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Issue Brief

Türkiye's Renewed Engagement with the Gulf

Abhishek Yadav

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Summary

Erdoğan's October 2025 visit to Kuwait, Qatar and Oman produced 24 cooperation instruments, signalling a deeper push into defence, economic and industrial engagement with the Gulf. While outreach broadened partnerships, implementation remains the key test for creating long-term impact.

Context

Türkiye’s President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, from 21 to 23 October 2025, visited three Gulf countries—Kuwait, Qatar and Oman. It signalled Ankara’s intent to advance practical economic and industrial ties, deepen defence-industry cooperation, and coordinate regional diplomacy, particularly on Gaza, while hedging its bets across multiple partners. Ankara sought to align its Gulf outreach with the shifting regional security agenda following US President Donald Trump’s proposal for a ‘Comprehensive End of Gaza War’, commonly referred to as the Gaza peace plan that Israel and Hamas signed at the Sharm el-Sheikh Peace Summit in Egypt on 9 October 2025.¹ Given that Gulf States are anticipated to assume a central role in the emerging framework, the shared priority of preserving peace and facilitating a phased stabilisation in Gaza became a focal point of the latest dialogue.

In addition to bilateral dynamics, the discussions during Erdoğan’s visit centred on several key issues, including the uninterrupted flow of humanitarian assistance, the swift establishment and deployment of an international peacekeeping mechanism, Gaza’s reconstruction needs, and the structure of post-war governance. These agendas are closely interconnected, as the Gulf countries, particularly due to their financial capacities, are expected to contribute substantially to reconstruction efforts to propel broader stabilisation.

These steps align with a broader trend. Following recent shocks, such as Israel’s strike on Qatar in September 2025, some Gulf States may find it pragmatic to gradually reduce their traditional overdependence on US military support, build independent defence industries and diversify procurement sources.² Given that Türkiye has a credible defence industrial base, the Gulf States are seeking partners beyond their traditional providers. Ankara, therefore, has a window of opportunity to expand its influence and defence exports in the Gulf region. Furthermore, Türkiye’s position as a mediator in the Gaza talks lends additional weight to Erdoğan’s regional visit.

During the 2017–2021 Gulf crisis, Türkiye’s relations with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain were strained due to deep political and regional rivalries, as Ankara supported Qatar against the blockade imposed by its Gulf neighbours, backed movements like the Muslim Brotherhood, and openly confronted Riyadh over the Khashoggi murder. However, after the Al-Ula Agreement in 2021 ended the boycott, Türkiye shifted towards pragmatic rapprochement as its engagement with the Gulf region evolved to structured mechanisms, including high-

¹ “[Full Text of Oct. 9 Israel-Hamas Deal on Trump’s Plan for ‘Comprehensive End’ to Gaza War](#)”, *The Times of Israel*, 14 October 2025.

² Hursit Dingil, “[Erdogan’s Gulf Tour Signals Emerging Regional Security Architecture](#)”, *TRT World*, 27 October 2025.

level committee meetings, Ankara’s push for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and significant defence-industry linkages.

Türkiye’s relations with Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain have undergone a process of diplomatic normalisation since 2021, marked by renewed political dialogue and expanded economic cooperation. High-level exchanges, investment commitments and growing cooperation in trade and technology now characterise ties with Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. At the same time, Bahrain has pursued a more measured yet steady rapprochement through sectoral MoUs and diplomatic consultations. Collectively, these improving relations provide the broader strategic context for Ankara’s current Gulf outreach and complement its efforts to build structured, multi-actor engagement across the region.

Erdoğan’s visit to Kuwait, Qatar and Oman is built on this trajectory. Erdoğan specified that engagement with the Gulf also deepens through Türkiye’s ties with the GCC, currently chaired by Kuwait, and emphasised that the countries he visited play a crucial role in advancing this framework.³ The negotiations on the long-pending FTA with the GCC were revived in 2024, after a significant hiatus. Erdoğan expressed confidence that concluding several agreements would significantly boost bilateral trade and stimulate greater cross-investment between Türkiye and the Gulf States.

Broad Themes

Defence Cooperation

The Turkish National Defence Ministry and the Kuwaiti Ministry of Defence signed an ‘Implementation Protocol on State-to-State Defence Industry Procurement Contracts’ in May 2024. Additionally, an MoU on establishing a strategic dialogue was signed by the respective foreign ministers.⁴ During Türkiye’s Defence Industry Agency President Haluk Görgün’s visit to Oman in February 2025, Oman’s Ministry of Defence organised a workshop showcasing Turkish defence-industry capabilities and discussing avenues for military cooperation.⁵ The meeting culminated in the signing of contracts with Turkish companies Havelsan and Aselsan, underscoring both sides’ interest in expanding practical, technology-focused defence collaboration.

For Oman, working with Turkish defence companies may boost local capability and diversify its defence-industrial relationships. These defence-industrial engagements illustrate Ankara’s dual-track approach: building long-term partnerships while

³ [**“President Erdoğan Addresses Journalists’ Questions on Return Flight From Gulf Countries”**](#), Directorate of Communications, Presidency of The Republic of Türkiye, 24 October 2025.

⁴ [**“Kuwait, Türkiye Sign Cooperation Agreements”**](#), Kuwait News Agency, 7 May 2024.

⁵ [**“Oman Signs Multiple Military Cooperation Agreements With Türkiye”**](#), Middle East Monitor, 7 February 2025.

securing interim capabilities. On 24 October 2025, Erdoğan noted that, under the Ministry of National Defence’s coordination, Türkiye’s talks with Qatar and Oman on a prospective Eurofighter purchase are advancing positively.⁶ Notably, Türkiye is pursuing the acquisition of used Eurofighter Typhoon jets from both Gulf States as a transitional capability until the domestically produced fifth-generation KAAN becomes operational. This Gulf-track negotiation complements the MoU signed with the United Kingdom in July 2025⁷ for the acquisition of 44 Eurofighter Typhoon aircraft, including 24 second-hand units, for which the UK is acting on behalf of Qatar and Oman.⁸

Notably, on 27 October 2025, Türkiye secured a landmark £8 billion agreement with the United Kingdom to procure 20 Eurofighter Typhoon jets, marking its largest fighter acquisition in nearly two decades.⁹ The deal, concluded during UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s visit to Ankara, is likely to strengthen Türkiye’s airpower, enhance NATO interoperability, and underscore Ankara’s strategy of diversifying procurement while awaiting the KAAN platform’s entry into service. As per reports, Ankara’s plan aims to assemble a transitional fleet of around 120 aircraft, comprising Eurofighters, US-made F-16s and F-35s, the latter of which are tied to Türkiye’s ongoing efforts to rejoin the F-35 program following its 2019 suspension over the S-400 issue.¹⁰ Erdoğan’s recent Gulf visit underscores Türkiye’s broader push to diversify procurement channels and secure interim airpower capabilities, ahead of KAAN’s projected entry into service around 2028.

However, Israel’s Ambassador to the United States, Yahel Leiter, signalled clear opposition to any prospective US sale of F-35 fighter jets to Türkiye, arguing that such a transfer would be strategically “unconstructive” given Ankara’s current posture and President Erdoğan’s “hostile and belligerent” rhetoric, while expressing comparatively little concern over a potential sale to Saudi Arabia.¹¹ Leiter nonetheless acknowledged Türkiye’s enduring strategic value as a NATO member with significant military capabilities and a crucial geographic position, stressing that Israel recognises Washington’s interest in sustaining robust ties with Ankara. He framed Israel’s approach as an effort to cultivate a “functional, practical relationship” that accommodates Türkiye’s role in Western security architecture, while

⁶ [“President Erdoğan Addresses Journalists’ Questions on Return Flight From Gulf Countries”](#), Directorate of Communications, Presidency of The Republic of Türkiye, 24 October 2025.

⁷ Gavin Blackburn, “[UK and Turkey Sign Deal for Eurofighter Jets As Ankara Aims to Upgrade Air Force](#)”, *Euronews*, 23 July 2025.

⁸ [“Türkiye to Acquire 44 Eurofighter Typhoons in Total”](#), *TurDef*, 28 October 2025.

⁹ [“20,000 UK Jobs Secured As Türkiye Buys 20 Typhoon Jets in Biggest Fighter Jet Deal in a Generation”](#), Prime Minister’s Office, UK Government, 27 October 2025.

¹⁰ [“Turkey In Talks With Qatar and Oman to Buy Used Eurofighter Jets, Erdogan Says”](#), Associated Press, 24 October 2025.

¹¹ [“Israel Opposes US F-35 Sale to Turkey, Envoy Says”](#), *Kathimerini*, 16 November 2025.

safeguarding Israel’s own security imperatives, particularly its categorical opposition to any involvement of Turkish troops in Gaza or Syria, a stance he noted is respected by the United States.¹²

Economic Cooperation

The economic dimension of the visit was equally prominent, underscoring Ankara’s intent to anchor ties in measurable outcomes. Türkiye and the Gulf States set a US\$ 15 billion trade objective following Erdoğan’s recent visit, a move that the Turkish Trade Ministry described as part of a broader effort to deepen economic engagement. During the 21–23 October visit, Trade Minister Ömer Bolat advanced negotiations on the Türkiye–GCC FTA, covering trade in goods and services, investment facilitation and digital commerce.

Current trade figures underscore the scope for expansion: Türkiye’s total trade with GCC nations was US\$ 27.7 billion in 2024, exports to GCC states reached US\$ 14.7 billion, with imports at US\$ 13 billion in 2024, while Kuwait (US\$ 713 million), Qatar (US\$ 1.1 billion) and Oman (US\$ 1.3 billion) collectively accounted for approximately 16 per cent share of Türkiye’s 2025 trade profile with GCC.¹³ The discussions further identified potential roles for Turkish contractors within major Gulf development agendas, including Kuwait’s Vision 2035, Qatar’s National Vision 2030 and Oman’s Vision 2040.

Looking ahead, institutional strengthening and targeted cooperation, such as the Development Road Project, connecting the Gulf to Europe, enhanced business partnerships and potential collaboration in Syria’s reconstruction, are being explored. Bolat held bilateral meetings with Qatari and Omani counterparts to accelerate FTA progress. At the same time, parallel talks with Industry and Technology Minister, Mehmet Fatih Kacır, covered industrial capacity-building and investment opportunities. Türkiye’s Trade Ministry noted its intention to raise Türkiye’s bilateral trade with Kuwait, Qatar and Oman to US\$ 5 billion each.¹⁴

EV Diplomacy

Beyond hard power and trade, Erdoğan also employed symbolic gestures to project Türkiye’s industrial capability and modernisation. He gifted the Turkish electric car Togg to the Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and the Sultan of Oman, Haitham bin Tariq. This symbolic gesture conveyed goodwill, showcased Türkiye’s emerging industrial and technological capabilities, and

¹² Ibid.

¹³ “[Türkiye, Gulf Countries Set \\$15 Billion Trade Target After Erdoğan’s Tour](#)”, *Hürriyet Daily News*, 25 October 2025.

¹⁴ “[Türkiye Sets \\$15 Billion Trade Target With Gulf Nations After Erdogan’s Regional Tour](#)”, *Türkiye Today*, 24 October 2025.

augmented commercial diplomacy by promoting the national electric vehicle (EV) as an exportable product. Togg is Türkiye’s first domestically produced electric vehicle brand, symbolising the country’s drive towards advanced industrial and technological self-reliance.

Türkiye had earlier gifted Togg vehicles to Qatar, the UAE and Saudi Arabia in July 2023, reflecting a pattern of using industrial symbolism as a diplomatic tool. It signifies Ankara’s use of technological symbolism and industrial capability to strengthen bilateral ties and open avenues for investment, cooperation and market access in the Gulf. Moreover, public briefings and photo-op inspection of the vehicle underscore an intent to demonstrate technical features and signal readiness for international partnerships, consistent with Ankara’s broader practice of using Togg as a diplomatic offering to prospective partners.

Palestinian Solidarity

Politically, Erdoğan’s Gulf diplomacy underscores Türkiye’s attempt to project regional leadership, particularly through vocal advocacy for the Palestinian cause alongside Gulf monarchies. In each country, Erdoğan also addressed the situation in Gaza and regional security. In Kuwait and Qatar, he backed Palestinian rights and a permanent ceasefire. For example, in Kuwait, he stressed that only a two-state solution—“a State of Palestine along the borders of June 4, 1967”—can ensure lasting peace. In Doha, Erdoğan and Sheikh Tamim vowed to “ensure the ceasefire is permanent”. Oman’s Sultan Haitham also emphasised the importance of dialogue in addressing regional crises.

Erdogan’s Visit: Deliverables

Türkiye and Kuwait

Kuwaiti investments in Türkiye have surpassed US\$ 2 billion, with a predominant concentration in finance and real estate. A total of 427 Kuwaiti firms are currently active in the Turkish market, and bilateral trade reached nearly US\$ 700 million in 2024.¹⁵ As specified in Table 1, four cooperation agreements were signed during the visit, reflecting a targeted effort to deepen the economic partnership between Türkiye and Kuwait.¹⁶ These agreements are anticipated to deepen the economic partnership and create additional avenues for enhanced trade and investment between the two countries.

¹⁵ “[Türkiye and Kuwait Strengthen Bilateral Ties With Four Strategic Agreements](#)”, Investment and Finance Office, Presidency of The Republic of Türkiye, 23 October 2025.

¹⁶ Merve Yıldızalp Yormaz, “[Erdogan Concludes Gulf Tour With 24 New Pacts in Kuwait, Qatar, and Oman](#)”, Anadolu Agency, 23 October 2025.

**Table 1. Agreements and Memoranda Signed Between
TÜRKİYE and Kuwait**

Serial No.	Instrument Type	Agreement / MoU Title	Sector / Focus
1.	Agreement	Maritime Transport Agreement	Maritime connectivity, shipping
2.	MoU	Mutual Recognition of Seafarers’ Certificates	Labour mobility, professional standards
3.	MoU	Energy Cooperation	Conventional & emerging energy sectors
4.	MoU	Promoting Direct Investments b/w TÜRKİYE’s Presidency of Investment Office – Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA)	Investment facilitation, FDI promotion

Source: Adapted by author from “[Erdogan Concludes Gulf Tour With 24 New Facts in Kuwait, Qatar, and Oman](#)”, Anadolu Agency, 23 October 2025.

TÜRKİYE and Qatar

During the 2017–2021 Gulf crisis, TÜRKİYE stood firmly by Qatar, providing crucial political, military and economic support when Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt imposed a blockade. This period transformed the TÜRKİYE–Qatar relationship from cordial cooperation into a deep strategic partnership. During the visit to Doha, Erdoğan and Qatar’s Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani co-chaired the 11th TÜRKİYE–Qatar High Strategic Committee Meeting, where four new cooperation instruments were signed, as mentioned in Table 2.¹⁷ Notably, TÜRKİYE and Qatar made TEPA—their 2018 trade pact—fully operational in August 2025, aiming to double trade volume.¹⁸ The communiqué set a bilateral trade target of US\$ 5 billion and reaffirmed “shared vision” on regional stability and Palestine. Erdoğan and Emir Tamim also expressed commitment to preserving Gaza’s ceasefire.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ “[Joint Communique of 11th Session of Supreme Strategic Committee Between Qatar and TÜRKİYE](#)”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, State of Qatar, 22 October 2025.

Table 2. Agreements and Memoranda Signed at the 11th Türkiye–Qatar High Strategic Committee Meeting

Serial No.	Instrument Type	Agreement / MoU Title	Sector / Focus
1.	MoU	Strategic Development Planning	Policy coordination, strategic planning
2.	MoU	Defence Industry Cooperation	Defence production, technology collaboration
3.	Joint Declaration	High Strategic Committee Meeting	Bilateral priorities, institutional coordination
4.	Joint Ministerial Statement	Trade Facilitation and Economic Cooperation	Trade policy, economic cooperation

Source: Adapted by author from “[Erdogan Concludes Gulf Tour With 24 New Facts in Kuwait, Qatar, and Oman](#)”, Anadolu Agency, 23 October 2025.

Türkiye and Oman

During the Muscat visit, a wide-ranging set of agreements and declarations was concluded, signalling a comprehensive strengthening of Türkiye–Oman cooperation across strategic, economic, technological and societal domains.¹⁹

Table 3. Agreements, Memoranda and Declarations Signed Between Türkiye and Oman

Serial No.	Instrument Type	Agreement / MoU Title	Sector / Focus
1.	MoU	Mining and Critical Minerals	Resource development
2.	MoU	Military Cooperation	Defence cooperation

¹⁹ Merve Yıldızalp Yormaz, “[Erdogan Concludes Gulf Tour With 24 New Facts in Kuwait, Qatar, and Oman](#)”, no. 16.

3.	MoU	Industrial Cooperation	Industrial collaboration
4.	MoU	Science, Technology and Innovation	R&D, technology
5.	MoU	Competition Protection	Market regulation
6.	MoU	Media and Communication	Media partnerships
7.	MoU	Defence Industry Cooperation	Defence technology, industry
8.	Agreement	Strategic Cooperation Agreement (Türkiye Wealth Fund – Oman Investment Authority)	Sovereign wealth cooperation
9.	Shareholding/Cooperation Agreements	OYAK, Amber Limited, Uzbek-Oman Investment Co., Oman Food Investment Holding	Corporate investments
10.	MoU	Innovance Information Technologies Inc.– Oman Telecommunications Company	Digital/ICT
11.	Cooperation Agreement	Land allocation for Turkish Maarif Foundation schools in Oman	Education
12.	Joint Declaration	Establishment of the Coordination Council	Institutionalisation of dialogue
13.	Joint Declaration	Visa Exemption for ordinary passport holders	Mobility facilitation

Source: Adapted by author from “[Erdogan Concludes Gulf Tour With 24 New Facts in Kuwait, Qatar, and Oman](#)”, Anadolu Agency, 23 October 2025.

Previously, during Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al Said’s first official visit to Türkiye in December 2024, the two countries signed 10 wide-ranging agreements that significantly broaden their strategic and economic cooperation. The centrepiece was

a US\$ 500 million joint venture between OYAK and the Oman Investment Authority to develop the “Güney Container Port” in İskenderun.²⁰ Additional MoUs advanced collaboration in investment promotion, monetary and financial policy, SME development, agriculture and food security, health and medical sciences, labour mobility, cultural exchange and diplomatic coordination. A joint Communiqué was also concluded, affirming a shared vision for strengthened Türkiye–Oman ties.

The MoUs and agreements Türkiye signed with Kuwait, Qatar and Oman collectively indicate Ankara’s shift towards a more institutionalised, multi-vector Gulf strategy centred on economic rationale, defence-industrial cooperation, Gaza solidarity and strategic alignment with Gulf development agendas.

Limitations and Challenges

Despite the breadth of agreements, the visit’s credibility largely depends on implementation. While Ankara’s Gulf outreach yielded 24 instruments, the predominance of MoUs and joint statements underscores a critical distinction. These instruments signal intent but do not guarantee material outcomes, and the visit’s credibility will ultimately hinge on whether significant capital flows and project execution follow. In the defence domain, the proposed procurement of second-hand Eurofighter Typhoons is a strategically consequential deliverable of the visit. However, its materialisation is predicated upon the resolution of complex licensing negotiations, interoperability standards, logistical architectures and NATO compliance protocols.

From the Gulf perspective, partners remain cautious actors navigating their own strategic equilibria *vis-à-vis* the US, Europe, Iran and intra-Gulf dynamics. Moreover, Ankara’s strong emphasis on Gaza–Palestine and its willingness to assume larger roles in post-conflict reconstruction expose Türkiye to heightened political risks, potentially drawing it into regional fault lines involving Israel, the US and Gulf–Iran dynamics.

Conclusion

Türkiye’s October 2025 Gulf engagement indicates a deliberate consolidation of economic and geopolitical strategy. However, its long-term impact will depend on whether the largely intent-driven instruments mature into tangible outcomes. The visit reaffirmed Ankara’s effort to diversify its Gulf partnerships, balancing its institutionalised relationship with Qatar by elevating ties with Kuwait and Oman,

²⁰ “[Türkiye and Oman Seal 10 Agreements, Including a USD 500 Million Joint Venture](#)”, Investment and Finance Office, Presidency of The Republic of Türkiye, 3 December 2024.

while simultaneously leveraging Gulf capital and investment frameworks to cushion domestic economic pressures. This outreach complements Türkiye’s parallel rapprochement with Riyadh, Abu Dhabi and Manama, signalling a comprehensive Gulf strategy. It also reflects a multi-vector approach, through which Türkiye seeks to broaden its strategic options by engaging multiple Gulf actors across defence, trade and industrial diplomacy.

In terms of defence-industrial output, Ankara’s pursuit of interim airpower solutions through prospective Eurofighter acquisitions from Qatar and Oman reflects a pragmatic recalibration as it awaits the operationalisation of the KAAN platform. Türkiye’s use of TOGG as an instrument of technological diplomacy further underscores its attempt to signal technological modernisation and project industrial credibility across the region.

Equally important is the renewed push for the Türkiye–GCC FTA, which embodies the most structurally significant component of Ankara’s economic diplomacy. The signing of the FTA would elevate Türkiye–Gulf commercial ties beyond transactional engagement and create long-term interdependencies aligned with Gulf development visions.

At the same time, Gulf partners continue to exercise strategic caution, preferring flexible cooperation mechanisms that preserve their autonomy amid complex regional alignments and great-power dynamics. The political volatility surrounding the Gaza peace plan and the sensitivities embedded in defence procurement add layers of uncertainty. Erdogan’s outreach enhances Türkiye’s visibility and aligns with its broader ambition to embed itself structurally within Gulf economic and security architectures.

About the Author



Dr. Abhishek Yadav is Research Analyst at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi.

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