

Erdoğan's Regional Charm Offensive

by Burak Bekdil

Turkey's relations with other regional actors over the past decade have all followed a similar course: frequent radical shifts between alliance and hostility in accordance with the vicissitudes in the political fortunes of its long-reigning autocrat, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Ankara's recent charm offensive toward its United Arab Emirates (UAE), Israeli, Egyptian, and Saudi nemeses is part of a broader effort to change tack after years of feuding have produced no visible geostrategic benefits. Hence, while the nascent Turkish attempts at détente entail many opportunities for mutual economic gain with its rivals, especially in the defense sphere, their long-term sustainability remains doubtful given Erdoğan's unpredictability and past conduct.



Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's (left) state visit to the UAE, February 14, 2022. The Turkish president's wooing of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, and Israel comes after years of feuding produced no visible geostrategic benefits for Turkey.

What Makes Erdoğan Tick?

During his 20-year rule, Erdoğan has increasingly acted like an Ottoman sultan, consistently escalating crises with adversaries and never retreating, so as to uphold his untainted "tough guy" public image. Diplomatic maneuvering and courtesy

does not fit his rising imperialist posture. Only when he has felt that Turkey's economic weaknesses threatened his political power and re-electability has he allowed his pragmatic self to prevail over his ideological and imperialist self. For while self-aggrandizement has become the hallmark of

Erdoğan's confrontational foreign policy, there is little doubt that he has miscalculated Ankara's economic and military might when he promised his loyalists a return to the glorious days of the Ottoman past in time for the centennial of the Turkish republic in 2023 (when Turks will go to the polls to elect their next president and members of parliament).

Now, Erdoğan's recent charm offensive toward Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, and Israel offers a good example of the subjugation of his ideological and imperialist self to the pragmatic self. Rather than a fundamental change in his perception of these states, this move is aimed at luring billions of dollars from his wealthy gulf adversaries to help Turkey's cash-strapped economy ahead of the 2023 elections. He also gambles that a deal with Israel for the construction of a pipeline to carry Eastern Mediterranean natural gas to European markets via Turkish soil could bring in huge benefits in the future, especially after the withdrawal of Washington's support for the rival Israeli-Cypriot-Greek EastMed pipeline. In addition, the Ukrainian war seems likely to drive the Europeans to look for viable alternatives to Russian gas and oil. In short, though Erdoğan has been reluctant to pay a political price for his neo-Ottoman pretenses over the past decade, this is not his first tactical retreat. Take, for example, the November 2015 incident in which Ankara became the first NATO member to shoot down a Russian fighter plane in an incident that occurred over the Turkish-Syrian border. Ankara claimed that the Russian Su-24 had violated its airspace several times (a claim denied by Moscow) and warned that any future violations would meet the same response. Vladimir Putin immediately

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imposed an array of punishing economic sanctions, hitting Turkey's tourist industry and food exporters and costing its fledgling economy billions of dollars within a few months.

It took the Russian sanctions less than half a year to revive Erdoğan's pragmatic self. Putin threatened to tighten the sanctions unless an official apology was forthcoming and demanded in private that Ankara take no steps vis-à-vis Syria that compromised Moscow's interests there. In response, in June 2016, the Turkish autocrat threw in the towel. Not only did Erdoğan go to Moscow to apologize, but he also initiated what he would later call a "strategic partnership with Russia" although Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov denied any such partnership.¹

Erdoğan's more recent confrontations with the EU and Washington ended in similar ways. In 2018, President Trump threatened to ruin Turkey's economy if it did not free an American pastor imprisoned on bogus charges of conducting terrorist activity and supporting the abortive 2016 coup. And while Erdoğan vowed that he would "never release this terrorist as long as he ran Turkey," no sooner had the Turkish lira crashed in financial markets than the pastor was posing for cameras in the Oval Office alongside the U.S. president.² Similarly, Erdoğan's tussles with the Biden administration over a range of issues—from the Syrian civil war, to Ankara's acquisition of Russian S-400 surface-to-air missiles, to Biden's being the first U.S. president to recognize the Armenian

¹ *Armenpress* (Yerevan, Arm.), [Oct. 14, 2020](#).

² *The Guardian* (London), [Oct. 13, 2018](#).

genocide—came to an abrupt end with the imposition of mild U.S. sanctions.³ Meanwhile, Turkey’s threats of military action in the Aegean and Mediterranean seas over littoral sovereignty disputes and hydrocarbon claims, perpetual military tensions with Greece and Cyprus, and a Turkish plan to “flood the EU with millions of Syrian migrants” have all quietly vanished after the EU imposed minor sanctions on Turkey and threatened tougher ones.⁴



Bread lines make a comeback in Turkey. By 2022, basic commodity shortages were rife: gasoline, gas, and electricity bills doubled; the national currency lost half its value against Western currencies.

From Zero Problems to Zero Friends

No sooner had international relations professor Ahmet Davutoğlu become Turkey’s foreign minister in May 2009 than he turned Ankara’s foreign policy calculus into a laboratory for experimenting his “zero problems with neighbors” doctrine. In Davutoğlu’s thinking, most forcefully articulated in his book *Stratejik Derinlik* (Strategic Depth),⁵ the attainment of Middle East peace and stability depended on the unification of Muslim nations once again under Turkish-Islamist dominance and a unified Muslim effort against Israel, which the foreign minister claimed more than once as the only obstacle to regional peace. Shortly before the eruption of the Arab upheavals in 2011, Davutoğlu was toying with the idea of creating a “Muslim Commonwealth” in the Middle East

with Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan as founding members. Iran, Egypt, and the Persian Gulf monarchies could join at a later stage, with the new entity becoming borderless over the long term, and even featuring a unified army.⁶

With this in mind, Davutoğlu welcomed the Arab upheavals (or the “Arab Spring” as they were misnamed) as a golden opportunity to implement this grandiose vision: Syria’s non-Sunni regime would be toppled and replaced by jihadists friendly to Ankara; Lebanon would be dragged into Turkey’s sphere of power due to the common Israeli enemy; Hamas would remain a useful Turkish protégé; the Muslim Brotherhood and its ideological kinfolks would seize power in Egypt and Libya; and the glittering neo-Ottoman empire would become the center of attraction for other regional actors.⁷

³ Reuters, Mar. 10, 2022.

⁴ Ibid., Feb. 8, 2016.

⁵ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik. Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* (Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2001).

⁶ *The Jerusalem Post*, [Jan. 25, 2019](#).

⁷ William Armstrong, “[The fall of the Turkish model](#),” *Hurriyet* (Istanbul), N.D.

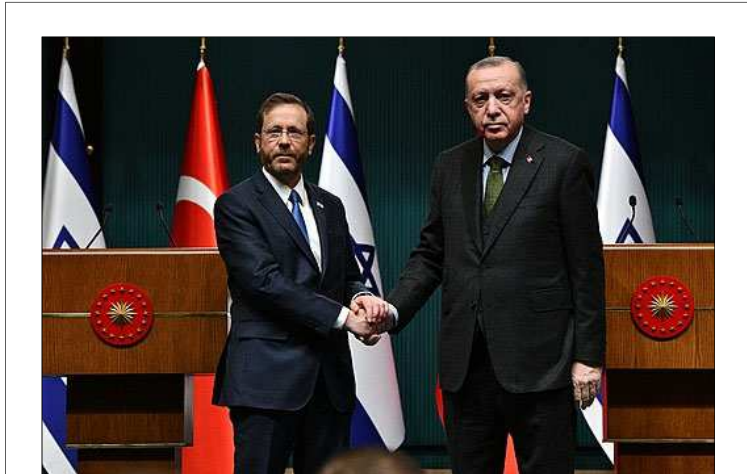
Nothing of the sort happened. A decade after the Arab upheavals, Turkey had become the *bête noir* in its neighborhood and beyond: the only country to be sanctioned by Russia, the United States, and the EU, all within a span of five years. The gulf states (apart from Qatar) had joined Egypt—now cleansed of the Muslim Brotherhood—Syria, and others to become Erdoğan’s regional rivals while Israel signed the historic Abraham accords with four of its former Arab enemies.

By 2021, five years after President Erdoğan fired Davutoğlu (who had been promoted to prime minister in August 2014), Turkey’s international isolation had vastly intensified, and its economy had sunk from one low to another. At the beginning of 2022, the country appeared economically paralyzed: the official annual inflation rate ran at 48 percent (though independent researchers measured it at 114 percent); basic commodity shortages were rife; gasoline, gas and electricity bills had doubled within a year; the national currency had lost half of its value against major Western currencies, and per capita income was in freefall for the seventh year running. The minimum wage, barely at \$375 a month, was the second lowest in continental Europe (after Albania).

That was how Turkey looked merely sixteen months before Erdoğan’s all-or-nothing presidential race in June 2023. Not a good omen for an autocrat who had been undefeated in the past two decades.

Down and Up with Israel

The past thirteen years have seen an unprecedented quantitative and qualitative Turkish ideological war on Israel, along with steady support for the “Palestinian cause,”



President of Israel, Isaac Herzog (left), and Turkey’s Erdoğan meet, Ankara, March 9, 2022. In April 2022, Erdoğan condemned three terror attacks in Israel, despite years of previous support for the Palestinians.

including several infamous Erdoğan quotes: “Jews know too well how to kill”; “the Jewish state is a baby-killer,” and “Israel is a terror state.” In this period of Turkish-Islamist insanity, Ankara perpetually pledged to isolate Israel internationally, twice downgrading its diplomatic ties with Jerusalem; these former allies do not have ambassadors in each other’s capital to this day. So, few people could imagine that, on a cold March 2022 day in Ankara, the presidential corps would welcome Israeli president Isaac Herzog, by playing Israel’s nation anthem “Hatikva” with two presidential guards carrying Turkish and Israeli flags on horseback. Erdoğan also said he intended to host then-prime minister Naftali Bennett in Ankara.⁸ Shortly after Herzog’s visit to Ankara, Turkish energy minister Fatih Dönmez met with his Israeli counterpart, Karin Elharrar, on the sidelines of the International Energy Agency’s conference in Paris.

⁸ *Haaretz* (Tel Aviv), [Mar. 2, 2022](#); *The Times of Israel* (Jerusalem), [Mar. 22, 2022](#).

Even more symbolic, in April 2022 Erdoğan strongly condemned the three terror attacks that claimed eleven lives in Israel. “Condemning the heinous terror attacks that recently took place in different cities in Israel, President Erdoğan conveyed his condolences for those who lost their lives and wished a speedy recovery to the injured,”⁹ the office of the Turkish presidency said.

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Bad Times with the Gulf Muslims

The gulf monarchies (with the exception of Qatar) viewed Erdoğan’s grand neo-Ottoman ambitions with considerable alarm, especially in view of Ankara’s support for the Arab uprisings (a minor form of dissent in the UAE during the upheavals was linked to the local Muslim Brotherhood chapter, *Islah*). Was Turkey on a fast track to becoming the natural leader of the uprisings? What if it found political synergy by joining forces with its affluent Qatari partner? With such fears in mind, the UAE not only presented itself as a moderate alternative to Islamist Turkey but also sharpened the rift and the political rhetoric surrounding it.¹⁰

In July 2017, UAE foreign minister Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan shared a tweet that accused Turkish troops of looting the holy city of Medina a century ago, causing a present-day diplomatic row with

Ankara. In 2020, the Emirati minister of state for foreign affairs, Anwar Gargash, emphasized the need to confront Turkey’s expansionist agenda as much in the media as in diplomatic meetings, urging Europe to fol-

low France’s lead by taking a united position against Erdoğan’s Islamist project to “revive their empire.”¹¹ Also in that year, former Dubai police chief Dhahi Khalfan called for a popular boycott of Turkey, claiming that “when you travel to Turkey under Erdoğan today, you are travelling to a repressive state.”¹² In response, senior Turkish intelligence officials accused the UAE government of collaborating in a failed revolt with coup plotters in Turkey before the unsuccessful attempt of July 15, 2016, was launched, using exiled Fatah leader Muhammad Dahlan as a go-between with the U.S.-based cleric Fethullah Gülen accused by Turkey of orchestrating the plot.¹³ The pro-government Turkish media and government officials cited as evidence reports in the Dubai-based *Sky News Arabic* and *Al-Arabiya* on the night of the coup that described the putsch as successful.¹⁴

The anti-UAE campaign in Turkey quickly flourished. In 2017, Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu claimed that the UAE had funneled US\$3 billion to the Gülen movement for the attempted coup.¹⁵ In December 2019, shortly before deploying

⁹ News release, Office of the President of the State of Israel, Jerusalem, Apr. 1, 2022; *The Jerusalem Post*, [Apr. 2, 2022](#).

¹⁰ Aslı Aydıntaşbaş and Cinzia Bianco, “Useful enemies: How the Turkey-UAE rivalry is remaking the Middle East,” European Council on Foreign Relations, Berlin, Mar. 15, 2021.

¹¹ *Asharq al-Awsat* (London), [Nov. 2, 2020](#).

¹² Aydıntaşbaş and Bianco, “Useful enemies.”

¹³ TRT Haber TV (Istanbul), [Dec. 5, 2019](#).

¹⁴ *Middle East Eye* (London), July 29, 2016; *Yeni Şafak* (Istanbul), July 30, 2016.

¹⁵ *Yeni Şafak*, June 12, 2017.

troops to Libya, Ankara issued an arrest warrant for Dahlan, describing him as a “regional pawn of the UAE” and accusing him of “organizing the July 15 coup attempt with the [Gülenists],” followed the next year with a red notice for his arrest through Interpol.¹⁶ In July 2020, Turkish defense minister Hulusi Akar accused the UAE of being “a functional country that serves others politically or militarily and is used remotely,” warning that Ankara would hold Abu Dhabi accountable at the right time and place for the “malicious actions committed in Libya and Syria.”¹⁷

When in June 2017, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain broke off relations and imposed an economic blockade on Qatar, which they accused of supporting terrorism, Erdoğan promptly vowed to support Doha, and his government vehemently rejected the accusations. In challenge to the Saudi-led boycott, Turkey not only sent cargo ships and planes to Qatar to help overcome shortages of food and other essentials, but also deployed armed forces in the emirate.

This brought the crisis between Turkey and the gulf monarchies to a head. According to press reports, Saudi Arabia and the UAE sought to overthrow the Qatari emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, and replace him with his nephew living in London, only to be foiled by Turkish units that guarded Sheikh Tamim’s palace and prevented the coup.¹⁸ While Erdoğan derided the gulf states’ demand for the withdrawal of Turkish forces

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as disrespectful and reiterated his support for Doha, UAE minister of state for foreign affairs Gargash countered:

The Turks left Qatar over a century ago and now have re-turned. They have big interests in the region, and we hope Turkey’s priority will be its interests and not its ideology. But 1,000 or 2,000 Turkish troops show lack of confidence from [the] Qatari government in its stability. Stability will come from integration with the neighborhood.¹⁹

The deepening rift created a “UAE the enemy” concept in Turkish public opinion. According to a 2021 survey by Istanbul’s Kadir Has University, the UAE did not exist in the Turks’ top twenty friendly countries list (which, ironically, included Greece and Israel). Instead, Turks listed the UAE as the sixteenth biggest threat to their country after Saudi Arabia (14) and Egypt (15).²⁰

Courting the Gulf States

A day after the announcement of the historic UAE-Israel decision to normalize their relations, Erdoğan announced that he might suspend diplomatic relations with the emirate or recall his ambassador from Abu Dhabi because “the move against Palestine is not a step that can be stomached.” The Turkish foreign ministry was even more scathing, warning in an official statement,

¹⁶ TRT Haber TV, Dec. 13, 2019.

¹⁷ Aljazeera TV (Doha), July 30, 2020.

¹⁸ *Yeni Şafak*, [Dec. 26, 2017](#).

¹⁹ *The Guardian*, [June 25, 2017](#).

²⁰ “Turkish Foreign Policy Public Perceptions Survey-2021,” June 15, 2021.

History and the conscience of the region's peoples will not forget and never forgive this hypocritical behavior of the UAE, betraying the Palestinian cause for the sake of its narrow interests.²¹

These statements met with bemused bewilderment in many Middle East and Western capitals given Ankara's longstanding relations with the Jewish state. Having maintained a neutral policy during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, in March 1949, Turkey became the first Muslim state to recognize the nascent state of Israel and, ten months later, sent a career diplomat to Tel Aviv as its first chargé d'affaires. In 1951, Ankara joined Western nations in protesting Cairo's decision to deny Israeli ships passage through the Suez Canal, and three years later, Turkish prime minister Adnan Menderes urged the Arab states to recognize Israel. In the early 1950s, the Mossad began operating a station on Turkish soil.²²

Erdoğan can be blinded by ideology at times and a reckless gambler at others, but he is not suicidal. Hence, his anti-normalization bluster was quickly followed by semi-covert efforts to mend the fences with his adversaries. The November 2021 visit by the UAE's crown prince Sheikh Muhammad bin Zayed marked a foreign policy reset by



Turkey and the UAE sign a memorandum of understanding, Ankara, May 30, 2022. The countries have signed agreements on industries including defense, agriculture, IT, construction, energy, food, real estate, and health.

Erdoğan who seemed to have shed some of his illusions, putting interests ahead of slogans and announcing his intention to visit the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt.²³

He soon made good on this pledge, arriving in Abu Dhabi on February 14, 2022—the first time since 2013. The emirate's leadership was all too happy to reciprocate the apparent restart. As Erdoğan spoke of shaping the next fifty years of “friendship and brotherhood with the UAE,” Turkey's red flag illuminated buildings in the UAE and flew high in a ceremony in Dubai. Minister Gargash, who just over a year earlier urged Europe to stop Turkey's expansionist agenda, tweeted that Erdoğan's visit “opens a new, positive page in bilateral relations.”²⁴

²¹ Reuters, Aug. 14, 2020; *Middle East Monitor* (London), [Aug. 14, 2020](#).

²² Jacob Abadi, “[Israel and Turkey: From Covert to Overt Relations](#),” *Journal of Conflict Studies*, Fall 1995; Hasan Kösebalaban, “The Crisis in Turkish-Israeli Relations: What Is Its Strategic Significance?” *Middle East Policy*, Fall 2010.

²³ Aljazeera TV, [Apr. 15, 2021](#), [Nov. 23, 2021](#), [Jan. 3, 2022](#), [Feb. 14, 2022](#).

²⁴ *Bianet News* (Ankara), Feb. 3, 2022; *Evrensel* (Ankara), Feb. 7, 2022; *Haber Global* (Istanbul), Feb. 5, 2022.

The two countries signed thirteen agreements to boost trade and investments. Emirati officials pledged to invest \$10 billion in Turkey's defense, agriculture, information technology, construction, energy, food, real estate, and health industries in the next several years. "The first of the planned UAE investments will come into Turkey's defense industry," said Nail Olpak, chairman of Turkey's Foreign Economic Relations Council. "We see a particularly great appetite to invest in the Turkish defense industry." Two-way trade between Turkey and the UAE was at \$8 billion in 2021. Olpak estimates the annual trade to grow by 40 percent in the years ahead.²⁵

Defense Industry Cooperation

Arms sales are often among the first casualties of inter-state political confrontation. Turkish defense manufacturers did not lose the UAE market to foreign rivals but were casualties of Erdoğan's neo-Ottoman games, in the same way they had lost the Saudi and the Egyptian markets as well as defense cooperation with Israel. However, that trade is also one of the first to recover when adversaries decide to reconcile, and the Turkish-UAE détente may not be an exception.

"Turkey has a genuine desire to cooperate with the UAE, especially focusing on co-production modality," a presidential aide in Ankara told this author. He added,

Before things turned sour, scores of Turkish companies sought co-production opportunities in the UAE targeting third markets. That concept can meet Abu Dhabi's and Ankara's critical requirements and create export opportunities in

²⁵ Aljazeera TV, Feb. 14, 2022.

third countries. ...Turkey intends to share its defense technology without limitations with friendly countries that may benefit the UAE in the longer-term.²⁶

This prognosis was reinforced by a general manager of a medium-size Turkish company that specializes in designing and producing remotely-controlled weapon stations:

We can coproduce these weapon systems in the UAE and sell to their country buyers ... We can also share technology in unmanned land vehicles and border surveillance solutions. There is big potential also in military software.²⁷

A senior Turkish defense procurement official agreed:

The UAE has reasons to avoid Western software solutions and develop its own with Turkish know-how. They once asked us to help them develop their national datalink system because they did not trust Western suppliers. There is also big potential in upgrading systems and equipment.²⁸

Military electronics conglomerate Aselsan, Turkey's biggest defense company, can be a focal point in offering solutions in a wide number of areas. State-controlled missile producer Roketsan can renew contacts with the UAE defense establishment, which has shown interest in its missile solutions. Turkish

²⁶ Author interview with Turkish presidential aide, Ankara, Feb. 17, 2022.

²⁷ Author interview, Ankara, Feb. 18, 2022.

²⁸ Author interview with Turkish defense procurement official, Ankara, Feb. 24, 2022.

companies have made much progress in advancing unmanned technologies over the past decade. Baykar Makina, maker of the successful TB-2 unmanned combat aerial vehicle (UCAV), sells to a growing number of countries, including Poland. Several other smaller companies are producing a rich menu of unmanned military platforms, including for land and sea missions.

Most notable among these is Turkey's first armed, unmanned surface vessel (AUSV), the ULAQ, developed in November 2020 by a partnership of two leading Turkish defense companies: Ares Shipyard and Meteksan Defense. The ULAQ can be used for a wide range of military purposes with its 400-kilometer range, 65 kilometer/hour maximum speed, day/night vision capabilities, and an encrypted communication infrastructure that can be operated from mobile vehicles and headquarters or from sea platforms such as aircraft carriers or frigates. Its capabilities include intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, surface warfare, asymmetric warfare, and escort and strategic infrastructure protection missions. According to its manufacturers, ULAQ is not only a remotely controlled vehicle but also an autonomous vehicle that hosts artificial intelligence.²⁹

A defense industry source said that the UAE could consider joining Turkey's efforts to develop various engines to power military platforms on sea, land, and air. "Both sides should agree on a common road map, clearly define their requirements, and move quickly

Armored vehicles provide one area where Turkish manufacturers could fill the UAE's diverse needs.

to become technology partners in this field," he said.³⁰

A variety of armored vehicles is another potential field where Turkish manufacturers could fill the UAE's diverse needs. In February 2021, for example, a joint venture between the UAE's Edge and the Turkish Otokar launched the Rabdan 6x6 amphibious armored vehicle, a variant of the Rabdan 8X8, which entered service with the UAE armed forces earlier that year.³¹

"The UAE has faced threats from Yemen which it must more efficiently counter," said prominent defense analyst Özgür Ekşi, editor-in-chief of the leading Turkish defense journal *Turdef*. He added:

The country's wealth doesn't offer immediate solutions. It would be rational to think that various low-range air defense systems like Aselsan's Gökler and Korkut and Roketsan's Hisar-A and Siper can efficiently protect UAE soil. In addition, the UAE armed forces can perform counterattack and intelligence missions with armed Turkish drones like Anka, Aksungur, and Akıncı, which can be used in sea or above land via SATCOM command systems.³²

Other analysts suggest that the UAE can use Turkish drone systems for securing its ports, military bases, and water routes. Turkish-made midget submarines, developed by Turkey's state-controlled defense tech-

²⁹ "The First Indigenous and State of the Art 'Armed Unmanned Surface Vehicle-AUSV,'" Ares Shipyard and Meteksan Defense [website](#).

³⁰ Author interview with UAE defense industry official, Ankara, Feb. 25, 2022.

³¹ "Rabdan 6x6 Armoured Fighting Vehicle," ArmyTechnology.com, [Apr. 15, 2021](#).

³² Özgür Ekşi, Ankara, Feb. 27, 2022.

nologies firm STM, might also be used for this purpose.

Conclusion

While the prospects of Turkish-UAE defense collaboration look promising, Erdoğan's mercurial personality and past behavior would suggest caution. Since Erdoğan's standing is at a decades-long low both at home and abroad, his charm offensive vis-à-vis past nemeses—Israel, Egypt, and the gulf states—offers a short-term, win-win strategy. Yet, given his past zigzagging between vile, anti-Arab rhetoric (“all Arab nations wouldn't make one Turkey”) and philo-Arab flattery (“the Arab is the Turk's right eye and right arm”), the Turkish autocrat may well revert to his neo-Ottoman quest for pan-Islamic leadership should he win the June 2023 elections.

Erdoğan's intricate acrobatics vis-à-vis the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, reflect a similar dilemma. Russia is Turkey's biggest energy supplier; Russia and Ukraine together are Turkey's biggest tourist markets and grain suppliers. Turkey became the only NATO member to purchase the Russian-made S-400 anti-aircraft system, risking suspension from the U.S.-led, multinational program to build the F-35 Lightning II combat aircraft, while at the same time supplying armed drones to Ukraine.

Seemingly caught off guard by the invasion, Ankara sought to have its cake and eat it too. It supported Ukraine's territorial

The Turkey-UAE détente provides insight into the shift in Erdoğan's priorities: surviving at the ballot box.

integrity and condemned the Russian invasion as “illegitimate” and “unacceptable” yet abstained from voting on Moscow's suspension from most bodies of the Cooperation Council in

Europe and refrained from joining the Western sanctions on Russia. And while Ankara blocked the passing of Russian military vessels from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean Sea through the Dardanelles and Bosphorus straits at Kyiv's request and in accordance with the 1936 Montreux convention, it did so with Moscow's consent after clarifying that the closure applied to all parties. Stating his determination “not to abandon either Russia or Ukraine” and not to “compromise our national interests,” Erdoğan offered his good offices to both belligerents, and on March 10, the Russian and Ukrainian foreign ministers met in Ankara in the highest-level talks since the onset of hostilities.³³

In these global, regional, and domestic circumstances, there is every reason to be suspicious of Erdoğan's charm offensive in Turkey's immediate and wider neighborhoods. However, the UAE détente still provides insight into the shift in Erdoğan's priorities—from reigning over a resurgent neo-Ottoman empire to surviving at the ballot box.

Burak Bekdil is a Turkey- and Greece-based political analyst and a fellow at the Middle East Forum.



³³ *Naval News* (Paris), [Feb. 28, 2022](#); Aljazeera TV, [Mar. 1, 2022](#), [Mar. 10, 2022](#); *Alarabiya News* (Dubai), [Mar. 1, 2022](#);