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Cairo – Ankara relations in transition

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Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's visit to Cairo on February 4, 2026 was a turning point in bilateral relations. During the visit, President Erdogan and President Abdel-Fattah Al-Sisi witnessed the signing of 18 agreements in the fields of defense, tourism, health, and agriculture.¹ Foremost among the agreements was a Military Framework Agreement signed by Egypt's Minister of Defense, General Abdel Megeed Saqr, and his Turkish counterpart, Yaşar Güler.² During the visit, Turkish President Erdoğan and his Egyptian counterpart, President Al-Sisi, also co-chaired the second meeting of the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council.³

For nearly a decade, relations between Egypt and Turkey were marked by ideological hostility and regional rivalry. Bilateral relations deteriorated sharply after Egypt's 2013 political transition, when Ankara openly supported the Muslim Brotherhood, which Egypt has designated as a terrorist group.

President Erdogan had been a vocal critic of Al-Sisi following the latter's rise to power, particularly due to the ousting of Mohamed Morsi, leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, which historically had close ties with Islamists in Turkey. This led to both countries declaring each other's ambassador persona non grata and their subsequent expulsion in 2013.⁴ For much of the following decade, relations were frozen at a minimal diplomatic level, while Cairo and Ankara supported opposing sides in several regional conflicts.

Since the early 2020s, however, both states have pursued a cautious normalization driven by shifting geopolitical conditions, economic pressures, and evolving security

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priorities. The process of normalization saw significant progress as both nations announced on July 4, 2023 the restoration of diplomatic relations at the ambassadorial level and appointment of ambassadors.

This article examines the transformation of Egypt–Turkey relations from confrontation to pragmatic engagement. It analyzes the core disputes that shaped bilateral tensions, emerging cooperation on Gaza and the implications of renewed military and defense ties. The article argues that current Egypt–Turkey relations represent a form of transactional pragmatism, characterized by selective cooperation without strategic alignment or ideological convergence.

Sources of the disputes: ideology and regional competition

The rupture in Egypt–Turkey relations following 2013 was primarily ideological. Turkey’s leadership framed developments in Egypt as a violation of democratic legitimacy and maintained links with the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist political actors whom Cairo regarded as existential threats. Egypt has designated the Muslim Brotherhood, as a terrorist group and interpreted Turkey’s position as interference in domestic affairs and a challenge to regime security.

Istanbul emerged as a hub for Egyptian media affiliated with Morsi’s Muslim Brotherhood. However, amid the normalization process, Turkey urged Brotherhood-affiliated media to cease critical coverage of Egypt.⁵

Although ideology has receded as an explicit point of contention since normalization efforts began, it remains an underlying constraint. The absence of ideological reconciliation explains why rapprochement has proceeded cautiously and pragmatically rather than culminating in a strategic partnership.

Beyond ideology, Egypt and Turkey advanced contrasting regional strategies and Libya became the primary theater of Egypt–Turkey confrontation. Turkey’s military intervention in support of the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord altered the balance of power in western Libya, while Egypt backed the Libyan National Army under Khalifa Haftar. Ankara’s 2019 maritime delimitation agreement with Tripoli further intensified tensions by challenging Egypt’s and Greece’s claims in the Eastern Mediterranean.

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Rapprochement has reduced rhetorical escalation and encouraged diplomatic engagement, yet fundamental differences remain. In the Joint Declaration of 2nd Meeting of High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council between Egypt and Turkey: " both countries confirm their will to support a Libyan owned and Libyan led political process under the facilitation of the United Nations with the aim of preserving Libyan security, stability, sovereignty, territorial integrity and political unity". ⁶The Libyan case illustrates how normalization has moderated conflict without resolving strategic divergence.

Implications for Egypt–Greece relations - for Greece, Egypt has long served as a vital counterweight to Turkish influence in the Eastern Mediterranean. Egypt, Greece and Cyprus have established a tripartite mechanism for cooperation and hold regular tripartite summits. The 10th and latest was held in Cairo in January last year, during which the three countries reiterated their commitment to the stability and security of the region.

Egypt's rapprochement with Turkey has prompted speculation regarding its strategic alignment with Greece. The new Egypt-Turkey closeness affects Greek interests in several ways :

Athens' primary concern should be that a future deal between Cairo and Ankara could undermine the 2020 Greece-Egypt Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) agreement.

The Egypt-Turkey partnership focuses heavily on natural gas and energy infrastructure, areas where Greece is also a major player. Egypt and Turkey recently discussed increasing liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports from Egypt to Turkish terminals. This could compete with Greek ambitions to serve as the primary energy hub for Europe via its own pipelines and LNG facilities.

However, as of early 2026, Egypt continues to balance these ties, hosting trilateral summits with Greece and Cyprus to reassure them that its core partnerships remain unchanged, while simultaneously engaging Ankara on bilateral issues. This multi-vector approach reflects Egypt's preference for flexibility over exclusive partnerships.

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Gaza as a platform for cooperation

The Gaza war created an opportunity for functional coordination between Egypt and Turkey. Both states supported ceasefire efforts, humanitarian access, and post-conflict reconstruction, issuing joint diplomatic statements endorsing international mediation mechanisms and rejecting forced displacement.

Erdogan and Al-Sisi signed a declaration of intent at the Sharm el-Sheikh Summit for Peace held in Egypt in October 2025, which was also attended by U.S. President Donald Trump. As part of efforts to implement the second phase of the cease-fire in Gaza, a Gaza Executive Committee was established, with Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan representing Turkey and Egyptian Intelligence chief Hassan Rashad representing Egypt. Turkey is a core member of the mediation group alongside Egypt, Qatar and the United States, and is prepared to contribute to an International Stabilization Force in Gaza if requested.⁷

In the Joint Declaration of 2nd Meeting of High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council between Egypt and Turkey , on February 4, 2026, "both parties reaffirm their support for President Trump's comprehensive plan to end the war in Gaza, including the commitment of Israel to fully withdraw from Gaza, and underscore the centrality of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2803 in shaping the course of the temporary transitional phase until the Palestinian Authority completes the required reforms, paving the way for its return to the administration of the Gaza Strip.

Both countries further emphasize the imperative of preserving the unity and territorial integrity of the Palestinian territories, stress the need to ensure urgent, safe, sustained and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance to Gaza at scale, and underscore the necessity of opening the Rafah crossing in both directions. They also highlight the urgency of initiating, at the earliest possible time, a comprehensive early recovery and reconstruction process across the entire Gaza Strip, without discrimination. Both countries stand ready to contribute, together with the international community, to recovery and long-term reconstruction of Gaza".⁸

The two states seem to see eye to eye regarding the Palestinian cause, with both calling for a two-state solution and the establishment of a Palestinian state. In the Joint Declaration of 2nd Meeting of High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council

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between Egypt and Turkey, on February 4, 2026, " both countries reiterate the necessity of launching a political process leading to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the lines of 4th of June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital".⁹

Both Cairo and Ankara are confirming their presence in any settlement of that issue, a fact that annoys Israel, which has also expressed its discomfort with Turkish involvement in Gaza's reconstruction.¹⁰

Tukey and Egypt coordinate on the territorial integrity of Somalia and Sudan

Sudan - constitutes a core national security concern for Egypt due to geographic proximity, Nile water security, and regional instability. As Sudan's civil war escalated, Egypt shifted toward a more assertive posture, reportedly deploying Turkish-made Bayraktar Akıncı unmanned combat aerial vehicles near the Sudanese border and, according to open-source reporting, conducting strikes against Rapid Support Forces positions.

Turkey's involvement in Sudan has been more limited and diplomatic, reflecting broader engagement in the Red Sea and Horn of Africa rather than direct military intervention.

Egypt and Türkiye express deep concern over the continuation of conflict in Sudan. Both Parties reiterate their call for a peaceful resolution of the conflict through a humanitarian truce leading to a permanent ceasefire followed by an inclusive national dialogue and an inclusive Sudanese-owned and led political process.³²

In the Joint Declaration of 2nd Meeting of High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council between Egypt and Turkey:" both parties reaffirm their respect and commitment to the sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity of Sudan, as well as their support for Sudanese national institutions and unequivocal rejection to the establishment of any parallel governing structures in Sudan. The two states assert their support to the efforts of regional and international actors including the QUAD, the African Union, the League of Arab States to find a political solution to the conflict and alleviate the suffering of the Sudanese people. Both Parties also stress the need for sustained and unhindered access of humanitarian assistance and for the scaling up

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of humanitarian aid to Sudan and neighboring countries as well as the need for the establishment of safe havens and safe corridors to enhance protection of the Sudanese people and access of humanitarian assistance".¹¹

Somalia - Turkey maintains one of its largest overseas military presences in Somalia, combining security assistance, training, and infrastructure development. Egypt's role is comparatively restrained, focusing on counterterrorism cooperation and multilateral African frameworks.

In the Joint Declaration of 2nd Meeting of High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council between Egypt and Turkey:" on the Horn of Africa, both sides reaffirm their steadfast support for the sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Somalia, and reiterated their rejection of any measures that undermine it. The two sides also express appreciation for their respective efforts in supporting counter terrorism efforts, enhancing stability, and promoting sustainable development in the Federal Republic of Somalia ".¹² The two countries have also backed the government of Somalia and condemned Israel's recognition of the breakaway region of Somaliland.

The economic relations between Egypt and Turkey

On the economic level, the diplomatic thaw in relations has led to an economic leap forward. Turkey is now Egypt's second-largest export destination in the region after Saudi Arabia, reinforcing a deepening economic interdependence—particularly significant amid the current economic crunch.

Bilateral trade has surged from \$5 billion in 2013 to approximately \$9 billion in 2024.¹³ During that period, Turkey's exports totaled \$4.2 billion, while imports stood at \$4.6 billion. Erdogan and Al-Sissi have set a joint target of increasing bilateral trade volume to \$15 billion by 2028 and relevant ministries are carrying out intensive work to achieve that goal.¹⁴

In the Joint Declaration of 2nd Meeting of High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council between Egypt and Turkey:" recognize the significant growth in bilateral trade, which approached nearly USD 9 billion, underscore that this progress reflects the shared political will to advance relations toward a new phase of strategic partnership, and

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confirm the shared objective of increasing bilateral trade volume to USD 15 billion by 2028 through the further promotion of economic and commercial relations.

Both parties reaffirm their commitment to strengthening economic cooperation, with a focus on economic reform, high-productivity sectors, advanced infrastructure, and private sector-led growth, while recognizing significant potential for collaboration in industrial innovation and high-value manufacturing, including but not limited to automotive and machinery manufacturing, construction and infrastructure development, renewable energy, agriculture, agribusiness, and tourism".¹⁵

The military and security cooperation

Military ties between Egypt and Turkey have expanded steadily since 2023, following the full restoration of diplomatic relations and reciprocal presidential visits.¹⁶ The visit to Türkiye by Egyptian Chief of Staff Ahmed Fathi Khalifa in May 2025 marked the beginning of a new phase in military relations.¹⁷

The latest step was a military cooperation agreement signed in Cairo in the presence of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and Erdogan. The deal was signed by Egypt's Minister of Defense, Lieutenant General Abdel Mageed Saqr, and Turkey's Minister of National Defense, Yasar Guler.¹⁸

Defense cooperation between the two countries covers several areas:¹⁹

Joint exercises – the Turkey-Egypt "Sea of Friendship 2025 " naval exercise, held in the Eastern Mediterranean in September 2025 after a 13-year hiatus, stood out as a concrete reflection of growing military cooperation between the two countries.²⁰

The Turkish and Egyptian naval units that took part in naval exercise:

Turkish navy - Frigate TCG Oruçreis, Frigate TCG Gediz, Fast-attack craft TCG İmbat, Fast-attack craft TCG Bora and Submarine TCG *Gür*.

Turkish Airforce – two F-16.

Egypt's navy – Frigate Tahya Misr and ENS Fouad Zekry.

The drills began at Turkey's Aksaz naval base and continued in waters between Cyprus and Egypt.²¹

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The exercise aimed at enhancing combat readiness and exchanging military expertise. In a statement, Egypt's military spokesman said the drills included workshops to align operational concepts and live-fire exercises by special forces from both countries using different weapons.²² Participating units also conducted a range of maritime activities, including helicopter landings on naval vessels, visit-and-search operations on suspected ships, at-sea replenishment, and complex sailing formations. According to the statement, these activities highlighted strong coordination between the two navies and their ability to operate quickly and effectively. Senior commanders from both navies attended the closing phase.²³

Security and intelligence cooperation, particularly through information sharing in counterterrorism efforts and coordination on regional issues such as Libya and Sudan.²⁴ The two sides highlighted the need to combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and they stressed the importance of addressing the issue of foreign terrorist fighters.

Both parties also highlighted the need to tackle the dilemma of terrorism in the Sahel region. In this regard, both countries will continue exerting their efforts to enhance the capacities of the Sahel states against the terrorist groups in coordination with the respective governments.

The Bayraktar Akıncı - one of the most tangible outcomes of normalization has been Egypt's acquisition of Turkish-made Bayraktar Akıncı drones. Egypt has acquired Turkish-made Bayraktar Akıncı drones by mid-2024, marking the first major Turkish defense export to Egypt following normalization. Bayraktar Akıncı drones were displayed bearing the Egyptian flag at the Egypt Defense Expo (EDEX 2025) in Cairo.

Open-source intelligence and satellite imagery indicate that Akıncı systems were deployed to Egypt's Oweinat airbase by mid-2025.²⁵ Bayraktar Akıncı drones have been striking Rapid Support Forces (RSF) targets in Sudan from a covert Egyptian airbase hidden in a vast agricultural project in the country's Western desert. The Turkish Defense Ministry denied any Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) activities in Sudan.²⁶

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The Akıncı deal illustrates a shift toward pragmatic defense cooperation. For Egypt, it reflects diversification of arms suppliers and reduced dependence on traditional Western sources. For Turkey, it confirms the maturation of its defense industry and its capacity to translate diplomatic normalization into strategic exports.

The joint defense manufacturing

The Turkish Defense Minister Yaşar Güler disclosed military deals with Egypt valued at approximately \$350 million:

The ‘TOLGA’ Close-In Weapon System (CIWS) - the package includes the export of the ‘TOLGA’ to Egypt in a deal worth \$130 million. TOLGA is a Turkish airborne electronic warfare system developed by ASELSAN, designed to provide radar jamming and electronic protection for combat aircraft, particularly the F-16 fleet. It reflects Turkey’s broader effort to develop indigenous electronic warfare capabilities and reduce reliance on foreign systems.²⁷

Artillery and small-caliber ammunition – the remaining \$220 million of the package is dedicated to industrial investments within Egypt. The agreement outlines the establishment of a joint venture between Egypt and MKE to build a factory for the production of long-range artillery and small-caliber ammunition. This facility is designed to meet the requirements of the Egyptian Armed Forces and facilitate exports to regional markets.²⁸

A primary objective is the construction of a 155mm long-range artillery ammunition factory. In the context of current global supply chain pressures and the high consumption rates of artillery in modern conventional conflicts, localizing the production of 155mm shells provides Egypt with a critical strategic advantage and greater operational self-sufficiency.²⁹

The agreement also includes the establishment of production lines for 7.62mm and 12.7mm small arms ammunition. These facilities will not only supply the Egyptian Armed Forces but will also serve as a source for regional exports. By shifting from a traditional buyer-seller relationship to one defined by technology transfer and joint

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manufacturing, Turkey and Egypt are creating a more resilient defense industrial base that is less susceptible to external diplomatic pressures or logistics disruptions.³⁰

The ‘Hamza’ drones - Major General Mokhtar Abdel Latif, Chairman of the Arab Organization for Industrialization (AOI), revealed a strategic partnership with Turkish firms to produce ‘Hamza’ drones in Egypt. Abdel Latif emphasized that the agreement includes an expedited timeline for joint production, noting a full consensus between Cairo and Ankara to accelerate cooperation in this vital sector to bolster mutual defense capabilities and reflect the deepening of bilateral ties.³¹

Hamza-3 - Egypt’s state-owned Arab Organization for Industrialization (AOI) unveiled its Hamza-3 suicide drone at World Defense Show in Saudi Arabia. The Hamza-3 is the latest evolution of the Hamza series, with an extended range of 1,800 km, equipped with cameras and anti-jamming systems, according to the company. It identifies moving targets and has swarming capabilities.³² Some subsystems of the Hamza-3 were imported from China, but the firm expects to localize full production in Egypt.

Abdel Latif announced that the AOI has already secured a contract with an African nation to export 20 ‘Hamza’ drones—a milestone reflecting growing international confidence in the joint Egyptian-Turkish industrial capacity.

The Hamza-2 - on December 1, 2025, Egypt’s Arab Organization for Industrialization signed co-production and manufacturing agreements at EDEX 2025 covering the Hamza-2 armed drone (with China's Norinco), aviation maintenance activities, and new industrial investments with Chinese and Emirati partners.

The Hamza-2 is reportedly based on the Chinese ASN-209 tactical drone that Egypt has assembled for more than a decade. The ASN-209 is a medium altitude, medium endurance system designed for aerial reconnaissance, battlefield surveillance, target location, damage assessment, and artillery fire correction under day and night conditions. The complete system consists of a drone, an avionics suite, mission payloads, a data link, a ground control station, support systems, and launch and recovery equipment.³³

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The Hamza-1 - Egypt and Türkiye signed an agreement in August 2025 to jointly produce vertical takeoff and landing drone - Hamza-1. Under the deal, the two sides will co-produce Havelsan's vertical take-off and landing drone (VTOL-UAV) at Egypt's Kader Factory for Developed Industries, which is overseen by the AOI. Hamza-1 was unveiled for the first time at the EDEX 2025 Egypt Defense Fair.³⁴

Unmanned ground vehicles - the Aqrab, an unmanned ground vehicle, was developed as a 6x6 platform capable of carrying a remote-controlled weapon system. With these features, it represents a significant innovation, offering a type of solution that did not previously exist in Egypt. The platform produced in Egypt through cooperation between Havelsan and the Arab Organization for Industrialization (AOI).

Aqrab unmanned platform was unveiled for the first time at the EDEX 2025 Egypt Defense Fair. Sevket Unal, vice president of international business development and marketing at Havelsan, said that after the fair, field demonstrations would be conducted for end users to collect feedback, and based on that input, the vehicle would be further developed and made ready for duty.³⁵

Turkey's fifth-generation stealth fighter jet program, KAAN - Turkey's KAAN program, led by Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI), aims to produce a twin-engine, all-weather fifth-generation fighter jet equipped with advanced stealth capabilities, super cruise, sensor fusion, and network-centric features. The KAAN made its maiden flight in 2023 and scheduled to start delivery to the Turkish Air Force between 2030 and 2033.³⁶

Egypt is actively moving to join Turkey's KAAN program. Formal agreements were expected by late 2025, following inspections of the KAAN prototype by Egyptian officials. Egypt is expected to become a co-producer of the aircraft, with potential for local assembly and component manufacturing.³⁷

Militarily, Cairo seeks to modernize its air force. Egypt's current fleet includes US-made F-16s, French Rafales, and Russian MiG-29s, but reliance on these suppliers has proven limiting. In particular, US arms sales often come with political strings connected to Egypt's human rights record while Russian deals face increasing sanctions risks since the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. By partnering with Turkey, Cairo diversifies its sources, gaining access to cutting-edge stealth technology without

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Western oversight. This aligns with Sisi's push for self-reliance in defense manufacturing, potentially allowing local production of KAAN components and reducing import dependencies.

Summary

Egypt and Turkey are keen to strengthen ties because they face similar challenges, including shifting regional power balances. The vacuum left by Iran following the collapse of the "Axis of resistance" and the "Shiite Crescent" is the defining geopolitical event of the decade. This collapse is not merely military; it represents the disintegration of a regional architecture built by Iran over 40 years.

But the vacuum Iran left has not remained empty; it is rapidly being filled by a Sunni-axis. The growing partnership aims to restore Egyptian-Turkish influence by reshaping regional power balances, particularly amid concerns over expanding Israeli influence, which threatens the interests of both countries.

The rapprochement between Egypt and Turkey, which culminated in a historic summit in Cairo on February 4, 2026, marks a transition from a decade of ideological rivalry to "political realism."

Egypt-Turkey relations have entered a new phase characterized by pragmatic engagement rather than ideological reconciliation. Normalization has produced concrete outcomes—diplomatic coordination on Gaza, economic exchanges, and defense cooperation—while leaving core disputes unresolved. But the relationship remains transactional, contingent, and reversible.

Notes

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