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Turkish - Egyptian Relations under Erdoğan in the Light of the Regional Security Complexes Theory

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ABSTRACT

AKP's rise to power in Turkey brought economic development and the re-examination of the country's self-perception. Erdoğan's foreign policy aimed to develop relations with Middle Eastern countries so that Turkey could become the region's leader. This article focuses on Turkey's relations with Egypt within the Regional Security Complexes Theory framework. It argues that the rise of Turkey's influence and power led to new alignments between the region's countries. Following the coup led by General el-Sisi, Egypt became hostile to Ankara and sought allies to help it counterbalance Turkey. Thus, it began cooperating with Greece and Cyprus, states that do not belong to the Middle Eastern RSC. This new alignment then slowed down the process of normalisation of ties between Cairo and Ankara, which became possible only after both countries experienced economic problems, and the regional climate changed after the blockade of Qatar ended.

Introduction

In the 21st century, Turkey's domestic and foreign policy has undergone significant changes due to social, political and economic transformation brought about by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) that came to power in 2002. Turkey's activism in the Levant and broader Middle Eastern region brought it to a collision course with the interests of Egypt, the most populous Arab country. Following a promising development during the presidency of Mohamed Morsi, the relations between Turkey and Egypt broke down in 2013 after a coup led by Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. In 2021, meetings were held between the two countries' Foreign Ministries officials, but there was little progress in the process of normalisation of relations. During the 2022 World Cup opening ceremony in Qatar, el-Sisi and Erdoğan met and shook hands (Ertan, 2022). Still, only after seven additional months were the diplomatic ties thoroughly restored. Both Turkey and Egypt currently suffer from economic problems (Financial Times, 2023), and a complete restoration of friendly relations would facilitate bilateral trade and economic cooperation to the benefit of both Cairo and Ankara. So why does the rapprochement process between Turkey and Egypt takes so long? Aside from conflicting interests in the Eastern Mediterranean region and perhaps personal animosity between Erdoğan and el-Sisi, what else complicates the normalisation process? To answer this question, we will turn to the Regional Security Complexes Theory (RSCT), whose authors had some relevant ideas about Turkey's potential role in the Middle Eastern (and, by extension, the Eastern Mediterranean) region under certain conditions.

Theoretical Framework

The RSCT presumes that since most threats travel more easily over short distances, security interdependence is usually patterned into regionally-based clusters: security complexes. It means that the processes of securitisation (and the degree of security interdependence) are more intense inside such a regional security complex (RSC) than they are between actors inside the RSC and outside of it (Buzan and Weaver, 2003: 4). In other words, they are defined by "*durable patterns of amity and enmity taking the form of sub-global, geographically coherent patterns of security interdependence*" (Buzan and Weaver, 2003: 45).

According to the RSCT, the international system is structured around a power spectrum consisting of superpowers, great powers, and regional powers. *Superpowers* have the most far-reaching military, political and economic capabilities. Their actions and policies have a global reach. The United States is currently the only superpower. *Great powers* have neither the global reach nor capabilities of superpowers. Yet, they are treated in the calculations of other major powers as if it has the economic, military, and political potential to become a superpower in the short or medium term. Russia, China, Japan, or the EU can be considered great powers. *Regional powers* have a considerable reach on the regional level but minimal capabilities at the global level. In other words, their power and ambition are limited to the RSC they belong to. Examples of regional powers are India and Brazil (Buzan and Weaver, 2003: 34-36).

To classify a great power as an international, its material (military and economic) capabilities are considered, as well as whether it is formally recognised as such by the other leading international actors and how it is incorporated into their strategies and behaviours (Buzan and Weaver, 2003: 32). Moreover, great powers think of themselves as more than regional powers and can operate in more than one region (Buzan and Weaver, 2003: 35). In other words, we must consider the state's capacities, perceptions of its peers, and self-perception.

The Regional Security Complex Theory categorises Turkey as an insulator: "*a location occupied by one or more units where larger regional security dynamics stand back-to-back*" (Buzan and Weaver, 2003: 41). Turkey acts as an insulator between the Middle Eastern, European, and post-Soviet RSCs. Buzan & Waever (2003: 394-395), however, note that Turkey challenges the concept of insulators as passive states that only absorb energies from the surrounding RSCs. Turkey is very active in the neighbouring regions, yet the authors insist that it still is an insulator because it does not bring different RSCs together into one strategic arena. The categorisation of Turkey as an insulator may be questioned if actors from different RSCs began strategically cooperating, and as a result, the boundaries of the complexes would become thin. Such a development would be possible if Turkey became a great power, and thus, it would be analysed as a pole in some RSC, not an insulator between RSCs. However, they believe that Turkey will remain an insulator in the foreseeable future.

This article argues that in the 21st century, Turkey changed its foreign policy doctrine, expanded its power projection capabilities, and became intensely involved in the Middle Eastern region, which led to a dramatic change in the power and security dynamics in it and had a significant impact on Turkey's relations with Egypt. This argument is supported by the analysis of Turkey's relations with Egypt in political, military, and economic sectors of security analysis as defined by the Copenhagen School. Environmental and societal sectors are skipped since there are very few interactions between Turkey and Egypt within them.

Turkey under Erdoğan

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk founded modern Turkey as a secular republic, and the Turkish Army, as a guardian of this vision, intervened in Turkish politics when Islamist politicians threatened the secular character of the state. Despite this, political Islam gradually established itself as an essential force in the political system (Eligür, 2010: 76-77), culminating in the electoral victory of Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party in 2002. During its first term, many reforms were adopted – from civil-military relations to minority rights, and the country enjoyed economic growth. Thanks to conventional tools, support from foreign powers and then under a more explicit electoral mandate and populist strategies, AKP took over crucial institutions from the secularist opposition by 2011 (Castaldo, 2018: 478). As Erdoğan intensified the centralisation of power in his hands, the economy experienced a downturn due to the world financial crisis. Public discontent manifested in the May 2013 Gezi Park protests that were violently suppressed. Repression of AKP's opponents intensified: owners of media houses, activists and journalists were intimidated, fired, or imprisoned. After the December 2013 corruption scandal, AKP's alliance with the religious movement of Fethullah Gülen collapsed, and members of the group became targets of persecution. After a Gülenist faction of the Turkish Armed Forces unsuccessfully attempted a coup on July 15 2016, the Turkish government escalated the purge of the military, police, administration, judiciary and education to unprecedented levels (Castaldo, 2018: 479-487).

In April 2017, constitutional amendments were approved in a referendum that changed the Turkish political system to a presidential one. In the snap presidential and parliamentary elections held in June 2018, Erdoğan was elected President for the second term, and AKP maintained the majority in the Parliament thanks to the alliance with the nationalist party MHP (Castaldo, 2018: 481).

New foreign policy doctrines

Following Kemalist secular and pro-Western ideology that was the dominant force in Turkish politics until the 1990s, Turkey developed relations with the West while staying distinct from the Middle Eastern states. In the Kemalist view, Muslim countries represented backwardness and threat to modern, secular and Westernised Turkey (Pehlevan, 2019: 16-17).

AKP's coming to power dramatically changed the understanding and implementation of Turkish foreign policy. One of the prominent architects of this transformation is Ahmet Davutoğlu, who served as a foreign policy advisor under prime minister Erdoğan between 2002 and 2009 and then as a foreign minister until August 2014 (Arkan and Kınacıoğlu, 2016). Turkey became eager to play a significant role in the mediation of conflicts and contribute to peace and stability in its near abroad as a part of the "zero problems with neighbours" principle (Tüfekçi, 2017: 77). In his book *Strategic Depth*, Davutoğlu points to the legacies and continuities cognitively present in the fabric of Turkish society, as well as the societies of neighbouring communities. He believes that Turkish society needs a multi-dimensional transformation to equip it with profound knowledge and awareness of history. Turkey must remember, re-interpret, and re-imagine its history and geography to see the strategic depth and be able to shape the future of its civilisation and fulfil its responsibility towards the former elements of its civilisation. According to Davutoğlu, Turkey is geographically located in the centre of various geopolitical areas of influence and historically at the epicentre of historical events. The idea of having impact and responsibility for the surrounding regions lies in Turkey's historical depth, while the geographical depth is based on the geographical continuity of links between various cities within and in the proximity of present-day Turkey that were artificially severed by the modern state borders. Discovering Turkey's historical and geographical depth changes the perception of its position in the international system – it is no longer a wing country or a bridge between the East and the West, but a central country that enjoys a broad area of influence and has the capability to simultaneously manoeuvre in several regions (Tüfekçi, 2017: 87-90). The "Strategic Depth" is

conceptualised through four principles: a safe neighbourhood based on a shared understanding of security; pro-active, high-level political dialogue with all neighbours; fostering regional economic interdependence; and promoting multi-cultural, multi-sectarian peace and harmony. In practice, this meant increasing international humanitarian assistance by Turkey; intensifying public diplomacy by governmental institutions such as Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA), The Turkish Red Crescent (*Kızılay*), or Disaster and *Emergency Management Authority (AFAD)*; and opening new embassies and increasing diplomatic representation abroad. The ultimate goal of this proactive foreign policy was to transform Turkey from a peripheral actor in world politics into a central one (Tüfekçi, 2017: 148-153).

Apart from Davutoğlu's doctrine, expansionist visions of Turkey's foreign policy grew in importance in the later years of the AKP rule. Adnan Tanrıverdi, a former Brigadier-General expelled from the Turkish Army for being an Islamist and founder of a private military company SADAT, promoted a pan-Islamist, anti-Israel and anti-Western foreign policy ideas from the position of President Erdoğan's chief military advisor he obtained after the July 2016 coup attempt. He called for military cooperation between Muslim states, as well as the formation of a union of Islamic countries with a constitution based on Shariah law (Middle East Media Research Institute, 2020).

The second doctrine, *Mavi Vatan* ("Blue Homeland"), was formulated by former rear admiral Ramazan Cem Gürdeniz and promoted by the former navy's chief of staff, Cihat Yayci. It claims that Turkey's maritime jurisdiction in the Black, Mediterranean and Aegean seas should be much larger than it is now. In recent years, Erdoğan's government has adopted this doctrine to justify its claims on the natural gas deposits in the Eastern Mediterranean at the expense of Greece and Cyprus. Although both Gürdeniz and Yayci are currently retired, Turkey's policy in the Eastern Mediterranean is shaped by the *Mavi Vatan* vision (Gingeras, 2020).

Overview of Turkey's Relations with Egypt

Political Sector

Initially, Turkey's relations with Egypt gradually developed after AKP came to power. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak visited Turkey in 2007 and 2009, and the two countries cooperated in the fields of energy and security (Middle East Monitor, 2014).

The Arab Spring represents a milestone in Turco-Egyptian relations. After the mass demonstrations began in January 2011, Erdoğan called for Mubarak to step down. Egyptian opposition was led by the Muslim Brotherhood, and Turkey hoped that should it oust Mubarak; Egypt would become Turkey's ally and help it spread its influence into more remote parts of the Middle East. Although Turkish-Egyptian relations were improving under Mubarak, it was not fast enough and therefore, Turkey opted to support the regime change (Stein, 2015: 38-40).

At first, it seemed that the Turkish strategy worked. Mubarak resigned on February 11 2011, and Turkish foreign minister Gül, the first foreign leader, visited Egypt after Mubarak's fall. In September, Erdoğan visited Egypt and was greeted by cheering (Stein, 2015: 40-41). In the parliamentary elections, the Muslim Brotherhood-linked Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) emerged victorious, and its leader, Mohammed Morsi, was elected President in June 2012. But large segments of the Egyptian public rejected the Brotherhood's ideology, as well as Turkish meddling in the country's internal affairs. Soon, demonstrations against Morsi erupted, and on July 03 2013, a coup led by General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi overthrew Morsi. The new regime brutally suppressed protests organised by the Brotherhood, and many of its members fled to Turkey. Following the coup, Turkish-Egyptian relations nosedived, and the two countries began competing for regional influence (Stein, 2015: 41-47).

Another flashpoint of Turco-Egyptian relations is Libya, where the two countries supported the opposing sides of the conflict. Turkey backed the Government of National Accord (GNA) mainly because after the 2015 electoral defeat, Erdoğan allied himself with ultranationalist groups that wanted to pursue aggressive foreign policy in the region. In the Eastern Mediterranean, this is embodied by the *Mavi Vatan* doctrine that envisages Turkey's jurisdiction over large areas in the Eastern Mediterranean. In November 2019, Turkey signed a Memorandum on the delimitation of the maritime jurisdiction areas in the Mediterranean with the GNA that legitimises Turkey's claims. This would allow Turkey to exploit the Eastern Mediterranean's hydrocarbon resources and cut the EastMed pipeline's planned route.

Moreover, Turkey has commercial interests in Libya, ambitions in Africa and ties with Muslim Brotherhood, participates in GNA and controls several militias (Harchaoui, 2020). Egypt backed the Tobruk-based House of Representatives (HoR) and its Libyan National Army (LNA) because it wanted to protect its borders from smuggling, human trafficking and the flow of jihadists; it considers the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamist militias in Libya to be terrorist organisations; wishes to restore the mutual trade and oil import from Libya that plummeted sharply after Qadhafi's downfall (Westenberger, 2019). Egypt became increasingly worried about Turkey's growing involvement in Libya but ultimately did not pursue military action. Instead, it chose to develop ties with Libyan tribes and militias affiliated with LNA (Horton, 2020).

In January 2021, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt ended the de facto blockade of Qatar that has been in place since June 2017 due to its support to the Muslim Brotherhood, ties with Iran, and propaganda activities of the state-owned AlJazeera media network. At this point, the Brotherhood lost a considerable portion of its influence in the region and was no longer viewed as a threat by the other Arab states (Stratfor, 2021). This allowed the gradual normalisation of relations between Cairo and Ankara. In May and September 2021, two rounds of negotiations were held (Reuters, 2021); Turkey offered to mediate the dispute between Egypt and Ethiopia regarding the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (Tok, 2021), and Turkish authorities requested Egyptian opposition media based in the country to soften their criticism of the Sisi regime (Soylu, 2021). In May 2022, Turkey's then-Finance Minister Nebati visited Egypt to attend a meeting of the Islamic Development Bank, making it the first ministerial-level visit of the country since 2013 (Daily Sabah, 2022). In November 2022, Turkish President Erdoğan met with Sisi on the sidelines of the football World Cup opening ceremony in Qatar (AlJazeera, 2022). This process of rapprochement was facilitated by the general climate of warming ties in the Middle Eastern region – not only did the blockade of Qatar end, but Turkey was able to normalise relations with the United Arab Emirates and mend ties with Saudi Arabia, Egypt's allies, and financial backers (Baycar, 2022; AlJazeera, 2022). The devastating February 2023 earthquake that hit Turkey and Syria led to a wave of solidarity – Turkey's former opponents, including Egypt, rushed to provide material and financial aid and rescue personnel. At the end of February, Egyptian Foreign Minister Shoukri visited Turkey, and a month later, its Turkish counterpart paid a visit to Cairo (Maher, 2023). Sisi congratulated Erdoğan after his victory in the May 2023 Presidential Elections, and the two leaders agreed on upgrading diplomatic relations and exchanging ambassadors (The Arab Republic of Egypt Presidency, 2023). This took place in early July, and thus the relations between Cairo and Ankara finally continued at the highest diplomatic level (Uras, 2023).

Military Sector

Turkish-Egyptian relations in the military sector have never been particularly intense, and AKP's rise to power did not change much. In 2009, the first Turkish-Egyptian naval exercise, the *Sea of Friendship*, took place (Bosphorus Naval News, 2009). After Mubarak's regime fell, Turkey and Egypt became closer than ever before, but this did not manifest in the military sector. Joint naval exercises occurred in 2011 and 2012 (Elbakyan, 2016). Morsi's overthrow ended any military

cooperation between Turkey and Egypt, and instead, Egypt became concerned about Turkey's expansion into areas that Egypt considers its zone of influence. In 2017, Turkey and Sudan signed a contract allowing Turkey to build a naval base on Suakin Island in the Red Sea. Egypt has territorial and water disputes with Sudan, so it negatively perceived the Sudanese alignment with Turkey (Karasik and Cafiero, 2018). The overthrow of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir in April 2019 put these plans on hold (Gurbuz, 2019).

Egypt and Turkey competed for influence in Libya, where Turkey initially backed the GNA by providing diplomatic support and supplying weapons. On November 27 2019, Turkey and the GNA signed a memorandum on security and military cooperation that committed Turkey to defend the Tripoli government threatened by LNA's offensive (Harchaoui, 2020). Since January 2020, Turkey sent Libya dozens of military advisors and thousands of mercenaries from Syrian rebel groups under Turkey's control and deployed UCAVs. Turkish military support turned the tide in the Libyan Civil War: GNA stopped Haftar's push towards Tripoli, and by the end of March 2020, it launched a counterattack that recaptured the coastline between Tripoli and Tunisian border, as well as the strategic Al-Watiya airbase in May (Ramani, 2020).

Egypt has provided Haftar with political support and weapons but has not intervened directly. For the Egyptians, Haftar's territory serves as a buffer zone between the GNA (and the Muslim Brotherhood) and Egypt. As GNA pushed eastwards, Egypt declared the cities of Sirte and Jufra in central Libya a "red line". On July 20, the Egyptian Parliament approved the deployment of troops in Libya should it be required to protect the country's security, but this did not occur as the ceasefire was declared later in August (Horton, 2020).

Turkey's assertive policy in the Eastern Mediterranean that aims to exploit the large deposits of natural gas has led to military cooperation between Egypt, Greece and Cyprus. Since 2015, the three countries have conducted at least one naval and air force exercise yearly (Shay, 2019).

Economic Sector

AKP's coming to power intensified economic relations between Turkey and Egypt. In 2005, the two countries signed FTA. The mutual trade blossomed: while in 2005, it accounted only for 301 million USD, in 2013, it reached 5 billion USD (Cagaptay and Sievers, 2015). In March 2012, Turkey and Egypt signed an agreement to establish the "Roll/on – Roll/off" (RO-RO) maritime transportation system. Turkish ships would bring containers to the Egyptian ports on the Mediterranean Sea, and then they would be transported by land to Egyptian ports on the Red Sea. From there, other Turkish ships would carry them to different destinations (Alsahary, 2014).

In September 2012, Mohammed Morsi, the new President of Egypt, visited Turkey and negotiated a 2 billion USD loan to stabilise the currency, develop financial institutions, and encourage the entry of Turkish companies into Egypt and the export of Egyptian goods into Turkey (Elbakyan, 2016). His downfall temporarily had a negative effect on Turco-Egyptian relations in the economic sector as the regime of General Sisi refused to prolong the RO-RO agreement, but FTA remained in place (Adly, 2022). The bilateral trade dropped to 4,1 billion USD in 2016, but then it grew again and reached 7,7 billion USD in 2022 (State Information Service, 2023).

In the 21st century, the energy sector became an increasingly important factor in the relations between Egypt and Turkey due to the discoveries of substantial volumes of natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean (Winrow, 2018). In 2003, Egypt and Cyprus signed a treaty delineating the exclusive economic zone (EEZ). According to Turkey, however, the treaty violates its continental shelf. Moreover, Turkey does not recognise Cyprus's sovereignty over the entire island but only over the territory not governed by the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. In the following years, the

Cypriots began the exploitation of natural gas deposits in the area, while Turkey signed an EEZ agreement with Northern Cyprus in 2011 and began its own exploration of the deposits (Ayđın, 2018).

In January 2019, Egypt, Jordan, Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Cyprus, Greece and Italy established the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) to promote regional cooperation in the energy sector. In January 2020, Greece, Cyprus and Israel signed an agreement to construct the *EastMed* pipeline to connect the EU with natural gas deposits in the Eastern Mediterranean and bypass Turkey (Stanicek, 2020: 2-3). However, in November 2019, Turkey signed a Memorandum on the delimitation of the maritime jurisdiction areas in the Mediterranean with the Libyan GNA, according to which Turkish EEZ would be significantly expanded, thus interrupting the planned pipeline's route. On May 11 2020, foreign ministers of Greece, Cyprus, and Egypt, together with the UAE and France, issued a joint statement condemning the memorandum. During the summer of 2020, Turkey continued drilling activities in the disputed waters off the coast of Cyprus. As a result, Egypt and Greece grew even closer, and in early August 2020, the two countries signed an agreement to demarcate maritime borders that ignored the maritime deal between Turkey and GNA (Stanicek, 2020: 5-6).

Turkey's relations with Greece and Cyprus are historically hostile, and in the second decade of the 21st century, the relations with most of the Levantine countries deteriorated rapidly, resulting in its exclusion from regional cooperation initiatives in the energy sector. Ankara, therefore, chose to pursue a unilateral and assertive policy that ultimately led to the formation of two blocs of countries in the Eastern Mediterranean: one consisting of Turkey (and the TRNC), the other comprising Greece, Cyprus, and Egypt.

The Emergence of the Greco-Cypriot-Egyptian Bloc in the Eastern Mediterranean

As Turkey began to pursue more and more assertive policy in the Mediterranean Sea, Egypt found itself in the same boat with two other regional rivals of Turkey: Greece and Cyprus. Since 2014, the three countries' leaders began to meet to discuss various regional issues, such as energy security, natural gas exploitation, maritime borders, illegal migration, terrorism, economic cooperation, and tourism. So far, nine of these trilateral summits have taken place: the first one in November 2014 and the most recent one in October 2021 (Al-Monitor, 2021). On May 11 2020, the Foreign Ministers of Egypt, Greece, Cyprus, the United Arab Emirates and France agreed on the formation of an alliance that would focus on confronting Turkey's actions in the Eastern Mediterranean – namely the drilling and exploration operations in disputed waters, violations of Greek air space and intervention in Libya (Mikhail, 2020).

In October 2022, Turkey and the Libyan Tripoli government signed another Memorandum of Understanding, this time on oil and gas exploration in Libya's soil and territorial waters. This prompted condemnation from both Greece and Egypt, whose foreign ministers met to discuss the issue (France24, 2022).

The cooperation between Egypt, Greece and the Republic of Cyprus also expanded the military sector. In 2015, Greek and Cypriot air forces took part in the Egyptian *Horus 2015* exercise, and Egyptian Air Force and Navy participated in the *Medusa 2015* exercise, organised by Greece. In the following years, more Greek-Egyptian joint naval and aerial exercises took place: *Medusa 2016* and *Medusa 2017* (Shay, 2017). Since 2018, Cyprus has joined the military cooperation with the two countries by participating in the series of joint military exercises *Medusa 6*, *Medusa 7* (2018), *Medusa 8*, *Medusa 9* (2019) (Farouk, 2019), *Medusa 10*, *Medusa 11* (2021) and *Medusa 12* (2022)(Liam, 2022). Special forces from Greece, Cyprus, Egypt and other countries also began joint

exercises, *Hercules 2021* and *Hercules 2022* (Obeid, 2022), while Egyptian and Greek air forces conducted joint exercise MENA-II in December 2022 (Mohamed, 2022).

In April 2021, Egypt, Greece and Cyprus signed a trilateral treaty on the military cooperation programme (Al-Monitor, 2021). In June, the Defense Ministers of the three countries met to discuss military cooperation to overcome shared security challenges and threats (Saied, 2022). Despite numerous meetings and joint military exercises, Ankara remained largely undeterred by the collaboration between Greece, Egypt and Cyprus and continues to pursue its interests in Libya and Eastern Mediterranean.

The Regional Security Complexes Theory and the "New Turkey"

The RSCT considers Turkey an insulator between European, Middle Eastern, and Post-Soviet regional security complexes. Its authors, however, noted already in 2003 that Turkey was not a typical, passive insulator like Afghanistan or Mongolia but played an active role in its surroundings. Yet they insist that for Turkey not to be considered an insulator, it would need to bring together actors from different RSCs into one strategic area. Such development would be possible if Turkey became a great power and these actors from different RSCs would cooperate to counterbalance it.

According to Buzan and Waever (2003: 32), to classify a state as a great power, we must assess its capabilities, how it is perceived by other states and how it perceives itself. Turkey is one of the biggest countries in the Middle East; it has the second-largest army in NATO and a strategic geographical position. Therefore, it has always enjoyed a degree of respect from both Western and non-Western countries.

AKP's coming to power in 2002 brought not only changes in foreign and security policies but also substantial economic growth that lasted until 2018, expansion of its defence industry, modernisation of the military, and development of its power projection capabilities (most recently reinforced by the amphibious assault ship and drone carrier TCG Anadolu (Bekdil, 2023)). Thanks to its economic tools, as well as historical, religious, and cultural ties ("soft power"), Turkey was able to gain considerable influence in Arab countries, primarily in the Levant region. Given Turkey's deep involvement in the Syrian Civil War, Russia, the U.S., and other external actors in this conflict were forced to acknowledge its interests. In Libya, Turkey became the main backer of the GNA, and therefore, it has gained a voice in any discussions regarding the country's future. Thanks to its geographical position and military capabilities, Turkey could press claims regarding the hydrocarbon deposits in the Eastern Mediterranean. All of this was possible because, under AKP, Turkey had undergone a process of self-reassessment. The doctrines of *Strategic Depth* and *Blue Homeland*, as well as pan-Islamist ideas adopted under Erdoğan, have a common goal: to reinstate Turkey to its rightful position as a great power.

It may be too soon to designate Turkey as a great power – especially as its economy has been suffering from high inflation and depreciation of currency for more than four years, while the power of the Muslim Brotherhood (one of the main tools of influence in the Middle Eastern region) waned. But on the other hand, Turkey's activism in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean provoked a reaction from actors originating in different regional security complexes, as the authors of RSCT predicted in case Turkey becomes a great power. While they stated cooperation between Syria, Greece and Russia as an example (Buzan and Weaver, 2003: 395), in reality, it was Egypt (Middle Eastern RSC), Greece and the Republic of Cyprus (European RSC) that formed an informal anti-Turkish alliance that will most likely continue to exist in some form even after Ankara normalises relations with Cairo.

While Turkey's current behaviour in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean is less belligerent due to the economic downturn, and the Muslim Brotherhood now plays a marginal role in its soft power, Ankara is still very active in these regions – it maintains a military presence in Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Northern Cyprus, strong economic ties with Israel, and actively develops relations with Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE (ironically enabled by the decline of the Muslim Brotherhood). Thus, while Turkey's status as a great power is debatable, it could be argued that it became one of the poles of the Middle Eastern RSC, and its policies blurred the boundaries between the Middle Eastern and European RSC (in the case of Greece, Cyprus and Egypt).

Conclusion

AKP's rise to power brought radical changes in Turkey's both domestic politics and foreign policy. Erdoğan's government liberalised the economy, eliminated the political power of Turkish armed forces while developing their capabilities along with the domestic defence industry, and introduced a new vision of Turkey's foreign policy, radically different from the previous Kemalist doctrine. Following the *Strategic Depth* blueprint, Turkey developed long-neglected relations with Middle Eastern countries and used the Arab Spring and the Muslim Brotherhood to boost its regional influence. But this strategy backfired as the Arab Spring turned into "Arab Winter" – the regime of General Sisi was hostile to the Brotherhood and saw Turkey as foreign power interfering in Egypt's internal affairs. While economic relations remained relatively unharmed, all military and political cooperation between the two countries was terminated for more than five years, and Ankara and Cairo engaged in a struggle for influence in the Eastern Mediterranean and Libya. Egypt aligned itself with Greece and Cyprus to counterbalance Turkey, bridging the boundaries between Middle Eastern and European regional security complexes. Over time, the power of the Muslim Brotherhood declined, and with it did the fear of Arab monarchies of it. Beginning in 2021, the climate of reconciliation prevailed in the Persian Gulf as the blockade of Qatar ended. Ankara capitalised on it by normalising relations with the United Arab Emirates and launching the process of rapprochement with Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Sympathy, humanitarian aid, and financial donations that followed the February 2023 earthquake facilitated these trends, and after it became clear that Recep Tayyip Erdoğan would be the President of Turkey for another term, Cairo and Ankara went on to fully restore their diplomatic relations. Still, this does not mean Egypt's cooperation with Greece and Cyprus which came into being as a byproduct of Ankara's assertive policies in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Levant region, will simply cease. Despite the reconciliation between Egypt and Turkey and Erdoğan's much softer stance towards Athens and Nicosia (so far, there have been very few naval incidents or rhetorical attacks in 2023), Turkey's growing power will continue to incite these countries to counterbalance it through cooperation in diplomatic, military, and energy sectors.

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