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## Egyptian-Turkish Relations: Roots and Fruits

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Egypt and Turkey have a deep relationship in terms of both geography and history; so it is a long-standing, multi-chapter relationship. In terms of geography, the location of Egypt and Anatolia on the Mediterranean coast prompted both of them to be in need of each other; and sometimes seek to extend their power to one another. Before the Muslim Conquest of Egypt, the North African country was part of the Byzantine Empire which had its capital at Constantinople. In terms of history, the relationship between the Turks and Egyptians started before the Turks entered Anatolia in the late Abbasid period.

Soon after the Turks settled in Anatolia and were able to rule Constantinople following removal of the Byzantine Empire, Egypt became a state of the Ottoman Empire, a relationship that only ended when Egypt fell under the foreign occupation (by France and later by Britain). However, the peoples of the two nations remained brothers of Islam. Almost all plans that have discussed the rise of Muslims again, included talk about the need to reunite the two major powers in the region: Egypt and Turkey.

*This paper summarizes the history of the Egyptian-Turkish relations through four axes:*

### **First Axis:**

This section discusses the relation between the Turks and Egyptians before the Ottoman Empire, and deals with the access to Egypt by the Turkish race and its empowerment to rule the state of Egypt since the time of the Abbasids through the independent Tulunid and Ikhsidid states; and the presence of the Turkish race in the Fatimid army and the ruling class within the Ayyubid state, and later their presence in power in the Mamluk era.

## Second Axis:

This section deals with the Ottoman rule of Egypt, where the Ottomans ruled Egypt for four centuries, starting from the access of Sultan Selim I (1517 AD) up to the declaration of Egypt's independence (1922), with a three-year interruption during the French occupation (from 1798 to 1801), when it was considered as part of the French Empire. In fact, the Ottoman rule of Egypt was much less than four centuries. The grip of the Ottomans in Egypt soon weakened and Egypt actually was under the rule of the Mamluks; and later under the rule of the dynasty of Muhammad Ali Pasha, an Albanian officer in the Ottoman army. Muhammad Ali Pasha and his dynasty ruled Egypt independently from the Ottoman Empire until Britain occupied Egypt in the last fifth of the ninth century. The era of the British occupation lasted until the end of the Ottoman Empire in 1924. Therefore, we can say that Egypt remained under actual Ottoman rule for only one century, not four centuries.

## Third Axis:

This section deals with the Egyptian-Turkish relations since Egypt's independence (1922) through the foundation of the Turkish Republic (1924) up to the year 2017.

We can monitor the course of the Egyptian-Turkish relations in several different stages.

- 1- A long period of estrangement and mutual apathy with undeclared hostility until the AKP came to power in Turkey.
- 2- A Turkish attempt to extend bridges of relations with Egypt.
- 3- The stage of Arab Spring revolutions that led to the access of Mohamed Morsi to power in Egypt: This period witnessed a "revolution" in the Egypt-Turkey relations.
- 4- The military coup phase which has opened a period of apparent mutual hostility between the two countries.

#### Fourth Axis:

This section discusses the future of Egyptian-Turkish relations, the importance of Turkey and Egypt in the region, and the expected impact of likely strong relations between the two countries on the whole region. We will also monitor here Western expectations of the Egyptian-Turkish relations as stated in a number of research reports and foresight literature.

*In conclusion, the paper finally states the following points:*

- 1- The depth of the historical relationship between the Egyptians and the Turks over a thousand years makes it impossible for any political system in either country to overlook this reality. The inevitability of geography in the Eastern Mediterranean makes the relationship between the two countries an indispensable necessity.
- 2- The “nationalist” era in both countries failed to create a new identity for both peoples; the two countries soon converged together when elected regimes reached power. While Turkey's attempts to improve relations with Egypt have not stopped since Necmettin Erbakan and then the AKP government, yet the Turkish position has been divided over the severing of political relations with Egypt following the military coup in the latter.
- 3- At present, it seems that there is a bipolar regional system in the Eastern Mediterranean area, where Turkey and Israel represent the main two poles around which regional countries revolve. Unfortunately, Egypt is part of the Israeli camp. Although Turkey is not satisfied that Egypt remains in the Israeli camp, yet improvement of Turkish relationship with Egypt appears to be a threat to Turkey's interests and the moral image it has drawn for itself in the region. Despite the other necessities that require political cooperation between the two countries, the outstanding issues between them are still too difficult to be easily solved during the



reign of Egypt's Abdel Fattah Sisi, who appears to represent a serious obstacle to any development in the Turkish position - both for personal reasons and due to the policies that he adopts.

4- At present, the Turkish regime seems stable and does not suffer from existential threats, while the Egyptian regime does not enjoy the same stability. Amid absence of a regional power that is capable of bringing the two countries together - especially after the shift in the Saudi position - and the rigid stances adopted by the leaders of the two countries, there seems to be no likely convergence between Egypt and Turkey in the near future.

5- Some Western quarters raise the issue of the so-called "Turkish aspirations" along with the "fears" of the Arab regimes in this regard. In short, playing on the national ethnic issues remains the only tool that can be exploited by those who want to prevent any rapprochement between Turkey and Egypt, or at least disrupt any likely bilateral communications.

6- The existence of two likely strong and independent regimes in Egypt and Turkey could create a new equation in the region, paving the way for restoration of the independent Middle East that could play an active role in both regional and international arenas. Because this is not desirable by the major powers, Mohamed Morsi of Egypt was soon overthrown (only one year after he assumed power).

7- Those who administer the Turkish-Arab relations in the Arab side belong to the "Nationalist" School, highlighting "apprehension" and "fears" while talking about the future of Turkish-Arab ties. This requires extensive efforts from the "Islamist" School in both the Arab world and Turkey to develop the Turkish-Arab relations, focusing primarily on the research area.