

# Strategic shifts: the role of the Gulf Crisis in transforming Qatari-Turkish relations (2017–2021)

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The study investigates how the 2017 Gulf crisis reshaped Qatari-Turkish relations, transforming them from cordial cooperation into a robust strategic alliance. It examines the political, military, and economic implications of Turkey’s support for Qatar during the blockade, and how this realignment altered the balance of power in the Gulf region, eroded Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) unity, and redefined Turkey’s role in regional geopolitics.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The study uses a qualitative political analysis approach grounded in international relations theory, particularly realism. It synthesizes academic sources, policy briefs, economic data, and military reports to assess the geopolitical, economic, and security dynamics of Qatari-Turkish relations during the crisis and contextualizes them within the broader shifts in regional and global power structures.

**Findings** – The Gulf crisis catalyzed a strategic partnership between Turkey and Qatar, strengthening military and economic ties while weakening GCC cohesion. Turkey’s rapid support helped Qatar withstand isolation, increased Turkish influence in the Gulf, and triggered realignments, including heightened militarization and a shift in regional alliances. The crisis exposed deep political divisions and a growing dependency on external actors.

**Research limitations/implications** – The study is primarily qualitative and may not fully capture the evolving nuances of post-crisis relations. It focuses on 2017–2021, potentially limiting insights into subsequent developments. The research highlights the need for further longitudinal studies on the sustainability of Turkey’s Gulf presence and the future of intra-Gulf cooperation amid external interventions.

**Practical implications** – For policymakers, the study underscores the strategic benefits of flexible alliances in times of crisis. It shows how middle powers like Turkey can use regional instability to enhance influence through diplomacy, military deployment, and economic partnerships. The findings are relevant for strategic planning in regional security, defense cooperation, and energy diversification.

**Social implications** – The crisis disrupted Gulf societal cohesion, severing kinship ties and exacerbating identity divisions. The research draws attention to how geopolitical conflicts trickle down to affect families, migration, and social trust across the Gulf. It calls for future policies that prioritize regional integration and social reconciliation alongside political realignment.

**Originality/value** – The study offers a comprehensive, multidimensional analysis of the 2017 Gulf crisis through the lens of Qatari-Turkish relations, combining geopolitical, economic, military, and sociocultural perspectives. It uniquely highlights how a regional blockade became an opportunity for strategic realignment and provides a novel case study of how middle powers expand influence during crises.

**Keywords** Gulf crisis, Arab spring revolutions, Turkey, Arab–Turkish relations, Qatar

**Paper type** Research article

## 1. Introduction

The Arab Gulf region occupies a pivotal position in global geopolitics due to its vast energy resources, strategic control over vital maritime trade routes, and its proximity to prominent international actors, including Europe and Asia. These structural features have long attracted the attention of external powers. At the same time, regional complexities—such as the enduring Arab-Israeli conflict—have further heightened the Gulf’s significance in shaping security and political dynamics across the Middle East. Over time, the involvement of external



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actors has not only deepened internal divisions but also contributed to a fragile and often externally mediated balance of power. Gulf states, in turn, have grown increasingly reliant on outside security guarantees and strategic partnerships, thereby reinforcing a regional order that frequently aligns with foreign rather than local interests (Orhan, 2023).

Against this backdrop, Turkey's engagement with the Gulf has evolved from peripheral interest to strategic imperative. The 2017 Gulf crisis—marked by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt's blockade of Qatar—presented Ankara with a significant opportunity to project influence and reshape its regional alliances. Seizing the moment, Turkey swiftly extended political, economic, and military support to Qatar, solidifying a partnership that had previously been cooperative but limited in scope. This realignment unfolded within a broader regional context characterized by the gradual retrenchment of U.S. influence in the Middle East, particularly between 2001 and 2018, during which regional powers, such as Turkey, sought to assert themselves through recalibrated foreign policy strategies (Yüksel and Tekines, 2021; Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, 2023).

This article presents a comprehensive and original analysis of the transformation in Turkish–Qatari relations during the Gulf crisis, uniquely integrating political, economic, and military dimensions into a single analytical framework. While existing scholarship has tended to examine these factors in isolation, this study adopts a multifaceted lens to demonstrate how they collectively contributed to a strategic realignment in the Gulf. It fills a critical gap in the literature by synthesizing these elements to argue that the 2017–2021 period marked not only a shift in diplomatic and economic relations but also a broader reconfiguration of regional alliance structures. In doing so, it reveals both the mechanisms through which smaller Gulf states—such as Qatar—recalibrated their foreign policy amid a shifting geopolitical environment, and how Turkey leveraged this moment to elevate its strategic position in the Gulf.

Recent academic work has increasingly turned attention to Turkey's assertive turn in foreign policy under the leadership of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). Scholars such as Aras and Akpınar (2017) and Bakeer (2021) have documented Ankara's strategic use of hard and soft power in volatile regional contexts. In parallel, the Qatari response to the 2017 blockade has received growing scholarly attention, particularly concerning its realignment with Turkey through enhanced defense and economic cooperation (Zweiri *et al.*, 2021; Ulrichsen, 2020). Other studies have examined the implications of the Gulf crisis for intra-GCC cohesion and broader regional balances (Keating and Abbott, 2021). However, while these contributions illuminate specific dimensions of the crisis, few offer a holistic synthesis of the political, economic, and military determinants shaping Turkish–Qatari relations during this transformative period. This article addresses that gap by situating its analysis at the intersection of these dimensions, providing a comprehensive account of how the Gulf crisis catalyzed the evolution of bilateral ties from pragmatic cooperation to a strategic alliance between Ankara and Doha from 2017 to 2021.

## 2. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, theory-informed case study approach to examine the transformation of Turkish–Qatari relations during the 2017–2021 Gulf crisis. The analysis is guided by the realist school of international relations theory, as articulated by Morgenthau (1985), which posits that the behavior of states is driven by the rational pursuit of power and security under conditions of international anarchy. Within this framework, the research investigates how Qatar, as a small state facing acute security threats, recalibrated its strategic alliances in response to regional isolation.

The paper employs process-tracing and thematic content analysis to assess the political, military, and economic dimensions of the bilateral relationship. It relies entirely on secondary data, including peer-reviewed academic sources, official statements, think tank reports, government publications, and international news agencies. These materials have been selected for their credibility, relevance, and coverage of the crisis and its aftermath.

This case study design enables an in-depth understanding of the causal mechanisms and strategic calculations that shaped the Turkish–Qatari alliance, offering insights into how state behavior adapts under geopolitical stress. The realist lens is particularly useful in interpreting defense cooperation, alliance formation, and energy security strategies during periods of regional polarization.

### 3. Research objectives, questions, and hypotheses

This study aims to examine the strategic transformation of Qatari–Turkish relations in the context of the 2017–2021 Gulf crisis and its aftermath. Specifically, it seeks to (1) analyze the nature and trajectory of this bilateral relationship during and following the crisis period, and (2) evaluate the geopolitical and economic implications of Turkey’s engagement with Qatar in response to the regional blockade.

To guide this inquiry, the study addresses the following research questions:

- (1) How did the 2017 Gulf crisis reshape Turkey’s role and strategic posture in the Gulf region?
- (2) What were the specific political, military, and economic factors that contributed to the intensification of Qatari–Turkish relations during the crisis period?

In pursuit of these objectives, the paper advances two core hypotheses:

- H1.* The establishment of a Turkish military base in Qatar constituted a critical inflection point that transformed bilateral relations from pragmatic cooperation into a strategic alliance.
- H2.* The blockade imposed on Qatar by neighboring Gulf States catalyzed a significant expansion in bilateral economic agreements between Turkey and Qatar.

### 4. The determinants of Turkish–Qatari relations

The determinants of Turkish–Qatari relations can be understood through the realist lens of international relations, which emphasizes that in a chaotic global system lacking a central authority, states prioritize their security and interests by acquiring power and forging strategic alliances (Hans (1985)). In this context, small states like Qatar, which face significant security challenges, seek to protect themselves by aligning with more powerful regional or global actors. Turkey emerged as a key strategic partner for Qatar, particularly after the 2017 Gulf blockade imposed by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt. This blockade highlighted Qatar’s vulnerability and reinforced the need for a robust alliance with Turkey, a country capable of providing political, economic, and military support (Altunışık and Battaloglu 2023).

From a geopolitical standpoint, Turkish–Qatari relations have deepened not only due to shared security interests but also because of converging regional ambitions. Turkey views its partnership with Qatar as a means of bolstering its influence in the Gulf, a region of critical strategic importance. Both countries also share similar political ideologies, particularly through their support for groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood in various Middle Eastern countries (Policy Brief 8, Update 3). The establishment of a Turkish military base in Qatar and Turkey’s immediate support for Qatar during the blockade exemplify the institutionalization of their alliance (Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, 2017).

Thus, Turkish–Qatari relations are driven by pragmatic security concerns, shared geopolitical goals, and the need for bilateral defense cooperation to navigate an increasingly complex regional environment.

#### 4.1 The geostrategic and political determinants

Its unique geographical position profoundly influences the geostrategic and political determinants of Turkey’s foreign policy. As Al-Mahdawi (2009) highlighted, the

geographical variable plays a significant role in shaping a country's foreign policy, with Turkey as a prime example due to its pivotal location. Turkey's geography is characterized by its central position between Europe and Asia, controlling critical land and sea lanes, including the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits, which link the Black Sea to the Mediterranean (Al-Sarhan, 2013). This geostrategic position has given Turkey immense geopolitical leverage, particularly as a connecting point between the continents of Asia, Europe, and Africa (Oglu, 2020).

With 97% of its territory in Asia and 3% in Europe, Turkey's proximity to the Middle East further enhances its strategic importance. Its borders with Syria, Iraq, and Iran, alongside maritime boundaries with the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas, position it as a key player in regional security dynamics (Al-Kilani, 1985). Historically, Turkey has been seen as a bulwark against Soviet expansion during the Cold War. However, in contemporary times, regional conflicts and alliances have reshaped their strategic relevance, particularly during the Arab Spring and the Qatar crisis (Aras and Akpinar, 2017).

Turkey's geostrategic importance stems from its proximity to the Black and Mediterranean Seas, its control over vital waterways such as the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, and its dominance over the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, which directly impact regional water security (Al-Sarhan, 2013, pp. 266–267). This geographical significance enables Turkey to exert considerable influence in regional affairs, serving as a transit hub between Europe and Asia and a critical player in controlling water resources that affect downstream nations, such as Iraq and Syria.

While geographically smaller, Qatar holds a strategic location on the western shores of the Arabian Gulf. As a peninsula covering 11,437 square kilometers, Qatar extends into the Gulf, offering it control over regional maritime routes and the security of navigation for naval fleets and oil tankers. This positioning has historically made Qatar a point of contention between colonial powers, such as France and Britain, during the negotiations leading up to the Sykes-Picot Agreement. Qatar's narrow land border with Saudi Arabia—just 60 km—further highlights its strategic vulnerability (Al-Tamimi, 2017, p. 6).

In response to security concerns, particularly after the 2017 Gulf blockade, Qatar established military agreements with the United States and Turkey, establishing Al-Udeid and Al-Rayyan military bases, respectively. The Turkish military presence in Qatar, in particular, has caused anxiety among its neighbors, notably Saudi Arabia and the UAE, who view the Turkish presence as a direct challenge to their regional influence (Bakir, 2019; Aras and Akpinar, 2017).

#### 4.2 *The economic determinant*

The Turkish economy is regarded as one of the strongest in the world thanks to its diverse sectors, including investment, industry, tourism, and shipping. Turkey ranks among the top 20 global economies, positioning it as a significant player on the world stage. In 2018, Turkey's real GDP was approximately \$778 billion, with an average per capita income of \$7,646. However, the country's economy faced a slight decline in the subsequent years, with the GDP dropping to \$761.4 billion in 2019 and \$720 billion in 2020 (Shaqiri, 2020). Despite this, it was predicted to recover and reach \$801 billion in 2021, with the per capita income rising to \$9,489 (Zanganeh, 2021).

Economic resilience has been crucial to Turkey's regional influence, particularly in its relations with Gulf states such as Qatar. Turkey's economy, driven by the defense, construction, and energy industries, is self-sufficient and a significant contributor to regional economic stability. Turkey's strategic partnerships, especially with Qatar, have further bolstered its economic outlook. For instance, the trade volume between the two nations exceeded \$2 billion. Qatari investments in Turkey have exceeded \$33 billion, which has been instrumental in Turkey's growth, particularly in sectors such as real estate and infrastructure.

While robust and diverse, the Turkish economy faces significant challenges in the energy sector, particularly due to its relative oil production deficit. Turkey's oil reserves are estimated at 388 million barrels, with a daily production of approximately 245,000 barrels. However, domestic consumption far exceeds this at approximately 845,000 barrels per day, leaving the country heavily reliant on imports to meet its energy needs, which exposes Turkey's energy security to significant risks (Adiyaman, 2017). Given this energy deficit, the Arab Gulf region, especially Qatar, plays a crucial role in Turkey's economic strategy.

Qatar's importance stems from its vast reserves of natural gas, which are the third-largest globally, positioning it as a key player in the liquefied natural gas (LNG) market. This energy source has become increasingly important to Turkey, particularly following the deterioration of Turkish-Russian relations in 2015, when Russia imposed economic sanctions on Turkey. To mitigate this, Turkey signed agreements with Qatar, including deals to import liquefied natural gas, which amounts to 50 billion cubic meters annually (Salah, 2018). The partnership with Qatar helps Turkey diversify its energy imports and lessen its dependence on Russia, while Qatar benefits from an expanded export market (Yüksel and Tekineş, 2021)

#### 4.3 The military determinant

Military strength is a crucial indicator of a state's latent power during peacetime and the most visible demonstration of its force in warfare. As Ladmi (2017) emphasizes, military force is a key instrument for a state to pursue its foreign policy objectives while maintaining its international status and influence. As a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Turkey has become one of its most crucial components. With the second-largest army in NATO, Turkey maintains a military force of approximately 1,206,700 soldiers, comprising 639,000 active-duty personnel, 387,000 reserves, and 180,000 paramilitary personnel. Additionally, Turkey maintains about 30,000 soldiers in Northern Cyprus, underscoring its strategic military presence (Ladmi, 2017).

Turkey's military power extends far beyond its personnel and resources. Over the past 2 decades, the country has made significant progress in revitalizing its military-industrial base, with the capacity to manufacture approximately 80% of its military equipment needs domestically. This includes a diverse range of defense products, such as uncrewed aerial vehicles (UAVs), naval ships, and armored vehicles. This expansion has been a cornerstone of Turkey's growing defense autonomy. A prominent example of this progress is the development of the Bayraktar TB-2 drone, which gained international attention during the Russia-Ukraine conflict, highlighting Turkey's advancements in drone warfare technology (Kasapoğlu, 2022).

Turkey's defense sector has also witnessed rapid growth in exports. Between 2020 and 2021, revenues from foreign contracts increased by 42%, reflecting the country's expanding influence in global defense markets. This growth has allowed Turkey to diversify its customer base, with defense exports reaching 170 countries. The increase in defense production and exports underscores Turkey's ambition to position itself as a leading defense exporter on the global stage, rivaling established defense industries in Europe and the United States (Kasapoğlu, 2022).

In addition to its domestic military developments, Turkey has also strengthened its military alliances, particularly with Qatar. Common security concerns have driven closer military cooperation between the two countries, culminating in the establishment of a Turkish military base in Qatar. For Qatar, a small country with limited strategic depth, the Turkish military presence serves as a vital security guarantee, particularly given uncertainties about the long-term presence of U.S. forces at the Al-Udeid base (Youssef, 2020). The partnership has been further solidified through military treaties that facilitate the exchange of expertise and the joint development of military industries. These agreements underscore the growing strategic alignment between the two nations, enhancing regional security while providing Turkey with a foothold in the Gulf (Youssef, 2020).

Turkey's rapid militarization and expansion of its defense sector have brought both significant advantages and challenges. On the one hand, Turkey's growing domestic production capacity has successfully reduced its reliance on foreign arms, thereby strengthening its national sovereignty. The country's defense industry has made substantial progress in producing a range of military equipment, from drones to armored vehicles, contributing to its strategic autonomy (Kasapoğlu and Özkardeş, 2024). However, the defense sector still faces critical limitations in high-end technologies. For example, Turkey has yet to develop advanced systems, such as exo-atmospheric missile defense and fifth-generation fighter jets. Despite its growing capabilities, Turkey relies on NATO for advanced sensor and radar systems, highlighting an ongoing dependence on Western technology in key areas (Kasapoğlu and Özkardeş, 2024).

### 5. The repercussions of the Gulf crisis on Turkish–Qatari relations (2017–2021)

The Gulf crisis, which erupted on June 5, 2017, saw Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt sever diplomatic relations with Qatar, citing its alleged support for Iran and terrorist organizations. This crisis had profound consequences within the Gulf region and across Asia, Africa, and the broader Middle East. The crisis affected key areas such as the Horn of Africa due to its proximity to the Gulf of Aden, as well as the ongoing conflicts in Libya, Egypt's dispute with the Muslim Brotherhood, and the war in Yemen.

One of the critical developments stemming from the Gulf crisis was Turkey's strategic involvement in supporting Qatar. Turkey played a vital role in helping Qatar withstand the blockade through military cooperation and diplomatic efforts. This collaboration significantly strengthened the Turkish–Qatari alliance, showcasing Turkey's growing regional influence and ability to support Qatar during intense political and economic isolation. The crisis also reshaped regional alliances, highlighting the shifting balance of power within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) (Zweiri *et al.*, 2021).

#### 5.1 *The political, economic, and military repercussions*

Turkey's strategy in the region, especially in light of the evolving political, economic, and military dynamics, reflects its efforts to minimize losses while capitalizing on the contradictions among conflicting parties. The objective is to capitalize on these contradictions, thereby positioning Turkey as a significant player in regional development. Through this approach, Turkey has maintained a flexible foreign policy, adapting to the shifts in alliances and regional power balances.

One of Turkey's key strategies has been to leverage its alliances and regional influence, particularly through its close ties with Qatar, as seen during the Gulf Crisis in 2017. Turkey demonstrated its readiness to support Qatar militarily and diplomatically, which not only strengthened its regional presence but also allowed it to exert pressure on other Gulf actors. This strategic alignment has positioned Turkey as a counterbalance to the influence of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in the region. Ankara's willingness to deploy hard power by establishing military bases in Qatar, as well as its decisive actions during the blockade against Qatar, has highlighted Turkey's ability to exploit regional fissures for its gain (Aras and Akpınar, 2017).

Moreover, Turkey's involvement in Qatar has been characterized by a pragmatic approach to regional conflicts. By supporting Qatar, Turkey has managed to maintain its influence in the Gulf while navigating the broader geopolitical competition between the Saudi-led coalition and Iran. This strategy of hedging—balancing relationships with different power blocs—has enabled Turkey to safeguard its national interests while portraying itself as an indispensable regional actor (Bakir, 2019).

#### 5.2 *The political repercussions*

Since its establishment in 1923, Turkey has played a central role in NATO's strategic posture, especially during the Cold War. It acted as a crucial military outpost for Western powers,

particularly the United States, aimed at containing Soviet influence. However, during this period, Turkey's relations with Arab and Islamic nations were often strained, as its policies were aligned more with Western objectives than those of its regional neighbors. The rise to power of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2002 marked a significant shift in Turkey's foreign policy. Under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkey sought to reposition itself as a key player in the Middle East, reclaiming its historical role in the region and increasing its influence by participating actively in regional crises. This shift was marked by Turkey's involvement in economic, political, and military developments across the Arab world, and it became especially pronounced after the 2017 Gulf crisis.

Following the eruption of the Gulf crisis, which saw Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt impose a blockade on Qatar, Turkey quickly emerged as one of Qatar's primary allies. Turkey and Qatar signed a joint defense agreement in 2014, which allowed Turkish military personnel to be stationed at the Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar. This marked Turkey's first military presence in the Arabian Gulf since the Ottoman Empire's retreat from the region, signaling a critical shift in regional dynamics (Al-Tamimi, 2017). The base is strategically located, allowing Turkey to project its military influence near key waterways such as the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf. It also gives Turkey a foothold in a critical region for energy supplies and international shipping lanes (Salah, 2018). The Turkish base in Qatar also counterbalances Emirati military activities in southern Yemen and around the Bab al-Mandab Strait, further entrenching Turkey's role in regional power struggles (Salah, 2018).

One of the significant drivers of Turkey's strategic posture in the region is its "Blue Homeland" (Mavi Vatan) doctrine—a naval strategy aimed at asserting Turkish sovereignty over maritime zones rich in energy resources across the Mediterranean, Aegean, and Black Seas. The doctrine also extends Turkey's strategic ambitions into the Red Sea, Caspian Sea, and the Arabian Gulf, reflecting the country's broader aspirations of energy independence and geopolitical influence (Kitan, 2020). This approach has been reinforced by Turkey's growing economic development, political stability, and military capabilities, which have enabled it to expand its role beyond its immediate geographical area (Omar, 2018).

Turkey's increasing involvement in the Red Sea and Gulf regions has raised concerns among other regional powers, particularly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. These states view Turkey's expanding military presence as a threat to the regional balance of power, especially as Turkey becomes more involved in conflicts where its interests diverge from those of other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members. The Turkish military base in Qatar has been a significant point of contention, with Saudi Arabia and its allies calling for its closure during the blockade. Turkey's military presence in Qatar exacerbated intra-GCC tensions, as it indicated Qatar's defiance of Saudi-led efforts to isolate the small Gulf state (Abdel Halim, 2018).

In addition to the geopolitical ramifications, the Turkish-Qatari alliance has had significant economic and energy implications. After the downing of a Russian airliner by Turkey in 2015 and the subsequent imposition of Russian economic sanctions, Qatar became an essential partner for Turkey, particularly in the energy sector. Qatar's gas supplies played a crucial role in mitigating the impact of Russian sanctions, providing Turkey with an alternative source of energy at a time when its relationship with Russia was strained (Omar, 2018). This economic cooperation, along with the military and political alignment, has solidified the strategic partnership between Turkey and Qatar, which has continued to evolve in the face of ongoing regional challenges.

Turkey's growing involvement in the Gulf, particularly through its military base in Qatar, reflects its broader ambition to expand its influence and secure its interests in a volatile region. However, this has also increased tensions with other regional powers, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, who view Turkey's presence as a direct challenge to their dominance in the Gulf (Dogan-Akkas and El-Berni 2022). As Turkey continues to pursue its strategic objectives, its role in the Gulf will likely remain a source of both opportunity and conflict as regional dynamics shift (Bakeer, 2021).

### 5.3 *The security implications*

The security implications of Turkey's military presence in strategic regions, such as the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, and Qatar, are crucial to understanding its broader geopolitical ambitions. Turkey views both the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden as vital links connecting the Eastern Mediterranean with the Indian Ocean, providing it access to crucial maritime routes and enhancing its naval power projection. This is part of a broader Turkish naval strategy aimed at expanding its influence, establishing military outposts, and training personnel in critical areas (Kıtan, 2020).

Military relations between Turkey and Qatar began in 2007 with a defense cooperation agreement focused on industrial cooperation. These relations deepened in 2012 with the signing of a joint military training agreement. In 2014, the partnership evolved into a "status of forces agreement" that permitted the mutual use of ports, airports, military facilities, and joint military exercises between the two nations. This marked a significant strengthening of military ties between Turkey and Qatar, aimed at enhancing defense capabilities and cooperation in the broader Middle East region (Al-Tamimi, 2017).

In 2015, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Qatar's Emir, Tamim bin Hamad, agreed to establish a Turkish military facility in Qatar. From Qatar's perspective, this base provides critical military protection, especially given the country's limited strategic depth. Qatar's concerns about its security were heightened by discussions in the United States about the potential closure of the U.S. military base at Al Udeid. This added urgency for Qatar to seek alternative security guarantees, leading to a deepening of its military relationship with Turkey (Chiraglu, 2021).

The Turkish military base in Qatar also plays a crucial role in Turkey's broader regional strategy. From Turkey's perspective, the base strengthens its presence near vital waterways such as the Arabian Gulf and Indian Ocean, key areas for global trade and Turkish commercial interests. Additionally, it positions Turkey closer to Iran, balancing regional power dynamics in a region heavily influenced by Iranian military proxies and militias, particularly in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. The base also offers Turkish forces an opportunity to train in a desert environment, vastly different from Turkey's native geography, which could prove essential for future operations beyond Turkish borders (Salah, 2018).

The Turkish military presence in Qatar gained increased significance during the 2017 Gulf crisis, when several Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, and Egypt, imposed a blockade on Qatar. Fearing potential security threats such as a coup attempt or internal destabilization, Turkey swiftly deployed 1,500 soldiers to Qatar to safeguard its ally's sovereignty (Al-Nuaimi, 2020). The rapid deployment underscored the strategic depth of the Turkey-Qatar military alliance and positioned Turkey as a critical security partner for Qatar during one of its most vulnerable moments.

Turkey's move into the Red Sea, particularly its cooperation with Sudan to develop Suakin Island, further demonstrates Turkey's strategic ambitions in the region. This base in Sudan has sparked concerns in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, who view Turkey's growing military presence in the Red Sea as a potential threat to their interests in the region (Karasik and Cafiero, 2018). Turkey's engagement in these regions reflects its desire to establish a robust military and economic presence across key strategic maritime routes, thereby further solidifying its role as a regional power.

Moreover, Turkey's strategic ambitions extend beyond the Gulf, reflecting a broader agenda that includes enhanced security and diplomatic engagement across Africa. In countries such as Ethiopia, Libya, and Somalia, Turkey has established multifaceted relationships that involve military bases, economic investments, and humanitarian outreach, further solidifying its role as a regional and transregional actor (Bani Salameh, 2025). This reflects a consistent pattern in Turkish foreign policy that balances ideological affinities with pragmatic security and economic interests. Simultaneously, Arab Gulf states have responded to emerging security threats by adopting diversified strategic approaches, enhancing their military capabilities, and fostering alliances with both regional and global powers, including Turkey (Bani Salameh and Mubiadeen, 2025).

## 6. The economic repercussions

The period from 2008 to 2014 marked a significant phase of economic growth in Turkish-Qatari relations. This relationship began with the first Turkish–Qatari Business Forum in Doha in 2008, during which Turkish President Abdullah Gul and Qatari officials signed a memorandum of understanding. This agreement laid the foundation for a broad range of collaborative ventures across multiple industries. In 2014, further cooperation was solidified when the Emir of Qatar visited Turkey, leading to the establishment of the Higher Strategic Committee, which aims to enhance economic, defense, and security cooperation between the two nations. Since its inception, the Joint Higher Strategic Committee has held seven formal sessions, resulting in the signing of nearly 90 agreements across the political, economic, and security sectors.

The Gulf crisis of 2017, which saw Qatar face an economic blockade imposed by its Gulf neighbors, presented a unique opportunity for Turkey to deepen its economic ties with Qatar further. Turkey responded swiftly by creating an air bridge to supply Qatar with essential goods, including food, medical supplies, and construction materials, to meet the demands of the 2022 World Cup preparations. This move marked a significant escalation in bilateral trade and economic cooperation between the two countries (Mahmoud, 2018).

Turkish-Qatari trade relations flourished throughout the siege, positioning Turkey as one of Qatar's most important business partners. In the years prior to the blockade, trade between the two nations had experienced fluctuations, with commerce volumes rising from \$1 billion in 2011 to \$1.4 billion in 2012, only to drop to \$773 million in 2013. However, during the blockade years, trade between the two nations surged. In 2017, trade volumes reached \$1.188 billion; by 2018, they had increased by 57% to \$ 1.86 billion. This growth trajectory continued, with trade volumes reaching \$2.286 billion in 2019 and \$2.8 billion in 2020.

This increase in economic engagement was marked by the growth of Turkish exports to Qatar, which included electrical circuits, construction materials, food products, and dairy items. In contrast, Qatar's exports to Turkey were dominated by liquefied natural gas, aluminum, and plastic products. The establishment of numerous economic committees further strengthened these growing economic ties, enabling them to address shared economic concerns and opportunities.

Furthermore, Qatari investments in Turkey have contributed to the country's economic growth, particularly during periods of economic hardship. Significant investments were made by Qatari entities, including the Commercial Bank of Qatar, which acquired a 70% stake in Alternatif Bank for \$460 million, and Qatar National Bank, which purchased 99.81% of Finansbank. Additionally, Qatar's Mayhula Investments acquired a 30.7% stake in Turkey's Boyner Group for \$295.7 million, and the Qatari Armed Forces Industry Committee purchased 50% of the shares in BMC, a Turkish armored vehicle manufacturer.

The two countries signed a \$3 billion currency swap agreement in the financial sector in 2018, which later expanded to \$15 billion in 2020. This agreement played a crucial role in stabilizing the Turkish lira, providing much-needed relief to Turkey's financial markets (Chiraglu, 2021). These efforts underscore the strategic depth of Turkish-Qatari economic relations, highlighting the importance of their partnership in addressing regional challenges.

The data, sourced from the Turkish Statistical Authority, also reveals shifts in trade dynamics, especially after 2017, when both countries faced geopolitical tensions in the Gulf. Following the Gulf Crisis, Turkey's exports to Qatar nearly doubled from \$439.14 million in 2016 to \$648.91 million in 2017, highlighting an adaptive economic strategy and a stronger trade alliance amid regional challenges. This period highlights how political events can catalyze trade growth, underscoring the importance of strategic partnerships in fostering resilient trade relations.

Various products dominate Turkish exports to Qatar, including electrical and electronic circuits, construction materials, mineral oils, foodstuffs, and dairy products. Conversely, Qatar's exports to Turkey primarily consist of raw aluminum, liquefied natural gas (LNG), and plastic goods. These trade flows underscore the complementary nature of the two economies,

fostering a robust commercial relationship between the countries. In addition to trade, several economic committees have been established to enhance the bilateral relationship further and discuss ways to activate and strengthen shared economic interests (Daily, 2020).

Qatari investments in Turkey have played a significant role in the Turkish economy. For instance, the Commercial Bank of Qatar made a critical investment in 2013, acquiring 70% of Alternatif Bank's shares for \$460 million. Further expanding this economic collaboration, Qatar National Bank purchased 99.81% of Turkish Finansbank. Similarly, Mayhula Investments, a Qatari firm, invested \$295.7 million to acquire a 30.7% stake in the Turkish "Boynar" group. Notably, the Qatari Armed Forces Industry Committee also acquired 50% of the shares of Turkish armored vehicle manufacturer BMC, signaling Qatar's strategic interest in Turkey's defense sector (Mahmoud, 2018).

In 2015, the Qatar National Bank further expanded its investments in Turkey by purchasing 99.8% of the shares in the National Bank of Greece (Vinas Bank) for \$2.94 billion, demonstrating Qatar's significant commitment to the Turkish financial sector. Turkey launched a commercial office in Doha in 2017 to attract additional Qatari investment. By 2018, Qatari investments in Turkey had reached \$19 billion, with notable investments in sectors such as agriculture and animal development, which accounted for approximately \$650 million (Mahmoud, 2018).

The construction sector also represents a vital area of Turkish-Qatari collaboration. By 2019, Qatar had become the seventh-largest construction market for Turkish firms, with projects valued at approximately \$1.5 billion. Approximately 711 Turkish companies operate in Qatar, with 664 joint ventures involving Qatari and Turkish capital, while 47 firms are fully Turkish-owned (Daily, 2020). The Qatari economy also hosts around 183 Qatari businesses operating in Turkey, further demonstrating the deep economic ties between the two nations.

In the financial and banking sector, Turkey and Qatar signed a significant \$3 billion currency swap agreement in 2018 to stabilize the Turkish lira, which had depreciated against the U.S. dollar. By May 2020, the value of this swap agreement increased to \$15 billion, playing a crucial role in bolstering Turkey's financial markets. Additionally, Qatar's commitment to investing \$15 billion in Turkish markets further underscores the depth of the economic relationship (Chiraglu, 2021).

## 7. The repercussions of the Gulf Crisis on regional balances

The 2017 Gulf crisis had a profound impact on regional balances. It reshaped alliances in the Gulf region, particularly affecting Turkey's relationships with Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf nations. Turkey's swift and decisive involvement in supporting Qatar during the crisis marked a significant shift in its role in the Gulf, elevating Turkish-Qatari ties from collaboration to a strategic partnership. Establishing a Turkish military base in Qatar further cemented Turkey's position as a key player in the Gulf's strategic and security dynamics.

This intervention, however, strained Turkey's relationships with other Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia and the UAE. While Turkish-Saudi relations became increasingly tense, the UAE, which had previously worked towards normalizing relations with Turkey, reverted to a more adversarial stance. On the other hand, Turkish involvement encouraged Kuwait to strengthen its ties with Turkey, resulting in the signing of several cooperation agreements, particularly in the security and military fields, during a 2017 visit by the Kuwaiti prime minister to Ankara. These shifts in alliances have had a lasting impact on regional power dynamics, positioning Turkey as a more influential actor in Gulf affairs (Qatar University Digital Hub, 2021).

Turkey's active participation in the crisis, including the rapid deployment of its military forces to Qatar, directly influenced the balance of power in the Gulf. The presence of Turkish troops served as a deterrent to military escalation and strengthened Qatar's resilience against the blockade imposed by its neighbors. These developments have also redefined Turkey's role in regional politics, aligning it more closely with Qatar while distancing it from other Gulf powers, especially Saudi Arabia and the UAE (Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, 2018).

### 7.1 *The change of regional alliances*

The 2017 Gulf crisis significantly transformed regional strategies, promoting the development of new axes and alliances that allowed for greater engagement by regional and international powers in Arab affairs. The blockade imposed by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt on Qatar led to a reshaping of power dynamics within the Gulf region. At the center of these changes was the deepening of the Turkish-Qatari partnership, which evolved from collaboration to a strategic alliance. Turkey's establishment of a military base in Qatar and its rapid support during the blockade marked its emergence as a key player in Gulf security dynamics, thereby altering the region's strategic balances.

The establishment of a Turkish military base in Qatar during the crisis highlighted Turkey's willingness to expand its influence in the Gulf, thereby challenging the dominance of Saudi Arabia and the UAE in the region. Turkey's swift response, including logistical support and military presence, reinforced Qatar's resilience during the blockade. However, this involvement strained Turkish relations with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, as they perceived Turkey's growing influence as a challenge to their leadership. Bahraini-Turkish relations also froze, given Bahrain's close alignment with Saudi Arabia in regional power structures. Nevertheless, Turkey managed to maintain open diplomatic channels with other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, ensuring its continued influence in the region despite these tensions (Bani Salameh, 2024; Al-Jazeera Centre for Studies, 2018).

On the opposite side of the Gulf crisis, Saudi Arabia, supported by Egypt, Bahrain, and the UAE, led an alliance to contain Qatar's foreign policy ambitions. This alliance aimed to restore Qatar's subordination to Saudi control and establish a security framework that countered the policies of both Turkey and Qatar. In response, Qatar aligned more closely with Turkey, further complicating regional dynamics. At the same time, Kuwait, which remained neutral during the crisis, sought to enhance its relationship with Turkey. Kuwait's neutral stance enabled it to hedge its position amid rising tensions, resulting in several cooperation agreements with Turkey, including those signed during the Kuwaiti Prime Minister's visit to Ankara in 2017 (Bani Salameh, 2024).

These emerging alliances significantly impacted regional balances in the Gulf and the broader Middle East. Turkey's military presence in Qatar gave it strategic depth near the Gulf's critical waterways, further shifting power dynamics. Meanwhile, the Saudi-Emirati bloc strengthened its security arrangements through cooperation with Egypt and Bahrain, opposing the policies of Turkey and Qatar. These shifts reshaped the Middle East's geopolitical landscape, underscoring the growing influence of external actors, such as Turkey and Iran, on regional security (Bani Salameh, 2023).

### 7.2 *The militarization of the Arab Gulf states*

The 2017 Gulf crisis significantly disrupted trust among the Arab Gulf states, particularly among smaller nations, such as Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain, which began to perceive Saudi Arabia and the UAE as dominant forces that posed a potential threat to their sovereignty and security. This growing sense of insecurity prompted these smaller states to pursue military and security treaties, as well as increase their defense spending by acquiring weapons and military equipment from Western countries, including the United States.

During the three years following the Gulf crisis, Qatar signed 11 defense and military agreements with various countries, including the United States, Turkey, the United Kingdom, France, and even NATO. These agreements were part of Qatar's efforts to bolster its military capabilities in response to the blockade. In addition to these treaties, Qatar also finalized numerous arms deals to enhance its defense infrastructure (Salameh and Alsmadi, 2022).

Kuwait and Oman followed a similar path, signing defense treaties with the United States, Western nations, and Turkey as they sought to strengthen their security positions. The Gulf crisis, thus, triggered a surge in defense spending across the region, as illustrated by the significant rise in military expenditure during this period (Salameh and Alsmadi, 2022).

This increase in military spending underscored the heightened insecurity felt by Gulf states in the wake of the crisis, as smaller nations sought to hedge against the growing influence of Saudi Arabia and the UAE by aligning themselves with other global powers. This trend was particularly evident in the arms transactions and defense agreements made in the years following the crisis.

Saudi Arabia emerged as the leading spender among Gulf states in terms of military expenditure, with spending rising from \$62.6 billion in 2016 to \$69.4 billion in 2017, followed by a gradual decrease to \$67.5 billion in 2018, \$61.8 billion in 2019, and \$57.9 billion in 2020. This placed Saudi Arabia as the sixth-largest military spender globally, accounting for 2.9% of total global military expenditure. Political motivations were a key driver behind the increase in Saudi military spending, as the Saudi government viewed arms deals as an important means of solidifying its relations with successive U.S. administrations despite not necessarily having an immediate need for such vast military resources (Cordsman, 2018).

The UAE's military spending surged dramatically to \$30 billion in 2017, driven by its active engagement in the Yemen conflict and its foreign expansion strategy, including establishing military facilities abroad. The UAE's military budget decreased to \$14.3 billion in 2019 before rebounding to \$21.8 billion in 2020, reflecting ongoing regional commitments.

Kuwait's defense expenditure increased steadily from \$6.5 billion in 2016 to \$7.7 billion in 2019. In contrast, Oman's military spending declined from \$10.5 billion in 2016 to \$8.6 billion in 2017, and continued to decline to \$6.6 billion in 2018–2019. Although Qatar's official military spending figures were not consistently available, its arms procurement activities increased significantly, with arms contracts between 2014 and 2018 totaling approximately \$50 billion. In 2021, Qatar received the first American F-15 fighter jets as part of a \$12 billion deal signed in 2017.

Total military spending across the Gulf rose from \$81.3 billion in 2016 to \$85.9 billion in 2017, followed by a decline to \$81.6 billion in 2018 and \$77.7 billion in 2019. However, in 2020, total spending jumped to \$95.4 billion despite the challenges posed by declining oil prices and the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The region's persistent instability prompted continued investment in arms deals, particularly with Western nations and the United States. According to the militarization index, the Arab Gulf states ranked among the top seven globally in terms of militarization during this period.

### *7.3 Weakening the Arab political role and increasing Gulf dependency on the major countries of the region*

The 2017 Gulf crisis significantly weakened the political cohesion of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and increased the dependency of Arab Gulf states on external powers. As the crisis unfolded, the Gulf states found themselves divided into two opposing camps: Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain on one side, and Qatar, Kuwait, and Oman on the other (Al Jazeera Center for Studies, 2017). This division exposed the fragility of the GCC's unity and trust, prompting each Gulf state to seek external alliances to secure its national interests. For example, Qatar and Kuwait turned to Turkey for security support, whereas Saudi Arabia and the UAE strengthened their military ties with the United States (Abu Nahl, 2018).

The Gulf crisis also raised serious questions about the future viability of the GCC as an adequate regional security and political organization. The joint Gulf defense treaties, designed to safeguard the collective security of member states, were undermined, further disrupting the Council's institutional functions and eroding trust among member states (Al Jazeera Center for Studies, 2017). As a result, Gulf states began acting independently, aligning themselves with external powers such as Turkey, the United States, and even Iran rather than relying on a unified regional strategy (Enas and Ibrahim, 2018). The long-term consequences of this division included a significant shift in the role of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. Rather than pursuing coordinated strategies to counter external threats, they prioritized individual state security strategies, often involving major non-Arab regional powers, such as

Turkey and Iran. This weakened the GCC's geopolitical cohesion, allowing other regional actors to exert greater influence over Gulf affairs (Bin Neha and Al-Mohammadi, 2019).

Economically, the Gulf crisis had severe repercussions, especially for Qatar, which faced a mass withdrawal of foreign investments amounting to approximately \$30 billion. This forced the Qatari Central Bank to intervene, injecting around \$38.5 billion to stabilize the economy (The Arab Research Center, 2017). The economic upheaval also increased competition among GCC states for regional and global investments, further undermining the Council's economic cohesion and unity.

Socially, the crisis fractured the Gulf's tightly knit social fabric. The embargo imposed by the blockading countries forced many Qatari nationals to flee, disrupting family and kinship ties that had historically unified the Gulf's population. The political disputes at the state level reverberated through the region's societies, creating divisions and a sense of disintegration among the people (Keating and Abbott, 2021). These social tensions and the political crisis contributed to a growing sense of alienation among Gulf populations, disrupting the historical unity that had previously existed among the Gulf states.

The Gulf crisis also highlighted the growing dependency of Arab Gulf states on external powers. Qatar, for instance, deepened its alliance with Turkey, which provided military and economic support throughout the crisis. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia and the UAE consolidated their military alliances with the United States (Abu Nahl, 2018). These alignments underscored the erosion of the GCC as a unified regional bloc and the rise of external powers as influential players in Gulf security and politics (Ulrichsen et al., 2021). The crisis also underscored the strategic importance of Turkey and Iran in the region, as both countries leveraged the internal Gulf rifts to expand their influence.

## 8. The end of the Gulf Crisis and its impact on Turkish–Gulf relations

The end of the Gulf crisis marked a significant turning point in Turkish–Gulf relations. Under former U.S. President Donald Trump's administration, the policy in the Gulf was shaped by the "maximum pressure" doctrine and an approach focused on financial transactions in exchange for protection. This strategy, which avoided diplomatic solutions, encouraged Saudi Arabia and the UAE to take bold and aggressive steps in the region, including the blockade against Qatar and other interventions in poorer regional states (El-Sherbiny, 2021). This period heightened tensions in the Gulf, polarizing the region further and damaging intra-Gulf relations.

However, the 2020 election of Democratic President Joe Biden marked a significant shift in U.S. foreign policy. Biden's emphasis on reducing the U.S. military footprint in the Middle East and his plans to revisit the nuclear agreement with Iran have caused concerns among the Gulf states, which have relied heavily on U.S. military support for their security. The Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, recognized the need to reconcile with Qatar as part of a broader strategy to mitigate their vulnerabilities amidst declining U.S. involvement (Abdel-Aty, 2021). This change in approach culminated in the signing of the Al-Ula Agreement in January 2021, officially ending the three-and-a-half-year blockade of Qatar.

The Al-Ula Agreement had profound implications for Turkey's relations with the Gulf. Despite concerns among some Gulf states about Turkey's strong ties with Qatar and Iran, Turkey's position in the region remained stable. Turkish-Qatari relations were left intact, and bilateral ties continued to flourish. This period also saw an improvement in Turkey's relationships with other Gulf states, including the UAE and Saudi Arabia. The UAE initiated diplomatic outreach at the foreign ministry level, which eventually led to high-level visits by UAE Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed to Turkey and by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to the UAE. Similarly, Saudi Arabia began restoring diplomatic ties with Turkey, highlighted by Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu's visit to Saudi Arabia and a direct engagement between the Saudi king and President Erdoğan during the virtual G20 summit

2020. Furthermore, the growing demand for Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2 drones played a role in strengthening military cooperation between Turkey and Gulf states (Abu Nahl, 2018).

Saudi Arabia's diplomatic outreach extended beyond Turkey to include Iran, signaling a broader reorganization of foreign policy strategies in the Gulf. This shift, led by key regional actors such as the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran, reflected a new era of pragmatic diplomacy and mutual understanding. The willingness to de-escalate tensions and open channels of communication was driven by several factors, including the global economic downturn, the COVID-19 pandemic, falling oil prices, and the internal economic challenges faced by regional states (Mahmoud *et al.*, 2018). This realignment in foreign policy is a critical restructuring of the region's geopolitical landscape, offering new opportunities for cooperation and reducing hostilities that had previously defined Gulf relations.

### 9. Conclusion and results

The 2017 Gulf crisis served as a defining moment in the realignment of regional alliances and security structures in the Middle East, particularly in transforming Qatar's relations with Turkey. Confronted with severe regional isolation, Qatar deepened its bilateral cooperation with Turkey, which rapidly positioned itself as a critical partner by providing military, economic, and political support. The establishment of a Turkish military base in Qatar symbolized this new phase of engagement, reflecting Ankara's strategic commitment to protecting a key ally while simultaneously expanding its influence in the Gulf. In turn, Qatar's alignment with Turkey represented a pragmatic response to existential threats, enabling Doha to safeguard its sovereignty and reinforce internal stability amid a hostile regional environment.

This alignment evolved beyond a tactical response to a blockade. Throughout the crisis, the Qatari-Turkish relationship matured into a comprehensive strategic partnership encompassing defense cooperation, political coordination, and economic integration. Key developments—such as the signing of multiple bilateral agreements, a currency swap arrangement, and growing Qatari investments in Turkish infrastructure and finance—demonstrated the extent to which both states leveraged the crisis to institutionalize their alliance. At the same time, this realignment coincided with the weakening of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), whose internal fractures and declining cohesion rendered it increasingly ineffective as a regional security mechanism. As the crisis widened the gap among GCC members, states like Qatar began seeking alternative security arrangements with non-Gulf actors such as Turkey and, to some extent, Iran.

The crisis also highlighted the broader political vulnerabilities of the GCC and exposed the fragility of intra-Gulf unity. The polarization that followed diminished the Council's capacity to collaborate and emboldened regional competitors. Turkey, in particular, benefited from this fragmentation, expanding its regional presence through both soft and hard power strategies. Meanwhile, Qatar faced significant economic shocks, including capital flight estimated at \$30 billion in the immediate aftermath of the blockade. While these shocks were mitigated by decisive state intervention, they underscored the cost of geopolitical isolation and the importance of resilient external partnerships.

Socially, the crisis generated deep fissures within the region's societal fabric. The enforced return of Qatari nationals from neighboring countries disrupted transnational family networks and community ties that had long transcended national borders. The blockade's sociopolitical consequences, including intensified nationalist rhetoric and the politicization of identity, contributed to an enduring sense of division and mistrust within the Gulf.

While the Turkish-Qatari alliance proved mutually beneficial during the blockade, it also highlighted several underlying complexities. A key concern pertains to power asymmetry: Turkey's superior military and economic capabilities—amplified by its role as security guarantor—have raised questions regarding Qatar's strategic autonomy. The establishment of a Turkish military base and Ankara's increasing role in Qatar's economic sectors, though stabilizing in the short term, have prompted debates about sovereignty and long-term dependence.

Moreover, despite the robustness of the partnership, Turkey and Qatar do not always share congruent regional visions. Divergences are evident in their respective engagements in geopolitical flashpoints such as Libya, Egypt, and Iran, where differences in scope, timing, and strategic priorities reflect the limits of alignment. These nuanced variations suggest that even strong alliances must navigate periodic misalignments that could pose challenges to long-term cohesion.

Domestic scrutiny has also emerged as a factor influencing the perception and sustainability of the alliance. In Turkey, critics have voiced concerns over perceived Qatari overreach in key economic sectors, particularly real estate and banking, framing it as a vulnerability to economic influence. Conversely, in Qatar, segments of the population have expressed reservations about the country's alignment with Turkey's assertive regional posture. These internal debates serve as a reminder that public opinion and domestic political discourse play important roles in shaping the trajectory of international partnerships.

### **10. Foresight and future scenarios**

Looking ahead, the durability of the Turkish–Qatari alliance will depend on how both countries adapt to shifting regional and global dynamics. In the short term, the trajectory appears stable, driven by shared strategic interests, increased defense collaboration, and complementary economic investments. The legacy of the crisis continues to bind the two states, offering both strategic depth and operational resilience in navigating regional uncertainties.

In the medium term, however, factors such as the normalization of intra-GCC relations following the 2021 Al-Ula Agreement, evolving U.S. policy in the Middle East, and the growing involvement of global actors, including China and Russia, may introduce pressures that compel both states to recalibrate their strategic calculus. A reactivated and more cohesive GCC, or a new wave of regional realignment, could alter the incentives that originally underpinned the Turkish–Qatari alliance. Nonetheless, barring a dramatic shift in the regional balance of power, their partnership is likely to endure as a key pillar of Turkey's Gulf strategy.

This dynamic highlights the need for ongoing reassessment of alliance frameworks in the Gulf, particularly in the context of rising multipolarity and the waning of Western hegemony. The Turkish–Qatari relationship, born out of crisis, now represents a model of adaptive, multi-domain cooperation in a volatile geopolitical landscape.

### **11. Policy implications and Avenues for future research**

#### *11.1 Policy implications*

The findings of this study offer valuable insights for both policymakers and analysts concerned with alliance-building, crisis diplomacy, and regional order in the Gulf. The Gulf crisis demonstrated the strategic utility of external alliances for small states facing existential threats. For Gulf leaders, this highlights the importance of adopting diversified, multi-vector foreign policy strategies that utilize a combination of military, economic, and diplomatic instruments. Turkey's role as a responsive regional power highlights how non-Western actors can serve as both stabilizers and strategic balancers in periods of regional upheaval. Accordingly, Gulf states would benefit from reassessing traditional reliance on Western security guarantors and engaging more systematically with emerging powers. Likewise, the crisis revealed the need for collective security reform within the GCC to prevent fragmentation and reinforce institutional resilience.

#### *11.2 Avenues for future research*

This study opens several promising directions for further investigation. Future research could assess the post-2021 trajectory of Turkish–Qatari relations in light of the Al-Ula Agreement and broader regional reconciliation efforts. Has normalization weakened or reinforced the alliance? Additionally, a deeper exploration of the socio-cultural underpinnings of the bilateral

relationship—including media discourse, ideological affinity, and public sentiment—would enhance understanding of its popular legitimacy. Finally, comparative studies examining Qatar’s strategic relationships with other powers (e.g. Iran, the U.S., China) could shed light on the effectiveness of small-state hedging strategies amid systemic volatility. These inquiries would help illuminate broader patterns of alliance behavior and regional order transformation in the contemporary Middle East.

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