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العثمانية الجديدة واستعادة القوة المصرية (صدام جيو - سياسي)

Dr. Mai Mogib Mosad

**The Neo Ottoman Empire and the  
restoration of the Egyptian Power  
A Geo- Political Clash**

**العثمانية الجديدة واستعادة القوة المصرية  
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## المخلص:

بلغ نهج السياسة الخارجية التركية ذروته تجاه مصر في الفترة الممتدة من فبراير ٢٠١١ حتى يونيو ٢٠١٣. في تلك المرحلة، حاولت تركيا، تحت حكم أردوغان، دعم عملية تمكين جماعة الإخوان المسلمين في مصر، ودعم مساعيها لاحتكار الدولة والمجتمع وفق المشروع الديني الذي تبنته جماعة الإخوان منذ تأسيسها عام ١٩٢٨. في تلك المرحلة من التاريخ، توافقت طموحات تركيا في الهيمنة مع مشروع الهندسة الطائفية للشرق الأوسط برعاية إدارة الرئيس الأمريكي السابق باراك أوباما.

وبعد سقوط هذه اللحظة الاستثنائية، اتخذ العداء التركي لمصر عدة جوانب، يمكن تلخيصها فيما يلي:

- رعاية حملات النقد السياسي والإعلامي المنظمة والممنهجة ضد مصر ونظامها السياسي، بعضها موجه للمجتمع الداخلي في مصر، وأخرى للرأي العام العالمي.
  - احتواء العناصر الإرهابية للإخوان المسلمين وتقديم الدعم لها للعمل ضد مصالح مصر وأمنها القومي.
  - التعاون مع الشبكات الإقليمية لتنظيم "داعش" الإرهابي الذي يضع مصر ومجالها الحيوي على رأس أهدافها الإقليمية في الشرق الأوسط.
  - بناء تحالفات إقليمية في عداء شديد لمصر ودورها الإقليمي.
  - كثرة محاولات التسلل إلى المجال الحيوي لمصر وتهديد مصالحها وأمنها القومي.
- ومنذ عام ٢٠١٤، أعلن الرئيس المصري -أكثر من مرة- أن المبادئ السياسية الإقليمية في مصر تقوم على دعم الدولة الوطنية ومؤسساتها وفي مقدمتها الجيوش الوطنية، ورفض كل المشاريع الطائفية، وأي تمكين للمليشيات الدفاع عنها، بالإضافة إلى محاربة الإرهاب الذي يسعى إلى استخدام الخطاب الأصولي والعنصري لتفكيك المجتمعات واستنزاف الدول. ومن هنا اصطدمت السياسة المصرية في ظل النظام المصري القائم بشكل مباشر مع الأطماع التركية ودينامياتها في المنطقة.
- تحاول الورقة تحليل المظاهر المختلفة لسياسات العداء التركية تجاه مصر، وتناقش تداعياتها المحتملة، وأنماط الاستجابة المصرية المحتملة ضد هذه السياسات.

**Abstract:**

It has been observed that the Turkish foreign policy approach has reached its peak towards Egypt during the period February 2011 until June 2013. At that stage, Turkey, under Erdogan, had attempted to support the process of empowering the Muslim Brotherhood organization in Egypt and support its efforts to monopolize the state and society according to the theocratic project adopted by the MB since its foundation in 1928. At that point in history, Turkey's hegemony ambitions matched with the project of sectarian engineering for the Middle East sponsored by the administration of the former U.S President Barack Obama.

After the fall of this exceptional moment, the Turkish hostility towards Egypt took several aspects, which can be summarized as follows:

-Sponsoring organized and systematic political and media criticism campaigns against Egypt and its political system, some of which are directed to Egypt's internal society, and others to the international public opinion.

-Embracing the terrorist elements of the Muslim Brotherhood and give them the support to act against Egypt's interests and security.

-Cooperating with regional networks of the terrorist "ISIS" organization that places Egypt and its vital domain at the top of its regional goals in the Middle East.

-Building regional alliances in a severe hostility to Egypt and its regional role.

- Frequent attempts to penetrate into the vital field of Egypt, and threaten its interests and national security.

Since 2014, the Egyptian President announced more than once that the regional political principles in Egypt are based on supporting the national state and its institutions, at the forefront of which are the national armies, rejecting all sectarian projects, and any empowerment of the militias that defend them, in addition to fighting terrorism, which seeks to use fundamentalist and racist discourse to dismantle societies and drain countries. Hence, Egyptian politics, in light of the existing Egyptian system, collided directly with Turkish ambitions and its dynamics in the region.

The paper attempts to analyze the various manifestations of the Turkish hostility policies toward Egypt, and discusses its potential implications, and the potential Egyptian response patterns against such policies.

**Keywords:** Egyptian Regional restoration, Neo Ottoman Empire, Geo-Politics Engagement

**Introduction:**

Much of the analysis holds that the reason for the extreme hostility of the Turkish Justice and Development Party (AKP) towards the Egyptian Political system, after the June 30th revolution, and the political change that led to it, is mainly due to the overthrow of the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood, which belongs to the same political ideology that the Justice and Development elite in Turkey belongs to.

This elite emerged from the cloak of the fundamentalist Islamic Welfare Party founded by "Najm Al-Din Arbakan" ,the spiritual father of the political Islamic orientation that currently dominates in Turkey<sup>(1)</sup>. In addition to the similarity of the ideological roots, "Arbakan" and the Turkish political Islam stream, since the early seventies of the twentieth century, had the support of some branches of the Muslim Brotherhood, which were then stationed in the Arab Gulf region, so that "Arbakan" formed a coalition government with an Islamic tendency in 1996<sup>(2)</sup>.

And apparently in exchange for positions of influence and effect, the Islamists of Turkey subsequently managed, especially with the start of the AKP's domination of power since 2002, to contain the international organization of the Brotherhood and employ it to serve the expansion of Turkish influence in its various dimensions, politically and economically, not only intellectually and ideologically. This included the Turkish recruitment of the Muslim Brotherhood in more than one circle, but the most prominent were the circles of the Arab world, Europe and the United States of America. In the context of this ideological and functional rapprochement, it became clear, after the June 30 revolution in Egypt, that Turkey lost the opportunity to dominate the Egyptian political decision, by enabling the Muslim Brotherhood to monopolize the political and economic spheres in Egypt, as well as one of the most important pillars of strengthening its ideological and intellectual influence regionally<sup>(3)</sup>.

However, this constructivist interpretation that is based on ideological and intellectual rapprochement, although it may explain a major part of the Turkish hostility scene towards Egypt, is not sufficient to explain the overall scene of this acute Turkish hostility, especially when compared to the active, non-hostile, and even positive



engagement pattern that Turkey pursued toward the Former Egyptian President, Mubarak, between 2002 to 2010, despite the fact that the Muslim Brotherhood was in a position of "containment" outside the decision-making circles under this system.

This discrepancy indicates that there are other factors that need to be taken into consideration to explain this hostility. Some of these factors are related to structural changes in the regional system on one hand, and the nature of the Egyptian system on the other hand, which was produced by the June 30 revolution and its attitudes towards Egypt's regional role. This is what the paper will try to examine and clarify.

### The Turkish Role Shifts in the Middle East:



### Middle East Map, Source:

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Middle-East>

In this regard, it is noted that the tendency to dominate the Arab neighborhood remained present in the Turkish political mind, after the fall of the Ottoman Caliphate in July 1923. This obsession

was reflected in various manifestations throughout the following decades of the twentieth century, perhaps the most prominent of which are:

- 1- The attempt to dominate the Levant region and Iraq, through the “Baghdad Pact”, which first occurred between the governments of Iraq and Turkey in February 1955, before joining Iran, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom. This alliance failed to achieve its goals, in light of sharp Egyptian opposition, and the rise of the Arab nationalism in Egypt and Syria, and later in Iraq, after the overthrow of the monarchy in July 1958, in addition to the rapprochement of the three countries with the former Soviet.
- 2- The Turkish military escalation against Syria in 1957, in an attempt to topple “Shukri Al-Quatli” government in Syria because of its rapprochement with the Soviet Union, and during that crisis, the Egyptian President made a decision on October 13, 1957, to send Egyptian forces to confront the Turkish crowds on the Syrian-Turkish border. This Egyptian position was an important catalyst for the Syrians' insistence on unity with Egypt, which was already achieved in February 1958<sup>(4)</sup>.
- 3- Attempting to control the water resources of Syria and Iraq, and strangling the two countries by water. This approach has taken increasing momentum since the 1970s, with planning to construct a series of dams that reduce the flow of water from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers to the two countries, within the framework of what is known as the "Southeast Anatolia Project"<sup>(5)</sup>.

Despite the emergence of some indications and evidence of a dominance trend among Turkish politicians vis-a-vis Arab neighborhood, throughout the decades that followed the fall of the Ottoman Caliphate, this trend remained restricted to respecting the borders and sovereignty of neighboring countries in light of the balance of regional and international powers that maintain the stability of the Middle Eastern regional system. It has taken root in the region since the end of the First World War, and has guaranteed the



boundaries and sovereignty maps that formed it. However, the decade of the nineties, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, began to witness a fundamental imbalance in these balances of international powers, and a gradual escalation in the internal fragility factors of the structure of many regional systems, led by the regional system in Eastern Europe. Despite the rapid and violent collapse of the regime in that region, due to several geostrategic calculations, there was a necessary and sufficient international will to re-establish the system in it quickly and decisively.

The Middle East, especially with the exit of Iraq from the balance system of regional powers and the undermining of the elements of the state's power in it, throughout the 1990s, the country in Iraq was maintained in what resembled a case of clinical death. Perhaps because of the US fear of facing the burdens of another critical regional re-engineering, as well as regional re-engineering in Eastern Europe. However, Iraq's growing weakness allowed, on one hand, the escalation of internal fragility factors, especially with regard to the increase in the violence and tendencies of separatist movements, and opened a new horizon for the ambitions of hegemony by the regional neighboring countries, a horizon that does not respect the borders of the Iraqi state under the claim of confronting the activities of the Kurdistan labor Party in north Iraq<sup>(6)</sup>.

In 1998, Turkey mobilized its forces again, threatening to intervene in Syria, to stop the party's activities on its territory. Once again, Egypt intervened to stop the Turkish threat. A grand mediation by the former Egyptian President, Mubarak, ended with the signing of the "Adna" agreement on October 20, 1998, which responded to the Turkish demands, and ended any activity of the PKK on the Syrian territory<sup>(7)</sup>.

It is clear from the previous brief presentation that the Egyptian role, during many of Turkey's attempts to translate its tendency to dominate, into a real threat to its Arab neighbors - either an undermined role, or at the very least a restrictive role for these conflicts. This is a clear indication of the historical contradiction between the effective presence of Egypt regionally, and the

requirements imposed to protect its national security, and any ambitions of regional hegemony by non-Arab neighbors.

Beginning from the twenty-first century, and precisely since the United States invaded Iraq in March 2003, a regional re-engineering began to take an accelerating momentum, even if it evolved through two major stages that are highly incompatible, and did not proceed according to a stable pattern, as was the case in East Europe. This strategic and structural transformation in the Middle Eastern system established a policy of an integrated and active Turkish intervention towards the region, insofar as it established changing political orientations towards Egypt as far as the development of its regional role for the sake of the Turkish hegemony.

In this context, two basic stages can be highlighted for the development of the Turkish intervention policy in the Middle East, namely the stage of active positive engagement, followed by the stage of the clash with geo-politics. Below, we will try to outline the most important characteristics of each, and their implications for Turkey's policy towards Egypt, up to the current stage of hostility.

### **1- Active Positive Engagement Phase:**

The features of that stage can be seen during the period after the attacks of September 11, 2001, until the turmoil that has struck more than one Arab country since the end of 2010. This stage witnessed four major transformations that prompted Turkey to adopt an active regional policy towards the Middle East, which can be summarized as follows:

- A- The emergence of the political Islam's dilemma in the American foreign policy, and the direction of American and European policy when they imagined that it could be a model of "moderate Islamic religious rule" that can be relied upon in what is known as the "Islamic world"<sup>(8)</sup>.
- B - The U.S invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the start of a process of regional re-engineering imagined that Bush administration could be imposed by direct US intervention. On the one hand, this invasion established a Kurdish challenge to Turkey, while giving Turkey a greater opportunity to adopt an interventionist



policy in Iraq, with the state of dislocation that followed the invasion, and even with the consent of the central government in Iraq in many cases to deter any separatist aspirations in the Kurdistan region of Iraq and its right in self-rule. On the other hand, a number of Gulf countries viewed Turkey as a counterpart to Iran after Iraq disappeared from the balance of regional power balance, and even gradually fell into the orbit of Iranian hegemony and influence<sup>(9)</sup>.

- C- The growing Turkish ambition to join the European Union, especially after the announcement of the European Council meeting, which was held in Helsinki on December 10 and 11, 1999, that Turkey is a candidate for EU membership on an equal basis with any other possible candidates, and that was the most important development when Turkey has sought to join the European Union, since it applied for formal membership in the European Economic Community on April 14, 1987. This development was followed by another essential step, with the announcement of the European Council meeting, which was held in Copenhagen on 12 and 13 December 2002, that the European Union will launch a "without postponement" negotiating process if the Presidential Council meeting, scheduled in December 2004, approved that Turkey has fulfilled the Copenhagen criteria adopted in 1993 to determine the extent to which a country is eligible for membership in the European Union or not. The European Council, at its meeting held in Brussels on December 16 and 17, 2004, decided to start negotiations on Turkey's accession on October 3, 2005.

At that stage, Turkey's hopes of joining the European Union rose sharply, and although this could have meant at first glance that Turkey will turn its face towards the west in Europe, and not to south towards the Middle East, the ruling elite in Turkey at that time rose, as will be explained later, that strengthening the Turkish influence in its Middle Eastern neighborhood could boost Turkey's cards in negotiations with the European Union<sup>(10)</sup>.

- D- The fourth and final difference was the rise of the "Justice and

Development” Party, with its Islamic background, to seize power, following the 2002 parliamentary elections. This party was established in 2001 by a number of political Islamists, after the banning of the Islamist “Raffah” and “Virtue” Parties, respectively. The party adopted from the beginning a speech, claiming respect for the values of Western democracy and the secular values upon which the modern Turkish state was founded, but it gradually led to the interests of an authoritarian regime in Turkey, and supported the strengthening of the position of political Islam forces and its various organizations in the neighboring countries of the Middle East, and the Russian Commonwealth in Central Asia, as well<sup>(11)</sup>.

In light of these structural transformations, the Justice and Development elite saw a unique opportunity to enhance Turkey's role in the Arab world, and in the Middle East, by enhancing the presence of the political Islam project. This vision did not adopt undermining options for the existing system of states in the Middle East until then, as much as it adopted options to enhance influence by means of mechanisms allowing the penetration of its soft forces through the structures of the existing regional system, and not through clashing with it.

This vision seemed, to a large extent, to reflect the categories of the framework of the theory of complex interdependence developed by Robert Cohen and Joseph Nye<sup>(12)</sup>, that says that countries in light of the growing complexity of international relations issues, the breadth of their scope, with the increasing number of states, prefer to work through international organization that maximizes its ability to influence and gives it better chances of bargaining without having to resort to military or violent force. But later it seemed that this approach was nothing more than a major misleading process, as a result of the AKP leadership realizing that the existing balance of power, even though Iraq had left the equation, would not have been able to impose a regional map that is compatible with its efforts to achieve hegemony.

In this context, Turkey adopted a vision towards the region,



based on three components:

A- The “Turkish Democracy” model that was promoted through mainthink tanks, and the main media platforms in the United States, and the Western camp in general, as the most appropriate model for establishing a safe and effective democracy in the countries of the Islamic world. This democracy has been proposed on one hand capable of absorbing what was described, the deception of moderate political Islam in Islamic countries, and the ability, on the other hand, to be a substitute for the existing regimes in the Arab countries, which were perceived by the American interpretations, after September 11 terrorist attacks as a major reason for the growing terrorism of the radical and Salafi Jihadist organizations, and for their hostility to the United States. And that "Turkish democracy" was proposed, on the third hand, as being able to be an acceptable alternative to conservative Islamic societies instead of the theocratic style of government in Iran, or the ideological orientations of radical Sunni Islam<sup>(13)</sup>.

The Justice and Development elite, through this misleading rhetoric, attempted to identify with the American reviews of the regional re-engineering project in the Middle East, which entered into an acute crisis with the outbreak of sectarian violence in Iraq, after the American invasion. Hence, the party strengthened its standing in both the American and regional spaces, on the one hand, the party made Turkey a platform for dialogue between the United States and some currents of political Islam, which were described as moderate, especially the wings of the Muslim Brotherhood in Arab countries. While imposing, on the other hand, its domination over many forces of political Islam across the region, which sought to obtain American recognition of the alleged model of “Turkish democracy”<sup>(14)</sup>.

### **B- The “Bow and Arrow” equation<sup>(15)</sup>:**

This equation framed the strengthening of Turkey's influence in the Middle East as one of the foundations to support its membership in the European Union. According to this equation, Turkey was

depicted as an archer, as long as Turkey can extend the stock of the arrow eastward, its arrow can fly westward. In other words, the "Justice and Development" elite saw the strengthening of its influence through the "Greater Middle East" that extends from the borders of Afghanistan to Libya, in addition to the Arab "Maghreb" countries, as a lever to enhance its position and importance for European countries, and the western camp in general. Turkey adopted a multi-dimensional strategy, which includes the economy, security, and identity, with the aim of strengthening its influence in the East, and strengthening its position as a bridge between East and West.

### C- The "zero problems" principle:

"Building regional relations based on mutual respect, dialogue, economic cooperation, resolving disputes by peaceful means, and accommodating ethnic and religious diversity", the core of a strategic theory presented by "Ahmed Davutoglu" in his book "Strategic Depth"<sup>(16)</sup>, published in 2001, Which was known as "zero problems". And that was before he put it into practice, when he assumed the position of advisor to Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in 2003.

This principle was more like a "Trojan horse", through which Turkey sought to implement what might be called a policy of soft penetration across the Arab world. This penetration was a new aspect of the aspirations of the Turkish national character for regional hegemony, but it drew to accommodate the variables of knowledge globalization, and its various tools, with the aim of imposing what the "Justice and Development" elite aspired to for a new soft Turkish hegemony, by fabricating a false and artificial Ottoman identity, imposed from its eastern surroundings<sup>(17)</sup>.

Through this "zero problems" policy, Turkey has sought to overcome the obstacle of opposition to the ruling political systems to the growing maximization of its influence within the Arab countries, and its influence in large sectors of its people by employing various tools of academic, media and cultural power. At the same time, the process of creating this "shared" Ottoman identity aimed to create in the Arab mind a false awareness of history, both ancient and



modern, by allowing the passive inheritance of the Ottoman colonialism to be lost, and for the attempts of rough Turkish domination over the capabilities of its Arab neighborhood<sup>(18)</sup>, which continued and developed throughout the second half of Twentieth century.

In light of the active positive engagement stage, Egypt was located at the head of the Arab countries that were targeted by these attempts of soft Turkish penetration, in addition to take advantage of the huge Egyptian market. On the one hand, Turkey sought to avoid attempts to clamp down on Turkish influence with an Egyptian resistance that would have a deterrent effect, given Egypt's pioneering political and cultural position in the Arab world. On the other hand, it aimed to penetrate into the Egyptian identity and culture, and to try to divert them from their deep-rooted national heritage, and to make them more receptive to an international political Islam project with a Turkish character.

During that phase, the mutual trade between Egypt and Turkey has strengthened, and its volume has more than quadrupled, from about half a billion dollars in 2001, to about 3 billion dollars in 2010, and the rate of official visits between the two countries has increased to about 64 visits for Turkish delegations at various levels to Egypt between 2003 and 2009, compared to 29 visits by Egyptian delegations to Turkey during the same period. This momentum was translated into signing a free trade agreement between the two countries in 2005 (activated in 2007)<sup>(18)</sup>. At this stage, travel rates for Egyptians for tourism in Turkey increased, and the invasion of Turkish series of Egyptian and Arab satellite channels in general increased, generating a state of fondness for Turkey and its artificial cultural model.

## **2- The clash with geo-politics and violent engagement:**

With the eruption of social and political turmoil in a number of countries in the Arab world, since the end of 2010, it became clear that the re-engineering projects in the Middle East region have entered a new phase, one that embodies the statements of American politicians about accomplishing a process of political change through what they called " Constructive chaos"<sup>(20)</sup>. The regional engineering project,

through direct US intervention, has proven a failure in both Afghanistan and Iraq. The United States has begun to implement an active policy to free itself from dependence on Middle Eastern oil, as well as a compass of its policy heading towards the regions of the South and Southeast Asia as the locomotive of growth and the main source of challenge for US leadership during the twenty-first century.

The American policy has abandoned the idea of maintaining the stability of the structure of the Middle Eastern system, according to the pattern of governance and the interactions that have taken hold in it since the early fifties of the twentieth century. The first ingredient for regional re-engineering, in its new phase, since 2009 was the replacement of a Sunni political Islam model in a number of major Arab countries, outside the Arab Gulf region, based on the perception that political forces of Islam are the most capable of controlling the street, and responding to the conservative and traditional nature of the people of the region, the most capable of containing Salafi and radical organizations. As for the other ingredient, it was creating a balance of sectarian weakness between a Sunni political Islam camp, in the face of a Shiite political Islam camp, containing each other, and creating a conflict situation that wandered away without the domination of any other regional or international power other than the US's over the region's capabilities.

Coinciding with this state of regional liquidity, Turkey's bets to join the European Union declined, with a slowdown and even stalemate in the negotiating process that started for its accession to the European Union. And the elite of the "Justice and Development" Party, began to look to the Middle East, not as a space to pull the bowstring, but on the contrary, as the goal that the Turkish arrow is targeting. At that point, the state of liquidity that afflicted the Middle Eastern system, and the factors of disintegration that were evident in the construction of more than one Arab country, tempted Turkey by trying to achieve its ambitions to extend its influence, occupy parts of its neighboring countries, Syria and Iraq, and impose itself as a dominant regional power, not through soft penetration, but through force and aggression against the sovereignty and rights of the



countries in the region.

Turkey took advantage of a number of tools, according to each case of chaos in the Arab countries hit by the unrest, they can be summarized as follows:

- 1-The transformation from the "zero problems" approach, with an intrusive and even hostile policy against many Arab countries. In this context, Erdogan turned his policy towards many leaders of the Arab countries, with whom he had previously cooperative relations, even friendship and trust. In this regard, his position towards the former Egyptian President Mubarak, the late Libyan President, Muammar Qaddafi, and finally the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.
- 2- Helping to enable the Muslim Brotherhood organization within the framework of political interactions, in Egypt, Syria, Tunisia, and Libya, and using it as a ride to impose Turkey's hegemony and ambitions.
- 3-The functional use of the most violent terrorist organizations, as was the case with ISIS, and many of the Salafi Jihadi organizations in Syria and Libya, or attempts to use them as tools for attrition, and threatening security, as it appeared in support of the ISIS terrorist focus, which were made in earnest attempts to plant it on the Egyptian border with Gaza.
- 4-It presented itself as a partner to both Russia and the United States in their military operations, and most importantly to the maps of influence and the balance of multilateral forces which it tried to create in Syria.
- 5-Direct occupation inside Syrian and Iraqi territories.

To sum up, it can be said that Turkey's policy, during that phase, has exploited the state of chaos in many countries of the region, and competition for influence between the major powers, in addition to the regional crises to achieve more military penetration in the affairs of the region, especially in its most weakest hotspots, and trying to impose its aggression as it is a reality that must be dealt with. Turkey took advantage of all of these pillars of influence that it has established in the phase of active positive engagement, and

instead of working through the mechanisms of complex interdependence that respect the existing international system, Turkey has become a major factor in creating and perpetuating chaos in many Arab countries, in an effort to maintain its influence and impose its ambitions , which can only be embodied in an environment characterized by weak state control and violent political confrontations.

**During this phase, it is clear that Turkey has adopted two widely opposed approaches towards Egypt, which can be summarized as follows:**

### **1- The stage of seeking a "strategic alliance":**

That stage started immediately after the resignation of the former Egyptian President Mubarak, until the overthrow of the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood in the aftermath of the June 30, 2013 revolution. It was notable at that point that the rate of high-level visits from Turkey to Egypt accelerated. And then, the Turkish President, Abdullah Gul, was the first foreign head of state to visit Egypt in March 2011, followed by the Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan, the strongman in the “Justice and Development” Party, who made two visits to Egypt in 2011 and 2012.

It is noted that Erdogan met in his first visit, in September 2011, the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood, and gave his advice on what he deems the most appropriate way, in order to aspire to power in Egypt. What reflects the “Justice and Development” government's rush to enhance its influence in Egypt is the fact that Erdogan violated a Turkish tradition, which was his first, after his victory in the parliamentary elections, in June 2011, as the Turkish Prime Minister usually goes in his first foreign visit to what is known as the "Turkish Republic of Cyprus", then to Azerbaijan. Erdogan, on his visit to Egypt, accompanied six of his ministers and a large number of advisers and diplomats and over 250 businessmen and investors, on September 20, 2011, then the Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, in an interview with "The New York Times", expressed his country's desire to establish a partnership with Egypt, establishing what he called a "new axis of power" in the region<sup>(21)</sup>.



In September 2012, Muhammad Morsi, the candidate of the Muslim Brotherhood, who announced his victory in the controversial presidential elections in the same year, visited Turkey, during which he participated in a meeting of the Turkish “Justice and Development” Party, stressing his unity and the Muslim Brotherhood organization, ideologically and politically, with the ruling party in Turkey. During a speech at Cairo University, in his second visit to Egypt, in November 2011, Erdogan described the alliance between the two countries as "an Egyptian-Turkish alliance" to guarantee peace and stability in the Middle East<sup>(22)</sup>.

At that point, the two ruling regimes in Egypt and Turkey signed a large number of trade and naval agreements that aimed to facilitate Turkish trade through Egypt, all the way to the Red Sea and the Arab Gulf region, especially after the violent conflict that exploded in Syria which cut the traditional road that linked Turkey to the Arab Gulf states .

At this point, it seems that Turkey’s bets on Egypt reached an unprecedented level since the French campaign against Egypt at the end of the eighteenth century. Increasingly, it seemed that Turkey was trying to restore the wheel of history to more than two centuries, and was imposing legitimate a "neo-Ottoman" empire influence on Egypt, taking advantage of the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood. At that point, Erdogan's goals were not only to avoid Egypt's resistance to Turkey's soft penetration into the region, but the Turkish elite sought to employ the Egyptian policy to be the spearhead of its aggressive policies, and to achieve its ambitions across the region, we can notice this in the following files:

- A- Passing the Turkish ambitions in the waters of the Eastern Mediterranean: In March 2013, Turkey submitted a proposal to demarcate the maritime borders between Egypt and Turkey, according to the Turkish viewpoint that violates the rules of international law in this regard. Despite the approval of the Muslim Brotherhood and its party, at the time, the “Freedom and Justice” Party, on the Turkish proposal, the Egyptian Ministry of Defense, rejected this proposal, as it

represented an attack on the borders of Greece and the Cyprus Sea, and because it is called to depend on parts of the Egyptian concessions to Turkey<sup>(23)</sup>.

B- Identification with the Turkish colonial project in Syria: Just as the “Justice and Development” government was opening up the Turkish lands to the flow of terrorist and jihadist elements into Syria, in June 2013, the representative of the Brotherhood, Muhammad Morsi, announced cutting ties with Syria and opening the door to what he called "jihad" in Syria<sup>(24)</sup>.

The fixation of this identification with the Turkish policy, reflected dependency, against all the principles of the Egyptian national security with the constants of Egypt's historical role as a national power, and reveals that the Muslim Brotherhood was perceived to be just a sectarian spearhead of Turkish ambitions.

This dependence on the Turkish “Neo Ottoman” empire project played one of the factors of the Egyptian people's rapid rejection of the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood and the revolution against it following a revolutionary movement that has continued in a strong way, since Morsi attempted a coup against the Egyptian state and its ruling authorities, in what he called a constitutional declaration in November 2012<sup>(25)</sup>.

### **The Egyptian Military and Morsi’s army chief-of-staff:**

In the context of the need for the Supreme Council of armed forces ,SCAF, to have mass political coverage, and the Muslim Brotherhood realizing that they are facing a historical opportunity, the presidential elections came as a step. Once the new president is elected, the military become an agent for the newly elected president, especially since the traditions of the Egyptian presidency see the president as the head of state, who has huge unrestricted powers, especially since the Egyptians entrusted the powerful ruler with wide powers. President Morsi came to power with two-stage free elections, at the end of which he won 51.7% of the vote on June 30, 2012, but he began his rule in a clash with the leaders of SCAF.

According to the complementary constitutional declaration,



issued on June 17, 2012, the president started his rule with incomplete powers, so a clash between the two forces seemed to be inevitably coming<sup>(26)</sup>. It is evident that both SCAF and the Muslim Brotherhood have been forced to ally with the other. There is no doubt that the Supreme Council recognized the growing power of the Muslim Brotherhood to which the President-elect belongs, so it was forced to avoid the initial clash with the army, saving itself with constitutional declarations as a legal complement to its effective control<sup>(27)</sup>.

After the Council succeeded in reducing the actual powers of the President in accordance with the complementary constitutional declaration, the political struggle for power began by legal means in search of legal and formal power. On June 29, 2012, a huge protest came out in the name of "To hand over power" calling for the abolition of the complementary constitutional declaration and the restoration of the president's powers.

Perhaps the events of "Rafah", which claimed the lives of 16 recruits on the Egyptian border, have prepared the scene for the President by taking his decision on August 8 to overthrow the minister of Defense ,Marshal Hussein Tantawi , and General Sami Annan, Chief of Staff. According to these decisions, the president has enjoyed all executive and legislative powers in the absence of the parliament, and then he asserts that he is a new president with new legitimacy, and therefore his right to appoint top positions.

A new Minister of Defense was appointed, General Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, as a step the President saw a guarantee to tighten his civilian control over the army, but it must be mentioned that the dismissal decisions and the new appointments did not produce any signs of defections within the army, and that these measures allowed the army to ,for a while, withdraw from political rule<sup>(28)</sup>. Parallely, the military guaranteed a privileged position in the new constitution - the 2012 constitution - with regard to limiting the discussion of its budget to the National Defense Council only, as well as the permissibility of trying civilians before military courts for crimes that harm the armed forces. Perhaps this is justified, as the Muslim Brotherhood realized the centrality of the military establishment in the structure of the

state<sup>(29)</sup>. that it seeks to govern, and thus sought to rapprochement with the army at the expense of the alliance and participation with the civil and liberal forces.

That kind of relation between the president and the military was broken by some signs as the army's refusal to support the Syrian insurgents against the Syrian political system<sup>(30)</sup>. after Morsi's declaration that Egypt is ready to send its troops to the Syrian lands to support the Syrian "revolution". Also ,the president's refusal of the army's mediation between the presidency and the political powers that refused the president's constitutional declaration of November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2012. All this evidence proved where was the army, led by Al-Sisi, standing in regard to the presidency and the MB relations towards Turkey specially its support to all the terrorist movements that curb the Syrian political system, as mentioned earlier.

In general, President Morsi could not seem to be a decisive president in his performance, due to the lack of political experience, the weakness of his advisers, and the MB's desire to seize power. All of the factors that gained from the opportunity available to him for civilian control of the army, especially in light of the severe political polarization between the Islamic political forces and the civil forces, which the military establishment took advantage of to restore its popular balance and "return" to the political scene again, which was evident on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2013.

## 2- The stage of strategic engagement:

This is the stage that followed the overthrow of the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood on July 3, 2013, when Turkey's policy turned into open hostility against Egypt, which not only produced the shattering of Turkish dreams in the domination of Egypt through the Muslim Brotherhood, but also resulted, and perhaps to a greater degree, in the rise of an Egyptian political system adopting a clear and comprehensive strategy, based on the one hand, protecting the historical national elements of the Egyptian state, and on the other hand, rebuilding the strength of the Egyptian state and its presence as a stabilizing factor and regional balance.



In other words, the new regime in Egypt has become a structural challenge to the Turkish ambitions. Hence, a renewed struggle for historical status which has often been imposed by the calculations of geo-politics, will be mentioned below.

## **Second: The nature of the new regime in Egypt:**

In addition to the development of the Turkish ambitions on the transformations of the regional crises in the Middle East, Egypt witnessed the rise of a national system of government, adhering to the principles of Egyptian national security, objectively opposing not only the Muslim Brotherhood political project, but also the Turkish hegemony project.

Since 2013 in Egypt, Egyptian-Turkish relations have deteriorated significantly. Ankara condemned the ousting of President Morsi and embraced Morsi's supporters. For his part, President Sisi views Turkey as a regional foe and does not accept its growing role and influence, especially in Libya<sup>(31)</sup>. and the Eastern Mediterranean – as mentioned above. Turkey's support of Egypt's political opposition, since after, plays a major role in the conflict with Sisi's regime. Turkey provided a refuge to the Muslim Brotherhood's members and leaders. It also allows anti-Sisi media networks to operate and broadcast freely from Istanbul. These policies infuriate Sisi's regime, which accuses Turkey of supporting terrorism and instability in Egypt<sup>(32)</sup>.

In other words, the restoration of government in Egypt, because of its national compass, and its possession of the vision of building power and possessing capacity represented a challenge to the Turkish hegemonic policy and its "Neo Ottoman" project, from several angles, which can be summed up in two basic contrast equations for Egyptian and Turkish policies over the regional axes at which they clash:

### **1- Nationalism versus "Pan Turkism":**

Despite the fact that the national component is the main impetus for the Turkish hegemony policies throughout history, whether in the outdated Ottoman era or in the current stage of Turkish policy, which became known as the "Neo Ottoman" empire,

Turkey has taken advantage of the regional discourse of the Islamic Nation, and the illusion of restoring the state of "Caliphate", as a way to employ the forces of political Islam, with its version of "Brotherhood" and "Jihadist Salafism" to pass its regional ambitions. Like Iranian politics, Turkish politics took advantage of the state of disintegration and chaos, which is spread by the forces of political Islam in the structure of the nation state, to pass influence, and even impose colonization, when this is available, as is evident in north Syria today.

In exchange for this sectarian project, which leads to the rule of the policies of division, disintegration, isolation, and racism within states and between groups in the Middle East, the national state project, which represents Egypt as its natural historical manifestation in the region, appears to be the objective contrast within which this sectarian flood can stop<sup>(33)</sup>. This was already achieved in the revolution of June 30, 2013 in Egypt, which, as far as it is a revolution to defend the historical Egyptian identity in the face of the project of political Islam, is the revolution of patriotism in the face of sectarian looting.

It can be seen that after the success of the June 30 revolution in protecting Egypt from slipping into the furnace of sectarian warfare, national forces have grown in many of the foci of state collapse that were drowning in front of the expansion of the sectarian project with its Sunni and Shiite versions, as between the Libyan national army in the face of the Salafi and jihadist militias, also what can be seen in anti-political movements that worked to perpetuate the elements of sectarian divisions in Iraq and Lebanon.

The political system in Egypt, after the June 30 revolution, committed to protecting those national principles as one of the most important pillars of Egyptian foreign policy in the region<sup>(34)</sup>., and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi announced more than once that the principles of the Egyptian regional policy are to support the national state and its institutions, and in its forefront national armies, rejecting all sectarian projects, and any empowerment of the militias that defend them, in addition to fighting terrorism, which seeks to use fundamentalist and racist discourse to break ties of societies and



exhaust states. Because of this commitment, Egyptian politics collided directly with the Turkish ambitions and its regional dynamics.

## 2- Stability and balance versus chaos:

Since the end of the sixties of the twentieth century, the Egyptian politics has seen stability of the regional balance of power as an essential pillar of Egyptian national security. Hence, Turkey's policy of creating chaos and expansion posed a serious threat to Egyptian national security. The Egyptian regime has worked to promote stability after June 30 and restore some elements of balance in the region. We can allude to this in Egypt's endeavor to build Arab-Arab understandings, even to a minimum, in a way that guarantees the restoration of some balance in the face of the great imbalance that struck the equations of the balance of regional powers, after the exit of a number of major countries from those equations.

Although it cannot be claimed that a true and effective balance of power has been restored, with which regional interactions can be stable, it is certain that the Egyptian effort in this regard has made undeniable progress, supported by the growing risks of the chaos that is facing many countries in the region. As much as Egypt's progress in building regional axes seeks to restore and protect stability, it is expected that Turkish hostility to Egypt will increase.

**In return, Egypt pursues a policy with cumulative effects, which attempts to deter and contain the Turkish threats simultaneously. The most prominent elements of that strategy include:**

- 1- Building an Egyptian military force that deters all threats that could extend to Egypt from distant points in its regional environment. And after the Egyptian armament rates have declined relatively, in the face of a regional arms race that has accelerated across the region, since 2005, Egypt has sought to catch up with this race, by doubling its spending on arms purchases, during the period from 2015 to 2018<sup>(35)</sup>., and developing Egyptian deterrence capabilities on the long run, by air and sea.

- 2- Establishing legal systems that limit the chances of the Turkish ambitions. This is evident in relation to the demarcation of the maritime borders in the Eastern Mediterranean, the establishment of the East Mediterranean Gas Forum in Cairo to coordinate the policies of the countries of the region, and the reduction of any disagreement among them over the rules of this exploitation. The stability of this legal system would reduce Turkey's chances of creating chaos in the region, or the rift between its countries.
- 3- Building security hubs to contain the Turkish threats across the region, whether in the Eastern direction, through rapprochement with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, or in the Northern direction with Cyprus and Greece. To the extent that these axes can be developed towards an overall military alliance, and the formulation of stable equations for common security, or even collective.
- 4- Supporting the national armies and state-building efforts, and this behavior represents the most important impact in the medium term regarding containment of the Turkish ambitions, and Ankara has completely retreated from trying to engage with its geographical neighborhood<sup>(36)</sup>.
- 5- Developing cultural policies that undermine Turkey's ability to fabricate false historical awareness across the region.



## Conclusion:

The escalating regional confrontation between the Turkish ambitions and the consolidation of the Egyptian state's strength and regional presence calls for the experience of conflict over the status between the two countries in several historical moments. That experience demonstrates that the interaction between the two countries is still largely governed by geopolitics. This confrontation does not seem to be resolved any time soon, given the following reasons: **First**, the expected regional liquidity to continue with a time horizon that extends to the medium term at best case scenarios. **Second**, Turkey's exploitation of the conflicts in regional interests between the major powers, and its increasing concern not to get involved in severe and long-term regional conflicts to bargain with these powers to reduce the burden of its regional involvement, in exchange for recognizing the roles that enshrine Turkish ambitions. **Third**, the acute crisis faced by political Islam movements across the region, which would mobilize its forces to support the Turkish policy to the maximum extent, in what can be considered a battle of existence for those forces. **Fourth**, Erdogan's depletion of the possibility of restoring a peaceful Turkish presence, which is accepted and trusted by his neighboring countries. Thus, it appears that without radical political change in Turkey, Erdogan's regional options are greatly reduced to be confined to the conflict dimensions.

Over the past few years, Egypt has managed to develop an effective deterrent capacity in the face of Turkish ambitions. But Turkey, likely to try to create multiple paths and dynamics to pass those ambitions, requires Egypt to adopt a continuous and evolving policy to build strength, fortify the regional system, and establish a stable balance of power in it. It seems that the main bet for Egypt to achieve all these goals, which guarantee a real containment of the Turkish threats, is based on:

- Establishing an effective and sustainable deterrence equation in the face of this Turkish hostile behavior, whether by developing the Egyptian military capacity, or by strengthening deterrent regional alliances, based on solid and stable pillars.

- Mobilizing a regional and international project to rebuild the national state in Libya, Syria, Sudan, and the “Sahel and Sahara” region. Despite the high cost of such a project, the development of major projects for economic integration, and the establishment of major trade hubs, through these regions, could attract huge international investments, which had to meet a significant portion of this cost, and liberate those areas from dependence on violence and blood trade that has become an important source of income for groups operating through it, and for large segments of its population.
- Establishing legal centers supported by a dense network of international interests, which makes maintaining regional stability and preventing threats through it an inherent international concern, not just an emergency or marginal issue. Perhaps the creation of an international system to exploit the wealth of the gas region, in addition to the development of the Suez Canal as a major economic, regional and global axis, represents an important opportunity to create this multilateral network.
- Strengthening the Egyptian alliance with both Cyprus and Greece, by developing economic and human ties, through a comprehensive partnership that goes beyond the immediate security challenges.
- Restoring the momentum of the Egyptian soft power, which is based on emancipating the mind, combating fundamentalism, and possessing the corner of knowledge and technical development, which represents the most important bet for Egypt's ability to enhance its regional presence on one hand, and defeat the Turkish ambitions on the other hand.



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- (16)-. Turkey itself is caught in that arc, and therefore its interest in the first place necessitates that it intervenes and acts, not by the old rules governed by the two great powers, but by new rules that are driven by new motives that exclude Turkey from being a mere "country that guards the borders adjacent to the communist camp on the outskirts of the continent."
- (17)-. A large part of its internal files are influenced by what is happening and what will happen in the Middle East: the Kurdish file in Iraq and Syria, the Syrian revolution, refugees, and ISIS, and therefore it cannot wait for what others decide in a file that will affect the internal equation itself.
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- (19)- A book written by Ahmet Davutoglu, Turkey's Prime Minister in 2001. This book deals with ways to secure Turkish national security, and how Turkey uses its historical and geographical heritage in its foreign policy. The author tried to use the term "strategic depth" in defining Turkey's international relations, seeking to remove Turkey from its marginal role during the Cold War and move it to a pivotal and internationally influential country. The first Arabic edition came out in 2010, and it was published by the Arab House for Science and Al-Jazeera Center for Studies, then Second edition was reprinted in 2011.



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The discovery of huge reserves of natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean, has added fuel to the existing tensions between Egypt and Turkey. In 2015 Egypt discovered vast natural gas deposits in its waters and began to use them for economic and geostrategic leverage against Turkey by seeking to build alliances with the latter's Mediterranean adversaries, namely Greece and Cyprus. Furthermore, in 2019 Turkey was excluded from the newly founded East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) which includes Cyprus, Israel, Greece, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, and Italy, in addition to Egypt. The EMGF aims to enhance natural gas production in the region and create a regional energy market that could

- export gas to Europe. Leaving Turkey out of the forum, despite its geostrategic importance and interests in the eastern Mediterranean, provided more proof of the mounting conflict in the region. Consequently, when Turkey signed the military and maritime agreement with the GNA, Egypt vehemently rejected it and called upon the UN Security Council to annul it. The agreements with the Libyan GNA would allow Turkey's naval warships to explore gas fields in the Eastern Mediterranean and spoil the EMGF gas plans.
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Turkey's decision to provide military and logistical support to the GNA has exacerbated tensions with Egypt. An agreement was signed in late November 2019 stipulates that Turkey will be able to exercise its rights over vast sea areas off the coast of Libya – areas that may have significant oil and gas reserves – to Egypt's dismay. In return, Egypt has officially condemned the Turkish move and warned it “would negatively affect the stability of the Mediterranean region” and that “Turkey will bear full responsibility for the consequences.”

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# مجلة بحوث الشرق الأوسط



مجلة علمية محكمة (مختصة) شهرية  
يصدرها مركز بحوث الشرق الأوسط

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