

# **Entente Cordiale:** Exploring Turkey–Qatar Relations

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## Introduction

**I**n November 2018, the fourth meeting of Turkey-Qatar High Strategic Committee was held in Istanbul. During the meeting, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated that:

*Turkey and Qatar have repeatedly shown that they are each other's true friends. The Turkish nation has exerted great efforts to nullify the blockade and sanctions targeting its Qatari brothers. And, Qatar, for its part, has been among the countries which have given our country the strongest support in the aftermath of the July 15 coup attempt. It has also stood by us in the face of the speculative attempts targeting our economy in the recent months.* (TCCB, 2018)

This quote might seem ordinary, however, in reality it reveals the fact that in the last years, Turkey and Qatar have developed a solid relationship that goes beyond a fair-weather friendship, and extends to times of difficulty.

With the Justice and Development Party's (AK Party, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) accession to power in 2002, Turkey's international alliances began to expand, and the AK Party governments have broadened the horizons for the Turkish foreign policy. From the start, the AK Party governments tended to be more active in the Middle East than their predecessors. The increasing mediating activities of Turkey in Palestine and Lebanon, have contributed to the development of new relations — particularly with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates -the UAE-) (Martin, 2009).

Turkey and the GCC have developed promising interactions both politically and economically. Leaders and officials from Turkey and the GCC countries have had frequent meetings, and there was a considerable increase in the number of investments from some of the GCC countries to Turkey and vice versa. In the first years of the AK Party rule, Saudi Arabia and the UAE dominated the economic

relationship (TCMB, 2018), and bilateral relations with Saudi Arabia showed remarkable improvement (Larrabee, 2011). In recent years, though, Qatar has risen to the forefront. The new political dynamics caused by the Arab Spring<sup>1</sup> and Syrian civil war shifted alliances in the region. Thus, Turkey has moved away from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and established firmer ties with Qatar. In the context of the Gulf Crisis that began in July 2017, this transition has become even more definite.

Qatar and Turkey have continued to develop their political and economic relations. Above all, the leaders started to come together frequently and made promising statements for future bilateral relations (Al Jazeera, 2018). In the following period, military agreements have been signed, and investments between the countries have increased (ibid.). In parallel with these developments, both countries have supported each other politically and economically in times of crises such as the 15 July coup attempt in 2016, the Gulf Crisis and the recent currency crisis in Turkey, which occurred in the summer of 2018 (Al Jazeera, 2018; Osman, 2016; The Guardian, 2018). Thus, they actually have become friends in times of trouble. Subsequently, socio-cultural relations have evolved as well. A growing number of Qatari nationals have visited Turkey in recent years (MCT, 2017), and organizations that introduce Qataris to Turkish culture have also been established in Qatar (Yousuf, 2016).

This paper examines how regional political dynamics, which have broken the balance of power in the region — namely, the Arab uprisings, the Syrian war, and the Gulf Crisis — have brought Turkey and Qatar closer and led to the development of significant political and economic relations. One may argue that this relationship will not stand the test of time, such as Turkey's ties with Saudi Arabia and the UAE. However, considering recent developments, the relationship between Turkey and Qatar seems more entrenched than ever.

<sup>1</sup> International media commonly use the term "Arab Spring" to refer to the mass protests that hit North Africa and the Middle East from January 2011 onwards. These demonstrations called for an end to nepotism and corruption, improvement of economic conditions, establishment of democratic representation, and protection of human rights.

# Turkey and the Gulf Cooperation Council

In the 1990s, Turkey preferred to stay neutral in the Middle East (Martin, 2009) and focused on enhancing its ties with the West. When the AK Party came to power in 2002, the priority was to improve relations with the European Union (EU) and – more importantly – work on the policies which would pave the way for the EU membership (Cagaptay, 2009). However, in light of the discouraging EU accession process, the second AK Party government (2007-2011) began to shift Turkey's foreign policy (Altunışık & Martin, 2011).

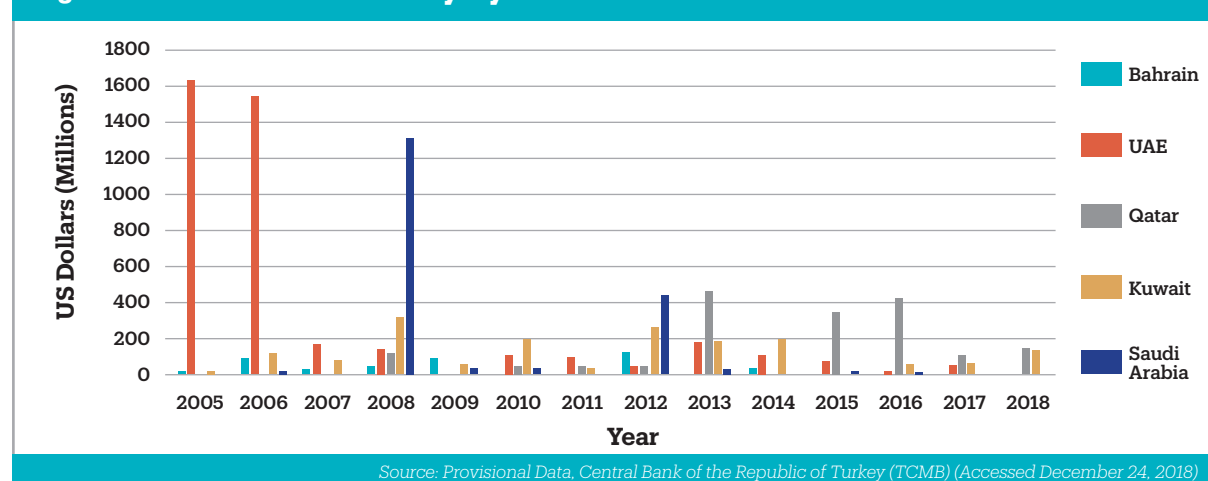
Using Charles Hermann's (1990) model of foreign policy changes, academics Meliha Altunışık and Lenore Martin claim that there has been a "program change" in the AK Party's agenda, which includes developing diplomatic negotiations, exerting soft power, aiming economic interdependence and undertaking mediator roles in the Middle East. The program change has been followed by what is called an "orientation change", and Turkey started to diverge from the West (Altunışık & Martin, 2011). In contrast to the perspective that construes these changes as "leaving the West," such step can be interpreted as a "normalization" in the Turkish foreign policy, since Turkey abandoned its Ottoman ties in first decades of the republic along with secularizing and nationalist reforms (Cagaptay, 2009; Oğuzlu, 2008). Therefore, by maintaining its relations with the EU on one side,

and improving its ties with the Middle East on the other, Turkey actually has broadened its diplomatic horizons.

Turkey's changing posture was soon faced with significant political challenges, such as the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, popular uprisings across the Arab world, the Syrian civil war, the emergence of Daesh and the GCC Crisis. Thus, Turkey sought reliable political and economic allies in the region in order to better weather the crises. In 2003, the US invasion of Iraq engendered drastic changes in the region. Due to the rise of sectarian violence in Iraq and numerous unexpected consequences of the war, both Turkey and the GCC began searching for strategic partners in the region (Çetinoğlu Harunoğlu, 2016).

This process ended up with the rapprochement of Turkey and the GCC countries. Negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Turkey and the GCC began in 2005. In 2008, the Memorandum of Understanding -expected to pave the way for agreement on the FTA- was signed (Emirates 24/7, 2008). Following from these developments, the second half of the 2000s witnessed a significant increase in Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) in Turkey, particularly from the UAE and Saudi Arabia (see Figure 1).

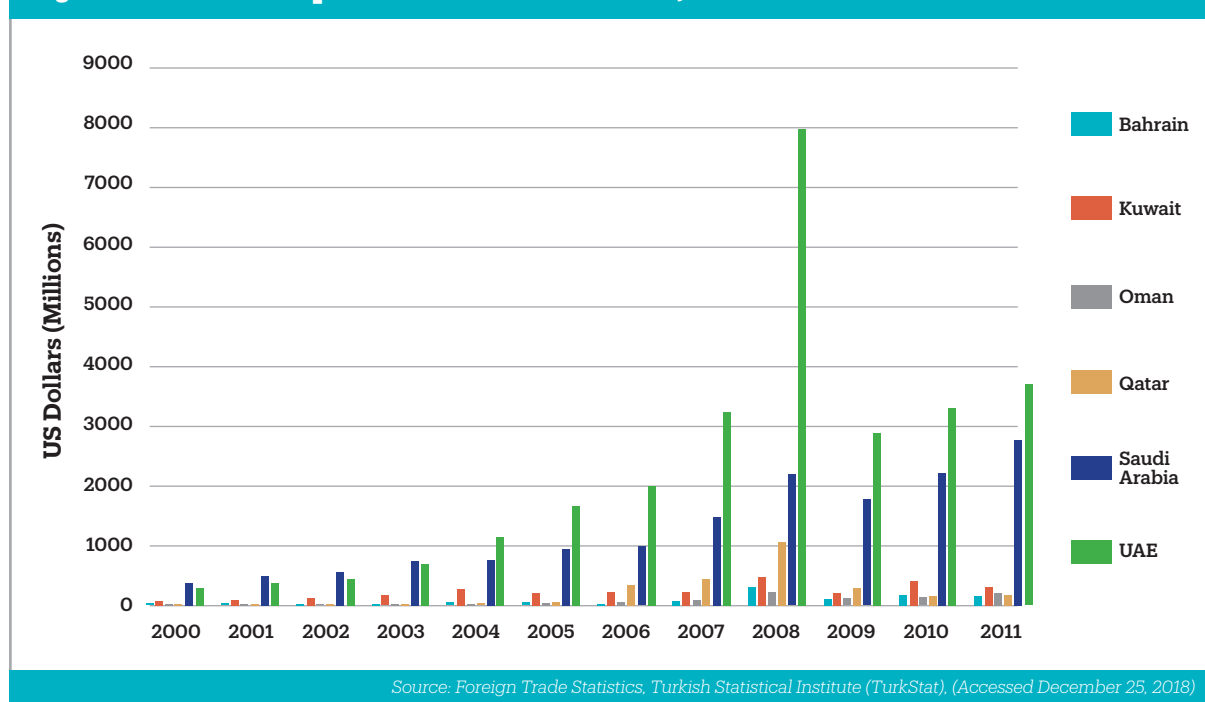
**Figure 1: FDI inflow to Turkey by the GCC Countries**



During the first decade of the 2000s, the major investors within the GCC in Turkey were Saudi Arabia and the UAE (TCMB, 2018). Dubai investors showed interest in Turkish mobile company, Turkcell, and the banking and construction sectors in Turkey until 2008. In a similar vein, Kuwaiti firms invested in shopping malls in Istanbul and banking sector in Turkey (Olson, 2008). The Saudis, in addition to investing in the banking and construction sectors, focused on investments in the health sector including hospitals,

medical schools, fitness centres, and pharmaceutical companies, which in turn have contributed to the emergence of health tourism in Turkey (ibid.). Qatar also developed its economic relations with Turkey during the AK Party rule. However, significant increases in FDI inflow from Qatar only occurred after 2012 (see Figure 1). Furthermore, Turkish exports to the Arab Gulf countries showed a sharp increase between 2000 and 2008 (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Turkish Exports to GCC Countries, 2000-2011**



In addition to economic ties, political relations have made progress as well. In August 2006, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia paid the first official visit of a Saudi monarch to Turkey in 40 years, which was followed up by a subsequent visit in 2007 (Larrabee, 2011). Similarly, in September 2008, King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of Bahrain paid the first official of a Bahraini leader to Turkey (Martin, 2009). In 2009, former Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Ahmet Davutoğlu, invited the GCC Foreign Ministers to Istanbul in order to develop a "high-level strategic dialogue" between the GCC and Turkey (MFA, 2009). Accordingly, the two sides would aim for cooperation in the spheres of military,

economy, culture, and education. Among these, military cooperation has particular importance. Both sides pursued military cooperation for the purpose of acquiring support of issues of mutual concern such as terrorism and instability in the region (Martin, 2009).

However, the close rapport between the GCC and Turkey was soon affected by the coup in Egypt in 2013 (Çetinoğlu Harunoğlu, 2016). In the new post-Arab Spring environment, the alliances in the Middle East shifted, particularly in the Gulf region. These shifts exposed rifts with the GCC and between individual GCC states and Turkey, resulting in a strengthening of ties between Turkey and Qatar (ibid.).

# Turkey and Qatar: Growing Ties

Qatar, one of the smallest countries in the world, has had the highest gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in the world since 1997 (IMF, 2018), and the country is considered one of the richest ones in the world (Khatib, 2013). Due to its significant oil and natural gas resources and small population, Qatar has managed to preserve and improve its economy and even distribute its wealth to its citizens through “public sector employment, grants of land to citizens and the provision of subsidized goods and services” (Antwi-Boateng, 2013). Qatari people enjoy a high standard of living thanks to “free education, health care, and utilities –electricity and water– as well as high wages and no taxes” and sophisticated sports and art facilities that their country offers (ACW Research Team, 2018). This economic and social well-being is topped off by its diplomatic activities and achievements, and in return, Qatar has turned into a crucial actor in the region as well as in the world in the last decade (Cooper & Momani, 2011).

Although Qatar gained its independence in 1971 under the reign of Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al Thani; however, until 1995, Qatar had been “overshadowed” by two of its neighbours, Saudi Arabia and Iran, and remained largely withdrawn from regional and international affairs (Barakat, 2014). During this period, Qatar focussed on its internal affairs rather than making its presence felt in the international area. After Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani overthrew his father in a bloodless coup in 1995, Qatar started to make its own way and develop “innovative” diplomacy (Cooper & Momani, 2011).

Qatar, aware of its vulnerabilities as a small state while trying to punch above its weight in the international order, therefore, remained cautious in its new approach to diplomacy (Cooper & Momani, 2011). Instead of developing aggressive stance, Qatar approached diplomacy in way that did not impede others, but at

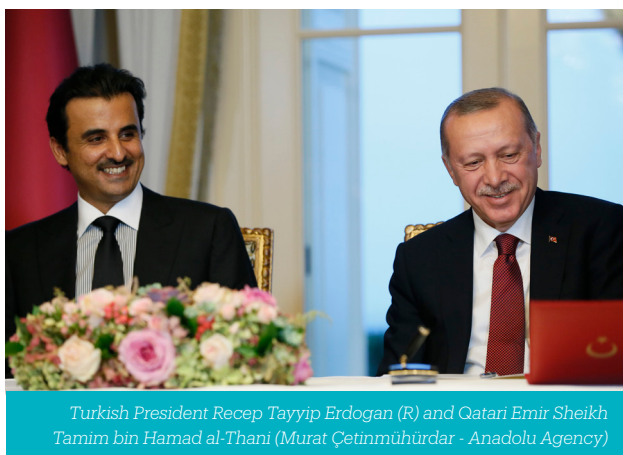
the same time expanded its sphere of influence (ibid.). It consisted in undertaking a “mediator” or “negotiator” roles and distributing humanitarian aid to states affected by political conflicts in the Middle East (Khatib, 2013).

During the conflicts in Yemen and Lebanon, or the conflict between Sudan and Darfur, Qatar aimed to find compromise (Akpınar, 2015). In 2003, even the term “mediation” became officially included in the Qatari constitution as a foreign policy imperative (ibid.). This

attitude has continued unabashed during the rule of Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, who took over leadership from his father in 2013. On the one hand, it played host to an Israeli trade office, while on the other hand, it has provided a space for Hamas’ leadership (Khatib, 2013). Similarly, Taliban officials have been living in Doha

since 2010, and recently, the representatives of Taliban and the US met in Doha to negotiate for peace in Afghanistan in January 2019 (Al Jazeera, 2019). While these have been politically beneficial for Qatar, they have also created numerous dilemmas. For instance, Qatar has hosted members of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) as a part of its open-door policy; and during the Gulf Crisis in 2017, blockading countries blamed Qatar for siding with “terrorist organisations,” and demanded that it cut ties with MB (Al Jazeera, 2017).

Turkish-Qatari relations have largely developed in the context of the emerging post-Arab Spring geopolitical environment. Like the other GCC countries, Qatar developed its relations with Turkey during the AK Party era. The relationship was nurtured under the auspices of the GCC. However, following the Arab-Spring and its aftermath, political differences emerged between Turkey and the Saudi-UAE camp on the one hand, and between the latter and Qatar on the other. As a consequence, a close partnership between Turkey and Qatar began to emerge (Çetinoğlu Harunoğlu, 2016).



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (R) and Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani (Murat Çetinmühürdar - Anadolu Agency)

## 1. The Arab Spring

As a milestone, the Arab Spring has turned the region upside-down. After it started in Tunisia in December 2010, the yearning for democracy swept through the Middle East region. Eventually, new actors emerged, violence increased, and the conflicts have become more complicated in time and led to significant changes in the region. Under these circumstances, as Akpınar (2015) states “even of countries that have not directly experienced the Arab Spring such as Turkey, Iran, and Qatar” increasingly have had security problems. Therefore, these countries have been involved in the process at some levels and had to develop their own stances.

During the Arab Spring, both Turkey and Qatar sought to play a balancing act in the region, while at the same time, both states knew that it was crucial to “carve new regional roles for themselves” in this shifting political order (Salloukh, 2013). For Qatar, the Arab uprisings seemed to present a good opportunity to enhance its role as mediator. However, the increased polarised region did not always present opportunities to maintain the perception of Qatar’s mediating capacity. While broadly speaking, in Bahrain and Yemen, Qatar abided by the GCC position (Ulrichsen, 2014), in other cases, Qatar openly backed popular uprisings and highlighted the importance of change (Akpınar, 2015). Accordingly, Al Jazeera broadcast full coverage of protests in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria, highlighting the demonstrators demand (Barakat, 2014). In addition to providing media support for agents of change, Qatar supported various activists in a number of other ways. Whereas, in Libya, Doha provided direct military support, in Syria, assistance was only financial (Nuruzzaman, 2015). In the case of Egypt, though, Qatar went the extra mile.

When the popular uprising started in Egypt, Qatar’s stance was clear due to its relations with the MB and the long history of antagonism with the Mubarak regime. As mentioned above, Qatar hosted many members of the MB. In the 1960s and 1970s, many MB members, including Yusuf al-Qaradawi who is one of the leading intellectuals within MB, settled in Qatar (Roberts, 2014). The Qatari leadership, which grew wary of the Saudi ideology that pervaded all aspects of public life, contemplated a pragmatic use of MB to lessen Saudi influence in the religious and social realms of the country. Although Qatar showed its commitment to Wahhabism by naming its state mosque after

Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab in 2012 (Roberts, 2014), it has been troubled with the “Saudi dominance over the Arab world” (Davidson, 2017). Therefore, such step was a prerequisite to preserve their national interests and security.

On the other hand, although in the 2000s, there were ongoing tensions between Doha and Cairo, in 2010 Mubarak visited Emir Sheikh Hamad in Doha and two weeks later, Qatari Prime Minister Hamad bin Jassim came to Cairo for developing economic and political cooperation (Ulrichsen, 2014). However, these attempts did little to moderate the tensions between Egypt and Qatar. Throughout and following the protests, which culminated in the toppling of Hosni Mubarak and the election of Mohamed Morsi to the Egyptian presidency in June 2012, Qatar continued its financial aid (ibid). These actions were vehemently opposed by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, both of which provided financial support to General Abdel Fattah el Sisi during and after the coup d’état which General Sisi conducted against Mohamed Morsi, in July 2013 (Barakat, 2014). Consequently, after the coup in 2013, Qatar’s position within the GCC started to become shaky.

The Arab Spring also presented challenges to Turkish-GCC relations. During the uprisings, Turkey tried to take on the role of mediator in Bahrain, Libya, Syria, and Yemen. However, Turkey’s mediation attempts were only successful in Bahrain and, to a lesser extent, in Libya (Akpınar, 2015). In Egypt, Turkey and Qatar had similar positions. Turkey condemned the 2013 coup led by Sisi, in opposition to the GCC, with the exception of Qatar (Çetinoğlu Harunoğlu, 2016).

While there are many questions that remain to be answered regarding the Arab Spring, there is no doubt that one of the immediate effects has been a further destabilisation of the region. Turkey and Qatar have aimed to play a balancing act with all forces despite such an unstable environment. However, their relations with Egypt have been severely dented, the crisis in Yemen continues unabated, and the Syrian war has proven to be an intractable conflict.

## 2. Syrian Civil War

Turkey and Qatar have had similar approaches vis-à-vis the Syrian war as well. The relationship between Turkey and Syria has been unsteady for years. During the 1990s, Syria’s support for the PKK, which was seemingly



Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Cavusoglu (5th L) and Turkish Economy Minister Nihat Zeybekci (3rd L) pose for a photo as they attend Turkey - Gulf Cooperation Council meeting in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on October 13, 2016. (Fatih Aktaş - Anadolu Agency)

settled with Syria's commitment to end its support to the PKK on 20 October 1998, was the main issue between the two countries (Altunışık, 2010). Subsequently, a process of trust building began between the two countries, and in time, turned into increased security and economic cooperation through trade agreements and diplomatic visits in the 2000s (ibid.). However, the crackdown against a popular uprising in Syria led to a complete breakdown of relations.

At the onset of the crisis in Syria, both Turkey and Qatar invited Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to enact political and economic reforms in order to prevent escalation in violence (Salloukh, 2013). Initially, the Arab Gulf states did not make moves against the Assad regime, however, with the increasing sectarian tone of the Assad regime, the Gulf policy in the region become more in favour of a regime change (Hokayem, 2014). Due to the "traditional competition for regional hegemony" between Iran and Saudi Arabia, when Iran intervened on behalf of the Assad regime, blaming "the West, the Gulf states and Israel" for the escalation of crisis in Syria, Saudi Arabia, followed by the GCC stand, developed a counter-discourse (ibid.).

In 2011 and 2012, Turkey's mediation attempts continued, however, Turkey did not get any returns for its attempts (Akpınar, 2015). Qatar, on the other hand, suspended the operations of its embassy in Damascus in July 2011 (Barakat, 2014). Qatar's opposition to the Syrian regime became even sharper. First, it sought to suspend Syria's membership in Arab League along with the other Gulf States (ibid.). It then allowed Syrian opposition to have a seat at the 2013 Arab League summit held in Doha and open an embassy in Qatar (Hokayem, 2014).

In subsequent years, both Turkey and Qatar have made their opposition to the Syrian regime clear, and sided with various anti-regime forces. They joined the Friends of Syria Group in 2012, established to support the opposition in Syria and increase pressure in (Akpınar, 2015). While the second meeting of the group was held in Istanbul in 2012, Doha hosted another gathering of the group which aimed to start the peace talks and negotiations in 2013 (Al Jazeera, 2013). However, there was not any improvement in the situation. Besides, with the rise of Daesh in Iraq and Syria, especially in 2013 and 2014, and the inability of the international actors to deal with Daesh, the security problems have intensified (Hokayem, 2014).

Later on, things have become even more complicated for Turkey in Syria due to the US' open support to the YPG, the Syrian branch of the PKK, and Russia's support to Syrian regime in 2015 (TRT World Research Centre, 2017). After these developments, Turkey continued its attempts to defuse tensions. However, such efforts were not successful. Turkey and Qatar took part together in meetings for ceasefire on 14 November 2015 and on 15 October 2016 with the participation of other countries, however, both ended without achieving a solution (ibid.). Eventually, Turkey launched a series of cross-border operations in Syria, starting with Operation Euphrates Shield on August 2016 and later Operation Olive Branch on 20 January 2018 (ibid.).

Overall, both Turkey and Qatar were on the similar pages regarding various popular uprisings in Arab states, including the Syrian civil war. Both aimed to mediate between the regime supporters and opposition, tried to prevent the war in Syria, to some extent, and joined some meetings for initiating peace in Syria.

However, with the escalation of violence and increasing security problems, they needed to change their attitude at some level. Turkey opened its border for the refugees coming from Syria especially after the usage of chemical weapons (Çetinoğlu Harunoğlu, 2016), and subsequently launched operations there (TRT World Research Centre, 2018). For its part, Qatar has continued its media coverage of the Syrian revolution. As opposed to the uprisings in Tunis or Egypt, in Syria, the uprising turned into a war, and led to a humanitarian crisis far beyond anyone's expectations.

### 3. The GCC Crisis

The GCC Crisis, initiated by the Saudi-led-coalition against Qatar, also served to intensify the relationship between Turkey and Qatar. On 5 June 2017, the blockading countries, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt, cut their diplomatic relations with Qatar and imposed a land, air and sea blockade leading to food shortages in Qatar and troubles in its trade routes (Harb, 2018). They released a list of 13 demands with a 10-day expiration date, which includes shutting down the Turkish military base in Qatar (Al Jazeera, 2017). Qatar rejected the demands while the blockading countries continued their media attacks. Their troops were even located on the Qatari border to increase the level of pressure on Qatar (ACW Research Team, 2018). In the following period, the Emir of Kuwait tried to mediate between the parties, and Germany and France sought to settle down the tension (ibid.). One of the crucial responses came from Turkey.

The Turkish Defence Minister immediately stated that there was no attempt from Turkey to close the Turkish military base in Qatar and added: "The base in Qatar

is both a Turkish base and one that will preserve the security of Qatar and the region" (Al Jazeera, 2017). On 7 June 2017, the Turkish parliament approved legislation which authorized the deployment of Turkish troops to the Turkish military base in Qatar (Baabood, 2018). Later, Erdoğan visited the Turkish base on 15 November 2017 and highlighted the importance of peace in the region with his speech (Alam, 2017). Turkey's quick military response shows not only its solidarity with Qatar but also how Turkey attaches importance to preserving the peace in the region. Turkish forces in Qatar held joint exercises with both the Qatar Emiri Naval Forces (QENF) and the Qatar Emiri Land Forces (QELF) as a precaution against a possible military intervention by the blockading countries (ACW Research Team, 2018).

On the other hand, the Turkish response to the blockade was not limited to the military cooperation. When the blockade started, Qatar was faced with a food crisis. Due to its geographical limitations, Qatar heavily relies on imports especially in daily needs such as food, water, and medicine. As Collins (2018) states "slightly more than 15 percent of Qatari imports came from the blockading countries," — especially from Saudi Arabia by land. Therefore, Qatar had to take precautions immediately after the Saudis closed the border. Under these circumstances, Turkey again showed its support by sending food shipments by sea and air cargo and promising the crucial supply of construction materials for ongoing FIFA 2022 World Cup projects (The Peninsula, 2017). On the societal level, the support for Qatar has been outstanding. The day after the blockade started, the tweets with the hashtag #TurkeyWithQatar trended on Twitter (TRT World, 2017). Turkish people used the hashtag to show their support whereas Qatari people expressed their appreciation.

## Bilateral Relations and High Strategic Committee

The very first attempt for establishing an alliance between Turkey and Qatar came in December 2014, and later, in December 2015, President Erdoğan and Emir of Qatar met in Qatar for the first Turkey-Qatar High Strategic Committee (TCCB, 2015). This meeting was critical and paved the way for the establishment of a Turkish military base in Qatar (Çetinoğlu Harunoğlu,

2016). In this meeting, 15 agreements on education, environment, maritime affairs, energy, science, and technology were signed (TCCB, 2015).

As mentioned above, more Turkish troops arrived at this military base after the Gulf Crisis, and Turkish and Qatari soldiers have subsequently held joint military

exercises since then (Alam, 2017). Recently, military cooperation between Turkey and Qatar was further enhanced. On 13 January 2019, during the launch of a new facility for Turkish defence firm BMC, President Erdoğan announced that this facility would produce military products which would be exported to Qatar (Daily Sabah, 2019). Qatar has already invested in BMC, and its share is expected to increase with this new facility (ibid.).

The committee held three additional meetings within three years (Amiri Diwan, 2016; MOFA, 2018; TCCB, 2018). The second meeting was held on 18 December 2016. When both sides came together in Trabzon for this meeting, memoranda of understanding were signed regarding cooperation in the spheres of higher education, information technology, health and medical sciences, youth communication and the organization of cultural activities (Amiri Diwan, 2016). Thus, it is clear that both countries aimed to cooperate beyond the existing political and economic aspects. This one was a great opportunity for Qatar to show its support to Turkey against the perpetrators of the 15 July coup attempt. Before the second meeting, Qatar had already stood by Turkey. After the coup attempt, the Emir of Qatar was the first person who called Erdoğan to express his and his country's solidarity with Turkey (Osman, 2016). Later, the Qatar Foreign Ministry published a statement stating that "The State of Qatar expressed its strong denunciation and condemnation of the military coup attempt, lawlessness, and violation of the constitutional legitimacy in the Republic of Turkey" (Qatar Tribune, 2017). The comprehensive cooperation that was achieved with the second meeting shows that Qatar's support for Turkey is not in name only.

During the recent currency and debt crisis, in which the Turkish lira suffered, Qatar offered its support. On 15 August 2018, the Emir of Qatar came to Turkey and met with President Erdoğan to offer his country's financial help (The Guardian, 2018). Qatar decided to invest \$15 billion to Turkey in support of the Turkish economy (ibid.). Later on, it was announced that Turkey has received some portion of this \$15 billion package of investments (Knecht, 2019).

Turkey-Qatar relations have not only continued to develop at the state level but also at business sector level private business as well. There has been already an increase in the number of Turkish companies in

Qatar. In 2017, in the organization of Turkey Expo Qatar, 154 Turkish companies from various industries and 10 Qatari institutions and organizations came together in Qatar for further direct investments, joint ventures and business partnerships (Turkey Expo Qatar, 2018). The second trade show was held in 2018 (ibid.).

These trade shows have provided an opportunity for both Turkish and Qatari individual investors to find new markets and cooperation. The last trade show which was held from 16 to 18 January 2019, again, the investors came together in Doha (Turkey Expo Qatar, 2019). During the expo, Turkish Deputy Finance Minister Osman Dinçbaş stated that for Turkey, Qatar was one of the fastest growing trade areas in 2018, and trade volume between Turkey and Qatar for the first 10 months of 2018 is higher than the \$1.3 billion in all of 2017 (Knecht, 2019). So, in total, for 2018, the trade volume is expected to hit \$2 billion (ibid.). As can be seen from Figure 1, FDI inflow from Qatar to Turkey showed an increase in 2015 and 2016, while this movement dropped in 2017. According to Dinçbaş, there is again an inflow upsurge in 2018.

Another improvement is in the tourism sector. The number of tourists coming from Qatar to Turkey was 824 in 2002, whereas the number increased to 7661 in 2011, 29,743 in 2014 and 48,764 in 2017 according to the Border Statistics of the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MCT, 2017). In the summer of 2018, in order to encourage travel between these countries, Qatar Airways added new direct flights from Doha to Bodrum, and Antalya (The Peninsula, 2018). On the other hand, in order to increase the number of Turkish tourists to Qatar and make them easier for these tourists to deal with the visa and accommodation arrangements, the Qatar Tourism Agency (QTA) opened an office in Istanbul on 8 August 2016 (Daily News, 2016). Since tourism is economically beneficial for both countries, it is significant to sustain the tourism exchange between Turkey and Qatar. Lastly, in 2015, the Turkish Cultural Centre Yunus Emre and in 2016, the first Turkish school opened in Doha (Yousuf, 2016). These initiatives enabled Qataris to be directly acquainted with Turkish culture in Qatar.



President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan (C-R) and Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani (C-L) shake hands as they pose for a photo during an official welcoming ceremony at Presidential Complex in Ankara, Turkey on August 15, 2018. ( Kayhan Özer - Anadolu Agency)

## Conclusion

Over the course of the last two decades, a number of critical events have contributed to shaping the relationship between Turkey and the GCC states, and Qatar in particular. Ranging from the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, the Arab uprisings, Syrian civil war, to the rise of Daesh, and the GCC Crisis, the regional outlook of Turkey and Qatar were fundamentally shaped by these events.

Relations between Turkey and the GCC began in the context of security and subsequently evolved into economic cooperation. This alliance was also suitable with the AK Party's desire to take an active part in the Middle East. However, the Arab Spring damaged this alliance, since Turkey and the GCC - put forward different approaches. This was particularly acute as it relates to Egypt. Qatar, on the other hand, showed that it is the principled member of the GCC through its stance towards the Egyptian uprising. In addition, Qatar shared a similar attitude with Turkey vis-à-vis most of the popular Arab

uprisings. This similarity has continued during the Syrian War as well. As discussed, at first they invited Assad to fulfil the demands of the opposition. Then, with the rise of violence and insecurity in the region, Turkey and Qatar changed their stance towards Assad's regime.

During the uprisings and in their aftermath, the strategic alliance between Turkey and Qatar has been shaped and strengthened through agreements, diplomatic visits and statements. In terms of military cooperation, successful steps were undertaken. With the establishment of the High Strategic Committee, Turkey and Qatar have created arenas for more military and economic alliances in the future. Moreover, Ankara and Doha have reacted quickly when their counterpart confronted critical political or economic predicaments, such as the July 15 coup attempt, the GCC Crisis, and the recent currency and debt crisis that Turkey faced in 2018.

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