

## Turkish President Erdogan Visits the United Arab Emirates in an Attempt to Bolster Long-Strained Diplomatic Relations

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan traveled to the United Arab Emirates earlier this week for the first time in nearly a decade, as the two countries seek to strengthen their economic and diplomatic relations. The meeting comes a few months after United Arab Emirates Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed (MBZ) visited Ankara for talks with Erdogan back in November of last year. Bilateral ties between Turkey and the United Arab Emirates have been strained for years due to differences regarding several key regional issues like Libya, the Qatari diplomatic crisis, and gas exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean. In the past, foreign policy analysts have criticized the United Arab Emirates for its destructive actions, such as support for renegade warlord Khalifa Haftar in Libya and the devastating war in Yemen. With last November's gathering in Ankara and this latest meeting in Abu Dhabi, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates are striving for improved relations. Erdogan's visit this week saw over a dozen agreements signed by the respective delegations covering an array of fields including trade, defense, investment, transportation, health, agriculture, and technology.

Relations between Turkey and the United Arab Emirates have been marred with tension over the past decade, with the two finding themselves at odds on multiple issues. They provided support to opposing sides in the Libyan conflict, with Turkey aiding the internationally-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) while the United Arab Emirates backed renegade warlord Khalifa Haftar and his Libyan National Army (LNA) forces. Relations had also been further strained after Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain cut all ties with Qatar, a close ally of Turkey, back in 2017 before eventually restoring ties last year. In fact, some experts suggest that MBZ's visit to Ankara several months ago, which has paved the way for warmer ties, was part of the United Arab Emirates' attempt to recalibrate its foreign policy initiatives after the unsuccessful effort to isolate Qatar.

Erdogan arrived in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, to an honor guard welcome and an official ceremony. The Turkish president had traveled with a large delegation, demonstrating the perceived importance of bolstering relations. Accompanying him on the trip were numerous government ministers from a diverse collection of industries, signaling the intent to secure deals on a broad scope of areas. Recent months have seen Turkey seek warmer ties with the United Arab Emirates among others, a development that many observers contend is driven by converging interests. These analysts argue that the diplomatic maneuvering indicates an increasing realization across the region that the United States' interest is moving elsewhere around the world. Turkey's actions may be additionally influenced by worsening economic circumstances, with inflation skyrocketing domestically. They have also been working to re-open relations with Egypt and Saudi Arabia, though there are few concrete signs yet of such improvements.

Turkey's economic situation has been plagued with rapidly rising inflation since last year, with it recently reaching a high of 48.7%. Foreign investments have also suffered and just a month ago, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates agreed to a currency swap that amounted to nearly \$5 billion in local currencies to help Turkey's faltering economy. After this latest visit, the United Arab Emirates also announced a \$10 billion investment fund in Turkey – a win-win for both countries as the UAE gets a great deal because of the cheapness of the Turkish lira while Turkey gets desperately needed investments that may help revive its economy. Of course, even with the improvement in bilateral relations, ideological differences remain which could still present issues moving forward. However, it is becoming too risky to remain confrontational in the region and as such, both countries are striving to find ways to cooperate.