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A New Era in Ankara-Cairo Relations: Military Integration That is Disrupting Regional Balances

As of July 16, 2026, it is evident that, following a long period of tension between Türkiye and Egypt from 2013 to 2022, relations have not only normalized but have evolved into a strategic partnership focused on security and defense. Following the military framework agreement signed in February and the joint air exercise in June, the two countries took military integration to the highest level by a “Letter of Intent on Defense Cooperation” on July 13 and a “Defense Industry Cooperation Agreement” on July 14. These concrete steps taken by these two powerful actors in the Eastern Mediterranean are viewed as a turning point that could fundamentally alter the balance of power in the region and crown the emerging process of a new security alliance among Türkiye, Egypt, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

The process of rapprochement between Türkiye and Egypt has been reflected not only diplomatic rhetoric but also in concrete steps taken on the ground. The first legal step taken as part of this

process was the military framework agreement signed in February and the massive deal involving the Machine and Chemical Industry Cooperation’s \$350 million ammunition production line and the export of TOLGA Close-In Air Defense System. In June, a joint exercise conducted by the two countries’ air forces directly tested the “interoperability” capabilities between their militaries, while the agreements signed in July demonstrate that this integration has reached the highest level. The “Letter of Intent on Defense Cooperation” signed on July 13 between Minister of National Defense Yaşar Güler and his Egyptian counterpart Ashraf Salem Zaher paves the way for military training and joint activities; the “Defense Industry Cooperation Agreement” signed on July 14 ensures the integration of the two countries’ defense industries in terms of technology transfer and joint production.

The military integration established between Ankara and Cairo has the potential to profoundly affect geopolitical hotspots in the Middle East and North Africa, particularly in the Eastern Mediterranean. The establishment of a defense partnership between these two actors who possess the strongest navies along the Mediterranean’s longest coastline is rebalancing Cairo’s strategic focus, which had been centered on Greece and the Government of the Republic of Cyprus during a period of strained relations. This balance not only facilitates the development of joint stability on the ground by two powers



that previously supported different factions in Libya but also enhances the capacity for collective action in regional crises such as those in Gaza and the Red Sea. Indeed, this move constitutes one of the most critical factors in the multifaceted regional security framework emerging among Türkiye, Egypt, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia in the face of global powers' struggles for influence.

In summary, the historic agreements signed between Türkiye and Egypt are paving the way for a new era based on mutual benefits, leaving past disputes behind. This integration of the two regional powers not only strengthens bilateral relations but also paves the way for a balanced and stable regional security architecture in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East.



Strategic Expansion of the Regional Conflict: Iran's Drone Strikes on U.S. Bases in Jordan, Kuwait, and Bahrain

The long-escalating military tension in the Middle East has reached a new and critical phase on July 18, 2026, with Iran's announcement that its armed forces' unmanned aerial vehicles

(UAVs) targeted United States military bases in Jordan, Kuwait, and Bahrain. Following the collapse of a fragile ceasefire agreement that had gone into effect just a week prior but rapidly deteriorated, the U.S. launched intensive airstrikes against Iranian military positions and particularly its critical logistics infrastructure, shifting the war into a new dimension. This simultaneous drone operation, following immediately after the U.S. campaign, demonstrates that the conflict is no longer confined to the Persian Gulf but has evolved into a multi-front regional security equation. Iran's direct targeting of American military presence and logistical bases across multiple Arab nations simultaneously reveals Tehran's resolve to project its deterrence strategy over a wider geography, while exposing the stark fragility of the regional security architecture.

These attacks demonstrate that Iran is transcending its traditional security paradigm rooted in proxy warfare and directly projecting its asymmetric deterrence capacity onto the battlefield. The simultaneous deployment of low-cost yet highly operational unmanned aerial vehicles underscores that hybrid warfare methods are becoming increasingly decisive against technologically superior, conventional military powers. Furthermore, targeting U.S. bases in Jordan, Kuwait, and Bahrain sends a strategic message not only to Washington but also to the host nations accommodating the American military and logistical footprint. This situation



brings forth new debates regarding the efficacy of regional air defense systems, the protection of critical military infrastructure, and the sustainability of collective security mechanisms. This development is of a nature that could induce significant uncertainties across global energy markets, international trade routes, and financial stability. Escalating security risks in the Persian Gulf and the Levant corridor carry the potential to impose additional pressures on energy supply security, maritime shipping, commercial insurance costs, and global supply chains. In particular, mounting anxieties over the safety of energy shipments navigating the Strait of Hormuz and the broader Gulf region are evaluated among developments that could drive geopolitical risk premiums higher in international markets. Alongside this, it appears likely that major economies will accelerate trends toward diversifying energy sources, fortifying strategic reserves, and redirecting supply chains to more secure regions.

From a Turkish perspective, these developments yield multi-dimensional strategic ramifications. As a NATO member maintaining deep political and economic ties with Middle Eastern countries, Turkey stands as one of the actors that could be directly impacted by mounting regional instability. The expansion of regional friction mandates that Ankara pursue a more cautious and multifaceted diplomacy regarding energy supply security, foreign trade, the Middle Corridor Project, border security, and defense

planning. Concurrently, it is of strategic vital importance for Turkey to further strengthen its defense industry, unmanned aerial vehicle technologies, intelligence capabilities, and crisis management mechanisms to adapt to this shifting security environment. In this framework, Iran's drone strikes on U.S. bases in Jordan, Kuwait, and Bahrain on July 18, 2026, demonstrate that security competition in the Middle East is no longer limited to conventional military struggles between states; rather, asymmetric technologies, hybrid warfare methods, and regional deterrence strategies are becoming increasingly definitive. Should diplomatic initiatives fail to bring the current tension under control, it is assessed that the risk of the regional security crisis spilling over into a much wider geography will persist.



International Discussions and Initiatives on Gaza's Reconstruction

International discussions started to focus not only on ending the conflict but also on what will happen after the war in Gaza. Reconstructing, arranging security, and governance became the main issues lately. Infrastructure and public services were greatly damaged after the war that



started with Hamas's attack on Israel on 7 October 2023. Reconstruction is not only a financial issue but also depends on political agreements between the both parties of the war, and international actors. One of the biggest challenges is Gaza's future governance. International actors were cautious about reconstruction plans because of uncertainty over Hamas's future role and security conditions. This issue became more important on 6 July 2026, when Hamas announced the dissolution of its Gaza government. Although Hamas presented this as a step toward a new administrative system, Israel and other actors questioned whether it represented a real political change. Israel has its focus mainly on security concerns on the issue. Israel officials stated that reconstruction cannot be possible without Hamas's disarmament and that Hamas should not have a role in Gaza's future without giving up its military capabilities. They argued that a civilian administration would not help create stability if Hamas still maintains its military power. Financial support also became an important issue in the reconstruction process. President of United States Trump announced that around \$7 billion initially had been collected for the Board of Peace initiative for Gaza on, but later reports showed that only a limited amount became available for the actual reconstruction. A major financial development happened on 13 July 2026.

The European Commission and some partner countries launched the Team Gaza Initiative worth €883.6 million, which is around \$1 billion. The initiative focused on reconstructing basic infrastructure, including water systems, sanitation systems, healthcare facilities, and debris removal. Yet this amount is still much lower than what is actually needed for full reconstruction. According to the UN, European Union, and World Bank assessment, Gaza's recovery and reconstruction needs are estimated around \$71.4 billion. Both initiatives show the difference between political promises, real implementation and Gaza's needs. Security arrangements became another important issue after Morocco signed an agreement on 15 July 2026 to join the planned International Stabilization Force-ISF for Gaza. According to Reuters, Morocco agreed to provide military personnel, police officers, and a field hospital. This showed that security forces are seen as a priority by international actors for the post-war process. At the same time, Reuters reported that Israel had expanded its control over large parts of Gaza and this development can affect both reconstruction projects and future arrangements about governance.

Despite these developments, major issues are still unresolved, including Hamas's disarmament,



Israel's withdrawal, the establishment of a transitional administration, and the role of international forces. Although financial support has started to increase, major political and security issues still need to be solved for Gaza's reconstruction. So, Gaza's reconstruction has become not only a rebuilding process but also a major diplomatic challenge that will affect the future of the region.



From the 20% Transit Fee Debate to Gulf Investment Bargaining: US-Iran Tensions

The recent debate over a proposed 20% security fee for commercial vessels passing through the Strait of Hormuz has drawn international attention and raised new questions about maritime security and energy politics. US President Donald Trump initially suggested imposing the fee on commercial cargo ships using the strait. However, following international criticism and concerns in global markets, the proposal was revised. Instead of charging transit fees directly, Trump stated that the United States would focus on securing large-scale investment a

nd trade agreements with Gulf countries. At first glance, this policy change appears to reflect the Trump administration's negotiation style. More broadly, however, it also shows Washington's effort to connect regional security policies with its economic interests. The proposal for a 20% security fee can be understood as part of the United States' long-standing argument that its regional allies should contribute more to the cost of maintaining security in the Gulf. Washington has repeatedly argued that it carries a disproportionate share of the financial burden of protecting maritime trade routes. Nevertheless, the idea of charging ships for transit through the Strait of Hormuz immediately raised legal and political concerns. Such a measure would likely conflict with the transit passage regime established under the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and could disrupt global supply chains. The Trump administration's later emphasis on investment and trade agreements may therefore be seen as an attempt to obtain greater economic commitments from Gulf states through diplomatic bargaining rather than direct transit charges. Iran's response represents another important aspect of this debate. Tehran has consistently regarded the Strait of Hormuz as a vital area for its national security and regional stability. In this context, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi stated that Iran would remain the "guardian of the Strait of Hormuz."



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His remarks clearly reflect Tehran's determination to preserve its role in the waterway. They also suggest that Iran is unlikely to accept unilateral initiatives that could change the current security balance in the strait. Alongside diplomatic statements, Tehran may increase its naval activities and emphasize its deterrence capabilities to reinforce this position. Looking ahead, the future of this issue will largely depend on the outcome of negotiations between Washington and the Gulf states. If Gulf countries provide fewer investment commitments than the United States expects, the Trump administration could bring similar economic measures back into discussion. At the same time, China, which depends heavily on energy imports passing through the Strait of Hormuz, may increase its diplomatic and maritime engagement in the region. Rising maritime insurance costs and higher shipping expenses could also affect global energy markets if tensions continue. In conclusion, the debate surrounding the Strait of Hormuz has moved beyond a purely military confrontation between the United States and Iran. Questions related to burden-sharing, energy security, and international maritime law are becoming increasingly important. In the coming period, regional stability will depend not only on military developments but also on how Washington's economic expectations and the political and economic responses of Gulf countries evolve.



Critical ASEAN Summit in Manila: A Litmus Test for Strategic Autonomy and Hegemony in Southeast Asia

The Asia-Pacific region, a primary battleground for global power rivalries, is currently witnessing high-stakes diplomatic maneuvering poised to reshape regional dynamics. Earlier today, the 59th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting officially commenced in Manila, the capital of the Philippines, under the banner "Navigating Together in Our Future." Running through July 24, the summit convenes against a backdrop of escalating border frictions in the South China Sea, maritime jurisdiction disputes, and an entrenched US-China geopolitical rivalry. As such, it serves as a historic benchmark for the institutional resilience of Southeast Asian unity. As the cornerstone of multilateral diplomacy across the Asia-Pacific axis, ASEAN finds itself squarely caught in the crosshairs of global polarization. The most strategically vital agenda item in Manila revolves around a singular challenge: how member states can safeguard their "strategic autonomy" without being pulled into



zero-sum bloc politics. Tensions are particularly high during security talks due to recent maritime standoffs between the host nation, the Philippines, and China in the South China Sea. Consequently, member states are walking a tightrope, attempting to strike a delicate balance between Beijing's immense economic leverage and Washington's regional security umbrella. On the geopolitical front, this multilateral equation is deeply tied to the security of Asia's vital tech and energy corridors. Compounded by vulnerabilities in global supply chains and intensifying market competition, ASEAN nations are feeling the pressure to deepen internal geo-economic integration. Deliberations regarding upgraded regional free trade agreements and unified digital economy standards aim to insulate the bloc against external shocks. These initiatives signal ASEAN's broader ambition to transition from a passive talk shop into a proactive governance body capable of keeping the global economy's center of gravity firmly anchored in Asia. Ultimately, the 59th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting marks a watershed moment that will define whether Southeast Asian nations can maintain a unified diplomatic front against external pressures. The joint communiqués arising from Manila will ultimately signal whether the region is destined to be absorbed into a US- or China-centric hegemonic divide, or if it can successfully forge an independent security and economic architecture in an

increasingly multipolar world. The diplomatic path chosen here will have a direct hand in shaping the future distribution of global power.



National Intelligence Decision in Japan

Japan has undertaken the most comprehensive intelligence reform since World War II, deciding to centralize its fragmented intelligence capabilities. With a law passed by the Japanese Parliament in May 2026, the existing Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office (CIRO) is being transformed into the National Intelligence Council (NIC), headed by Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, and its operational unit, the National Intelligence Bureau (NIB). This structure will have the authority to coordinate intelligence gathering and analysis among ministries. Planned to operate with approximately 700 personnel, the institution will consolidate all intelligence functions previously carried out within the foreign affairs, defense, national police, and public security intelligence agencies. The background to this decision can be interpreted on



two separate levels: structural and conjunctural. On the structural level, the Japanese political leadership's significant dependence on the US for security decisions and strategic intelligence throughout the post war period long neglected the need to develop independent intelligence capabilities. On the conjunctural level, China's increasing regional influence, the theft of covert information through cyberattacks, and disinformation activities have been decisive factors. The Cabinet Secretary spokesperson also explained the rationale for the new structure in light of these emerging threats. Furthermore, the Trump administration's rhetoric, which created ambiguity regarding alliance commitments, triggered a reflex in Tokyo to gather its own intelligence.

This step, viewed from a neoclassical realist framework, serves as a classic example of how systemic pressures, such as China's rise and alliance uncertainty, trigger internal institutional transformation. The Takaichi government's lifting of the ban on lethal weapons exports in April 2026, and its presentation of this reform as complementary steps, demonstrates Japan's gradual but determined departure from a pacifist constitutional framework. Prime Minister Takaichi's characterization of this law as the first step can be interpreted as an indication that the process will not end here, and that a separate agency focused on foreign intelligence gathering is also on the agenda.

In addition, the domestic political cost of the reform should not be overlooked. Opposition lawmakers emphasize that the new structure lacks legislative oversight and risks violating the right to privacy. Along with the opposition, regional reactions to the decision have also been harsh. Chinese experts have described the move as a resurgence of militarism, while allies like Australia have welcomed the decision.

It is no coincidence that most decisions taken in the international arena in recent years have been security related. Ultimately, the intelligence reform initiated in Japan is a multifaceted transformation process that must be monitored in terms of both internal institutional balance and the balance of power in the Indo Pacific.



A Constitutional Reform is Requested from Bulgaria for North Macedonia's European Union Accession

European Union "Enlargement Commissioner" Marta Kos visited North Macedonia to discuss North Macedonia's accession to EU.



During her visit, Kos talked about EU's demands in accordance with their priorities in the gradual accession process for North Macedonia with the Prime Minister Hristijan Mickoski and the Minister for European Affairs Bekim Sali.

Aside from the lack of a proper institutional foundation and poor economy of the country, one of the most critical obstacles before North Macedonia's accession is regarded to be Bulgaria's veto against North Macedonia. Bulgaria demands a constitutional change to relieve their concerns regarding bilateral ethnic claims of the Bulgarian state over the history and identity of the Macedonians and the Macedonian state. A constitutional reform is suggested to the government of North Macedonia (currently led by VMRO-DPMNE coalition) by EU as well to prevent Bulgaria from casting a veto on North Macedonia's accession again.

Nevertheless, it should be said that Bulgarian claims go beyond the constitutional change, Bulgarian politicians and historian have nationalist tendencies causing to view Macedonian identity and language as artificially created concepts to disrupt Bulgarian history and identity saying that Macedonian language itself is a dialect of Bulgarian and history of Macedonia is a part of Bulgarian history. However, some contradictions can be found in Bulgarian claims as the Bulgarian state also demands a revision to be made on the North Macedonian constitution by requesting that Bulgarians should be included and recognized as one of the constitutive groups

in North Macedonia. It is known that according to the demographic census done in 2021 by North Macedonian government 3,504 people in North Macedonia identified themselves as Bulgarians. However, it is easy to say and observe that the public opinion in North Macedonia is as much concerned as the North Macedonian bureaucrats regarding the possibility of Bulgaria's veto even if the constitutional change takes place. For the fear that a similar experience might happen just like the time North Macedonia officially changed its name to "North Macedonia" from "Republic of Macedonia" (even though they were still recognized as the "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" by the international law) to mitigate the Greek claims over the country's name did not cause Greece to lift their embargo and veto against North Macedonia. Moreover, Greek claims over the name Macedonia along with its history and historical figures such as the "Alexander the Great" have troubled North Macedonia's accession to NATO and EU for more than three decades resulting in the poor integration of North Macedonia's to the Western World and international organizations. That is why the current government of North Macedonia can be seen unwilling to give any concessions regarding their bilateral issues with Bulgaria believing that it might not be enough to lift Bulgaria's veto before North Macedonia while putting North Macedonia into a practically irreversible position on the constitutional level.



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In other words, North Macedonia does not want to make any sacrifices before getting rewarded this time and this situation complicates their bilateral relations with Bulgaria creating a stalemate.



Declassified CIA Files Reignite Venezuela's Election Fraud Debate

CIA documents declassified by the Donald Trump administration have brought the issue of election integrity allegations in Venezuela back to the international agenda. According to the documents reported by the BBC, it is estimated that Venezuela's electoral system—including its technical infrastructure—has theoretically possessed the capacity to alter vote counts by approximately 1.5 million votes since 2012. Consequently, these documents should be treated as intelligence indicating clear manipulation of election results and, more specifically, the electoral system itself. To understand the election controversies in Venezuela, it is important to examine the political history of the Bolivarian movement. Bolivarianism is a political ideology named after Simón Bolívar—the hero of Latin American independence—and is based on the

principles of anti-imperialism, national sovereignty, social justice, and regional unity. After coming to power in 1999, Hugo Chávez reshaped this ideology through the concept of "21st-century socialism." However, following 2007, public support for the Bolivarian movement began to gradually decline due to deepening economic problems, high inflation, shortages of basic necessities, and increasing political polarization. After Chávez's death in 2013, Nicolás Maduro was elected president by a very narrow margin over opposition candidate Henrique Capriles; this result was viewed as a significant indicator that the movement had lost strength compared to previous years. The presidential elections held on May 20, 2018, further deepened the debate regarding democratic legitimacy in Venezuela. According to official results, Maduro was elected president for a second term with approximately six million votes; however, the turnout rate was only 46%, marking the lowest participation in a presidential election in the country's recent history. The boycott of the elections by a significant portion of the opposition, the exclusion of leading opposition candidates from the race, criticisms regarding the independence of the National Electoral Council, and allegations that state resources were used to favor the incumbent raised serious questions about the fairness of the elections. Numerous international actors—including the US, the European Union, the Lima Group, and the Organization of American States



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—did not recognize the election results as legitimate. Consequently, while CIA documents released to the public in 2026 reignited debates surrounding the 2012 elections, the documents do not, in themselves, prove electoral fraud. In contrast, the 2018 elections are regarded as one of the most striking examples of democratic backsliding in Venezuela—not only due to allegations of potential technical irregularities but also because of the curtailment of political competition, the exclusion of the opposition, and criticisms concerning the impartiality of electoral institutions.