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Turkish-Egyptian Reconciliation:
Statements and Responses

EIS Research & Studies Unit



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Turkish-Egyptian Reconciliation: Statements and Responses

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Introduction

Over the past few days, senior officials in the Turkish administration issued positive statements indicating likeliness of restoration of normal Turkish-Egyptian relations that has witnessed a significant deterioration since the July 3, 2013 coup in Egypt. Despite the fact that political relations between the two countries have been strained since July 3, 2013 due to Turkey's rejection of the military coup that was led by then Defense Minister Abdel Fattah al-Sisi against the elected civilian President Dr. Mohamed Morsi, however, all forms of economic relations have continued between Ankara and Cairo. Rather, the volume of trade between the two countries has increased than ever before.

Such statements by Turkish officials, on working to improve relations with Egypt, were not the first of their kind, but this time, the new thing is that some of these statements were made by senior Turkish officials.

First: Official Turkish Statements

During a press conference on Friday, March 12, 2021, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Turkey's cooperation with Egypt in the economic, diplomatic and intelligence fields is continuing.

"Our cooperation with Egypt in terms of intelligence, diplomacy and economy is already continuing. There's no problem with that. It isn't at the highest level, but close to a high level," President Erdogan said, adding that he hopes to strengthen relations further.

Confirming that the people of Egypt and Turkey are inseparable, Erdogan said relations could grow stronger once intelligence, diplomatic, and political negotiations yield results.¹

¹ Al-Jazeera Mubashir, 'Turkey: We have started diplomatic contacts with Egypt and there is nothing to prevent improving relations with Saudi Arabia', 12 March 2021, accessed 15 March 2021, [link](#)

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On Friday, March 12, 2021, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu also revealed that diplomatic contacts between his country and Egypt started, with the aim of restoring normal relations between the two countries, without putting forth any preconditions by the two sides.

"We have contacts at both the level of intelligence and foreign ministries with Egypt. Diplomatic-level contacts have started," Mevlut Cavusoglu told Anadolu Agency and TRT in a joint interview on developments in foreign policy files last Friday.

Noting that neither side put forth preconditions, Cavusoglu said since ties were derailed back in 2013, they cannot be mended quickly or easily. He said a lack of trust is also normal in such situations and may exist for both parties.

"For this reason, negotiations take place and continue under a certain strategy, a roadmap," Cavusoglu said.

He said that there used to be occasional talks with Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry when they met at international meetings, including when they met in New York two years ago.

Since the ties were disrupted in 2013, there are no preconditions, but contacts are being held step by step, he said.

It should be noted that Cavusoglu said on 30 December 2020 at a year-ender briefing on external affairs that the country's relationship with Egypt was not limited to intelligence cooperation and included talks at the diplomatic level; and that both countries were seeking to define a road map regarding their bilateral relations.

Cavusoglu stated that contacts between the representatives of Ankara and Cairo are continuing and that he had met with his Egyptian counterpart at international meetings last year and agreed to cooperate "on a road map"².

² Anadolu Agency, Cavusoglu: We started diplomatic contacts with Egypt without preconditions", 12 March 2021, accessed 15 March 2021, [link](#)

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On March 3, 2021, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu affirmed during a joint news conference with his Georgian counterpart Davit Zalkaliani in Ankara, the common interests between Turkey and Egypt, indicating that Turkey could sign an agreement on maritime jurisdictions with Egypt after taking part in negotiations.

"Depending on the course of our ties, as two countries with the longest land and sea borders in the Eastern Mediterranean, we could also sign an agreement with Egypt by negotiating maritime jurisdictions," Cavusoglu said.

In addition to these statements by President Erdogan and Foreign Minister Cavusoglu, which indicated the general orientation of the Turkish administration for seeking a formula for communication and understanding with the Egyptian regime in several files, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's spokesman [Ibrahim Kalin](#) in an interview with Bloomberg on Saturday 8 March 2021, said:

"A new chapter can be opened, a new page can be turned in our relationship with Egypt as well as other Gulf countries to help regional peace and stability," Kalin said, adding, "Egypt is an important country in the Arab world and remains the brain of the Arab World, is the heart of the Arab world."

"We are interested in talking to Egypt on maritime issues in the eastern Mediterranean as well as other issues in Libya, the peace process and the Palestinians. We can address a number of these issues; we can lower tensions and that kind of a partnership can help regional stability from North Africa to the eastern Mediterranean," Ibrahim Kalin told Bloomberg.³

Commenting on the statements of Kalin, Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) Advisor Professor Yasin Aktay said in statements to the official Turkish TRT Arabic channel, "Whoever walks towards us one step, we walk towards him two steps," Aktay said, adding that Kalin's statement came "after statements and activities on the part of Egypt, which confirmed that it respects the rights of Turkey, and would announce its activities (that is Egypt's activities for energy exploration in the eastern Mediterranean) according to the Turkish demarcation."

³ Bloomberg, "Interview With Turkish President's Spokesman Kalin", 8 March 2021, accessed 15 March 2021, [link](#)

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Two days before the statements of the Turkish presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin, that is, on March 6, 2021, Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar also had important statements in which he addressed the Egyptian file. During the Blue Homeland 2021 tactical exercise, Hulusi Akar said it is a very important development that Egypt has made a tender on hydrocarbon exploration in the eastern Mediterranean respecting Turkey's continental shelf limits.

"We have many historical and cultural values in common with Egypt. When they are put in use, we consider that there may be different developments in the coming days," Akar said.

He said, "Turkey considers works on such agreements and memorandums of understanding with Egypt under the maritime jurisdiction limits that the country declared to the United Nations."⁴

Also, earlier, on March 12, Veysel Eroglu, special envoy of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Iraq, announced that his country is ready to lead mediation talks related to the Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. In a TV interview with Al-Jazeera Mubashir that Turkey: "Is ready to mediate the issue of the Renaissance Dam on condition of no interference by the Western countries because this would lead to a state of no agreement," adding, "The issue of the Renaissance Dam is technical and that his country has many experts who can help resolve it."⁵

Second: Egyptian reactions:

After official statements coming from the Turkish side, there were immediate and direct responses from the Egyptian side, but these responses varied between official responses and responses from personalities and media circles affiliated with Egyptian intelligence services.

⁴ Deutsche Welle, 'Turkish Minister of Defense appreciates Egypt's respect for the borders of the continental shelf of his country', 6 March 2021, accessed 15 March 2021, [link](#)

⁵ Turk Press, 'Turkey announces possibility of mediation in the Ethiopian Renaissance Dam between Egypt and Ethiopia', 12 March 2021, accessed 15 March 2021, [link](#)

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1- Official reactions:

In immediate response to the statement of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Sameh Shukri, Egypt's Minister of Foreign Affairs, during the meeting of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Egyptian House of Representatives (lower chamber) on Sunday 14 March 2021, said, "The Foreign Ministry was closely following the recent Turkish statements announcing the opening of communication and dialogue channels with Egypt," Shoukry said.

"Egypt has always been keen on resuming normal relations between the Egyptian and Turkish people, however, political relations between the two countries in the past period were negatively impacted by the positions of politicians in Turkey, especially their negative attitude towards Egypt," he added.

Commenting on the contacts between Egypt and Turkey, the Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs said: "Contacts between Egypt and Turkey are just confined to the normal diplomatic channels at the moment," Sameh Shoukry said.

"But if we [found] that Turkey will take serious actions and adopt new policies and objectives that go in line with Egypt's objectives and policies, which always seek the spreading of stability in the region, rejecting interference in the internal affairs of states, and maintaining mutual respect, I can say that we will be able to put the groundwork necessary for establishing normal relations with Turkey," he added.⁶

Two Egyptian intelligence sources said Turkey had proposed a meeting to discuss cooperation, but they suggested that the contacts were still only preliminary - a view later backed up by a report on Egypt's state-run MENA news agency.

On Friday, March 12, 2021, Reuters News Agency reported, citing two Egyptian intelligence sources, that Turkey had proposed a meeting to discuss cooperation, but they suggested that the contacts

⁶ Al-Akhbar Portal, 'Words without deeds not enough .. Shoukry sets conditions for return of relations with Turkey, 15 March 2021, 16 March 2021, [link](#)

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were still only preliminary- a view later backed up by a report on Egypt's state-run MENA news agency.⁷

On Saturday, March 13, 2021, the Daarb (non-governmental) website published statements attributed to an Egyptian official, whose name was not defined, that "there is nothing that can be described as 'resuming diplomatic contacts' between Cairo and Ankara," adding that "The Egyptian and Turkish diplomatic missions exist at the charge d'affaires level, and they communicate with the accrediting country in accordance with established diplomatic norms."

The source emphasized that "upgrading the relationship between the two countries requires taking into account the legal and diplomatic frameworks that govern relations between countries based on respect for the principle of sovereignty and the requirements of Arab national security."

The source added that "Egypt expects any country that aspires to establish normal relations with it to abide by the rules of international law and the principles of good neighborliness, and to stop attempts to interfere in the internal affairs of the countries of the region."

At the same time, the source stressed the importance of the strong bonds and ties between the peoples of the two countries.⁸

In response to the Turkish statements, Mustafa Bakri, member of Egyptian House of Representatives, made a statement to Russia Today, saying: "I think that Turkish policy during the era of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, especially in recent time, relied on what can be described as the revival of the old Ottoman Empire. This is what made Turkey try to outflank the Arab world in more than one direction." Bakri added, "I think that the chapters of the Turkish conspiracy have clearly manifested themselves in Libya, Syria and Iraq, which confirms that the Turkish ambitions will not stop at a certain limit." Bakri also said, "Therefore, from my point of view, before Turkey demands

⁷ Reuters, 'Turkey says it has restarted diplomatic contacts with Egypt', 12 March 2021, accessed 15 March 2021, [link](#)

⁸ Daarb, 'Egyptian sources respond to Turkey's statements: There is nothing to be described as "resuming diplomatic contacts"', accessed 12 March 2021, accessed 15 March 2021, [link](#)

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resumption of relations with Egypt, it must first prove its goodwill with taking practical steps on the ground, by handing over all wanted elements related to cases of violence and terrorism to Egypt, where many of them have been sentenced to criminal offenses.”

Bakri added, “Turkey must also stop the media platforms based in Turkey, inciting against Egypt, withdraw all mercenaries that it sent to Libya, and stop interfering in the affairs of Arab countries, such as Syria and Libya. If Ankara takes these steps, then, only then, it will be possible to talk about starting a reconciliation process with Egypt. Anything else cannot be described as restoration of relations or a reconciliation process, as the matter does not go beyond coordination in some issues.”⁹

Major General Tamer Al-Shahawi, a former Military Intelligence Service deputy, a member of the Egyptian House of Representatives, and a former member of the Parliament’s National Defense and Security Committee, also made statements to Russia Today, saying, “Between words and deeds, we monitor only deeds; and if Turkish statements are not compatible with policies, these statements do not really matter.”

“We have gotten used to statements of this kind coming from the Turkish side in recent years, but the Egyptian position is clear: if Turkey shows the will to move with a positive agenda on regional issues, Egypt is ready to respond to that,” Al-Shahawi added. Al-Shahawi also said: “There are many contentious issues between the two countries, but nothing has changed on the ground, especially in the Libyan arena, where the situation has frozen at the cease-fire points.” “If Turkey does not move in this positive direction, then all the allegations that speak of rapprochement are false statements; and if they do, Turkey will have decided to turn its tide for cooperation with Egypt, given that Egypt is the major pivotal country in the region and is strongly present in all regional files – which would likely indicate that Turkey has found its interests with, not against Egypt.”

⁹ Russia Today, 'How do Egyptians view Erdogan's statements about reconciliation with Egypt?', 12 March 2021, accessed 15 March 2021, [link](#)

2- Media reactions:

Media reactions also came from Egyptian personalities affiliated with the Egyptian intelligence services, as the first of those responses came on the official Facebook account of journalist Ahmed Al-Khatib, the managing editor of Al-Watan, a daily newspaper owned by Egyptian intelligence services. Al-Khatib, who is known for affiliation with the Egyptian General Intelligence Service, on his [Facebook](#) account said that Egypt has set ten conditions for accepting reconciliation with Turkey, putting them as follows (N.B. This is the literal text of Al-Khatib's post, as he stated it):

1. There is no demarcation of the maritime borders between the two sides outside the rules of international law, in reference to the need to prompt Turkey to comply with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which Ankara refuses to sign or recognize.
2. No political communication with Ankara before Cairo makes sure that the Turkish side complies with public discipline, provided that the communication with Turkey will remain on the security level, given that political communication does not take place with (countries that support terrorism)!
3. There is no Egyptian-Turkish agreement in the eastern Mediterranean, except after a comprehensive Turkish agreement with the European allies, specifically with the Greek and Cypriot sides.
4. Turkey's political, military and security exit from Libya, leaving the Libyan file permanently, and pledging to withdraw the mercenaries that it brought to the Libyan lands.
5. Setting a timetable for the exit of the Turkish forces from northern Syria, and concluding a binding legal agreement with the Iraqi government after intervening militarily in the Iraqi territories once again.
6. Negotiations shall include the Saudi and Emirati sides, with apology from Turkey for the abuses that occurred in recent years towards the Gulf states, provided that Cairo will not meet any understandings with Turkey without Ankara's pledge not to intervene once again in the internal affairs of Arab countries, and to abide by the determinants of Arab national security.

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7. Blocking all Muslim Brotherhood media outlets that attack Egypt in particular and the Gulf states in general; and Turkey is also banned from embracing any political activity of the Brotherhood organization on its territory.
8. Allowing the International Police (Interpol) to handle all the wanted from the Muslim Brotherhood on Turkish territory, and not opposing the European authorities, in particular, to deal with them as Cairo does not demand their extradition .. and does not want to, noting Ankara was the one that offered to hand them over to Egypt in batches to appease the Egyptian side!
9. The Egyptian security authorities shall monitor the conduct of the Turkish regime and the extent of its commitment and compliance with these conditions within the coming period before entering into any other contact; by submitting a report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is responsible for submitting it to the Egyptian political leadership.
10. Turkey will not be accepted in the Eastern Mediterranean Forum before three years if Egypt, Greece and Cyprus agree on demarcation of maritime borders in the Eastern Mediterranean with Ankara according to the above conditions.

The second media response came from one of the most important media arms of the regime, that is the well-known journalist Emad Eddin Adib, who was advisor to former President Hosni Mubarak for media affairs, and is currently playing the same role with Sisi. Emad Eddin Adib is affiliated with the Egyptian General Intelligence Service that is run by Major General Abbas Kamel, the right arm of Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi.

Journalist Emad Eddin Adib made a televised statement to MBC Masr TV's 'Al-Hikayah' talk show, presented by his younger brother, journalist Amr Adib, who is also affiliated with the security services in Egypt. The 'Al-Hikayah' talk show is the most watched program in Egypt.

The main part in that episode was addressing the Turkish statements regarding improvement of relations with the Egyptian side, where Amr Adib stated that this could be done only in the event that

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Turkey completely abandoned the Muslim Brotherhood, adding that President Erdogan must choose between the Egyptian regime or the Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁰

After commenting on the Turkish statements, Amr Adib contacted his older brother, Emad Eddin Adib, to comment on President Erdogan's statements. Following is the key points included in Emad Eddin Adib's televised statement:

- Emad Adib confirmed that the statements of President Erdogan and the Turkish Foreign Minister are romantic statements that do not go beyond words only until now.
- He confirmed that the internal pressures on President Erdogan prompted him to talk about his intention to start a new page with the Egyptian regime.
- He said that President Erdogan's plan was mainly aimed at toppling Sisi. After failing to achieve that goal, he decided to turn a new page with Sisi.
- Adib claimed that Turkey supported terrorism in Egypt, which resulted in deaths in all Egyptian territories.
- He demanded an official apology from President Erdogan for what he had done against the Egyptian people during the past years.
- He claimed that Egypt has an elected president, (Abdel Fattah al-Sisi), and if President Erdogan is serious about opening a new page with Egypt, he should contact the Egyptian Presidential Palace and take an appointment from the clerk there to speak with Sisi "if Sisi agrees".
- He said Turkey should acknowledge that what happened on June 30 was a revolution, not a coup; and declare it publicly.

¹⁰ MBC Masr TV, 'Televised statement of Emad Eddin Adib with 'Al-Hikayah' talk show program', 13 March 2021, accessed 15 March 2021, [link](#)

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- He claimed that Turkey is not trustworthy in any way, but he added that he meant President Erdogan, describing the Turkish state as an important country, and saying that he differentiates between Erdogan and Turkey, and said that Turkey is not Erdogan.
- Inappropriately, he described President Erdogan, saying (as he stated it), that "He is a (nitwit) that has committed several (follies), and that he is in his last days, taking his last breath, and will fall soon, but he just wants to cling to any collar of salvation."
- He claimed that Erdogan is only trying to feel the pulse, and that they neither believed nor questioned his statements, adding, 'but Egypt will not restore relations with Turkey except after the latter meets preconditions, including apology and repairing damages through real deeds.

In attempt to explain the recent Turkish statements calling for improvement of relations with Egypt, Emad Eddin Adib says that they are due to seven reasons, which he stated as follows¹¹:

1. Joe Biden's access to the White House has changed the rules of the international game.
2. This month will witness convening of the European Union summit to discuss sanctions against Turkey.
3. Adib claims that the internal situation in Turkey is very bad, especially after the departure of three key figures from the ruling party, namely Ali Babacan, Ahmet Davutoglu and Abdullah Gul.
4. He claims that the Turkish lira has significantly declined, and the unemployment rate in Turkey has reached the highest levels.
5. He claims that Turkey attempts to improve relations with Egypt because the main funder of Turkish military moves, Qatar, has engaged in reconciliation with the four Arab countries, and

¹¹ Emad Eddin Adib reveals 10 reasons for recent Turkish statements: "He tries to avoid fall", Al-Watan, 12 March 2021, accessed 15 March 2021, [link](#)

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therefore it is difficult to continue financing any military moves in those countries, even if it is temporary. He also claims that after Erdogan had adopted a “zero problems” approach, he now has “zero allies”; so, he is attempting to repair his policies, because the internal, economic, regional, and international situation expects that Erdogan will fall, and therefore he is looking for any lifeline to restore relations.

6. He claims that Turkey cannot enter Saudi markets; and the UAE cannot re-inject the funding of petroleum projects that it used to finance in Turkey, unless the outstanding problems between Egypt and Turkey are settled.
7. He claims that Turkey realized that the situation in Libya could not continue after it became clear that there was a red line drawn by Sisi, so Erdogan wanted reconciliation with the Egyptian regime.

Conclusion:

Tracking the Turkish-Egyptian mutual statements regarding likeliness of restoration of normal relations between the two countries, it appears to observers that the Turkish side -at highest official levels- is more keen on restoration of bilateral relations; so, what is the reason behind the discrepancy in the number and content of the statements of the two countries?

The Turkish side outweighs the Egyptian side in terms of the number and quality of statements, which was evident in the level of officials that released these statements on the two sides.

Following the recent statements, we find that the Turkish officials were the ones who started releasing direct statements on restoration of relations with the Egyptian side, where the Turkish statements included President of the Turkish Republic Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Presidential Spokesman Ibrahim Kalin, Defense Minister Hulusi Akar, Foreign Affairs Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, Advisor to Chairman of the Justice and Development Party Yasin Aktay, and Turkish President's Special Envoy to Iraq Veysel Eroglu.

On the Egyptian side, only one senior Egyptian official, Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry, responded to the Turkish statements, and his response was largely negative. No other high-ranking official responded to the Turkish statements, which indicates almost deliberate disregard. Also, the responses

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of media professionals close to the security and intelligence services reflected a great sense of speaking from a position of power, as they intended to declare that Turkey must adhere to several conditions and carry them out, before starting any negotiations for restoration of relations between the two sides.

The large number of statements made by senior Turkish officials and their reiteration within a short time, may have pushed the Egyptian side to adopt that superior approach in handling the Turkish statements which may have been interpreted as indicative that the Turkish side is experiencing a crisis, that such statements may have stemmed from a weak position, and that the Turkish side is seriously and urgently striving to conclude an agreement with the Egyptian regime. Therefore, the Egyptians sought to raise their ceiling of demands so that they could achieve as much as possible of these demands when they sit at the negotiating table with the Turkish side.

However, by tracking Egyptian reactions, whether the official circles or the media, it appears that the bulk of the circles of the Egyptian regime have neither seriousness nor real desire to engage in a political settlement with the Turkish administration under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on new foundations. The Sisi regime is promoting itself as the stronger party that the Turks strive to appease. The Egyptians also think that the Turkish side is the one that is going through a crisis and seeking to conclude that reconciliation due to its internal and external problems. Therefore, the Egyptians talk about conditions that must be met by the Turkish side before starting any dialogue, which was clear from all forms of Egyptian statements.

On the other hand, there may be parties within the Egyptian regime that wish to restore Egyptian-Turkish relations out of common interests, but there are no indicators for this on the ground. Some believe that Cairo has recently introduced changes to its policy towards Libya, bringing it closer to Ankara, which could be among other steps that Cairo is taking to restore Egyptian-Turkish relations, given that Egypt has recently taken a number of steps on the Libyan file, such as supporting the Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh government, sending a high-level diplomatic and security delegation to Tripoli, and announcing plans to reopen its embassy in Tripoli for the first time since 2014. Those who adopt this view believe that Ankara understood these Egyptian steps as positive messages, and did not pass them unnoticed, making direct statements that call for opening a new page with the Egyptian regime.

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However, such voices seem to be still weak within the Egyptian power system compared to the party seeking to obtain moral gains that may cover up the internal crisis in Egypt.

