The High-Stakes Geopolitical Chess Match Between Ankara and Cairo's Elites and the Existential Threats for Cairo's Secular Governing Elite

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The Eastern Mediterranean is witnessing a high-stakes geopolitical drama where strategic cooperation and deep-seated rivalries tightly coexist. As Turkish naval units prepare to dock in Alexandria for the Sea of Friendship 2026 joint naval exercises, scheduled from November 4 to 9, 2026, the spectacle underscores a profound paradox.[1]

Beneath the facade of renewed diplomatic handshakes lies a complex, dual-track strategy by Ankara aimed at securing its Neo-Ottoman regional ambitions in North Africa and in the Eastern Mediterranean. It is a strategy that the Egyptian governing elite views as a potential Pandora's box for its own existence.

Ankara's approach to the land of the Pharaohs operates on two distinct, simultaneous tracks consisting of hard power containment and soft power proselytization of the masses. On the geopolitical front, Turkey's extensive military footprint in western Libya, combined with its expanding influence toward the eastern part as well, places a formidable Turkish security apparatus directly on Egypt's western border and all with what applies. Most concerning for Cairo is the recent construction of a massive new airbase built by Turkish companies in eastern Libya's Jaghbub Oasis.[2]

Located just 23 kilometers from the Egyptian border, this strategic facility features a major runway designed to project air and logistical capabilities right onto Egypt's doorstep but also it enhances Ankara's Intelligence and subverting capabilities inside Egypt.[3] This aggressive border encirclement directly challenges Cairo's traditional sphere of influence in North Africa and if it remains uncheck it might have dire consequences for Cairo's Secular governing legacy in the long term.

Concurrently, Turkey has deployed a multi-billion-dollar soft power offensive inside Egypt itself. Ankara has heavily invested upwards of five billion dollars into Egyptian commercial infrastructure and massive defensive projects. While these investments provide tangible economic benefits, they also double as a Trojan horse. The long-term concern is that Turkey will leverage this growing domestic footprint to subtly shift the internal balance of power, quietly strengthening

the societal and bureaucratic role of the Muslim Brotherhood to counter Egypt's secular governing elite power on the land of Pharaohs.

Rumors already persist within regional intelligence circles that Muslim Brotherhood sympathizers retain considerable quiet strength within the Egyptian Foreign Ministry's bureaucratic apparatus and the judicial system. Greek analysts point to recent legal flashpoints, such as the controversial judicial maneuvers aimed at nationalizing the properties and artifacts of the Greek Orthodox Monastery of St. Catherine in Sinai, as potential evidence of what these invisible bureaucratic pressures suggest. This internal vulnerability is something that figures like Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan and the Turkish foreign policy apparatus are widely expected to further exploit to Turkey's long-term advantage against its regional enemies, namely Greece, Cyprus, and Israel.

The upcoming Sea of Friendship drills, which focus on surface warfare, anti-submarine operations, and air defense, mark the stabilization of defense ties after a long hiatus following the 2013 ouster of the Muslim Brotherhood government of President Morsi. Yet, the most critical maneuvering is happening entirely off the radar. Coinciding with the naval exercises, Ankara is aggressively offering Cairo a bilateral Maritime Boundary Delimitation Agreement. The incentive is massive, as Turkey claims that if Egypt abandons its current alignment and signs a Libyan-style memorandum with Ankara, Cairo stands to gain over fifteen thousand square kilometers of additional maritime jurisdiction carved out of what Greece and Cyprus claim as their Exclusive Economic Zones.

This offer exposes the core dilemmas of the relationship. While Turkey's primary objective is to annul the 2020 Greece-Egypt border EEZ agreement and expand the Turkish continental shelf touching that of Libya's, Egypt faces the dilemma of gaining immediate maritime territory at the expense of Greece but at the cost of breaking international legal precedents and treaties, resulting in a massive loss of European funds and trust in its foreign policy image.[6] Furthermore, Ankara seeks to isolate Greece and Cyprus while disrupting the trilateral strategic alliance with Jerusalem.[3] By accepting, Cairo would risk alienating key European Union partners and destabilizing its relations with Israel.[6]

Finally, Turkey wants to gain veto power over East-Med natural gas reserves and transit corridors to Southern Europe, leaving Egypt with the long-term risk of becoming logistically dependent on Ankara for regional energy distribution, thus becoming another pro-Turkish vilayet in a way for the land of Anatolia.[6]

For Ankara, drawing Egypt into its maritime orbit yields an ultimate double-dividend. It eliminates the geopolitical encirclement Turkey feels from the Athens-Nicosia-Jerusalem axis, while economically and logistically curtailing Israel's geopolitical, economic, and logistical connectivity to Europe.[3]

As the Egyptian military leadership watches Turkish warships enter the port of Alexandria, they are fully aware of the stakes. Cairo must walk an exceptionally thin tightrope: from the one side secure the immediate financial and defense rewards of normalization, while simultaneously ensuring that Ankara's Pandora's box of ideological subversion, border bases, and maritime

revisionism remains firmly shut. This is something that looks quite difficult to achieve; thus, Cairo soon will have to decide on which side of the opposing line it will have to stand.

Footnotes

[1] "Türkiye, Egypt to Hold Naval Drills Amid Eastern Mediterranean Tensions." *Asharq Al-Awsat*, October 28, 2026.
[2] "Nova Exclusive: Khalifa Haftar's base built by Turkish companies is alarming Egypt." *Agenzia Nova*, October 28, 2026.
[3] Nedos, Vassilis. "Ankara's Cairo charm offensive faces headwinds." *Kathimerini English Edition*, October 30, 2026.
"#Daily_Brief: Türkiye, Egypt to hold joint naval exercise in Alexandria amid warming defense ties." *Addis Standard*, October 29, 2026.
"Türkiye ready to sign maritime jurisdiction agreement with Egypt: National Defense Ministry." *Anadolu Agency*, October 28, 2026.
[6] Akin, Ezgi. "After EU rebuff, how Turkey is courting Egypt for maritime deal." *Al-Monitor*, October 31, 2026.