

# UAE's Rapprochement with Syria Aimed Against Turkey

By [Paul Antonopoulos](#)

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*In the midst of the coronavirus crisis, Syria's **President Bashar al-Assad** and Abu Dhabi's **Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan**, the head of United Arab Emirates (UAE), spoke by phone on Friday in the first such communication since the Syrian War began in 2011. This shows a metamorphosis of alliances and geopolitics in the Middle East and the wider region considering the UAE was one of the main backers of terrorist organizations who fought to remove Assad from power. However, for more than a year, the UAE has been sending signals showing a change in policy towards Syria. The phone call was after a long series of rapprochement that began in late 2018 with the reopening of the Emirati embassy in Damascus.*

"I have discussed with the Syrian president... updates on the coronavirus. I assured him of the support of the UAE and its willingness to help the Syrian people," Prince Mohammed [said on Twitter](#). "Humanitarian solidarity during trying times supersedes all matters, and Syria and her people will not stand alone."

A diplomatic source close to the case was quoted by the [Lebanese daily L'Orient-Le Jour](#) as saying the "Westerners, the Americans and French particularly, were against" a Syrian-Emirati rapprochement. According to the diplomatic source, the UAE is trying to gain favours from Moscow and has already won dozens of contracts, including in armaments, gas and infrastructure, but also with space cooperation. This is part of a broader geostrategic context and the stakes go far beyond Syria and the UAE. Rather, the UAE has acknowledged that Russia has taken a greater interest in the region, in particular in Syria and Libya.

Relations between the Gulf monarchies and the United States, traditional allies, have greatly deteriorated in recent years. The gradual disengagement of American forces from the region, but especially the lack of support from Washington against Turkey, made the monarchies with the exception of Qatar, lose the confidence they once had in the United States. According to the diplomatic source quoted by L'Orient-Le Jour, the UAE is trying to get closer to Beijing and Moscow, and the Crown Prince's phone call to Assad is evidence of that. The call also comes as relations with Iran softened, especially seen with the many Emirati delegations who visited Iran last year, however this has not softened the UAE's brutal Yemeni policy. None-the-less, this suggests a change in foreign policy that appeals to Moscow.

It appears then that the UAE's turn around in its Syria policy serves two purposes: first - to strengthen relations with Russia, second - to form an anti-Turkish bloc.

As Turkey actively pursues for the establishment of [a neo-Ottoman Empire](#), the UAE is aggressively undermining the project as it opposes the Muslim Brotherhood, an organization that Turkish **President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan** has openly supported and backed in Syria, Libya and Egypt. The UAE recognized the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization in 2014 after the fundamentalist group made plans to infiltrate and destabilize the Gulf country to take control – the main reason for the ever-increasing deterioration in relations between the UAE and Turkey.

Since then, the UAE has been actively pursuing to counter Turkish influence across the region. As part of its efforts to create an anti-Turkish block, the UAE have strengthened their relations with Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Both Saudi Arabia and Egypt fear being taken over by Muslim Brotherhood rule. However, the UAE’s pursuit of countering Turkey has not been reduced to only the Islamic world.

Greece, considered the “Old Enemy” by the Turks, received 11 tons of medical aid from the UAE on Thursday, with a Greek government press release [stating that](#) relations “began as economic cooperation, but thanks to the trust that was developed, it evolved into a strong bond.” This came as a working meeting of the Greece-UAE Broader Strategic Cooperation Forum [was held in Athens](#) on February 19 following the Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis’ visit to UAE. In 2019 and 2020, the UAE and Greece has conducted joint military drills and military heads have been meeting each other often in a clear directive against Turkey.

In Libya, the UAE has not held back in supporting the Libyan National Army in their struggle against the Muslim Brotherhood government in Tripoli, headed by the ethnic Turk Fayez al-Sarraj who has the full backing of Erdoğan. The UAE’s material assistance has been crucial in the success of the Libyan National Army’s battle against Muslim Brotherhood forces, a clear demonstration that the UAE are willing to directly check Turkey’s ambitions to exert its influence and power across the region.

By securing close relations with Greece and directly countering Turkey in Libya, the UAE’s rapprochement with Syria is another step in formulating an anti-Turkish bloc, with itself at the head. While Turkey has acted to strangulate countries who oppose its hegemony in the region, it now appears that it is the UAE who is pressurizing Turkey and isolating it. There is every chance that the UAE will begin sending material aid to Syria that will be crucial in its future battles to expel the Turkish military and their jihadist proxies from Syrian territory. This will once again undermine Turkey’s efforts to dominate Syria and be the main power in the region, a move that Erdoğan would not have expected.

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**Paul Antonopoulos** is a Research Fellow at the Center for Syncretic Studies.

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