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Is the Muslim Brotherhood losing Turkey and Qatar in the light of the rapprochement with Egypt?

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Egypt's relations with Turkey and Qatar have been improving for the last six months, following a long period of diplomatic crises and hostility that lasted eight years and four years, respectively. This rapprochement is an attempt to reset relations in a way that would allow all three parties to maintain their good relations with the new U.S. administration. As a condition for normalizing ties, Egypt had demanded that Turkey and Qatar end their support to the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). This demand has been described in the Arab media as an ominous sign for the MB, which feared it would be sacrificed on the altar of Turkish and Qatari state interests. However, the discourse of the MB's members on the subject, the continued anti-Egyptian remarks of senior Turkish government officials, and the intention of the Egyptian government to execute senior MB leaders suggests that the chances of Turkey and the MB ending their relationship are quite slim. Qatar, for its part, continues to allow the MB's members to find refuge within its borders, but at the same time is not interested in provoking Egypt.

The 'Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi led military coup against the MB regime headed by Mohamed Morsi in July 2013 resulted in many of Egypt's MB members fleeing to Turkey and Qatar. Those who remained in Egypt were killed, imprisoned, or their activities were driven underground. In their exile, the MB's members built an extensive infrastructure for anti-Egyptian propaganda, with Turkish support and Qatari funds. The MB established satellite television channels such as *al-Makamilin*, *al-Sharq*, and *al-Watan*, and used social media campaigns to incite the Egyptian public to launch popular protests against the regime. Several factors underpinned Turkish-Qatari support for the MB, primarily their desire for regional hegemony.¹ They view support for the Muslim Brotherhood as an important

¹ Rory Miller and Harry Verhoeven, "Overcoming Smallness: Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and strategic realignment in the Gulf," *International Politics*, vol. 57, 2020, 1–20; Michael Young, "[The Lure of Regional Hegemony](#)," *Carnegie Middle East Center*, July 27, 2020.

element of soft power, which adds to their governments' popular support and religious legitimacy. This support stands in contrast to their Sunni rivals in the region, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, all of which have taken a hardline against the Muslim Brotherhood, persecuting its activists and driving the organization underground. Turkey and Qatar have also used their support for the MB to mobilize and recruit fighters in conflict zones such as Libya, which Turkey hopes to use as an instrument to consolidate its claims in the Mediterranean Sea.

Several geopolitical developments have contributed to the rapprochement between Egypt, Turkey, and Qatar. First, Turkey has watched with growing concern as ties between Egypt, Israel, Greece, and Cyprus have expanded through the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF). This multilateral organization was established in connection with the distribution of gas resources and the demarcation of maritime borders in the Eastern Mediterranean. Second, and relatedly, Turkey wants to be part of a political settlement in Libya that will allow it to maintain its political influence there and in Libya's territorial waters. Third, Turkey also fears a confrontation with the Biden administration in the United States, and hopes settling its disputes with Egypt will help its cause in Washington. For Qatar, the reconciliation with Saudi Arabia and Egypt also improves Qatar's image in Washington. Qatar also seeks reconciliation with Egypt in order to realize its goal of strengthening its influence in Libya and Sudan.² On the Egyptian side of the ledger, Cairo hopes that reconciling with Qatar will lead to Qatari investment in the Egyptian economy, which has been severely damaged by the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. Egypt is also seeking to build a united Arab front against Ethiopia's Renaissance Dam project. Finally, Cairo would like Qatar to exert pressure on the MB to limit the organization's activity against Egypt. To a certain extent, Egypt's move to reconcile with Turkey is also fueled by this factor, but with a great deal more suspicion and circumspection.

Statements from Turkish and Qatari officials expressing the importance of strengthening ties with Egypt,³ were also accompanied by concrete actions on the ground. On January 5, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, and Bahrain signed the Al-Ula Declaration at a Gulf Cooperation Council summit in Saudi Arabia to end their dispute with Qatar and restore diplomatic relations. In addition, Qatar significantly restricted the publication of media content and videos attacking the Egyptian regime and even removed some of them from *al-Jazeera* at the request of Egypt.⁴ The Turkish government also demonstrated its goodwill toward the Egyptian government by ordering the MB's Arabic language satellite

² Ismail Azzam, "[Egypt and Qatar... Reasons which led to a reconciliation, and who is benefiting and who is losing](#) [Arabic]," *Deutsch Well*, May 29, 2021; "[Qatar is using rapprochement with Egypt to restore its influence in Libya and Sudan](#) [Arabic]," *al-Arab*, May 25, 2021.

³ "[Egypt, Qatar stress importance of building on Al-Ula Summit](#)," *Daily News*, May 25, 2021; "[Egypt is a leading country, and we look forward to cooperation: Qatari minister](#)," *Egypt Independent*, May 29, 2021.

⁴ "[Samih Shukri discusses in Doha at the Summer Conference of al-Sisi — Tamim](#) [Arabic]," *al-Jarida*, June 14, 2021.

television channels in Turkey to stop broadcasting political content against Egypt.⁵ Mu‘taz al-Mattar, a prominent MB journalist on *al-Sharq* television channel in Turkey, quit his program in protest and declared his intention to continue broadcasting outside Turkey.⁶

The Arab media interpreted the Turkish and Qatari policy reversal toward Egypt as yet another manifestation of the existential crisis plaguing the MB since 2013. This crisis has been characterized by the disengagement of some of the Arab regimes from the MB;⁷ by an orchestrated campaign of religious Muslim authorities such as al-Azhar against the MB;⁸ and by internal rifts within the MB's ranks on different issues such as the legitimacy of their leader. Commentator Ibrahim al-Zobeidi stressed that the course of rapprochement between the two countries heralds the end of the MB: "Today, the Muslim Brotherhood is right to worry about its fate, in anticipation of its expulsion from the two countries, in conformity with the conditions put by the Egyptian government. Finding alternative havens, when they are on Interpol wanted lists, will be extremely difficult."⁹ Egyptian journalist Hisham al-Najjar assessed that in the absence of Turkish and Qatari support, the MB would be forced to explore alternative havens like Iran, similar to *al-Qa'ida* leaders finding refuge there.¹⁰ The Saudi-backed *al-Arabiya* television channel claimed MB members were intending to immigrate to Kosovo.¹¹ Tariq al-Bashishi, a journalist based in the Gulf, noted that the MB had lost their sense of security in Turkey, living in fear that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan would sacrifice junior MB activists in order to normalize relations with Egypt.¹²

The Muslim Brotherhood leaders rejected claims that the Turkish and Qatari diplomatic maneuvers represented a loss of support for the MB. In March of this year, Ibrahim Munir, the general guide of the MB, who is residing in the United Kingdom, made it clear that Turkey does not intend to hand over any opposition activists to Egypt, asserting that Turkey respects political refugees and due to international law prohibiting it. He also clarified that

⁵ ["Turkey orders Muslim Brotherhood TV channels to stop airing anti-Egypt rhetoric,"](#) *al-Arabiya*, March 23, 2021.

⁶ ["Mutaz Mattar is Leaving al-Sharq Channel and Turkey after 7 Years of Incitement and Shameful Deeds](#) [Arabic]," *al-Watan*, June 5, 2021; [@moatazmatar](#), Twitter [Arabic], 10:33am, June 5, 2021. However, Egyptian sources asserted the reason for his departure was financial rather than ideological.

⁷ For example, Jordan's top court dissolves MB: Saud al-Sharafat, "[Jordan revisits relationship with Muslim Brotherhood](#)", *al-Monitor*, January 1, 2021. KSA, UAE, Bahrain & Egypt designated the MB as a terrorist organization: Tamara Abueish, "[Muslim Brotherhood is a terrorist group: Saudi Arabia's Council of Senior Scholars](#)," *al-Arabiya*, November 11, 2020.

⁸ Mohammed Abu Zaid, "[Al-Azhar decrees prohibition of joining Muslim Brotherhood](#)," *Arab News*, December 20, 2020.

⁹ Ibrahim al-Zobeidi, "[The losers in the Turkish – Qatari reconciliation with Egypt](#)," *The Arab Weekly*, June 2, 2021.

¹⁰ Hisham al-Najjar, "[The global organization of the Muslim Brotherhood faces lifting the political cover from it with the strategy of latency](#) [Arabic]," *al-Arab*, May 31, 2021.

¹¹ "[Rapprochement with Egypt... Will Kosovo become a haven for the Brotherhood residing in Turkey](#) [Arabic]," *al-Arabiya*, May 12, 2021.

¹² "[Fears of deporting the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood from Turkey are increasing with the improvement of diplomatic relations](#) [Arabic]," QPosts.com, May 15, 2021.

Turkey does not intend to close the opposition satellite television channels but asked them to comply with the country's communications laws.¹³ Muhammad Sudan, a senior MB member, emphasized that the MB movement would continue to see the Egyptian regime as illegitimate due to its rise to power in a military coup and its violation of Egyptian civil liberties. He explained that Turkey's reconciliation talks with Egypt would be conducted on the basis of those principles.¹⁴

Reconciliation talks between Turkey and Egypt are still ongoing but do not appear to be moving in the desired direction. For example, Turkey has refused to extradite two MB leaders to Egypt who were suspected of armed resistance to the Egyptian regime. This was on the grounds that they had received Turkish citizenship and Turkish citizens could not be extradited.¹⁵ Moreover, it seems that the MB's media operations in Turkey have resumed their propaganda against the Egyptian regime. For example, on June 18, the *al-Makamilin* television channel published a video claiming that Mohamed Morsi could have succeeded in policy areas where the current Egyptian regime has allegedly failed, as in the management of the water crisis with the Ethiopian government over the Renaissance Dam project, for example.¹⁶

It is possible that Turkey's resumption of propaganda targeting Egypt is related to Egyptian mediation during the May 2021 war between Israel and Hamas. Turkey was excluded from any mediation role during the conflict, despite hosting Hamas leaders within its borders.¹⁷ Moreover, in mid-June this year, an Egyptian court announced its intention to execute twelve members of the MB. The declaration was severely criticized by senior officials in Turkey, and the MB movement described the Egyptian regime as a dictatorial regime that suppressed individual liberties.

In conclusion, Turkey's rapprochement with Egypt does not seem to herald a real change in Turkey's attitude towards the MB. Rather, it seems to be a tactical change designed to achieve political gains. Turkey's leadership still perceives the MB as a channel for strengthening its regional influence and bolstering its domestic support. Likewise, Qatar has not abandoned its ambition to play a regional leadership role. It continues to shelter MB members, while trying to avoid irritating Egypt and its Gulf neighbors, which might erode its influence in Libya and other areas. Turkey and Qatar perceive reconciliation with Egypt as an opportunity to continue to expand their regional influence and bid for hegemony.

¹³ Omar Jamal, "[The dialogue with the regime and the situation of the \[MB\] group in Turkey...included Positive interaction with Ibrahim Mounir's statements](#)" [Arabic], *al-Jazeera*, March 21, 2021.

¹⁴ "[The Muslim Brotherhood's stance towards Egypt's Rapprochement to Turkey, Qatar & Hamas](#)" [Arabic], *al-Mustaqillah*, June 6, 2021.

¹⁵ "[Fears of deporting the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood from Turkey are increasing with the improvement of diplomatic relations](#)" [Arabic], QPosts.com, May 15, 2021.

¹⁶ [@mek_news](#), Twitter [Arabic], 9:43am, June 18, 2021.

¹⁷ Ahmad Jamal, "[The Brotherhood channels in Turkey resume their attack against Egypt after a short truce](#)" [Arabic], *al-Arab*, June 2, 2021.

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