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# BEYOND ALLIES: CAN TURKEY AND QATAR BECOME COMPLEMENTARY NATIONS?

Alliances are a salient feature of international affairs. They are particularly salient in the volatile Middle East where there is a history of multiple and often intertwined conflicts among regional actors. This perspective paper focuses on a developing partnership between two regional actors, Turkey and Qatar, as a possible example of 'complementary nations'. This concept has rarely been discussed by international affairs analysts and it is timely to launch such a discussion to make sense of widening and deepening ties between the two. While rooted in the

alliance literature, the notion of complementary nations does not merely point to a traditional alliance between two or more states but to a deeper kind of tie. As Nachmani tells us, the concept of complementary nations started circulating in Israeli policy circles with respect to Turkey in the 1950s. The idea in Israel was that Turkey and Israel could indeed complement each other with vast Turkey putting size and human resources and tiny Israel putting advanced industrial and technological know-how on the table (Nachmani 1987). Can Turkey and Qatar

complement each other in a similar fashion? Are Turkey and Qatar the new complementary nations of the Middle East? What is the key difference between alliances and complementary nations? Let me elaborate further below.

The concept of an alliance has been assigned a number of divergent meanings across history. During the 18th century, an alliance implied the pairing of two or more states for mutual security usually for a limited duration. In the 19th century, an alliance referred to a security arrangement regulated by a formal treaty involving a *casus foederis* or a situation whereby military commitments became operational. Softer definitions have started rising to take account of an increasing number of *de facto* alliances in the international system that lack formal arrangements but are akin to the ones that are formalized. In short, an alliance can be understood as the pursuit of joint efforts of greater or lesser of formality by two or more states to achieve more security. When seeking more security, states will usually try to influence the distribution of relative power to their advantage or to the disadvantage of their perceived adversaries.

Achieving more security, however, may not be the only reason why states establish alliances. As Barnett and Levy (1991) emphasized, domestic constraints and resource scarcity can lead states to search for allies as well. Security guarantees are as precious, perhaps even more precious, to a resource scarce state as manpower, military equipment or technical know-how are and an ally's value might be in those resources it provides.

The idea of complementary nations fits right here and attraction to the other party's resources is the key in making sense of it. A common threat perception is not necessarily a requirement in discussing complementary nations as in a traditional alliance (although it may well be and often is the case). Alliances can be formed between parties of equal strength or alternatively between a strong and a weaker party. In that case, however, the weaker party is often a burden on the stronger one and what happens is bandwagoning by the weak. The crucial element in complementary nations is that each party has otherwise attractive qualities but also specific structural weaknesses that can be compensated for with the help of the other. Mostly, complementary nations make up for one another's respective qualitative and quantitative shortcomings. As Nachmani (1987) explains, the idea of turning Israel and Turkey into complementary nations was persistently emphasized in Israel's policy circles in the 1950s as the newly-established Israel tried to break its diplomatic isolation. Turkey was an ideal candidate: it was one of the first states in the world to recognize Israel and shared with Israel a Western/American orientation. Their respective resources were ideally placed to compensate for the other's weaknesses. Turkey had vast land and human resources and a mostly agrarian economy. Israel was small in comparison but was highly industrialized and developed technologically. There could thus be a perfect 'division of labor' between sizeable/agricultural Turkey and relatively small/technologically-advanced Israel (Nachmani 1987: 65). Turkey, however, stayed aloof to the idea of

becoming complementary nations with Israel. I explain why below.

Can Qatar and Turkey become complementary nations in today's Middle East? There are structural similarities here to the Turkey-Israel case. Qatar is a small and wealthy state, the wealthiest in the world in fact in terms of GDP per capita in 2020 and consistently among the top wealthiest within the last 20 years (Global Finance 2020). In 2014, Turkey and Qatar established the Supreme Strategic Committee that has been providing for cooperation and high-level dialogue since then (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2021). Turkey also maintains a military base in Qatar under the 2014 deal. In June 2017, Turkey sent new troops and five armored vehicles to the base in addition to 4000 tonnes of dry food, fruit and vegetables to Qatar when it faced a regional blockade from the Arab Quartet (Reuters 2017).

The 2017 crisis brings me straight to the point of a specific structural weakness that Qatar can compensate for with Turkey's resources: food insecurity. Arid climate conditions mean that Qatar faces extreme challenges in growing its own food and imported nearly 90 per cent of its food prior to the regional blockade (AlJazeera 2020) which exposed just how vulnerable Qatar is in this area. Turkey, with its moderate climate and developed agricultural infrastructure, is a food exporter and the value of its exports has exceeded \$20bn recently as the Anatolian Agency (2021) reports. Exports to Qatar have been rising since the 2017 blockade and the high-purchasing power of Qatari consumers is very attractive to Turkish companies as the Agency (2017) adds. Food security can therefore be a crucial

area in which Turkey and Qatar can act as complementary nations.

A particular structural weakness in the Turkish case is its fragile economy which has come to rely heavily on financing from Qatar in the last couple of years. In May 2020, Qatar has provided over \$10 bn under an expansion of a prior 2018 currency swap deal and continued its investments in Turkey in several areas including the purchase of a 10% stake in the Istanbul Stock Exchange (Sonmez 2020; Soylu 2020). The Turkish economy's vulnerability to currency fluctuations in particular will mean that its reliance on outside financing is set to continue and wealthy Qatar can keep acting as a financial lifeline to Turkey.

Complementary nations are nations that can cover for each other's weaknesses and share a common security vision. A common interest in curbing Saudi influence in the Middle East, Qatar's need for military assistance as well as food security and Turkey's ongoing need for financing are the chief ties that unite Qatar and Turkey. The structural conditions for turning Turkey and Qatar into 'complementary nations' exists just like in the Turkey-Israel case where the two can make up for each other's respective qualitative and quantitative vulnerabilities. In that case, Nachmani (1987) reminds, Turkey, the heir to the Ottoman Empire, found it unpalatable to admit that tiny Israel was far advanced in certain areas. That was primarily why Turkey remained distant to Israel's idea of complementary nations. Today, certain segments in Turkish society worry that just too many assets are being sold to Qatar. Keeping this particular glitch in mind, we can continue to discuss and

develop the concept of 'complementary nations' with respect to Turkey and Qatar.

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