

**The Middle East After 9/11: Determinants and Issues:  
The Impact on Egyptian-Turkish respective roles and relations**

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**Introduction:**

The term “Middle East” allows the inclusion of Turkey and other non-Arab countries- in addition to the Arab countries -into a wider system of regional interactions than that of the Arab system.

The “Middle East” terminology started gaining increased attention than it did a century ago. Now, it is acquiring renewed attention after facing several setbacks along the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

With the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the emergence of Ataturk’s new regime in Turkey and Arab nationalism, conflicts between the Turks and the Arabs took place. A third party, The European Colonialism- under the auspices of mandate- was the beneficiary, while a complete blockage damaged Arab- Turkish relations.

During the cold war, the gap between the Turkish and the Arab side was deepened with the creation of the state of Israel and the radical Arab nationalists’ orientations and policies.

The last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the reconstruction of bridges and a relaxation in the Turkish- Arab relations. Since 1991 a Turkish initiative towards the Arab world –which was met by a positive Arab response- started and deepened relations. The end of the cold war, the consequences of the Gulf crisis and the launching of the Madrid peace process affected the relations between both sides .

By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and in the light of the experiences of the evolution of Arab- Turkish relations, we can conclude that foreign influences and interventions that had consequently reshaped the regional

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context have had a major impact on Arab- Turkish relations and on the reciprocal perspectives and positions towards regional issues.

The Ottoman empire history- whether the periods of strength or weakness- provided us with memories of historical experiences which proved that foreign interventions had negatively affected the Arab-Turkish relations.

Our actual interest in the “ Middle East after 9/11” is an interest in a new critical period where the region is facing a serious reshaping process imposed by the American Power and its Allies. Hence, major foreign intervention is radically affecting regional balances and internal systems. So, the launching of the American initiative for a “Greater Middle East” is considered, after the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, as the third step in applying the global American strategy after 9/11.

Accordingly, determining the nature of the Egyptian and the Turkish positions towards such a Middle Eastern context that the US is planning for, will be the main concern of this paper.

As a result of the ups and downs in Arab-Turkish relations -during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century- the evolution of these relations was mainly determined by both: The Turkish role in American strategy and the Turkish orientation towards the west on one side and Turkish- Israeli relations on the other side. The evolution of these relations clearly showed that Turkish policy towards the Middle East considers relations with Arab world as a tool and not as a goal in itself. While relations with the USA, the integration in Europe and the alliance with Israel are considered as independent variables, relations with Arabs are the dependant ones.

Comprehending the Turkish role towards the current Middle Eastern reshaping process since 9/11 requires the following:

- 1- Studying the international, regional determinants that surround both Egypt and Turkey as well as the internal ones.
- 2- Determining the areas and issues of Egyptian-Turkish interaction that influence their respective positions in the American strategy towards the Middle East.

- 3- Studying how, in Egypt, we perceive the Turkish general orientations and positions towards reshaping the Middle East after 9/11.

All these points pave the way for the coming papers to discuss more specific issues covered by the sessions of the colloquial.

In other words, my presentation aims to discuss the following problematic: The relationship between the geo-strategic aspects that enhances the possibility of conflicts, and the common historical and cultural bonds (civilizational neighborhood) that enhance the possibility of cooperation between Egypt and Turkey.

Although Turkey and its Arab neighbors belong to one civilization, they experienced -all along their extended historical relations- various types of conflictive and cooperative interactions. So several questions were always raised: Is Turkey a national neighborhood threatening Arab interests? or should civilizational neighborhood and common vital interests bound The Turkish and Arab people? Is the role of Egypt and Turkey competitive, complementary or conflictive ? What are the conditions that enhance the possibility of cooperation or conflict? Do foreign influences or the internal ones enhance the possibility of conflict?

### **First: Determinants of reshaping Arab System after 9-11**

- 1- External Determinants : Global American Strategy (War Against Terrorism):

Since the cold war the American strategy towards the Middle East was constantly influenced by its global strategy. The situation of both Egypt and Turkey was always linked to the evolution of these two strategies.

The 9/11 events did not give birth to a new global American strategy. They, very much indeed, put it in light. An American strategic thought was already established and planned just before the 9/11 events. These events later paved the way for executing its strategy regionally and globally. US administration had succeeded to use the war on terrorism as a justification for its policies and the establishment of an international coalition that it led vigorously since 9/11.

The main aspects, motives and policies of the global American strategy can be summarized as follows:

- a) Fighting terrorism –according to the American definition and perception of terrorism – is the main security goal. Although Military force is the major tool for fighting terrorism, other policies, i.e economic, diplomatic and cultural policies should support the use of force. The American strategy is based on preventive measures, coalition with friends according to the famous motto: “Who is not with us is against us”.
- b) Fighting terrorism, which is threatening to destroy the Western civilization, does not constitute the only motive that directs the global American strategy after 9/11. Other motives could be cited: tightening control on Petroleum resources stretched from Central Asia to the Gulf region, reshaping regional balances in a way that impose the American hegemony all around the world, preventing the emerging big power (China), the one that is reconstructing its capabilities (Russia), and the one that completes the needed bases for an effective and independent international role( European Union), preventing them from competing with American hegemony, and finally reshaping the Muslim World according to the American alliance with the Zionist interests.

The previous aspects shows to what extent military and economic aspects are intermingled with cultural ones. So the American policies towards the Middle East are a combination of both military force as well as educational and cultural policies to impose change in education, culture, information and internal political system.

The Egyptian and Arab perspectives of these aspects and their impact on the reshaping of Arab regional system agreed that American strategy aims to realize the following objects:

- Protecting petroleum resources that necessitates controlling the gulf area.
- Protecting not just Israeli security but also Israeli regional hegemony, to an extent that can sacrifice the peace process and a just settlement for the Palestinian issue.

- Reshaping the regional alliances in a way that permits to build new alliances with Iraq, Kuwait and Qatar at the expenses of its alliances with Egypt and Saudi Arabia.
- Breaking the remaining Arab resistance centers by tightening the political and economic blockade (Syria), or using the minorities card (Sudan and Syria), or the accusation of supporting terrorism and having massive destruction weapons(Syria, Libya).

Since 9/11, the American presence was consolidated deeply by its direct and extensive military presence. Especially after the war on Iraq, the US seems to be no longer in need of its allies, friends or clients. On the other hand, the cultural and societal aspects of American intervention was no more separated from the military and economic ones. They are indeed very much interlinked. The American perspective is considering that the reshaping of the region could not be achieved only through direct military means but also through societal and cultural changes. The relations between Islam, society and the State are in the core of these needed changes.

On the other hand, according to the status of big powers in the international system and their position towards the American hegemony practices, we can clearly observe that these big powers were really trying to minimize the negative impacts of this hegemony on their national interests. Thus, their policies towards the Arab region were only a means to achieve this.

Therefore, The Middle East since 9/11 entered a critical moment where foreign intervention had reached its peak. The linkages between the external and the internal became intense and deep. The external was internalized and vice versa and the regional became international, while foreign interventions became quite clear, solving regional issues became the responsibility of foreign powers. The high degree of disorder and weakness at the regional and internal level had enormously facilitated the American mission, that brought the Middle East in the core of its global strategy after 9/11.

## **2- Internal Determinants:**

Both Egypt and Turkey share the following determinants:

- a) Type of relations between religion, states and society:

Turkey is a secular republic, a democratic system with a distinct role that the military plays for defending secularism. The political societal (socio-political) developments show three essential crises:

- Identity crisis (i.e., the reorientation towards East or West, Secularism or Islam).
- The polarization secularism/Islamism with the emergence of powerful Islamic trends.
- Political Instability because of the fragility of coalition governments.

Egypt, according to the constitution, is an Islamic state. The Egyptian political system is a restricted semi-democratic where true rotation of power does not exist. While the Turkish secularism restrictions affected the Turkish Islamism, the Egyptian system after liquidating by force the Gama'at is still refusing to recognize the legitimacy of the extended moderate Islamic trend.

We can certainly notice the differences in nature and type of both the actual Islamic Party that is in power in Turkey (Justice and Development Party) and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, that is playing its role as an opposition force which does not yet enjoy legitimacy.

b) The deteriorating economic situation.:

Both states are suffering –in different degrees- critical economic crises. This is reflected clearly in unemployment, inflation, decreased rate of growth and deterioration of the living standard. These crises affected –deeply- the foreign policy orientation of both states, because they use it mainly for serving the purpose of development. Hence, a pragmatic consideration is playing a distinct role, as a way to overcome foreign restrictions.

c) Regional role orientation:

Both states have always been aiming at playing a regional role. Alongside with Iran, they present three main centers in the Islamic world. Their respective regional roles have always intersected in a conflictual or competitive way. The orientation of both states toward the Arab region have been fluctuating, influenced by US relations.

### **3- Regional determinants:**

#### a) The role of Israel:

The role of Israel accelerated constantly in the actual American strategy after 9/11. The war on Afghanistan, the occupation of Iraq and the critical aggression against the Palestinian people have clearly reflected to what extent the American-Israeli alliance is fortified and consolidated. It is now clear how this alliance will affect new regional balances. In other words, Israel, the terrorist state, has deeply benefited from the so-called global war against terrorism that the USA led since 9/11. While the Egyptian-Israeli relations are confronting problems, because of the Israeli aggression on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the Turkish-Israeli relations were enhancing.

#### b) Other regional determinants:

- The collapse of the peaceful settlement process and the joint Israeli-American efforts to liquidate the Palestinian issue and imposed, by force, an Israeli-American settlement. While, on the other hand, an impressive Palestinian resistance is still existing using various tools.
- The actual pressure on Syria.
- The future of Gulf security and regional alliances under the American military occupation.
- The fate of the new Iraqi state, its territorial integrity, its foreign policy orientation
- The consequences of the security problem in the Asian neighborhood.
- The actual American pressure on Iran and post-Taliban Afghanistan.
- The challenges that face the Pakistani role in the American strategy.
- Regional issues such as the mass destruction weapons, water distribution, minority rights (especially the Kurdish case) and the role of the politicized Islamic movements.

## **Second: Egypt and Turkey's position in the process of reshaping of Middle East: Common aspects, different orientations and suggested options**

Mainly, this position faces the challenges imposed by American interventions since 9/11. These interventions led the two countries' options to a critical phase. These options will affect deeply, the respective images of the two sides. Turkey has been seen, from some Egyptian perspectives, as follows:

- A western not an Islamic country, or an Islamic country that faced an identity crisis and because of the deep obstacles that faced its integration in Europe, Turkey will reorient its foreign policy.
- A source of threat to Arab interests and security or a possible ally because of the common Islamic heritage and civilization.
- A model for a modern secularism that presents a bridge between the western secularism and Islam, or a model of “ moderate political Islam”, the so called “ Islamic Secularism” .

To clarify how the American intervention is shaping the two countries' positions, we have to discuss six main issues that the papers of the colloquial will treat: Internal political and societal change, the regional security arrangements and the Middle Eastern economic arrangements after the occupation of Iraq, the regional alliances in the post Iraq occupation era, the collapsed peace process and Israeli- Turkish alliance, and the cultural aspects i.e the dialogue or the clash of cultures and civilizations.

I will only approach two issues as clarifying examples.

### **1. Internal Change and Its External Extensions:**

The political and societal change issue has become an external problem, because both Egypt and Turkey - for a different reasons- are running the actual process of internal change while looking at foreign responses and pressures that American strategy is exercising.

On the Turkish side, we noticed the following: the trial to present an image of a moderate Islam that the USA can accept, the improvement of human rights situation, constitutional amendments that insure the



respect of these rights, and dealing with the problems of identity without evoking the rage of the west or cutting the links between the ruling Islamic Party (Justice and Development) and its electoral and societal roots.

The actual internal developments in Turkey were run under the stress of both: the future of Turkey's membership in the EU, and the possible prevention of confrontation with the actual American hegemony that could trigger critical risks and threats to national interests.

The modern political Turkish experiences (since the ottoman reforms beginning at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century until the Ataturk radical changes) highlighted the enormous impact of the foreign factors. There is no doubt that the actual situation after 9/11 imposed more restraints, especially on a party with Islamic orientation. It is important to study the nature of the party's orientation, program, how it had won the elections with a remarkably majority, how it is running the paradoxes of the relations with USA and its position towards the most critical issues in the region such as Iraq and Palestine. The study of the "Justice and Development" party's experience will shed light on how some political Islam forces can overcome the restrictions imposed by both internal regimes and US policies.

As long as Egypt presents another model for the relation between Islam, state and society, the actual situation imposes different type of foreign stress on its experience of internal change. A large Islamic trend is still considered illegitimate. Although it is now sharing with the other political trends in Egypt some major requirements of political change.

The role of the military in Egypt is no more comparable with before. In Both Egypt and Turkey the societal mobilization movement is reflecting a renewal role of Islam in societal and educational civil society activities. While educational and cultural changes that USA seeks to impose, as a mean of fighting the roots of terrorism, were considered by these movements as a non accepted foreign intervention, the different political and societal trends in Egypt agreed that the religious discourse needs to be renewed. However, the scope and content of this renewed process were not agreed upon.

In other words, the future of internal changes in Egypt and Turkey will affect the landscape of balances between Middle Eastern political

forces(secular, Islamist), as well as the nature of democracy that the political systems will adopt. This landscape will affect foreign policies orientations and the type of regional alliances that the two countries adopt.

## **2. Foreign policy circles: The impact of American global strategy, the significance for internal change and regional security arrangements:**

Egypt and Turkey have special relations with USA, even though they differ in motives, degree and nature. On other hand, the foreign policy circles of both Egypt and Turkey are various. The priority of them had changed according to the phase that their national foreign policy goes through. On the Turkish side, the following circles are present: European, Atlantic, Middle Eastern, Central Asia, Balkan, and Islamic. On the Egyptian side we site the following circles: Arab, African, Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, Islamic and South.

Both Egyptian and Turkish society faces the problematic of Identity that had evoked tensions between elites belonging to different trends of thoughts. This problematic had hardened the choices of foreign policies positions.

At the Actual stage of Middle East reshaping under the impact of American global strategy, the urgency of these circles have changed. Hence the Middle East circle priority jumped to the top at the expenses of other, especially the Arab one (in the case of Egypt), and the European one (in the case of Turkey).

The Middle East arrangements, especially tightening the relations with Israel and keeping a balanced alliance with USA in front of Arab issues, would be the price that Turkey will pay in return for accomplishing benefits at the European circle level. But, on other hand, to what extent the internal political situation , having the Justice and development party in power, will affect Turkish orientation towards more or less alliance with both Israel and USA at the expense of a balanced relation with the Arabs and the Muslim World?

On the other side, the Egyptian position on the American strategy towards Middle East, will deeply affect the Egyptian orientation towards Arab and Islamic circle, as well as towards European- Mediterranean one.

The conflict between Middle Eastern system under US and Israeli hegemony and European Mediterranean partnership under EU leadership, will be renewed in a way that will give rise to the Turkish and Israeli role at the expenses of the Egyptian role and the efforts done to rebuild and renew the Arab regional system.

The military security arrangements, the economic ones as well as the fate of the peace process and the process of reconstructing Iraq, present main issues that will test all the above-mentioned analysis. The papers of the colloquial will treat these issues.

**Finally:**

After reviewing the main external, regional and internal determinants, and after evoking questions concerning the main issues that the reshaping process of the Arab system will confront, multiple questions could be summarized as follows and addressed by the colloquial:

Does the actual state in the Middle East enhance the possibility of more or less coordination between Egypt and Turkey? Does this coordination help in making balance in front of foreign American intervention and reducing its negative impact on the national interests of the two countries, especially Egypt?. Do the external determinants, especially American global strategy, impose restraints and pressures on Egypt more than it imposes on Turkey, the traditional ally with USA and Israel? Would these determinants prevent fruitful coordination to accomplish Egyptian and Turkish respective interests?

If the external restraints and pressures that Turkey faced are not as critical as the ones that Egypt confronted, hence, does the Egyptian coordination with Turkey increase the Egyptian possibilities of action or not? If Egypt can realize direct economic benefit through its relations with Turkey, can it influence the Turkish positions towards major Arab issues, such the Iraq after occupation, the Palestinian issue, the siege on Syria, and the Gulf security?. In other words: if the existing Egyptian role is already restrained, can the coordination with Turkey help reactivate it? and in what direction?

On the other side, Turkey's direct interests (economic ones) with Arabs are not threatened, hence it does not feel the urgency for revising

its policies towards some Arab issues , especially on the water issue or tightening its alliance with Israel while the later continues its aggression on the Palestinian people. In other words: if realistic considerations impose compromises on Egypt's position towards Turkey's justification of its policies towards Israel, the Kurdish problem, etc, but we notice that some Egyptian non-formal forces perceive Turkish policies as a source of threat. So, the Turkish side has to revise its policies in order to achieve more coordination with Egypt (putting some pressure on Israel, in spite of selling her water).

Of course it is expected that the coming sessions of the colloquial will discuss Egyptian perspectives that explain what does Egypt want from Turkey and why?

These perspectives will testify a comprehensive statement that can be summarized as follows: *Turkey is a major given that Egyptian policies can never drop or neglect.* Although some Arab nationalists that perceived Turkey as a threat to Arab national security, Egypt can either leave Turkey to Israel, or consider it a second enemy that serves Western interests in the region. Although some Egyptian perspectives admit that there are some determinants of Turkish policies that can not be overcome, i.e the role of the military that enhances special relations with Israel and the alliance with the west, these perspectives admit on the other hand that there are areas of common interests that could be promoted.

Egypt should not be satisfied with only promoting economic and cultural ties with Turkey, in spite of the existing regional tensions and the differences between Egyptian and Turkish policies towards some main issues. Egypt should not just play the role of conflict mediation between Turkey and some Arab countries such as Syria. So, instead of taking a reactive positions towards Turkish- Western- Israeli initiatives, Egypt should also promote its initiatives based on a strategic vision of its relations with Turkey. Such vision will make Egypt and Arabs a goal for Turkish policies and not just a secondary tool.

The balanced clever diplomacy that Turkey had adopted before and after the occupation of Iraq assured that we should discover the common grounds and areas of interests. We should not leave the scene for Israel to forge more vital relations with Turkey at the expense of Arab relations. We should not retreat in front of extremist secular forces that

dropped historical and cultural ties that bounded Egypt and Turkey for a long time. We should be convinced that nationalist differences do not create by themselves conflicts. These conflicts are rather the outputs of political calculations of benefits and costs. Egypt should work hard for consolidating the benefits from Turkey as long as Turkey is convinced that her interests with the Arabs are not less important than with Israel and the West.

## Resources

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