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**THE REGIONAL RESET:
A FRESH START OR MORE OF THE SAME?
TURKEY'S RELATIONS WITH EGYPT, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, AND ISRAEL**

Ali Bakir

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Ali Bakir is Research Assistant Professor, Ibn Khaldon Center, Qatar University

Introduction

Starting in 2021, the Middle East's primary players started showing different dynamics in their foreign policy behavior compared to the last four years. De-escalation, talks, negotiations, meditation, and positive messaging replaced escalation, conflicts, struggles. These traits became a defining factor of the countries' interrelations and a milestone in the current post-US' Trump-period.

In the Gulf region, the GCC members and Egypt signed the al-Ula agreement ending three years and a half crisis with Doha that spilled over into other regions in the Middle East and beyond. As a result, the Saudi-Led quartet (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt) removed the blockade against Qatar, agreed to restore diplomatic ties, and initiated a reconciliation process to normalize relations between the concerned parties. Soon after, Doha expressed its readiness to mediate between "Iran and the GCC," "Iran and the US," and "Saudi Arabia and Turkey."

In the wake of the al-Ula agreement, and after years of showing intense hostility towards Ankara, the UAE expressed its willingness to normalize relations with Turkey. It offered to mediate [between](#) India and Pakistan, Egypt [and](#) Ethiopia. Likewise, Iran also agreed to engage in indirect talks with the US over the fate of the 2015 nuclear deal, the JCPOA.

Not far away from the Gulf region, Ankara and Paris [announced](#) that they are working on a roadmap to normalize ties. Soon after, Greece and Turkey held their first official [direct talks](#) since 2016 on the standoff in the Eastern Mediterranean, while the UN convened an invitation for the (5+1) group for [a meeting](#) on Cyprus to test whether a solution was possible to the Cypriot problem. The Turkish officials expressed interest in mediating [between](#) Sudan and Ethiopia, as well as in intra-Afghan peace [talks](#).

In the Mediterranean basin also, Israel [announced](#) that it is in talks with Turkey over East Med. Cairo introduced changes to its Libya policy, sent an official [delegation](#) to Tripoli for the first time in 7 years, and [discussed](#) opening its embassy there. Despite signing a maritime delimitation agreement with Athens, Cairo notably respected the coordinates of the [continental shelf](#) as declared by Ankara in its new oil-and-gas exploration [bid](#) prompting Turkish officials to reach out to their Egyptian counterparts. Furthermore, Cairo and Doha assumed a leading role in the ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinians after Netanyahu's war against Gaza.

All these critical developments took place within few months. During this short period, the regional powers showed increasing will to engage, talk, and sit together to de-escalate and discuss matters of mutual interests and/or concerns. They even competed to exhibit a pro-active and constructive attitude, another sign of a departure from the old regional alliance structure, born in the aftermath of the Arab revolutions in 2011, at least on the rhetoric level.

In this context, this paper discusses Turkey's relations with three regional players: Egypt, UAE, and Israel. As a regional power and a crucial player in several geopolitical theaters, Turkey was one of those countries recalibrating its position and adopting a charm offensive to adapt to the new realities in the post-Trump period and prepare for the post-COVID-19 era.

While Turkey was at the center of these new diplomatic initiatives, observers often mistakenly portrayed Ankara's moves as a unilateral initiative towards "the other," disregarding the timeline of the events, the regional and the international environment, as well as the other players'

motives and goals. Such view/analysis is often the result of a one-sided approach that leads to an inaccurate and distorted account of the events and undermines one's ability to grasp what is happening and foresee the endeavors.

To avoid such an outcome and better anticipate the trends of these political/diplomatic moves and their denouements on the regional chessboard, the paper adopts an in-depth analysis, holistic and multi-dimensional approach. It considers the historical account of the involved states' behavior, motives, calculations, interests and aims at a multilayered structure comprising political, economic, security, and geopolitical factors during the last decade or so.

The paper consists of three chapters in which it tries to answer a set of questions: Why do we have such a shift on the regional level? What are the primary motives of the involved players? Do they have common interests? Are these moves genuine? Do they aim to achieve tactical or strategic gains? Do they seek to serve political, economic, or security goals? Are there any foreign factors-players that can affect the behavior of the meant parties at a certain point? Can the involved normalize their relations at the current motives? What is required? What can we draw from the experience? And what can we expect in the future?

Turkey – Egypt Relations

Observers often see the Turkish- Egyptian relations from the prism of the competition over regional primacy. However, Egypt's former Ambassador to Turkey disagrees with this conventional wisdom. In a speech for him in November 2012, Ambassador Abderahman Salaheldin¹, dismissed this claim as "a misconception that has been surfacing every now and then by many ill-informed or ill-intended sources."² In his own words, "Egypt and Turkey have many commonalities, foremost regarding their geopolitical location, history, and cultural affinity."

In the aftermath of the Egyptian revolution erupted in 2011, the Turkish-Egyptian relations peaked in an unprecedented way politically, economically, and security-wise. Turkey's President at the time, Abdullah Gul, was the first foreign official to visit Cairo only one month after Mubarak was forced to step down. In September 2011, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Prime Minister, visited Cairo for the first time. His visit opened a new horizon for the Turkish-Egyptian cooperation. Ankara and Cairo established a High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council and signed a dozen agreements in technology, communications, tourism, energy, electricity...etc. Moreover, in March 2012, Ankara and Cairo signed a "Ro-Ro" agreement.

All these developments took place before the Egyptians choose their first civilian President-the late Mohammad Morsi, in the first free elections ever. After assuming power, Morsi further strengthened his country's relations with Turkey and deepened the cooperation and coordination with Ankara on the bilateral, regional, and international levels.

¹ Salaheldin served in Turkey during the time of three Egyptian Presidents: Hosni Mubarak, Mohammad Mursi, and Abdul Fattah el-Sisi.

² A Lecture for Salaheldin hosted by the author in USAK on 28 November 2012.

This kind of cooperation and coordination alarmed several regional rivals. Shortly afterward, Morsi was toppled by a military coup with the backing of several regional capitals, including Abu Dhabi and Riyadh, and the relations between Turkey and Egypt took a downturn.

In this section, we will navigate the (2013-2021) period.

I. Politics

In July 2013, the defense minister, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, led a military coup against the first freely elected civilian President ever in Egypt. The coup resulted in a great massacre, which Human Rights Watch [described](#) as "one of the world's largest killings of demonstrators in a single day in recent history." The Turkish government reacted harshly to the event. It strongly condemned the coup, refused to recognize the Sisi regime's legitimacy, and became a haven for the Egyptian opposition. Amid the lack of adequate response from the major powers and the international community, Ankara emerged as one of the fiercest critics of the coup and Sisi's government.

At the time, several [considerations](#) shaped Turkey's position from the event. First, as a country that witnessed several military coups in its recent history, Ankara knows how devastating a military coup can be. In this sense, when the military coup managed to take power in Cairo, Turkey looked at the events from its own lens. It couldn't embrace something that runs against its beliefs, especially when several internal and external forces were still entertaining the idea of a coup in Ankara. The Turkish government was still working on clipping the nails of the military establishment to force it to stop its interference in politics and submit to the civilian-political decision.

Second, during that period, Turkey had an inspiring experience that encouraged the Arab public to seek the long-awaited change in their countries. As a primary backer for the Arab uprisings, it was self-evident that Ankara will condemn the coup and refuse to recognize al-Sisi as the country's legitimate leader. Not only would acknowledging the military coup have undermined its image, soft power, and credibility in the eyes of its people and the people of the region, but it would have also empowered the internal elements aspiring such an action. As a result, the Turkish government insisted on the need to free Morsi and stop the crackdown on civilians.

In November 2013, Egypt decided to consider the Turkish ambassador persona non grata while accusing Ankara of trying to influence public opinion and inciting instability in the country. Turkey retaliated to the Egyptian move by barring the Egyptian ambassador and downgrading the ties. One month later, the Egyptian authorities designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization and banned the protests in the country, thus further complicating the internal situation and the relations with Ankara.

Despite the tense relations between the two countries, there have been several attempts to communicate on different levels in 2014, 2015, and 2017. These attempts failed to achieve the intended breakthrough because the circumstances were still inadequate, the interests of the two governments were not big enough to create a common ground for the talks, and the influence of some Gulf countries –such as the UAE- over the Egyptian decision was still strong

In his speech at the UN General Assembly in 2014, Turkey's President Erdogan questioned the legitimacy of al-Sisi. He criticized the United Nations as well as the democratic countries for doing nothing but watching the overthrowing of an elected president, the killings of thousands of innocent people, and legitimizing al-Sisi.

The speech resulted in canceling a [meeting](#) that was supposed to take place at the sidelines of the General Assembly between Turkey's Foreign Minister Cavusoglu and his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry. Later on, Erdogan uncovered that he turned down two dinner [invitations](#) at the UN General Assembly in order not his photo to be taken with Sisi on the same table. "That picture would be a black stain for me in the history books. I can't sit at the same table with a coup leader. The World knows our attitude on the issue," Erdogan said.

Upon the ascendance of King Salman to power in Riyadh in 2015, Ankara proposed an initiative to resolve the crisis if Cairo agreed to move Morsi to a third country and free the political prisoners; yet, the initiative did not see the light of the day.³ When a military junta tried to topple the Turkish government in July 2016, the Egyptian media and the political elite cheered the coup. Egypt hosted several media platforms and other institutions affiliated with Fethullah Gulen. These platforms, such as "Doğrusu" and "Turkey now," Targeted Turkey's image and its foreign policy for years. Moreover, Egypt-based Al-Ghad TV was the first Arabic channel to [host](#) Gulen. Cairo's Ten TV [hosted](#) him also in one of its shows in September 2019.

On a regional level, the Egyptian authorities used the Arab League organization to incite Arab countries against Ankara. Cairo joined the Saudi-led blockade against Qatar. With its allies, it put a list of 13 conditions that Doha had to meet, including stopping the military cooperation with Turkey and the immediate withdrawal of the Turkish troops from Qatar. None of these conditions were met by Doha, and Egypt had to normalize its relations with Qatar after the blockade turned into a fiasco. Cairo tried to undermine Turkey in Syria, Iraq, Sudan, and Libya but failed.

Towards the end of 2017, Egypt's Foreign Minister Sameh Shukri [said](#) that his country was open to restoring relations with Turkey and has the constant desire to overcome the tensions. In his interview with a local newspaper, he praised the ties between the people of the two countries. He maintained that Egypt has a constant desire to overcome any tensions with Turkey and resume the relations based on non-interference in internal affairs. Shoukry's statement came at a time when both Cairo and Ankara were keeping the economic channels open. They reaped the outcome of this step swiftly in 2018 -as we will explain in the economic section below-. Although no concrete evidence, it is believed that the intelligence communication between the two countries started as early as that year.

2019 was critical for several reasons. This year witnessed the establishment of the Cairo-based East Gas Med forum, the death of Egypt's legitimate President Morsi in his jail, and the delamination agreement of the maritime borders between Turkey and Libya's UN-recognized government (GNA) in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Turkey responded to the rising anti-Ankara alliance in the eastern Mediterranean by following an assertive policy and backing Libya's GNA against warlord Haftar and his backers (UAE, Egypt, France, and Russia, among others). Erdogan [urged](#) the UN to launch an official investigation into Morsi's death in the prison and rejected an offer to join a dinner with US President Donald Trump because he was seated next to al-Sisi.

These developments and the Libyan issue's complications in early 2020 threatened the progress achieved between the two sides on the intelligence level. Yet, this was the exact reason why both sides intensified their communications and managed to upgrade them and open new channels on the foreign ministry level in March 2021.

³ An official source with access to this information told the author.

II. Economics

When the AKP assumed power in Turkey in 2002, the volume of bilateral trade between Ankara and Cairo was almost negligible compared to the potentials of the two sides. It stood at around \$444 million. Given Turkey's extreme political orientation towards the West and its over-dependent on Europe and the US, this did not come as a surprise. However, when the AKP adopted the "Strategic Depth" doctrine and sought to open up on the Arab World among other regions, things started to change. Egypt was at the center of Ankara's effort to diversify its relations and expand its horizons to find new partnerships, markets, and friends in the Middle East.

Within only three years, Ankara and Cairo [signed](#) a Free Trade Agreement (FTA). The volume of bilateral trade was around \$954 million, but when the FTA entered into force in 2007, thus eliminating tariffs and non-tariff barriers, trade between the two countries almost doubled in two years from \$1.5 billion in 2007 to \$3.2 billion in 2009. Since then, the volume of trade started to increase slowly but steadily.

Turkey's Trade with Egypt 2000-2009
(One thousand Dollar)

	Exports	Imports	Volume	Balance
2000	375.707	140.720	516.428	234.987
2001	421.469	91.720	513.189	329.748
2002	326.389	118.173	444.562	208.216
2003	345.779	189.397	535.176	156.382
2004	473.145	255.242	728.387	217.904
2005	687.299	267.246	954.545	420.054
2006	709.353	392.524	1.101.877	316.829
2007	902.703	679.933	1.582.635	222.770
2008	1.426.449	942.816	2.369.266	483.633
2009	2.618.193	641.552	3.259.745	1.976.641

Source: TUIK

However, the 2011 uprising in Egypt boosted the economic cooperation between the two sides in an unprecedented way. In 2012, the volume of bilateral trade hit \$5 billion for the first time. After the 2013 military coup, the relations between the two countries [deteriorated](#) significantly and took a downturn. This situation left its marks also on the economic and business interactions between Ankara and Cairo. As a result, bilateral trade volume decreased for four consecutive years from 5 billion in 2012 to nearly \$4 billion in 2016.

Turkey's Trade with Egypt 2010-2017
(One thousand Dollar)

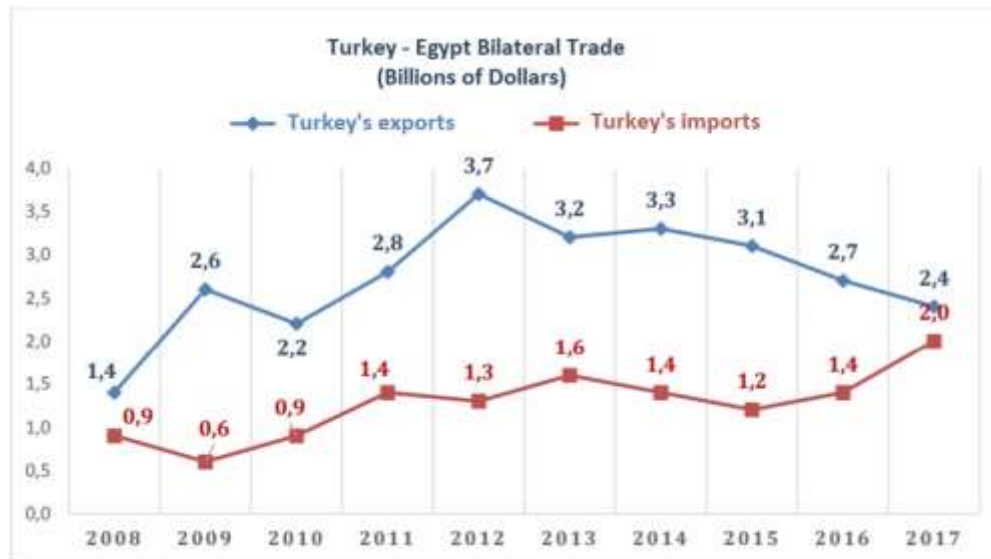
	Exports	Imports	Volume	Balance
2010	2.250.577	926.476	3.177.053	1.324.100
2011	2.759.311	1.486.725	4.246.036	1.272.586
2012	3.679.195	1.342.051	5.021.246	2.337.144
2013	3.200.921	1.628.868	4.829.789	1.572.053
2014	3.300.940	1.434.472	4.738.201	1.863.680
2015	3.124.876	1.215.905	4.438.759	1.810.993
2016	2.733.143	1.443.408	4.244.410	1.221.877
2017	2.360.867	1.997.503	4.358.370	363.364

Source: TUIK

Nevertheless, starting 2017, one can notice that the numbers reflect a different trend, yet another indication that something was going on behind the scenes. During that year, the Egyptians [signaled](#) their desire to restore relations with Turkey and affirmed their readiness to overcome tensions. The relevant authorities in Egypt gave the Egyptian business community some freedom to work with their Turkish counterparts. Later on, this move proved beneficial for Egypt and Turkey on economic and political levels. It helped keep channels open between the two sides on people to people and business to business levels and involved political messaging.

At the end of 2017, more than 305 Turkish companies were operating in Egypt and accommodating about 75 thousand workers, providing indirect job opportunities and family income to nearly one million Egyptians. Moreover, [three](#) Turkish companies based in Egypt were among the top 10 companies that export the most abroad.

In this sense, the 2018 year was exceptional. The volume of bilateral trade between Turkey and Egypt increased by 20%, and it crossed, for the first time, the \$5 billion threshold by \$245 million compared to \$4.358 billion in 2017. Not only the volume of trade between Ankara and Cairo was increasing, but also Egypt was closing the gap in the balance of trade, which means more Egyptian exports to Turkey and more foreign currency income.



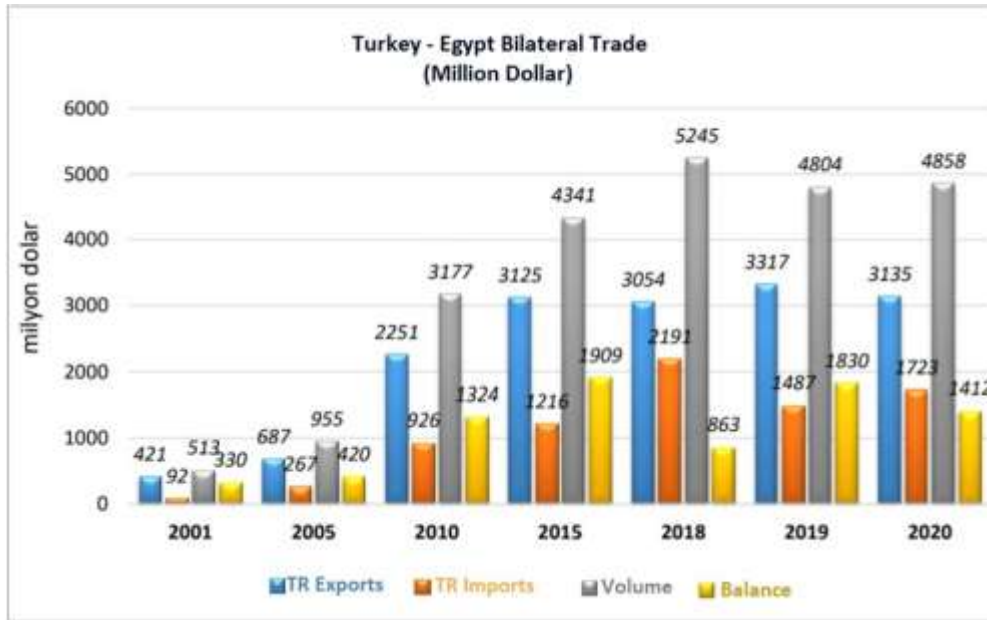
Source: TIM

During the last eight years, there has been a consensus among Turkish and Egyptian business people and business circles on the necessity to separate the business activities from the political tensions between the two countries. Turkey and Egypt hosted several economic and business delegations in 2017, 2018, and 2019. The talks usually [focused on](#) cooperation in several sectors, including furniture industry, Textile, energy industries, chemicals, metals, construction, export-import, tourism...etc. The Turkish- Egyptian Businessmen Association (TUMIAD) was one of those institutions that affirmed the need to continue economic interactions and shield the economy against political fluctuations.

Established in Cairo in 2003, the association has more than 733 active Turkish and Egyptian members. In 2017, TUMIAD launched the "let us manufacture together" initiative in Turkey's Konya and Istanbul in cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce in Konya, the Turkish Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEIK), and the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA). The conference resulted in [signing](#) \$51 million worth of agreements. During the same year, Cairo hosted a [meeting](#) of the Egyptian-Turkish Business Forum, organized by the General Federation of Egyptian Chambers of Commerce supervised by the Ministry of Trade and Industry.

According to Egypt's Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, Turkey emerged in 2019 as the [third](#) biggest importing country from Egypt. Despite the slight decrease in bilateral trade volume that year, Cairo emerged as Ankara's largest trading partner in Africa. The fact that the trade transactions flourished in general in the last few years despite the rising political tensions means that Ankara and Cairo sought to shield the trade relations and keep the economic channels active.

[Data from](#) the Cabinet's Media Information Center in Egypt shows that Turkey was the fifth-largest exporter to the country in 2020, accounting for 5% of the most populous Arab country's total imports. Currently, the Turkish investments in Egypt are [estimated](#) to be \$2.5 billion compared to 58 million Egyptian investments in Turkey.



Source: T.C. Ticaret Bakanlığı

This policy option separating the economic interactions from the political disagreements is not new or incidental in Turkey's foreign policy. In the last two decades, Ankara always favored separate politics from the business during troubled times with other countries. The conventional wisdom is that such a step would keep communications channels open, and ultimately, common interests would bridge the gap of disagreements between the two sides or convince them to open a dialogue at least.

On the other hand, Egypt had to learn the disadvantages of harming the economic ties due to political disagreements later. In October 2014, and in response to rising tensions between the two states, Sisi's government [notified](#) Ankara that it unilaterally terminated the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation on Ro-Ro and Road Transit Transportation between the two states and that it will not renew the agreement after April 2015. Ultimately, the termination of the contract harmed Egypt mostly rather than Turkey. Yet, the fact that Egypt was receiving enormous financial support from the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait made it easier for it to take such a decision.

However, when this support started to dry up due to the oil price crash in (2018-2020), Egypt realized that every penny coming from economic relations with Ankara is important. Therefore, when members of the Egyptian parliament intensified their calls to terminate the FTA with Turkey in [2019](#), [2020](#), and [2021](#) with the pretext that it "harms local products and the interests of Egypt," Sisi's government dismissed those calls but did not shy away from taking political measures against Turkey.

At the end of the day, Cairo's need for foreign currency, foreign investments, and a diversified economy favored a scenario in which it sought to benefit from strengthened economic relations with Turkey despite the political tensions. Another example is Egypt's position from Qatar, the primary ally of Turkey in the region. When the Gulf crisis erupted in June 2017, Cairo joined Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Bahrain in severing ties with Doha and imposing a blockade against it. Yet, unlike its allies, Egypt did not take measures or actions [against](#) the economic activities with

Qatar and/or Qatar's investments in the country. In November 2019, Doha [announced](#) that it started to operate its \$4.4 billion refinery project in Egypt, the most significant investment of its kind for QP in an Arab and African country. Just when the al-Ula agreement was signed, Qatar's Minister of Finance flew to Cairo to [inaugurate](#) a \$1 billion luxury St. Regis Hotel there.

On the other hand, Turkey had an interest also to deepen its economic relations with Cairo to court is based on the [common interests](#) of the two nations in the Eastern Mediterranean and Libya. Ankara's message was simple: cooperation with Turkey is in Cairo's interest. The unmistakable tenor is that an interest-based approach rather than an ideological one will benefit Turkey and Egypt and add to the economic benefits.

III. Geopolitics

In the aftermath of the 2011 uprising, Egypt became at the center of regional competition between regional powers with contrasting agendas. Each of these regional powers sought to attract Cairo to its side. The [logic](#) behind such effort was simple; whoever manages to win Cairo will alter the regional balance to its benefit and will be able to shape the region's future according to its vision. Ultimately, Turkey was the closest to win the race vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Israel. Turkish officials, including the President at the time [Abdullah Gul](#) and Prime Minister Erdogan, were the first foreign officials to [visit](#) Egypt. In the prime Minister's case, he [urged](#) the Egyptians to adopt a secular model for the State. His call drew [criticism](#), including from the Muslim Brotherhood. Despite this, relations between Turkey and Egypt accelerated after electing Mohammad Morsi. Turkey's Foreign Minister at the time, Davutoglu, dubbed the emerging relations [as](#) "Axis of Democracy."

In 2012, Ankara and Cairo cooperated and coordinated [closely](#) in several hot regional issues like never before. In Syria, they have both called for an end to the bloodshed in that country. They backed uniting the Syrian opposition and openly called the Assad regime to step down and pave the way for a democratic process in Syria. In Iraq, Ankara and Cairo supported Baghdad's strive for national unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity.

In the Palestinian issue, Turkey and Egypt believed in the necessity of establishing the Palestinian State within the borders of 1967 with East Jerusalem as its Capital to achieve peace in the region. They firmly called on Israel to end its occupation, stop its illegal settlement policy, and stick to the international commitments and resolutions. Ankara and Cairo also supported efforts to reconcile and unify the Palestinian factions and worked together to produce the ceasefire agreement brokered in November 2012 under the Egyptian auspices between Hamas and Israel. Turkey supported Egypt's initiative to establish Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone in the Middle East (WMDFZ).

This kind of unprecedented cooperation, coordination, and synchronization between the two regional giants reshaped the power balance in the region. It brought new realities, thus alarming other regional rivals such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. Yet, the harmony in the regional foreign policies of Cairo and Ankara short-lived after the 2013 military coup.

Afterward, Egypt joined the anti-revolutions axis led by the UAE and Saudi Arabia. And due to the fact these Gulf monarchs backed this military coup politically and financially, Cairo became so dependent on them and took the backseat in the regional politics in almost all hot issues. According to some estimates, Gulf countries –mainly UAE and Saudi Arabia- supported Sisi with [around](#) \$92 billion since he took power by force.

This support came at the expense of Egypt's traditional role in the Middle East. Sisi had to make concessions on different levels to buy legitimacy, consolidate his powers, and maintain this support. For example, Sisi [relinquished](#) Egyptian lands in the form of two strategic islands in the Red Sea, Tiran, and Sanafir, to Saudi Arabia in 2016. He granted Abu Dhabi unprecedented influence inside Egypt and on its foreign policy. As a result, Cairo was pretty much downsized to a follower and adopted an anti-Turkey stance in Syria, Iraq, Palestine, the Gulf, Libya, Eastern Mediterranean...etc.

When King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia died at the beginning of 2015, Riyadh bridged the gap between its regional policies and Turkey to counter Iran's expanding regional agenda. During his first official visit to Riyadh in March 2015, Erdogan and Salman exchanged views on the situation in Egypt. Turkey signaled possible normalization with Cairo if it was willing to meet some requirements. Yet, in 2016, relations deteriorated significantly due to Egypt cheering the coup attempt in Turkey and Saudi Arabia adjusting its policies for the post-Obama period.

Trump's victory emboldened the anti-Turkey activities led by the UAE. In 2017, Egypt joined Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain in severing ties with Doha, Ankara's primary ally in the region, and imposing a blockade against the small Gulf country. Cairo, along with Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, and Manamah, demanded Doha to fulfill [thirteen conditions](#), including "the immediate termination of the Turkish military presence in the country and ending any joint military cooperation with Ankara." Cairo also incited the members of the Arab League against Turkey's military operations in Syria and Iraq and used the organization to undermine Turkey.

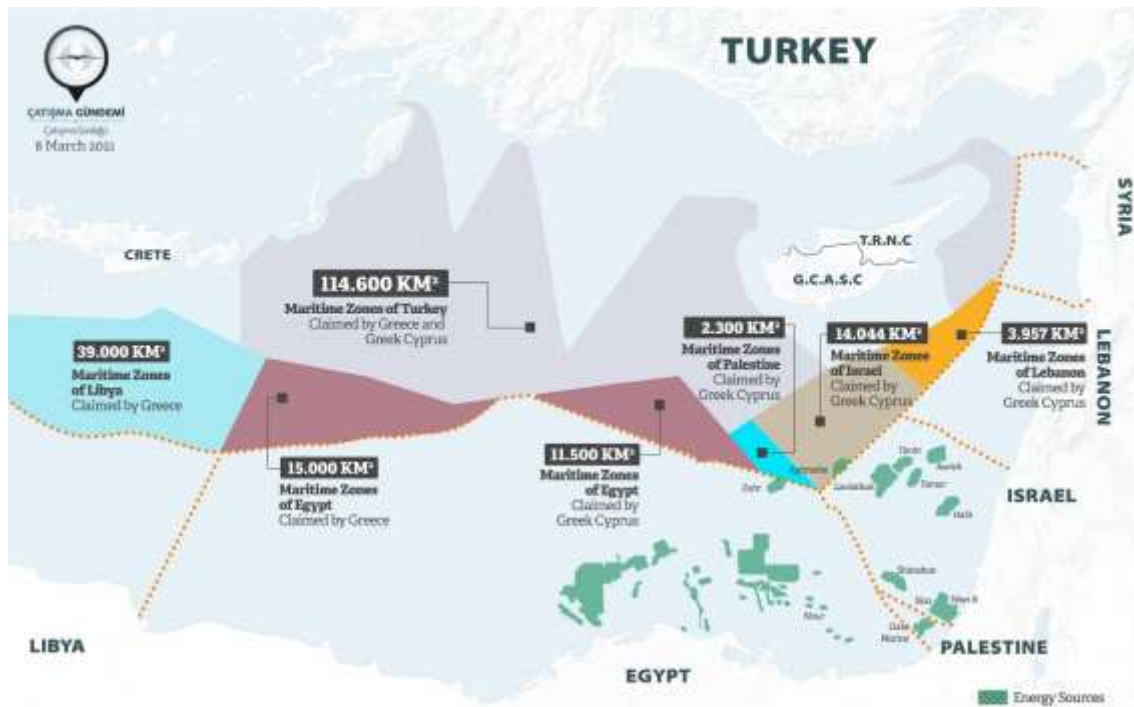
The establishment of the Cairo-Headquartered Eastern Mediterranean Gas forum in 2019 antagonized Ankara because it meant to alienate Turkey despite being the [seventh](#) biggest gas consumer in the World, an aspiring energy hub, the biggest economy in the region, and the country with the longest coast in Eastern Mediterranean. The same year witnessed a significant UAE-Egyptian military support for warlord Haftar's assault against Tripoli, the Capital of Libya, where Turkey has interests that [exceed](#) \$19 billion and eyes lion's share of [potential](#) \$120 billion of future opportunities.

At the end of 2019, Turkey responded by a [game-changer](#) delimitation agreement with Libya's UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) along with a security one. The two agreements foiled the attempts to isolate Ankara in the Eastern Mediterranean and enabled it to become a primary player in the Libyan theatre. Although these agreements constituted new challenges for Cairo, they also offered it new opportunities. Although Greece and Egypt dismissed this agreement using different pretexts, Egypt's Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry gave an eyebrow-raising statement. During the Rome conference in December 2019, he [stressed](#) that the deal "doesn't harm Egypt's interests" in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Not only Shoukry was right on that, but also the agreement paves the way to a potential Turkish-Egyptian maritime deal that could grant Cairo at least 15000 km² if it chose to delimitate its maritime borders with Ankara. For years, Greece has been negotiating with Egypt to avoid such a scenario. In December 2019, several allegedly official documents on the negotiation process between Egypt and Greece were [leaked](#) to the media. One expert document noted that the Greek team "lacked credibility and resorted to crooked methods" in negotiations.

According to one document, the Greeks continued "fallacy and false claims" and "exploited the political understanding between the two governments to embarrass the Egyptian negotiating-legal team." Another document by Egypt's Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukri to President Sisi reveals disagreements between Cairo and Athens on the appropriate principle to delimit maritime

boundaries. It clearly states that the Greek position will result in the loss of around 10,000 square km2 of Egypt's share, an area that almost equals the size of a country like Lebanon.



Sea Areas to be Waived by the Region Countries
According to the Seville Map Thesis

Countries	Sea Areas to be Waived	Claiming Country
Turkey	114.600 km ²	Greece and Greek Cyprus
Libya	39.000 km ²	Greece
Egypt	26.500 km ²	Greece and Greek Cyprus
Israel	14.044 km ²	Greek Cyprus
Lebanon	3.957 km ²	Greek Cyprus
Palestine	2.300 km ²	Greek Cyprus

Source: Çatışma Gündemi

In June 2020, an Egyptian official [told](#) Cairo-based news outlet: "officials at the Foreign Ministry and the General Intelligence Service (GIS) were lobbying the Presidency for a quiet acceptance of the deal with Turkey, as it would have granted Egypt a sizable maritime concession." However, he added, "The executive authority did not accommodate this recommendation." As President Sisi sought political, economic, and financial support from the West to compensate for the lack of legitimacy and counter the mounting internal and external

challenges to his regime during the Pandemic, he decided to defy his officials' recommendation and sign a delimitation deal with Greece.

Yet, the agreement signed in August 2020 was [partial](#) and even [endorsed](#) Turkey's thesis. This development meant that Cairo kept the door open for a similar deal with Turkey in the future. In February 2021, Egypt [announced](#) a new oil-and-gas exploration bid round in the Eastern Mediterranean. It notably took into consideration the coordinates of the [continental shelf](#) as declared by Ankara.

IV. A Breakthrough?

In addition to Egypt's recalibrated position in Libya after Haftar's defeat, these implicit positive messages towards Ankara prompted Turkey to react positively and move open a new channel of communication with Cairo in addition to the already existing intelligence channel between the two countries. In a series of explicit statements in March 2021, Turkey's senior officials, including the [Foreign Minister](#), the [Defense Minister](#), and the [Presidential Spokesperson](#), stressed two points: First, the common interests in the Eastern Mediterranean between Turkey and Egypt. Second the possibility of opening a new chapter with Cairo.

The toning down of criticism in the media outlets of the two sides allowed them to create a relatively positive atmosphere, which paved the way to direct talks. While Turkey's [request](#) from the Istanbul-based TV channels of the Egyptian political opposition to tone down criticism of the Egyptian government took much attention, following the Egyptian media outlets, one can conclude that it was a two-way understanding. Soon after, Egypt [invited](#) an official Turkish delegation to Cairo for explanatory talks. In May 2021, the Turkish delegation headed by deputy foreign minister Sedat Önal arrived to Cairo to conduct an exploratory round of consultation between the two countries. The delegation was the first of its kind to Egypt since the military coup in 2013. At the conclusion of this round of talks, Ankara and Cairo [issued](#) a joint statement highlighting the fact that discussions were frank and in-depth, and they addressed the bilateral and regional issue, in particular the situation in Libya, Syria, Iraq, and the need to achieve peace and security in the Eastern Mediterranean region. They noted that they would evaluate the outcomes and agree on the next steps.

In the broader context, several regional and international developments have made this possible, including:

1. Foiling Haftar's military coup in Libya: The defeat of Cairo's primary ally in Libya forced Egypt to adapt to the new emerging situation in which Turkey has the upper hand there. In order not to be boxed out, Cairo swiftly changed its position to stay in the game. In this sense, Libya turned from being a fundamental challenge to Turkish-Egyptian relations to a possible opportunity. As a result, a common point was established where both could discuss their concerns and interests directly.
2. The Abraham accords between the UAE and Israel: Although Cairo welcomed these accords and the normalization between Abu Dhabi and Tel Aviv, it soon realized that they came with several arrangements that have the potential to [harm](#) Cairo's [political](#), [economic](#), and [strategic](#) interests, and further degrade its importance in the eyes of the Israelis and the Arabs. Thus, Egypt needed to diversify its relations, explore new

opportunities, and signal its pleasure. Opening up on Turkey serves Cairo's interests in this regard.

3. Biden's victory in the US Presidential elections at the end of 2020: This victory forced the regional players to adapt to very different policies than Donald Trump. To avoid possible pressure from the new US administration, Ankara and Cairo want to promote themselves as constructive and proactive regional players. The aim is to show that the new US administration can depend on them in regional initiatives. In this sense, trying to mend fences between each other rather than escalating against each other seemed quite sensible.
4. Al-Ula agreement between the GCC countries: This agreement allowed Turkey to [strengthen](#) its relations further with Qatar, Kuwait, and Oman. It also offered Turkey and Saudi Arabia, on the one hand, and Turkey and UAE, on the other, the opportunity to de-escalate, reach a détente and try to normalize their relations. While preparing for this agreement with Qatar, neither Saudi Arabia nor UAE coordinated with Egypt or consulted it before sealing it. As a result, Egypt was left alone. It had to make its own arrangements with Qatar to normalize the relations with the small rich-gulf country. Therefore, opening up on Doha's ally, Turkey, to diversify its ties, pursuing its interests, and exploring new opportunities is also compatible with this step. By doing this, Egypt is improving its chances to benefit economically and politically from both camps (Turkey and Qatar on the one hand, and UAE and Saudi Arabia on the other hand) and increasing its value in the eyes of its traditional allies.
5. Egypt's GERD Quagmire with Ethiopia: For quite some time, the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Nile River has been the most pressing national security issue for Egypt. Yet, instead of addressing this critical problem, the Egyptian authorities were deeply involved in the last few years in a UAE-led regional agenda to disrupt Turkey, especially in Libya. When Ankara managed to turn the tide of events in Libya against Haftar and his regional and international backers, Cairo lost its bet.
6. Soon after, it realized that it is about to be cut off the Libyan file, and it would be too late to turn to its southern front to counter Ethiopia while it is still involved in an aggressive agenda against Ankara. Therefore, Egypt decided to adapt to the new realities in Tripoli, de-escalate with Turkey, and normalize with Doha to use its financial and diplomatic might to produce a unified Arab stance against Ethiopia.
7. The de-escalation between Turkey and EU countries: The de-escalation between Turkey and several members of the EU, including France, Greece, and Cyprus, in addition to the détente with Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, encouraged Cairo to get involved in similar behavior. On the Other hand, working on a win-win formula with Egypt in Libya, Eastern Mediterranean, and elsewhere in the region keeps Egypt from being held hostage to other states that want to use it as a shield in their own battles with Turkey - mainly the UAE and Greece, and strengthen Ankara's regional position.
8. Turkey's desire to cash in its regional gains: Thanks to the effective use of its hard power, Ankara scored substantial regional gains in 2020 in several critical theatres against Russia-backed parties in the Middle East, North Africa, Caucasus, and the Eastern Mediterranean. Yet, to transform these gains into a sustainable influence, Ankara needs to resort to diplomacy and conclude agreements that serve its goals. This new approach is compatible with the regional players' desire to de-escalate to accommodate the new game

unfolded by the new US president, including Egypt, among other players in the Middle East and Europe.

V. Conclusion:

There are genuine interests that can form the basis of a real rapprochement between Turkey and Egypt. Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean come at the top of these interests. Cooperation between Turkey and Egypt in these two files has the potential to secure a win-win situation for them and offer new opportunities for collaboration and coordination on bilateral and perhaps multi-lateral levels where everyone can emerge as a winner. Stabilizing the situation in Libya will address any possible security concerns for Cairo and offer vast economic opportunities for the struggling Egyptian economy in the post-pandemic era. Cairo is expecting the employment of around one million Egyptians in different sectors of the Libyan economy in the coming period.

On the other hand, better relations between Turkey and Egypt will consolidate Ankara's rising influence and interests in the North African country. It will also dilute attempts by some third parties to delegitimize Ankara's presence and interests in Libya. The Turkish contracting and construction companies, globally rank second after China, are working in Libya since the seventies of the last century. These Turkish companies have vast experience in Libya. If an understanding is reached between them and their Egyptian counterparts to rebuild and develop Libya, this step will open new doors for more cooperation inside Libya and abroad.

The two countries have genuine interests in delaminating their maritime border. While this might not prove to be an easy task as it usually takes time and effort and might require, at certain point, to invite Greece, it has the potential to unlock the whole crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean. Turkey has been calling for a regional East Mediterranean conference that considers the rights and interests of all countries and people of the region instead of the current approach, which aims to isolate some parties such as Turkey, the Turkish Cypriots, Lebanon, Syria, and Libya. Progress on the Turkish-Egyptian front will have a positive impact on the overall situation.

During the last few months, there has been slow but steady progress in the exploratory talks between the Turkish and Egyptian officials. Although Egypt's Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry has been announcing some demands from time to time on media outlets, Turkey's foreign Minister [reiterated](#) more than once that none of the two sides came up with any preconditions neither before nor during the meeting.

If everything goes well, the following steps would be sensibly appointing new ambassadors and a visit from Egypt's Foreign Minister to Ankara. If normalization between the two countries is sealed at any point in the future, this does not necessarily mean that they will not have a different opinion on different matters. Furthermore, they would still be able to disagree on a host of issues. Yet, the normalization of relations would help them better contain their differences and try to address them while coordinating or cooperating simultaneously in matters of common interests. In other words, they will be better positioned not to let the disagreements hinder their capacity to work together where their interests intersect.

Having said this, one must urge cautious and maintain a moderate expectation not to put the cart before the horse. Several reasons suggest that we should not exaggerate the expectations:

- I. The personal hostility between the two Presidents. The institutions on both sides seem to be more open, in need of normalization and are pushing towards it. However, the executive branches in both states are not so convinced, and despite not objecting to the

current efforts, they can disrupt it at any point just like they did before. Regardless of how the talks will go in the coming period, Turkey's President and his Egyptian counterpart are not expected to meet any time soon.

- II. Unlike Turkey, Egypt's motives at this point sounds tactical rather than strategic. Cairo is notably keen to appear reserved in public, and this is probably to serve two goals. First, to pose as a desirable heavy player that Turkey is approaching. Second, to monitor the reaction of its traditional allies -especially in the Gulf- and whether they would offer more carrots to Cairo to stall, stop, or walk away from the talks with Turkey. Third, to enable the Egyptian authorities to retract at any point while attributing the failure to Ankara's non-compliance with certain conditions.

VI. Indicators To Watch:

- 1) US position concerning Egypt's internal situation and foreign relations: Any change in the US policies might probably leave its implications over the talks between Ankara and Cairo.
- 2) Statements coming from the Presidents of the two countries: These statements can give a hint on whether the talks are still on, stalled or ending very soon.
- 3) Reaction of Egypt's traditional allies. Countries like the UAE and Saudi Arabia retain considerable influence inside Egypt and over its politics, especially Abu Dhabi. At a certain point, they –along with Greece- may have an interest in sabotaging the talks.
- 4) Egypt's GERD quagmire with Ethiopia. The more the crisis persists or intensifies, the less likely Cairo will be involved in hostile agendas against Turkey, whether in Libya or the Eastern Mediterranean.
- 5) Turkey's relations with Gulf countries. If UAE and Saudi Arabia declined to normalize their relations with Turkey, they would have less interest in allowing Egypt to normalize its relations with Ankara.
- 6) The situation in Libya: Any change in the balance of power in the North African country and/or the return of Haftar's camp through hard or soft means might discourage Cairo from engaging with Ankara.

Turkey – UAE Relations

I. The Good Times

Despite the apparent tension and hostility in the UAE-Turkey relations during the last decade, this has not been the case before the eruption of Arab revolutions in 2011. In the pre-Arab uprisings era (2002-2010), Ankara and Abu Dhabi enjoyed excellent relations. The bilateral economic, political, and even military interactions were pretty much advanced compared to Ankara's interactions with the other Gulf States, including Saudi Arabia and Qatar. High-level

officials in both countries exchanged visits routinely. Several economic and political agreements, memorandum of understanding, and protocols were signed during that period.

At the time, the Turkish officials expected \$400 million Emirati investments over a decade. Ankara and Abu Dhabi aimed for an ambitious \$40 billion of bilateral trade. The Emirati citizens were among the first in the region to get visa-free entry to Turkey in 2008. In as early as 2002, the UAE had ten pilots training at Akinci airbase. In 2005, the country opened its military attaché in Ankara. Abu Dhabi took part in the Anatolian Eagle military/air force exercise in its 2002, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, and June 2013 versions. At the end of 2012, the Emiratis concluded negotiations on around \$13 billion worth of deals in Turkey's energy sector.

Taking the geopolitical context at the time into consideration, one reason why UAE's relations with Turkey were flourishing is the rising fear from Iran's regional expansionist agenda. The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 altered the regional balance towards Tehran and gave Iran's "Shiite Crescent" project a significant regional boost. After the 2006 Israeli war on Lebanon, Iran's regional influence peaked. This development coincided with the rise of Turkey's soft power in the region. As a result, Ankara became at the heart of the competition between two camps: The so-called "resistance axis" and "moderate axis." Both tried to appease Ankara and influence Turkey's regional moves. The GCC countries, particularly the UAE and Saudi Arabia, strengthened their ties with Turkey, hoping that rising Ankara can counter Iran and block its expansion.

The GCC as a regional organization increased its cooperation and coordination with Turkey unprecedentedly in the period (2005-2010). In 2004, all GCC countries except Oman and Saudi Arabia joined NATO's Istanbul cooperation initiative (ICI). In 2005, the GCC and Turkey agreed on establishing a joint Committee for Economic Cooperation. Three years later, the two sides [signed](#) a Memorandum of Understanding establishing a joint Strategic Dialogue Mechanism that aims to deepen Turkey's relations with the GCC in political and cultural areas and the existing economic cooperation. Accordingly, relations between Turkey and the UAE flourished in parallel with Turkey-GCC relations.

Although it maintained good relations with Iran, Turkey seemed closer to the so-called moderate axis -comprising mainly Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, and Jordan- on the main regional issues. For example, Turkey supported the Arab Peace Initiative concerning the Arab-Israeli and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, supported the two-state solution, mediated between Syria and Israel, tried to dilute Iran's influence over Syria. Moreover, a stabilized Iraq and out of Iran complete control was a Turkish priority. The fact that Turkey was a rising heavy weigh regional player with widespread support in the region convinced the Gulf countries that it is the best available option to counter Iran.

During the first decade of AKP rule in Turkey, trade volume with UAE increased from around \$445 million in 2001 to around \$4 billion, almost \$2 billion and 635 million as a surplus for Ankara.

II. The Birth of a Disruptive Sheikhdome

The eruption of the Arab uprisings constituted a critical conjecture for the Turkey-Gulf and the Turkey-UAE relations in particular. At the time, the Turkish officials had to decide whether to side with the regimes or the revolting people. As a source of inspiration and a rising power, it was fatal for Ankara to side with the governments. Turkey saw the Arab uprisings as a rare

opportunity to reshape the region and create a stable, democratic, and prosperous Middle East. Accordingly, it decided to side with the popular uprisings.

However, several Arab regimes considered the uprisings a severe threat to their power. In this sense, the Arab uprisings affected Turkey's relations with the GCC countries in several ways. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) emerged as the leader of the counter-revolutions force in the Arab world. Parallel with this change; the Emirati-Turkish relations started to take a downturn while the Qatari-Turkish ties gained momentum.

The uprisings reshuffled the geopolitical alliances. Although the cooperation between Ankara and Abu Dhabi continued on a bilateral level for a brief time afterward, serious problems emerged, and the contrasting agendas crystallized in the aftermath of the 2013 UAE-backed military coup in Egypt.

The coup gave the Abu Dhabi-led counter-revolutionary axis a significant regional boost. It resulted in three contrasting and competing regional camps, the anti-revolutions camp (UAE and Saudi Arabia), the Shiite crescent camp (Iran and its allies and proxies), and the newly established pro revolutions camp comprising of Turkey, Qatar, and the popular uprisings.

Overthrowing the first elected civilian president in the first fair and democratic elections ever in the history of Egypt granted the UAE more confidence in its ability to reverse the regional tide. To that end, Abu Dhabi formulated a new foreign policy agenda based on two primary pillars: First, to promote a narrative that demonizes political Islam, displays it as a source of instability, and warns against its ability to reach power. Second, to disrupt Turkey's regional role in every possible way to stop the domino effect of the new wave of change and return to the pre-Arab uprising statuesque.

This anti-democracy, heavy-oriented agenda of Abu Dhabi elevated Turkey as a top regional threat instead of Iran. It also featured the Muslim Brotherhood as an overriding factor in shaping the narrative explaining the events. In this sense, exaggerating the ideological aspect in its foreign policy agenda, media outlets, think tanks, international platforms meant to distract attention away from the real threat it fears: democracy.

Unlike Abu Dhabi, Turkey never considered the UAE a rival or a priority on its foreign policy agenda. Except for a short period in 2019, no much or particular attention was given to UAE in Ankara even when Abu Dhabi was doing its best to create troubles for Turkey and incite globally against it.

Although many experts mark this period (2011-2020) as the start of a fierce rivalry between UAE and Turkey, the asymmetric nature of the indicators related to the two states in terms of size, geography, population, economy, and military suggest that the UAE is a disrupting player rather than a rival for Turkey. Accordingly, the 2013 military coup in Egypt led to the birth of the UAE as a disruptive regional force. Abu Dhabi aimed to distract and undermine Turkey's regional role in several levels over several theaters by several means.

III. Short-Lived Rapprochement

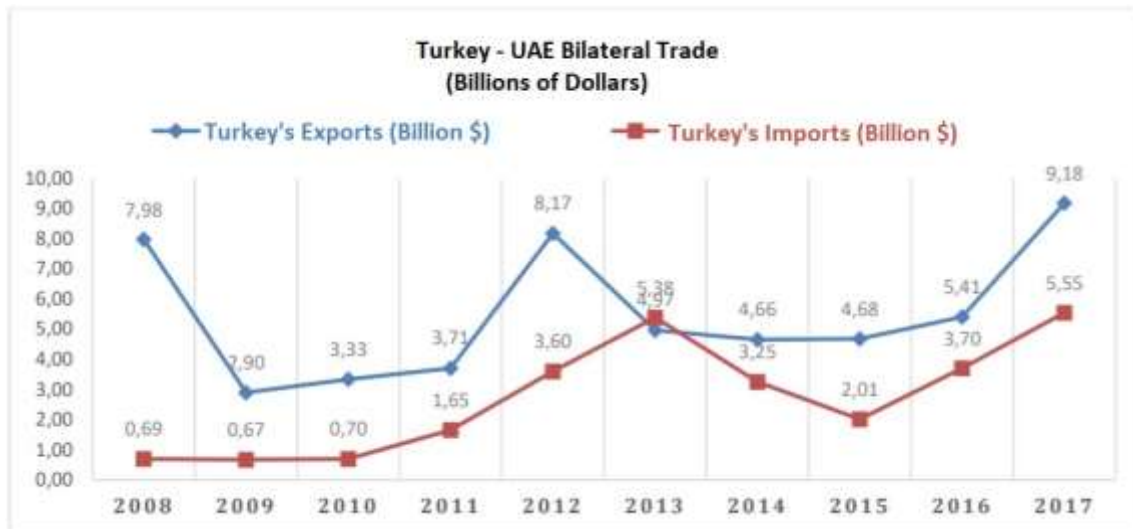
In early 2016, the two sides adopted an approach that aims to contain their differences and build on common interests. President Erdogan [noted](#) that his country's relations with the UAE were robust until recently. He affirmed that reasons of divergence should be removed as soon as possible, urging that the fault out from Egypt's events must be addressed through diplomatic means rather than talking against each other. UAE's minister of state at the time, Anwar Gargash,

said that his country is seeking good and positive relations, [stressing](#) "It is time to overcome the Turkish-Emirati dispute over the Egyptian developments, as the region does not tolerate such disagreements."

Accordingly, the UAE invited Turkey's foreign minister to visit Abu Dhabi on 25 April 2016. It was the first visit for a Turkish official to the Gulf country in almost three years. During the visit, Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu [met](#) with Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum, Vice President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, and Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al-Nahyan (MBZ), Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, and Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan, Foreign Minister of the UAE. Afterward, UAE decided to [appoint](#) an ambassador to Turkey and turn a new page in its relations with Ankara. Six months later, UAE's Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed paid an [official visit](#) to Turkey, where he met President Erdogan and his counterpart Çavuşoğlu and discussed bilateral and regional developments.

However, what was thought to be turning a new page was actually not. A few months later, Turkey accused UAE of backing the military coup. Although some pundits [argue](#) that no legal evidence to a direct Emirati role, there were several clues on Abu Dhabi's stance at the time, especially on media, political, and [financial](#) levels. The Turkish media was explicit in this regard, but some politicians preferred not to mention UAE's name in order not to escalate the situation. During the coup, UAE's Skynews Arabia was the first channel to promote [fake news](#) claiming the Turkish President Erdogan fled the country. Moreover, Al-Ghad TV, run by UAE-based Mohammad Dahlan, an aide of MBZ, [hosted](#) US-based Fethullah Gulen-accused by the Turkish authorities of being the mastermind behind the coup. In 2019, Turkey [added](#) Dahlan to its most wanted criminals list and [offered](#) a (\$700,000) bounty for information leading to his capture for his ties to the 2016 coup plotters.

Fearing a backlash, UAE de-escalated with Ankara in the aftermath of the failed coup, paid an effort to mend fences, and took some measures to appease Turkey. The Emirati authorities were the first to detain two Turkish generals and [deport](#) them to Ankara for suspected links with the coup. During that period, the economic interactions between the two countries surged noticeably. The volume of bilateral trade between Turkey and UAE increased from around \$6.6 billion at the end of 2015 to around \$9.1 billion at the end of 2016, with a \$1.7 billion surplus in favor of Ankara.



Source: TIM

IV. The Bad Times

Yet, the biggest crisis in bilateral relations erupted in mid-2017. The distinguished relations between MBZ, the de facto ruler of UAE, and US President Trump and his son-in-law Jared Kushner emboldened Abdu Dhabi and prompted it to act with impunity. In June 2017, UAE and Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Egypt severed diplomatic ties with Qatar and imposed a blockade against the gas-rich country. The split within Trump's administration over the crisis compromised the US security guarantees to Qatar, [promoting](#) Abu Dhabi and Riyadh to consider invading the small Gulf country and toppling its Emir.

As a result, Doha relied entirely on Turkey, which swiftly [responded](#) by extending an economic lifeline to the small Gulf country and deploying troops to Doha in line with the 2014 strategic and defense agreements between the two countries. The fact that Ankara foiled this plot and prevented the military escalation of the crisis convinced the UAE that unless Turkey is undermined, it would be hard to stop the change in the region. The UAE demanded that Turkey withdraw its troops and close the military base in Doha, among other conditions.

After failing to force Doha to abide by these conditions, UAE engaged in multi-level cross-dimensional wars against Qatar's primary backer, Ankara. Abu Dhabi's activities included: [info wars](#) (war of words, narrative warfare, targeted fake news, propaganda,...etc), [intelligence operations](#) (spying, [tapping phones of officials](#) using Israeli tech and US hackers), and disruptive measures in several regional theatres (in the Levant, the Gulf, North Africa, Horn of Africa, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Caucasus).

Aware of its limited capacity, the UAE brought in other countries in its bet to undermine Turkey regionally. The Emirati lobbying efforts during the 2017-2020 period included an array of actors across several regions: The Gulf axis (Saudi Arabia and Bahrain), the Arab axis (Egypt, Assad, Haftar), the EU axis (France, Greece, Cyprus), and the US-Israel axis.

In one of his leaked e-mails in 2017, UAE's ambassador to Washington Yousef al Otaiba [told](#) a *New York Times* columnist, "We don't want Turkey or Qatar to be able to shape a dinner menu much less a country." From Libya to Iraq to Syria to Somalia to Sudan..etc, the UAE did everything in its hands to undermine Turkey. In 2020, The US Department of Justice [released](#) a

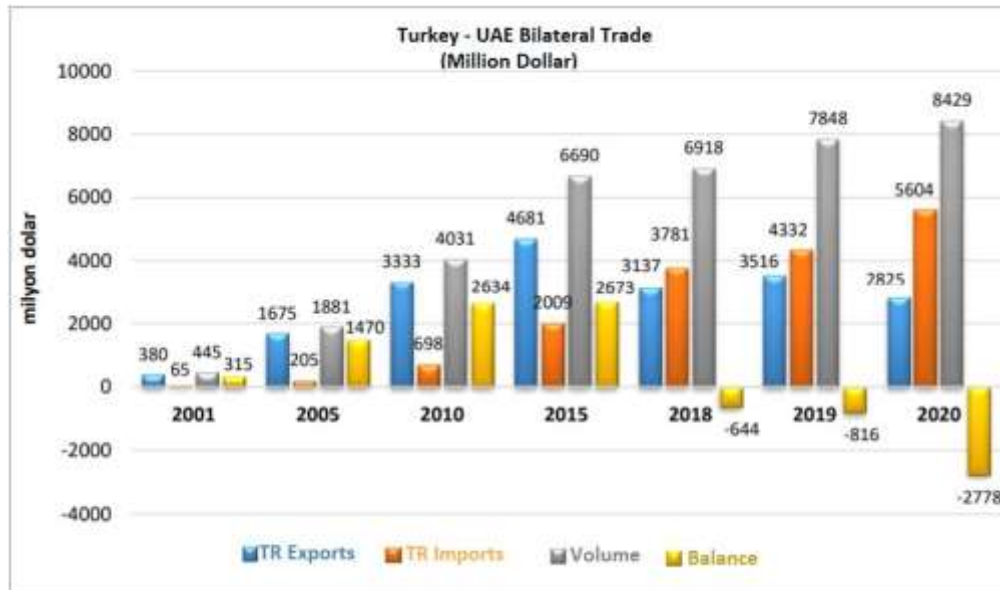
document related to Yousef al Otaiba, uncovering Abu Dhabi's efforts to pitting the US against Turkey in Libya. Although Otaiba claimed Turkey wanted Egypt to enter Libya as bait and the UAE was restraining Cairo, the opposite was true.

Being fed up with the Emirati behavior, Ankara responded with the harshest statements yet against Abu Dhabi. At the end of April 2020, the Turkish foreign ministry [accused](#) Abu Dhabi of threatening peace, security, and stability in the region through destructive activities in Yemen, Syria, Libya, Somalia, and the Horn of Africa, among other areas. It portrays the UAE as a force of instability and chaos extending all kinds of support to coup plotters, terrorist organizations like al-Shabab in Somalia, and separatist activities in Yemen. The statement invited the UAE Government to renounce its hostile attitude towards Turkey and know its place.

This statement was the most potent Turkish message yet to UAE since they began to quarrel about a decade ago. It reflected a mindset shift on how Ankara should deal with Abu Dhabi from that point forward. The content and the tone of the statement signaled that Turkey would resort to firm and decisive behavior with the Emiratis. Later on, Turkey's Foreign minister Mevlut Cavusoglu [affirmed](#) the same message by accusing the UAE of bringing chaos to the region. At the end of July 2020, Turkey's defense minister, Hulusi Akar, [warned](#) that his country would hold the UAE to account if it does not stop committing malicious acts and sponsoring terrorists and anti- Turkey activities.

V. The Reach Out

In an unexpected shift, Abu Dhabi sent positive signs towards Ankara only two months after UAE's State Minister of Foreign Affairs, Anwar Gargash, criticized Turkey's military base in Doha. On 7 January, the same Emirati official [told](#) Bloomberg, "We don't cherish any feuds with Turkey," adding that his country is Turkey's number one trade partner in the Middle East. Three days later, Gargash [told](#) Abu Dhabi-based Skynews Arabia channel that the UAE wants to normalize relations with Turkey within the framework of mutual respect for sovereignty. The new Emirati rhetoric focused on the fact that there are no serious long-term problems with Turkey, such as border problems. From the newly emerging Emirati perspective, this stage is a positive stage that offers the opportunity to build the bridges between the UAE and Turkey.



Source: T.C. Ticaret Bakanlığı

In fact, before these public statements, Abu Dhabi quietly took several positive measures towards Turkey, including easing restrictions on the movement of Turkish business people and business interaction between the two countries. The Emiratis also resumed their daily flights to Istanbul [on](#) 21 December 2020. Several reasons explain this shift in UAE's position from Turkey.

- 1) The UAE lost its strong ally in the White House: Upon Biden's victory in America's Presidential elections, Abu Dhabi lost its strong partners Trump and his son-in-law Jared Kushner. These two US officials, in particular, encouraged the UAE and provided impunity to its foreign policies and regional gambles, including pitting actors against each other and destabilizing the region under the pretext of countering political Islam. Till the last moment, Abu Dhabi was hoping that Trump will serve a second term, yet when Biden won, it had to recalibrate its positions to avoid the US pressure and pose as a constructive player rather than a spoiler or disrupter.
- 2) Al-Ula agreement between Saudi Arabia and Qatar: After failing to force Qatar to submit to the Quartet's list of 13 demands for three years and a half, Riyadh assessed –for its own reasons and interests- that it is better to close this issue before Biden begins his Presidency. Yet, until the last moment, UAE objected to the reconciliation idea. On 16 November 2020, UAE's ambassador to Washington [said](#) "I don't think the Qatari rift will get any results soon. It is a small problem, not really being addressed, not on anyone's priority list right now. I think we have a very philosophical disagreement over what we want our region to look like, and we had not really sat down to figure out what the solution is. They want to go their way, we want to go ours, and I don't think anyone cares too much." Despite its resistance, Abu Dhabi had to sign the agreement after all. This agreement can develop positive Saudi-Qatari relations, attracting other regional players such as Turkey and Pakistan. Moreover, the deal allows Turkey to reach a détente with Saudi Arabia and strengthen its ties with other Gulf countries such as Qatar,

Kuwait, and Oman. If succeeded, this could leave the UAE isolated, and Abu Dhabi does not want to be in such a position, hence de-escalating with Ankara.

- 3) The Turkish-Egyptian rapprochement efforts: Although UAE's positive statements towards Turkey might have expedited the Egypt-Turkey communication efforts, the fact that Ankara and Cairo had been communicating on intelligence level could have affected the Emirati position in the first place. In other words, after failing to prop up Haftar in Libya, Abu Dhabi became aware that the incentives for an interest-based Egypt-Turkey rapprochement are much bigger than its influence over Cairo. The fact that UAE did not have enough power to prevent Saudi Arabia from reconciling with Qatar means that If Cairo and Ankara agreed to normalize their relations, Abu Dhabi might not have enough power to stop Egypt. Thus, UAE would be in a better position if it remained close to the developments at this point rather than resisting or countering them.
- 4) The regional power fatigue: De-escalating with Turkey would help the UAE catch its breath after the regional exhaustion and capitalize on the changing dynamics in the region and the sudden shift to diplomacy. It would serve its goal of posing as a de-escalator and constructive player willing to assist the administration in stabilizing the region. Additionally, this would be compatible with Abu Dhabi's [claims](#) that it ended its military role in Yemen, withdrew its military equipment from Libya, dismantled its military base and installations in Somaliland and Eritrea,...etc.

Regardless of the Emirati motives to de-escalate with Turkey, Ankara received the Emirati message positively. In January 2021, Ankara welcomed the Emirati positive statements but demanded concrete steps. "If they take sincere, concrete, and constructive steps, we will respond positively too," Turkey's Foreign Minister [said](#). Last March, Cavusoglu retreated his country's position on this matter and appointed a new Turkish ambassador to the UAE. The Emirati response did not take long. In a first since five years, UAE's foreign minister Abdullah bin Zayed phoned his Turkish counterpart [on 22 April](#). They exchanged messages of congratulations over the holy month of Ramadan. The Turkish side described it as polite and "significant exchange considering the lack of such an engagement for the past five years."

VI. Conclusion:

There is great room for boosting the economic relations and business interactions between Turkey and the UAE in the post-covid-19 era given their untapped potentials, ambitions, and the fact that the volume of bilateral trade is way below the record of \$14.8 billion registered in 2017. Turkey would be eager to increase its bilateral trade volume with Abu Dhabi and strengthen its economic relations, investments, and business ties. Additionally, since it has no interest in undermining its ties and/or economic relations with any Gulf countries, let alone the UAE, Ankara would meet Abu Dhabi's positive statements and measures with similar steps. As some Turkish officials noted, "the UAE has tried to sabotage our government in the region; we have never made similar efforts against them."

Therefore, de-escalation might continue for some time. Given the current regional configuration in the post-Trump era and the al-Ula agreement, it is likely that we witness positive measures from both. Yet, considering the past experience of the rapprochement efforts between the two

countries, especially in 2016, it is implausible that Abu Dhabi is seeking a genuine rapprochement or normalization with Ankara.

The fact that MBZ is still the de facto ruler in UAE means that it would be rather surprising to expect a genuine change in his policies. Besides, the recalibration of UAE's policies is not so convincing for observers who witnessed its post Arab revolutions policies. For so long, the UAE managed to find itself a role on the regional stage through disruptive and manipulative policies. Posing as a mediator or stabilizer will not grant it the perceived role, especially that such a role is pretty much secured by countries like Qatar in the Gulf region. The UAE is most likely lying low, waiting for the right moment to return to its traditional policies. Accordingly, even if Turkey and UAE made progress on the bilateral level, from Ankara's perspective, it would be hard to trust the Emirati statements if not backed by credible measures.

VII. Indicators To Watch

- 1) The status of Mehmet Ali Ozturk: He is a Turkish citizen who is unjustly imprisoned on trumped-up charges while being in the UAE in 2018. [Reports](#) say he was subjected to torture, blackmail, and a show trial. Freeing him would be seen as a positive gesture and a sign of willingness to back the positive political statements with actions.
- 2) UAE's media and lobbying efforts: It goes without saying that if the Emirati media outlets continue to defame and demonize Turkey in the public sphere, it would be sensible to assume that the efforts reach détente or normalize are not genuine. UAE's [lobbying](#) efforts against Turkey in the US and the European countries are to be monitored closely also as they are serious indicators of Abu Dhabi's sincerity.
- 3) Turkey-Egypt and Turkey-Saudi Arabia talks: These talks will probably affect the nature of relations between the UAE and Turkey. In other words, fearing the isolation, Abu Dhabi will closely monitor Ankara's rapprochement efforts with Cairo and Riyadh in particular. The more progress on both fronts, the more the chances of better Emirati-Turkish relations. Yet, it is hard to maintain that the Emirati U-turn is a strategic move rather than a tactical one at the current stage. In other words, if the regional and international environment that led to such a U-turn changed, there is a great chance that the UAE goes back to its old policies.
- 4) The status of the JCPOA: If the US and Iran managed to reach an agreement that puts the JCPOA back on track, there is a possibility that Abu Dhabi chooses even to come closer to Turkey to guard against the negative implications of the deal and to balance with Iran. Yet, unlike the pre-Arab revolutions era, this scenario might not be granted given that Abu Dhabi has the Israeli option this time after the Abraham accords.
- 5) The coming elections in Turkey and the US: Both Turkey and the US will have critical Presidential elections in 2013 and 2014, respectively. The results of these elections will probably shape to a large extent Abu Dhabi's behavior towards Turkey and in the region in the long run. The UAE might be aiming currently to maintain a non-aggressive policy until the outcome of those elections become clear.

Turkey- Israel Relations

I. The Peak

The Turkish-Israeli relations have never been easy in the last two decades. Although several factors played a role in shaping these relations during that period, two main factors, in particular, had a significant impact on the nature of the links and Turkey's behavior towards Israel: First, the Gaza War at the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009. Second, the Israeli raid against the Turkish ship MV Mavi Marmara in the international waters in the Mediterranean Sea. These two events left negative implications on bilateral relations and continue to shape the Turkish perspective towards Israel.

Following the rise of AKP to power in 2002, the Turkish –Israeli relations continued just like before on political, economic, and security levels. In fact, these relations intensified amid the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, especially security and defense-wise. Yet, this did not prevent the Turkish side from reminding the Israelis of the need to change their behavior towards the Palestinians and abide by the United Nations Security Council Resolutions and the related agreements concerning the two-state solution and their policies.

In 2003, Turkey increased its engagement in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Ankara announced a comprehensive economic and social action plan for Palestine. It also launched the Ankara Forum for Economic Cooperation between Palestine, Israel, and Turkey, which had its first meeting in [2005](#) to create a mutual trust among the parties, embarking upon projects aimed at the rehabilitation/establishment of industrial zones in Palestine.

During his visit to Israel in 2006, Turkey's President at the time, Ahmet Necdet Sezer, underlines Ankara's bottom line in this matter "We want an independent and peaceful Palestine state next to Israel with internationally recognized borders." Accordingly, from that point on, Turkish officials highlighted two things: First, they want good relations with Israel but not at the expense of the Palestinians. A balanced relation would require Turkey to criticize Israel whenever it crosses the line against the Palestinians Second, peace in the Middle East can only be [achieved](#) by establishing a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its Capital.

To that end, the Turks [expressed](#) their readiness to contribute to resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict and include Syria and Lebanon in the peace effort. At the time, Turkey was a rising power broker and peacemaker in the region. The zero problem policy was at the core of its strategic depth doctrine for the region. Turkish officials initiated two major diplomatic initiatives to achieve peace and stability; one is related to Israel and the Palestinians; the other is related to Israel and Syria.

These were very much needed initiatives for the Turkish establishment because they can unlock decades of instability and chaos in the region and grant Turkey a wider diplomatic, political, and economic influence in the Middle East. As a non-oil producing country that depends mainly on exporting goods and agricultural products, Ankara needed a stable and prosperous region with open markets and borders that allows the flow of people, money, and services among its countries.

Due to Turkey's unique character as a NATO country with cordial ties with the opposing camps in the region, Ankara managed to quickly achieve progress on the two fronts. Erdogan visited Israel before, and Ankara [hosted](#) Shimon Peres in 2007, who became the first Israeli President to address the Turkish Parliament.

II. The Valley

However, relations between Turkey and Israel deteriorated significantly at the end of 2008, following the Israeli war against the Palestinians in Gaza. The three weeks assault [resulted in](#) killing more than 1400 Palestinian and injuring more than 5400. The war caused unprecedented official anger in Ankara against Tel Aviv because it interrupted the Turkish process, damaged Ankara's political investments during the previous years to stabilize the region, and undermined the rising Turkish role.

Moreover, the Turkish officials felt disrespected and betrayed because only two days before the war, Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Olmert was on an [official visit](#) to Ankara to strengthen bilateral relations and discuss regional issues, including efforts on Syria. Still, he did not inform them about it. This war was a huge embarrassment source, undermined their credibility in the region, and created distrust with the Israelis. It made them look like as if they were colluding with Israel or too weak to stop it.

Despite this, Ankara resumed its diplomatic effort in a bid to end the assault. After consulting with several Arab countries, it proposed a two-stage plan. The first stage would be a ceasefire supervised by international peacekeepers, including Turkish forces. The second stage would seek to find common ground between rival Palestinian groups to achieve sustainable peace in the region. Yet, it never saw the light of the day due to the US and Israeli positions.

In February 2009, the Davos forum hosted Erdogan along with Peres to discuss the Gaza war. Erdogan rebuked Israel, and when the moderator tried to interrupt him by giving him around half the time given to Peres, he burst out of anger and stormed out of the session with loud applause from the audience. The "one minute" stand raised Turkey's stocks in the region in an unprecedented way. Ankara became the rising star in the eyes of the Arab public, something that Israel did not admire. Yet, the straw that broke the camel's back in the Turkish- Israeli relations was the Israeli military operation against the Gaza Freedom Flotilla that was carrying humanitarian aid to the Palestinians to break the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip.

On 31 May 2010, Israel raided the six civilian ships in international waters in the Mediterranean Sea, including the Turkish ship MV Mavi Marmara. The attack ultimately killed 10 Turkish citizens, detaining hundreds of activists and seizing the vessel. The Israeli military operation was seen as an attempt to draw a new parameter to contain Turkey's rising regional role. Following the raid, Turkey downgraded its relations with Tel Aviv, cut its military ties, and put three [conditions](#) to normalizing ties: official apology, compensation, and removal of the blockade on Gaza. For around three more years, this raid continued to poison the Turkish-Israeli relations as Tel Aviv resisted the Turkish conditions.

Another factor that seemed to disturb the relations between the two countries is Turkey's increasing role in championing the Palestinian cause. For the Turkish officials, this was the right thing to do not only because there is consensus about it among the spectrum of the political parties but also because it serves Turkey regionally and Israel itself. They believe that for Israel to be secured, Israelis should pursue two-state solutions, abide by international law, and radically change their policies.

Furthermore, for Turkey, championing the Palestinian cause is essential to prevent youth exploitation by some regimes, radical, and/or terrorist groups that aim to recruit more of them. It protects young people from being drawn into extremism and terrorism in the light of the silence

and/or complicity of other governments. On the regional level, championing the Palestinian cause undermines Iran's influence, which seeks to monopolize the file and employ it for its own agenda. It also provides the Palestinians with alternatives and prevents them from completely falling into the Iranian embrace.

Fearing the regional isolation and the security implications amid the Arab uprisings, several [senior](#) Israeli officials highlighted the importance of mending ties with Turkey as a rising power and called on resuming relations. Yet, Israel's war on Gaza in 2012 complicated the issue, and the Turkish government had to condemn Israel harshly again. Although the deteriorating of the relations since 2010 did not affect much the economic interaction between Turkey and Israel, the security and intelligence cooperation between the two parties suffered greatly. For example, Turkey VETOed advancing the NATO-Tel Aviv relations. Moreover, the Israelis [claimed](#) that Ankara canceled agreements that allowed Mossad's agents to operate freely in the country and [compromised](#) an Iranian spy ring that worked for Tel Aviv.

III. The Deal(s)

In March 2013, the then US President Barack Obama [helped](#) the two parties to mend fences by persuading the Israeli Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu to apologize to the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The Israeli [apology](#) was part of a more significant deal meant to address Turkey's conditions and help normalize the relations between the two sides. After Erdogan accepted the apology on behalf of the Turkish people, a negotiation process started on the other terms, which lasted three more years. Some Israeli officials sought to disrupt the process by adding their own conditions, especially regarding Turkey-Hamas ties. Meanwhile, Ankara lifted its VETO against NATO-Israel cooperation, and both announced that they reached a reconciliation agreement on 26 June 2016.

Israel paid \$20 million in compensation to the families of the 2010 Gaza Flotilla raid victims. Additionally, Turkey was cleared to send aid and supplies to Gaza Strip, build a new power station and a water desalination plant and hospital. In return, Ankara agreed to drop any legal proceedings against Israel concerning the raid. The Turkish Parliament [approved](#) this reconciliation agreement on 20 August 2016, and President Erdogan signed a bill on 30 August, giving the green light for its implementation. At the end of that year, Turkey and Israel resumed diplomatic representation at the ambassadorial level for the first time since 2010.

However, the reconciliation short-lived mainly because of Trump's Israel- Palestine Policy, better known as the "Deal of the Century," and Israel's aggression against the Palestinians. At the time, Turkey was heading the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC), established in 1969 following the arson attack against Al-Aqsa Mosque in occupied Jerusalem. With 57 member states from four continents and a population of over 1.8 billion, the OIC is the second-largest intergovernmental organization globally after the United Nations. Given that it is the collective voice of the Muslim world and its priority is to safeguard and protect the Islamic sanctities in Palestine and the rights of the Palestinians against the Israeli violations, Turkey could not afford to look weak during its Presidency term.

Following Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as the Capital of Israel and move the embassy while pressuring other nations to follow suit, Ankara called for an emergency (OIC) summit and a UN General Assembly meeting. In May 2018, it also [recalled](#) its ambassador from Tel Aviv and expelled the Israeli ambassador [over](#) the killing of tens and injuring of thousands of

Palestinians protesting against the US move. Israeli [responded](#) by expelling the Turkish Consul-General, and Erdogan and Netanyahu got involved in a war of words again. Due to the urgency and the importance of the situation in Palestine, Turkey was the only country to host three OIC summits (one regular and two extraordinary summits) during its Presidency term.

In January 2019, energy Ministers of seven countries, including Israel, initiated strategic engagement; the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum. The gathering had anti-Turkey nature, especially with two specific countries (Greece and Cyprus) coordinating with the other members to isolate Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean. Two months later, Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, hosted a trilateral summit with the presence of the US secretary of state Pompeo. The summit [established](#) a trilateral mechanism that aims to increase regional cooperation; support energy independence and security, and defend against external malign influences in the Eastern Mediterranean and the broader Middle East. Turkey [considered](#) the Israeli-led initiative a US-sponsored anti-Turkey gathering.

IV. Common Interests

However, excluding the Palestinian issue, Turkey and Israel share many common interests on the regional level. Both considered ISIS as a rising and expanding threat. Recently, both capitals are closely monitoring the proliferation of the IRGC's franchised pro-Iran Shiite armed groups on their borders. Although Ankara did not show an adverse reaction to Iran's nuclear activities during the last two decades, a nuclear Iran is problematic for Israel and Turkey. Both have no interest in seeing Iran, a major regional rival, equipped with a nuclear weapon because this will seriously jeopardize the regional power balance, shield Iran, and prompt other regional players to follow suit.

Additionally, the two states have economic interests to build on. Ankara and Tel Aviv mulled plans to transfer fresh water, electricity, gas, and oil between them for so long. They have been negotiating from time to time plans to build an underwater pipeline to carry Israel's gas to Europe.

Despite the deterioration of the relations, 2020 witnessed several essential developments in Turkey-Israel relations that went unnoticed. In February, an unexpected air raid attributed to the Assad regime killed at least 33 Turkish soldiers and injured 30 in Idlib. The dramatic strike was a turning point and resulted in the launching of "Operation Spring Shield" (OSS) against the Assad regime and the birth of Turkey as a drone power. While some Arab governments such as UAE and Egypt criticized and/or condemned Turkey, Israel sent its [condolences](#). Yet, the most critical development that caught the attention of the Israelis was the targeting of Iran's IRGC and Shiite militia members during the OSS by Turkey's TB-2 UCAV.

During the last few years, Israel executed hundreds of raids against Iranian targets inside Syria. However, one thing that went unnoticed also is that Turkey never condemned these Israeli raids. This situation reflected an implicit interest-convergence between Ankara and Tel Aviv. Later on, Israel and Turkey will exchange several positive messages towards each other.

In 2020, the regional competition over the Eastern Mediterranean increased, Turkey stepped up its efforts to support the UN-recognized GNA in Tripoli and stabilize Libya. The tensions between Turkey and the French-led camp (Greece, Cyprus, UAE, and Egypt) increased unprecedentedly. Despite this and its close coordination with Greece, Cyprus, and Egypt, Israel never criticized Turkey's activities the way these countries did. One reason why Israel has been

cautious about criticizing Turkey's stance in the Eastern Mediterranean is the [EastMed pipeline project](#) to export gas to Europe.

Since Israel discovered the giant Leviathan Field in 2010, its interest in exporting gas to Europe increased sharply. The Leviathan was the most significant discovery worldwide during the first decade of the century. The only pipeline projects that were discussed by the time were those related to Turkey. However, when relations with Ankara started to deteriorate significantly, Israel began to mull different options. In 2013, the EU designated a pipeline through Israel, Cyprus, and Greece. Between 2015 and 2018, the EU funded a study on that pipeline. Despite approving it in 2020 by the three countries' leaders and moving forward with the plans to complete it by 2025, several factors cast shadows over its future.

According to the most recent estimates, the pipeline will be extremely long (1900 km long), very costly (around \$7 billion). Without a stable and secure environment, it would be almost impossible to protect it, let alone convince investors to pour money into it. However, the most challenging factor remains the Turkish-Libyan delimitation agreement at the end of 2019. This agreement complicated Israel's calculations on this matter. According to it, the EastMed pipeline is supposed to pass through a Turkish claimed territory. Aware of these obstacles and of the fact that a pipeline to Turkey would be the only viable alternative if the EastMed project failed, Tel Aviv kept its options open by avoiding challenging Ankara in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Potential Export Routes for Eastern Mediterranean Gas

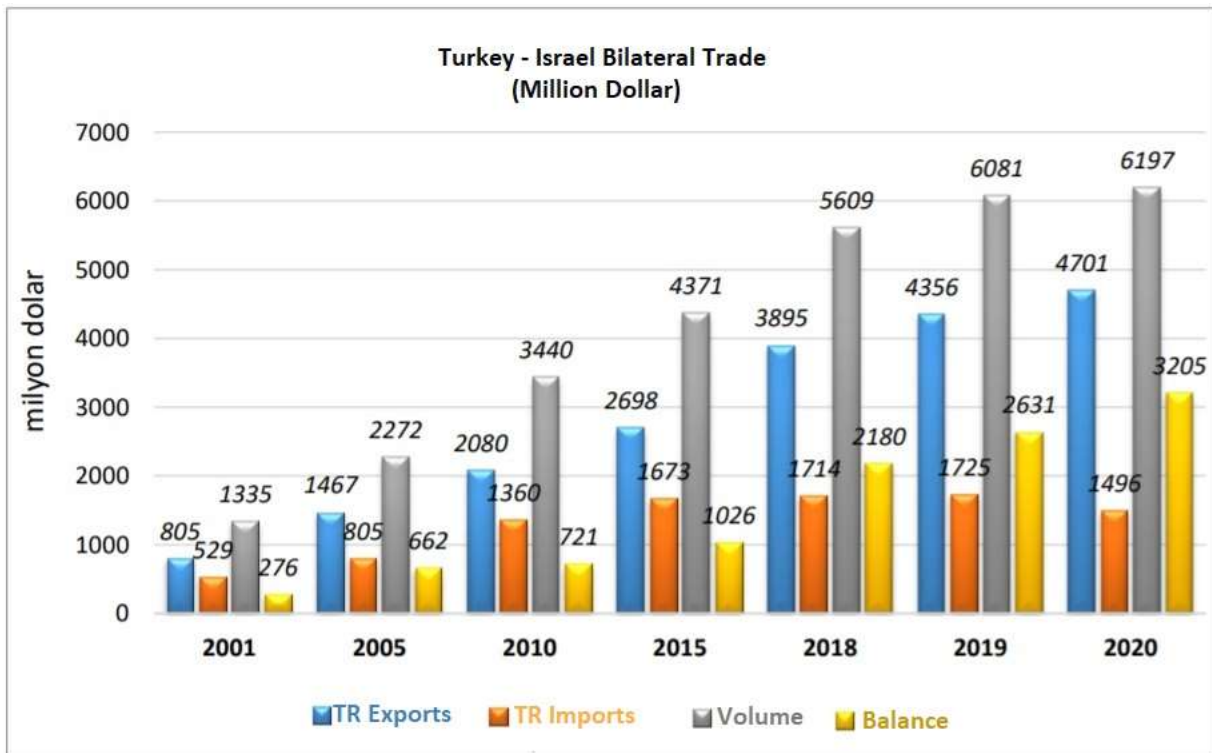


V. A Lost Opportunity?

Consequently, these implicit gestures prompted the two sides to develop small but positive steps that reflected the need to fix the relations. The pandemic was supposed to impact the economic relations severely; however, paradoxically, it forced more Israeli importers and exporters to turn to Turkey as an alternative to China due to its geographical proximity. In this sense, the pandemic boosted the business interactions between Tel Aviv and Ankara. During the pandemic,

Turkey ran very active pandemic diplomacy sending gear and medical equipment to many struggling countries worldwide, including the US and Israel. In a humanitarian step, the Turkish government approved special [permission](#) to send medical equipment, facemasks, protective overalls, and sterile gloves to Israel. Three Israeli planes [landed](#) in Incirlik base to pick up the cargo.

In May 2020, Israeli carrier El Al [applied](#) for the first time in ten years for a permit from Turkey that allows import and export transportation via cargo planes. The [Turkish aviation authorities gave El Al](#) approval to operate flights twice weekly between Istanbul and Tel Aviv. During that month, Israeli officials voiced their desire to restore the full diplomatic ties with Turkey. The Israeli Foreign Ministry engaged even in [Twitter diplomacy](#) to send the same message. When a major earthquake hit Turkey's Aegean region in October 2020, Israel [offered](#) to send a search and rescue team.



Source: T.C. Ticaret Bakanlığı

Building on these positive developments, President Erdogan indicated at the end of 2002 that Turkey continues to maintain active intelligence ties with Israel. He made it clear that the main [obstacle](#) that prevents the strengthening of relations between the two sides lies in Israeli's top level. Parallel with this, news on Ankara's intention to send a new ambassador to Tel Aviv surfaced. However, from the Turkish perspective, Netanyahu has been a long-standing problem. The unstable political environment in Israel, the hostile anti-Palestinian policy, the settlements, the lack of will for peace, not to mention personal enmity, among several other issues, all contribute to the faltering state of Turkish-Israeli relations.

In a conference held in Cyprus in March 2021, the Eastern Mediterranean and gas issues will surface again as a common ground and a starting point to build a positive atmosphere. Israel's energy minister Yuval Steinitz [expressed](#) his country's readiness to cooperate with Turkey on natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean and hoped that Turkey would join the East Mediterranean Gas Forum in the future.

To further show Ankara's seriousness, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said in a TV interview that Ankara was ready to re-evaluate its relations with Israel if its leaders changed their policies towards Palestine. He later extended an [invitation](#) on April 2021 to the Israeli energy minister to attend "The Antalya Diplomacy Forum" in June 2021. The forum is an official conference sponsored by Turkey's President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, which means that the invitation had support from the highest level in the country.

Although a first in years, giving a stage for the Israeli minister to talk about some important topics such as energy, gas, and regional issues was not surprising because of the latest gestures from both sides. Additionally, this particular Israeli minister favored positive relations with Turkey. He [reportedly](#) had a private meeting with President Erdogan on the sidelines of a nuclear security summit in Washington in March 2016. Although he did not disclose the content of the meeting, which lasted 20 to 30 minutes, he said that he is a great proponent of the effort to resume diplomatic relations with Turkey. It is believed that the private meeting, which lasted 20 to 30 minutes, discussed the war in Syria, Iran's presence there, terrorism, and natural gas. These topics, in particular still very relevant today to both sides as they were five years ago.

Just when the relations between Turkey and Israel seemed to be heading in the right direction and before the awaited visit of the Israeli minister to Turkey in June 2021, Israel's Prime minister, Netanyahu, sabotaged the whole issue again. In May 2021, he stood behind the illegal evictions of the Palestinians in Sheikh Jarrah, storming Al –Aqsa mosque during Ramadan and finally launching a war against Gaza. These Israeli actions against the Palestinians prompted a strong condemnation and criticism from Turkey. As a result, Ankara [withdrew](#) its invitation to Israel's energy minister, and the rapprochement effort suffered a setback.

VI. Conclusion:

Contrary to what many pundits might believe, the 2009 Israeli war on Gaza and the raid on Mav Marmara profoundly impacted the dynamics of the Turkey- Israel relations. The implications of these two particular events that occurred amidst Ankara's sincere efforts to create long-lasting peace in the region between Israel and the Arabs go beyond what most observers think. They continue to shape Turkey's behavior and its policy towards Israel until today and are expected to continue in the future. If a comparison is to be made between Ankara's behavior towards Israel before and after these events, one can notice that Turkey never trusted Tel Aviv afterward. Only then, Ankara made it clear that better relations with Israel would require Tel Aviv to end its attacks on the Palestinians. To fully grasp Turkey's policy towards Israel, one should always consider this.

For the Turkish government, the Netanyahu factor is highly poisonous to Turkish-Israeli relations. Just before the last war against Gaza, Erdogan openly laid out Turkey's guidelines for healthy relations with Israel. These guidelines have been there for the previous 11 years or so. Better Turkish-Israeli relations require Tel Aviv to change its policy towards the Palestinians. Turkey cannot be seen as complicit with Israel against the Palestinians or silent on the Israeli

aggression against them because this would deal a massive blow to its image and regional role, among other things.

From the Turkish perspective, to reach sustainable, just, and comprehensive peace, there is a need to name things as they are and hold Israel accountable whenever it violates international law, UNSCRs, International agreements, and/or relevant agreements with Palestinians. The more the Israeli pressure on the Palestinians, the more critical the Turkish government to the Israeli behavior and policies (for several internal and external reasons). This means that the way Israel behaves and acts towards the Palestinians plays a primary role in shaping Turkish-Israeli relations.

Having said this, the two sides seem to shield the economic interactions against political fluctuations after the 2016 deal. This policy preference is consistent with Turkey's behavior in many cases. The Turks prefer to separate economic relations and business from political quarrels. Although the importance of the security factor in Turkish-Israeli relations decreased significantly in the last decade, it is still relevant, especially when it comes to mutual interests. Finally, the topics that can create strategic realignment between Turkey and Israel remain intact.

VII. Indicators To Watch:

- 1) The policies of the new Israeli government: On 13 June 2021, the Israeli Parliament approved a new coalition government led by Naftali, ending Netanyahu's 12-year rule. In theory, this could offer new opportunities to Ankara and Tel Aviv, yet whether it will give a boost to new rapprochement efforts will depend on the new government's approach towards the Palestinians and the Turkish government will to reach out to it. The fact that the coalition government includes the United Arab List party (Ra'am), representing the Palestinian Arabs in Israel, could offer Turkey the suitable pretext to reach out to the new government. However, being a coalition of left-wing, centrist and right-wing parties, there is a little common between them and a lot of doubt regarding their will to change Israel's anti-Palestinians policies radically. This might prevent effective communication with Ankara; especially while Bennet at the helm. Regardless, Economic interactions and security communications are expected to continue.
- 2) The situation in Eastern Mediterranean: Easing the tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean, especially between Greece and Turkey and/or progress on the Egypt-Turkey front, might contribute positively to the rapprochement efforts between Ankara. The escalation between the aforementioned regional players in the eastern Mediterranean might also force Israel to keep the door open with Turkey. Fearing that Ankara would resort to power to prevent the construction of the very long and costly EastMed pipeline that passes through a Turkish claimed territory, Israel will always consider the less expensive and more efficient Turkish alternative, a pipeline through Cyprus and Turkey to Europe.
- 3) Iran's regional policies: Tehran's regional policies amid the newly elected ultra-conservative President along with the fate of the JCPOA nuclear deal between Iran and the US is another factor to watch as these two issues can impact the rapprochement efforts between Israel and Turkey. Re-activating the JCPOA and removing sanctions on Iran without addressing its ballistic missiles program and its malicious regional behavior and activities will most likely result in

emboldened Iran. In this scenario, Iran will send more money to revive IRGC's Shiite militias across the region. This action will strengthen Tehran's position in Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon, creating another common ground for Turkey and Israel to cooperate. Failing to re-activate the JCPOA is not less problematic for Ankara and Tel Aviv, thus the need to keep the channels open.