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Diplomatic Delight: Turkiye's Future with the Gulf and Analyzing GCC Responses to Erdoğan's Victory

GULF STUDIES CENTER

Policy Brief

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Introduction

On May 28, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan [announced](#) his victory in the second run-off for the Turkish presidential elections, extending his rule into a third decade. In one of the most fiercely contested presidential and parliamentary elections the country has ever experienced, results showed that Erdogan won 52.18 percent of the vote, while opposition candidate Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, head of the Republican People's Party (CHP), got 47.82 percent of the ballot boxes.

The elections in Türkiye drew special attention from the Gulf region. Leaderships in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states were among the first to congratulate Erdoğan on his re-election as it would bring a sense of continuity and consolidate relations between Türkiye and the six members of the sub-regional bloc. In this context, GCC states immediately expressed their strong commitment to maintain and further improve the ongoing process of enhancing relations with Ankara during Erdoğan's upcoming term.

This brief analysis the diplomatic responses of the GCC states to Erdoğan's victory, attendance from the GCC states to the inauguration ceremony of Erdoğan held on June 3 at presidential complex, reactions from the Gulf streets to a new term with Erdoğan, and future prospects in Türkiye's relations with the six members of the GCC.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia's King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has separately [sent](#) two cable of congratulations to Erdogan after he was declared the victor in a historic runoff Turkish elections. Following the cables, crown prince also held a phone call with Erdogan, wishing him more success, and the people of Türkiye more progress and prosperity. For his part, Erdogan thanked the crown prince for his congratulations and noble feelings. Riyadh also sent the [Foreign Minister](#) Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah to Ankara on June 3 to attend the inauguration ceremony of Erdogan held in Presidential Complex.

Under the current leaderships in two countries, Ankara and Riyadh are expected to continue pursuing ambitious foreign policy agendas. There are three key areas where the Turkish-Saudi relationship is expected to develop over the next five years. The first area is in the economic realm. Close ties with Saudi Arabia will assist Erdogan

in revitalizing the Turkish economy and tackling persistent inflation. Turkiye presents itself as a financial and business hub for Saudi investors to invest in diverse sectors. [The investment](#) in Turkiye could be one of the areas in which a competition among the GCC states, namely Saudi Arabia and the UAE, can take place. The second area of potential cooperation lies in the defense sector. The deepening defense-trade relationship between Turkiye and Saudi Arabia will likely continue in the next five years. The third area for fruitful cooperation is in the regional and international arena. There may be closer cooperation on other regional issues of mutual interest.

The State of Qatar

Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani demonstrated his promptness in extending congratulations to the recently re-elected Erdogan, even before the final election results were announced. Through a tweet in Arabic from his personal account, Emir Tamim referred to Erdogan as "[My dear brother](#)," emphasizing the close personal ties between the two leaders.

Over the past two decades, the relationship between Qatar and Turkiye has significantly deepened, and Erdogan's victory was joyously celebrated within Qatar's borders. On May 28, residents of Qatar took to the streets, engaging in [car parades](#) at prominent locations such as Katara and Lusail Boulevard, while waving Turkish flags. Moreover, buildings in Lusail and Doha were [illuminated](#) in red, symbolizing the significance of Turkiye's "election of the century." Qatar's Minister of Interior and the Emir's brother, Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, attended Erdogan's inauguration ceremony in Ankara on June 3. [Sheikh Khalifa](#) conveyed the greetings and congratulations of Emir Tamim during this event. The enthusiastic reception of Erdogan's re-election by Qatar is unsurprising, considering that the two nations have emerged as [the closest allies](#) in the region, particularly during times of crisis. Qatar's swift and congratulatory response to Erdogan's re-election underscores the continuation of friendly relations and the strengthened cooperation between the two countries in economic, military, political, and social spheres over the next five years.

The United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) showed an early display of diplomatic engagement when its President, Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, took to Twitter to [congratulate](#) Erdogan on his re-election. On May 29, President Al Nahyan further [expressed](#) the UAE's aspirations for ongoing cooperation to enhance the bilateral relations and strategic partnership between the two nations, ultimately benefiting their respective populations over a phone conversation.¹ Despite the absence of the UAE from Erdogan's inauguration ceremony, this apparent absence may be attributed to the planned [official visit](#) of the UAE president to Turkiye, scheduled for June 10. President Sheikh Mohamed was among the first world leaders to meet Erdogan following his re-election, with a warm welcome extended by the Turkish president at the onset of the official trip to Istanbul. Media coverage depicted the interactions between Al Nahyan and Erdogan during the UAE president's visit to Istanbul, including their joint participation in [a test drive](#) of Turkiye's national car, TOGG. Additionally, the Turkish and Emirati presidents were seen together at Istanbul's Ataturk Stadium, where they [watched](#) the Champions League final between Manchester City and Inter Milan.

From the realms of sports politics to techno-diplomacy, the relations between Turkiye and the UAE are poised to enter a phase of reconciliation, particularly in the economic and defense spheres. The UAE's ratification of the Free Trade Agreement with Turkiye on May 31 solidifies these expectations, as the agreement aims to elevate bilateral trade to [\\$40 billion](#) within a five-year timeframe.

The State of Kuwait

Kuwait was among the first GCC countries to congratulate Erdogan over his victory. The Emir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Sabah, Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Sabah and Crown Prince Mishal Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah separately [sent](#) three cable of congratulations to Erdogan on winning a third term in office. Kuwait also sent the Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Al Sabah as the representative of the emir to Ankara on June 3 to attend [the inauguration ceremony](#) of Erdogan held in Presidential Complex.

Turkiye's relationship with Kuwait could be described as the most stable of any with a GCC nation, without any significant ups or downs. Any issues have not affected it, negatively or positively. There are five [motivating factors](#) in Turkish-Kuwaiti ties: Historical/political, economic, security/defense, regional vision, and humanitarian assistance. Türkiye hosts millions of Syrians and carries out successful humanitarian assistance in its refugee camps; Kuwait is among the largest donors to Syrians, and has carried out several aid campaigns at Türkiye's southeastern border with Syria. Besides developing relations in the diplomatic realm, Türkiye's relations with Kuwait also took attention in the security and defense realms. Thus, Kuwait's own priorities and concerns shape its relationship with Türkiye, as it is a small state that opted to strategically hedge its relationships with regional actors to cope with the threats posed to their sovereignty and stability. The recent reconciliation climate opened a room for Kuwait to foster its relations with Ankara without the pressure it faced from the Türkiye-Gulf tension over the past decade. The ending of the Gulf dispute with the al-Ula declaration was a sigh of relief for Kuwait, which was concerned over the GCC's fate as a sub-regional organization.

The Kingdom of Bahrain

Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, crown prince and Prime Minister Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa [sent](#) a cable of congratulations to Erdogan on his re-election, wishing him success in his next term, and further progress and prosperity for Türkiye. He also expressed the Kingdom's commitment to further enhance ties and cooperation with Türkiye. Bahrain sent the deputy Prime Minister Shaikh Khalid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa to Ankara on June 3 to attend the inauguration ceremony of Erdogan held in the Presidential Complex. In an interview with Turkish state-run agency, Al Khalifa [noted](#) that his country places great importance on its relations with Türkiye, "we welcome Türkiye's role and positive participants at the regional and international levels, becoming a role model in development," he added.

For Bahrain, it has become critical to diversify its partnerships with regional powers, especially in defense and trade. Over the past few years, Türkiye's defense industry has increased its sales to Gulf countries, so this might be an area for Bahrain to deepen cooperation with Türkiye. Although the trade volume between Türkiye and Bahrain does not compare to that of other Gulf countries, there is an opportunity for

Ankara to reach new sources of energy, hydrocarbons and renewables, through its ties to Bahrain, while Manama can also attract [Turkish investments](#). Despite the relatively undeveloped level of economic ties, there are significant security aspects to the Turkish-Bahraini relationship. Bahrain, like other GCC members, might seek to deepen its ties with Turkiye.

The Sultanate of Oman

Following the announcement of the election results on May 28th, Sultan Haitham bin Tariq conveyed his congratulations to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan for his successful re-election as the President of the Republic, thus commencing a new presidential term. In his correspondence, Sultan Tariq [expressed](#) Oman's aspirations to fortify the amicable relations and cooperation between the two nations. Notably, during the inauguration ceremony of President Erdogan on June 3rd, 2023, the representation of the Sultanate was undertaken by Yahya bin Mahfoudh al-Mantheri, the Chairman of the Council of State of Oman. On June 7th, Oman's Foreign Minister, Sayyid Badr Albusaidi, [engaged](#) in a telephonic conversation with Hakan Fidan, the recently appointed Foreign Minister of the Republic of Turkiye. Albusaidi extended his congratulations to his Turkish counterpart, and both ministers concurred on the importance of further strengthening the bilateral relations between their countries across diverse domains.

Over the upcoming five years, defense cooperation emerges as a highly promising area of collaboration between Turkiye and Oman. Notably, according to [a report](#) published by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Oman has been the third-largest beneficiary of Turkish arms exports, accounting for 13% of Turkiye's total arms exports during the period spanning from 2018 to 2022. The significant steps have been taken between Ankara and Oman in the last couple of years to enhance the bilateral economic relations, especially in [the energy sector](#). This momentum is likely to continue in the next five years under the Erdogan presidency.

Conclusion

The new Turkish foreign policy approach towards the GCC states appears to have two tracks – economy and diplomacy, navigated by two seasoned figures:

Mehmet Şimşek as minister of Treasury and Finance, and Hakan Fidan as the foreign minister. Both names are not strangers to relations with the GCC states. Şimşek is a trusted name in global markets, and has a strong business network in the Gulf region. Fidan, who has led the National Intelligence Organization for 13 years, is internationally well known for his back-channel talks to improve Türkiye's diplomatic relations with the GCC states. Fidan, along with precedent Mevlut Cavusoglu, has prepared the ground for Erdogan's first-ever visit to the UAE after a decade of frosty ties. He not only visited the GCC states for the betterment of Turkey's ties with the Gulf monarchies, but has also become the leading actor in Turkey's normalisation with Egypt and Israel. Thus, Ankara will continue prioritizing its economic, political and defense ties with the GCC states, which are important to Ankara's trade and defense markets.

President Erdogan is expected to visit the Gulf soon, which reflects the importance of the GCC States in the Turkish foreign policy agenda in the upcoming term. In the next five years of Erdogan's tenure, the GCC states can expect a new episode of cooperation in their dealings with Ankara.