An Indirect Nexus: Egypt's Geopolitical Connection to Syria's Afrin Region Before 2010

Introduction

An analysis of the relationship between the Arab Republic of Egypt and the Afrin region of northwestern Syria before 2010 reveals a connection that is almost entirely indirect, geopolitical, and mediated through the high-level interactions between the capitals of Cairo and Damascus. The available historical record shows no evidence of direct bilateral relations, specific economic partnerships, or targeted cultural exchanges between the Egyptian state and the Afrin district as a distinct entity.[1] Therefore, to understand this connection, one must move beyond a search for direct ties and instead examine how the major shifts in the Egypt-Syria relationship—from pan-Arab union to bitter rivalry and eventual rapprochement—created political and security shockwaves that were felt acutely in Syria's peripheries, including Afrin.

This report argues that Egypt's connection with Afrin before 2010 was powerfully shaped by three primary geopolitical vectors. First, the centralizing, pan-Arabist ideology of the United Arab Republic (UAR) from 1958 to 1961 sought to erase sub-national identities, directly impacting the political and cultural expression of Kurds in Afrin and across Syria. Second, the strategic rivalry and eventual rapprochement between Egypt and Ba'athist Syria, particularly after the 1979 Camp David Accords, created the geopolitical context for Damascus's use of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) as a proxy force against Turkey, a policy that transformed Syria's Kurdish regions into a rear base for the insurgency. Third, Egypt's re-emergent role as a key regional mediator under President Hosni Mubarak culminated in its pivotal intervention in the 1998 Turkey-Syria crisis. This mediation, which resulted in the Adana Agreement, represents the most significant, albeit indirect, Egyptian action influencing the affairs of Syria's Kurdish regions prior to 2010. Ultimately, for Egyptian foreign policy, Syria was consistently viewed as a unitary actor represented by its central government. The internal affairs of the Afrin region, and the status of its Kurdish population, were not a subject of Egyptian policy but rather an object impacted by the consequences of high-level statecraft.

Table 1: Timeline of Key Events in Egypt-Syria Relations and their

Impact on the Afrin Region (1946-2009)

Period/Year(s)	Key Event in Egypt-Syria Relations	Nature of the Connection to Afrin/Syrian Kurds	Key Sources
1946–1957	Post-colonial instability in Syria; Rise of Nasser's Pan-Arabism.	Syrian state implements Arabization policies; Kurdish political identity is suppressed.	[4]
1958–1961	Formation of the United Arab Republic (UAR).	Intensified suppression of Kurdish identity under a centralized pan-Arab state; all political parties, including the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria (KDPS), are banned.	[6]
1961–1963	Collapse of the UAR; "Secessionist" regime in Syria.	Syrian resentment of Egyptian dominance leads to the reversal of UAR-era socialist policies. Grievances are aired at the 1962 Chtoura meeting.	[8]
1963–1970	Ba'ath Party takes power in Syria; Intra-Ba'ath struggles.	Continued state policies of Arabization and discrimination against Kurds under a new nationalist regime.	[5]
1970–1977	Hafez al-Assad consolidates power; Egypt-Syria alliance for the 1973 October War.	Alliance is tactical; Assad's regime continues to view Kurdish identity as a threat to the unitary state.	[10]
1977–1989	Sadat's visit to Jerusalem; Camp David Accords;	Syria's regional isolation creates an incentive to use proxy	[12]

	Egypt-Syria diplomatic break.	forces. Assad regime begins providing sanctuary and support to the PKK to pressure Turkey.	
1980s–1998	Assad's patronage of the PKK deepens.	Syria's Kurdish regions, including areas near Afrin, become a crucial recruitment and logistical base for the PKK's war against Turkey.	[13]
1998	Turkey threatens military action against Syria over PKK support.	Egypt's President Mubarak mediates the crisis, leading to the Adana Agreement. Syria expels PKK leader Öcalan and ceases support for the group.	[14]
1989–2009	Egypt rejoins Arab League; Gradual Egypt-Syria rapprochement under Mubarak and Assad.	State-to-state relations normalize. Egyptian policy focuses on regional stability and mediation, not the internal affairs of Syria or the status of its minorities.	[16]

Part I: The Foundational Context: Syria, Egypt, and the Kurds on the Eve of Union

1.1 The Afrin District: A Historical, Demographic, and Cultural Overview

To comprehend the indirect nature of Egypt's connection to Afrin, it is essential to first establish the region's distinct character. Located in the northwestern corner of Syria, in the Aleppo Governorate, the Afrin region (also known historically as Kurd-Dagh, or "Mountain of

the Kurds") has a history of settlement stretching back to antiquity.[18] Archaeological evidence points to a Syro-Hittite settlement at Ain Dara, south of the modern town of Afrin, and the discovery of a Luwian stele from the 9th or 8th century BC confirms its place within the ancient civilizations of the Levant. The area was subsequently part of the Roman province of Coele Syria and later became an important center for Christianity.[18]

The region's identity has been profoundly shaped by its Kurdish population. While Kurdish tribes served as mercenaries and soldiers-for-hire in the area since the Seleucid era, significant settlement patterns are recorded by the 16th and 17th centuries.[18] Over time, Afrin developed into a recognized Kurdish cultural hub, distinguished by its lush olive groves, which became a symbol of the region's identity and economy.[18] Its cultural fabric was also unique within Syria. It was known for a more secularly tolerant and less conservative interpretation of Islam, which allowed vibrant Yazidi and Alevi communities to thrive alongside the Sunni Muslim majority. Before the turmoil of the 21st century, Afrin was reputed to have the fewest mosques of any region in Syria, a testament to its distinct social character.

Afrin's modern geopolitical vulnerability was sealed by the drawing of the Syria-Turkey border in 1923 and the subsequent Turkish annexation of the Hatay Province in 1939. These events left the Afrin district almost entirely encircled by the Turkish border, a geographical reality that would dominate its security considerations for the remainder of the 20th century and beyond.

1.2 The Post-Colonial Syrian State and its "Kurdish Question"

Following its independence from the French Mandate, the modern Syrian state embarked on a nation-building project rooted in an assertive Arab nationalist ideology. This project was inherently exclusionary towards the country's non-Arab minorities, particularly its substantial Kurdish population. Successive Syrian governments adopted policies of ethnic discrimination and forced Arabization aimed at erasing Kurdish cultural and political identity.

These policies manifested in multiple spheres of life. The Kurdish language, the second most spoken in Syria, was banned from official use and from public schools.[5] Families were prohibited from registering their children with Kurdish names, and businesses could not operate without Arabic names. The state systematically underinvested in Kurdish-majority regions like Afrin, and laws were passed to discriminate against Kurds in property ownership and certain professions.

The most flagrant act of this state-led discrimination was the special census conducted in the Jazira province in 1962. This census was explicitly designed to strip a large portion of the Kurdish population of their nationality, based on the government's claim that they were illegal immigrants from Turkey. As a result, an estimated 120,000 Syrian Kurds were rendered stateless, a status that was passed down to their descendants.[5] This policy was later complemented by the "Arab Belt initiative" in the 1970s, which involved the expropriation of fertile Kurdish agricultural lands and their redistribution to Arab families relocated from other provinces, in a clear attempt to engineer the region's demographics. This was the domestic political reality in Afrin and other Kurdish areas on the eve of the union with Egypt: a

community under sustained pressure from a central government hostile to its very identity.

1.3 Egypt and Syria (1946-1958): The Path to Pan-Arab Unity

In the years following World War II, the relationship between the newly independent states of Egypt and Syria was shaped by shared regional ambitions and anxieties. Both were founding members of the Arab League and signatories of the Alexandria Protocol, establishing a basis for cooperation. Their joint participation and subsequent defeat in the 1948 war against Israel sent profound shockwaves through their respective political systems. In Syria, the defeat contributed to a period of chronic instability marked by a series of military coups in 1949. In Egypt, it fueled the discontent within the military that culminated in the 1952 Free Officers' coup, which overthrew the monarchy and brought Gamal Abdel Nasser to power.
Nasser's rise, and particularly his defiant stance against Western powers during the 1956 Suez Crisis, transformed him into a heroic figure across the Arab world. His message of pan-Arab unity, strength, and anti-imperialism resonated powerfully in Syria, where political leaders were grappling with internal factionalism and external pressures of the Cold War.[6] Western powers, concerned about Syria's growing ties with the Soviet bloc, engaged in covert operations aimed at unseating Syrian governments, which only pushed Damascus further into the embrace of its allies.[21] It was in this climate of internal fragility and external threat that Syrian political and military leaders began to see a full union with Nasser's Egypt not just as an ideological goal, but as a strategic necessity for survival.

Part II: The United Arab Republic (1958-1961): Centralized Power and the Erasure of Peripheries

2.1 Forging the Union: Geopolitical Drivers and Syrian Motivations

The creation of the United Arab Republic on February 22, 1958, was overwhelmingly a Syrian-driven initiative, born from a confluence of internal power struggles and external geopolitical pressures.[6] While popular pan-Arab sentiment was strong in Syria, the immediate catalyst was a desperate maneuver by factions within the Syrian ruling coalition. The Arab Socialist Resurrectionist Party (ASRP, or Ba'ath Party), a key advocate for the union, saw it as a decisive way to strengthen its position against the growing influence of the Syrian Communist Party and its pro-Soviet allies in the military, such as Chief of Staff Afif al-Bizri.[6]
In mid-January 1958, Syrian leaders, including Foreign Minister and ASRP leader Salah al-Bitar, traveled to Cairo to press the case for immediate union with Nasser. They effectively presented Nasser with an ultimatum: accede to the union or risk losing his influence in Syria to

the communists. Nasser, who had previously been reluctant to tie his regional freedom of action to an unstable Syrian ally, was convinced that the union was now necessary to maintain his dominant position in Damascus. He agreed to the merger, but on his own strict terms, which would have profound consequences for Syria's political landscape.

2.2 The Administration of the "Northern Province": Egyptian Centralization and Political Suppression

The union was structured as a highly centralized state, effectively turning Syria into the "Northern Province" of a republic governed from Cairo. Nasser's conditions were non-negotiable: one president (himself), one parliament, one army, and one political party—the National Union.[6] This framework necessitated the immediate dissolution of all existing Syrian political parties, including the Ba'ath Party, which had been the union's most fervent champion.[4]

This political consolidation was accompanied by the swift export of Egypt's statist economic and administrative structures to Syria. Nasser initiated land reform laws in Syria in September 1958, mirroring the policies he had implemented in Egypt, under the justification that "political freedom is not everything, without economic liberation". However, the administration of the union quickly became a source of profound Syrian resentment. Egyptians tended to dominate the new power structure, treating their Syrian counterparts as "subordinates". Syrian elites and military officers felt marginalized, and the perception grew that Syria was being reduced to the status of an Egyptian colony. This feeling was exacerbated when Nasser appointed his vice president, Field Marshal Abdel Hakim Amer, as the de facto governor of Syria, further centralizing control in the hands of the Egyptian leadership.

2.3 The Impact on Syria's Kurds: The UAR's Pan-Arab Ideology and the Suppression of Kurdish Identity in Afrin and Beyond

For the Kurdish population in Syria, including in the Afrin region, the United Arab Republic represented a direct and intensified assault on their cultural and political existence. The union's foundational ideology was an uncompromising pan-Arabism that had no tolerance for non-Arab identities. The pre-existing Arabization policies of the Syrian state were not merely continued but were accelerated and given a powerful new ideological justification under Nasser's leadership.

The UAR's "one party" rule meant the immediate suppression of all independent political organization. This explicitly included the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria (KDPS), which was forced underground. The state's security apparatus cracked down on any expression of Kurdish identity. The mere possession of Kurdish-language publications or music became a sufficient reason for arrest and detention. While the infamous 1962 census that denationalized tens of thousands of Kurds occurred just after the UAR's collapse, the ideological groundwork

for such an action was firmly laid during the union period. The state's narrative, which framed Kurds as foreign infiltrators, was perfectly aligned with the UAR's goal of forging a single, homogenous Arab nation. For the people of Afrin, the UAR was not an abstract geopolitical arrangement; it was a period of heightened state surveillance and cultural repression, enforced by a centralized power structure in Cairo that was fundamentally hostile to their identity.

2.4 The Dissolution of the UAR: Syrian Resentment and the "Chtoura Meeting" Accusations

The union proved to be short-lived and, for many Syrians, a "bitter disappointment". On September 28, 1961, a coup led by Syrian army officers in Damascus effectively ended the UAR, re-establishing Syria as an independent state.[8] The collapse was driven by a potent mix of grievances: widespread resentment among the political and military class over Egyptian domination; the suppression of political life; and economic hardship exacerbated by a severe drought and the unpopularity of Egyptian-imposed socialist measures, such as land reform and nationalizations. The "secessionist" regime that took power immediately began to dismantle these policies.

The depth of Syrian animosity was put on full display in August 1962 at a meeting of the Arab League in Chtoura, Lebanon. The Syrian government filed a formal complaint against the UAR (Egypt, which retained the name until 1971), accusing Nasser and Egyptian intelligence of continued interference in Syria's internal affairs, including attempts to orchestrate a counter-coup to restore the union. The Syrian delegation accused Nasser's regime of "authoritarian policies" and "individualistic, tyrannical" rule. They presented documents alleging that Egyptian intelligence was recruiting Syrian officers and providing them with money and explosives to carry out assassinations. Furthermore, they accused the Egyptian military leadership of deliberately dismantling the Syrian army during the union, turning its command into a ceremonial post, and "looting" Syrian military equipment. The Chtoura meeting served as a public and formal indictment of the UAR experience, cementing a legacy of bitterness and mistrust that would define Egypt-Syria relations for years to come.

Part III: The Assad Era: A Geopolitical Triangle of Cairo, Damascus, and Ankara

3.1 The Hafez al-Assad Regime: Consolidation of Power and Strategic Foreign Policy

After a decade of instability following the UAR's collapse, Hafez al-Assad seized power in a 1970 coup, ushering in an era of unprecedented, albeit brutal, stability.[8] Assad constructed a formidable authoritarian state, concentrating power within the military, the intelligence apparatus, and the Ba'ath Party, all dominated by his minority Alawite sect.[11] Political dissent was ruthlessly eliminated through arrest, torture, and execution. The most infamous example of this was the 1982 Hama massacre, where the regime crushed an uprising by the Muslim Brotherhood, resulting in an estimated 20,000 deaths and the near-total destruction of the city.[10]

In foreign affairs, Assad pursued a shrewd and ambitious policy aimed at establishing Syria as a leader of the Arab world and the primary "confrontation state" against Israel.[10] To achieve this, he abandoned his predecessor's policy of exporting socialist revolution and instead focused on building up the Syrian military, for which he relied heavily on an alliance with the Soviet Union.[10] While forsaking the Nasserist dream of a single Arab nation, Assad positioned his regime as the staunchest defender of the Palestinian cause, a stance that would put him on a collision course with Egypt.

3.2 From Alliance to Animosity: The 1973 War and the Camp David Rupture

Upon taking power, Assad forged a new strategic alliance with Egypt's new president, Anwar Sadat. This partnership culminated in the coordinated surprise attack on Israel in October 1973, known as the Yom Kippur War.[4] The war initially appeared to be a major Arab success, but the relationship between the two leaders quickly soured. Sadat's decision to accept a U.S.-brokered ceasefire left the Syrian military exposed and vulnerable to Israeli counter-attacks, a move that earned Sadat Assad's "enduring resentment".

The final, irreparable rupture occurred following Sadat's historic visit to Jerusalem in 1977 and the subsequent signing of the Camp David Accords with Israel in 1979. Assad viewed this as a profound betrayal of the Arab cause. Syria led the charge in condemning the peace treaty, severing all diplomatic relations with Egypt.[12] At Syria's instigation, a mob ransacked the Egyptian embassy in Damascus, and Egypt was formally suspended from the Arab League, a suspension that would last for a decade.[25] This diplomatic break plunged Syria into a period of regional isolation, pitting it against the U.S.-backed Egypt-Israel axis and leaving it increasingly reliant on its Soviet patron.

3.3 Damascus's "Kurdish Card": The Strategic Patronage of the PKK

It was within this context of regional isolation and heightened rivalry with its neighbors that the Assad regime began to cultivate the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) as a strategic asset. The PKK, a militant group founded in Turkey in the late 1970s, was engaged in a violent

insurgency against the Turkish state for Kurdish autonomy.[13] For Assad, supporting the PKK served multiple strategic purposes. It allowed him to exert pressure on Turkey, a key NATO member and U.S. ally, over long-standing disputes, including water rights from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and Syria's irredentist claim to the Hatay province.[13] It also served the interests of his Soviet patrons, who saw value in destabilizing a crucial southern-flank NATO state.

Beginning in the early 1980s, Syria provided the PKK with a vital safe haven.[13] The group's leader, Abdullah Öcalan, was allowed to establish his base of operations in Damascus, where he resided for nearly two decades.[14] PKK militants were provided with training camps, primarily in the Syrian-controlled Bekaa Valley in Lebanon, where their activities could be closely monitored by Syrian intelligence.[13] This patronage had a direct impact on Syria's own Kurdish population. Assad's regime allowed the PKK to recruit heavily from Kurdish communities in Syria, including in and around Afrin. This policy cleverly diverted the political energies and frustrations of Syria's oppressed Kurds away from demands for rights within Syria and channeled them into the conflict against Turkey, thereby serving the regime's foreign policy objectives.

3.4 Pivotal Moment: Egypt's Mediation of the 1998 Turkey-Syria Crisis

By the late 1990s, Turkey's patience with Syria's open support for the PKK had exhausted. In September and October 1998, Ankara escalated its threats to an unprecedented level. The Turkish military chief of staff accused Syria of waging an "undeclared war," and Turkey massed an estimated 10,000 troops on the Syrian border, making a military invasion appear imminent.[13]

This crisis represented the single most significant moment of Egyptian connection to the affairs of Syria's Kurdish regions. The intervention was not driven by any specific policy towards the Kurds, but by the core tenets of Egyptian foreign policy under President Hosni Mubarak: the preservation of regional stability and the reassertion of Egypt's role as the indispensable Arab mediator.[31] A war between Turkey and Syria would have been calamitous for the entire region, undermining Egypt's strategic interests.

Leveraging Egypt's good relations with both sides, Mubarak launched an intensive diplomatic effort.[14] He engaged in shuttle diplomacy, flying to Ankara and Damascus and hosting President Assad in Cairo.[14] This mediation was instrumental in convincing a defiant Assad that the Turkish military threat was credible and that he could not win a conflict against the superior Turkish army. The result of Mubarak's intervention was the Adana Agreement, signed on October 20, 1998. Under the terms of the agreement, Syria officially designated the PKK as a "terrorist organization," pledged to halt all forms of support for the group, and, most critically, expelled Abdullah Öcalan from Damascus.[14] Egypt's actions, motivated by its own national interests, directly and fundamentally altered the security environment in which the PKK operated, with profound and lasting consequences for the militant group and for the Syrian Kurdish regions that had served as its sanctuary.

3.5 The Cautious Rapprochement: Relations under Mubarak and a Pre-2011 Assad

The successful resolution of the 1998 crisis, coupled with Egypt's formal readmission to the Arab League in 1989, paved the way for a gradual but steady rapprochement between Cairo and Damascus.[16] Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, relations between President Mubarak and President Hafez al-Assad (and later his son, Bashar) were generally described as correct and positive.[4] This was based on a shared past as military men and a mutual interest in maintaining a stable regional order.

Mubarak even attempted to leverage this improved relationship to mediate in the Syrian-Israeli peace process, discussing plans for a potential return of the Golan Heights in exchange for normalization.[4] This warming of state-to-state ties, however, did not translate into any change in the fundamental power dynamics within Syria. The Ba'athist regime's policies of suppressing Kurdish identity and denying political rights remained firmly in place.[5] For Egypt, the relationship was with the regime in Damascus; the internal conditions of Syria's regions, such as Afrin, remained outside the purview of its foreign policy.

Part IV: An Analysis of Economic and Cultural Linkages

4.1 Egypt-Syria Bilateral Economic Relations: A Macro-Level Overview (Pre-2010)

The economic relationship between Egypt and Syria in the period before 2010 was a function of their political alignment. Following the diplomatic break in 1979, economic ties were minimal. The restoration of diplomatic relations and Egypt's return to the Arab League in 1989 led to a normalization of economic activity.[17] In June 1989, the first Syrian civilian aircraft since the break landed in Cairo, signaling the resumption of official contacts and paving the way for renewed trade. Syria invited Egypt to participate in the Damascus International Fair that same year, marking a formal return to economic engagement.

However, there is no evidence to suggest that Syria was a top-tier economic partner for Egypt during this period. The Egyptian economy in the 2000s, particularly before the 2008 global financial crisis, was experiencing robust growth driven by large-scale foreign direct investment (FDI), a booming tourism sector, and revenues from the Suez Canal.[33] In fiscal year 2007/2008, net FDI into Egypt reached $13.2 billion USD. Egypt's primary economic focus was on its major trade partners and sources of investment, which were not centered on Syria. While bilateral trade agreements undoubtedly existed, the scale of economic exchange was

secondary to the political and strategic dimensions of the relationship.

4.2 The Absence of Direct Ties: Investigating Specific Economic or Cultural Exchange with Afrin

A comprehensive review of the available evidence reveals a complete lack of documented, specific economic or cultural links between the Egyptian state and the Afrin region before 2010. This absence is not merely a gap in the historical record but is, in itself, a definitive finding that illuminates the nature of Egypt's foreign policy.

Egyptian economic policy and trade promotion efforts were conducted at the national, continental, or major partner level. Official documents and reports detail strategies for increasing trade with Africa as a whole, partnerships with the European Union, and engagement with global powers, but contain no mention of targeted engagement with sub-regions of other Arab states.[35] Similarly, cultural and educational exchanges were structured as state-to-state agreements. For example, scholarships offered to Syrian students to study in Egypt were managed through a cultural exchange agreement between the Syrian Ministry of Higher Education in Damascus and its Egyptian counterpart. There is no indication that these programs had any regional specificity or were in any way tailored to particular communities within Syria, such as that of Afrin.

This lack of granular engagement demonstrates that, from Cairo's perspective, Syria was a unitary political and economic entity. All official interactions—be they political, economic, or cultural—were channeled through the central government in Damascus. The internal composition of Syria, its regional economies, and its diverse ethnic and cultural communities were not distinct targets or considerations for Egyptian policy. This reinforces the conclusion that the only tangible connection between Egypt and Afrin was the indirect, top-down influence of high-level geopolitics.

Conclusion: Synthesizing an Indirect Relationship

The connection between Egypt and Syria's Afrin region in the decades preceding 2010 was exclusively indirect, shaped by the grand currents of regional politics rather than any direct engagement. The relationship can be understood as a series of impacts, mediated entirely through the central government in Damascus, which Cairo consistently treated as the sole, monolithic representative of the Syrian state. The evidence points to two distinct historical periods during which Egyptian policy had a profound, albeit unintentional, effect on the political and security environment of Afrin and Syria's broader Kurdish population.

The first period was the United Arab Republic (1958-1961). The union, driven by Syrian desperation but forged on Egyptian terms, institutionalized a pan-Arab ideology that was inherently hostile to non-Arab identities. For the Kurds of Afrin, this meant an intensification of the state's pre-existing Arabization policies and a direct crackdown on their political and

cultural expression, enforced by a centralized state apparatus controlled from Cairo. The UAR experience demonstrated how Egyptian-led pan-Arabism could be deployed to suppress sub-national identities within its sphere of influence.

The second, and more pivotal, period of connection came in the wake of the 1979 Camp David Accords. The resulting diplomatic rupture between Cairo and Damascus created the strategic context for Hafez al-Assad's regime to sponsor the PKK as a proxy against Turkey. This policy transformed Syria's Kurdish regions into a vital rear base for the insurgency. The definitive moment of Egyptian influence arrived with the 1998 crisis, when President Hosni Mubarak's successful mediation between Turkey and Syria averted a regional war. This intervention, which led directly to the Adana Agreement and the expulsion of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan from Damascus, was the high-water mark of Egypt's indirect impact on the security landscape of areas like Afrin. This action was not motivated by any concern for the Kurds, but by Egypt's core foreign policy interest in maintaining regional stability and cementing its status as the primary Arab mediator.

Ultimately, the analysis confirms that for Egyptian policymakers before 2010, Afrin as a distinct region did not appear on their strategic map. There were no specific economic initiatives, cultural outreach programs, or political considerations directed toward it. The people of Afrin experienced Egyptian influence not through trade, scholarships, or direct diplomacy, but through the ideological pressures of a short-lived union and, decades later, through the consequences of a high-stakes geopolitical game played by the leaders of Cairo, Damascus, and Ankara. For Cairo, the object of policy was always the Syrian state; for Afrin, Cairo's power was a distant but formative force that helped define the precarious boundaries of its political existence.

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