finding common ground and resolving long-standing issues. Potential collaborations on natural gas projects have economic benefits and signal a shared interest in promoting stability in the region. President Erdoğan and El-Sisi are demonstrating a commitment to playing a constructive role in regional peace efforts by addressing conflicts in Gaza, Libya, and Sudan.

## Areas of Collaboration

The recent visit of Turkish officials to Egypt was heralded by Egyptian authorities and the media as a demonstration of shared interests, at a time when both nations have been embroiled in various regional conflicts, including those in Gaza, Ukraine, Libya, and the Horn of Africa. Experts and diplomatic analyses suggest that a significant factor contributing to regional instability has been the inadequate coordination between Cairo and Ankara, which has exacerbated conflicts and played into the hands of regional actors opposed to Turkish-Egyptian reconciliation and resolution of their bilateral issues.

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, a former intelligence chief, is seen as a pivotal figure in driving the new diplomatic approaches. Known as a close confidant of President Erdoğan and a key player in Türkiye's decision-making apparatus, Fidan is instrumental in the pursuit of a policy aimed at resolving outstanding regional disputes and fostering a 'zero-problems' foreign policy strategy.

Ankara and Cairo realized that reconciliation would benefit both nations. During the Arab-Spring, the Turkish Authorities provided sanctuary and support to Egyptian opposition members following their political fallout in Egypt. However, given Türkiye's broader strategic interests, including stabilizing economic relations and enhancing regional security cooperation, Ankara has sought to mend fences with Egypt. These reconciliation efforts have led to reduced political and media freedoms for Brotherhood members in Türkiye. These are welcomed developments for President el-Sisi, whose administration must deal with growing economic concerns, and aims to also have zero-problems at home and abroad to be able to navigate the troubled waters ahead.



Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, a former intelligence chief, is seen as a pivotal figure in driving the new diplomatic approaches. (Murat Gök - Anadolu Agency)

Giorgio Cafiero, CEO of Gulf State Analytics, [commented](#) that: "The Turkish government assessed the costs which Ankara had to pay for being so involved in various regional conflicts on the side of Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated groups and concluded that pursuing a more transactional and less ideational foreign policy in the Middle East would be most pragmatic. Since the 2020-22 period, Turkey has focused much more on pursuing opportunities in the domains of trade, commerce, investment, and defence deals rather than standing up for certain causes that Ankara believed it needed to defend during the Arab Spring period. Within this wider context, Turkey's relationship has also significantly improved with Saudi Arabia and, even more so, with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) throughout these past few years".

## Gaza

The United Nations [report](#) emphasises the urgent need to end Israel's war on Gaza, highlighting the significant loss of civilian lives caused by Israel's military campaign. Israel's onslaught has resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of Palestinians, including thousands of [children](#), and has left well over a million people [homeless](#). As the war drags on, there is an increasing danger of wider divisions emerging throughout the Middle East.

The genocidal war on Gaza is considered the most devastating tragedy for Palestinians in the past 75 years, as it has resulted in a high number of casualties and displacements. This event surpasses even the [Nakba](#), which led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes and forced them into becoming refugees.

However, Israel's war on Gaza also showed that Arab and non-Arab states must find common ground to stop the ongoing genocide. Already, many states, including Türkiye, are in touch to mitigate the ongoing conflict. Several initiatives are on the table. For instance, recently, Spain, Ireland, and Norway have formally [recognized](#) a Palestinian state. They believe that by doing so, they can shift focus towards finding a political solution to the conflict in the Middle East. Together, they aim to encourage other European countries to also recognise Palestine in hopes of diplomatically aiding in securing a ceasefire in Gaza.

Türkiye and Egypt, which are very influential countries in the region, could unify the nations around the Middle East



(Jehad Alshrafi - Anadolu Agency)

and put pressure on Israel to accept the ceasefire, allow humanitarian access to Gaza and support the negotiations between rival sides to find a political solution for an end to the war in Gaza. During the joint press conference at Ittihadiya Palace in Cairo, both leaders [emphasised](#) the importance of an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and achieving calm in the West Bank. President el-Sisi expressed the goal of re-launching Israeli-Palestinian peace talks with the aim of establishing an independent Palestinian state. President Erdoğan also pledged to work together with Egypt to end the bloodshed in Gaza and stand in solidarity with their Egyptian brothers.

## Libya

The war in Libya has claimed the lives of tens of thousands and increased instability in North Africa and the Sahel. The political deadlock and ongoing humanitarian crisis have now entered their thirteen years in Libya, and there is no obvious end in sight. Both Ankara and Cairo significantly influence Libya and could play a key role in promoting regional stability. Ankara supports the UN-recognised government in Tripoli, whereas Cairo backs Haftar's LNA. Despite their differing alliances, both countries understand the importance of revitalising the political process and assisting with democratic elections.

Recently, Egyptian President el-Sisi and President Erdoğan [emphasised](#) the importance of enhancing communication regarding the Libyan issue between their countries. They discussed the significance of facilitating presidential and legislative elections and unifying the military institutions in Libya. Both leaders expressed hope in achieving security and political stability in Libya.

Various interests, including security concerns and economic considerations, [drive](#) Egypt's policy towards Libya. The ongoing turmoil in Libya poses a significant risk to Egypt's security and stability, especially along the [1,150-km border](#) the two countries share. Since Gaddafi was ousted, violence along the border has escalated, making it difficult for Egypt to secure it fully. This porous border [remains](#) a hotspot for illegal activities such as trafficking weapons, drugs, and individuals, including extremist groups.

The economic advantages Cairo once enjoyed from its neighbour have diminished, exacerbating its financial woes. Bilateral trade between the two nations saw a [sharp decline](#), with only 770 million euros recorded by the end of 2014, starkly contrasting the previous figure of 2.1 billion euros before the Libyan revolution. Moreover, Egyptian exports to Libya suffered a notable 75 per cent drop in 2015. Before Gaddafi was overthrown, Egypt viewed Libya as a valuable resource for addressing its high unemployment rate. Before 2011, around 2 million Egyptian workers found employment in Libya's oil and gas, construction, and informal sectors. Before the 2011 revolution, Egypt heavily de-

pended on the Libyan economy. Approximately 2 million Egyptian expatriates [sent](#) \$33 million back home, while Libya was a reliable source of affordable oil. Furthermore, Libya had invested over \$10 billion in different sectors of the Egyptian economy.

For Türkiye, it has a variety of interests in Libya. However, its primary motivations for involvement are safeguarding its economic and geostrategic interests in Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean region. Stephen M. Walt's balance of threat theory [suggests](#) that Türkiye's policy towards Libya primarily responds to the perceived threats posed by alliances in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Focusing on supporting stability in Libya, particularly under internationally recognised governments like the Government of National Accord (GNA) and Government of National Unity (GNU), is a crucial component of Türkiye's broader regional alliance strategy.

Libya represents a valuable market on its own. The fact that Türkiye had contracts [worth](#) between \$19 and \$25 billion in Libya when the 2011 uprising occurred shows the significant commercial interests involved. Therefore, it is crucial to preserve its economic interests in the country. With its strategic location and abundant natural resources, Libya has the potential to be a key player in the global economy.

It is sensible for Türkiye to collaborate with the international community and regional countries like Egypt to help bring stability and peace to Libya. The current military and political stalemate is not beneficial for Türkiye or Egypt. Once Libya is stabilised, there will be great opportunities for business and trade. However, it has been challenging to increase trade between Libya under the current circumstances. Therefore, both countries must work together to find a political solution to the conflict and unlock these opportunities.

Reconciliation with the UAE and Egypt, long-time supporters of the parallel government in Benghazi, could potentially lead to opposing groups in Libya developing a new strategy to overcome the political deadlock, resolve conflicts, and pave the way for nationwide elections. In this scenario, involving critical regional players like Türkiye and Egypt would be crucial. A consensus between these actors could significantly influence the implementation of necessary policies for the country's stability and progress.

In this context, Türkiye and Egypt have the potential to collaborate in maintaining security and stability by using their influence over the conflicting factions in Libya. They share a common goal of reinitiating the political process and endorsing democratic elections. Libya is in dire need of a new constitution, which has been a major hindrance to enhanced security nationwide, necessitating the unification of military institutions. The unification of military institutions is crucial for stability and peace in the country.



(Orhan Çiçek - Anadolu Agency)

## The Eastern Mediterranean Region

The improving relationship between Türkiye and Egypt has led to a re-evaluation of their differences, with a focus on mutual benefits in exploring the rich gas fields of the eastern Mediterranean Sea. Both countries have acknowledged the potential economic gains that can be achieved through cooperation in the energy sector. By setting aside past disagreements and focusing on shared interests, Türkiye and Egypt can tap into the region's vast natural resources and strengthen their diplomatic ties.

The discovery of significant natural gas reserves in the region has [sparked](#) a race among countries to secure their energy needs and assert their influence, leading to heightened tensions and competing claims over maritime boundaries in the East Mediterranean. This competition has resulted in alliances in the past and geopolitical dynamics in the region, with countries like Türkiye, Libya, Greece, Egypt, Israel, and Cyprus becoming key players in the energy race as they [seek](#) to assert their territorial claims and protect their interests in the Mediterranean.

Greece, Egypt, and Greek Cyprus have acted against Türkiye due to the dispute using offshore waters within the Mediterranean Sea. In January 2020, a significant development occurred in the geopolitical landscape of the Eastern Mediterranean region, as Greece, Greek Cyprus, and Israel came together to [formalise](#) their commitment to the East

Med pipeline project. The main goal of this initiative is to connect the energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean area with Europe while specifically excluding Türkiye and North Cyprus to secure their offshore pipeline. The US [reportedly](#) did not support this initiative due to the lack of the project's economic and commercial viability and the fact that the project creates tensions in the region.

In August 2020, Cairo [signed](#) a limited boundary agreement with Athens despite [objections](#) from Egyptian officials at the Foreign Ministry and General Intelligence Service. The reason for their opposition was that the agreement hindered Cairo's ability to expand its territorial claims. If Cairo had an agreement with Türkiye, which granted them a sizable maritime concession, it could potentially benefit both countries. For instance, by reaching an agreement between Ankara and Tripoli, the agreement enabled both countries to increase their respective maritime zones.

Former Chief of Staff of the Turkish Navy, Admiral Cihat Yaycı, [claimed](#), in the context of 'Mavi Vatan' or Blue Homeland, that Türkiye has rights to a 145,000 km<sup>2</sup> area in the Mediterranean with its EEZ. Thanks to the [Türkiye-Libya](#) deal, that area has now expanded to an area of 189,000 km<sup>2</sup>. By signing this agreement, Libya's maritime jurisdiction has expanded to the territorial waters of the island of Girit. According to the former admiral, if Lebanon, Israel and Egypt sign an EEZ agreement with Türkiye (instead of Greece), Egypt, Israel, and the Greek Cypriot Administration (GCA) would all be able to expand their territorial claims.

In February 2021, Egypt [announced](#) a new oil and gas exploration bid round in the Eastern Mediterranean. The announcement notably took into [consideration](#) the coordinates of the continental shelf as declared by Ankara. By acknowledging the strategic importance of defining their sea borders, Ankara and Cairo are taking steps towards resolving past political obstacles. The countries in the Eastern Mediterranean have come to understand that Türkiye plays a crucial role in the success of any regional plans. Ankara's belief in collaboration and fair resource distribution shows a commitment to ensuring all parties benefit from these agreements.

## Strengthening Economic Ties

Over the last decade, diplomatic relations between Egypt and Türkiye have experienced a noticeable deterioration; however, their economic ties have persevered and even flourished. Initiating a free trade [agreement](#) in 2005, followed swiftly by its enforcement in 2007, has enabled sustained economic collaboration between the two countries despite the prevailing political discord. This phenomenon underscores the significance of economic interests in maintaining bilateral relationships even amidst geopolitical challenges.

Between 2007 and 2024, the trade volume in US dollars between the two countries [saw](#) a notable rise from \$4.42 billion to [\\$10 billion](#), indicating a deliberate effort to keep economic activities separate from political conflicts. Mustafa Denizer, the chairperson of the Türkiye-Egypt Business Council, [emphasises](#) the importance of nurturing and enhancing trade ties between the nations. It is expected that the trade volume in the next five years can reach \$10 billion to \$15 billion. By the end of 2021, Egypt had emerged as a key [LNG supplier](#) to Türkiye, indicating that their energy partnership was steadily growing stronger.

Egypt has been Türkiye's number-one trade partner in Africa, which is crucial for both countries' economic growth and stability. Strengthening their trade relations can lead to mutually beneficial opportunities and foster deeper cooperation in various sectors. By prioritising this partnership, Cairo and Ankara can further enhance their diplomatic ties and solidify their status as key players in the African market. For instance, the Libyan economy and trade minister, Al-Huweij, recently [stated](#) that a meeting between Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi could facilitate the swift reconstruction and development of Libya. He emphasised that the meeting, along with collaboration between Turkish and Egyptian companies, would accelerate Libya's rebuilding and growth. The head of Libya's contractors' union [estimates](#) that rebuilding the country will cost \$450 billion. If both countries work together to bring stability, there is a greater chance that most of the contracts could be won by

Turkish-Egyptian joint ventures.

Both nations are actively working to increase and vary their collaborative investments. The Egyptian Businessmen Association [held](#) the 16th meeting of the Türkiye-Egypt Business Council in October 2023. Representatives from 13 Turkish companies operating in the textiles, construction, chemicals, and transportation sectors attended the meeting. The main focus of the discussion was on enhancing Turkish investments in Egypt and [aiming](#) to raise the trade volume between the two nations to \$20 billion within five years.

The textile sector in Egypt is experiencing growth in bilateral partnerships, with the top four textile factories being of Turkish origin. Some Turkish companies often choose Egypt as a manufacturing hub due to the advantages offered by the Qualifying Industrial [Zones agreement](#) between Egypt and the United States, which enables Egypt to export products to the United States duty-free. As a result, Turkish firms eye Egypt as an alternative manufacturing hub and emerge as a lower-cost production base due to the stronger Turkish lira.

The number of Turkish tourists visiting Egypt has significantly [increased](#) thanks to improving relations between the two countries. Data from the Egyptian Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics ([CAPMAS](#)) and the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism indicate a growth of over 40 per cent, with 80,000 Turkish tourists visiting Egypt during the first four months of the year. This is a significant increase from the 50,000 Turkish tourists that visited Egypt during the same period in 2023. Amr Elhamamy, Ambassador of Egypt to Ankara, [emphasised](#) the significance of enhancing tourism between Türkiye and Egypt. He noted that the number of Turkish tourists visiting Egypt has nearly tripled since visa procedures for Turkish citizens were eased.

## Potential Defence Cooperation

Recently, the Turkish government has [agreed](#) to supply Egypt with drones, which have played a significant role in various conflicts, such as those in Azerbaijan, Ethiopia, Libya, Syria, and Ukraine in recent times. Ankara's decision to supply Egypt with Bayraktar TB2 drones shows a genuine interest in forming a partnership. Turkey has also shown eagerness to expand its collaboration with Egypt in drone production. For instance, last December, there was the Egypt International Defense Industry Fair [EDEX 2023](#), and 23 Turkish companies attended the fair, including Tosas, Roketsan, Sarsilmaz, TUSAS, and BMC. Celal Sami Tufekci, Turkish deputy defence minister at a fair in Cairo, [said](#), "Türkiye wants to carry its strength and capabilities in the defence industry to Egypt and other African countries".

The decision to supply Egypt with drones represents a strategic move towards strengthening diplomatic ties between the two nations. By showcasing a willingness to collaborate in drone production and participating in defence industry fairs like EDEX 2023, Türkiye is demonstrating its commitment to expanding its partnership with Egypt. The presence of Turkish companies at the fair signifies Ankara's desire to share its expertise and capabilities in the defence industry not only with Egypt but also with other African countries, highlighting a broader regional cooperation strategy.

## Looking Ahead

The recent efforts by Türkiye and Egypt to repair their strained relationship mark a significant shift in their diplomatic landscape. President Erdogan's recent visit to Egypt marked a considerable development in diplomatic relations and was a vital step towards strengthening bilateral ties. This visit highlights the progress made since 2021 in improving relations and symbolises a new chapter in Egyptian-Turkish relations.

Creating new prospects for development and security enhancement, the alliance between these two nations could be crucial in bringing stability to the region amidst intricate challenges. Working together, they can focus on fostering political stability in Libya by urging rival factions to address critical obstacles such as rebuilding state institutions, particularly the military, and progressing towards a new constitution that may lead to long-awaited elections. Furthermore, a joint effort to pressure Israel into halting its military actions in Gaza could also be a significant step towards peace in the region. However, the long-term implications of this development on the alignment of interests between both countries and regional stability remain uncertain.

The strategic implications of the rapprochement between Türkiye and Egypt are worth considering; as discussed above, various strategic motivations underscore the necessity for enhancing diplomatic ties between Türkiye and Egypt. The divergence should not jeopardise their diplomatic relations despite differing views on multiple issues. Both countries must recognise and leverage their collective capabilities to contribute positively to the regional dynamics.



(Murat Kula - Anadolu Agency)