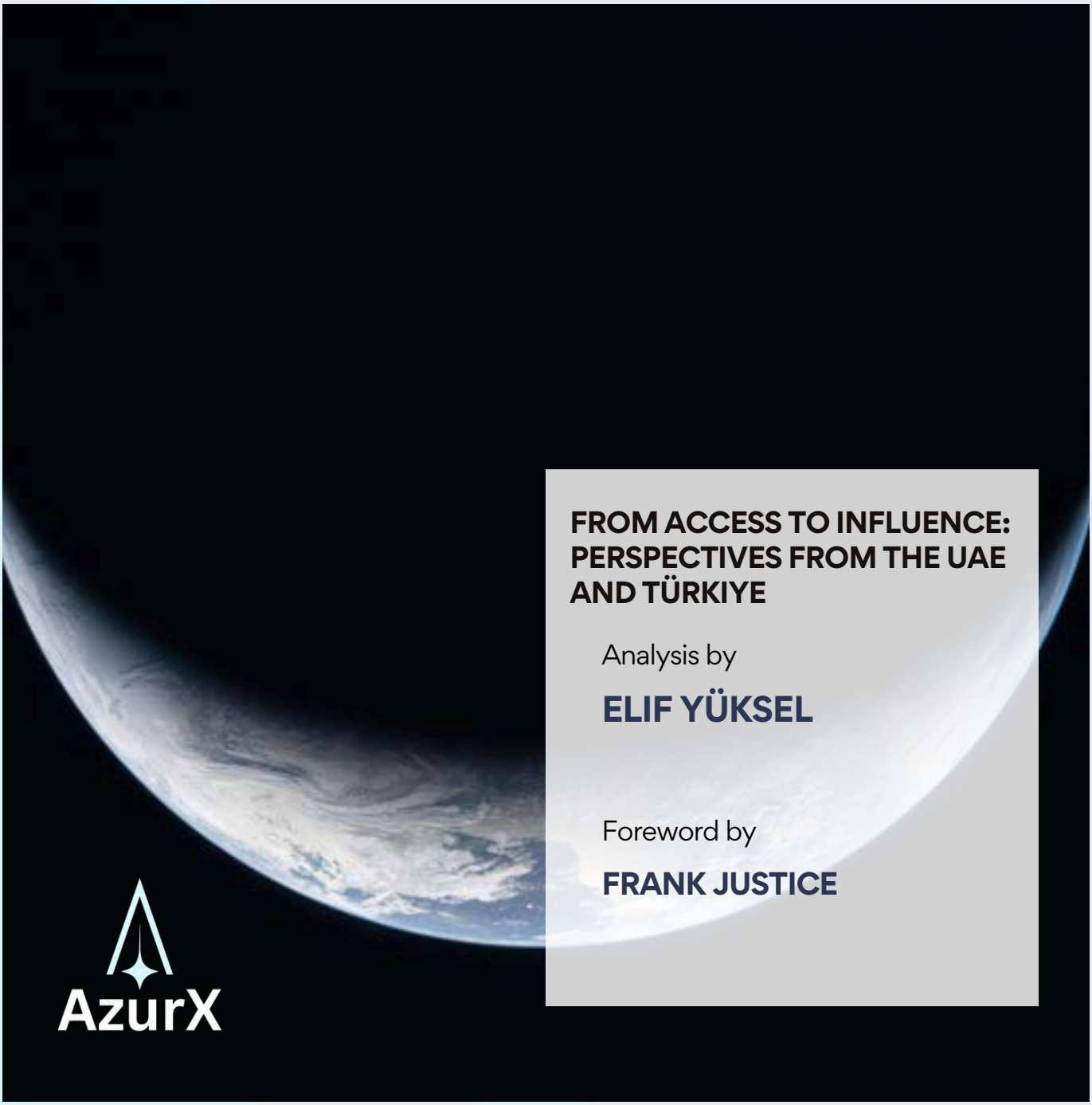
AX-GEN INSIGHT | JUL 2026

SPACE DIPLOMACY FOR EMERGING SPACE ACTORS IN THE ARTEMIS ERA



FROM ACCESS TO INFLUENCE: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE UAE AND TÜRKIYE

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FOREWORD - FRANK JUSTICE

Frank Justice is Director of the Space Diplomacy Initiative at Meridian International Center, advancing U.S. global partnerships in the space sector. Frank also leads Meridian's broader Open Diplomacy programming. Over the years, Frank has been Meridian's incubator establishing the Center for Diplomatic Engagement, expanding the Meridian Summit, and creating the annual Diplomacy Forum. He served for a decade as Meridian's Vice President for Diplomatic Engagement and spent a further ten years with Meridian's Center for Global Leadership. He holds a Master of Public Policy degree from American University and a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of Rhode Island.

At Meridian International Center, we see diplomacy as the art of orchestrating networks of influence, mobilizing partnerships to manage competition and solve global problems in real time. Elif Yüksel's comparative study of the UAE and Türkiye space ecosystems gives that definition concrete meaning within the space domain. Her analysis shows that diplomacy is not peripheral to the making of a spacefaring nation; it is embedded in the institutional choices, partnerships, and strategic positioning through which states navigate competition and secure long-term influence.

Yüksel engages the right vocabulary — credibility, trust, partnership — not as diplomatic boilerplate, but as analytical tools, showing how countries use these instruments of diplomacy to build, shape, and strengthen their space ecosystems. Diplomacy in space is not simply a matter of signing intergovernmental agreements. It is multilayered - built through consistent institutional commitment, cross-sector engagement, and the kind of credibility that comes from demonstrating real capability. While the UAE and Türkiye possess the financial means to be relevant spacefaring nations, they also maintain the critical institutional buy-in to make space a genuine national priority. That distinction matters enormously.

Equally important is the question of who the actors in space diplomacy actually are. Neither diplomacy nor space is the exclusive province of governments. The commercial space sector has become an indispensable participant in how nations establish and project space capacity, and universities build the human capital that undergirds both technical achievement and international credibility. Furthermore, regulatory and legislative alignment is every bit as consequential to meaningful international cooperation as headline policy agreements like the Artemis Accords — these frameworks shape the actual environment in which collaboration either flourishes or stalls.

Yüksel's analysis explores how UAE's trajectory offers a blueprint for emerging spacefaring nations looking to build genuine relevance — not through financial investment alone, but through deliberate ecosystem development spanning government, industry, and academia. Space sovereignty does not mean an isolated national realm; it demands mobilizing an entire ecosystem to make tangible contributions that strengthen national capabilities while deepening partnerships in the shared commons of space. Meridian's Space Diplomacy

Initiative reflects this core reality: preserving American leadership in space is inseparable from international engagement. The United States has institutionalized this through the Artemis Accords, while China is advancing parallel frameworks through APSCO and its International Lunar Research Station partnerships. The architecture of space leadership, wherever it originates, is built on relationships.

This piece is timely with Türkiye to host the International Astronautical Congress (IAC) this fall, and the UAE recently launching an International Space Cooperation Initiative — two moments that reflect exactly the kind of strategic positioning this article examines. Countries at every stage of space development would do well to take note. Space is the ultimate soft power tool, a domain that generates excitement, pride, and wonder unmatched by others. Elif Yüksel has produced a valuable glimpse into two pathways for how that relevancy is built.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elif Yüksel is an early Turkish pioneer and practitioner in international space policy and space diplomacy. She currently serves as Advisor and Representative of METU Space, Türkiye's first dedicated space technopark, and as strategic and operational advisor to private space companies, advising organizations, governments, and industry on international space policy, diplomacy, business strategy, and strategic partnerships. A Fulbright Scholar, Space Policy Institute Fellow, and International Space University alumna, she is particularly known for advancing practical approaches to institutionalizing space diplomacy among emerging space actors through her "from orbits to outcomes" framework.

Elif Yüksel is an active member of the AzurX Global Expert Network, specializing in Space Policy and Diplomacy.

The Artemis era is no longer best understood as a single U.S.-led lunar program with a growing list of partner flags attached to it. By June 2026, Artemis had instead evolved into a broader political, industrial, and governance ecosystem, still anchored in NASA leadership but shaped increasingly through international and commercial participation. This shift is reflected in the expanding Artemis Accords framework, which had reached 68 signatories, with regular workshops and implementation discussions feeding into wider multilateral processes such as COPUOS,[1] as well as in the program's evolving technical trajectory: Artemis II had flown successfully in April 2026,[2] while NASA's new "Ignition" architecture had recast Artemis III as an Earth-orbit systems demonstration ahead of a later lunar landing.[3,4] Taken together, these developments illustrate an increasingly iterative and adaptive programme structure in which technical pathways, governance arrangements, and commercial interfaces evolve in parallel, reinforcing a "living framework" in which participation entails engagement with technical, commercial, and diplomatic parameters that continue to evolve.

The Shifting Meaning of Participation

This shift becomes particularly significant for emerging space actors, seeking to establish or expand national space capabilities. In an earlier phase of space development, access itself was often the prize: a first satellite, a first astronaut, a first interplanetary mission, or a first symbolic memorandum with a major space power. Today, access is only the entry point. The harder question is what that access converts into over time: industrial participation, governance influence, interoperability, credibility, and the ability to remain relevant when architectures change. As the author has recently argued in an interview with Türkiye's national news agency, success in practicing space diplomacy is shifting "from orbits to outcomes" as defining success in space diplomacy transforms.[5-7] Therefore, the key test is no longer whether a state can enter the space domain, but whether it can translate activity into sustainable strategic international influence.[8] This is why the distinction between access and alignment has become more important in the Artemis era. To join a coalition is to gain visibility, but it can also entail normative expectations, industrial standards, and long-term political signaling. For emerging space nations, the challenge does not remain simply whether to participate; today, it extends to how to participate without narrowing future room for maneuver. Some states are responding by embedding themselves deeply inside coalition structures. Others are keeping a more flexible posture, engaging several institutional ecosystems at once.

IMAGE: "FROM ACCESS TO INFLUENCE" AUTHOR-DEVELOPED FRAMEWORK; VISUAL GENERATED BY CHATGPT USING OPENAI TOOLS, MAY 2026.

The United Arab Emirates and Türkiye illustrate these two different approaches particularly well across the Gulf and wider Middle East, where emerging space nations are increasingly navigating questions of alignment, industrial growth, and strategic autonomy simultaneously.[9] Both are ambitious, both are internationally active, and both see space as part of a larger national strategy. However, they are organizing their diplomatic trajectories differently.

The UAE Case

The UAE is one of the clearest examples of how an emerging space nation can lay the foundation for institutionalizing space diplomacy rather than treating it as an afterthought to technological achievement. This is reflected in its status as one of the original Artemis Accords signatories in October 2020.[10] It later hosted the 2025 Artemis Accords workshop in Abu Dhabi, where participants from 30 countries of the 55 signatory nations discussed implementation and operational challenges.[11] At the multilateral level, the UAE also chaired COPUOS for 2022–2023, underscoring that its engagement has not been limited to U.S.-aligned exploration architecture alone, but has extended into mainstream UN space governance.[12] This is precisely what makes the UAE case so important: it has pursued coalition-minded alignment while preserving legitimacy in broader multilateral channels. This trajectory has continued at the time of writing. At the Fourth Artemis Accords Workshop held in Lima, Peru, the UAE participated alongside representatives from all 67 signatory states and organized two tabletop exercises focused on "non-interference," building on recommendations developed during the Abu Dhabi workshop in May 2025.

The episode illustrates how the UAE has increasingly positioned itself as an active contributor to both Artemis governance discussions and the operationalization of emerging norms surrounding cislunar cooperation and space sustainability.

IMAGE: A DELEGATION FROM THE UAE SPACE AGENCY AT THE FOURTH ARTEMIS ACCORDS WORKSHOP HELD IN LIMA, PERU. SOURCE: UAE SPACE AGENCY

That diplomatic activism is backed by unusually coherent institutional foundations underpinned by sustained public investment and long-term strategic planning. In May 2026, UAE officials announced that the country had invested more than AED 40 billion in the space sector, framing space development as part of a broader partnership-driven strategy integrating international cooperation, commercial ecosystems, and economic diversification objectives.[13] The UAE's National Space Policy explicitly ties the sector to economic diversification, scientific capability, national interests, commercial development, international cooperation, and a safe and stable space environment. Since then, the UAE has updated its legal architecture, starting with Federal Decree-Law No. 46 of 2023 on regulating the space sector, followed by implementing resolutions on authorizations, penalties, and space resources.[14]

This does not appear as a minor administrative detail. It is what gives diplomatic positioning credibility. When a state arrives at international tables with clear policies, an active regulator, and visible licensing pathways, it represents a capacity beyond only asking to join the conversation; it is demonstrating that it can operationalize its commitments.

The UAE's astronaut program reflects this evolution particularly well. Hazzaa Al Mansoori's 2019 ISS mission and Sultan Al Neyadi's six-month expedition aboard the International Space Station in 2023 – one of the longest Arab astronaut missions to date – moved the UAE beyond symbolic participation toward sustained operational engagement in human spaceflight.[15]Across more than 200 scientific experiments conducted in collaboration with international partners, Al Neyadi's mission further strengthened the UAE's visibility within wider scientific and operational cooperation networks tied to the Artemis generation of space exploration. This trajectory has continued through the second batch of the UAE Astronaut Programme, including Nora AlMatrooshi, the first Arab woman astronaut, and Mohammad AlMulla, both of whom graduated alongside the Artemis generation class at NASA's Johnson Space Center in 2024.

The gradual development of a trained national astronaut corps, together with planned future participation in Artemis-related missions, has helped deepen long-term working relationships with NASA and international partners, reinforcing how space diplomacy increasingly operates through lived technical and operational ecosystems rather than solely through intergovernmental agreements.

IMAGE: FIRST EMIRATI FEMALE ASTRONAUT NORA AL MATROOSHI CONDUCTS TRAINING AT THE NEUTRAL BUOYANCY LABORATORY AT THE JOHNSON SPACE CENTER IN HOUSTON, USA.
SOURCE: ARABIAN BUSINESS

The UAE has also comprehended – relatively earlier with aligned actions than many emerging space actors – that space diplomacy now works through industrial ecosystems with different actors as much as it works in agency-to-agency agreements. In 2022, the AED 3 billion National Space Fund was created to support national capabilities, diversify the economy, and foster cooperation between Emirati and international companies.[16,17] The National Space Academy is explicitly designed to build long-term human capital, while the Space Means Business campaign - kicked off in June of 2023 - and related Space Economic Zones seek to draw private companies, local and international, into mission supply chains.[18,19] This is exactly the kind of policy mix that attaches strategic significance in the Artemis era: if space cooperation is now increasingly mediated by commercial participation, then states need domestic mechanisms that help their companies become partners rather than spectators.

The Emirates Mission to the Asteroid Belt (EMA) offers a particularly outstanding example. From the start, the UAE Space Agency framed the mission not only as a scientific undertaking but as a vehicle for industrial development and knowledge transfer. It pledged that at least 50 percent of the overall contracted mission would go to private-sector companies, described the mission as a "private sector first approach," and later identified local companies such as 971Space and Sadeem Space Solutions among those helping lead the design of the Justitia lander.[20,21] The Technology Innovation Institute, serving as the prime contractor for the EMA lander, further illustrates the UAE's broader effort to develop indigenous deep-space engineering and testing capacity through nationally embedded industrial ecosystems.[22] Scheduled to fly aboard the MBR Explorer, the lander also represents the UAE's first locally built deep-space spacecraft.

The point here is not simply that the UAE is involving companies, but that it is actively structuring and using space exploration to build a repeatable national cooperation architecture in which public missions generate commercial opportunity, local technical heritage, and international partnerships simultaneously.

Some other examples can be seen in the steady expansion of its broader satellite and downstream space ecosystem. Alongside its Earth Observation satellites, such as DubaiSat-1 (2009) and DubaiSat-2 (2013), as well as its fully indigenous satellites KhalifaSat (2018) and the recently launched MBZ-SAT (2025), the country has continued strengthening its communications infrastructure through platforms such as YahSat and Thuraya – Yahsat's subsidiary mobile telecommunications services platform that built the UAE's first satellite, Thuraya-1 which became the Middle East's first mobile telecommunications satellite launched in 2000. At the same time, the country has also expanded into emerging SAR and commercial geospatial ecosystems through initiatives linked to the SIRB programme under FADA – EDGE's space-focused entity – and partnerships with ICEYE.[23] Meanwhile, OrbitWorks' plans to invest $1 billion over the next five years to expand satellite manufacturing and constellation activities further reflect the UAE's longer-term effort to turn space activity into durable industrial and technological capacity with broader economic relevance.[24]

The UAE's role in Gateway reflects this logic particularly well. In January 2024, NASA and the Mohammed bin Rashid Space Centre announced that the UAE would contribute to Gateway's Crew and Science Airlock module, alongside plans for a future UAE astronaut mission connected to Artemis.[25] Since then, however, NASA's "Ignition" framework has begun reshaping the broader lunar architecture, including a pause to Gateway in its current form as attention shifts toward a phased lunar base model and more flexible surface infrastructure.[26,27] Yet this shift does not necessarily diminish the strategic value of the UAE's earlier positioning. If anything, it highlights a more important point about the Artemis era itself: architectures evolve, timelines change, and programs are repeatedly recalibrated, but the states that secure early roles inside the underlying industrial and operational ecosystem tend to retain relevance even as specific configurations are revised. The UAE's approach was therefore never only about association with a single platform. More importantly, it placed the country inside the wider cislunar infrastructure conversation through interoperability, industrial participation, and long-term technical contribution.

Its scientific credibility reinforces this posture as well. The Emirates Mars Mission's Hope Probe, which entered Martian orbit in 2021, generated unprecedented atmospheric and climate data while further consolidating the UAE's profile as a scientifically active deep-space actor.[28] That trajectory has since expanded into lunar exploration through the Emirates Lunar Mission and the Rashid Rover programme. Rashid Rover 1, launched in 2022 aboard Japan's Hakuto-R Mission 1 lander, became the first Arab lunar rover mission to reach lunar orbit before the lander's unsuccessful touchdown attempt. Together, these missions have helped strengthen the UAE's scientific visibility, deepen international cooperation networks, and reinforce the broader diplomatic credibility underpinning its growing role within emerging cislunar and deep-space ecosystems.

Just as important, the UAE has built itself into a convening platform. The Abu Dhabi Space Debate brought together more than 1,000 attendees from 53 countries in 2024, including ESA, UNOOSA, JAXA, Thales Alenia Space, the African Space Council, and numerous government

agencies, while also hosting closed-door industry workshops with U.S., Japanese, and Emirati stakeholders.[29] At Expo 2025 Osaka, the UAE Space Agency explicitly linked Artemis, the deep-space economy, bilateral industrial partnerships, and sustainability under a single public diplomacy umbrella.[30] This is what sophisticated space diplomacy looks like in practice: not only joining platforms created by others, but creating forums where the diplomatic, commercial, and regulatory agenda can be shaped through your own institutional and policy capacity. In practice, the UAE is increasingly helping shape the institutional, commercial, and diplomatic environment surrounding the evolving Artemis ecosystem.

Türkiye as a Parallel Case

Türkiye offers a useful parallel case while reflecting a different strategic calibration in the region, as its approach is shaped more by multivector engagement and strategic flexibility across competing governance frameworks, including both the U.S.-led Artemis Accords and China's parallel but not similar growing lunar ecosystem, International Lunar Research Station (ILRS), neither of which Türkiye had joined as of May 2026. Rather than rapidly embedding itself within a single exploration architecture, Ankara has pursued a more calibrated approach centered on preserving maneuverability across multiple cooperation environments while gradually expanding sovereign technological and industrial capacity. Türkiye's space trajectory also builds on a longer satellite legacy dating back to TÜRKSAT 1B, the country's first communications satellite, launched in 1994.[31] Since then, the country has progressively developed its domestic satellite capabilities through earlier technology development including the country's first Earth Observation satellite BİLSAT (2003), before advancing toward indigenous Earth Observation satellites such as RASAT (2011), GÖKTÜRK-2 (2012), and the first indigenous submeter-resolution satellite İMECE (2023), later designated as GÖKTÜRK-2B, alongside its first indigenous communications satellite TÜRKSAT 6A (2024).[32]

IMAGE: ILLUSTRATION OF TÜRKSAT 6A. SOURCE: SATNEWS.COM

As of May 2026, Türkiye operated nine active government-controlled satellites, including six communications satellites and three Earth Observation satellites, reflecting the country's growing operational depth across both communications and remote sensing domains.[33]

It has also broadened industrial dialogues rapidly under bilateral cooperations, very recently with Axiom Space and Italy.[34,35] The country is also hosting the 77th International Astronautical Congress in Antalya in October 2026.[36] Furthermore, Türkiye is a founding member of ITU, EUMETSAT, APSCO, and in December 2025, TUA President Yusuf Kıraç was elected APSCO Council Chair for 2026–2027, the first Turkish representative to hold that position.[37] Moreover, Türkiye's international space profile is broader than is often recognized. It is one of the relatively few states party to all five UN space treaties, including the Moon Agreement, and it participates through multiple regional and multilateral channels, including COPUOS, APRSAF, EURISY, COSPAR, ISNET, Group on Earth Observations, and the Organization of Turkic States, in addition to the organizations aforementioned.[38]

The 12U OTS-Sat CubeSat project shows how Ankara is also using space cooperation in a regional institution-building mode.[39] In this sense, Türkiye is increasingly visible across several lanes at once when it comes to space governance regionally. Where Türkiye differs from the UAE is not in its level of ambition, but in how it has approached positioning, institutionalization, and long-term strategic flexibility. Türkiye's current trajectory increasingly reflects an effort to expand sovereign technological depth while preserving diplomatic flexibility across multiple cooperation environments.

Human spaceflight has also gradually become part of Türkiye's broader strategic space trajectory. The country's first astronaut and science missions in 2024, including Alper Gezeravcı's mission aboard the International Space Station and Tuva Cihangir Atasever's suborbital research flight, carried a total of 20 scientific and operational experiments that expanded Türkiye's practical exposure to emerging commercial human spaceflight ecosystems, while also helping normalize space activities more visibly within the country's broader public and institutional landscape.[40]

This broader trajectory is also becoming increasingly visible in Türkiye's expanding commercial and private space ecosystem. Emerging commercial actors such as Fergani Space and Plan-S increasingly point toward a gradual diversification of the ecosystem beyond exclusively state-led structures. Fergani Space, for instance, has continued expanding its orbital activities through successive deployments of indigenously developed systems, including the launch of hybrid-propulsion-based Orbital Transfer Vehicle FGN-TUG-S01 and the recent launch of FGN-100-D3 as part of its long-term Uluğ Bey Global Positioning System initiative, which aims to deploy more than 100 satellites over the next five years.[41] Furthermore, Plan-S has expanded its Connecta IoT constellation to 16 active satellites, reflecting wider efforts to build nationally embedded space-based infrastructure and downstream connectivity capabilities within Türkiye's growing commercial ecosystem.[42]

Türkiye's space ecosystem has also increasingly been supported through expanding public investment and nationally coordinated strategic programs. According to the 2026–2028 central government budget framework, approximately 8.7 billion Turkish lira (around USD 270 million) was allocated to space and aerospace-related programs for 2026, reflecting the state's growing commitment to indigenous technological capacity and long-term strategic infrastructure development.[43] This is particularly visible in areas linked to sovereign access and lunar-oriented capability development under the framework of Türkiye's National Space Program and National Space Program Strategy Document (2022).[44,45] DeltaV's Hybrid Propulsion System (HIS), being developed within the Lunar Mission of Türkiye framework for the planned

2027 lunar mission, reflects broader efforts to strengthen indigenous propulsion and mission-integration capacity for future deep-space environments.[46] If successful, it would become the first hybrid propulsion system ignited in space. Similar efforts are also becoming visible in the UAE case. In 2025, the UAE's Technology Innovation Institute successfully launched the country's first hybrid research rocket, reflecting growing regional interest in propulsion technologies and sovereign deep-space engineering capabilities beyond satellite development alone.[47] Also, Türkiye's announced plans regarding the development of a spaceport in Somalia further reflect growing strategic attention toward sovereign access, launch infrastructure, and long-term autonomy in critical space capabilities.[48] Parallel initiatives under the National Space Program launched in 2021 – including the Rubidium Atomic Frequency Standard (RAFS) project, currently approaching completion, carried out within the Regional Positioning and Timing System (BKZS) framework by TÜBİTAK UME and TUA, as well as METU Space Technopark, Türkiye's first dedicated space technology development zone – further point to longer-term ambitions surrounding independent access, navigation, strategic infrastructure, and institutionalized innovation capacity across the broader space ecosystem.[49,50]

IMAGE: ILLUSTRATION OF AN ASTRONAUT REPRESENTING THE TURKISH SPACE AGENCY (TUA).
SOURCE: TURKISH SPACE AGENCY

From this perspective, Türkiye's absence from the Artemis Accords at this stage should not necessarily be interpreted as strategic disengagement, but rather as part of a more calibrated sequencing strategy within an increasingly fragmented governance environment. In practice, Ankara appears to be prioritizing the gradual accumulation of interoperable technical and industrial capability while preserving room for diplomatic maneuverability across multiple cooperation architectures before moving toward deeper alignment within any single framework. As the author argued in 2025 and again in 2026, Türkiye eventually needs a clearer national space policy document, stronger interagency coordination mechanisms, and, in the longer term, a dedicated national space law if it wants to convert technical gains into more sustained diplomatic influence. The result is a model that prioritizes long-term maneuverability and sovereign capacity accumulation, even if its institutional visibility develops through a different rhythm than more deeply coalition-integrated approaches.

That is why Türkiye works well as a parallel case: its approach reflects a distinct strategic calibration among emerging regional space actors navigating the Artemis era. It demonstrates the strengths of a country that wants to remain maneuverable across several cooperation environments while ensuring strategic autonomous capacity in critical space technologies as well as related subsystems. The risk, however, is that high visibility without sufficiently formalized diplomatic architecture can leave influence under-converted. In a fragmented space order, flexibility is an asset, but so is institutional density. The core comparative lesson is not that every emerging space nation should imitate the UAE exactly. It is that whichever route a country chooses, coalition-minded alignment or multi-vector flexibility, it needs to build country-specific national structures that can carry diplomatic intent beyond one-off announcements and headline missions.

Regional Implications for the Gulf and Beyond

For Gulf readers in particular, the broader regional picture is striking. The UAE was an original Artemis signatory in 2020, Bahrain joined in 2022, Saudi Arabia joined in 2022, and Oman joined in January 2026. In the wider Arab space, Jordan and Morocco also joined the Accords in April 2026. This does not mean that the region is moving in lockstep. It does mean, however, that Gulf and Arab governments increasingly see lunar exploration frameworks as part of a broader diplomatic and strategic landscape. Across the region, Artemis is gradually becoming tied to larger questions of technological alignment, trusted partnerships, industrial positioning, and long-term influence within emerging space governance structures. Seen from this lens, space diplomacy is increasingly being used as a practical mechanism for securing strategic relevance in order to better aim for building interoperability, expanding industrial cooperation, strengthening political relationships, and ensuring a place within the ecosystems likely to shape the next phase of lunar activity. The region is, therefore, gradually becoming part of the diplomatic, industrial, and governance architecture forming around the Artemis era itself.

IMAGE: THE COMMITMENTS OF THE ARTEMIS ACCORDS AND EFFORTS BY THE SIGNATORIES TO ADVANCE IMPLEMENTATION OF THESE PRINCIPLES SUPPORT THE SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE EXPLORATION OF SPACE. SOURCE: NASA

More broadly, space diplomacy is no longer confined to Artemis or lunar exploration frameworks, but increasingly reflects wider state strategies spanning technology access, trade diversification, industrial partnerships, and geopolitical alignment.

Seen from that perspective, the UAE–Türkiye comparison becomes even more relevant. Their CEPA, signed in March 2023 and in force since September 2023, is not a space agreement, but it is highly relevant to space diplomacy because it shows how trade, investment, advanced technology, and industrial partnerships are increasingly interwoven.[51] In May 2026, UAE officials stated that non-oil trade with Türkiye had exceeded $45.2 billion in 2025 and had nearly tripled compared with 2022.[52] For governments and CEOs alike, that matters: future space partnerships will rarely emerge in isolation from the broader political economy of bilateral relations and industrial cooperation. In the Gulf context, space diplomacy is becoming part of a larger ecosystem that includes trade agreements, sovereign investment, AI, advanced manufacturing, and regulatory cooperation. Within this context, the CEPA programme – with 32 agreements concluded and 14 already in force – reflects the UAE's broader commitment to open, rules-based trade as a mechanism for economic diversification and for expanding access to high-growth markets, reinforcing the same ecosystem logic that now underpins space diplomacy itself.[53]

Even the African angle, though not yet central to this discussion, is already coming into view. At the 2024 Abu Dhabi Space Debate, the African Space Council and Egyptian Space Agency were present alongside major global agencies and industry leaders, and UAE officials explicitly framed the event as a forum for supporting emerging markets and building a more equitable space economy. That suggests that future Gulf space diplomacy will not be limited to transatlantic or East Asian partnership lanes. It is likely to expand across the Global South as more emerging actors look for training, industrial participation, data partnerships, and governance voice.

What Credible Space Diplomacy Requires

IMAGE: AN ARTIST'S CONCEPT OF TWO SUITED CREW MEMBERS WORKING ON THE LUNAR SURFACE. SOURCE: NASA

The central lesson of the Artemis era is that credible space diplomacy is built, not declared. It rests on a combination of policy clarity, regulatory readiness, multilateral presence, industrial positioning, convening power, and specialized human capital. The UAE has moved further in assembling those pieces into a coherent model. Türkiye has demonstrated that a more flexible, multi-vector strategy can also yield diplomatic room to maneuver, but that it too must be institutionalized if it is to generate durable influence. These are not mutually exclusive paths. They are different answers to the same strategic problem.

For emerging space actors, the choice ahead is therefore not simply between joining or not joining Artemis, nor between "East" and "West." The real challenge is to develop enough alignment to be interoperable, trusted, and economically relevant, while preserving enough autonomy to adapt as architectures shift and geopolitical conditions change. The UAE has leaned toward institutionalized coalition-building, within structured multilateral frameworks, while Türkiye has pursued a more flexible multi-vector approach to international space engagement. Both approaches contain valuable lessons. But in both cases, visibility alone is not enough. The countries that matter most in the next phase of lunar cooperation will be the ones that can remain indispensable even when roadmaps are revised, missions are delayed, or coalition boundaries blur.

Therefore, the next frontier for space diplomacy is not access alone, and not prestige alone. It is an influence that can survive change. In the Artemis era, successful states will be those that can turn participation into policy leverage, projects into partnership ecosystems, and national ambition into internationally recognized strategic credibility. For the UAE, that process is already well underway. For Türkiye, the opportunity remains very real, but it will depend on whether flexibility is matched by stronger institutionalization. For the Gulf and other emerging space actors, the broader takeaway is clear: diplomacy should not follow the space program after the fact. It should be designed into the architecture from the start.

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