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The coup in Egypt strikes a blow for Turkey's position in the Middle East

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Turkey has firmly condemned the military coup in Egypt which led to the ouster of President Mohamed Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood-dominated government. In the first days following the coup, Ankara was at pains to convince the international community (including the UN, the United States, the European Union and the Arab states) to pressure the Egyptian army into re-instating Morsi as president or at least to condemn the military for staging an assault on democracy. As these attempts proved unsuccessful, Ankara criticised the European Union for applying double standards in its evaluation of political transformation in its neighbourhood. The Egyptian coup is currently the main topic on the agenda for Turkish politicians. Numerous demonstrations of support for the toppled Egyptian government have been witnessed in Turkey.

Commentary

- From Turkey's point of view, Egypt under Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood was a promising political partner. It was mainly due to Egypt's pivotal role in the Middle East, similar approach to regional security issues (e.g., support for the Syrian opposition, and the Palestinian issue) and some ideological similarities (Muslim conservatism and opposition to the army interfering in politics). Although, the domestic instability, economic slump and Cairo's ambitions to be a regional power had made Egypt a difficult interlocutor for Ankara, nevertheless, the ouster of Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood has deprived Turkey of a potentially important partner in the Middle East. Condemnation of the coup and attempts to delegitimise the army-backed interim government will make it significantly more difficult for Turkey to establish political and economic co-operation with the new Egyptian government.

- The military coup has weakened Ankara's influence in the Middle East. Since the Egyptian army, who have a neutral stance on Israel, has grown stronger, Tel-Aviv's determination to normalise relations with Turkey is likely to decline. There is little chance that the new government will back Turkey's policy on Syria and Palestine (for instance, the Turkish prime minister was planning to visit the Gaza Strip, which he was to access from Egypt). The fall of the Morsi government is also a blow to those groups of the Syrian opposition who are backed by Ankara, because they also originate from the Muslim Brotherhood.

The fact that the key Arab states, including Saudi Arabia and Qatar, are favourably disposed to the military coup will further deepen Turkey's political isolation on the regional scene; at least until the Muslim Brotherhood gains political influence there. The difference in attitudes will also impede Turkey's co-operation with the EU and the United States on Middle Eastern issues.

- By condemning the military coup in Egypt, Turkey is trying to restore its image of a promoter of democracy. This image was tarnished, both domestically and internationally, as a result of the government's brutal response to the mass anti-government protests in May and June this year. By criticising the EU for its acceptance of the military coup, Ankara is trying to discredit it as a supervisor of the Turkish transformation. Ankara will likely resort to this tactic whenever the EU points to the deficiencies of Turkish democracy.