

TURKISH-SAUDI RELATIONS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNAL  
AND REGIONAL DYNAMICS DURING THE 1990s AND THE 2000s

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **TURKISH-SAUDI RELATIONS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNAL AND REGIONAL DYNAMICS DURING THE 1990s AND THE 2000s**

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This thesis aims to analyze Turkish-Saudi relations with covering the impact of the domestic, regional and international developments on relations during the 1990s and the 2000s. The bilateral relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia, two heavyweights in the Middle East, are based on mutual respect. Due to the different political considerations and Turkey's security orientated foreign policy, the relations between the two countries were limited during the 1990s. However, the internal transformations in the two countries and the developments in regional and international level changed the course of the relations during the 2000s. On the Turkish side, the coming to power of the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) in 2002 with a new discourse towards the Middle East has been important. On the Saudi side, King Abdullah's coming to power in the kingdom in 2005 has paved the way for the two countries to come closer. The official visits from both sides and several agreements signed between two countries further developed the relations. The problematic issues in the Middle East, such as the Palestinian issue, Syrian conflict, Iranian nuclear threat, instability in Iraq and common security concerns pushed the two countries towards further cooperation. This thesis not only examines

the transformation in Turkish and Saudi foreign policy but also looks at the main drivers of the relationship between two countries. This study argues that a combination of regional and international factors pushed two countries towards cooperation when it came to the developments regarding the balance of power in the region. Yet, the thesis also finds out that domestic factors can act as a limiting force on this cooperation especially if the nature of the regional developments is related to ideology rather than the balance of power.

Keywords: Turkish Foreign Policy, Turkish-Saudi Relations, Justice and Development Party, King Abdullah, Saudi Arabia.

## ÖZ

### İÇSEL VE BÖLGESEL DİNAMİKLER BAĞLAMINDA 1990'LAR VE 2000'LER BOYUNCA TÜRK-SUUDİ İLİŞKİLERİ

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Yüksek Lisans, Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü

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Bu tez, 1990'lı ve 2000'li yıllarda içsel, bölgesel ve uluslararası gelişmelerin Türk-Suudi ilişkilerine etkisini analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Türkiye ve Suudi Arabistan arasındaki ikili ilişkiler karşılıklı saygıya dayanmaktadır. Farklı siyasi anlayış ve Türkiye'nin güvenlik odaklı dış politikası nedeniyle 1990'lı yıllar boyunca iki ülke arasındaki ilişkiler sınırlı kalmıştır. Ancak 2000'li yıllarda her iki ülkenin iç politikasında yaşanan dönüşüm ile bölgesel ve uluslararası düzeyde meydana gelen gelişmeler Türk-Suudi ilişkilerinin seyrini değiştirmiştir. Türkiye'de 2002 yılında Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi'nin (AK Parti) iktidara gelmesinin ardından oluşturduğu Ortadoğu'ya yönelik yeni söylem önemli olmuştur. Suudi tarafında ise 2005 yılında Kral Abdullah'ın tahta oturması iki ülke arasındaki ilişkilerin ilerlemesine imkan vermiştir. İki ülke arasında imzalanan anlaşmalar ve karşılıklı resmi ziyaretler Türk-Suudi ilişkilerinin daha da gelişmesini sağlamıştır. Suriye krizi, İran'ın nükleer tehdidi, Filistin sorunu ve Irak'taki istikrarsızlık gibi Ortadoğu'daki problemler ve ortak güvenlik kaygısı iki ülkeyi daha fazla işbirliğine teşvik etmiştir. Bu tez, Türk-Suudi dış politikasındaki dönüşümü incelemekle kalmamaktadır, aynı zamanda iki ülke arasındaki ilişkileri etkileyen temel etmenleri analiz etmektedir. Bu tezde, bölgedeki güç dengesi ile ilgili bölgesel ve uluslararası faktörlerin iki ülkeyi

iřbirlięi yapmaya ittięi belirtilmektedir. Tez, ayrıca bölgesel geliřmelerin yapısı, güç dengesi yerine ideoloji ile ilgili olduęunda iç faktörlerin iki ülke arasındaki iřbirliğinde sınırlayıcı bir etkisi olduęunu savunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türk Dıř Politikası, Türk-Suudi İliřkileri, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, Kral Abdullah, Suudi Arabistan

*To my dear mother*



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLAGIARISM.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
ÖZ.....	vi
DEDICATION.....	viii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	ix
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	x
LIST OF TABLES.....	xii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xiii
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. RELATIONS BETWEEN TURKEY AND SAUDI ARABIA IN THE 1990s 14	
2.1. Domestic factors in Turkish-Saudi relations in the 1990s.....	15
2.1.1. Domestic Politics in Saudi Arabia.....	15
2.1.2. Domestic Politics in Turkey.....	18
2.1.3. Riyadh's approach towards Ankara and Saudi Foreign Policy.....	25
2.1.4. Turkish Foreign Policy towards Middle East, Saudi Arabia.....	33
2.2. Regional factors in Turkish-Saudi relations in the 1990s.....	37
2.2.1. 1990 Invasion of Kuwait and stances of Ankara and Riyadh.....	37
2.2.2. Turkish-Saudi relations within regional context of the 1990s.....	45
2.3. International factors in Turkish-Saudi relations in the 1990s.....	51
2.3.1. Post-Cold War Era: Turkey and Saudi Arabia.....	51
3. RELATIONS BETWEEN TURKEY AND SAUDI ARABIA IN THE 2000s 58	
3.1. Domestic factors in Turkish-Saudi relations in the 2000s.....	60
3.1.1. Emergence of AK Party in Turkey.....	60
3.1.1.1. New Discourse towards Middle East.....	60
3.1.1.2. Turkish-Saudi mutual investments and economic ties.....	67
3.1.1.3. The issue of Ottoman heritage in Saudi Arabia.....	74
3.1.2. King Abdullah's era in Saudi Arabia.....	77

3.1.2.1. Change of domestic and foreign policy with new king.....	77
3.1.2.2. Considering Turkey as a strong regional ally .....	81
3.1.2.3. Role of Turkish soap operas.....	84
3.2. International factors in Turkish-Saudi relations in the 2000s .....	88
3.2.1. Impact of 9/11 .....	88
3.3. Regional factors in Turkish-Saudi relations in the 2000s .....	92
3.3.1. 2003 US invasion of Iraq and change of political environment ....	92
3.3.2. Rising Iranian power in region .....	97
3.3.3. Common fields for cooperation: Palestine, Lebanon.....	101
3.3.4. Close cooperation through OIC, GCC .....	106
3.3.5. Post-2010 Era: Arab Spring .....	111
3.3.5.1. Arab Uprisings: Turkish and Saudi approaches.....	111
3.3.5.2. Turkish-Saudi Cold War on Egypt.....	119
3.3.5.3. Turkish Model: Rise and Demise.....	122
4. CONCLUSION .....	127
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	134
APPENDICES	
A. TURKISH SUMMARY .....	154
B. Tez Fotokopisi İzin Formu.....	165

## **LIST OF TABLES**

### **TABLES**

Table 1 Trade volume between Turkey and Saudi Arabia during 2001-2013 ..... 73

Table 2 Trade volume between Turkey and the GCC states in the recent years ... 110

## LIST OF FIGURES

### FIGURES

Figure 1 Foreign Trade between Turkey and Saudi Arabia in the 1990s .....	48
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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The main purpose of this thesis is to examine the evolving nature of Turkish-Saudi relations during the periods of the 1990s and the 2000s within the context of domestic, regional and international developments. The 2000s witnessed a general improvement of Turkey's relations with the Middle Eastern countries, in general, and Saudi Arabia, in particular. The 2000s poses an important turning point in Turkish-Saudi relations, where we could see high-level mutual visits taking place between two countries as well as increasing cooperation on regional issues. In order to understand the roots of the developing relations between the two countries in the 2000s, the thesis firstly covered the course of Turkish-Saudi relations during the last decade of twentieth century.

Despite the growing relations between two countries in the 2000s, it is interesting to see that there are not many scholarly studies over the subject with the exception of news analysis and some articles which do not exceed few pages. Although there are several books on Turkish foreign policy and Saudi foreign policy in particular, the literature on Turkish-Saudi relations is scarce. Based on the content briefly underlined above, this thesis claims to make a unique contribution to the literature on Turkish-Saudi relations as being a primary source covering the subject comprehensively. In order to understand Turkish-Saudi relations from different vantage points, this study aimed to analyze the bilateral relations between two countries in three levels: domestic, regional and international.

Moreover, what makes this thesis important is that it is a product of a field work. Since, there are limited sources on the subject; in order to richen this study, several interviews have been conducted by Saudi officials, academics and journalists during the field research period in Saudi Arabia. Throughout the thesis, the views of Saudi

and Turkish academics are given at length. Since there is a lack of scholarly sources on the topic discussed, the thesis utilized from books, academic papers, news articles and agreements signed between two countries. Therefore, regarding the methodology of the thesis, the study is not only a product of interviews but an empirical analyzes of related books, articles, newspapers and websites over Turkish and Saudi foreign policies during the 1990s and the 2000s. Moreover, the websites of Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Saudi Arabia Ministry of Foreign Affairs also provided official information over the subject. Although many of these studies have been useful and is used as a reference in this thesis, the absence of a comprehensive study on Turkey-Saudi relations led the author of this thesis to richen the study with analyzing on three levels during the two important decades of relations.

Since this study scrutinizes the bilateral relations from a comprehensive point that include the impact of the domestic, regional and international factors on relations, the research question of this thesis would be read as to search which factors facilitated the relations and which factors limited and to what extent these factors affected the Turkish-Saudi relations during the years of the 1990s and the 2000s.

The Republic of Turkey recognized the independence of the countries founded on the former territories of the Ottoman Empire with the signing of the Lausanne Agreement.<sup>1</sup> When the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was founded in 1932, Turkey was the first country to recognize it and inked a friendship agreement with the newly-established Arab country. However, since the establishment of the relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia, the bilateral relations were limited. During the Republican era in Turkey, the relations with the Arab world, in general, and Saudi Arabia, in particular, did not see much improvement. Turkey's ruling elite preferred to engage into efforts of nation-building with western orientation, remained distant from Middle East, pursued a policy of non-involving to the conflicts and wars in its immediate neighborhood, gave priority to establish close ties with the western world in order to preserve the secular state structure. The newly-formed republic's efforts to modernize the country led to the adoption of a Western-oriented foreign policy

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<sup>1</sup> Muhittin Ataman, "Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?" SETA | Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research | July, 2012 | Brief No: 57

line. Turkey with its secularist approach was posing a challenge to Saudi Arabia's political system which is based on religious Wahhabi ideology and was not considered by the kingdom as a potential partner to cooperate in the region. On the other side, for Turkey, Arab world represented backwardness and an area of political risks that Turkey should avoid interfering. Therefore, due to the negative perceptions towards each other based on the prejudices of the past, differing political systems and ideological structures adopted by both countries, the relations between two countries were limited.

The kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which was founded in 1932, is an absolute monarchy ruled by the al-Saud family. The government of the country is headed by the king, who is also the prime minister as well as the commander in chief of the armed forces. The Saudi monarch also appoints the diplomats and ambassadors of the country.<sup>2</sup> Since the establishment of the kingdom, the sons of the founder Abd al-Aziz bin Abd-al Rahman al Saud is ruling the country. If the king is incapacitated, the crown prince, who is also the deputy prime minister, becomes the acting ruler. There are no political parties in Saudi Arabia and the opposition is banned. The kingdom does not have a constitution and considers Quran, the holy book of Islam, as the constitution of the country. Islamic law (*Shariah*) is being implemented in the kingdom.

The political and the social environment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have been influenced by the Wahhabi ideology initiated by the religious reformer Muhammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab. The legitimacy of the Saudi Arabia is based on the 1744 alliance of Muhammad ibn Saud, whose descendants are now the rulers of the kingdom, and the Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1787), whose descendants are now the country's leading religious family known as al-Shaykh. Ulama (the body of religious leaders) serve a crucial role in preserving the tradition and social values of the country as well as play a significant role in legitimizing the decisions of the Saudi regime.<sup>3</sup> For instance, when King Fahd allowed the presence of the American troops in the kingdom during the Gulf war (1990-91), Ulama played an influential role in

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<sup>2</sup> Sherifa Zuhur, "Saudi Arabia, Middle East in Focus", ABC-CLIO, 2012, pg.85

<sup>3</sup> Zuhur, "Saudi Arabia, Middle East in Focus", pg.95



decreasing the tension among the religious Muslims, who harshly criticized the decision of the king.

Saudi Arabia is the home to Islam's two holiest cities; Mecca and Medina and the king also has the official title of 'Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' since 1986. Hosting of these two cities makes the kingdom one of the main players in the Arab and the Muslim world. The economic power of a country also has an important impact on its foreign policy. Saudi Arabia enjoys a special importance in the world thanks to its rich oil reserves and strategic location. It is the world's dominant exporter of oil with holding more than 25 percent of the world's known oil reserves.<sup>4</sup> The total population of the country is approximately 28 million.<sup>5</sup>

The threat perception also plays a significant role in determining the foreign policy decisions of a country. Iran's expansionist policies in the region and its nuclear issue, al Qaeda terrorist activities, the instability in Iraq and the spillover effect of the Arab Spring are regarded as the main foreign threats by Saudi Arabia. The internal threat faced by the Saudi kingdom is its Shiite population concentrated in the eastern province, which makes about 15 percent of the total population. Riyadh is concerned over an adverse impact of Iranian influence on its own Shiite population. Saudi foreign policy motivations are mostly determined in countering Iranian influence in the region.

On the other side, Republic of Turkey, which was established in 1923, is a parliamentary representative democracy where political parties run for elections to establish a government. Since 1946, the country has adopted the multiparty system. The president is the head of the state. The president holds mostly ceremonial position. The prime minister, who is the head of the government, holds the real power in hand along with the cabinet in Turkish politics. Turkish political structure is based on the separation of power; in which executive power is acted by the Council of Ministers, the legislative power by Turkish Parliament (Grand National Assembly

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<sup>4</sup>Saudi Arabia profile, BBC News, 2 December 2014 (last updated), Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14702705>

<sup>5</sup> See, <http://data.worldbank.org/country/saudi-arabia>

of Turkey) and judiciary power is independent and separated from executive and legislative powers. Turkish constitution sets out the principles and the rules of the management of the state and the responsibility of the state towards its citizens.

Besides the government, the military could be considered part of the broader political environment of a country. The military had a significant influence on the domestic and foreign policy of Turkey for a long time. The military considers itself as the protector of the principles of the republic and has intervened in politics on several occasions when it felt that the secular values of the state were challenged.<sup>6</sup> Turkey witnessed three military coups in 1960, 1971, and 1980 and in 1997 an unarmed military intervention. In each intervention, after period of interim military rule, the government was returned to the civilian politicians. Since 2002, the ruling party in the country is Justice and Development Party (AK Party), which came to power with a landslide victory in elections. The total population of Turkey is approximately 81 million.<sup>7</sup> Also, Turkey is a NATO member and has the second largest army within the organization after the United States.<sup>8</sup> It is also the candidate country for the membership of the European Union, which initiated accession negotiations with Ankara in 2005. The level of the economic development also plays a role in shaping foreign policy of a country.<sup>9</sup> With its growing industrial economy and investment-friendly environment, Turkey is the 18<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world.<sup>10</sup>

After providing brief information regarding the political, social and economic environment in the two countries, it is significant to analyze the impact of the domestic, regional and international developments on Turkish-Saudi relations in the past two decades. The changing of the international order as a result of the end of the Cold War and the impact of this international development on Turkish and Saudi

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<sup>6</sup> Turkey profile, BBC News, 28 August 2014 (last updated), Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17988453>

<sup>7</sup> CIA Factbook, See <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tu.html>

<sup>8</sup> “Turkey and the European Union: Domestic Politics, Economic Integration and International Dynamics”, Ed: Ali Carkoglu & Barry Rubin, Routledge, 2003, pg.42

<sup>9</sup> Hans. J. Morgenthau, “Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace”, Ed: Kenneth W. Thompson, McGraw-Hill, 1993, pp. 133-134.

<sup>10</sup> See, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/turkey/overview>

foreign policy has drawn considerable academic attention. Some Scholars such as Meliha Altunışık and Alexander Murinson have argued that the changing of the international order with the end of the Cold War and the regional developments in the post-Cold War era had significant implications on Turkey's foreign policy. For Altunışık, "on the international level, the systemic change of 1989 has had a profound impact on Turkey and unveiled a new context to re-think Turkish foreign policy"<sup>11</sup> and Murinson says that this change is "responsible for a shift in general Turkish foreign policy."<sup>12</sup> One goal the thesis aims to show is the impact of the end of the Cold War on Turkish and Saudi foreign policy. The change of the system led to the emergence of many factors that caused an impact on the foreign policy decisions of the two countries. The collapse of the Soviet threat forced both Ankara and Riyadh to redefine their foreign policy line and reset their calculations. In this respect, Muhittin Ataman's contribution is important, as he explains that the end of the Cold War enabled a closer engagement in bilateral relations between Turkey and the Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia.<sup>13</sup>

However, the most significant development that took place following the fall of the Iron Curtain was the Gulf War of 1990-91, which, as Hamit Batu argues, pushed Turkey to deviate from its traditional approach towards the region.<sup>14</sup> This thesis covers the Gulf War as the most significant development in the early 1990s that pushed Turkey to pursue a more active foreign policy in the regional affairs. There are several opinions among the scholars over the impact of the Gulf War on Turkish foreign policy. Some Scholars such as Philip Robins, Sabri Sayarı, Alan Makovsky and William Hale point out that Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East witness a significant change during the Gulf War, while some such as Nur Bilge Criss argue that Turkish foreign policy did not deviate from its traditional approach and that it was disputable whether Turkey's participation in the anti-Iraq camp in the

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<sup>11</sup> Meliha Benli Altunışık, "Worldviews and Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East", *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 40, 2009

<sup>12</sup> Alexander Murinson, "Turkish Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century", *Mideast Security and Policy Studies No. 97*, 2012

<sup>13</sup> Ataman, "Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?"

<sup>14</sup> Hamit Batu, "Turkish Foreign Policy in a Changing World, *Studies on Turkish-Arab Relations*", 6 (1991), pg. 85

war was a change in Turkey's foreign policy.<sup>15</sup> Sayarı, in his article named "Turkey: the Changing European Security Environment and the Gulf Crisis", describes Turkey's foreign policy during the Gulf War as a "major break from decades of established Turkish policy concerning non-involvement in Middle Eastern conflicts."<sup>16</sup> In similar fashion, Makovsky, in his article titled "The New Activism in Turkish Foreign Policy", says that "in joining the Gulf War coalition, Turkey broke several of its long-standing taboos."<sup>17</sup>

The second chapter of this thesis gives a special importance to the Gulf War as a regional development that played an important role in the improvement of the relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Although, Turkey's active support to the anti-Iraq camp received great appreciation from the Middle Eastern countries, in general, and Saudi Arabia, the main player of the war, in particular, several issues such as; the domestic political instabilities, the security concerns related to the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which intensified its attacks against Turkey from neighboring countries, and the water dispute with Syria and Iraq, limited Turkey's relations with the region in the following years of the 1990s. As stated previously, there is an enormous literature over Turkish foreign policy towards Middle East during the 1990s. Nilsu Gören argues that in the 1990s, for Turkey, the Middle East was the major source of its security concerns.<sup>18</sup> Turkey's strained relations with Iran, Syria, Iraq and the PKK threat originating from these countries pushed Turkey to adopt a security-orientated understanding in its internal and external policies during the 1990s, thus limiting to pursue an active foreign policy towards the Middle East. Throughout the 1990s, the growing Kurdish separatism, which posed a serious threat to Turkey's territorial integrity, security and status quo

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<sup>15</sup> Nur Bilge Criss, "Turkish Foreign Policy Toward the Middle East", MERIA Journal Volume 1, No.1, 1997

<sup>16</sup> Sabri Sayarı, "Turkey: the Changing European Security Environment and the Gulf Crisis", Middle East Journal, 46:1 1993

<sup>17</sup> Alan Makovsky, "The New Activism in Turkish Foreign Policy", The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, SAIS Review, 1999

<sup>18</sup> Nilsu Gören, "Lessons Learned: The Turkish role in arms control and regional security talks in the Middle East", Edited by: Chen Kane & Egle Murauskaite, "Regional Security Dialogue in the Middle East, Changes, Challenges and Opportunities", Routledge, 2014, pg. 137

since the 1980s, was the most significant issue and Ankara's foreign policy towards the Middle East was mostly determined according to this threat. Meliha Altunışık has extensively studied the impact of the Kurdish separatism on Turkish foreign policy, with particular attention to the Middle East. For instance, Altunışık elaborates Turkey's approach to the Middle East from the security perspective, in her article named "Turkey: *Arab Perspectives*", as: "Turkey felt threatened by developments in the region, notably in Iraq after the Gulf War as well as Syrian support for the PKK. Turkey chose to deal with these threats by adopting policies prioritizing military means and balancing threats with alliances. Thus throughout most of the 1990s, Turkey was seen largely irrelevant to debate in the Arab world and mutual perceptions of threat and distrust characterized the relations."<sup>19</sup> This thesis underlines that the security-based perspective of Ankara and Saudi support to Syria's anti-Turkey campaign in the Arab world throughout the 1990s could be considered as factors that limited Turkish-Saudi relations. Philip Robins, who comprehensively covered Turkish foreign policy in his book "Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy Since the Cold War", states that "the nature of threats, both as perceived from a state and as perceived by other states regarding the state, is a key variable in the development and evolution of foreign relations."<sup>20</sup> Turkey's strained relations with Syria due to PKK and water issues had adverse impact on Turkey's approach towards the Middle East and accordingly to the Arab World, in which Saudi Arabia as a heavyweight play a significant role. As another source over Turkey's Middle East policy in the 1990s, Ali Balcı underlines that due to the PKK threat, Turkey's policy-makers aimed on preserving territorial integrity and secularism and the military bureaucratic elite determined Turkey's relations with the Middle East only around security concerns.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Meliha Altunışık, "Turkey: *Arab Perspectives*", Foreign Policy Analysis Series. 11, TESEV Publications, 2010

<sup>20</sup> Philip Robins, "Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy Since the Cold War", C. Hurst & Co, London, 2003, pg. 189

<sup>21</sup> Ali Balcı, "Türkiye Dış Politikası: İlkeler, Aktörler, Uygulamalar", Etkileşim Yayınları, 2013, pg.212

In regards to Turkey's internal situation during the 1990s, there are some opinions that base Turkey's limited relations with the Middle Eastern countries, including Saudi Arabia, to domestic instabilities. For instance, Muhittin Ataman, in his article titled "Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners", argues that due to the political instability in Turkish domestic politics in the 1990s, there were ups and downs in bilateral relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia and says that "radical secularist understanding of the military-backed coalition government in Turkey reversed the route of bilateral relations and Ankara returned to its traditional approach of mistrust and neglect."<sup>22</sup> Philip Robins and Ömer Taşpınar also evaluate the status of the domestic politics in Turkey in the 1990s. Taşpınar refers to Turkey of the 1990s as a "lost decade", which he describes as "a war with Kurdish separatists, polarization between secularists and Islamists, economic turmoil, and systemic corruption".<sup>23</sup> For Robins, periods of coalition government was characterized by competition among insecure leaders which led to "fragmentation and competition" in foreign policies.<sup>24</sup> He then goes on to underline the impact of instability and competition in the domestic politics on the foreign policy by stating that "Turkey had nine foreign ministers during July 1994- June 1997". In the thesis, there are several Saudi scholars who share the similar views mentioned above. However, this thesis argued that although, Turkish domestic politics witnessed several government changes throughout the 1990s, Turkey's foreign policy towards the Middle East was coherent and determined by the security concerns. The thesis underlined that in the 1990s the ultimate goal of Turkey was to eliminate the PKK threat and in order to achieve this goal, a policy without concession towards the regional countries, including Saudi Arabia, was inevitable.

Until the late 1990s, Turkey pursued a distant, cautious and a security-based foreign policy towards the Middle East. The mutual threat perceptions and distrust dominated the Turkish-Arab relations. The atmosphere began to change considerably after the signing of the Adana Accords with Syria in 1998. Particularly following the

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<sup>22</sup> Ataman, "Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?"

<sup>23</sup> Ömer Taşpınar, "Turkey's Middle East Policies Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism", Carnegie Middle East Center, No.10, 2008

<sup>24</sup> Robins, "Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy Since the Cold War", pg. 64

capture of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1999 and his announcement of putting an end to hostilities, Turkey's security concerns and threat perception of PKK began to decrease. As many analysts argue "resolving the Öcalan case was like the bursting of the bubble."<sup>25</sup> After the elimination of the PKK threat, Turkey's relations with regional countries started to develop.

This thesis underlines that Turkey's normalization with the neighboring states started from 1999 onwards thanks to the former foreign minister İsmail Cem's regionally-based foreign policy approach. It was during the tenure of Cem, the signing of the Adana agreement, capture of Öcalan, a period of trust-building in the relations with the Middle Eastern countries and Turkey's activism towards the Middle East happened.

With the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) coming to power in Turkey in 2002, the relations with the Middle Eastern countries started to further deepen. The new leadership advocated maximum cooperation, pro-active, dynamic, and multidimensional foreign policy. The mastermind of AK Party's foreign policy, Ahmet Davutoğlu, emphasized the importance of the elimination of the historical prejudices against the Middle East and acknowledgement of Turkey's Ottoman legacy. His doctrine, "zero-problems-with-neighbors" policy occupied an important place in AK Party's foreign policy orientation towards the Middle East. This thesis notes that the AK Party leadership in Turkey found an opportunity to build its vision and policy regarding the Middle East upon the activism initiated in the previous era. Some scholars such as Meliha Altunışık underline that the AK Party principles shared important similarities with previous attempts and that the new leadership had more opportunities to implement them in a more comprehensive way.<sup>26</sup> Cem also believed that the Turkish foreign policy should not alienate from its historical and cultural roots and should be aware of its rich identity and historical assets inherited

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<sup>25</sup> See, Özden Zeynep Oktav, "Water Dispute and Kurdish Separatism in Turkish-Syrian Relations" *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations*, Vol. 34, 2003; also: "Syria forms new alliances", *Christian Science Monitor*, 2002

<sup>26</sup> Meliha Altunışık, "Turkish Foreign Policy in the 21st Century", *CIDOB International Yearbook*, 2011

from the Ottoman time.<sup>27</sup> It is important to note that there were significant attempts to open Turkey's doors for a multidimensional foreign policy before the AK Party came to power.

Altunışık, in her article named "Turkish Foreign Policy in the 21st Century", also argues that the domestic, regional and international developments provided opportunity for the AK Party to increase its role in the region and implement the policies mentioned above. The regional and international developments also paved the way for the AK Party to further engage with the Middle Eastern countries. During the era of the AK Party, Turkey started pursuing a more pro-active and multidimensional foreign policy towards the regional countries, including Saudi Arabia. As part of its pro-active foreign policy, Turkey strengthened its political and economic relations with Saudi Arabia with signing several agreements and cooperating on several issues regarding the region.

The domestic transformations that the two countries experienced in the early 2000s had significant impact on the foreign policies of each country. Turkish-Saudi relations further bolstered after King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud became the new king in 2005. The new monarch pursued a more active, multidimensional and pragmatic understanding in the foreign policy and sought to strengthen Riyadh's relations with Ankara. It was the domestic transformation in the two countries and the understanding of keeping aside differences that positively affected bilateral relations and the foreign policy orientations towards each other. In her article titled "Turkish Foreign Policy, its Domestic Determinants and the Role of the European Union", Meltem Müftüler Baç also underlines that the changes in the domestic politics in Turkey led to the reshuffling of foreign policy aims with an understanding of developing relations with the regional countries.<sup>28</sup>

In the last section of the thesis, a special importance has been given on the impact of the post-2010 developments in the region on Turkish-Saudi relations. The impact of

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<sup>27</sup> İsmail Cem: "Turkey in the New Century", 2001, pg.3

<sup>28</sup> Meltem Müftüler Baç, "Turkish Foreign Policy, its Domestic Determinants and the Role of the European Union", South European Society and Politics, Vol.16, No.2, 2011, pp.279-291



the Arab uprisings, which changed the balances in the region, on Turkish-Saudi relations has been covered in details. Although, Ankara and Riyadh enhanced their cooperation in the Syrian crisis, in which two countries seek for the fall of the Syrian President Bashar al Assad, the ouster of Egypt's first democratically elected President Mohammed Morsi with military intervention in 2013, led to the straining of Turkish-Saudi relations. Two countries adopted differing stances in the Egyptian crisis -- with Turkey supporting Muslim Brotherhood and Saudi Arabia backing military intervention. Turkish leadership's staunch support to the Muslim Brotherhood movement, which is considered by the Saudi regime as a threat to its survival, has put two countries at odds, while also putting the political and economic investments two countries have developed over the last decade at risk.

The thesis attempted to engage with domestic, regional and international context in which Turkish-Saudi relations takes place in order to offer a better understanding to foreign policy. As stated previously, the research question of this thesis is to determine which factors (domestic, regional, international) played a role in influencing Turkish-Saudi bilateral ties in the 1990s and the 2000s. While examining these factors, the thesis particularly underlined that the nature of the development is crucial in determining the approaches of two countries towards each other. In this regard, in order to analyze the characteristics of the relations between two countries, it is significant to examine which developments or factors led to cooperation and which led to competition.

The thesis contains four chapters. The first chapter is allocated to the introduction part. The second chapter analyses the bilateral relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia in the 1990s, the foreign policies of the two states and reveals the domestic structure of each state. The chapter is divided into three sub-headings. The first sub-heading "Domestic factors in Turkish-Saudi relations in the 1990s" discusses the domestic political developments in two countries during the 1990s and the influence of domestic politics on foreign policy making process. In this part, the approaches of the two countries towards each other from past to the 1990s is also examined. In the second sub-heading, the impact of the regional factors, particularly the impact of the First Gulf War, on the bilateral ties between two countries will be scrutinized. The

third sub-heading discusses the impact of the international factors, mainly the effect of Post-Cold War era, on Turkish-Saudi relations.

The third chapter covers the domestic transformations in Turkey and Saudi Arabia in 2000s. This chapter takes a closer look at the impact of these transformations on bilateral relations between Ankara and Riyadh in details. This chapter consists of five sub-topics. The first sub-topic “Domestic factors in Turkish-Saudi relations in the 2000s” discusses the change brought to Turkish foreign policy with the emergence of Justice and Development Party (AK Party) and the changes in Saudi foreign policy during the reign of King Abdallah. The second sub-topic is about the impact of international developments, including 9/11. The third sub-topic deals with the regional developments; such as the impact of 2003 US invasion of Iraq on regional order, Iranian threat, the fields of cooperation for Ankara and Riyadh on bilateral ties. This sub-topic also covers the post-2010 developments that are the Arab Spring and its impact on Turkish-Saudi policies. It also deals with the Turkish model in the Middle East and explains the rise and demise for the admiration to Turkish model. The thesis is completed with the conclusion part, which is devoted for the summary of the responds to the questions of the study. The conclusion part also includes the latest developments in Turkey and Saudi Arabia, while also offering predictions regarding the future of Turkish-Saudi relationship.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **BILATERAL RELATIONS BETWEEN TURKEY AND SAUDI ARABIA IN THE 1990s**

The domestic politics play a significant role in shaping the foreign policy of a country. Since the founding of the republic, the domestic politics had important impact on Turkey's foreign relations. Turkey's ruling elite, until the 1990s, preferred to remain distant from Middle East, pursued a policy of non-involvement to the conflicts and wars in its immediate neighborhood and gave priority to establish close ties with the western world. Turkey's lack of interest to the region, with addition to the historical prejudices, have created a negative perception of Turkey in Arab states, which throughout the twentieth century did not engage into close ties with Turkey.

However, the 1990s was a decade in which Turkey was dragged into the problems of the Middle East as a result of the changes in the international system. The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet threat, forced Turkey to leave the security and status quo orientated policies aside and shift its attention on the regional and international issues. Thus, the change of the international system led to the emergence of significant regional developments which pushed Turkey to play a more active role in the Middle East. Ankara's support for the US-led coalition against Iraq during the First Gulf War (1990-1991) created a positive climate between Turkey and the Middle Eastern countries. Turkey's activist policy was particularly appreciated by Saudi Arabia, the main player of the war.

Although the Gulf War, as a regional development, had a positive impact on Turkey's relations with Middle Eastern countries, several issues such as; the domestic political instabilities, the security concerns related to the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which intensified its attacks against Turkey from neighboring countries, and the water dispute with Syria and Iraq, limited Turkey's relations with

the region throughout the 1990s. During that decade, Turkish foreign policy was focused on two basic questions: how to strengthen further relations with the West, including the US, and how to contain the terrorism threat originating from neighboring countries, Syria, Iran and Iraq. Only after the signing of the Adana Accords with Syria in 1998, the capture of PKK leader Öcalan in 1999 and the announcement of a unilateral ceasefire following his capture, Turkey's security concerns regarding the region started to decrease and a normalization process began between Turkey and the Middle Eastern countries.

This chapter aims to respond to the following questions: During the last decade of the twentieth century, what was the status of the domestic politics in Turkey and Saudi Arabia. From past to the 2000s, particularly referring to the 1990s, how was the Saudi image in Turkey and the Turkish perception in Saudi Arabia. How and which factors determined the foreign policies of the two countries towards each other. In order to give a full picture, the chapter will touch upon the domestic, regional and international developments in the 1990s that affected the relations between two countries. In this respect, two important developments are covered: the First Gulf War and the end of the Cold War.

## **2.1. Domestic factors in Turkish-Saudi relations in the 1990s**

### **2.1.1. Domestic Politics in Saudi Arabia**

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia experienced a turmoil period during the 1990s both economically and politically. Following the First Gulf War (1990-1991), Saudi economy faced a difficult test in recovering the cost of the war. As a country that militarily, economically and politically supported the US-led war against Iraq, the kingdom wrestled with the uncertainties of politics and economics throughout the 1990s. Despite fighting the war in the frontline, the falling of oil prices, the increasing of unemployment among the educated youth, the stagnation of the economy and rising of debts in the aftermath of the war did little boost the popularity

of the royal family.<sup>29</sup> The government was consistently targeted for misgoverning the economy. Frustrated by the uncertainty in the country, the Saudi youth made calls for political reforms and further participation to the political life. In order to maintain the stability in economy and politics, in the early 1990s, King Fahd introduced a package of political, administrative and economic reforms. In 1992, he introduced the new basic law for the system of government, which identified the nature of the state, its aims and responsibilities and the relationship between the head of the state and the people, while emphasizing the equality of all citizens before the law.<sup>30</sup> There were also continuous calls by the Saudi youth, liberals and prominent members of the royal family for the restructure of the Majlis Al Shura (Consultative Council), a body that gives advices to the king on issues regarding the country. In 1992, in response to those demands, Fahd restructured the consultative council to give it a more formal and efficient mechanism.<sup>31</sup> Fahd also took steps regarding the military power of the kingdom. In the aftermath of the Gulf War, Saudi leaders were convinced that the kingdom needed to increase its military power to protect its territorial integrity.<sup>32</sup> During the 1990s, the kingdom increased its weapon purchases in order to prevent a similar vulnerable and weak position that they faced in 1990-91 Gulf War.

Beside the economic and political turbulence, Saudi Arabia also faced a series of terrorist attacks against its military, economic infrastructure and the American presence in the country in the mid-1990s.<sup>33</sup> King Fahd's decision to allow the American troops to base in Saudi soil in order to protect the kingdom from possible Iraqi attack during the Gulf War sparked harsh criticism from religious circles. The criticism against the royal family became more articulated in the 1990s when American troops continued to remain on the Saudi soil even after the Gulf War

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<sup>29</sup> Madawi Al-Rasheed and Robert Vitalis, "Counter-Narratives: History, Contemporary Society and Politics in Saudi Arabia and Yemen", Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pg.198

<sup>30</sup> See, <http://www.saudiembassy.net/files/PDF/Publications/Magazine/2002-Winter/King%20Fahd.html>

<sup>31</sup> See, <http://www.saudiembassy.net/files/PDF/Publications/Magazine/2002-Winter/King%20Fahd.html>

<sup>32</sup> Joseph A. Kechichian, "Political Dynamics and Security in the Arabian Peninsula through the 1990s", RAND, Santa Monica, CA, 1993

<sup>33</sup> Al-Rasheed and Vitalis, "Counter-Narratives: History, Contemporary Society and Politics in Saudi Arabia and Yemen", pg.198

ended. The continued presence of the American troops was considered as a serious provocation by radicals, who regarded the US-Saudi alliance as a wrong work and viewed America as an infidel power.<sup>34</sup> In 1995, a car bomb at the offices of the Saudi National Guard in Riyadh, and in 1996, attack to the Khobar Towers that is close to the US airbase in Dhahran caused lives of several Americans.<sup>35</sup> These terrorist attacks kept the Saudi government in a further difficult situation. The criticism regarding the mismanagement of the country exposed to Saudi royal family raised questions over its legitimacy. The situation in the country during the 1990s was linked to the Gulf War and to American military and diplomatic assistance, says Madawi Al-Rasheed and explains Saudi Arabia of the 1990s:

The turmoil of the 1990s, both political and economic, led to unusual dissent in a country not used to political confrontations in public, criticism within the country and abroad of the leadership, and terrorist acts on its own soil.<sup>36</sup>

The situation became more complicated when Fahd's health deteriorated and the king failed to rule the government. Although, Fahd continued to remain as the head of the state until his death in 2005, the daily duties of the government was carried out by the king's half-brother Crown Prince Abdullah.<sup>37</sup> From time to time, Fahd intervened in the state affairs or held the meetings with foreign dignitaries; but, it was Abdullah the undeclared ruler of the kingdom from the mid-1990s. However, the uncertainty in the country affected the decision-making process as Crown Prince Abdullah often clashed with other members of the royal family who preferred Fahd.<sup>38</sup> According to Al-Rasheed, due to these uncertainties, by the end of 1990s, Saudi domestic politics reached a period of stalemate.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Joseph Kostiner, "The Rise of Jihadi Trends in Saudi Arabia, The Post Iraq-Kuwait War Phase", Edited by: Hillel Frisch and Efraim Inbar, 'Radical Islam and International Security, Challenges and Responses, New York, Routledge, 2007, pg.78

<sup>35</sup> See <http://www.aawsat.net/2007/02/article55263529>

<sup>36</sup> Al-Rasheed and Vitalis, "Counter-Narratives: History, Contemporary Society and Politics in Saudi Arabia and Yemen", pg. 198

<sup>37</sup> Mordechai Abir, "Saudi Arabia in the 1990s: Stability and Foreign Policy", No. 365, 29 Av 5757 / 1, 1997

<sup>38</sup> Wayne H. Bowen, "The History of Saudi Arabia", Greenwood, 2007, pg.125

### 2.1.2. Domestic Politics in Turkey

The changing of the international order with the end of the Cold War and the regional developments in the post-Cold War era had significant implications on Turkey's domestic politics and foreign policy. During the 1990s, Turkey's domestic politics and its foreign policy towards the Middle East were mostly shaped by the security concerns. The decade of the 1990s witnessed the growing terrorist activities of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which launched its attacks against Turkish military and the civilians in Turkey from the border between southeast Turkey and northern Iraq,<sup>40</sup> where a power vacuum emerged as a result of the Gulf War. The growing Kurdish separatism, which posed a serious threat to Turkey's territorial integrity, security and status quo since the 1980s, was the most significant issue that dominated Turkish domestic politics and foreign policy and challenged Turkey's national security throughout the 1990s.

The Kurdish problem also had an important influence on Turkey's foreign policy and her relations with the Middle Eastern countries. Turkey's relations with both Iran and Syria were negatively affected due to their support to the terrorist organization in order to destabilize Turkey. The tensions with two of its immediate neighbors over the PKK issue further deepened Turkey's security problems. Particularly with Syria, with whom Turkey had thorny relations until the late 1990s due to several reasons; such as Damascus' claims over Hatay province, the PKK issue and the water dispute. As friction on water between two countries was indexed to Turkey's security issue throughout the 1990s, therefore; it is significant to firstly explain what the water dispute was. The disagreement between Turkey and Syria over the appropriation of the downstream waters from the Euphrates and Tigris rivers erupted in the 1970s<sup>41</sup> when Turkey started to construct dams on these rivers to develop agriculture and

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<sup>39</sup> Al-Rasheed and Vitalis, "Counter-Narratives: History, Contemporary Society and Politics in Saudi Arabia and Yemen", pg.198

<sup>40</sup> Ramazan Gözen, "Turkish Foreign Policy in Turbulence of the Post-Cold War Era: Impact of External and Domestic Constraints", Edited by: İdris Bal, Turkish Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era, 2004, Florida: BrownWalker Press, pg.48

<sup>41</sup> Zeki Kütük, "The marginalization of water in Turkish-Syrian relations", FIIA REPORT 25/2010

industry in the southeast of the country. Turkey's filling of the Atatürk Dam in 1990 reduced the water flow of Euphrates and led to the water shortages in Syria and Iraq. Turkey's Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP), which includes the construction of dams on the Euphrates, deepened the dispute further between Turkey and Syria and triggered the latter to support the PKK.<sup>42</sup> As Jongerden puts it, "Although GAP started as an energy and irrigation project to utilize the potential of the rich water and land resources in the region, the project also turned into a key element in the Turkish state's tackling of the Kurdish issue."<sup>43</sup>

In the 1990s, the water and PKK terrorism were the two problems linked to each other in bilateral talks between Turkey and Syria. As a retaliatory response to Turkey's water policy, as Kütük argues, Syria used the PKK as leverage in the 1990s, permitting the organization and its leader Abdullah Öcalan to have shelter and set up its training camps on its soil and in Lebanon.<sup>44</sup> As the PKK insurgency escalated by the late 1980s and the early 1990s, having realized that a diplomatic settlement is required with Syria, high-ranking Turkish officials launched initiatives to find a solution that would address Syria's concerns over water in return for an end to its support of the PKK. Prime Minister Turgut Özal, in 1987, decided to use water as a bargaining weapon against Syria<sup>45</sup> and made an agreement with Damascus that guaranteed a minimum annual flow of 500 cubic meters per second from the Euphrates basin to Syria<sup>46</sup>; while Damascus promised to cooperate with Turkey in security matters.<sup>47</sup> However, the attempt failed as Syria continued to support the PKK. The other two attempts in 1992 and 1996 also backfired as Syria ignored

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<sup>42</sup> Serdar Güner, "The Turkish-Syrian War of Attrition: The Water Dispute", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, January-March 1997, Vol. 20, Issue 1.

<sup>43</sup> Joost Jongerden, "Dams and Politics in Turkey: Utilizing Water, Developing Conflict", *Middle East Policy Council*, Spring 2010, Vol. 17, Number 1

<sup>44</sup> Kütük, "The marginalization of water in Turkish-Syrian relations"

<sup>45</sup> Damla Aras, "Turkish-Syrian Relations Go Downhill: The Syrian Uprising", *Middle East Quarterly*, Spring 2012, Vol. 19: Number 2

<sup>46</sup> See, "The Protocol of Economic Co-operation between Turkish Republic and Syria", *Resmi Gazete (Official Newspaper)*, December 10, 1987

<sup>47</sup> Güner, "The Turkish-Syrian War of Attrition: The Water Dispute"



Turkey's threats of retaliation for Damascus' sheltering of the PKK. After the efforts to find a diplomatic solution to resolve the issue of Syria's support to the organization failed, in the late 1990s, Turkish officials harden their rhetoric against Syria. The speech delivered by then Turkish Foreign Minister Deniz Baykal is worth recording here: "*Syria, as a neighbor country, should stop being the headquarters of a terrorist organization. It can be thought that hands with the blood of terror could be washed with more 'water'. However, Turkey will never bargain the use of terror for war.*"<sup>48</sup> In 1996, frustrated by the terrorist activities of PKK, Ankara sent a note to Syria to hand over Öcalan to Turkey and following this note, Turkey signed a Military Training Cooperation Agreement with Israel<sup>49</sup> – a development which caused fear and disturbance not only in Damascus but also in other Arab capitals.

The tension reached the peak in 1998 when Ankara and Damascus were at the brink of war after Turkey threatened to invade Syria if it continued to provide shelter for the PKK leader Öcalan, who was operating its organization's activities within Syrian borders, and did not cease providing logistical support to the organization. On the same day, while Chief of Staff General Huseyin Kıvrıkoğlu stated that Turkey and Syria were in an "undeclared war"; President Süleyman Demirel in his inaugural speech in the Parliament announced that Turkey was losing its patience and retains the right to retaliate against Syria.<sup>50</sup> In order to show its credibility, Ankara invited television crews to the Syrian border to illustrate the deployment of Turkish troops for war.<sup>51</sup>

Concerned over Turkey's military power, Damascus had to deport Öcalan and close the camps of the terrorist organization. In order to restore the bilateral relations, two countries signed the Adana agreement in 1998. With the agreement, Syria recognized

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<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Özlem Tür, "Turkish-Syrian Relations- Where are we going?" UNISCI Discussion Papers, No. 23, May 2010

<sup>49</sup> Baskın Oran (ed.), "Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar", İletişim Yayınları, 2001, Vol. II: 1980-2001, pg. 559

<sup>50</sup> "Turkey losing patience with Syria", BBC News, 4 October 1998, Available at: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/185992.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/185992.stm)

<sup>51</sup> Aras, "Turkish-Syrian Relations Go Downhill: The Syrian Uprising"

the PKK as a terrorist organization and pledged not to provide any kind of support, financial, logistic and military, to the organization on its soil.<sup>52</sup> The reason behind Syria's expulsion of Öcalan and sitting at the negotiation table was linked to Syria's concern over Turkish military capabilities in face of its weakness. However, after few years, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad stated in an interview that "*the deportation of Öcalan was not out of fear but because we preferred you. We would either be friends with the Turkish people or prefer the Kurds and lose you. Because our preference was with you, we sent Öcalan out.*"<sup>53</sup> The course of the bilateral relations between Turkey and Syria after the inking of the Adana Accords will be covered at the end of this chapter.

Beside Syria, the PKK also used the power vacuum in northern Iraq as an opportunity to launch its terrorist attacks against Turkey, causing the death of thousands of people and many more displaced. Also, continued PKK's attacks originating from the Iranian side deteriorated the relations between Ankara and Tehran.

In brief, during the 1990s, for Turkey, the Middle East was the major source of its security concerns<sup>54</sup> and Kurdish problem was the greatest domestic security issue. Turkey's strained ties with Iran, Syria and the terrorist threat originating from these two countries and northern Iraq pushed Turkey to adopt a distant and security-orientated understanding in its internal politics and external policy towards the Middle East until the late 1990s, thus limiting to pursue an active foreign policy towards region. Ankara's principal drive in formulating its Middle East policy was to get rid of PKK's separatism. Because the foreign policy was securitized, the military played an important role in influencing Turkey's foreign policy decisions. From the Saudi point of view, the presence of the military bureaucratic elite in Turkey was one

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<sup>52</sup> Oran (ed.), "Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar", pg. 566

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Tür, "Turkish-Syrian Relations- Where are we going?"

<sup>54</sup> Nilsu Gören, "Lessons Learned: The Turkish role in arms control and regional security talks in the Middle East", Edited by: Chen Kane & Egle Murauskaite, "Regional Security Dialogue in the Middle East, Changes, Challenges and Opportunities", Routledge, 2014, pg. 137

of the main factors that limited Turkey's relations with the Middle East and Saudi Arabia.<sup>55</sup> However, Robins elaborates the reason behind the presence of military in Turkish politics:

The Turkish armed forces, as the guardians of Atatürk's ideological legacy, see themselves as the ultimate guarantors of the state and its orientation; the repeated nature of external and internal security challenges necessitates that the military remain strong, vigilant and prepared to step in whenever required.<sup>56</sup>

For some, beside the PKK terrorism, the other issue that influenced Turkey's foreign policy towards the Middle East was the domestic political situation in the country. Gözen argues that during the 1990s Turkish domestic politics was trapped with instabilities and uncertainties and at the domestic sphere; the country was polarized socially, culturally and politically.<sup>57</sup> In the aftermath of the Gulf War, True Path Party (DYP) and Social Democratic People's Party (SHP) garnered the votes and formed a coalition government which rule the country from 1991 to 1994. While Turgut Özal, the president of the country during those years, advocated an active foreign policy towards the Middle East with further involvement in regional issues, the coalition government was not interested in pursuing such a policy.

The lack of harmony in Turkish politics also existed during the coalition government of Welfare Party (RP) and center-right DYP led by Tansu Çiller. In 1995 elections, the RP led by conservative leader Necmettin Erbakan garnered the majority of the votes by raising its votes from 5 percent in 1985 to 21.4 percent and won 158 seats, for the first time, being the biggest party in the Parliament in Turkish history. The change of the international system in the post-Cold War era and the impact of it on Turkey's domestic politics played an important role in the increase of RP's votes,<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Interview with Abdulrahman Saad Alorabi, *Assistant Professor at the department of History of King Abdulaziz University and editor at Madinah newspaper*, 11 March 2014, Jeddah

<sup>56</sup> Robins, "Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy Since the Cold War", pg. 163

<sup>57</sup> Gözen, "Turkish Foreign Policy in Turbulence of the Post-Cold War Era: Impact of External and Domestic Constraints", pg.39

<sup>58</sup> İhsan Dağı, "Kimlik, Söylem ve Siyaset: Doğu-Batı Ayrımında Refah Partisi Geleneği", Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 1998, pp.37-41

and also rising of political Islam in Turkey. During the Erbakan-Çiller coalition government, which only lasted for a year, there were divisions in conducting both domestic politics as well as the foreign policy. This division was particularly seen in the foreign policy sphere. According to Gözen, “while the RP emphasized Islamic policies in domestic and foreign policy, the DYP tried to maintain secular and pro-Western ideas.”<sup>59</sup> Erbakan’s Islamic tendency was posing a significant challenge to the country's secular form of the government.<sup>60</sup> It is significant here to note the statement of Robins on the challenge for foreign policy making during Erbakan’s era:

The critical months between December 1995 and February 1997 proved to be a period when competing ideological visions of Kemalism and Islamism wrestled and at times battled with each other in the domain of foreign affairs.<sup>61</sup>

Erbakan’s interest on building close relations with the Islamic states and Islamic movements; such as Hezbollah, Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas was also reflected on his controversial foreign visits to Iran, Libya and Sudan – countries that were considered as radical by the West. Erbakan was also eager to cement the ties with the Islamic countries with signing cooperation deals. The relations with the foreign governments, particularly with Saudi Arabia, Libya and Iraq, were improved, as Erbakan visited Saudi Arabia on 25 separate occasions since he assumed the premiership.<sup>62</sup>

Erbakan’s policy inclination caused concern within the military, which has significant influence on politics, as well as in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which has adopted a pro-western and pragmatic approach.<sup>63</sup> For instance, a defense

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<sup>59</sup> Gözen, “Turkish Foreign Policy in Turbulence of the Post-Cold War Era: Impact of External and Domestic Constraints”, pg.42

<sup>60</sup> Sabri Sayarı, “Turkey and the Middle East in the 1990s”, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3. (Spring, 1997), pp. 44-55

<sup>61</sup> Robins, “Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy Since the Cold War”, pg. 160

<sup>62</sup> Robins, “Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy Since the Cold War”, pg. 150

<sup>63</sup> Kemal Kirişçi, “Post-Cold-War Turkish Security and the Middle East”, *MERIA Journal*, Vol. 01, No.02, 1997

cooperation deal between Ankara and Tehran was expected to be signed during Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani's visit to Turkey; but that deal was blocked by the military and the coalition's partners, which strongly criticized Erbakan's such move.<sup>64</sup> In order to strengthen Turkey's links with the Islamic countries, Erbakan established the Developing Eight (D-8), which included eight countries such as Turkey, Iran, Egypt, Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Nigeria, in 1997. Erbakan considered the formation of the D-8 as a significant achievement during his era, which ended with the 28 February 1997 an unarmed military intervention that toppled the coalition government led by Erbakan's Welfare Party. In the aftermath of the ousting of RP-DYP coalition government, a transitional government led by Mesut Yılmaz's Motherland Party (ANAP) governed the country from 1997 to 1999. In the 1999 elections, Bülent Ecevit's Democratic Left Party (DSP) became the first; Devlet Bahçeli's Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) became the second party in the parliament.

Turkish politics witnessed several government changes during the 1990s. Within ten years of period, there were ten coalitions, each of which was formed by opposite parties.<sup>65</sup> This constant change in the governments during that decade led to the shifting of the several foreign ministers as well.<sup>66</sup> During the 1990s, the average term of a foreign minister was not more than ten months.<sup>67</sup> Turkey had nine foreign ministers between July 1994 and June 1997.<sup>68</sup> Some academics argue that the domestic transformations had a considerable impact on Turkey's foreign policy and that Turkey, for a decade from the 1990 to 2000, did not have stability in the political sphere. According to Linjawi, the uncertainty and instability in domestic politics limited Turkey's involvement to the Middle East. "It was one government

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<sup>64</sup> Kirişçi, "Post-Cold-War Turkish Security and the Middle East"

<sup>65</sup> Gözen, "Turkish Foreign Policy in Turbulence of the Post-Cold War Era: Impact of External and Domestic Constraints", pg.43

<sup>66</sup> William Hale, "Turkish Foreign Policy: 1774-2000", London: Frank Cass, 2002

<sup>67</sup> Ksenia Szelachowska, "Turkey - A regional power? The Case of Turkish Foreign Policy", Master thesis, Berlin, Centre international de formation européenne CIFE, 2013, pg.19

<sup>68</sup> Robins, "Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy Since the Cold War", pg. 64

overthrowing the other. In such a situation it was not easy for the Middle Eastern countries to consider Turkey as a partner to cooperate with.”<sup>69</sup>

In contrast to the Saudi view, although, Turkish domestic politics witnessed several government changes throughout the 1990s, Turkey’s foreign policy towards the Middle East was coherent and determined by the security concerns. Keeping aside the diverse thoughts in the country with some calling for further Turkish-Israeli cooperation, while some arguing that Turkey was pursuing one-sided policy towards Middle East with neglecting Arabs; Turkey’s ultimate aim, during the 1990s, was to eliminate the PKK threat.<sup>70</sup> In order to achieve this goal, a policy without concession towards Syria and other regional countries was inevitable.

### **2.1.3. Riyadh’s approach towards Ankara and Saudi Foreign Policy**

The bilateral relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia did not see much improvement since the establishment of the relations between two countries. The Republic of Turkey, which was established in 1923, recognized the independence of the countries founded on the former territories of the Ottoman Empire, with the signing of the Lausanne Agreement.<sup>71</sup> When the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was founded in 1932, Turkey was the first country to recognize and it inked a friendship agreement with the newly-established Arab country. However, until the 1990s, the relations between the two countries were limited due to their negative perceptions towards each other based on the prejudices of the past and also due to the opposing political regime and ideological structures adopted by Ankara and Riyadh. As Ataman puts it, “While the Kingdom employs the sharia/religious law, has a traditional social structure, and an autarchic economic system, Turkey has a strictly secular political system, a relatively Westernized social structure, and a liberal

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<sup>69</sup> Interview Haitham H. Linjawi, *Assistant Professor at the department of Political Science of King Abdul-Aziz University*, 13 March 2014, Jeddah

<sup>70</sup> Oran (ed.), “Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar”, pg. 564

<sup>71</sup> Muhittin Ataman, “Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?” SETA | Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research | July, 2012 | Brief No: 57

economic system.”<sup>72</sup> Turkey’s perception of the Saudi Arabia was mainly characterized by suspicion and the understanding that Saudis revolted several times against Ottoman rule during the critical years of the First World War and betrayed the Ottomans by cooperating with imperial powers. While, Saudi Arabia’s understanding of Turkey was shaped by Ottoman legacy and anti-Turkish perception was attributed to the fear that one day Turkey may increase its influence on the former Ottoman lands again.

As mentioned above, during the Republican era in Turkey, the relations with the Arab world, in general, and Saudi Arabia, in particular, did not see much improvement. Turkey preferred to pursue a distant policy towards the Middle East by not engaging into any close relationship with the regional countries, not taking side in Middle Eastern conflicts or wars and by preserving the secular state structure. Turkey with its secularist approach was not considered as a potential ally or partner to cooperate with in the region. As a sign of the low-profile relations between two countries, until the 1990s, no Saudi king visited Turkey with the exception of King Faisal (1964-1975), who just visited Turkey for a couple of hours to participate an international conference, in 1966. Alorabi elaborates the reasons behind the Arab suspicion towards Turkey:

Turkey, during the Kemalist era, was pursuing a policy of having closer relations with the West and turning its back to the Middle East. One of the main factors that limited the relations with Turkey was the security-oriented policy adopted by Ankara towards the Middle Eastern countries during this era. On the Saudi side, there was an understanding that since Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Turkey distanced itself from Arabs and this affected the relationships between Turkey and the Arab countries.<sup>73</sup>

In mid-twentieth century, Turkey’s relations with the Arab World followed zigzags. In face of the Soviet threat, in the 1950s, Turkey actively took part in the pro-

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<sup>72</sup> Ataman, “Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?”

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Abdulrahman Saad Alorabi, *Assistant Professor at the department of History of King Abdulaziz University and editor at Madinah newspaper*, 11 March 2014, Jeddah

Western efforts to prevent communist influence in the Middle East.<sup>74</sup> As part of these efforts, the Baghdad Pact, a pro-Western alliance was founded in 1955 between Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and the United Kingdom. Although, Turkey's active policy in taking part in the Baghdad Pact resulted with the strengthening of her security against communist threat, it also kept her in a difficult situation with certain complications and dangers.<sup>75</sup> Turkey's role in the creation of the Baghdad Pact not only got harsh reactions from the pro-Soviet Arab countries, such as Egypt, but also deteriorated its relations with the Arab world. Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser expelled Turkey's Ambassador to Cairo, Hulusi Fuat Tugay, and publicly targeted Turkey's Middle East policy, describing it as "anti-Arab".<sup>76</sup> The Baghdad Pact was harshly criticized for alienating the Arabs, thus creating divisions among them, and causing isolation of Turkey.<sup>77</sup> In addition to Egypt, Saudi Arabia was also strongly against the Baghdad Pact.<sup>78</sup> Arı notes that Turkey's participation to the Baghdad pact deepened the political difference between Turkey and the Arab states and adds: "Although Baghdad pact was an initiative formed by the Adnan Menderes government to increase Turkey's influence in the Middle East, it further distanced Turkey from Middle Eastern countries. Due to Egypt's influence, other Arab countries also did not participate to the pact. In the later years, Adnan Menderes had also admitted that the pact was a mistake."<sup>79</sup> The Baghdad Pact could be added as an issue that strained the Turkish-Arab and Turkish-Saudi relations at that time. With the fall of the monarchy in Iraq in 1958 with a military coup, the Baghdad Pact collapsed, making Turkish activist foreign policy short-lived.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Kirişçi, "Post-Cold-War Turkish Security and the Middle East"

<sup>75</sup> George Lenczowski, "The Middle East in World Affairs", Chapter IV: Turkey, Cornell Univ Press, 1980, pg.145

<sup>76</sup> John Sakkas, "Greece, Arab World and Israel: A Troubled Triangle in the Eastern Mediterranean," *Defensor Pacis* 20, 2007.

<sup>77</sup> Nur Bilge Criss, "Turkish Foreign Policy Towards Middle East", *MERIA Journal*, Vol. 01, No.01, 1997

<sup>78</sup> Lenczowski, "The Middle East in World Affairs", Chapter XIII: Saudi Arabia, pg. 592

<sup>79</sup> Tayyar Arı, "Geçmişten Günümüze Türkiye'nin Orta Doğu Politikasının Analizi ve İlişkileri Belirleyen Dinamikler", Edited by: İdris Bal, "21. Yüzyılda Türk Dış Politikası", Nobel Yayın Dağıtım, 2004, pg. 674

<sup>80</sup> Kirişçi, "Post-Cold-War Turkish Security and the Middle East"



Secondly, Turkey's close relations with the western countries and its indifference to the Middle East were interpreted as an 'unfriendly' attitude by the Arab countries and as alienation from Islam.<sup>81</sup> Several developments that took place throughout the 1950s adversely affected Turkey's relations with the Arab countries. Turkey's siding with the Western world and being abstinent from the vote on Algeria's self-determination at the General Assembly in 1955, its pro-western stance during the Suez crisis in 1956, its deployment of troops along Syrian border in 1957, when the community part in Damascus seemed to take the power<sup>82</sup> and its call for western military intervention in Iraq in order to bring back the monarchy after its fall in 1958 further strengthened the anti-Turkish perception among Arabs, particularly Saudis, deteriorated the relations with the Arab World.

Thirdly, Saudis suspicion of Turkey increased significantly with Turkey's recognition of Israel in 1949 and establishing ties with it -- a significant factor that deeply wounded the relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia and caused further deterioration of Turkey's relations with the Arab world. Turkey's relations with the Arab world was mostly shaped within the context of Turkish-Israeli relations says Küçükcan and explains: "Each step drawing Turkey and Israel closer brought with it a reaction from the Arab states, whereas each tension between Turkey and Israel created grounds for drawing closer to Arab countries."<sup>83</sup>

Turkey and Israel inked secret military pact in 1958 to contain the Soviet influence and Arab nationalism in the Middle East.<sup>84</sup> This pact raised the eyebrows in the Arab capitals. Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, supported the Cyprus issue in favor of Greece rather than Turkey from half of the century, due to Ankara's ties with Israel and its Middle East policy. In order to pressure Turkey over its relations with

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<sup>81</sup> Ali L. Karaosmanoğlu, "Turkey's Security and the Middle East", *Foreign Affairs*, Fall 1983, Available at: <http://m.foreignaffairs.com/articles/37977/ali-l-karaosmanoglu/turkeys-security-and-the-middle-east>

<sup>82</sup> Ömer Taşpınar, "Turkey's Middle East Policies Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism", Carnegie Middle East Center, No.10, 2008.

<sup>83</sup> Talip Küçükcan, "Arab Image in Turkey", SETA Research Report, Report No:1, June 2010

<sup>84</sup> Amikam Nachmani, "Israel, Turkey and Greece: Uneasy Relations in the Eastern Mediterranean", Routledge, 1987, pp.43-82

Israel, Arab states used several levers; such as oil weapon, Islamic solidarity, the Palestinian cause, and the issue of Cyprus.<sup>85</sup> Cyprus issue was the most influential card in the hands of Arabs against Turkey. Arabs voted in favor of Greeks at the UN General Assembly throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. In 1965, Arab states voted for UN resolution 2077, which was in favor of the Greek side as it reaffirmed the Greeks sovereignty and described any intervention to the island as illegal. In the following years, Greece achieved great support at the UN from the Arabs on Cyprus issue. As Criss puts it *“the review of Turkish-Middle East relations was largely caused by Turkish displeasure with the attitude of its allies who failed to support Turkey on the Cyprus issue. The Middle East countries’ support of the Greek Cypriots caused the Turks to come to terms with their cultural and historical bond”*.<sup>86</sup>

Turkey’s siding with the Arab countries in the Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973, its support for the Palestinian issue in the United Nations and its participation to the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1969 and becoming a full member in 1976 created a positive climate between Middle Eastern countries and Turkey in the 1970s<sup>87</sup>, but didn’t play much role in changing Turkish perception in the eyes of the Arabs. Although Turkey’s pro-Arab stance continued with the opening of a Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) office in Ankara in 1979<sup>88</sup>, Taşpınar notes that several developments forced Turkey to reassess its Middle East policy and elaborates:

An obvious source of discontent was the failure of the Arab countries and the PLO to support Turkey’s Cyprus policy. Neither at the United Nations nor at the OIC had the Arab world recognized the Turkish Cypriots’ demand for self-determination. Many Arab states enjoyed cordial relations with the Greek Cypriots and

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<sup>85</sup> Ofra Bengio, “The Turkish-Israeli Relationship: Changing ties of Middle Eastern outsiders”, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pg.3

<sup>86</sup> Criss, “Turkish Foreign Policy Towards Middle East”

<sup>87</sup> Nedim Yalansız, “Turkey-Middle East Relations in the Cold War Era and the Great Powers”, History Studies: International Journal of History, Vol. 4, No.2, pp. 393-402, 2012

<sup>88</sup> “PLO to open Ankara Branch” Jewish Telegraphic Agency, August 7, 1979, Available at: <http://www.jta.org/1979/08/07/archive/plo-to-open-ankara-branch>

recognized the Greek government as the only legitimate administration on the island.<sup>89</sup>

A positive climate occurred between Turkey and Arab countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, after Ankara took side in the US-led coalition against Iraq in the Gulf War in the early 1990s. Sager elaborates this positive sign: “in the early 1990s, diplomatic relations between Ankara and Riyadh were elevated to Ambassador Level (March 1992)”.<sup>90</sup> There were efforts from the two sides to get rid of the historical prejudices and ideological differences and to emphasize the significance of common interests regarding the region.

However, Turkey’s signing of the Military Training Cooperation Agreement with Israel in 1996 dealt a blow to the relations. Despite Turkish officials’ remarks that the agreement is not against a third party, it caused a great disturbance in the Arab public opinion and got harsh reactions from Arab states. The leaders of Saudi Arabia, along with Egypt and Syria, issued a joint statement expressing their concern and demanding that Turkey reconsider the agreement.<sup>91</sup> For some in the Arab world, the alignment was viewed as the second betrayal from the Turkish side against Arabs in the 50 years – which the first was regarded as the recognition of Israel by Turkey in 1949.<sup>92</sup> Arab countries, where the alarm bells rang with this alignment, feared about the Turkish-Israeli alignment as it would endanger Arab-Israeli peace process, by providing the upper hand to Israel and weakening the position of the Arab countries; thus also causing divisions among the Arab world.<sup>93</sup> Alorabi elaborates the effect of Turkish-Israeli alliance on Turkish-Arab relations, in general, and Turkish-Saudi relations, in particular:

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<sup>89</sup> Taşpınar, “Turkey’s Middle East Policies Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism”

<sup>90</sup> Interview with AbdulAziz Sager, *Chairman of the Gulf Research Center and President of Sager Group Holding*, 02 April 2014

<sup>91</sup> Sayarı, “Turkey and the Middle East in the 1990s”

<sup>92</sup> Ofra Bengio & Gencer Özcan, “Old Grievances, New Fears: Arab Perceptions of Turkey and its Alignment with Israel”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 37, No.2, April 2001, Frank Cass, London, pp.50-92

<sup>93</sup> Bengio, “The Turkish-Israeli Relationship: Changing ties of Middle Eastern outsiders”, pp.127-128

Turkey's maintaining of good relations with Israel, despite the discomfort of the whole Arab World, pushed Arab countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, to side with Greece on the debated issues between Ankara and Athens. Turks also adopted a position against Arabs causes particularly in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and the era before Turgut Özal. Arabs also supported Syria rather than Turkey on former's claims on water and border. Ankara's stance during those decades affected Saudi perception of Turkey.<sup>94</sup>

Turkey's military agreement, which shocked the Arabs, deteriorated Ankara's already existing not-that-good relations with the Arab world and strengthened the idea among Arab countries that Turkey could not be "a friend of some Arabs and the enemy of others".<sup>95</sup> Due to Turkey's alignment with Israel, Arabs felt the necessity to unify against Turkey in Arab causes, with adopting an anti-Turkey attitude in disputes between Turkey and Syria during the 1990s. Syria also used Turkey's military deal with Israel as an opportunity to gain the support of the Arab countries.<sup>96</sup> The water issue and the PKK became a source of tension between Ankara and Damascus throughout the 1990s, with Arab states supporting Syria in both the problems. Damascus' policy of using the PKK card to pressure Turkey in the dispute over sharing of the Euphrates water received maximum support from the other Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia. Altunışık elaborates how Syria used the support of Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, against Turkey:

After the Persian Gulf War, Saudi Arabia, along with Egypt and Syria, banded together in hopes of creating a new Arab order. Damascus, no ally of Ankara at the time, was able to frame many of its narrow fights with Turkey as pan-Arab concerns. Down the Euphrates from Turkey, for example, Syria was locked in constant argument with the Turkish government over how much water it would allow to flow downstream. Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Syria even launched a successful campaign to end World Bank funding

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<sup>94</sup> Interview with Abdulrahman Saad Alorabi, *Assistant Professor at the department of History of King Abdulaziz University and editor at Madinah newspaper*, 11 March 2014, Jeddah

<sup>95</sup> *Dunya al-'Arab*, op.cit.(February 1990); See also *Al-Shahid* (April 1990) in Bengio, "The Turkish-Israeli Relationship: Changing ties of Middle Eastern outsiders", pp.141

<sup>96</sup> Oran (ed.), "Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar", pg. 559

for Turkey's dam projects until Ankara signed a water agreement with the states below it.<sup>97</sup>

Concerned over Turkey's water policy, Arab countries also supported Iraq and Syria, which held officials contacts with European countries to prevent them financing Turkish projects<sup>98</sup>, in their call to foreign contractors not to cooperate with Turkey on the GAP project<sup>99</sup> Turkey's indexing of the water issue to the PKK problem, led to Syria to bring the water dispute to international sphere. In order to put pressure on Turkey in the international platform, Syria along with Egypt and the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), namely Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman and United Arab Emirates, issued "Damascus Declaration".<sup>100</sup> Damascus Declaration called for a fair settlement for the distribution of the Euphrates waters and criticized Turkey's plan to construct a new dam (Birecik Dam) on the Turkish-Syrian border, as part of the GAP project.<sup>101</sup> The importance of Damascus Declaration was that for the first time other Arab countries openly showed their support to Syria in water dispute with Turkey. The governments of Syria and Iraq also called the Arab League countries to cease financing Turkish projects and to boycott European companies that provide financial aid for the Birecik Dam.<sup>102</sup> In addition to water issue, PKK issue also played a significant role in further deteriorating the fragile relations between Turkey and the Arab countries. As mentioned above, Arab countries supported Syria in its claims over water and using the PKK card as an effective bargaining tool against Turkey. Bal elaborates the adverse impact of the PKK on Turkish- Arab relations:

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<sup>97</sup> Meliha Benli Altunışık, "Bitter Frenemies, The Not-Quite-Alliance Between Saudi Arabia and Turkey", Foreign Affairs, 2012, Available at: <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/137639/meliha-benli-altunisik/bitter-frenemies>

<sup>98</sup> "Damascus Seeks to Prevent Europe From Financing US \$ 1.6 Billion Turkish Dam", December 3, 1999, Available at: <http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/990312/1999031216.html>

<sup>99</sup> Oktav, "Water Dispute and Kurdish Separatism in Turkish-Syrian Relations"

<sup>100</sup> Robins, "Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy Since the Cold War", pg. 177

<sup>101</sup> See, 'Damascus Declaration states issue communique', 29 December 1995, <http://www.saudiembassy.net/archive/1995/news/page0.aspx>

<sup>102</sup> Ayşegül Kibaroğlu & Waltina Scheumann, "Euphrates-Tigris Rivers System: Political Rapprochement and Trans boundary Water Cooperation", in "Turkey's Water Policy: national framework and international cooperation", by A. Kibaroğlu, W. Scheumann and A. Kramer Springer, Berlin 2011, pg. 282

There were already cool tendencies between Turks and Arabs towards each other due to the bad memories of the First World War and before. With the open support of some Arab countries, such as Syria, for the PKK, this cool leaning risked to worsen the relations and turn into being hostilities. For instance, if Syria had not expelled Abdullah Öcalan, a Syrian-Turkish war or an Arab-Turkish war would very possibly break out. Therefore, the PKK formed a barrier before Turkish-Syrian relations, in particular, and Turkish Arab relations, in general.<sup>103</sup>

From the Saudi point of view, the main factors that limited the relations between Ankara and Riyadh, as Sager lists, were:

- Turkey's application in 1987 for full EEC membership confirmed its preference for a 'European identity' and caused Saudi decision makers to see it as a non-Middle Eastern state by choice and desire, which limited the Saudi approach to Turkey as a regional state or a potential ally,
- Turkey's strong relations with Israel and the strategic partnership between the two countries was also a major issue for the Saudis,
- Turkey's strained relations with Syria, was another factor that adversely effected the bilateral relations between Ankara and Riyadh
- Besides, Turkey's close relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, especially the strong trade relationship during the 1980s and 1990s, were a factor which hindered the development of the Saudi-Turkey relationship.<sup>104</sup>

#### **2.1.4. Turkish Foreign Policy towards Middle East, Saudi Arabia**

Since the establishment of the republic, Turkey's general perception towards the Arab world was mostly shaped within the context of the Arabs' stance during the First World War (WWI). The Arab revolts against the Ottoman rule during the WWI played a significant role in creating a negative image of the Arabs. Turkey's perception towards the Arab world, for many years, was constructed by the thought

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<sup>103</sup> İdris Bal, "Ortadoğu'da İstikrarsızlığa yol açan faktörler ve PKK'nın katkısı", Edited by: İdris Bal, "21. Yüzyılda Türk Dış Politikası", Nobel Yayın Dağıtım, 2004, pg. 664

<sup>104</sup> Interview with AbdulAziz Sager, *Chairman of the Gulf Research Center and President of Sager Group Holding*, 02 April 2014

that Arabs stabbed Turks in the back during the war by taking side with the British forces, and that they were traitors.<sup>105</sup> This thought had a considerable influence on Turkey's foreign policy towards the Middle East. Despite having common historical, cultural and religious links with the Middle Eastern countries, Turkey, in the republican era, preferred to distance itself from the region, particularly from the Arab world, in order to develop a secular state. The Sadabad pact, which was inked between Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan in 1937, is given as a good example of how the Turkey in Kemalist era distanced itself from the Middle East, particularly Arab World.<sup>106</sup> According to Sayarı, "since the founding of the republic in 1924, the Turkish ruling elite, in keeping with the legacy of Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey, has sought to identify the country more with the West than the Middle East and the Islamic world".<sup>107</sup> Ankara's giving priority to relations with the western world led to the alienation of Turkey from the Middle East for many years. The negative perspective towards Arabs was not only limited to politics. Turkish media, literature and education system also gave place to the anti-Arab perspective. Turkish-Arab relations were defined within the context of negative historical memories that was included to school textbooks, newspapers and literature. The popular saying "*Ne Arab'ın Yüzü, Ne Şam'ın Şekeri*" (neither face of Arab, nor candy of Damascus) serves as a good example to show the anger against Arabs<sup>108</sup> in the Turkish literature. Historical prejudices and negative perception towards the Arab world through the twentieth century limited Turkish-Arab relations. As Aras and Köni, puts it, "The Turkish establishment considered itself as the main successor state with negative memories of Arabs; in contrast the Arab states interpreted the demise of the Ottoman Empire as their emancipation from exploitation by an imperial power."<sup>109</sup> Beside the explanation that Arabs' betrayed Turks in the past, the

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<sup>105</sup> Küçükcan, "Arab Image in Turkey"

<sup>106</sup> Criss, "Turkish Foreign Policy Towards Middle East"

<sup>107</sup> Sayarı, "Turkey and the Middle East in the 1990s"

<sup>108</sup> Bülent Aras & Hasan Köni, "Turkish-Syrian Relations Revisited", Arab Studies Quarterly (ASQ), Vol.24, No.4, Fall 2002, pp.47-60, Available at: <http://www.sam.gov.tr/wp-content/pdfs/23.pdf>

<sup>109</sup> Aras & Köni, "Turkish-Syrian Relations Revisited"

explanation that most of the Arab countries took side in the Soviet bloc during the Cold War era also cemented the anti-Arab thought in Turkey.<sup>110</sup>

During the 1970s, it was difficult to find reports regarding the Arab countries in newspapers with the exception to Saudi Arabia, which was covered with a positive tone in Turkish media, in contrast to the rhetoric used towards other Arab countries. The positive coverage of the Saudi Kingdom was related to two factors: First factor was the constructive role played by Riyadh in the oil crisis; second one was Saudi Arabia's economic and political cooperation with Turkey.<sup>111</sup> However, in the early 1990s, the discourse and the perception towards the Arabs softened among the media and the writers, who adopted a neutral or relatively positive attitude while depicting the Arabs. Here, Turkish domestic politics played an important role in changing the Arabs' negative image. Turkey's further involvement in Middle Eastern issues, after long years, in contrast to its disengagement policy towards the region, created a positive climate in Turkey's relations with the Arab world. The negative image of Arabs considerably weakened in Turkish media thanks to the increasing visits of the journalists to the Middle Eastern countries during the era of Turgut Özal, who was interested to create rapprochement between Turks and Arabs.

The positive climate created in the early 1990s did not last for long due to the ups and downs in Turkey's relations with the Middle East. Küçükcan argues that the coalition government of the conservative Welfare Party led by Necmettin Erbakan, who wanted to establish close ties with the Islamic world, adversely affected the Arab image in Turkey both in terms of media and domestic politics. The negative image of Arab states in Turkish media with Erbakan's visit to Libya, whose leader Muammar al-Gaddafi severely criticized Turkish government for mistreating its Kurdish population<sup>112</sup>, is elaborated as follows:

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<sup>110</sup> Aras & Köni, "Turkish-Syrian Relations Revisited"

<sup>111</sup> Küçükcan, "Arab Image in Turkey"

<sup>112</sup> Robert Owen Freedman (ed.), "The Middle East Enters the Twenty-first Century", University Press of Florida, 2002, pg.101



The media printed news under headlines such as “The Bedouin went too far”, “The Arabs turn away from Turkey”, heavily criticizing the Arab attitude. Especially criticized was the Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan’s visit to Libya. During the visit, Muammar al-Gaddafi is reported to have made disturbing comments on Turkey’s domestic and foreign policies. The news about this visit was broadcast on national televisions over and over again and the government was accused of letting Bedouin insult Turkey’s national honor.<sup>113</sup>

The negative image of Arab countries in the press was strengthened with the perception of threat in the 1990s. The most significant issue for Turkey, in the 1990s, was the Kurdish issue, which had important ramifications on Turkey’s approach towards the Middle East. During this decade, due to the PKK threat, Turkey engaged into security-oriented policies with the regional countries. Ankara’s foreign relations with Syria, in particular, and the other Middle Eastern countries, in general, were dominated by the issue of security and the PKK. In order to understand Turkey’s Middle East policy of that time, it is significant to quote from Robins, who claims that “the nature of threats, both as perceived from a state and as perceived by other states regarding the state, is a key variable in the development and evolution of foreign relations.”<sup>114</sup> The threat perceived by the neighboring countries, namely Syria, Iraq and Iran, and the other Arab countries that support Syria forced Turkey to formulate its foreign policy according to its threat perceptions. Turkey’s strained relations with Syria due to PKK and water issues had adverse impact on Turkey’s approach towards the Middle East and accordingly to the Arab World.<sup>115</sup> Altunışık elaborates Turkey’s relations with the Middle East in the 1990s and the mutual perception between two sides:

Turkey felt threatened by developments in the region, notably in Iraq after the Gulf War as well as Syrian support for the PKK. Turkey chose to deal with these threats by adopting policies prioritizing military means and balancing threats with alliances. Thus throughout most of the 1990s, Turkey was seen largely

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<sup>113</sup> Küçükcan, “Arab Image in Turkey”

<sup>114</sup> Robins, “Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy Since the Cold War”, pg. 189

<sup>115</sup> Aydın Aydın, “Three types of Turkish foreign policy after the Cold War on the Middle East”, Süleyman Demirel University, The Journal of Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Vol.18, No.3, 2013, pp.475-495.

irrelevant to debate in the Arab world and mutual perceptions of threat and distrust characterized the relations. This atmosphere began to change considerably after 2003.<sup>116</sup>

## **2.2. Regional factors in Turkish-Saudi relations in the 1990s**

### **2.2.1. 1990 Invasion of Kuwait and stances of Ankara and Riyadh**

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, which is also known as First Gulf War, has caused a significant change on the regional balances, which was already affected by the 1979 Iran's Islamic Revolution and 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War. On August 2, 1990, Iraqi troops ruled by Saddam Hussein occupied Kuwait, a development that caused great tension in the Gulf region. Baghdad based its move on the claims that Kuwait was illegally drilling oil from the disputed Rumalia oilfield and that the tiny Gulf country was the 19th province of Iraq. According to Saddam, Kuwait was not an independent country but it was artificially carved off by the imperial powers. After occupying Kuwait, Iraqi troops started burning buildings and brutalizing civilians in the country; thus causing international outrage.<sup>117</sup> The adverse effect of the invasion on the stability of the oil market and the balances in the politically-fragile region has led the international community to take an action against Iraq.<sup>118</sup> Several resolutions were passed by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for Iraq to end its invasion of Kuwait. On November 29, UNSC passed the resolution No. 678, which called for the withdrawal of the Iraqi forces from Kuwait by the January 15, 1991. When Baghdad rejected to comply the resolution No. 678, which allowed the use of force in case of a threat to international peace and security,<sup>119</sup> UN-authorized Coalition Forces involving 34 nations led by the United States launched a war

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<sup>116</sup> Meliha Altunışık, "Turkey: *Arab Perspectives*", Foreign Policy Analysis Series. 11, TESEV Publications, 2010.

<sup>117</sup> James Wynbrandt, "A Brief History of Saudi Arabia", New York, Facts on File, Inc., 2004, pg.255

<sup>118</sup> Yurdanur Kuşçu & Muhittin Ataman, "Factors influencing the development of political and social movements in Saudi Arabia", *Alternative Politics*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1-26, February 2012

<sup>119</sup> Selin M. Bölme, "The Politics of Incirlik Air Base", *Insight Turkey*, Vol.9, Number.3 ,2007, pp.82-91

against Iraq. The Coalition's military offensive, dubbed "Operation Desert Storm", began on January 17 with an intensive air campaign targeting Iraqi forces and assets in Kuwait and Iraq.<sup>120</sup> Saddam's troops were defeated with a ground assault followed by the air attacks of the coalition forces and after a seven-month long occupation, Kuwait was liberated.

First Gulf War was the most significant development in the early 1990s that pushed Turkey to pursue a more active foreign policy in the regional affairs. Ankara's approach during the war was in line with the anti-Iraq coalition forces led by the United States. Turkey's active support for the US-led coalition and its key role in supporting the UN sanctions imposed to Saddam regime received great appreciation from Middle Eastern countries, in general, and Saudi Arabia, the main player of the war, in particular. The war had also played an important role in the improvement of Turkey's relations with Saudi Arabia. Bilateral relations between Ankara and Riyadh entered a new phase during the war.<sup>121</sup> During the "Operation Desert Storm", Turkey took the decision to allow the American troops to use its bases to strike Iraq.<sup>122</sup> NATO bases at İncirlik and other places such as Batman and Muş were opened for the multinational forces for offensive purposes in the strikes against Iraq.<sup>123</sup> Turkey also deployed troops to its border with Iraq. Turkey became the first country to comply with the economic sanctions that the UN imposed to Iraq. Turkish President at that period, Turgut Özal, shut off the two pipelines used to transport Iraqi oil through Turkey to the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>124</sup> Although it brought a high economic cost and raised the risk of Iraqi military action towards Turkey, the Kirkuk–Yumurtalık oil pipeline was closed.<sup>125</sup> Following Turkey's closure of the pipelines;

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<sup>120</sup> Wynbrandt, "A Brief History of Saudi Arabia", pg.258

<sup>121</sup> Ataman, "Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?"

<sup>122</sup> Bulent Aras, "Turkey and the GCC: An Emerging Relationship", *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XII, No. 4, Winter 2005, pp. 89-97, Available at, <http://sam.gov.tr/wp-content/pdfs/15.pdf>

<sup>123</sup> Zalmay Khalilzad, Ian O. Lesser, F. Stephan Larrabee, "The Future of Turkish-Western Relations: Toward a Strategic Plan", Rand Corporation, 2000, Chapter 4, 14

<sup>124</sup> Helen Chapin Metz, ed. *Turkey: A Country Study*, Washington, GPO for the Library of Congress, 1995. Available at, <http://countrystudies.us/turkey/88.html>

<sup>125</sup> Abdullah Karakoç, "Turkey's relations with Iran and the United States: a shift in alignment?", Master Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, California, March 2009

Saudi Arabia also decided to shut off the Iraqi Pipeline in Saudi Arabia (IPSA-2) -- a line from Iraq to the Red Sea terminal of Yanbu. According to Robins, without Özal's "swift and unequivocal" decision to close the pipelines, Riyadh would have been most probably to have acted cautiously over the shutting off the pipeline.<sup>126</sup> Turkey's decision to shut off the two pipelines came at a time when Saudi Arabia hesitated to close its own pipelines and this decision was of great importance to Washington, which was in search of an ally in the region.<sup>127</sup>

Turkey's allowing its territory to be used as a front in the war against Iraq has caused several criticisms in the country at that period. Despite the criticisms by his opponents on the fears that Iraq may retaliate to Turkey due to its support, Özal said in an interview that his decisions in the crisis were not a gamble; but rather a calculated risk, saying: "There is no profit without risk."<sup>128</sup> While key figures in the decision-making process such as Prime Minister Yıldırım Akbulut, Foreign Minister Ali Bozer and Chief of General Staff Necip Torumtay argued to pursue a cautious foreign policy, Özal believed to pursue an active foreign policy in order to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the war.<sup>129</sup> In order to determine Turkey's role in the war, Özal was in close contact with the American President Bush and often had phone conversations with him. Özal's siding by the US-led coalition was a clear intention of the Turkish president to increase Turkey's international role while the region was going through a crucial period. Özal's move was surprising as Turkey for a long time pursued a policy of non-involvement to the conflicts and wars in its immediate neighborhood. In joining the anti-Iraqi coalition, Turkey broke several of its long standing taboos and proved that it took sides in a Middle Eastern dispute.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Robins, "Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy Since the Cold War", pg. 17

<sup>127</sup> Oran (ed.), "Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar", pg. 255

<sup>128</sup> Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/01/20/world/war-in-the-gulf-turkey-turkey-s-role-in-air-assault-sets-off-fear-of-retaliation.html>

<sup>129</sup> Oran (ed.), "Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar", pg. 551

<sup>130</sup> Alan Makovsky, "The New Activism in Turkish Foreign Policy", The Washington Institute, SAIS Review, Winter/Spring 1999, Available at, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-new-activism-in-turkish-foreign-policy>

In the aftermath of the war, Turkish president declared that Turkey “should leave its former passive and hesitant policies and engage in an active foreign policy.”<sup>131</sup> One of the main reasons driving Özal to push Turkey to play a central role in the Gulf War was the belief that the show of loyalty to its allies during the war would bolster Turkey’s strategic importance for the United States and Western Europe.<sup>132</sup> Özal was convinced that with joining to the war, Turkey would gain an opportunity to attain several significant objectives which Sayarı lists as:

Expanding Turkey's political role and influence in regional affairs; gaining leverage with Washington regarding bilateral defense and trade issues and with Brussels regarding its goal of becoming a full member of the European Union (EU); and increasing its trade and business opportunities in the Middle East, particularly in the Gulf.<sup>133</sup>

According to one view, the reason behind Turkey’s stance in the Gulf War was the fear that Iraq may become a hegemonic power in the region following its invasion of Kuwait and would seek to solve all its disputes with the regional countries by force.<sup>134</sup> While one of the significance of the war for Turkish foreign policy was that Ankara kept aside the policy of non-interference to Middle Eastern issues, the other was that it created a serious conflict in the decision-making process in the country as Foreign Minister Ali Bozer, Defense Minister Safa Giray and Chief of General Staff Necip Torumtay resigned from their posts in order to protest Özal’s stance.<sup>135</sup> Also the decision to close the pipelines, as Gözen argues, was taken by Özal and the people close to him, while prime minister and the foreign minister was not informed

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<sup>131</sup> Philip Robins, “Turkish Policy and the Gulf Crisis: Adventurist or Dynamic?” in Clement H. Dodd, ed., *Turkish Foreign Policy: New Prospects*, Cambridgeshire, UK: Eothen Press, 1992, pg.70

<sup>132</sup> Yasemin Çelik, “Contemporary Turkish Foreign Policy”, Greenwood Pub/ Praeger, 1999, pg.111

<sup>133</sup> Sayarı, “Turkey and the Middle East in the 1990s”, See also, Oran (ed.), “Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar”, pg. 254

<sup>134</sup> Arı, “Geçmişten Günümüze Türkiye’nin Orta Doğu Politikasının Analizi ve İlişkileri Belirleyen Dinamikler”, pg. 682

<sup>135</sup> Oran (ed.), “Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar”, pg. 256

about the decision.<sup>136</sup> During a secret meeting between Özal and Bush in former's US visit to discuss the Gulf war, while the American foreign minister attended, Bozer was excluded from the meeting.<sup>137</sup> Critics argue that the resignation of the key figures was the result of Özal's intentions to take the decisions by himself behind the closed doors and their dissatisfaction of Özal's 'adventurist' Gulf policy. While, Bozer resigned from his post in protest of his exclusion from the meeting, Torumtay quit his position to protest Özal's approach.<sup>138</sup> It was the resignation of Torumtay who advocated pursuing a moderate policy that shocked the country.<sup>139</sup> Torumtay's resignation particularly came after Özal's decision to send troops to Saudi Arabia.<sup>140</sup> However, taking into account the domestic constraints over the sending of the Turkish troops, Özal, who was able to confront ministers and generals, didn't go too far; therefore, Turkish troops were not deployed in the Gulf. Without sending troops, Turkey has put itself into risk, argues Robins and elaborates:

Consequently, Turkey did not send even a symbolic contingent of soldiers to join the international coalition, even though, ironically, it did subsequently put itself at much greater risk by allowing the US to use the joint air bases in the south-east of the country to fly multiple sorties against targets in Iraq once the bombardment had begun on 17 January 1991. The prejudices and past traumas of the Turkish public therefore prevented Turkey from taking full advantage of the political opportunities provided by the crisis, even though few countries in the region actually took the security risks that Ankara did.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Ramazan Gözen, "Türkiye'nin II. Körfez Savaşı Politikası: Aktif Politika ve Sonuçları", Edited by: İdris Bal, "21. Yüzyılda Türk Dış Politikası", Nobel Yayın Dağıtım, 2004, pg. 733

<sup>137</sup> Gözen, "Türkiye'nin II. Körfez Savaşı Politikası: Aktif Politika ve Sonuçları", pg. 734

<sup>138</sup> "Two-headed Turkish administrations in both Iraq crises", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 26 January 2003, Available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/default.aspx?pageid=438&n=two-headed-turkish-administrations-in-both-iraq-crises-2003-01-26>

<sup>139</sup> Çelik, "Contemporary Turkish Foreign Policy", pg.87

<sup>140</sup> "Mideast Tensions; Turkish Leader is said to favor sending troops to Saudi Arabia", *The New York Times*, 5 December 1990, Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/12/05/world/mideast-tensions-turkish-leader-is-said-to-favor-sending-troops-to-saudi-arabia.html>

<sup>141</sup> Robins, "Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy Since the Cold War", pg. 17

For some critics, Turkey's participation to the war is considered as a "single-handedly" decision made by Özal, despite overwhelming opposition from the public<sup>142</sup> and failed to achieve the goals expected by Özal. The negative part of the participation was that the war dealt a severe blow to Turkey's economy. Turkish President Süleyman Demirel has noted that "the war and embargo had cost Turkey \$15 billion to \$20 billion, of which it had been compensated "three or four billion" by "our friends in the gulf."<sup>143</sup> As a sign of improving relations, Saudi Arabia compensated Turkey's economic losses by giving \$1.2 billion to the Turkish government, plus another \$1 billion to the Turkish defense fund.<sup>144</sup> In total, Kuwait, UAE and Saudi Arabia gave \$4.2 billion to the Turkish defense fund.<sup>145</sup> However, the amounts above have no meaning when taking into consideration that after a decade of embargo to Iraq, Turkey's economic loss reached \$100 billion.<sup>146</sup>

Beside the economic cost, the political cost of the Gulf War was the mass fled of the Iraqi Kurds, who rebelled against Saddam regime, to Turkey and other neighboring countries and the escalation of the Kurdish problem with the rising influence of the PKK, which established camps in the northern Iraq from where it launched attacks to Turkey. Following the war, Turkey had three fears over Gulf War's legacy in northern Iraq: The emergence of a separate Kurdish entity in northern Iraq that may encourage Turkey's Kurds towards independency, the emergence of a power vacuum in northern Iraq that the PKK can use as a springboard to attack Turkey and the refugee flow to Turkey.<sup>147</sup> The most negative impact of the Gulf War for Turkey was that the status of the Kurdish issue changed from regional one to international. In

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<sup>142</sup> Nathalie Tocci, "Turkey's European Future: Behind the Scenes of America's Influence on EU-Turkey Relations", NYU Press, 2011, pg.78

<sup>143</sup> "Turkey, Hurt by Iraq Curbs, Requests Help," *The New York Times*, 5 June 1994, Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/06/05/world/turkey-hurt-by-iraq-curbs-requests-help.html>

<sup>144</sup> Ataman, "Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?"

<sup>145</sup> Oran (ed.), "Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar", pg. 257

<sup>146</sup> Oran (ed.), "Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar", pg. 258

<sup>147</sup> Robins, "Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy Since the Cold War", pg. 313

order to find a solution to the Kurdish issue, the then foreign minister Kurtcebe Alptemoçin paid visits to Syria, Egypt and Saudi Arabia in 1991.<sup>148</sup>

On the Saudi side, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the decision by the monarchy to permit the presence of the American troops on the Saudi soil were important historical turning points for Riyadh.<sup>149</sup> The invasion raised great concerns regarding the fate of the kingdom, in particular, and the Gulf region, in general. When King Fahd was not given an assurance on Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait during his meeting with ‘Izzat Ibrahim, the Vice-President of Iraq’s Revolutionary Command Council, on August 3<sup>150</sup>, alarm bells started ringing in the Saudi capital. Concerned with the stability of the region, Saudi Arabia served as the first front in the war against Iraq. The kingdom regarded both its own defense and the liberation of Kuwait as imperatives.<sup>151</sup> When Iraq invaded Kuwait, Riyadh declared that the United States troops would temporarily be stationed in the northeastern part of the country.

Unlike Turkey, Saudi public was not against the participation of their country to the war; but the basing of American troops on the Saudi soil caused unrest among public. According to some religious Muslims, the Iraqi threat should be eliminated; however, the presence of non-Muslims on Saudi soil, the holy lands as they consider, was unacceptable. At that time, a prominent religious scholar has stated that Saudi Arabia’s enemy was not the Iraq but the USA, “an evil greater than Saddam, that is the USA” and the West, as he wrote in a letter to the head of the Council of Higher Ulama and the Institution of Ifta’ and Scholarly Research.<sup>152</sup> The Saudi rule’s approval for the US military presence on Saudi soil during the war in order to protect

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<sup>148</sup> Oran (ed.), “Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar”, pg. 254

<sup>149</sup> Alshamsi, “Islam and Political Reform in Saudi Arabia, The quest for political change and reform”, pg.80

<sup>150</sup> Tim Niblock, “The Contemporary Middle East, Saudi Arabia, Power, Legitimacy and Survival”, New York, Routledge, 2006, pg.68

<sup>151</sup> Wynbrandt, “A Brief History of Saudi Arabia”, pg.255

<sup>152</sup> Madawi Al-Rasheed, “A History of Saudi Arabia”, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002., pg.166



the kingdom from Iraq had increased the tensions of the radicals led by Osama bin Laden against Saudi royal family and the United States.<sup>153</sup>

Despite harsh criticism from various circles in Saudi Arabia, King Fahd agreed to allow the US military troops to have presence on his country's soil and in order to make its decision legitimate in the eyes of the religious Muslims, he obtained an approval (*fatwa*) from the Ulama, which plays an important role in giving the royal family its legitimacy among religious figures. Abdul Aziz Bin Baz, who had played a leading role in coaxing the Ulama to support the monarchy, argued "The Americans have come to protect, not to seize the haramain [holy places]. They have come to repel the aggression and to remove injustice."<sup>154</sup> The presence of the American troops in Saudi Arabia during the Gulf war was not for the first time; the United States had an air base at Dhahran, which was closed in 1962. The use of Dhahran by the US military became a problem for Saudi Arabia not only by the internal opposition but also in inter-Arab relations.<sup>155</sup> At the end of the war, Saudi government organized 'the *jihad* festival' as an Islamic celebration for the victory against Iraq.<sup>156</sup>

According to Wynbrandt, it was difficult to make it clear how much the war has cost for the kingdom; but it is likely to be of \$60 billion, a sum which is in addition to the \$25 billion it contributed to Iraq during its war against Iran in the years of 1980–88.<sup>157</sup> Besides its own losses, Saudi Arabia also compensated the losses of some other countries that joined the war against Iraq. The burden of the war on Saudi Arabia was of several kinds, including the Scud missile attacks and the Iraqi attack on the Saudi town of al-Khafji, close to the Kuwaiti border, on 29 January 1991.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Mohammed Ayoob and Hasan Kosebalaban, "Religion and Politics in Saudi Arabia: Wahhabism and the State", Introduction: Unraveling the Myths, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009, pg.11

<sup>154</sup> Robert Lacey, "Inside The Kingdom, *Kings, Clerics, Modernists, Terrorists, and The Struggle For Saudi Arabia*", Viking Penguin, a member of Penguin Group (USA) Inc, Chapter 16, 2009

<sup>155</sup> John P. Miglietta, "American Alliance Policy in the Middle East, 1945-1992 Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia", Lexington Books, Maryland, 2002, pg. 202

<sup>156</sup> Mansoor Jassem Alshamsi, "Islam and Political Reform in Saudi Arabia, The quest for political change and reform", Routledge, 2011, pg.85

<sup>157</sup> Wynbrandt, "A Brief History of Saudi Arabia", pg.259

<sup>158</sup> Niblock, "The Contemporary Middle East, Saudi Arabia, Power, Legitimacy and Survival", pg.69

As Sager put it, the 1990s opened on a positive note in relations between Ankara and Riyadh when Turkey allowed the US-led coalition against Iraq to launch air strikes from Turkish bases as part of the Kuwait liberation war in which Saudi Arabia was a main player.<sup>159</sup> Özal's strong stance against the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait has been a determinative factor in warming the ties between Ankara and Riyadh in the early 1990s.<sup>160</sup> During the war, Turkey and Saudi have pursued a common policy in preventing Iraq to advance in its aggressive move. From the first day of the crisis, Turkey engaged into contacts with Saudi Arabia whom it considered as a significant actor in the crisis. For both Ankara and Riyadh, the stability of the region was the top concern. As Mohammed Ameen Wali put it, "during invasion of Kuwait, Ankara and Riyadh see eye to eye and cooperated closely in all the fields. At that time, the concerns over the stability and the security of the region pushed the two countries to take part in the same alliance."<sup>161</sup> As an ambassador who served during those years, Wali noted that King Fahd pursued an insisting policy to keep the Saudi ties close with Turkey.

### **2.2.2. Turkish-Saudi relations within the regional context of the 1990s**

With the end of the Gulf war, Turkey was in search of its own position in international politics and particularly in Middle East region. Since the early 1990s, Turkey has been bent on carving out a new role in the Middle East.<sup>162</sup> During the era of Turgut Özal, Turkey adopted an active foreign policy line towards its immediate neighborhood, Middle East, which was neglected by Ankara for long time. Significant political and economic developments have taken place in Turkey's relations with the Middle Eastern countries, in general, and Saudi Arabia, in

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<sup>159</sup> Interview with AbdulAziz Sager, *Chairman of the Gulf Research Center and President of Sager Group Holding*, 02 April 2014

<sup>160</sup> Veysel Ayhan, "From Past to Future: Turkish-Saudi Arabian Relations", *OrtadoğuAnaliz*, Vol.2, No. 23, November 2010

<sup>161</sup> Interview with Ambassador to Turkey Mohammed Ameen Wali, *who served the position from late 1980s to 1990s*, 10 March 2014, Jeddah

<sup>162</sup> Ofra Bengio & Gencer Özcan, "Changing Relations: Turkish - Israeli - Arab Triangle", *Perceptions* 5, No.1, 2000, Also available at, <http://sam.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/OfraBengio-GencerOzcan.pdf>

particular, during his era. The foreign policy adopted by Özal paved the way for the bolstering of economic and diplomatic ties with the Gulf region. As part of the warming of the relations, Turkey initiated a process of comprehensive economic and political restructuring.<sup>163</sup> Özal's activism in foreign policy, which was appreciated by the Middle Eastern countries, was also reflected in Turkey's relations with Saudi Arabia; especially when Ankara decided to cement the ties with Riyadh. Özal's Turkey improved its relations with the Muslim countries and attached a particular importance to the relations with Saudi Arabia, which was considered by Ankara as a significant country to make trade. Özal's positive approach towards Saudi Arabia was motivated with the export-oriented policy and the concerns over the security and the stability of the oil market. As Abdul Rahman S. Alorabi put it, "the period of Turgut Özal was a milestone in relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia."<sup>164</sup>

During the Gulf War, Özal was motivated with the hope that Ankara's support to the anti-Iraq coalition would produce economic gains to Turkey. Özal's policy of pushing Turkey to engage in regional affairs in the early 1990s, despite economic troubles of the war, has not resulted with much political and economic gain in the aftermath of war. In fact some Turkish business interests won contracts for construction projects in the Gulf region<sup>165</sup> and Turkish companies started to invest in diverse fields in the country. However, Turkish economy was severely harmed by the consequences of the Gulf war. The UN sanctions against Iraq, which was an important market for Turkey prior to war, and Turkey's closing down its Kerkuk-Yumurtalik oil pipeline has also dealt a blow to the Turkish business particularly in the southern eastern cities, causing high economic losses. Before 1990, firstly Iraq, and then Iran were the main countries that Turkish exports had gone.

The war not only cost Turkey losing a major export market but adversely affected foreign investments and tourism sector as the country was a neighbor to war-torn

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<sup>163</sup> Ataman, "Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?"

<sup>164</sup> Interview with Abdulrahman Saad Alorabi, *Assistant Professor at the department of History of King Abdulaziz University and editor at Madinah newspaper*, 11 March 2014, Jeddah

<sup>165</sup> Metz, ed. *Turkey: A Country Study*.

Iraq.<sup>166</sup> The other negative impact of the war was that the Turkish Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita declined from about \$2,900 to \$2,100 and the Turkish lira lost 69 percent of its value.<sup>167</sup> According to Sayarı, Ankara's support to the UN sanctions imposed on Iraq cost Turkey nearly \$20 billion between 1990 and 1994.<sup>168</sup> By the end of 1996, the government stated that the lost has increased to approximately \$30 billion.<sup>169</sup> The war has caused dropping of the Turkish exports to the Middle East region from 23 percent of overall exports in 1989 to 16 percent in 1994.<sup>170</sup> Süleyman Demirel stated in 1994 that with the closure of the pipelines, "Turkey had lost the \$600 million or \$700 million a year that it collected for the use of the pipeline".<sup>171</sup> However, after an economic recession in 1991, with the beginning of 1992, Turkey gradually increased the level of its exports to the Gulf countries.<sup>172</sup> Trade with the Gulf countries seemed to be the most significant aspect of the overall relations with the region in early 1995.<sup>173</sup>

After several decades of state-led import substitution policies, during Özal's period, the economic policy of domestic and external liberalization triggered an era of growth.<sup>174</sup> It was also the era when the engagement with the Gulf region was cemented with the investments of the private sector. Özal, who gave priority to economics in international affairs, believed that greater involvement to the regional environment and increased trade with Turkey's neighbors would pave the way for

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<sup>166</sup> Ralph H Salmi & Gonca Bayraktar Durgun "Turkish-U.S. Relations: Perspectives From Ankara", Brown Walker Press, 2005, pg.3

<sup>167</sup> Salmi & Durgun, "Turkish-U.S. Relations: Perspectives From Ankara", pg.3

<sup>168</sup> Sayarı, "Turkey and the Middle East in the 1990s"

<sup>169</sup> Kirişçi, "Post-Cold-War Turkish Security and the Middle East"

<sup>170</sup> Kirişçi, "Post-Cold-War Turkish Security and the Middle East"

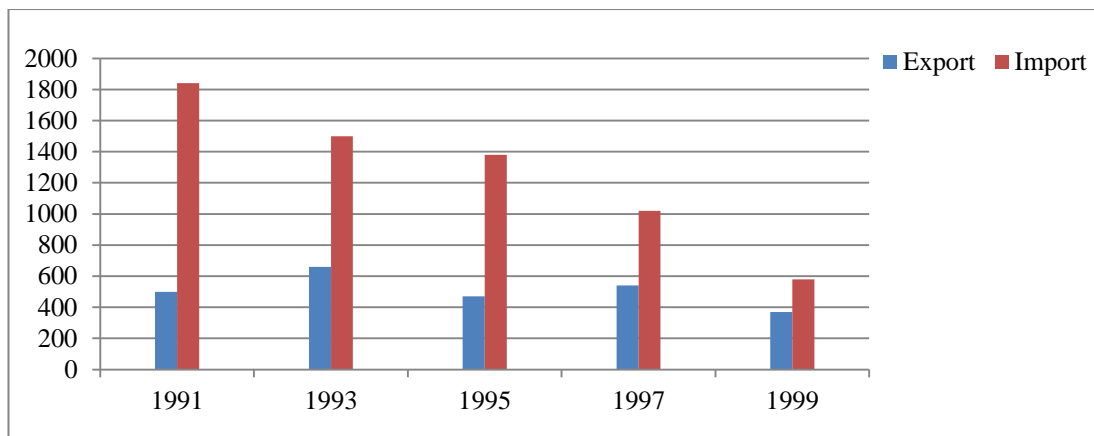
<sup>171</sup> "Turkey, Hurt by Iraq Curbs, Requests Help," *The New York Times*, 5 June 1994, Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/06/05/world/turkey-hurt-by-iraq-curbs-requests-help.html>

<sup>172</sup> Metz, ed. *Turkey: A Country Study*.

<sup>173</sup> Metz, ed. *Turkey: A Country Study*.

<sup>174</sup> Nermina Biberovic, "Turkey and the GCC: A New Era of Bilateral Economic Relations", *Gulf Monitor Issue*, 11 (October, 2008), pp.15 – 21

economic progress.<sup>175</sup> Özal’s economic policy facilitated Saudi capital flow to Turkey, while also increased Turkish investments in the kingdom. Making trade with Turkey was also benefiting Saudi Arabia because the kingdom entered the decade of the 1990s with a weak financial position due to the economic burden of the Gulf War.<sup>176</sup> The need of each other has pushed two countries to find a common ground in economic relations. For its part, Saudi Arabia needed Turkey's huge construction sector to build its modern cities, while Turkey needed oil.<sup>177</sup> The mutual dependency of the two countries was also reflected in their trade relations. The trade relations seemed to be at the highest level in the first half of the 1990s.



**Figure 1: Foreign Trade between Turkey and Saudi Arabia in the 1990s<sup>178</sup>**

The end of the Cold War has also enabled Turkey to further engage in trade with regional countries and open a period in Turkish-Saudi relations. According to Ziad Bassam al-Bassam, a Turkish businessmen İbrahim Cevahir came to Saudi Arabia in the 1970s to invest on construction sector and his company was the builder of most of the tunnels in Mecca.<sup>179</sup> Wali explains the achievements of Özal’s era as follows:

<sup>175</sup> Sayarı, “Turkey and the Middle East in the 1990s”

<sup>176</sup> Niblock, “The Contemporary Middle East, Saudi Arabia, Power, Legitimacy and Survival”, pg.69

<sup>177</sup> Altunışık, “Bitter Frenemies, The Not-Quite-Alliance Between Saudi Arabia and Turkey”

<sup>178</sup> Source, Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK), [www.tuik.gov.tr](http://www.tuik.gov.tr)

<sup>179</sup> Interview with Ziad Bassam al-Bassam, *Vice Chairman of Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry and CEO of the Al-Bassam Group*, 16 March 2014, Jeddah

The most important era in the Turkish-Saudi relations was the Turgut Özal era. Özal worked very hard with King Fahd to enhance the ties between two countries. During his era, many Turks have come to Saudi Arabia to work on different fields. They built tunnels, roads and buildings. Those structures do still exist in Mecca until now. Who ever visited Saudi Arabia, asks “who made these projects?”<sup>180</sup>

Improving economic ties was further cemented with the bilateral visits that took place between the officials of the two countries. Until 1984, no high level official visit took place from Saudi Arabia to Turkey. Thanks to Özal’s increasing activist policy towards the Gulf countries, President Kenan Evren and Prime Minister Özal visited Riyadh in 1984 and 1985 respectively; the Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdulaziz came to Turkey in 1984.<sup>181</sup> As part of enhancing bilateral ties with Saudi Arabia, during his premiership, Özal paid an official visit to the kingdom three times, while once during his presidency. After the Gulf war, as a sign of strengthening of the relations, Süleyman Demirel, prime minister, had paid a visit to Saudi Arabia in 1993. Wali says the close friendship between Fahd and Özal had positive impact on the bilateral ties and elaborates:

They used to talk by phone every week for about an hour. Since the Gulf War, every six months, the political committees of the two governments used to meet regularly. During Özal’s era, senior Turkish officials, including president, prime minister and foreign minister, and many other Arab diplomats used to have dinners at Saudi ambassador’s residence.<sup>182</sup>

However, the death of Özal in 1993 led to a stalemate in bilateral relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia. There were zigzags in Turkish-Saudi relations in the 1990s, as some argue, due to the political instability in Turkish domestic politics<sup>183</sup>, but mainly due to Turkey’s strained relations with Syria for latter’s claims on water and support to PKK and Turkish-Israeli cooperation. Only during the short reign of

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<sup>180</sup> Interview with Ambassador to Turkey Mohammed Ameen Wali, *who served the position from late 1980s to 1990s*, 10 March 2014, Jeddah

<sup>181</sup> Ataman, “Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?”

<sup>182</sup> Interview with Ambassador to Turkey Mohammed Ameen Wali, *who served the position from late 1980s to 1990s*, 10 March 2014, Jeddah

<sup>183</sup> Ataman, “Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?”

conservative leader Necmettin Erbakan in mid-1990s, the relations seemed to improve at least in rhetoric. Erbakan's policy was to have strong relations with the Islamic world, while opposing the close ties with the western countries. Before taking the office, he promised that the military deal inked with Israel will be scrapped and that he would reshape the Turkish foreign policy with more focus on the Islamic countries. However, during his era, the domestic politics not only prevented him from scrapping the agreement with Israel but had also pushed him to sign an additional one in 1996 to upgrade Turkish F-4 fighter planes and also ratify another agreement regarding the free trade with Israel.<sup>184</sup> Erbakan's those steps caused distaste among conservative Arab capitals, including Riyadh, which was particularly not comfortable about Erbakan's efforts to turn Turkey into a leading regional power that sets the future agenda of the Muslim Middle East.<sup>185</sup> Saudis praise Turkey's policies during the era of Özal when comparing to Erbakan's as they believe that that the latter attached importance to the Islamic world but neglected the Arab world.<sup>186</sup>

Erbakan wanted to take the flag of the Muslim world from the hands of Saudi Arabia. In light of this aim, he went to alliance with Iran, Pakistan and some other Muslim countries to form D-8 while excluding Saudi Arabia, the most important country in the Islamic world. This was considered as an offensive action by Riyadh at that time.<sup>187</sup>

The positive climate between Turkey and Saudi Arabia created during the Özal era lost its previous dynamic during Erbakan's period; however, the presence of the military bureaucratic elite in Turkish politics further disaffected the political climate. With the presence of military bureaucratic elite, which adopted a distant policy towards Middle Eastern countries and orientated the foreign policy according to external threats, the bilateral relations between Ankara and Riyadh returned back to

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<sup>184</sup> Kirişçi, "Post-Cold-War Turkish Security and the Middle East"

<sup>185</sup> Basheer M. Nafi, "The Arabs and Modern Turkey: A Century of Changing Perceptions", *Insight Turkey*, Vol.11, No.1, 2009, pp.63-82, Available at: <http://arsiv.setav.org/ups/dosya/53100.pdf>

<sup>186</sup> This was relayed to the author in numerous conversations with Saudi informants in Jeddah.

<sup>187</sup> Interview with Khaled M. Batarfi, *Saudi columnist at Saudi Gazette, writer and Assistant professor at Prince Sultan College for Tourism and Business*, 10 March 2014, Jeddah

the pre-1990 era, when mistrust and negligence dominated the policies between two countries. Sager summarizes the bilateral relations between two countries during the 1990s as follows:

Yet, relations between the two states were limited during the leadership tenures of Tansu Ciller, Mesut Yılmaz and Bülent Ecevit. On the Saudi side, King Fahd bin Abdulaziz Al Saud (1982-2005) did not see the necessity to develop relations with Turkey or accord it high priority. The King's long illness (until his death in November 2005) produced a power and leadership vacuum and the country's foreign relations remained inactive.<sup>188</sup>

### **2.3. International factors in Turkish-Saudi relations in the 1990s**

#### **2.3.1. Post-Cold War Era: Turkey and Saudi Arabia**

In the aftermath of the World War II, the international system was transformed into a 'bipolar' system with the United States on one pole and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) on opposite. The rivalry between these two powers, which have opposing ideologies, caused the emergence of the Cold War international system, where the other countries were opted to take side in one of the two camps; American or Soviet. During the Cold War international system, the countries' capabilities to make room for maneuver were limited.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, an era of constant tension between the United States and the Soviet Union, changed the balances in the Middle East and caused a vacuum of power. During the Cold war era, it was not difficult for the countries to define their foreign policies, due to the bipolar international system. In that system, the countries in the region were either pro-Soviet or pro-American; however, the end of the bipolar world pushed the states to make a choice for either pro-American or anti-American.<sup>189</sup> Throughout the bipolarity of the international system, Turkish and Saudi foreign policies were

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<sup>188</sup> Interview with *AbdulAziz Sager*, *Chairman of the Gulf Research Center and President of Sager Group Holding*, 02 April 2014

<sup>189</sup> Bengio, "The Turkish-Israeli Relationship: Changing ties of Middle Eastern outsiders", pp. 8-11



characterized by their close alliance with the United States and their positions were determined in the American camp. Two countries were concerned by the threat of communism. The collapse of the Soviet threat forced both Ankara and Riyadh to redefine their foreign policy line and reset their calculations.

The change of the system led to the emergence of many factors that caused an impact on the foreign policy decisions of the countries. With the fall of the Iron Curtain, two countries continued to pursue similar foreign policy orientations; that is, as Muhittin Ataman explains, “while they [Turkey and Saudi Arabia] continued to ally themselves with the West, both Ankara and Riyadh began to diversify their foreign policy approaches.”<sup>190</sup> During the post-Cold War era, both Turkey and Saudi Arabia gained a strategic importance in the eyes of Washington. The most important global development for both Turkey and Saudi Arabia in the post-Cold War era was the emergence of the globalization process in the international system during the 1990s. Linjawi defines the post-cold war era with the emergence of globalization in international politics and says:

Globalization emerged particularly after the victory of the US over Iraq in the Gulf War and then Bush-the-father declared the new world order. The changing of the international system impacted the relations between two countries, and this new world order pushed two countries to find each other in the same camp.<sup>191</sup>

Thus, the end of the Cold War enabled a closer engagement in bilateral relations between Turkey and the Gulf countries.<sup>192</sup> The Gulf War, which brought Turkey and Saudi Arabia closer, broke out at a time when the regional countries perceived the changes in the international affairs and were reconsidering their foreign policies. Turkey’s foreign policy, until the 1990s, was defined with two main principles; that is to sustain security and maintain country’s independence against Soviet ideological and territorial expansionism and to secure the modernist, secularist and national

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<sup>190</sup> Ataman, “Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?”

<sup>191</sup> Interview with Haitham H. Linjawi, *Assistant Professor at the department of Political Science of King Abdul-Aziz University*, 13 March 2014, Jeddah

<sup>192</sup> Biberovic, “Turkey and the GCC: A New Era of Bilateral Economic Relations”

regime of the country.<sup>193</sup> Until the Gulf War, Turkey's traditional foreign policy towards Middle East was characterized as: not involve in inter-Arab conflicts, to have a distant stance towards Arab-Israeli conflict, to maintain equal not very close ties with Arab states, Israel and Iran, not to intervene in the internal issues of any Middle Eastern country, to preserve the ties with the western world and to define its Middle East policy with western orientations.

However, the Gulf War pushed Turkey to deviate from its traditional approach towards the region.<sup>194</sup> More importantly, the end of the Cold War led to the emergence of new challenges in the international order. These challenges pushed Turkey to reevaluate its foreign policy in order to preserve its geopolitical significance.<sup>195</sup> As pointed out by Robins, "Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990 provided a new challenge to the principles of Turkish policy on the Middle East."<sup>196</sup> Also, according to Altunışık, the changes in the international system with the fall of the Iron Curtain led to the rethinking of the Turkish foreign policy. Referring to the impact of the change of the international system on Turkey's position, Altunışık explains:

The end of the Cold War with its new sources of uncertainties and also opportunities challenged the traditional paradigm of Turkish foreign policy and led to the surfacing of strong alternative viewpoints. The emergence of new possible areas of influence around Turkey also led to the re-emergence of a historical/cultural dimension in Turkish foreign policy and freed the country from the shackles of the Cold War.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Taner B. Özkeçeci, "The Impact of Institutionalized Ideas in Coalition Foreign Policy Making: Turkey as an Example, 1991-2002", *Foreign Policy Analysis I*, 2005, pg. 259

<sup>194</sup> Hamit Batu, "Turkish Foreign Policy in a Changing World, Studies on Turkish-Arab Relations", 6 (1991), pg. 85

<sup>195</sup> Salmi & Durgun, "Turkish-U.S. Relations: Perspectives From Ankara", pg.2

<sup>196</sup> Philip Robins, "Turkish Foreign Policy", Ramat Gan: The Begin Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 1999

<sup>197</sup> Meliha Benli Altunışık, "Worldviews and Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East, New Perspectives on Turkey", No.40, 2009, pp.172-176

Unlike the pre-1990s, when Turkey's relations with the Middle East had always taken a back seat to its NATO membership; in the post-Cold War era, the region occupied an important place in the Turkish foreign policy.<sup>198</sup> Turkey's rapprochement to the Middle East didn't mean that the close ties with the western alliance during the cold war were given an end. Turgut Özal, Sayarı says, "believed that Turkey could continue to be a valued ally of the West only by expanding its regional role and influence."<sup>199</sup> Similar to Turkey, with the end of Cold War, Saudi Arabia also heaved a sigh of relief, as the common foe, the Communist Soviet bloc was collapsed and a new international system was emerged. Like during the bipolar world, Saudi Arabia continued to maintain its close ties with the Western world, especially with the US, in the post-Cold war era. According to Chas W. Freeman, Jr., Ret. Ambassador, there was a simple bargain between the US and Saudi Arabia, that is, "in return for preferred access to Saudi oil, the United States undertook to protect the Kingdom against foreign threats."<sup>200</sup> Throughout the post-Cold War era, the relationship based on mutual interests of securing the flow of Saudi oil to international markets and protecting the status quo of the Gulf region from threats remained strong.<sup>201</sup> Batarfi likens the Turkish-US-Saudi alliance to the "Twin Pillar" policy of Washington and elaborates as follows:

Before the Iranian revolution, US pursued a Twin Pillar policy in the Middle East. One pillar was Saudi Arabia and the other Iran. But after the Cold War, Turkey filled the vacancy of Iran, which became anti-US after the revolution in 1979. Both Saudi Arabia and Turkey emerged as important allies of the US.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Patricia Carley, "Turkey's Role in the Middle East: A Conference Report", United States Institute of Peace, University of Michigan Library, 1995, available at: <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/pwks1.pdf>

<sup>199</sup> Sayarı, "Turkey and the Middle East in the 1990s"

<sup>200</sup> Speech of Ambassador Chas W. Freeman, Jr., USFS (Ret.) on Saudi Arabia's Foreign and Domestic Dilemmas for Middle East Policy Council, 2014

<sup>201</sup> Christopher M. Blanchard, "Saudi Arabia: Background and U.S. Relations", Congressional Research Service, CRS Report for Congress, 2010

<sup>202</sup> Interview with Khaled M. Batarfi, *Saudi columnist at Saudi Gazette, writer and Assistant professor at Prince Sultan College for Tourism and Business*, 10 March 2014, Jeddah

With the end of the Cold War, Turkey and Saudi Arabia started to play a more active regional role by supporting the resolution of the problematic issues in the Middle East. In early 1990s, Palestinian-Israeli conflict was one of the issues that two countries cooperated and supported it to reach a peaceful solution. The Oslo Accords signed between Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the government of Israel in 1993 created a positive climate in the region. Oslo process aimed at achieving a peace treaty and giving an end to the violence between two sides. Showing its strong support to the discussions between the conflicting sides, Saudi Arabia pledged \$100 million annually for the newly established Palestinian Authority.<sup>203</sup> Turkey has also welcomed the discussions and has given efforts for the accomplishment of the process successfully.<sup>204</sup> As part of its efforts, Turkey provided \$2 million aid and pledged a \$50 million credit to the Palestinians.<sup>205</sup> With the commitment of the Israeli government to the discussions, Turkey softened its foreign policy towards the Jewish state. The softening of the policy was first reflected in the official visits between Turkey and Israel. Being the first high-level visits by Turkish officials since the establishment of Israel in 1949, Foreign Minister Hikmet Çetin paid a visit in 1993, then Prime Minister Tansu Ciller in 1994, and President Süleyman Demirel in 1996 and Israeli officials, including president, prime minister and the foreign minister, reciprocated these visits.<sup>206</sup> Turkey also improved its relations with other Middle Eastern countries, such as Egypt and Jordan and took active role in some issues regarding the region in the early 1990s. However, Kirişçi argues that despite these developments, due to the uncertainties in the Middle East politics, Turkey's engagement to the region was limited and elaborates:

The enthusiasm over economic cooperation was disappointed and Turkey's participation at the Amman and Cairo economic summits was more subdued. Similarly, Turkey has not yet delivered the pledged \$50 million in credits to the Palestinians. In spite of Yasir Arafat's personal request to President Demirel, to provide 60 election monitors for the Palestinian elections in January 1996,

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<sup>203</sup> Bowen, "The History of Saudi Arabia", pg.124

<sup>204</sup> See <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/orta-dogu-baris-sureci.tr.mfa>

<sup>205</sup> Kirişçi, "Post-Cold-War Turkish Security and the Middle East"

<sup>206</sup> Kirişçi, "Post-Cold-War Turkish Security and the Middle East"

only 4 were sent. In December the Palestinian envoy in Turkey, Fuad Yaseen, complained that there was not greater Turkish involvement in support of the peace process.<sup>207</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Until the late 1990s, Turkey pursued a distant, cautious and a security-based foreign policy towards the Middle East. This, unlike the pre-1990s, was more than a choice but a necessity. The PKK threat originating from neighboring countries, namely Syria, Iraq and Iran, and the other Arab countries that support Syria in its disputes with Turkey forced latter to formulate its foreign policy according to its threat perceptions. The elimination of the PKK, which caused the deaths of 30.000 people and jeopardized Turkey's security, was the ultimate aim and in order to achieve this goal, Turkey had to pursue policies prioritizing military means without concession.

Although regional developments; such as the Gulf War, played a significant role in creating a positive climate between Turkey and the Arab states, the increasing terrorist activities of the PKK in the aftermath of the war pushed Turkey to deal with these threats by balancing threats with alliances. Throughout the 1990s, the alliance with Israel caused a disturbance in the Arab capitals, and led to an adoption of an anti-Turkish stance. The mutual threat perceptions and distrust dominated the Turkish-Arab relations until the late 1990s. The atmosphere began to change considerably after the signing of the Adana Accords with Syria in 1998. Particularly following the capture of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1999 and his announcement of putting an end to hostilities, Turkey's security concerns and threat perception of PKK began to decrease. As many analysts argue "resolving the Öcalan case was like the bursting of the bubble."<sup>208</sup>

Once the threat to its national security originating from Syria was eliminated, the bilateral relations between Ankara and Damascus considerably began to develop. In

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<sup>207</sup> Kirişçi, "Post-Cold-War Turkish Security and the Middle East"

<sup>208</sup> See, Oktav, "Water Dispute and Kurdish Separatism in Turkish-Syrian Relations"; also: "Syria forms new alliances", *Christian Science Monitor*, 2002

a gesture to normalize the relations, in June 2000, then Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer visited Damascus for the funeral ceremony of Hafez al-Assad. By visiting Damascus, Sezer became the first Turkish president to visit the Syrian capital since the foundation of the state in 1946.<sup>209</sup> The other significance of the visit was that despite several objections, Sezer paid his first official visit abroad to Damascus.<sup>210</sup> The high-level attendance to the funeral ceremony from the Turkish side was of symbolic importance. After a short period of time, in September, two countries signed a security cooperation agreement and in November, Syrian Vice President Abd al-Halim Khaddam visited Ankara and pledged to 'turn over a new leaf' in bilateral relations.<sup>211</sup> Ankara also welcomed Bashar al-Assad's taking office in the aftermath of his father's death. Turkey's concerns were particularly reduced when son Bashar assumed presidency rather than Hafez's brother Rifat, who had close personal ties with the PKK.<sup>212</sup>

These developments contributed to further improvement in Turkish-Syrian relations. Moreover, this prevailing positive atmosphere also had reflection on Turkey's relations with the Middle Eastern countries, in particular with Saudi Arabia. Since Syria was the mastermind of the Arab opposition against Turkey, normalization of Turkish-Syrian ties led to the breaking of ices between Turkey and the Middle Eastern countries. It is significant to note that when compared to the 1990s, Turkey's regional position was more relaxed as it entered to the 2000s.

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<sup>209</sup> William M. Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy Since 1774*, Routledge, 2013, pg. 234

<sup>210</sup> Oran (ed.), "Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar", pg. 567

<sup>211</sup> Freedman (ed.), "The Middle East Enters the Twenty-first Century", pg.105, also see; "Turkish-Syrian rapprochement: Causes and Consequences", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 14 July 2002.

<sup>212</sup> Oran (ed.), "Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar", pg. 567

## CHAPTER III

### BILATERAL RELATIONS BETWEEN TURKEY AND SAUDI ARABIA IN THE 2000s

As stated in the previous chapter, the change in Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East started after the Adana Accords signed between Turkey and Syria. Particularly, following the capture of Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Öcalan, the threat towards Turkey's domestic security began to decrease and normalization with the neighboring states started from 1999 onwards thanks to the former foreign minister İsmail Cem's regionally-based foreign policy approach. It is significant to note that important changes began during the term of İsmail Cem (1997-2002)<sup>213</sup>, as he played a crucial role in improving Turkey's relation with the Middle Eastern countries. By the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) came to power in Turkey in 2002, most of the problematic issues that limited Turkey's activism in the Middle East had already fade away. After a period of trust-building in the relations with the Middle Eastern countries, with the AK Party coming to power the relations started to further deepen. The new leadership in Turkey found an opportunity to build its vision and policy regarding the Middle East upon the activism initiated in the previous era. Moreover, the regional and international developments paved the way for the AK Party to further engage with the Middle Eastern countries. During the era of AK Party, Turkey started pursuing a more proactive foreign policy towards the regional countries, including Saudi Arabia. As part of its multidimensional foreign policy, Turkey strengthened its political and economic relations with the Gulf countries, which declared Turkey as a strategic partner in 2008.

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<sup>213</sup> For further information regarding İsmail Cem's policy understanding towards Middle East and his extensive efforts in normalization of relations with the regional countries, See: İsmail Cem: "*Turkey in the New Century*", 2001 (a book which is a collection of Cem's speeches, interviews and memories during his term as the foreign minister), Can Dündar, "*Ben Böyle Veda Etmeliyim*", 2008, and Ozan Örmeci, "*İsmail Cem's Foreign Policy (1997-2002)*", 2011.

In the early 2000s, not only Turkey, but also Saudi Arabia experienced a change in the domestic level. King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud became the new king in 2005. With King Abdullah coming to power, Turkish-Saudi relations further bolstered. The new monarch pursued a more active, multidimensional and pragmatic understanding in the foreign policy and sought to strengthen Riyadh's relations with the regional countries. The domestic transformations in both the countries in the early 2000s had a significant impact on the foreign policies of the two countries.

The regional and international developments, such as 9/11 attacks, 2003 US invasion of Iraq, rising of the Iranian influence in the region, escalation of Palestinian-Israeli conflict and Lebanese crisis had significant impact on Turkish-Saudi relations with pushing two countries towards cooperation. As a regional development, the Arab uprisings, which changed the balances in the region, forced two countries to re-calculate their policies regarding the region. As part of this development, the crisis in Egypt serves as a good case to show to what extent the domestic considerations of the two countries have an impact on Turkish-Saudi relationship.

This chapter aims to respond to the following questions: How the domestic transformations in Turkey and Saudi Arabia in early 2000s influenced the foreign policies of the two states? What were the common fields of cooperation for Ankara and Riyadh? What were the regional and international developments that paved the way for the boosting of ties between two countries while also served as a limitation in relations in the 2000s? In this respect, three important developments are covered: 2003 US invasion of Iraq, the 9/11 attacks and the post-2010 developments: Arab Spring.



### **3.1. Domestic factors in Turkish-Saudi relations in the 2000s**

#### **3.1.1. Emergence of AK Party in Turkey**

##### **3.1.1.1. New Discourse towards Middle East**

With the Justice and Development Party (JDP, AK Party or AKP), under the leadership of then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, taking the office, not only domestic and foreign policy went into a transformation but also Turkey's foreign policy towards the Middle East gained activism. In this respect, for Aras, Turkey's rearranging its domestic and foreign policy created self-confidence in regional policy, and as a consequence, Turkish policymakers have decided to pursue an active diplomacy intended at minimizing disputes with neighbors.<sup>214</sup> With the new understanding in foreign policy, Turkey sought to create economic and political alliances in the region, focused to play active role in the regional disputes, engaged into dialogue with several parties in the region and looked for cooperation with neighbors. As part of its normalization efforts with Syria -- which was initiated by the previous Turkish government -- land mines along the Turkish-Syrian border was cleared and border restrictions were eased by 2002.<sup>215</sup> As part of rapprochement, a free trade agreement and a military deal were inked and the visa requirements were lifted between two countries. At the same time, relations with Iraq and Iran were also developing.

During its rule, the AK Party also managed to demilitarize the domestic and foreign politics of the country. During the 1990s, as some argue, one of the main obstacles of Turkey's engagement with the Middle East was the presence of the military bureaucratic elite, which pursued security-oriented policy towards the region. While according to some, security threats necessitated Turkey to pursue a policy prioritizing military means and as a consequence relations with the Middle Eastern countries remained limited. In the 1990s the situation required Turkey to pursue a distant and cautious policy towards the region. However, during the Republican era;

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<sup>214</sup> Aras, "Turkey and the GCC: An Emerging Relationship"

<sup>215</sup> Oktav, "Water Dispute and Kurdish Separatism in Turkish-Syrian Relations"

it was more a choice of the ruling elite to remain distant from the Middle East. During the Republican era, Turkey pursued a foreign policy characterized by a Western orientation and was engaged into efforts of nation-building.<sup>216</sup> During this era, Turkey's involvement in the regional issues was not considered as advantageous. According to Yeşilyurt and Akdevelioğlu, there is dominant view by some ideological circles which argue that the removal of the Kemalist ideology in foreign policy has enabled Turkey's (AK Party's) activism in the Middle East.<sup>217</sup> While according to some, the transformation that provided the basis for activism in the foreign policy towards the Middle East was started in the previous era of Bülent Ecevit and that AK party was only the successor of that process.<sup>218</sup>

As stated previously, the government before the AK party has played a significant role in the change of the foreign policy towards Middle East; however, with the new vision and policy of AK Party, Turkey- Middle East relations entered a new phase. Ankara's focus to the Middle East particularly increased during the second term (2007-2011) of AK Party. As Bank and Karadağ puts it, "Middle East is the region in which [Ahmet] Davutoğlu's doctrine, particularly in the AKP's second term (2007–2011), has been most comprehensively enacted, thereby leading to Turkey's rise as a regional power."<sup>219</sup> According to Ahmet Davutoğlu, who served as the foreign minister of Turkey from 2009 to 2014 and who is the mastermind of AK Party's foreign policy understanding, in the twentieth century, Turkish governments were not aware of being the successor of Ottoman heritage and failed to understand Turkey's potential historical and geopolitical depth.<sup>220</sup> For Davutoğlu, getting rid of the historical prejudices against the Middle East, cooperating with the region economically and culturally and acknowledging its Ottoman legacy was not a choice

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<sup>216</sup> André Bank and Roy Karadağ, "The Political Economy of Regional Power: Turkey under the AKP", GIGA Research Unit: Institute of Middle East Studies, No. 204, 2012

<sup>217</sup> Nuri Yeşilyurt & Atay Akdevelioğlu, "Turkey's Middle East Policy under the JDP Rule", *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations*, Vol. 40, 2009, pp.40-69

<sup>218</sup> Yeşilyurt & Akdevelioğlu, "Turkey's Middle East Policy under the JDP Rule"

<sup>219</sup> Bank and Karadağ, "The Political Economy of Regional Power: Turkey under the AKP"

<sup>220</sup> Yeşilyurt & Akdevelioğlu, "Turkey's Middle East Policy under the JDP Rule"

but a must for Turkey.<sup>221</sup> The importance of the Ottoman legacy underlined by Davutoğlu also took its place in the literature with name “neo-Ottomanism”, an approach which was one of the conceptual tools used by Turkey in its relations with the Middle East. With the “Strategic Depth”<sup>222</sup> doctrine of Davutoğlu, Turkey reassessed its own position towards the regional issues.<sup>223</sup> As part of this doctrine, “zero-problems-with-neighbors” policy occupied an important place in AK Party’s foreign policy orientation towards the Middle East. Rather than adopting a security-oriented foreign policy based on cautious and suspicious approach towards the Middle East, AK Party advocated maximum cooperation and pro-active, dynamic, and multidimensional foreign policy.<sup>224</sup> One of the characteristics of AK Party’s foreign policy understanding was the diversification of alliances outside the Western world.<sup>225</sup> Also, one of the main strategies used by top Turkish officials towards the Middle East was to promote of the Turkish model.<sup>226</sup> In 2010, Office of Public Diplomacy was founded by the Prime Ministry in order to ‘tell Turkey’s new story’ of transformation of foreign and domestic politics to the world.<sup>227</sup>

As part of its pro-active role in the Middle East, Turkey inked several political, economic and cultural deals with the Arab countries, enhanced its position in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) and has joined the Arab League in the observer status.<sup>228</sup> Turkey has become the strategic partner of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), led by Saudi Arabia, in 2008. Turkey also signed a Memorandum of

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<sup>221</sup> Yeşilyurt & Akdevelioğlu, “Turkey’s Middle East Policy under the JDP Rule”

<sup>222</sup> Strategic Depth refers to Davutoğlu’s book titled “Stratejik Derinlik” in which he explains Turkey’s international position with geopolitical and historical analysis.

<sup>223</sup> Birol Başkan, “Ankara Torn Apart: Arab Spring Turns into Turkey’s Autumn,” *Turkish Yearbook of International Affairs*, Vol. 42, 2011, pp.1-25

<sup>224</sup> Ataman, “Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?”

<sup>225</sup> Hugh Pope, “Pax Ottomana? The Mixed Success of Turkey’s New Foreign Policy”, *Foreign Affairs*, 89, 6, 2010

<sup>226</sup> Bank and Karadağ, “The Political Economy of Regional Power: Turkey under the AKP”

<sup>227</sup> Ibrahim Kalin, “Soft Power and Public Diplomacy in Turkey”, *PERCEPTIONS*, 2011, Vol. 16, No. 3, pp. 5-23.

<sup>228</sup> Crystal E Ennis & Bessma Momani, “Shaping the Middle East in the Midst of the Arab Uprisings: Turkish and Saudi foreign policy strategies”, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 6, 2013, Routledge, pp 1127–1144

Understanding (MoU) with the GCC, becoming the first non-Gulf country acquiring the status of strategic partner.<sup>229</sup> This new foreign policy approach of the AK Party was also reflected in Turkey's perspective towards the Gulf region and its bilateral relations with the Gulf countries.<sup>230</sup> As a result of the shift in the foreign policy paradigm, Turkey's relations with Saudi Arabia also developed rapidly. Turkish-Saudi relations, which did not see much improvement during the twentieth century, entered into a new stage with the AK Party taking the office in Turkey with a new discourse towards the Middle East. Turkey's pro-active approach towards the region, particularly towards the Gulf, was welcomed by Riyadh. On the Saudi side, according to Ambassador Wali, the bilateral relations that were boosted in Özal's era gained momentum in the 2000s particularly with the new leaderships in Ankara and Riyadh.<sup>231</sup>

The top-official visits that took place between Ankara and Riyadh were the clear signals of the developing relations between two countries. As a sign of opening a new page in relations, King Abdullah, a year after assuming power, paid a three-day historic visit to Ankara and Istanbul in 2006 when Ahmet Necdet Sezer was the Turkish president. It was the first official visit by a Saudi monarch to Turkey after four decades and was regarded as a "milestone" in Turkish-Saudi relations.<sup>232</sup> Several agreements were inked between two governments during this important visit. The large Saudi delegation which included 400 ministers, businessmen, bureaucrats, and family members<sup>233</sup> was a clear indication of Riyadh's intention to deepen the economic and political ties with Turkey. Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal stated that the visit opened "a new chapter" in relations between two

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<sup>229</sup> Mariam Al Hakeem, "GCC Names Turkey First Strategic Partner Outside the Gulf," *Gulfnews.com*, 3 September 2008, Available at: <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/uae/general/gcc-names-turkey-first-strategic-partner-outside-the-gulf-1.129631>

<sup>230</sup> Birol Başkan, "Turkey-GCC Countries Is There a Future?", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2011

<sup>231</sup> Interview with Ambassador to Turkey Mohammed Ameen Wali, *who served the position from late 1980s to 1990s*, 10 March 2014, Jeddah

<sup>232</sup> Ataman, "Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?"

<sup>233</sup> Ataman, "Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?"

countries.<sup>234</sup> For, Turkey, the visit was of great significance as it was considered “turning point” in Turkey’s relations with the Arab world.<sup>235</sup> A year later, King Abdullah paid his second official visit to Turkey in order to congratulate new Turkish President Abdullah Gül on his presidency. Turkish president welcomed the Saudi delegation which came with nine planes to Ankara at the airport. During this visit, Saudi monarch presented Gül with the King Abdulaziz Medal of the First Degree to Gül, while in return; Turkish president awarded the monarch with the State Medal of Honor at a ceremony held at Presidential Palace in Çankaya.<sup>236</sup>

The visit also occupied a great place in the media after Gül visited the Saudi monarch at Ankara’s Swiss Hotel, where the latter and his delegation was staying during the visit, rather than at the presidential palace, where the Turkish president is expected to receive his guests according to diplomatic customs. Gül was heavily criticized by the media and the opposition for violating the protocol rules as during the era of the previous presidents all the foreign dignitaries were received in the presidential palace and the deals were signed there.<sup>237</sup> Meeting the foreign guest at the hotel was something unprecedented in presidential protocol. At that time, there were several speculations that a secret deal was signed between two sides during that meeting at the hotel.<sup>238</sup> Turkish Foreign Ministry defended Gül, saying that “the gestures that newspapers have said violated protocol rules were indicative of Turkey's desire to

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<sup>234</sup>“Saudi King Abdullah’s Turkish Visit ‘New Chapter’ in Relations,” *Today’s Zaman*, August 8, 2006, Available at: [http://www.todayszaman.com/latest-news\\_saudi-king-abdullahs-turkish-visit-new-chapter-in-relations\\_35450.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/latest-news_saudi-king-abdullahs-turkish-visit-new-chapter-in-relations_35450.html)

<sup>235</sup> “Saudi King Abdullah’s Turkish Visit ‘New Chapter’ in Relations,” *Today’s Zaman*

<sup>236</sup> “King Abdullah honored in Turkey”, *Hürriyet Daily News*, November 10, 2007, Available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/default.aspx?pageid=438&n=king-abdullah-honored-in-turkey-2007-11-10>

<sup>237</sup> See, “Kral için protokol kuralları altüst”, *Milliyet*, 12.11.2007, available at: <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/kral-icin-protokol-kurallari-altust/siyaset/haberdetayarsiv/12.11.2007/222495/default.htm>. See also: “Huzura çıktı”, *Hürriyet*, 11.11.2007, available at: <http://arama.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivnews.aspx?id=7667376>. See also: “MHP ve CHP'den Gül'e 'Suudi Kral' tepkisi”, *CNNTürk*, 12.11.2007, available at: <http://www.cnnturk.com/2007/turkiye/11/12/mhp.ve.chpden.gule.suudi.kral.tepkisi/404242.0/>.

<sup>238</sup> For such an approach: “Ziyaretin sırrı çözüldü”, *Vatan*, 21.11.2007, Available at: <http://www.gazetevatan.com/ziyaretin--sirri-cozuldu-147891-gundem/>, also: “Kral ve şeyhin bavul dolusu hediyeleri sır oldu”, *GazetecilerOnline*, 24.3.2013, available at: <http://www.gazetecileronline.com/newsdetails/9514-/GazetecilerOnline/kral-ve-seyh-in-bavul-dolusu-hediyeleri-sir-oldu>. See also:

improve dialogue with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.”<sup>239</sup> Saudi side also emphasized the close friendship between Abdullah and Gül, saying that such a friendship do not require protocol. According to Ambassador Wali, King Abdullah and President Gül were very close friends in personal relations and that this friendship has paved the way for closer political and economic relations between two states.<sup>240</sup>

The visit of the Saudi King was reciprocated by the top Turkish officials. Erdoğan had visited the kingdom in 2005 but the most significant visit from the Turkish side came in 2009, when Gül paid an official visit to Riyadh, where he was received in a rare gesture by the monarch at the airport as a sign of reciprocal respect.<sup>241</sup> During his visit to Riyadh, as being the first foreign Muslim president, Gül addressed the Majlis Al Shura (Consultative Council), where he made it clear that Turkey would side by the Arab initiative in the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Gül’s visit came at a time when Turkey’s strong stance towards Israel created a positive perception in the Arab world, particularly in Saudi Arabia. Sager’s remarks over Saudi perception of Turkey after AK Party came to power is worth recording here:

The major factor during the 2000s was the political change inside Turkey. The 2002 election which brought the Islamist-based Justice and Development Party (AKP) to power in a landslide victory was a factor in the Saudi calculus. The leadership of Abdullah Gul and Recep Tayyip Erdogan opened a new page in Turkey’s regional relations, and in particular Turkey-Arab relations. The Islamist pro-Arab stance of the Turkish Republic became more visible and was seen as a genuine policy, not a temporary maneuver. The initiative to improve Turkey-Saudi relations initially came from the new leadership in Ankara and was taken seriously by the new leadership in Riyadh (King Abdullah). Under the leadership of Mr. Erdoğan, Turkey’s relations with Israel gradually deteriorated, which was noted by Riyadh long before the 2008–09 Gaza War and the 2010

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<sup>239</sup> “Ministry defends gestures to visiting Saudi king”, *Today’s Zaman*, November 12, 2007, Available at: [http://www.todayszaman.com/diplomacy\\_ministry-defends-gestures-to-visiting-saudi-king\\_126843.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/diplomacy_ministry-defends-gestures-to-visiting-saudi-king_126843.html)

<sup>240</sup> Interview with Ambassador to Turkey Mohammed Ameen Wali, *who served the position from late 1980s to 1990s*, 10 March 2014, Jeddah

<sup>241</sup> Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi, “Turkey and Saudi Arabia: the buildup to Syria”, *Todays Zaman*, 18 August 2011, Available at: [http://www.todayszaman.com/op-ed\\_turkey-and-saudi-arabia-the-buildup-to-syria-by-sultan-sooud-al-qassemi-254174.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/op-ed_turkey-and-saudi-arabia-the-buildup-to-syria-by-sultan-sooud-al-qassemi-254174.html)

Gaza flotilla raid when Turkey took a strong stand against Israeli actions.<sup>242</sup>

The relations between Ankara and Riyadh continued to develop politically, economically and culturally in the following years with the mutual visits that took place from both sides. As a sign of deepening bilateral ties, Erdoğan, who paid a visit to Saudi Arabia twice in 2010, was honored by the Saudi monarch with the 2010 King Faisal International Prize for Service to Islam during his second visit. The award, which is given every year for those who make contribution to Islam and humanity, was considered as Riyadh's support of Turkey's efforts to strengthen ties with the Arab world. The award was also considered as Arab world's appreciation of Erdoğan's stance towards Israel. Erdoğan's popularity was boosted dramatically both in Turkey and in the Arab world after his heated debate with Israeli President Shimon Peres in 2009 at Davos Economic Forum, where he walked out of the panel and pledged to never return. He was given a hero welcome when he visited Saudi Arabia to attend the Jeddah Economic Forum, where he spoke at the session on "Global Leaders", in 2011.<sup>243</sup> Alorabi explains the factors that played role in Turkish-Saudi rapprochement:

First of all, Turkey itself changed its policy towards Middle East with Ahmet Davutoğlu's doctrine. It opened gates to the Arab world and Turkic countries, Balkans and Caucasia. That paved the way for the Saudis and the Arabs to look at Turkey as a "friendly" state. Secondly, the Islamic intention of Erdoğan and his party and his stance against Israel led the Saudi government and society to adopt a positive approach towards Turks and the Turkish government.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Interview with AbdulAziz Sager, Chairman of the Gulf Research Center and President of Sager Group Holding, 02 April 2014

<sup>243</sup> This was relayed to the author in numerous conversations with Saudi informants in Jeddah.

<sup>244</sup> Interview with Abdulrahman Saad Alorabi, Assistant Professor at the department of History of King Abdulaziz University and editor at Madinah newspaper, 11 March 2014, Jeddah

### 3.1.1.2. Turkish-Saudi mutual investments and economic ties

Turkey's pro-active foreign policy towards the Middle East has also paved the way for the development of its economic ties with the Gulf countries. With its growing industrial economy and investment-friendly environment, Turkey became the commercial hub of the Middle East. For Turkey, Gulf countries, with their rich energy resources and capitals, opened a door of opportunities to expand its economy.<sup>245</sup> According to Biberovic, in the past, due to its economic incapability, Turkey's economic engagement with the Gulf was restrained; however, with the changes in the domestic political-economic situation in the country; it started to play an active economic policy towards the region.<sup>246</sup> Turkish market turned into an attractive center of the Gulf investments, particularly after a legal regulation passed in 2003 regarding the entrance of the Foreign Direct Investments (FDI's) into country.<sup>247</sup> Gulf countries started to pay more attention on investing in Turkey as the legislation about FDI provides an equal treatment for local and foreign investors. One important development on the improving of the economic ties with the Gulf was the start of the discussions on the Free Trade Agreements (FTA) between Turkey and the Gulf monarchies in 2005.

In regards to Turkey's relations with Saudi Arabia, economic considerations played an important role. In the recent years, both Turkey and Saudi Arabia became the centers for foreign investment thanks to the increase of the economic reforms. Saudi Arabia became the major trading partner of Turkey among the Gulf countries as the two sides inked several agreements to boost the economic relations and to encourage trade and investments. During the visit of Saudi monarch in 2007 to Turkey, Turkish President Abdullah Gül and King Abdullah inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for cementing of political and economic cooperation between Turkey and Saudi Arabia.<sup>248</sup> In order to give a boost for the economic relations, Ankara and

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<sup>245</sup> Valeria Talbot, "Turkey-GCC relations in a Transforming Middle East", Analysis No.178, June 2013

<sup>246</sup> Biberovic, "Turkey and the GCC: A New Era of Bilateral Economic Relations"

<sup>247</sup> Yeşilyurt & Akdevelioğlu, "Turkey's Middle East Policy under the JDP Rule"

<sup>248</sup> Ataman, "Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?"



Riyadh signed several agreements, including ‘Double Taxation Prevention Treatment’ in 2007 and ‘Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement’ in 2006.<sup>249</sup> Turkish-Saudi Arabian Business Council was also founded in 2003 and an investment fund in 2005 was established to bolster business sectors in two countries. The fund, which aims to encourage the kingdom to direct its investments to Turkey, is coordinated by the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce and Jeddah Chamber of Trade and Commerce.<sup>250</sup> Mutual investments increased after businessmen and entrepreneurs of the two countries inked several deals and engaged into searching of potential fields to invest for. Malki explains the economic aspect of the improving ties between Turkey and Saudi Arabia as follows:

The tremendous growth of the Turkish economy and at the same time the downfall of the European economy, had led the Saudi businessmen to consider Turkey, which had stable economic environment, as a reliable trading partner in the region.<sup>251</sup>

Turkey soon became a hub for Saudi public and governmental investments. From 2004 to 2011, the total Gulf investment to Turkey amounted \$6.5 billion, which \$1.3 billion belonged to Saudi Arabia, according to National Commercial Bank of Saudi Arabia, reported by the Oxford Business Groups.<sup>252</sup> While Saudi Arabia imports industrial goods, agricultural and textile products, it exports petrochemical products and oil to Turkey.<sup>253</sup> Turkish companies are mainly focused on investing to infrastructure projects in Saudi Arabia, while Saudis on real estate, communications, banks and agriculture sector in Turkey. Especially, after the passing of the law that allowed foreigners to acquire property in Turkey, the investments on the real estate sector increased. As Bassem puts it, “after the new law that allowed the Gulf nations

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<sup>249</sup> Turkish Ministry of Economy, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Available at: <http://www.economy.gov.tr/index.cfm?sayfa=countriesandregions&country=SA&region=4>

<sup>250</sup> Ataman, “Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?”

<sup>251</sup> Interview with Sadiq Al Malki, *Assistant Professor at Political Science Department of King Abdul Aziz University*, 19 March 2014, Jeddah

<sup>252</sup> Talbot, “Turkey-GCC relations in a Transforming Middle East”

<sup>253</sup> Ataman, “Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?”

to have their own properties in Turkey, Saudi people invested to real estate. Now many Saudis have a second home in Turkey.”<sup>254</sup>

As an example of the increasing cooperation of the private sectors between two countries is the approval of the sale of the Türkiye Finans Katılım Bankası to Saudi Arabia’s leading bank, National Commercial Bank, which paid \$1.08 billion for 60 percent of the bank, in 2008. Türkiye Finans was a privately owned bank belonged to Ülker and Boydak groups.<sup>255</sup> Moreover, Ziraat Bank, one of Turkey’s largest banks, acquired an approval to open branches in Saudi Arabia in 2008 and declared that it will open several other branches in the kingdom. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan attended the inauguration ceremony of the branch in Jeddah, where he stated that “the bank would serve as bridge of finance between two countries.”<sup>256</sup>

Saudis also have investments on media sectors in Turkey. Saudi-based private investment company, Kingdom Holding Company (KHC), has presence in media sectors through Fox TV channel through News Corporation and in financial sectors through Citigroup and AKBANK through Citigroup.<sup>257</sup> The same company, owned by Prince Alwaleed bin Talal, who is considered as the richest businessmen with an estimated worth of \$21.4 billion, also has investments in hotels sectors and it manages eight hotels in Turkey; such as Four Seasons Hotel at the Bosphorus, Four Seasons Hotel Sultanahmet, Movenpick Hotel Istanbul, Movenpick Hotel Izmir, Movenpick Hotel Bodrum, Swissotel Istanbul, Swissotel Ankara and Swissotel Grand Efes Izmir.<sup>258</sup> Alwaleed bin Talal held several meetings with top Turkish officials to discuss the investments plans of his company in Turkey. One of those

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<sup>254</sup> Interview with Ziad Bassam al-Bassam, *Vice Chairman of Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry and CEO of the Al-Bassam Group*, 16 March 2014, Jeddah

<sup>255</sup>“Saudi Purchase of Turkish Bank Approved: Official”, *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 29 February 2008, Available at: <http://www.aawsat.net/2008/02/article55259742>

<sup>256</sup> Turkish lender opens branch in Jeddah”, *Hürriyet Daily News*, 20 March 2011, Available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/default.aspx?pageid=438n=turkish-lender-opens-branch-in-jeddah-2011-03-20>

<sup>257</sup> “Turkish investments focus of Kingdom Holding talks”, *Arab News*, 29 March 2014, Available at: [http://www.arabnews.com/news/547396?quicktabs\\_stat2=1](http://www.arabnews.com/news/547396?quicktabs_stat2=1)

<sup>258</sup> “Prince Alwaleed Receives Adviser to Turkish PM Erdoğan”, March 27 2014, Available At: <http://www.kingdom.com.sa/prince-alwaleed-receives-adviser-to-turkish-pm-erdogan>

meetings was held in 2012 with Erdoğan during Prince's visit to Bursa. The other one was in 2009, when President Abdullah Gül hosted a luncheon in honor of Prince at the Presidential Palace. Erdoğan and Prince also came together to discuss investments opportunities in 2007 and 2005 in the kingdom.

Saudi Arabia, due to the lack of water and cultivated area, is a dependent on imported agricultural products. Thanks to its geographical conditions and location, Turkey appears as the dominant player in the agricultural sector and has become the major supplier of agricultural products to Saudi Arabia. As part of this need, Saudi Arabia made significant investments in the food and pharmaceutical sector in Turkey. Saudi-based Savola Company, which controls 60 percent of the Saudi edible oil market, acquired 100 percent of edible oil firm Yudum Foods of Turkey in 2007 for 200 million Saudi riyals (\$53.3 million). The Saudi Company stated that with the acquisition, the Savola would control the 25 percent of the Turkish edible oil market.<sup>259</sup> The same company also showed its interest to the privatization tender process for 25 sugar factories, including Türkiye Şeker Fabrikalar.<sup>260</sup> Turkey's prominent pharmaceutical company, Abdi İbrahim, signed license agreement with Saudi Arabian pharmaceutical distribution firm, Banaja Holding, in late 2014, in order to acquire a market share of \$55 million within five years in the kingdom, conforming to its vision to widen into the global market.<sup>261</sup>

In order to improve its water infrastructure, in 2008, Saudi Arabia has awarded \$383 million contract to one of the leading Turkish companies, Yüksel Consortium, on water transportation tender and at same year, Turkey-based Yüksel Construction LLC was also awarded \$372 million contract for the Saudi Arabia Eastern Region

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<sup>259</sup>“Savola moves on Turkish edible oil market” *Arabian Business*, 25 November 2007, Available at: <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/savola-moves-on-turkish-edible-oil-market-196921.html>

<sup>260</sup> “Yudum'un sahibi Suudi Savola şeker fabrikalarına talip oluyor”, *Vatan Gazetesi*, 19 May 2008, Available at: <http://www.gazetevatan.com/yudum-un-sahibi-suudi-savola-seker-fabrikalarina-talip-oluyor-179427-ekonomi/>

<sup>261</sup> “Turkish pharmaceutical company enters Saudi market”, *Hürriyet Daily News*, 13 November 2014, Available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-pharmaceutical-company-enters-saudi-market----.aspx?pageID=238&nID=74278&NewsCatID=345>

Water Pipeline Project tender.<sup>262</sup> In 2011, Saudi Arabia announced that it plans to invest \$600 billion in agricultural and manufacturing sectors in Turkey in the next 20 years.<sup>263</sup> One of the most significant investment of Saudi-Turkish partnership was the setting a polypropylene manufacturing site near Turkey's Adana-Iskenderun region for \$1 billion in 2012 by the Saudi Company Advanced Petrochemical Company and Turkish Bayegan Group.<sup>264</sup> There are 304 Saudi companies operating in Turkey by 2012 and the total FDI's from Saudi Arabia to Turkey amounted \$1,6 billion during the years of 2002-2012, while, the total Turkish investments in the kingdom reached around \$2 million by 2014.<sup>265</sup>

In the first half of 2012, Turkish companies operating in Saudi Arabia were awarded with significant projects worth \$12.1 billion.<sup>266</sup> Up until the first half of 2013, Turkish companies had 193 projects in the kingdom that worth \$12.4 billion.<sup>267</sup> One of the most important projects carried out in Saudi Arabia is the construction of Medina and Jeddah airports by TAV, a prominent construction company which won the contracts for the construction of airports in two cities. TAV Airports' other consortium partners are GACA, the Civil Aviation Authority of Saudi Arabia, together with Al Rajhi and Saudi Oger for the project, which will be the first airport privatization of the kingdom.<sup>268</sup> TAV will be operating the airport for 25 years and the airport is expected to be opened in 2015. According to Bassem, in last ten years, there is a very big change in Turkish economy which pushed Saudi investors to prefer Turkey as a trading partner and elaborates:

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<sup>262</sup> Ataman, "Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?"

<sup>263</sup> "Saudi Arabia plans to invest \$600 billion in Turkey", 29 April 2011, Al Arabiya News, Available at: <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/04/29/147216.html>

<sup>264</sup> "One Billion USD investment in Turkey on Polypropylene", *Anadolu Agency*, 3 May 2012, Available at: <http://www.aa.com.tr/en/economy/48887--s>

<sup>265</sup> Interview with Cavit Özdem, *Commercial Attaché at Turkish Consulate General in Jeddah*, 12 March 2014, Jeddah

<sup>266</sup> Emrullah İşler, "Saudi-Turkish Relations," *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 24 May 2013, Available at: <http://www.aawsat.net/2013/05/article55302999>

<sup>267</sup> Turkish Ministry of Economy, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Available at: <http://www.economy.gov.tr/index.cfm?sayfa=countriesandregions&country=SA&region=4>

<sup>268</sup> "TAV Airports signed the contract for Medina Airport", Press Releases, Available at: <http://www.tavhavalimanlari.com.tr/en-en/pages/announcements.aspx?aid=101>

Turkish companies are interested to have businesses especially in Mecca and Medina in industrial and construction sectors. Most of the tunnels and roads in Mecca and Medina were built by Turkish companies since long time ago. Turkish Company İSTAÇ [company owned by the İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality] is acting as a consulting company for the Mecca and Medina municipalities. In the Saudi side, among the first businessmen to invest in Turkey was Saleh Kamel, the head of Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry, He is the owner of Al-Baraka Bank in Turkey and has a significant share in Ülker [a leading Turkish food firm], which also has manufactures in Saudi Arabia. Saudi businessmen have always been interested in the privatization in Turkey. During the privatization of İDO [İstanbul Ferry Lines], Saudis gave a good bid; however were not successful in winning.<sup>269</sup>

Beside mutual investments, culture and tourism are one of the most important drivers of relations between two countries. With the airline companies offering regular flights between two countries, the tourism has boosted significantly. Turkish Airlines is landing in nine Saudi cities, being the second company to have that large number of destinations after Fly Dubai.<sup>270</sup>

Turks travel to Saudi Arabia mainly for religious or business purposes. The number of the Saudi tourists arriving in Turkey has sharply increased compared to a decade ago. The number of the Saudi tourists visiting Turkey was more than 84.000 in 2010 and increased to 250.000 in 2013, while more than 500.000 Turks visits the kingdom each year to perform annual Hajj or Umrah duties.<sup>271</sup> In 2001 the number of Turks who visited the kingdom for Umrah was almost 10,000, in 2006 it reached 45,000-50,000 and in 2011 it increased to 450,000.<sup>272</sup> The hajj quota of Turkey is 74.000. Beside tourist purposes, Saudi Arabia is the Gulf country that has the largest number

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<sup>269</sup> Interview with Ziad Bassam al-Bassam, *Vice Chairman of Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry and CEO of the Al-Bassam Group*, 16 March 2014, Jeddah

<sup>270</sup> Interview with Ziad Bassam al-Bassam, *Vice Chairman of Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry and CEO of the Al-Bassam Group*, 16 March 2014, Jeddah

<sup>271</sup> Interview with Turkish envoy to Riyadh Yunus Demirer: “Turkish enterprises keen to build on strong ties”, *Arabs News*, 29 October 2014, Available at: <http://www.arabnews.com/saudi-arabia/news/651581>

<sup>272</sup> Interview with Ziad Bassam al-Bassam, *Vice Chairman of Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry and CEO of the Al-Bassam Group*, 16 March 2014, Jeddah

of Turkish residents. As of 2014, there is more than 100.000 Turks living in Saudi who mainly work on construction, food and furniture sectors.<sup>273</sup>

Although Turkey and Saudi Arabia, two important countries in the region having a total population of 105 million, are trading partners, the trade volume between the two countries is still below the potential.

**Table 1: Trade volume between Turkey and Saudi Arabia during 2001-2013<sup>274</sup>**

Years	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013
\$ billion	1.2	1.7	2.8	3.9	3.4	5.5	8.1

During several meetings between Turkish and Saudi officials, two sides pledge to increase the trade volume. In 2008, then Turkish Finance Minister Kemal Unakıtan has stated that Ankara has formulated a five-year objective to boost its trade volume with Riyadh to \$15 billion.<sup>275</sup> Also, speaking at a speech in the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry in 2010, Turkey’s Industry and Trade Minister Nihat Ergun called Saudi businessmen to invest in Turkey and boost the trade volume.<sup>276</sup> In 2013, Ankara and Riyadh signed ‘Mixed Economy Commission Protocol’ to enhance the trade volume between two countries. During the signing of the protocol, Turkey’s Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdağ stated that Turkey’s target was to increase the trade volume between two countries to \$20 billion in the next five years.<sup>277</sup>

<sup>273</sup> Interview with Cavit Özdem, *Commercial Attaché at Turkish Consulate General in Jeddah*, 12 March 2014, Jeddah

<sup>274</sup> Source: <http://riyad.be.mfa.gov.tr/ShowInfoNotes.aspx?ID=121159>

<sup>275</sup> “Turkey to Increase Trade Volume with Saudi Arabia”, *Khaleej Times*, 29 November 2008, Available at: [http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle.aspx?xfile=data/business/2008/November/business\\_November1318.xml&section=business&col=](http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle.aspx?xfile=data/business/2008/November/business_November1318.xml&section=business&col=)

<sup>276</sup> “Trade volume between Turkey and Saudi Arabia should be boosted” , 11 February 2010, Available at: <http://www.invest.gov.tr/en-US/infocenter/news/Pages/turkish.saudi.trade.volume.boost.expected.aspx>

<sup>277</sup> “Turkey, Saudi Arabia sign economy protocol to boost trade and investment”, *Today’s Zaman*, 6 November 2013, Available at: [http://www.todayszaman.com/business\\_turkey-saudi-arabia-sign-economy-protocol-to-boost-trade-and-investment\\_330777.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/business_turkey-saudi-arabia-sign-economy-protocol-to-boost-trade-and-investment_330777.html)

### 3.1.1.3. The issue of Ottoman heritage in Saudi Arabia

Despite the improvement in Turkish-Saudi relations, the Ottoman-era monuments within the Grand Mosque (Masjid al-Haram) in Mecca have become an issue of disagreement between Turkey and Saudi Arabia in the recent years. After the news reports indicating that the Saudi government has started to bulldoze the porticos around the Masjid al-Haram built in the Ottoman period in order to expand area for the increasing number of pilgrims, the fate of the 17-century Ottoman structures became an issue of concern for Ankara. Turkish authorities has raised their concerns over the historic architecture, which are considered as significant part of the Islamic legacy, and has requested from the Saudi authorities for the porticos, the only remains of the Ottoman heritage in Mecca, not to be harmed.<sup>278</sup> Following a meeting held between Saudi monarch and Erdoğan, in 2012, King Abdullah ordered the preservation of the porticos belonged to Ottoman period and the removal of the porticos that were constructed recently.<sup>279</sup> However, after several reports showing the pictures of the demolished Ottoman-era porticos, the issue has become a source of contention in 2013 when Turkish opposition parties accused Riyadh for being insensitive on protecting the Ottoman heritage in the city. Turkish government has requested the removed porticos to be sent to Turkey, but the Saudi authorities have remained silent on this request. Following the Turkey's pressure, Saudi authorities choose a Turkish firm, Gürsoy Group, to inspect the Ottoman-era porticos within the mosque.<sup>280</sup> Following the research finalized by the company, the Ottoman-era porticos were removed and carried to an area near Mount Arafat in order to restore the historic monuments without harming their original form. After the finalization of

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<sup>278</sup> "Opposition complains Saudi indifferent to Turkish concerns over portico", *Today's Zaman*, February 11, 2013, Available at: [http://www.todayszaman.com/diplomacy\\_opposition-complains-saudi-indifferent-to-turkish-concerns-over-portico\\_306774.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/diplomacy_opposition-complains-saudi-indifferent-to-turkish-concerns-over-portico_306774.html)

<sup>279</sup> "Ottoman portico surrounding Kaaba to be protected", *Today's Zaman*, December 09, 2012, Available at: [http://www.todayszaman.com/diplomacy\\_ottoman-portico-surrounding-kaaba-to-be-protected\\_300662.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/diplomacy_ottoman-portico-surrounding-kaaba-to-be-protected_300662.html)

<sup>280</sup> Interview with Ziad Bassam al-Bassam, *Vice Chairman of Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry and CEO of the Al-Bassam Group*, 16 March 2014, Jeddah



the restoration work, the porticos are planned to be replaced few metres away from their original position.<sup>281</sup>

The expansion project, which costs for \$21 billion, is consisted of two stages. The first stage requires the demolition of the building around the Grand Mosque, while the second stage focuses on the expansion of the area. Saudi authorities plan to treble the current size of the prayer area, to create a larger area for the rising number of the pilgrims, which is estimated to reach 17 million by 2025.<sup>282</sup> Saudi monarch assigned the imam of the Grand Mosque, Abdul Rahman al-Sudais, for the project which is won by Saudi Binladin Group.<sup>283</sup> The U.K.-based Islamic Heritage Research Foundation has stated that more than 98 percent of the historical and religious monuments in Saudi Arabia have been demolished in the last 30 years.<sup>284</sup> The executive director of the foundation, Irfan Al Alawi, has described the expansion project of the Saudi authorities as “cultural vandalism.”<sup>285</sup>

The dismantling of several monuments considered to be holy by Muslims is in some ways related to Saudi Wahhabism, an interpretation of Islam that is strongly against of encouraging Muslims for idol worshipping.<sup>286</sup> In September 2014, the president of Turkey’s Directorate of Religious Affairs, Mehmet Görmez, harshly criticized Saudi authorities over the expansion project in Grand Mosque and accused Saudi Arabia

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<sup>281</sup> This was relayed to the author in numerous conversations with Saudi informants in Mecca.

<sup>282</sup> “Medina: Saudis take a bulldozer to Islam's history,” *The Independent*, 26 October 2012, Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/medina-saudis-take-a-bulldozer-to-islams-history-8228795.html>

<sup>283</sup> “The photos Saudi Arabia doesn't want seen – and proof Islam's most holy relics are being demolished in Mecca”, *The Independent*, 15 March 2013, Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/the-photos-saudi-arabia-doesnt-want-seen--and-proof-islams-most-holy-relics-are-being-demolished-in-mecca-8536968.html>

<sup>284</sup> “Saudi Arabia Bulldozes Over Its Heritage”, *Time*, 14 November 2014, Available at: <https://time.com/3584585/saudi-arabia-bulldozes-over-its-heritage/>

<sup>285</sup> “Mecca redevelopment sparks heritage concerns”, *CNN*, 7 February, 2013, Available at: <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/02/07/world/meast/saudi-heritage-destruction-mecca/>

<sup>286</sup> “Medina: Saudis take a bulldozer to Islam's history,” *The Independent*



for destroying history.<sup>287</sup> “History is being destroyed on the Holy Land each day. I wish we were not experiencing a problem of de-historification in these lands. I wish we were able to protect history,” Görmez stated.<sup>288</sup> A decade ago, Saudi Arabia has met with a similar Turkish reaction, when Riyadh ordered the destruction of Al Ajjad Fortress in Mecca, the 18<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman monument, in order to build hotel complex for pilgrims. İstemihan Talay, Turkey’s Minister of Culture of that time, accused Saudis “act of barbarism.”<sup>289</sup> While Turkey stated that Saudi Arabia’s destruction of the historic heritage was a sinful behavior, Saudis refused Turkey’s reaction, saying Turkey was the last country to talk about protecting Islamic legacy.<sup>290</sup> At that time, Turkish Foreign Minister İsmail Cem had also criticized Saudi Arabia for being disregarded to Turkish concerns. The heated debate between two countries occupied a great space in press. Turkey’s *Hürriyet* newspaper has printed its headline in the front-page as “King Fahd is erasing Turkish footprints”.<sup>291</sup> Interview with Sami Angawi, a prominent Saudi architect and the founder of the Hajj Research Center in 1975, on the Ottoman heritage issue between Turkey and Saudi Arabia is worth recording here:

The heritage issue is one of the most problematic issues in the bilateral relations. This is an issue that every leadership in Turkey as well as in Saudi Arabia were aware of; however, two countries, to secure the economic interests, prefer to “agree to disagree” on this matter. It would be too late if both the sides fail to agree on the preservation of the historical and religious sites in the kingdom. Otherwise, this issue could be a matter of contention between two sides again in the future.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> “Turkey’s top cleric slams Saudi Arabia over Mecca skyscrapers”, *Hürriyet Daily News*, 1 October, 2014, Available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-top-cleric-slams-saudi-arabia-over-mecca-skyscrapers.aspx?pageID=238&nID=72377&NewsCatID=3933>

<sup>288</sup> “Turkey’s top cleric slams Saudi Arabia over Mecca skyscrapers”

<sup>289</sup> Mecca redevelopment sparks heritage concerns”

<sup>290</sup>“Saudis hit back over Mecca castle”, *BBC News*, 9 January, 2002, Available at: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/1748711.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/1748711.stm)

<sup>291</sup>“Turkey berates Saudi Arabia for destroying Ottoman castle”, January 8, 2002, Available at: <http://community.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/archive/?date=20020108&slug=turkey08>

<sup>292</sup> Interview with Sami Angawi, *a prominent Saudi architect and the founder of the Hajj Research Center in Mecca in 1975*, 20 March 2014, Jeddah

It seems like Turkish government limits its actions to rhetoric over the issue in order to preserve its economic interests with the Gulf country. Beside the economic concerns, it seems like Turkish stance is the political choice of the AK Party government. Opposition parties in Turkey several times criticized the Turkish government for not showing the necessary awareness over the matter, and called the government to take urgent steps in order to protect the Ottoman historical monuments, which reflects Turkish nation's moral value.

### **3.1.2. King Abdullah's era in Saudi Arabia**

#### **3.1.2.1. Change of domestic and foreign policy with new king**

Following the death of King Fahd in 2005, the Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud took the power in the kingdom. Abdullah, born in 1924, served in the position of the mayor of Mecca, deputy defense minister, the second deputy prime minister, and acting ruler during King Fahd's reign.<sup>293</sup> Abdullah has also served as the head of the Saudi Arabia National Guard since 1962.<sup>294</sup> With King Abdullah coming to power, Saudi Arabia's domestic and the foreign policy underwent a significant transformation. The new monarch started to seek a more active, multidimensional, pragmatic, rational and multilayered understanding in the transformation of the foreign policy of the kingdom.<sup>295</sup> Riyadh considerably increased its efforts to integrate with the international community, by taking part in international organizations and approving international agreements. In his first year at the office, Abdullah, who is described by Lacey as 'an old man in a hurry'<sup>296</sup>, undertook steps to reshape the country's domestic and foreign policy. In this respect, despite his advanced age, the Saudi monarch paid several visits to foreign countries with large number of businessmen accompanying him and hosted many important

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<sup>293</sup> Zuhur, "Saudi Arabia, Middle East in Focus", pg.69

<sup>294</sup> Bahgat Korany, "The Foreign Policies of Arab States: The Challenge of Globalization" ed: Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, The American University in Cairo Press, 2008, pg. 258

<sup>295</sup> Muhittin Ataman, "Reconstruction Efforts in Saudi Foreign Policy: The Rule of King Abdullah", *Ortadoğu Analiz*, July-August 2009 Vol. 1, No. 7-8

<sup>296</sup> Robert Lacey, "Inside The Kingdom, *Kings, Clerics, Modernists, Terrorists, and The Struggle For Saudi Arabia*", Viking Penguin, a member of Penguin Group (USA) Inc, Chapter 32, 2009

multilateral meetings. Also, the significant rise in the number of the foreign dignitaries visiting the kingdom was an indication of Riyadh's increasing efforts to engage with the international community. Saudi Arabia, under the rule of Abdullah, turned from a "closed country" to a more open country that seeks to take active role in the international platforms and pursue a multidimensional foreign policy. As Ataman put it, Abdullah's new foreign policy was based on ending the longtime dependency on one state (the US) and one product (oil) and making Saudi Arabia a country that plays an effective role in multilateral and international platforms.<sup>297</sup> Saudi Arabia's attempts to pursue a more independent policy in its foreign relations find its expression in Saudi Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz's words:

Diversifying the sources of our weapons is a policy that Saudi Arabia pursues. It is one of the strategies involved in building up and arming the Saudi armed forces. This strategy is based on three foundations. First: We do not wish to rely on one source to arm ourselves. Second: We always seek to acquire the most sophisticated weapons that are suitable for our armed forces. Third: We need to acquire certain technologies and adapt them for domestic uses. Purchasing weapons from different sources allows us to do that.<sup>298</sup>

King Abdullah gave priority to secure a respected position for his country in the Arab and the Muslim world. For Riyadh, the maintenance of the status quo and the survival of the regime have been the primary target of the country's domestic and foreign policy.<sup>299</sup> The foreign policy of Saudi Arabia has been built by an understanding that the kingdom is positioned as a safeguard of security and stability of the region and the protector of the Muslim and the Arab world. Kamrava elaborates the Saudi calculations in defining the security and stability of the region:

- 1) Supporting regional actors whose strategic objectives are aligned with those of the Kingdom and its Western allies;

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<sup>297</sup> Ataman, "Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?"

<sup>298</sup> "Asharq Al-Awsat Interviews Saudi Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz", 8 January 2007, Available at: <http://www.aawsat.net/2007/01/article55264085>

<sup>299</sup> F. Gregory Gause, III. "The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia," Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, eds., *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002), pg.206

- 2) Protecting the seemingly vulnerable security of the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf from internal and external threats without too much overreliance on America military protection;
- 3) Countering Iranian influence and ambitions in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and closer to home in Bahrain and the rest of the Persian Gulf; and;
- 4) Ensuring minimal inter-Arab conflicts and friction.<sup>300</sup>

When Abdullah acceded to the throne, he had to shoulder serious social and economic problems of the country inherited from the rule of King Fahd.<sup>301</sup> King Abdullah, who is known as liberal and reformist leader, undertook important reforms in the kingdom. Both the internal calls for reform and the external pressure since 9/11 has pushed the Saudi government to make reforms on judicial, social, economic and political issues. The municipal elections held in 2005, first time since the 1960s, and the Saudi women going to the ballot in the elections of the Chamber of Commerce of the Saudi eastern province in February 2006 for the first time were considered as positive steps that can help the kingdom move towards democracy.<sup>302</sup> In 2011, Abdullah announced that woman would have the right to vote, run in the municipal elections and join in the Shura (consultative) Council – a crucial progress in the woman rights in the kingdom.<sup>303</sup> The kingdom's membership to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2005 after 12 years of talks was a significant economic reform. The issue of WTO membership was one of the essential factors of economic reform in the country.<sup>304</sup>

In 2007, Abdullah issued a royal decree for changes in the judicial system. At same year, Abdullah issued an order banning the religious police from arresting suspects after growing criticism for violent treatment after deaths in detention. In 2009,

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<sup>300</sup> Mehran Kamrava, "Mediation and Saudi Foreign Policy", Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2012, Available at: <http://www18.georgetown.edu/data/people/mk556/publication-67816.pdf>

<sup>301</sup> John R. Bradley, "Saudi Arabia Exposed: *Inside a Kingdom in Crisis*", Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pg.220

<sup>302</sup> Alshamsi, "Islam and Political Reform in Saudi Arabia, The quest for political change and reform", pg.179

<sup>303</sup> "Saudi king gives women right to vote", Reuters, 25 September 2011, Available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/09/25/us-saudi-king-women-idUSTRE78O10Y20110925>

<sup>304</sup> Niblock, "The Contemporary Middle East, Saudi Arabia, Power, Legitimacy and Survival", pg.97

Abdullah discharged the head of the religious police, a senior judge and the head of the central bank in a unique reshuffle. The same year, he also appointed a woman minister previously unprecedented in history of the country. In a country where women are banned from driving the appointment of a woman minister was considered as a significant development and a reformist step by the king. The Saudi press interpreted the reshuffle as a courageous reform.

In order to avoid a succession crisis among the next generation of the royal family after the death of a king, in 2006, Abdullah issued a decree for the establishment of the Allegiance Council to guide the future succession process. Since the establishment of the kingdom, the sons of the first king have ruled the country. The task of the council is to form a mechanism to change the king and the crown prince if they fail to carry out their duties. With the formation of the council, Abdullah aimed to specify the royal succession and assure a peaceful transfer of power.

In order to form a platform to promote national discussion on social issues, Abdullah, while he was the crown prince, created King AbdulAziz Center for National Dialogue in 2003. While implementing reforms, Abdullah also tried to maintain the balance between the political authority and the religious establishments. Abdullah generally faced with the 'king's dilemma'<sup>305</sup> situation during implementation of the reforms in the conservative country. Regarding the reformist approach of Abdullah, a section from Lacey's book is worth recording here:

One outspoken writer and thinker—a member of the Shura Council—was worried to be summoned to the royal presence after he wrote an article that criticized the slow pace of reform. There were too many obstacles to modernization, he complained—lazy bureaucrats, *wasta* (elite influence, meaning royal and business corruption), and also the religious establishment: the sheikhs were getting in the way. 'A good article,' Abdullah informed him [the writer] approvingly. 'You should write more like that'.<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> King's Dilemma is a theory developed by Samuel Huntington that explains how a country is modernized administratively and culturally while the old political order remains unchanged

<sup>306</sup> Lacey, "Inside the Kingdom, *Kings, Clerics, Modernists, Terrorists, and The Struggle For Saudi Arabia*", Chapter 28.

Under the rule of Abdullah, Saudi Arabia continued to bolster its relations with the other regional countries and support Islamic causes. In order to gain prestige and increase its international legitimacy, Abdullah's kingdom sought to play the role of the mediator between the conflicting parties in the region. The mediation was an influential tool for the Saudi foreign policy to actively involve into the regional issues. During the rule of Abdullah, Saudi Arabia involved in several mediation efforts among different sides in Lebanon, Iraq, Palestine between Hamas and Fatah, and Afghanistan.<sup>307</sup> The main factors behind the Saudi mediation efforts were to boost international legitimacy of the royal family and to preserve the security of the kingdom.<sup>308</sup> Saudi Arabia's new understanding in the foreign policy pushed Riyadh to search for new partners that it can cooperate politically and economically. Turkey, which also made a change in its foreign policy orientation after the AK Party came to power, emerged as a potential partner for the Gulf country.

### **3.1.2.2. Considering Turkey as a strong regional ally**

As a consequence of the domestic developments in two countries, Ankara and Riyadh fixed their foreign and regional policies in the 2000s. The regional and international developments further paved the way for the improvement of the relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia. From Turkish side, the change AK Party had brought to the foreign policy pushed Turkey to actively engage with the Arab countries. According to Altunışık, from the Turkish side, important factors; such as the AK Party's acceding to power, Turkish Parliament's motion against US invasion of Iraq in 2003, Turkey's stance towards the war in Gaza and Davos in 2009, created a positive perception of Turkey in the Arab world.<sup>309</sup> While from the Saudi side, regional and international developments; such as 9/11 attacks in 2001, US invasion of Iraq in 2003, rising of the Iranian influence in the region, escalation of Palestinian-Israeli crisis, played a significant role in changing Riyadh's perception towards Turkey. Particularly, the 9/11 attacks, which adversely affected Riyadh's relations

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<sup>307</sup> Kamrava, "Mediation and Saudi Foreign Policy"

<sup>308</sup> Joseph Kostiner, "Saudi Arabia and the Arab-Israeli Peace Process: The Fluctuation of Regional Coordination," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 2009, pg. 417

<sup>309</sup> Altunışık, "Turkey: Arab Perspectives"

with the West, especially the US, the longtime protector of the kingdom, and the fall of Saddam's Sunni regime in Iraq, pushed Riyadh to look for a regional partner to cooperate with.

Turkey, with its growing economy and rising political image in the region, emerged as a potential partner to cooperate on political and economic matters. In order to secure the stability at home and in the region, and lessen its dependence on the US, the kingdom decided to cooperate with Turkey, a rising regional country, against the regional threats.<sup>310</sup> For Gulf, unlike Iran, Turkey was a country that did not pose any threat to Gulf's territorial integrity and sectarian sensitivities. Despite having different political structures, having prejudices of the past and adopting of different Sunni understanding -- Turkey represents moderate Sunni version while Saudi Arabia Wahhabi Sunni vision -- two regional countries shared same concerns and sought to maintain the stability and the security of the region. Two countries collaborated in the regional issues, including Palestinian dispute, Lebanese crisis, Iranian's regional influence and instability in Iraq. Ankara and Riyadh sought a regional policy that did not alienate the other in the region as Ataman explains:

Saudi leaders thought that if Turkey was marginalized because of its increased regional initiatives, Ankara could get closer to Israel and the West and turn its back on regional countries, which would be contrary to the interests of Arab peoples. The Saudi Administration feared the re-establishment of a new Turkish-Israeli alliance in the region. Throughout the Kemalist leadership period, the more Turkey improved its relations with Israel and the West, the more it turned its back on the Arab peoples. Therefore, Saudi Arabia preferred to improve its cooperation with Turkey under Erdoğan's leadership and to pursue similar policies towards the region.<sup>311</sup>

For many decades, the security of Saudi Arabia has been sustained by several American deals since the 1940s.<sup>312</sup> Following the September 11 terrorist attacks, Riyadh was determined to decrease its dependence on US, particularly in the field of

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<sup>310</sup> Ataman, "Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?"

<sup>311</sup> Ataman, "Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?"

<sup>312</sup> Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, 'Saudi Arabia', ed: Christopher M. Davidson, "Power and Politics in the Persian Gulf Monarchies", London: Hurst & Co, 2012, p 81.

weaponry. Although it continued to stay dependent on the US weaponry, Riyadh sought to benefit from Turkey's military expertise and power. In 2009, top Saudi officials, including Saudi Chief of the Naval Forces Admiral Fahd bin Abdullah Mohammed al-Suud and the head of Shura Council Abdullah Bin Mohammed Bin Ibrahim al-Sheikh, paid official visits to Turkey. In 2009, along with their families, the head of the Saudi Arabian Security Council Prince Bender Bin Sultan Bin Abdul-Aziz al-Suud and Prince Abdulaziz Bin Mohammed Bin Fahd al-Suud spent their holiday in Turkey.<sup>313</sup> The military and the political relations between the countries were strengthened with the military agreements signed in the recent years. In 2010, two countries inked a deal on military cooperation which aims the training, scientific and technical cooperation in the military field.<sup>314</sup> The deal was signed between Turkey's Chief of General Staff Gen. İlker Başbuğ and Saudi Arabia's Deputy Defense Minister Khalid bin Sultan in Ankara. Two countries have also signed an agreement for the modernization of hundreds United Defense-made M113 armored vehicles (APCs) by the Turkish company FNSS for over \$200 million in 2007.<sup>315</sup> In 2012, two countries signed a deal to cooperate on military education – an agreement which would give the opportunity for the Saudi soldiers to get education at Turkish military schools.<sup>316</sup> As a sign of strengthening of military cooperation, the same year, Turkey's Chief of General Staff Gen. Necdet Özel paid a visit to Saudi Arabia as the head of the General Staff in 20 years.<sup>317</sup> Also, in 2012, Turkish parliament approved an agreement with Riyadh for the training of military personnel.

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<sup>313</sup> Ataman, "Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?"

<sup>314</sup> "Turkey strikes military deal with Saudi Arabia", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 24 May 2010, Available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/default.aspx?pageid=438&n=turkey-strikes-military-deal-with-saudi-arabia-2010-05-24>

<sup>315</sup> "Turkey's FNSS to upgrade Saudi M113 armored vehicles", *Today's Zaman*, 27 August 2007, Available at: [http://www.todayszaman.com/diplomacy\\_turkeys-fnss-to-upgrade-saudi-m113-armored-vehicles\\_120473.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/diplomacy_turkeys-fnss-to-upgrade-saudi-m113-armored-vehicles_120473.html)

<sup>316</sup> "Turkey, Saudi Arabia sign military education agreement", *Today's Zaman*, 1 June 2012, Available at: [http://www.todayszaman.com/diplomacy\\_turkey-saudi-arabia-sign-military-education-agreement\\_282193.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/diplomacy_turkey-saudi-arabia-sign-military-education-agreement_282193.html)

<sup>317</sup> "Top commander pays landmark visit to Saudi Arabia", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 19 November 2012, Available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/top-commander-pays-landmark-visit-to-saudi-arabia.aspx?pageID=238&nID=34970&NewsCatID=338>



The military cooperation between two countries further enhanced with the agreement on defense industry. In 2013, Turkey's President Abdullah Gül and Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud agreed to cooperate on defense sector and inked a deal on defense industry.<sup>318</sup> The agreement will stay in force for five years and should be extended automatically for successive one-year periods.<sup>319</sup> In sum, significant domestic, regional and international developments forced Riyadh to take Turkey into account as a regional partner to fill the power vacuum in the region and to counter Iran's expansionist policies in the region.

### 3.1.2.3. Role of Turkish Soap Operas

One of the most influential factors that have played a significant role in changing Turkey's perception in the Arab world and boosting Arab awareness of the country was the popular Turkish soap operas. The famous Turkish soap opera, *Gümüş*, or *Noor* in Arabic, -- the first Turkish TV series broadcasted in the Saudi-owned Middle East Broadcasting Centre (MBC) -- in 2008, became a hit in the Arab world with more than 85 million viewers.<sup>320</sup> Only in Saudi Arabia, three to four million viewers were glued to the TV to watch 'Noor', according to MBC channel.<sup>321</sup> In the 2000s, the number of the tourists from the Middle East has increased to more than 1 million—a figure which is important when compared to the 1990s. In order to attract Arab tourists, the house where the series has been shot was rented by tour agents and was opened for the visitors. Thanks to these TV series, the number of the Saudi

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<sup>318</sup> "Defense cooperation agreement between Turkey and Saudi Arabia", *Anadolu Agency*, 21 May 2013, Available at: <http://www.aa.com.tr/en/tag/183593--defense-cooperation-agreement-between-turkey-and-saudi-arabia>

<sup>319</sup> "Turkey, Saudi Arabia Ratify Defense Industry Cooperation Accord", *DefenseNews*, 18 September 2013, Available at: <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20130918/DEFREG04/309180029/Turkey-Saudi-Arabia-Ratify-Defense-Industry-Cooperation-Accord>

<sup>320</sup> "Turkish Soap Operas Conquer Arab TV", *Venture*, Available at: [http://www.venture-mag.com/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=510:turkish-soap-operas-conquer-arab-tv&Itemid=14](http://www.venture-mag.com/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=510:turkish-soap-operas-conquer-arab-tv&Itemid=14)

<sup>321</sup> "Soap opera has Saudis glued to TV", *The Seattle Times*, 5 August 2008, Available at: [http://seattletimes.com/html/nationworld/2008092081\\_saud05.html](http://seattletimes.com/html/nationworld/2008092081_saud05.html)

tourists visiting Turkey for holidays in the recent years has rapidly raised<sup>322</sup>, doubling the number of the previous years. In 2011, Turkey received the sixth-highest number of tourists from the foreign countries.<sup>323</sup> Akeel explains the factors that increased Turkey's popularity in the Arab public:

Turkish series had a lot of role in how people get to know about Turkey. It was the introduction that made people more aware of Turkey. Saudis used to go to Europe and US for vacations; however, after 9/11, it became difficult. Turkey appeared as a new destination and people just loved visiting that country. Turkey appealed to both conservatives and liberals in Saudi Arabia because it was both European and a conservative country.<sup>324</sup>

The other positive impact of the soap operas was to increase the cultural interaction between Turks and Arabs<sup>325</sup> and contribute to Turkey's prestige in the Middle East. For many years, Arabs considered Turkey as a secular state that distanced itself from the Arab world and had a negative perception towards Turkey. However, Turkish soap operas not only increased curiosity about Turkey but also created positive view of Turkish culture and values and showed how Turkey balanced modernity and Islam. Turkish soap operas extraordinary success bolstered Turkey's soft power in the region. The success of the soap operas not only led to the revival of the tourism sector but also drew more interest in the Turkish language.<sup>326</sup> As a result of the interest on language, student exchange programs between Turkey and the Gulf countries started. Turkish soap operas have also opened the doors of the Gulf to the Turkish textile industry. The increased interest of Arabs on Turkish made brands

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<sup>322</sup> Roula Khalaf, "Viewers fall for soap's Turkish delight", *Financial Times*, 29 August 2008, Available at: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/15fe1b86-75f0-11dd-99ce-0000779fd18c.html#axzz3KP3xKUnV>

<sup>323</sup> Turkish dramas receive tourism awards", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 18 January 2013, Available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-dramas-receive-tourism-awards-.aspx?pageID=238&nid=39320>

<sup>324</sup> Interview with Maha Akeel, *the director of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC)'s Information Department and the Managing Editor of the OIC Journal*, 21 March 2014, Jeddah.

<sup>325</sup> Yeşilyurt & Akdevelioğlu, "Turkey's Middle East Policy under the JDP Rule"

<sup>326</sup> "Soap operas increasing Iraqi interest in Turkish literature", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 31 May 2011, Available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/default.aspx?pageid=438&n=soap-operas-and-turkish-literature-increase-interest-in-turkish-culture-2011-05-31>

displayed in the soap operas paved a way for the great number of Turkish designers, who achieved to win contracts, to open branches in the Gulf capitals.<sup>327</sup>

The rising popularity of the Turkish series has also attracted the attention of Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, which engaged into talks with popular Turkish actresses and the MBC for tourism campaign in 2009.<sup>328</sup> MBC, the largest media group in the Arab world owned by Al Waleed Al Ibrahim, the brother-in-law of former Saudi King Fahd<sup>329</sup>, broadcasted several Turkish soap operas, particularly *Gümüş* in 2006, dubbed in Arabic dialect, not classical Arabic -- something that makes the Arabs understand easily. Approximately 20 soap operas have been broadcasted in MBC channel, while the others are telecasted on Arabic satellite channels such as Abu Dhabi TV and Dubai TV.<sup>330</sup> Malki elaborates the role of the Turkish soap operas in changing perception of the Arabs towards Turks:

The important thing that should be kept in mind is that media have played a significant role, especially the Turkish soap operas, in bringing the people of the two sides closer. The soap operas were very effective in changing Arab public perception towards Turkey. It was a soft power tool used by Turkey. For instance, the soap opera named 'Magnificent Century' or 'Harem of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent' in Arabic version made the Arabs to think about the Ottoman era.<sup>331</sup>

Turkey has gained approximately \$200 million of income from the 15,000 hours of soap operas that have been sold over the past two years to 75 countries, while it

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<sup>327</sup> "Turkish textile retailers heading for the Gulf markets", *Business Turkey*, 16 July 2012, Available at: <http://www.business-turkeytoday.com/turkish-textile-retailers-heading-for-the-gulf-markets.html>. See also: "Türk tasarımı Körfez'e indi", *Sabah*, 16 December 2012, Available at: <http://www.sabah.com.tr/ekonomi/2012/12/16/turk-tasarimi-korfeze-indi>

<sup>328</sup> Yeşilyurt & Akdevelioğlu, "Turkey's Middle East Policy under the JDP Rule"

<sup>329</sup> Qassemi, "Turkey and Saudi Arabia: the buildup to Syria"

<sup>330</sup> "Turkish soap operas", *Gulfnews.com*, 1 April 2012, Available at: <http://gulfnews.com/business/features/challenge-of-the-turkish-soap-operas-1.1002249>

<sup>331</sup> Interview with Sadiq Al Malki, *Assistant Professor at Political Science Department of King Abdul Aziz University*, 19 March 2014, Jeddah

gained only \$1 million in 2007 and expects to gain \$1 billion in 2023.<sup>332</sup> Time magazine has also described the export of soap operas as the “secret of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.”<sup>333</sup>

In order to emphasize the political impact of the soap operas, Turkish President Abdullah Gül stated that the soap operas were the main topic of discussions with the officials from the Gulf countries.<sup>334</sup> The soap operas swept the Arab streets at a time when the two leading centers for the Arab TV dramas; namely Egypt and Syria, went through difficult days due to the uprisings in the Arab World. However, Saudis’ addiction to the soap operas has received harsh reactions from the conservative circles in Saudi Arabia that called for the TV channels to stop broadcasting those series.<sup>335</sup> Saudi Arabia’s chief cleric has even issued a fatwa saying that it was ‘sinful’ to follow those series. The religious authority in Saudi Arabia found the series harmful to the Saudi family tradition after several couples in the country divorced due to effect of the series. Saudi Arabia has also threatened to fine those keeping pictures of the Turkish actors on the car windows.<sup>336</sup> But despite those reactions, the popularity of the series continued to increase. In sum, Turkish soap operas played a very important role in enhancing Turkey’s popularity in the Arab world and increased awareness on country’s culture and values.

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<sup>332</sup> “Turkey’s biggest export: TV dramas”, *Hürriyet Daily News*, 10 November 2014, Available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-biggest-export-tv-dramas.aspx?PageID=238&NID=74070&NewsCatID=381>

<sup>333</sup> “Series boost Turkish ‘soft power’ in region”, *Hürriyet Daily News*, 12 December 2011, Available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/series-boost-turkish-soft-power-in-region.aspx?pageID=238&nid=8919&NewsCatID=381>

<sup>334</sup> “Turkish soap operas topic of meeting with Arab officials”, *Hürriyet Daily News*, 1 February 2012, Available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-soap-operas-topic-of-meeting-with-arab-officials-.aspx?pageID=238&nid=12714>

<sup>335</sup> “Kingdom’s grand mufti condemns ‘malicious’ Turkish soap operas”, *Arab News*, 28 July 2008, Available at: <http://www.arabnews.com/node/314149>

<sup>336</sup> Khalaf, “Viewers fall for soap’s Turkish delight”

## 3.2. International factors in Turkish-Saudi relations in the 2000s

### 3.2.1. The impact of 9/11

The September 11, 2001 (9/11) attacks on the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City became the first major international development in the early 2000s that affected Washington's relations with the Middle Eastern countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, and affected the politics in the region. Following the attack, Saudi-American strategic alliance, which was based on close political, economic and military interests since the establishment of the relations between two countries, deteriorated when the fifteen out of nineteen of the hijackers who carried out the attack were discovered to be Saudi nationals. The attack, which was considered as a turning point for the Middle Eastern countries, constituted a great challenge to US-Saudi relationship since the two countries became close allies. For the first time in the history of American-Saudi alliance, Saudi Arabia, its political system, its Wahhabi ideology and its educational system begun to be questioned. Because majority of the attackers were Saudis, Saudi regime was harshly accused and criticized by several circles; such as media, administration and public, in the US.<sup>337</sup> The Wahhabi ideology adopted by Saudi Arabia was defined as a threat for the US national interests.<sup>338</sup> Hethlain points out the emergence of the mutual mistrust and negative perception among the public and the administrative circles of the two countries in the following sentences: "*The attacks on US targets on 9/11 drove a wedge between the US and Saudi Arabia and that following the attacks, mutual accusations and suspicions arose publicly, as the two allies found themselves for the first time on a collision course.*"<sup>339</sup> The accusations were particularly directed to the Saudi monarchy, which was accused for indirectly supporting terrorism.<sup>340</sup> Even a

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<sup>337</sup> Niblock, "The Contemporary Middle East, Saudi Arabia, Power, Legitimacy and Survival", pg.127

<sup>338</sup> Salwa Ismail, "Producing 'Reformed Islam': A Saudi Contribution to the US Projects of Global Governance", Ed: Madawi Al-Rasheed, "*Kingdom without Borders, Saudi Arabia's Political, Religious, and Media Frontiers*", Part I, No. 5, Cambridge University Press, 2008, pg.114.

<sup>339</sup> Naif Bin Hethlain, "Saudi Arabia and the US since 1962, Allies in Conflict", Saqi Books, 2010, pg.264

<sup>340</sup> Alshamsi, "Islam and Political Reform in Saudi Arabia, The quest for political change and reform", pg.159

lawsuit was filed against the royal family members on charges of abetment in the September 11 attacks.<sup>341</sup> Saudi Arabia's image in the West, particularly in the US, was severely harmed after the attacks. Soon after the incident, some 600 Saudi nationals, some belonging to royal family and prominent business families, left the US<sup>342</sup> and the visas of the Saudi students and tourists were withheld, even those requested for medical reasons.<sup>343</sup> The attacks shake the status quo of the Saudi regime and led to the questioning of the legitimacy of the American-Saudi alliance.<sup>344</sup> In 2003, Saudi government's dependence on the military presence of the US started weakening. In April 2003, American troops ended their operations and withdrew from the kingdom after an agreement agreed between Saudi and American government.<sup>345</sup>

The maintenance of the Saudi-American alliance was of great importance to Saudi Arabia. For Riyadh, the partnership meant the protection of the territorial integrity against regional threats and increasing of the prestige in the international arena, while for the US, it meant secure access to Saudi oil resources and maintenance of American influence in the region. However, the attacks forced the two sides, Washington and Riyadh, to revise their relations. Saudi Arabia was both externally and internally pressured for change after the attacks.<sup>346</sup> Particularly America pressured the kingdom to make democratic reforms. Also the continuous terror attacks against Saudi and Western targets further increased the need for change. In order to repair its bad image in the western world, Saudi government accelerated its efforts by reforming its debated educational system, carrying out a fight against terrorism and engaging into relations with the regional countries.

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<sup>341</sup> Zuhur, "Saudi Arabia, Middle East in Focus", pg.118

<sup>342</sup> Niblock, "The Contemporary Middle East, Saudi Arabia, Power, Legitimacy and Survival", pg.127

<sup>343</sup> Zuhur, "Saudi Arabia, Middle East in Focus", pg.118

<sup>344</sup> Wynbrandt, "A Brief History of Saudi Arabia", pg.273

<sup>345</sup> Alshamsi, "Islam and Political Reform in Saudi Arabia, The quest for political change and reform", pg.160

<sup>346</sup> Wynbrandt, "A Brief History of Saudi Arabia", pg.285

Following the 9/11, the terrorist attacks of al Qaeda against the kingdom, pushed Saudi government to cooperate with Turkey against the regional transnational threat.<sup>347</sup> After the American withdrawal from the country and the deterioration of the Saudi-American relations due to the 9/11 attacks, Ankara and Riyadh realized that while the region was going through critical days, the cooperation between two countries was essential for the solution of the regional issues and maintaining of the stability in the region. Two countries, while enhancing the bilateral ties, started to give preference to regional dynamics instead of the priorities of the big powers.<sup>348</sup> According to Aras, “the post-9/11 atmosphere created a cooperative climate for the two countries to establish further ties.”<sup>349</sup> Linjawi explains the impact of September 11 incident on Turkish-Saudi ties as:

It was an incident which pushed Saudi Arabia to review its policies towards the US and the region. Turkey, a NATO member and an American ally, enjoyed good relations with the Washington. In order to reduce the US pressure on fight against terrorism, Saudi Arabia considered developing relations with Turkey, a country which had good experience on fight against terrorism and on how to deal with the issue.<sup>350</sup>

As a country which has been carrying out a fight against terrorism for decades, Turkey immediately condemned the September 11 terrorist attacks against the US and declared its full support in American war on terror. As part of its support, Turkey sent troops to Afghanistan and took part in the coalition operations against al Qaeda in the country. Ankara’s standing with the Washington on its fight against terror led to the flourishing of the US-Turkish relations.<sup>351</sup> Particularly Turkey’s commitment in the fight against terrorism emphasized Turkey’s regional significance and enhanced its relations with the United States. Salmi and Durgun lists the examples of

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<sup>347</sup> Ataman, “Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?”

<sup>348</sup> Ataman, “Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?”

<sup>349</sup> Aras, “Turkey and the GCC: An Emerging Relationship”

<sup>350</sup> Interview with Haitham H. Linjawi, *Assistant Professor at the department of Political Science of King Abdul-Aziz University*, 13 March 2014, Jeddah

<sup>351</sup> Giray Sadık, “American Image in Turkey: U.S. Foreign Policy Dimensions”, Lexington Books, 2009, pg.46

Turkey's cooperation in fight against terror as; "it opened its airspace for the American forces to use, it voted to invoke Article 5 of the NATO treaty, it participated to the coalition against al-Qaeda and the Taliban regime, it provided intelligence to the United States through its relationship with Uzbek-Tajik-Hazera Afghan Northern Alliance, it sent its Special Forces group to Afghanistan to train Northern Alliance forces, and after the fall of the Taliban regime, it sent 267 troops to join the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) peacekeeping operation."<sup>352</sup> Taşpınar elaborates that following the 9/11 incident, Turkey's domestic and foreign policy orientation gained significance for Washington:

In the post-September 11 world of polarization between the West and the Islamic world, the symbolism of a Muslim country seeking membership in a Western organization [EU] with a predominantly Christian population acquired global significance. Since Turkey challenged preconceived notions of a "clash of civilizations," Washington tended to present Turkey as a "model" for the Islamic world.<sup>353</sup>

Following the 9/11 Western world had a negative perception towards the Islam, which was abused by the terrorists to justify their attacks, and the Muslim countries. However, Turkey was considered as a secular country ruled by a Muslim conservative party that promotes a moderate interpretation of Islam.<sup>354</sup> In sum, Saudi Arabia's approaching to Turkey was due to several factors, but among the all, Ankara's close relationship with the west, especially with the US, pushed Riyadh to engage into close relations with Turkey in order weaken the western pressure towards the kingdom in the aftermath of the 9/11.

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<sup>352</sup> Ralph H. Salmi & Gonca Bayraktar Durgun, "Turkish-U.S. Relations: Perspectives From Ankara", Brown Walker Press, 2005,, pg.3-4

<sup>353</sup> Taşpınar, "Turkey's Middle East Policies Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism"

<sup>354</sup> Joost Lagendijk, "Turkey and 9/11", *Today's Zaman*, 11 September 2011, Available at: [http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist/joost-lagendijk/Turkey-and-911\\_256364.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist/joost-lagendijk/Turkey-and-911_256364.html)



### 3.3. Regional factors in Turkish-Saudi relations in the 2000s

#### 3.3.1. 2003 US invasion of Iraq and change of political environment

The American invasion of Iraq in 2003 and its consequences was not only the most significant developments in the Middle East in the post-Cold War era, but also one of the most difficult challenges that Turkey and Saudi Arabia faced in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. On March 1, 2003, Turkish Grand National Assembly decided not to support the US-led war against Iraq and refused to give permission to the American troops using its northern territory in war against Iraq. The decision was one of the main developments that showed the change in Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East.<sup>355</sup> Ankara's move served to boost Turkey's prestige in the Middle East. Turkish stance that is free from American influence created a positive approach towards Turkey in the Arab world.<sup>356</sup> As Altunışık put it, "this decision challenged the long-held view of Turkey as a "stooge of the US" in the Arab world and increased Turkey's credibility in the region."<sup>357</sup> Despite suffering economically, Turkey turned down American aid package of \$6 billion in direct grants and up to \$20 billion in loan guarantees which was offered for Turkey's support to war against Iraq.<sup>358</sup> The decision, or in other words the March 1 motion, was the historical key moment for Turkey, which stated that it would pursue its regional and international policies with the basis of democratic legitimacy.<sup>359</sup> Turkey attributed its decision for not allowing US to use its territory to the stance of the international community, which considered the American move as illegitimate. According to Çağaptay and Parris, American-Turkish relations were tested by the motion, which was failed after 100

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<sup>355</sup> Bank and Karadağ, "The Political Economy of Regional Power: Turkey under the AKP"

<sup>356</sup> Tayyar Arı & Ferhat Pirinççi, "Turkey's New Foreign Policy towards the Middle East and the perceptions in Syria and Lebanon", *Akademik Bakış*, Vol.4, No.7, 2010

<sup>357</sup> Altunışık, "Turkey: *Arab Perspectives*"

<sup>358</sup> Salmi & Durgun, "Turkish-U.S. Relations: Perspectives From Ankara", pg.4, See also: Ramesh Thakur & Waheguru Pal Singh Sidhu, "The Iraqi Crisis and World Order," Pearson Education India, 2007, pg.82

<sup>359</sup> Aras, "Turkey and the GCC: An Emerging Relationship"

parliamentarians from the ruling party (AK Party) voted against Turkey's participation to the war.<sup>360</sup> Beside the leadership, the 95 percent of the Turkish people were also not supporting the war.<sup>361</sup>

The other reason for Turkey's reservation was the concern of uncertainty in post-Saddam Hussein era. As a country being the immediate neighbor of Iraq, Turkey faced serious economic and security problems in the post-First Gulf war (1990-91) era and did not wanted to experience a similar situation again. Turkey's biggest concern about US invasion was its adverse outcomes; such as an emergence of a power vacuum in Iraq that may pose disquieting risks to the security and the stability of Turkey as well as the regional countries. Turkey used to enjoy stability in its Kurdish regions particularly after the capture of Öcalan and also Baghdad was providing stability in Turkey's southern border, therefore; the last thing the AK Party, the Turkish military, and the Turkish public wanted was another war in Iraq, says Taşpınar.<sup>362</sup> In order to find a diplomatic solution to the crisis, convince Saddam and prevent a war in Iraq, in January 2003, prior to the American invasion, Turkey launched the 'Iraq's Neighboring Countries Platform', led by then-Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül. The platform, considered as a last chance move for Iraq, brought together Iraq and its neighboring countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, Egypt and Iran. Similar to Ankara, Riyadh also engaged into diplomatic efforts to prevent a war that poses a risk for the stability of the Middle East and both Turkey and Saudi Arabia adopted similar stances in the platform.<sup>363</sup>

Then Turkish Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit's efforts to convince US not to launch a military intervention against Baghdad and his warnings for Saddam to allow United Nations inspectors into the country to check if the Baghdad regime has dismantled its

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<sup>360</sup> Soner Çağaptay & Mark Parris, "Turkey after the Iraq War: Still a U.S. Ally?" The Washington Institute, Policy Analysis, Conference Keynotes, 2003, Available at: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/turkey-after-the-iraq-war-still-a-u.s.-ally>

<sup>361</sup> "The Effects of the Iraq War on the U.S. – Turkish Relationship", Council on Foreign Relations, 6 May 2003, Available at: <http://www.cfr.org/turkey/effects-iraq-war-us-turkish-relationship/p6024>

<sup>362</sup> Taşpınar, "Turkey's Middle East Policies Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism"

<sup>363</sup> Ataman, "Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?"

weapons of mass destruction are significant steps taken by Turkey in order to prevent the war at its doorsteps. During a visit to Washington in January 2002, Ecevit emphasized Turkey's concerns over a military action to Iraq and stated that US invasion may lead to the fragmentation of Iraq and adversely affect Turkey's security and stability. Turkey was not supportive of the Baghdad regime but the maintenance of the territorial integrity of Iraq was of great importance to Ankara. George W. Bush's administration accused the Iraq for seeking weapons of mass destruction and supporting and harboring terrorist organizations.

Following his visit, Ecevit wrote a letter to Saddam in early February to warn the Iraqi leader to prevent a US military action by allowing the UN inspectors to enter the country. Ecevit started his letter by saying "Iraq is now face to face with a danger."<sup>364</sup> In his letter, Ecevit noted that Turkey was trying to avoid the risk of military intervention against its neighbor Iraq, but adding that Turkish efforts could not be successful if Baghdad does not allow UN inspectors entering to the country. "I would not have felt the necessity to bring these considerations to your attention if the situation was not very grave"<sup>365</sup>, Ecevit wrote in his short letter which only consists of ten sentences. After few days, Saddam responded to the Ecevit with a seven-page long letter saying that Iraq will not allow UN inspection and that the demands of UN were unlawful.<sup>366</sup> Turkey, which tried to avert a military action against Iraq, lost hope in Saddam after his letter.

On the Saudi side, Iraq's invasion was a challenging development for the country since the Gulf War (1990-91).<sup>367</sup> Riyadh entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century with increasing economic and political problems at home and straining of US-Saudi relations due to

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<sup>364</sup> Murat Yetkin," Irak krizinin perde arkası...(1)", *Radikal*, 18 January 2004, Available at: <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=102928>

<sup>365</sup> "Turkey warns, Iraq defiant While Saudis confused," *Hürriyet Daily News*, 5 February 2002, Available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/default.aspx?pageid=438&n=turkey-warns-iraq-defiant-while-saudis-confused-2002-02-05>

<sup>366</sup> Yetkin," Irak krizinin perde arkası...(1)"

<sup>367</sup> Madawi Al Rasheed, "Saudi Arabia: the Challenge of the American Invasion of Iraq", 18 September 2006, Available at: <http://www.madawialrasheed.org/site/more/64/>

the 9/11. Riyadh preferred the overthrow of the Saddam regime, but worried about the post-Saddam era. Also the larger part of the Saudi people opposed the US invasion; however, wanted the change of the regime in Baghdad. Riyadh's stance towards the American invasion was indecisive and confusing. From one side it didn't want to risk ties with US by opposing the war; from the other side, it didn't want to create unrest among the people that were highly critical of American moves in the region. Riyadh's dilemma was also reflected in the statements of the Saudi top officials. For instance, in one interview, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal stated that it would be unwise to launch a war before trying diplomatic efforts and that Riyadh requested for a diplomatic solution from the US. Replying to a question whether Saudi Arabia would permit US troops to be deployed on Saudi territory, the Saudi foreign minister said "under the present circumstances, and with no proof that there is a threat imminent from Iraq, I don't think Saudi Arabia will join in the war."<sup>368</sup> Also, King Abdullah, crown prince at that time, underlined in same month that Saudi forces will not participate to the war in Iraq and that it was unacceptable of a war posing threat to Iraq's unity and sovereignty or that its resources or internal security.<sup>369</sup> Although, the leadership in Riyadh was not eager on the US invasion, with several doubts over the post-invasion era, it decided to play a low-profile role with the Americans in the fight against Iraq.

The rapid changes in the Middle Eastern landscape in the aftermath of the 2003 Iraq invasion have led to the improvement in the bilateral relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Particularly, the emergence of new challenges in the region has contributed substantially for the start of a new era in Turkish-Saudi relations. Two countries have also taken part in the same camp during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990-91. After the 2003 invasion of Iraq, two countries have adopted a similar stance in face of the developments in Iraq. Ankara and Riyadh supported the preservation of the territorial integrity and national unity, maintenance of the stability and security of the country, and avoidance ethnic and sectarian divisions in the country. While Riyadh supports Turkey's efforts in engaging all groups in Iraq to the

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<sup>368</sup> Interview with Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal, 11 August 2002, *Iraq Watch*, Available at: <http://www.iraqwatch.org/government/Saudi/saudi-mfa-081102.htm>

<sup>369</sup> Al Rasheed, "Saudi Arabia: the Challenge of the American Invasion of Iraq"

political process, Ankara supports Riyadh's efforts in the reconstruction process of the country. Turkey and Saudi Arabia, in order to pursue a balanced policy towards all the political groups in Iraq, have hosted meetings with Iraq's prominent Sunni and Shiite figures.

Two countries have also actively cooperated in the formation of a new government in Iraq. One of the most important indications of the common Iraqi policy pursued by Ankara and Riyadh was their support for Ayad Allawi, former prime minister and the leader of the Sunni-backed Iraqiya political bloc that included both Sunnis and Shiites. Allawi paid several visits to Turkey and Saudi Arabia during the election campaign in Iraq in 2010. While Ankara and Riyadh threw their support behind Allawi, Iran backed the Shiite-led government of Prime Minister's Nouri al-Maliki's State of Law and Iraqi National Alliance—a Shia party also. In 2010 elections, Allawi's alliance won 24.72 percent, Maliki's party 24.22 percent, and Iraqi alliance 18.2 percent of the total votes.<sup>370</sup> Although Iraqiya bloc won a partial victory, Maliki remained as the prime minister of the country particularly after a court ruling disqualified about 500 candidates, including some close to Allawi, on charges that they had relations with Saddam Hussein's Baath Party.

The demise of Saddam's Sunni regime changed the balance of power in the region. Following the invasion, one of the most crucial developments that further improved the dialogue between Ankara and Riyadh was the rise of Iranian's regional influence, which was considered as a serious threat to the stability and security of the Gulf region, in particular, and the Middle East, in general. The regime change in Iraq and Shiites getting the upper hand in the power has not only become an external threat to Saudi Arabia but also domestic. The greatest concern of the Saudi Arabia was that the Iranian influence and the power change in Iraq may cause unrest among the Shiites in Saudi Arabia.

American invasion of Iraq did not solve a regional problem; but rather it brought a Shiite led government in Iraq to power—something considered as a threat by Sunni

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<sup>370</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman and Sam Khazai, "Iraq in Crisis", Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 6 January 2014, pp.1-324, pg.10, Available at: [http://csis.org/files/publication/130106\\_Iraq\\_Book\\_AHC-sm.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/130106_Iraq_Book_AHC-sm.pdf)

powers in the region.<sup>371</sup> Occasionally, Saudi kingdom adopted an anti-US attitude in order to preserve the balance of power in the region. For instance, in 2007, at the summit of the Arab League in Riyadh, King Abdullah stated that American presence in Iraq was “illegitimate foreign occupation.”<sup>372</sup> Riyadh prefers a coalition government in Iraq compromising Sunnis, Kurds and secular Shiite rather than a Shiite-dominated government in Baghdad.<sup>373</sup>

From Turkish perspective, the American intervention of Iraq has worsened Turkey’s Kurdish problem. The most important impact of the 2003 invasion, on the Turkish side, was the strengthening of the Kurdish ideal for independence in a weak and unstable Iraq and provoking Turkey’s Kurdish population. Larrabee elaborates the repercussions of the 2003 invasion on Turkey’s security:

From the outset Turkish leaders had strong reservations about the U.S. invasion of Iraq. They had no love for Saddam Hussein, but Saddam provided an important element of stability on Turkey’s southern border. Turkish leaders feared that his removal would lead to the fragmentation of Iraq, the growth of Kurdish nationalism, and an overall decline in Turkish security. The aftermath of the invasion has seen Turkey’s worst fears come true. Iraq has degenerated into sectarian violence; Iran’s influence in Iraq and regionally has increased; and the Kurdish drive for autonomy – and eventual independence – has been strengthened.<sup>374</sup>

### **3.3.2. Rising Iranian power in region**

The American military intervention of Iraq in 2003 not only accelerated the transformation in the fragile region but also affected the regional calculations and the balance of power. One of the most significant outcomes of the invasion was the shifting of the balance of power in favor of Iran’s interests. Following the invasion,

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<sup>371</sup> Ataman, “Reconstruction Efforts in Saudi Foreign Policy: The Rule of King Abdullah”

<sup>372</sup> King Abdullah: U.S Occupation ‘illegitimate’, *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 29 March 2007, Available at: <http://www.aawsat.net/2007/03/article55263211>

<sup>373</sup> Ömer Taşpınar, “American-Saudi Connection”, *Today’s Zaman*, 21 May 2007, Available at [http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist/omer-taspinar/the-saudi-american-connection\\_111739.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist/omer-taspinar/the-saudi-american-connection_111739.html)

<sup>374</sup> Stephen F. Larrabee, “Turkey as a U.S. Security Partner”, RAND Corporation, 2008, pg.8

the Shiite population, suppressed under Saddam Hussein's Sunni regime in Baghdad, was empowered – a situation that strengthened Iran's influence over Iraq and other countries.<sup>375</sup> Prior to the US invasion of Iraq, the balance of power in the region was divided between Arab countries and Iran. The fall of a Sunni power in the politically-fragile region led to the decline in Arab countries' power; but at the same time, boosted Iran's rise. With the removal of the Iraqi buffer, Iran gained an opportunity to easily maneuver in the heart of the Middle East.<sup>376</sup> Iranian influence in the region was reinforced particularly after a Shiite-dominated government in Iraq came to power.

The American policies in Iraq strengthened the position of Shiites in expense of Sunnis. Furthermore, US withdrawal for the country exacerbated the sectarian divisions in the country. Saudi uneasiness over American policy in Iraq was also reflected in the Saudi officials' statements. In 2005, Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal stated that "U.S. policy in Iraq is widening sectarian divisions to the point of effectively handing the country to Iran."<sup>377</sup> The rising influence of Iran in the region was the main threat perceived by Saudi Arabia explains Kamrava:

The rise of Iranian power that followed from the fall of Saddam Hussain and the subsequent increase in Iranian influence in Iraq, Hezbollah's successes in Lebanon, Iran' championing of Hamas in Palestine, and the development of Iran's nuclear program confronted the Saudis with a rising regional challenger.<sup>378</sup>

Concerned by the consequences of the invasion, Riyadh and the Gulf capitals have sought to counter the expansion of the Iranian influence in the region.<sup>379</sup> Especially

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<sup>375</sup> Talbot, "Turkey-GCC relations in a Transforming Middle East"

<sup>376</sup> Frederic Wehrey & Dalia Dassa Kaye & Jessica Watkins & Jeffrey Martini & Robert A. Guffey, "The Iraq Effect: The Middle East After the Iraq War", RAND Corporation, 2010

<sup>377</sup> Robert Gibbons, "Saudi says U.S. policy is handing Iraq to Iran," *San Diego Union Tribune*, September 21, 2005, Available at: [http://www.utsandiego.com/uniontrib/20050921/news\\_1n21envoy.html](http://www.utsandiego.com/uniontrib/20050921/news_1n21envoy.html)

<sup>378</sup> Mehran Kamrava, "The International Politics of the Persian Gulf", Syracuse University Press, 2011, pg.180

<sup>379</sup> Talbot, "Turkey-GCC relations in a Transforming Middle East"

Riyadh was concerned over an adverse impact of Iranian influence on its own Shiite population. In order to balance Iran's regional ambitions, to maintain stability at home and in the region, Saudi Arabia looked after a regional power that could counter-force Iranian influence. Due to the decline in the American influence, a power vacuum emerged in the region which was filled by two regional powers: Iran and Turkey, which, unlike to Iran, was considered as "independent, credible, and respectable" country.<sup>380</sup> Turkey's ability to engage into dialogue with several groups in the region bolstered its image as a reliable mediator. Turkey, as a NATO member with strong economy and positive image in the region, was considered by Riyadh as an important counter-force against Iran. Normally, Riyadh is greatly concerned by an emergence of a non-Arab power that could limit its influence in the region; however, Turkey was regarded as "a lesser evil" for Riyadh than Iran.<sup>381</sup>

Ankara tried to walk a fine line between Riyadh and Tehran, with improving its relations with Saudi Arabia while continuing to engage into dialogue with Iran, particularly on the nuclear issue. While both Turkey and Saudi Arabia considers the nuclear issue of Iran as problematic, two countries have a different approach regarding the solution of the issue with Turkey encouraging a diplomatic solution, while Saudi Arabia adopting a confrontational position.<sup>382</sup> Turkey advocated a diplomatic solution for the Iran's nuclear controversy with West, and accelerated its efforts during 2009-2011 to solve the issue through negotiations.<sup>383</sup> In 2010, Turkey and Brazil brokered a deal to decrease the tension between Iran and the West over Tehran's nuclear program; however, the agreement was rejected by the US. Turkey has also not supported UN sanctions against Iran in a move to defy Washington's efforts to isolate Tehran. Turkey's engagement efforts with Tehran were considered as two-facedness by Saudi Arabia, which had suspicions over Turkish-Iranian

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<sup>380</sup> Altunışık, "Turkey: *Arab Perspectives*"

<sup>381</sup> Altunışık, "Bitter Frenemies, The Not-Quite-Alliance Between Saudi Arabia and Turkey"

<sup>382</sup> Nathalie Tocci, Ömer Taşpınar, Henri J. Barkey, Eduard Soler i Lecha, and Hassan Nafaa, "Turkey and the Arab Spring: Implications for Turkish Foreign Policy from a Transatlantic Perspective", ed: Nathalie Tocci, Mediterranean Paper Series, 2011.

<sup>383</sup> Aaron Stein & Philipp C. Bleek, "Turkish-Iranian Relations: From "Friends with Benefits" to "It's Complicated", *Insight Turkey*, Vol.14, No.4, 2012, pp.137-150, Available at: [http://cns.miis.edu/reports/pdfs/insight\\_turkey\\_vol14\\_no4\\_2012\\_stein\\_bleek.pdf](http://cns.miis.edu/reports/pdfs/insight_turkey_vol14_no4_2012_stein_bleek.pdf)



relations. Regarding Iran's nuclear issue, Turkey adopted an opposing stance to a military strike, saying that a foreign intervention would be disastrous.<sup>384</sup> Turkey, having its own security worries, was concerned of a nuclear arms competition and the destabilization of the region. Turkey suffered from the instability and insecurity created by the Gulf war both in terms of economy and security.<sup>385</sup> While, for Saudi Arabia, Iran's nuclear program, which Tehran argues serves only peaceful purposes, was a big threat and should be countered with any way possible. Ankara's diplomatic efforts to convince Iranians to negotiate with the West bear no fruit and left no choice for Turkey to rely more on Riyadh as the backbone of its Middle Eastern diplomacy drive.<sup>386</sup> Iraqi elections in 2010 were considered as a proxy war between Turkish-Saudi alliance and Iran. After Tehran getting the upper hand in Iraq, Turkey interlocked with Saudi Arabia to balance the power in Iraq. Linjawi elaborates the Saudi view of Turkey in face of Iranian threat as follows:

In the regional level, there is a rising Iranian influence in the region. When AK Party came to power, Saudi Arabia considered Turkey as a counterforce against Iranian influence. Iran is a one of the factors that led two countries to cooperate.<sup>387</sup>

As part of efforts to engage with Turkey, Gulf countries declared that Turkey's strategic partnership with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), led by Saudi Arabia, in 2008 when the Turkey and the GCC members signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on security. The partnership between Gulf countries, which are skeptical about Iranian ambitions in the region, and Turkey is considered as

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<sup>384</sup> "Israeli strike on Iran would be 'disastrous,' Turkey's Erdoğan says", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 11 April 2012, Available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/israeli-strike-on-iran-would-be-disastrous-turkeys-erdogan-says-.aspx?pageID=238&nid=17349>

<sup>385</sup> Kadir Üstün, "Turkey's Iran Policy: Between Diplomacy and Sanctions", *Insight Turkey*, Vol.12, No.3, 2010 pp.19-26

<sup>386</sup> "What do Turkey and Saudi Arabia hope to accomplish?" *Today's Zaman*, 23 December 2011, Available at: <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-266505-what-do-turkey-and-saudi-arabia-hope-to-accomplish.html>

<sup>387</sup> Interview with Haitham H. Linjawi, *Assistant Professor at the department of Political Science of King Abdul-Aziz University*, 13 March 2014, Jeddah

significant step on balancing Iran's power.<sup>388</sup> Ataman says while "Ankara and Riyadh try to be in contact with Iran, they initiated a process of establishing a Sunni cooperation against an Iran-led Shiite regional block,"<sup>389</sup>-- referring to a meeting between seven Muslim countries in 2007. The foreign ministers of seven Muslim countries; Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia gathered in Islamabad in 2007 at a summit to discuss the problems regarding the Middle East. Iran was excluded from the summit. The countries agreed that the nuclear issue of Iran to be solved through peaceful and diplomatic ways. After several news reports saying that the summit was formed to confront increasing Iranian influence in the region, then-Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated that the summit did not aim to create an alliance against Iran.<sup>390</sup> While accelerating a process of rapprochement with Saudi Arabia, Turkey continued to pursue a policy that did not marginalize Iran in regional matters.<sup>391</sup>

### **3.3.3. Common fields for cooperation: Palestine, Lebanon**

In response to the crises in the Middle East, Ankara and Riyadh readjusted their foreign policy and see eye to eye in resolution of the major disputes in the region, being successful in some of them. Turkish-Saudi relations have further developed as the two countries took diplomatic initiatives in the resolution of the Palestinian issue and Lebanese crisis in the recent years. Beside the situation in Iraq, Lebanon could be considered as a significant field of cooperation for Ankara and Riyadh. Turkey has played an important role in finding a solution for a cease-fire for the Israeli assault to Lebanon in 2006. Since 2006, Turkish troops within the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) monitor the cease-fire between two sides-- marking the first time since the end of the WWI that Turkish troops have been stationed on Arab

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<sup>388</sup> Gallia Lindenstrauss & Yoel Guzansky, "The Rise and (Future) Fall of a Turkish-Iranian Axis", Middle East Media Monitor, Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2011

<sup>389</sup> Ataman, "Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?"

<sup>390</sup> "Turkey PM denies anti-Shia tie-up", *Al Jazeera*, 25 February 2007, Available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2007/02/2008525142135963838.html>

<sup>391</sup> Ataman, "Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?"

territory.<sup>392</sup> Turkish Parliament extends the mission of Turkey's troops in Lebanon every year. For the reconstruction of the country, Turkey provided humanitarian aid of total \$20 million and pledged to give \$30 million in addition.<sup>393</sup>

Turkey has also pursued an active policy in the overcoming of the presidential crisis in Lebanon in 2007 and 2008. Cooperating with Saudi Arabia, Turkey has also played an important role in the establishment of a government in the country. Turkey and Saudi Arabia have also cooperated intensively in the resolution of the crisis between the antagonist sides in Lebanon through dialogue and negotiations. Turkey with its efforts to engage the Shiite groups to the cooperation process, in one sense, indirectly helped the maintenance of the Saudi influence in Lebanon. The constructive role played by Turkey in integrating the several Lebanese actors to the Middle East political system was also supported by Saudi Arabia. Turkish top officials have several times stated that Turkey was ready to take part in any initiative to end the political crisis in Lebanon.<sup>394</sup>

In order to end the Lebanese deadlock, in 2007, Erdoğan paid visits to Syria and Iran, the main supporter of the Shiite group Hezbollah in Lebanon. Also, in 2006, Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Saniora asked Turkey's mediation to end the violence in the Middle East and Ankara responded positively to the demand, saying "Turkey is ready to make every contribution."<sup>395</sup> The month-long political crisis in the country came to an end after Lebanese factions signed an agreement in Doha in 21 May 2008. Turkey's efforts in signing of the Doha Agreement in 2008, and the formation of the national unity government in Lebanon, increased its prestige in the Arab world and created a positive perception in Lebanon.<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> Gönül Tol, "The "Turkish model" in the Middle East", Middle East Institute 14 December 2012

<sup>393</sup> Arı & Pirinççi, "Turkey's New Foreign Policy towards the Middle East and the perceptions in Syria and Lebanon"

<sup>394</sup> "Turkish premier 'ready to mediate' in Lebanon crisis", *Lebanon wire*, 3 January 2007, Available at: <http://lebanonwire.com/0701MLN/07010328DPA.asp>

<sup>395</sup> "Lebanon asks Turkey to help mediate", *The Jerusalem Post*, 15 July 2006, Available at: <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Lebanon-asks-Turkey-to-help-mediate>

<sup>396</sup> Turkish Foreign Ministry, Relations between Turkey and Lebanon, Available at: <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey-and-lebanon.en.mfa>

From Saudi perspective, Iranian influence over Syria and Lebanon; particularly through Shiite group Hezbollah is a concern for Riyadh, which wants the two countries to be removed from Tehran's orbit. In order to avoid instability in the region, Saudi regime engaged into several mediation efforts to encourage compromise among several sectarian fractions in Lebanon, where the politics is often influenced by external factors. As part of its mediation efforts, Riyadh tried to open the dialogue channels to all the different Lebanese parties, also Hezbollah, and secured the balance of interest between the groups.<sup>397</sup> For Saudi Arabia, Lebanon is important for several factors; to counter the threat of rising Iranian influence and to preserve the relations between Saudi royal family and the Sunni elites in Lebanon. Saudi Arabia aimed to expand its influence in the country through the Sunni elite with whom it enjoys close economic and politician relations as well.<sup>398</sup> In order to end the dispute between Sunni and Shiite groups in the country, King Abdullah accelerated its mediation efforts.

The other field of cooperation between Ankara and Riyadh is Palestinian issue. In this context, Turkey has played a significant role in the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian issue, which occupies a core place in Turkey's Middle East policy. Turkey also took part in efforts to end the Fatah-Hamas rift, which was deepened when the Hamas took the control of the Gaza Strip in 2007. Hamas and Fatah have a history of rivalry as the two Palestinian groups confront each other to share the power in the Palestinian politics.<sup>399</sup> Turkey, unlike Saudi Arabia, did not alienate Hamas in the reconciliation process and moved the Palestinian issue to the international platform. In 2007, Hamas asked for Turkey's mediation in the resolving

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<sup>397</sup> Khalid al-Dakhil, "Saudi mediation in Lebanon threatened by the collapse of sectarian balances," ed: Joshua Craze & Mark Hubard, "The Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Challenge of the 21st Century", Columbia University Press, 2009, pg. 115

<sup>398</sup> Mahan Abedin, "Saudis mull losses in Lebanon as bid for influence is shattered," ed: Joshua Craze & Mark Hubard, "The Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Challenge of the 21st Century", Columbia University Press, 2009, pg. 105

<sup>399</sup> Julia Pettengill & Houriya Ahmed, "Regional Actors and the Fatah-Hamas Unity Deal Shifting Dynamics in the Middle East?", 2011, Available at: <http://www.henryjacksonsociety.org/cms/harrier-collectionitems/Fatah+Hamas+Document.pdf>

of the dispute with its rival Fatah.<sup>400</sup> Also Turkey has offered in 2009 to mediate between two Palestinian groups to create a consensus for a long-lasting ceasefire in Gaza.<sup>401</sup> Turkey's developing ties with Hamas created suspicions in Riyadh towards Ankara. However, Erdoğan cleared the air during his visit to Saudi Arabia in 2010, saying that Turkey and Saudi Arabia have common goal and similar approach in the resolution of the Palestinian issue.

In order to maintain the unity among Palestinian groups and the end the civil war in 2006 that had led to the death of hundreds of people, King Abdullah had mediated between Hamas and Fatah.<sup>402</sup> Saudi monarch offered a Peace Plan for the crisis. In 2007, after intensive negotiations in Mecca, Fatah and Hamas decided to end the rivalry and establish a national unity government.<sup>403</sup> However, the negotiations, led by Saudi King Abdullah, later came to be known as Mecca Accords, failed to resolve the divisions between two Palestinian factions in the long term.<sup>404</sup> The hope to reunite two rival Palestinian factions was also increased in 2011 when Hamas and Fatah signed the Cairo reconciliation agreement, which also failed to be implemented. As an effort to implement the stalled Cairo deal, in 2012, the Doha agreement was signed between leaders of secular Fatah and conservative Hamas. However, the Doha deal was also not accomplished. Prior to the Cairo meeting, Turkey planned to bring together the leaders of the two factions in İstanbul; but after the two sides agreed on a deal in Cairo, the meeting was removed from the agenda.<sup>405</sup> As part of the mediation efforts, Turkish leaders came together with Palestinian

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<sup>400</sup> "Hamas requests Turkish mediation in dispute with Fatah", *Today's Zaman*, 22 June 2007, Available at: [http://www.todayszaman.com/diplomacy\\_hamas-requests-turkish-mediation-in-dispute-with-fatah\\_114737.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/diplomacy_hamas-requests-turkish-mediation-in-dispute-with-fatah_114737.html)

<sup>401</sup> "Turkey says it would mediate between Hamas and Fatah", *The Jerusalem Post*, 19 January 2009, Available at: <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Turkey-says-it-would-mediate-between-Hamas-and-Fatah>

<sup>402</sup> Ataman, "Reconstruction Efforts in Saudi Foreign Policy: The Rule of King Abdullah"

<sup>403</sup> Kamrava, "Mediation and Saudi Foreign Policy"

<sup>404</sup> Kamrava, "Mediation and Saudi Foreign Policy"

<sup>405</sup> "Fatah, Hamas reconciliation nixes Palestinian meeting in Istanbul", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 28 April 2011, Available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/default.aspx?pageid=438&n=palestinian-gathering-in-istanbul-is-no-more-in-the-agenda-2011-04-28>

President Mahmoud Abbas and Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal in several meetings in the recent years. For Turkey, a political reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas is crucial for the unity of the Palestinian interests.

On relations with Israel, Ankara's ties with Tel Aviv started to deteriorate after the Israeli operation to Gaza in 2008-2009. The heated debate between then Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Israeli President Shimon Peres in 2009 at Davos summit further strained the relations. However, the last straw was when Israeli commandos raided the Mavi Marmara, a humanitarian aid ship heading to break Israel's blockade of Gaza, in May 2010, causing the death of eight Turkish nationals and one Turkish-American. Following the incident, Turkey lowered its diplomatic relations with Israel by withdrawing its ambassador and expelling the Israeli envoy from Ankara.<sup>406</sup> For the normalization of the relations, Turkey demanded apology for the raid, compensation for the families of the victims and lifting of the Gaza blockade. The apology came from the Israeli side in 2013 and talks for the compensation are not concluded yet between two sides.

In sum, regarding the Palestinian issue, Turkey and Saudi Arabia supports the establishment of a dialogue process between the Palestinian groups, Fatah and Hamas, the end of Palestinian- Israeli conflict with peaceful ways and the establishment of an independent state on the 1967 territories.<sup>407</sup> Turkey had also supported Palestinians in their lobbying efforts for the United Nations vote to upgrade the Palestinian Authority to non-member observer status. In late 2012, United Nations General Assembly voted in favor of Palestine --a historic move praised by Turkey.<sup>408</sup> Sager elaborates the importance of cooperation between Turkey and Saudi Arabia:

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<sup>406</sup> "Turkey downgrades ties with Israel", *Al Jazeera*, 2 September 2011, Available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/09/2011927226423902.html>

<sup>407</sup> Ayhan, "From Past to Future: Turkish-Saudi Arabian Relations"

<sup>408</sup> "Turkey hails historic UN vote for Palestine", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 1 December 2012, Available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-hails-historic-un-vote-for-palestine.aspx?pageID=238&nID=35871&NewsCatID=359>

Being two major states in the Middle East region, cooperation between Turkey and Saudi Arabia could span a number of vital fields, such as economic relations, energy, counter-terrorism, regional conflicts and peacekeeping operations, WMD elimination and prohibition, resolving the political-security crisis in Iraq and Syria, Iranian nuclear issue, and intelligence cooperation.<sup>409</sup>

### 3.3.4. Close cooperation through OIC, GCC

The improving of the Turkish-Saudi relations was also seen in their cooperation within other organizations such as Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Turkey is the member of the OIC since its establishment in 1969. To develop bilateral political and economic relations with the members of the Jeddah-based OIC played a significant role in Turkey's participation to the organization.<sup>410</sup> In 2005, for the first time in its history, the OIC elected its secretary-general by a democratic vote. The members of the organization elected Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, a Turkish academic and diplomat, after a democratic election between three candidates rather than negotiating behind closed doors.<sup>411</sup> The election of a Turk as the ninth secretary-general of the OIC, the second largest intergovernmental organization after the United Nations, was an indication of Turkey's increasing prestige in the Middle East.<sup>412</sup>

Following the election, then-Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül stated that the election of İhsanoğlu in democratic ways was the indication of the start of the reformist moves and democratization with the organization.<sup>413</sup> Turkish government

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<sup>409</sup> Interview with AbdulAziz Sager, *Chairman of the Gulf Research Center and President of Sager Group Holding*, 02 April 2014

<sup>410</sup> Ali L. Karaosmanoğlu, "Turkey's Security and the Middle East", *Foreign Affairs*, [Vol. 62, No. 1, Fall 1983](#)

<sup>411</sup> Fehim Taştekin, "Turkish leader lashes Out on Twitter," *Al Monitor*, 21 August 2013, Available at: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/08/saudi-turkey-controversy-twitter.html#>

<sup>412</sup> This was relayed to the author in numerous conversations with Saudi informants in Jeddah.

<sup>413</sup> Taştekin, "Turkish leader lashes Out on Twitter"

had made great efforts for the election of İhsanoğlu to the position of OIC head.<sup>414</sup> During the 31st meeting of the OIC foreign ministers held in İstanbul, in 2004, Gül stated that “if our candidate will be elected, we will succeed in the restructuring of the organization.”<sup>415</sup> The fact that İhsanoğlu was born in Egypt and spoke Arabic and served as the founding director-general of the İstanbul-based Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA), the first subsidiary body of the OIC, for approximately 25 years<sup>416</sup> were the main factors in his election.

During his term, 2005-2014, İhsanoğlu made several changes to increase the effectiveness of the OIC; such as changing the name of the OIC to Organization of Islamic Cooperation in 2011, and revising the Charter of OIC in 2008. Turkey supported İhsanoğlu’s efforts in restructuring and transforming the organization. In the beginning of 2014, İhsanoğlu, who served two consecutive terms as secretary-general of OIC, handed over his position to former Saudi Minister of Culture and Information Iyad Madani, who became the first Saudi to take position of secretary-general of the organization.<sup>417</sup> Turkey and Saudi Arabia are active members of the organization, in which two countries cooperate in a number of issues; ranging from Palestine to Myanmar etc. Two countries also actively cooperate within the Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission, (IPHRC), an advisory body for the OIC. The body, which was established in 2011 as part of the İhsanoğlu’s efforts to promote the importance of human rights, has 18 members and two commissioners, which one of them is Turk and the other Saudi.<sup>418</sup> The remarks of Akeel, the director

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<sup>414</sup> Serkan Demirtaş, “King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia should resign!” *Hürriyet Daily News*, 21 August 2013, Available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/king-abdullah-of-saudi-arabia-should-resign-.aspx?pageID=449&nID=52901&NewsCatID=429>

<sup>415</sup> Medaim Yanık & Nebi Miş, “Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu’nun Siyasal Anlamı”, SETA, 9 August 2014, 32 pgs., pg.13

<sup>416</sup> Yanık & Miş, “Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu’nun Siyasal Anlamı”

<sup>417</sup> “İhsanoğlu to hand top OIC job to Saudi successor”, *Today’s Zaman*, 8 February 2013, Available at: [http://www.todayszaman.com/diplomacy\\_ihsanoglu-to-hand-top-oic-job-to-saudi-successor\\_306486.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/diplomacy_ihsanoglu-to-hand-top-oic-job-to-saudi-successor_306486.html)

<sup>418</sup> Interview with Maha Akeel, *the director of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC)’s Information Department and the Managing Editor of the OIC Journal*, 21 March 2014, Jeddah.



of the OIC's press department, on the role of İhsanoğlu's term in developing of Turkish-Saudi relations is worth recording here:

İhsanoğlu was a successful secretary general and that's why he was re-elected. He was very dynamic in his first term, he did many changes for OIC and these were all noticed by the member states, particularly by Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia supported him a lot in his re-election. When he was nominated by Turkish government to the position of the secretary-general, it was a secret ballot. There were three candidates and Saudi Arabia in that election gave its vote to other candidate, not İhsanoğlu. But İhsanoğlu received the largest number of vote and became secretary-general. In his second election, Saudi Arabia supported him fully and Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al Faisal praised İhsanoğlu a lot. For the OIC, both Turkey and Saudi Arabia worked hard to make the organization a more active one and OIC was a tool that enabled both countries to easily cooperate. During the years of İhsanoğlu, the ties between Turkey and Saudi Arabia were generally very good. There was sustainable increase in cooperation between two countries, which found a mutual interest and agreed on several issues.<sup>419</sup>

Two countries also actively cooperate in the Kashmir Group of the OIC. Besides OIC, Turkey also holds the observer status in the Arab League since 2005 and attends in almost every conference. In order to enhance the political, cultural and economic ties between Turkey and the Arab League member countries, in 2007, then-Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan and then-Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa inked a deal to form Turkish-Arab Cooperation Forum.

The other organization in which Turkey and Saudi Arabia deepen their cooperation was the GCC, founded in 1981 by the six Gulf countries: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In 2008, the GCC countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Turkey and declared Ankara as a strategic partner. Turkey was the first non-member strategic dialogue partner of the Council.<sup>420</sup> Several factors have played a role in Turkey's becoming

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<sup>419</sup> Interview with Maha Akeel, *the director of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC)'s Information Department and the Managing Editor of the OIC Journal*, 21 March 2014, Jeddah.

<sup>420</sup> Ali Oğuz Diriöz, "Turkey and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC): Strategic Partnership after 5 years", *OrtadoğuAnaliz*, Vol:5, No.55, 2013,

the strategic partner of the Gulf. First and foremost is the change of the leadership in Turkey with a one that is keen to develop relations with the Gulf. Second is the economic development that the new ruling party achieved within a decade. Third is Turkey's close tie with the West and its membership to NATO. These factors led the Gulf countries to consider Turkey as a trading and political partner. Turkey and the GCC countries held ministerial meetings since the beginning of the strategic dialogue mechanism. Turkey has also launched several initiatives with the GCC countries in the bilateral level. For instance, Turkey played a significant role in the establishment of the strategic dialogue between NATO and four out of six GCC states, such as Kuwait, Bahrain Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, through Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) of 2004.<sup>421</sup> Turkey has been actively supporting the partnership between NATO and the GCC.

As a significant step on the economic relations, Turkish president Gül and Secretary-General of the GCC, Abdul Rahman Bin Hamad Al-Attayah, inked a framework agreement to launch talks for a free trade agreement between Turkey and the GCC in 2005 in Manama.<sup>422</sup> At the ministerial meeting in Kuwait in 2010 between Turkey and the GCC countries, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu underlined that the talks for the free trade agreement should be reached as soon as possible; however, the GCC head noted that despite economic progress, there was still difficulties in concluding the agreement.<sup>423</sup> The agreement is not yet concluded.

Turkish-GCC relations are important in economic terms as two sides have complementary economic structures; such as Turkey is the leading industrial economy in the Middle East; and the Gulf countries have rich energy resources.<sup>424</sup> Turkey's rising political role in the region also had reflection on its economic ties

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<sup>421</sup> Şaban Kardaş, "Turkey and the Gulf Dialogue in the Middle East", TESEV, 2012, Available at: [http://www.tesev.org.tr/Upload/Publication/efe57ebc-ca34-4e94-a7e0-04b6b721e3bb/Turkey%20and%20Gulf%20Dialogue\\_Saban%20Kardas.pdf](http://www.tesev.org.tr/Upload/Publication/efe57ebc-ca34-4e94-a7e0-04b6b721e3bb/Turkey%20and%20Gulf%20Dialogue_Saban%20Kardas.pdf)

<sup>422</sup> Turkey-GCC framework agreement on economic cooperation published in Official Gazette on 13 April 2009 <http://goo.gl/Am3xr9>

<sup>423</sup> "Turkey, Gulf countries eye closer cooperation on trade, security", *Today's Zaman*, 19 October 2010, Available at: [http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail\\_openPrintPage.action?newsId=224743](http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail_openPrintPage.action?newsId=224743)

<sup>424</sup> Diriöz, "Turkey and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC): Strategic Partnership after 5 years"

with the Gulf countries. The trade volume between the Turkey and the GCC has increased rapidly in the recent years.

**Table 2: Trade volume between Turkey and the GCC states in the recent years**<sup>425</sup>

GCC	1996	2002	2005	2009
Saudi Arabia	2.138	1.348	2.850	3.462
Bahrain	0.014	0.035	0.060	0.138
Kuwait	0.210	0.165	0.251	0.395
Qatar	0.013	0.026	0.132	0.375
Oman	0.020	0.031	0.043	0.122
UAE	0.234	0.558	1.880	3.566
Total	2.632	2.165	5.220	8.059

With the increasing trade and the mutual investments, Turkey also developed its political ties with the Gulf. Beside the economic aspect, there are also other factors for developing Turkish-GCC relationship; such as instability in Iraq, Iran’s nuclear threat, security of the region, Turkey’s EU accession process, international terrorism, and issues regarding region and the Islamic world.<sup>426</sup> The security concerns have been the major determinant of the GCC countries’ policy and their relations with the other countries. The rising Iranian influence and the activities of the radical Islamic groups are the main threats perceived by the Gulf countries. As mentioned previously, the US invasion of Iraq had changed the balances in the region and affected the security strategies of the GCC states. Threats derived from the Iranian nuclear power, al Qaeda terrorism and instability in Iraq pushed the GCC states to revise their foreign policies towards the regional countries. The changing perception of the GCC towards Turkey could be read within this context.

<sup>425</sup> Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK), [www.tuik.gov.tr](http://www.tuik.gov.tr)

<sup>426</sup> Aras, “Turkey and the GCC: An Emerging Relationship”

### **3.3.5. Post-2010 Era: Arab Spring**

#### **3.3.5.1. Arab Uprisings: Turkish and Saudi approaches**

The Arab Uprisings, or popularly known as ‘Arab Spring’, which is still an ongoing process, started at the end of 2010 in Tunisia and spread to the rest of the region resulting with the ouster of the regimes of Zain al-Abidin bin Ali’s regime in Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, Muammar Gaddafi in Libya and creating a civil war in Syria. The Arab Spring, which became the most important development in the Middle East in the recent history, not only shook the countries in the region but also changed the dynamics and the calculations in the region, reshuffling the alliances in the Middle East.

The uprisings, which changed the course of the Middle Eastern history, had affected and are still affecting the regional countries, while transforming the balances in the region. While Egypt, Tunisia and Libya experienced the regime change, the other countries in the region had reconstructed their policies politically and economically. Turkey and Saudi Arabia -- two heavyweights of the region -- were not directly affected by the uprisings, but the unprecedented wave in the region pushed the two countries to revise their foreign policies and regional calculations according to their interests.<sup>427</sup> Although having differing motivations towards the uprisings, two countries manage to cooperate in face of the Arab Spring.

Before examining the stances adopted by Ankara and Riyadh towards the Arab uprisings, it is of great importance to assess the motivations behind the involvement of the two countries in the Middle East since the beginning of the Arab revolts. Turkey and Saudi Arabia – two important and stable countries in the politically fragile region – held different desires towards the outcomes of the uprisings and exerted their influence in the region while the tectonic changes were taking place.

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<sup>427</sup> Muhittin Ataman, “Turkish- Saudi Arabian Relations during the Arab Uprisings: Towards a Strategic Partnership? *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 14, No. 4 , 2012, pp. 121-136

While Turkey wanted to be emulated as a role model by the Arab countries with its successful economy and capability of combining both democracy and Islam, Saudi Arabia's motivation was the preservation of the status quo of its regime from the ongoing wave and to keep the upper hand in the regional competition with its long-time nemesis, Iran.<sup>428</sup> Saudi Arabia considers Tehran, its policies and its influence on the Shiite population in the kingdom and in other Gulf countries as a big threat to its stability and the security of the Gulf. While, Saudi Arabia's foreign policy throughout the Arab Spring was shaped by the Iranian concern, Turkey's foreign policy was determined by the thought of presenting its model to the regional countries and enhancing its position in the region.

In the initial days of the Arab uprisings, Turkey's reactions differed from country to country, depending upon its interests in each country. However, as the Arab Spring wave spread across the Arab world, Turkish government adopted a principled stance in favor of pro-democracy movements.<sup>429</sup> On the contrary, Riyadh approached to the uprisings with concern and suspicion and was alarmed with the ousting of its long-time friends in the region. In the case of Tunisia, Turkish government welcomed the change that ousted Bin Ali's regime and regarded the movement in the name of democracy.<sup>430</sup> While Turkey sided by the democracy in Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, uneasy over the development in Tunisia, preferred to support its friend by offering a refuge to ousted Tunisian leader, who enjoyed close intelligence and security links with the Saudi regime.<sup>431</sup>

Regarding Egypt, Turkish stance was coherent and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was among the international leaders to call for the fall of the

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<sup>428</sup> Crystal A. Ennis & Bessma Momani, "Shaping the Middle East in the Midst of the Arab Uprisings: Turkish and Saudi foreign policy strategies", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.34, No.6, 2013, pp.1127-1144

<sup>429</sup> Şebnem Gümüşçü, "Turkey's Reactions to the Arab Spring", *Yale Journal of International Affairs*, 2012, Available at: [http://yalejournal.org/op-ed\\_post/turkeys-reactions-to-the-arab-spring/](http://yalejournal.org/op-ed_post/turkeys-reactions-to-the-arab-spring/)

<sup>430</sup> Sarah Akram, "Turkey and the Arab Spring" *Strategic Studies* 3, 2011, 23–30.

<sup>431</sup> Madawi Al Rasheed, "The Saudi response to the 'Arab Spring': containment and co-option", *Open Democracy*, 2012, Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/madawi-al-rasheed/saudi-response-to-%E2%80%98arab-spring%E2%80%99-containment-and-co-option>

Mubarak regime.<sup>432</sup> According to Barkey, it was easy for Turkey to support the fall of Mubarak because Turkey and Egypt had been at odds with each other.<sup>433</sup> The tense regional rivalry between two countries was due to Turkey's rising role in the region and increased involvement in regional issues and its efforts to overcome the rift between two rival Palestinian factions, Hamas and Fatah.<sup>434</sup> Also it was easy for Ankara to adopt a critical stance towards the Egyptian leader and support its opponents as Turkey did not have much economic interest in the country to be concerned of. However, Saudi Arabia, concerned by the fall of her second friend in the region, stood side with Mubarak and backed the leader financially in order to compensate the loss of American aid.<sup>435</sup> In a personal phone, Saudi monarch Abdullah had also told US President Barack Obama not to 'humiliate' Mubarak.<sup>436</sup>

While in the case of Tunisia and Egypt, Turkey took side by the democratic calls; in Libya realpolitik came into play. Turkey's adoption of differing stance in each Arab Spring country became much apparent in the Libyan case. While the international community harshly criticized the Libyan leader Gaddafi's crackdown against the pro-democracy protestors, who called for the fall of his regime, Ankara adopted a silent stance, in contrast to its critical position against Egypt's Mubarak. Unlike Tunisia and Egypt, in Libya there were substantial Turkish investments, which pushed Ankara to adopt a hesitant stance and call for reform rather than the fall of the regime. While the conflict in Libya escalated, the number of the Turkish workers in the country was about 25.000 and Turkey had invested billions of dollars to the construction sector in the North African country.<sup>437</sup>

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<sup>432</sup> Gallia Lindenstrauss, "Turkey and the Arab Spring: Embracing "People's Power", European Institute of the Mediterranean, 2012

<sup>433</sup> Henri J. Barkey, "Turkey and the Arab Spring", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 2011, Available at: <http://carnegieendowment.org/2011/04/26/turkey-and-arab-spring>

<sup>434</sup> Akram, "Turkey and the Arab Spring"

<sup>435</sup> Al Rasheed, "The Saudi response to the 'Arab Spring': containment and co-option"

<sup>436</sup> "Saudis told Obama not to humiliate Mubarak", *The Times*, 10 February 2011, Available at: <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/to/news/world/middleeast/article2905628.ece>

<sup>437</sup> Akram, "Turkey and the Arab Spring"

Concerned over the adverse impact of a military intervention to the country, Turkey initially objected to the NATO intervention to enforce a no-fly zone and called for diplomatic efforts to convince Gaddafi.<sup>438</sup> Barkey notes that Turkey's opposition to the no-fly zone over Libya cost Turkey as anti-Turkish protestors burned the Turkish flag and tried to occupy Turkey's consulate.<sup>439</sup> According to Salem, beside the Turkey's \$15billion investments in the country, the other reason for Turkish hesitancy was the concern over the negative impact of a foreign intervention to Libya.<sup>440</sup> Turkish leader Erdoğan, referring implicitly to the adverse effect of the US invasion of Iraq to Turkey, said "*military intervention by NATO in Libya or any other country would be totally counter-productive.....We have seen from other examples that foreign interventions, especially military interventions, only deepen the problem.*"<sup>441</sup> However, after it became clear that the fate of Gaddafi was no different than Mubarak and Bin Ali; Ankara called for the Libyan leader's resignation. Yakış points out Turkey's U-turn in Libyan case in the following sentences:

In Libya, Turkey hesitated at the beginning to get involved in the crisis and even wanted to keep NATO out of it. Seeing, however, that "a coalition of the willing" was going to intervene with or without Turkey, it made a swift change and participated in the operations with six aircraft and five ships.<sup>442</sup>

Unlike Turkey, Saudi Arabia, along with the Arab League, was the staunchest supporter of the NATO-led intervention to Libya. The Saudi motivation was due to the antagonistic relations between Libya and Saudi Arabia during the era of Gaddafi, who was once even accused of trying to assassinate Saudi monarch Abdullah.<sup>443</sup>

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<sup>438</sup> Tocci, Taşpınar, Barkey Lecha, and Nafaa, "Turkey and the Arab Spring: Implications for Turkish Foreign Policy from a Transatlantic Perspective"

<sup>439</sup> Barkey, "Turkey and the Arab Spring"

<sup>440</sup> Paul Salem, "Turkey's Image in the Arab World", TESEV Foreign Policy Programme, 2011, p 3

<sup>441</sup> "Erdoğan discusses alternatives with Gaddafi to end crisis", *Today's Zaman*, 15.03.2011, Available at: [http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail\\_openPrintPage.action?newsId=238211](http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail_openPrintPage.action?newsId=238211)

<sup>442</sup> Yaşar Yakış, "Turkey after the Arab Spring: Policy Dilemmas", Middle East Policy Council, Journal Essay, Vol.21, No.1, 2014

<sup>443</sup> Altunışık, "Bitter Frenemies, The Not-Quite-Alliance Between Saudi Arabia and Turkey"

Saudi Arabia's actual stance towards the Arab uprisings became apparent in Bahrain. Saudi regime threw its support behind the Sunni regime of Bahrain and deployed its troops to the country in order to protect the regime against the pro-democracy wave.<sup>444</sup> Bahrain, a country pre predominately Shiite and ruled by the Sunni Al-Khalifa family, is a vital country for Saudi interest as the success of a Shiite uprising there, may trigger a similar one in the kingdom as well. Al Rasheed elaborates the Saudi stance in the Bahraini crisis as follows:

In Bahrain, which is much closer to home and has a Shiite majority linked to their Saudi counterparts in the Eastern province, the idea of democracy or majority rule could not be tolerated. With the support of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Saudis sent troops to help the al-Khalifa rulers against the pro-democracy movement, consolidating Sunni rule and rolling back what they saw as Iranian influence. The Bahraini regime was also propped up financially. This triggered a reaction across the border in Saudi Arabia. Playing up sectarianism became a Saudi pre-emptive counter-revolutionary strategy that exaggerates religious difference and hatred and prevents the development of national non-sectarian politics.<sup>445</sup>

In regards to Bahrain, Turkey adopted a cautious stance towards the Gulf country, which became a battlefield in proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. In order to diffuse the tension in the Gulf country, Ankara called Bahraini government to show restraint.<sup>446</sup> Concerned over the emergence of a Sunni-Shiite conflict in the Gulf country, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu had also engaged into efforts to mediate between in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Iran.<sup>447</sup> However, Turkish efforts did not take much attention. The other reason for the kingdom's intervention in the Bahraini uprisings was that Saudis inspired by the Arab Spring wave started to protest against the Saudi regime. Saudis, including liberals and religious, had sent several petitions to the monarch calling for further reforms and change in the

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<sup>444</sup> Ethan Bronner & Michael Slackman, "Saudi Troops Enter Bahrain to Help Put Down Unrest," *The New York Times*, 14 March 2011, Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/15/world/middleeast/15bahrain.html?pagewanted=all>

<sup>445</sup> Al Rasheed, "The Saudi response to the 'Arab Spring': containment and co-option"

<sup>446</sup> Ömer Taşpınar, 'Turkey's strategic vision and Syria', *Washington Quarterly*, 2012, p 129

<sup>447</sup> Lindenstrauss, "Turkey and the Arab Spring: Embracing "People's Power"



political system of the country. When the unrest among the public increased in 2011, Kingdom, in order to end the protests in the country, announced spending a total of \$130 billion on causes including unemployment and housing shortages.<sup>448</sup> Following the move of the Saudi regime, the situation seemed to calm in the kingdom with the exception among the Shiite population in the eastern part of the country. When Shiite protests increased, Saudi regime banned all anti-government protests and marches.<sup>449</sup>

In the Syrian crisis, things have become more complicated for both Turkey and Saudi Arabia as Syria became the toughest ordeal of the Arab Spring. Syrian case has regional implications as the countries in the region were directly involved in the crisis by supporting a particular side. In the early days of the uprising, Turkey was optimistic to convince Syrian President Bashar al Assad to respond to the call of the demonstrators. Having personally strong relations with Syrian leader, Turkish officials sought the mediation between Assad and the opposition, several times contacted Assad and solely called for the implementation of major reforms.<sup>450</sup> However, after the attempts convince Assad to make reforms failed; then, Turkey became the most vocal critics of Assad regime and the staunchest supporter of the opposition. Regarding the shift in the Syrian policy of Turkey, Davutoğlu stated that: *“We wanted [al-Assad] to be the Gorbachev of Syria, but he chose to be Milosevic. That is a problem.”*<sup>451</sup>

Ankara’s Syria policy cost Turkey politically, economically and socially. Turkey’s adoption of anti-Assad stance led to the loss of the Syrian market which was also the way for the other Middle Eastern countries, especially Gulf. The other impact of the policy was the increasing number of the Syrian refugees fleeing from the war-torn country and taking sheltering in Turkey. Following the spillover effect of the conflicts in the war-torn country to Turkey, Ankara made calls for a military

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<sup>448</sup> Guido Steinberg, “Leading the Counter-Revolution Saudi Arabia and the Arab Spring”, Berlin Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), 2014

<sup>449</sup> “Saudi Arabia bans protest rallies”, *Al Jazeera News*, 5 March 2011, Available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/03/201135143046557642.html>

<sup>450</sup> Lindenstrauss, “Turkey and the Arab Spring: Embracing “People’s Power”

<sup>451</sup> “We wanted al-Assad to be Gorbachev, he turned into Milosevic: Davutoğlu”, *Hürriyet Daily News*, 10 February 2012, Available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/we-wanted-al-assad-to-be-gorbachev-he-turned-into-milosevic-davutoglu-.aspx?pageID=238&nid=13467>

intervention to the country. As Ennis and Momani put it, “*where, in Libya, the Turks were more hesitant about military intervention than were their NATO allies, in Syria it is NATO allies that have been more hesitant than Turkey.*”<sup>452</sup> Turkey had several times made calls for the NATO to enforce a no-fly zone over Syria. Not giving a green light for that option, however, NATO agreed to deploy patriot air defense missiles for defensive purposes solely.<sup>453</sup> The missiles, which were deployed to protect Turkey from the spillover of the Syrian crisis, became operational since January 2013. Turkey also changed its military rules of engagement after Syria shot down a Turkish jet in 2012. Turkey’s anti-Assad stance also strained its relations with Iran, a Shiite ally of the Syrian regime.

While Saudi Arabia, which is uneasy over the change of regimes in the region, became one of the strongest supporters of the opposition aiming to topple Assad, and insistently called for a military action against Syria. Since 2005, before the Syrian crisis, Saudi-Syrian relations were strained due to the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister and a close Saudi ally, Rafiq Hariri as Syria was accused for the incident. Saudi Arabia has also called the international community to arm the Syrian opposition against Assad’s atrocities. The Saudi position in the Syrian crisis was motivated by several factors, most importantly political and sectarian. Saudi Arabia was highly concerned over close relationship between Damascus and Tehran and considered the fall of Assad as a blow to Tehran’s sectarian aim in the region. The uprising in Syria, pre-dominantly Sunni but ruled by an Alawite Assad family, was considered as a golden opportunity by Saudi regime to bring Damascus back into the Arab and Sunni sphere of influence and to weaken Iran’s hand.<sup>454</sup>

While, Turkey and Saudi Arabia were on the same page in the Syrian crisis, both countries backing the Syrian opposition and calling the fall of the Assad regime, the

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<sup>452</sup> A.Ennis & Momani, “Shaping the Middle East in the Midst of the Arab Uprisings: Turkish and Saudi foreign policy strategies”

<sup>453</sup> NATO deploying Patriot missiles to Turkey-Syria border”, *BBC News*, 4 January 2013, Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-20911919>

<sup>454</sup> A.Ennis & Momani, “Shaping the Middle East in the Midst of the Arab Uprisings: Turkish and Saudi foreign policy strategies”

motivations of the two countries towards the Syrian crisis was different. While Riyadh considers the Syrian crisis as a chance to break the Iranian influence over the country, Ankara approaches to the crisis with stability and security concerns as the number of the refugees sheltering in Turkey rises and the influence of the PKK on the Syrian Kurds increases. The worst scenario for Ankara in the Syrian crisis is the fragmentation of the war-torn country and the emergence of an autonomous Kurdish region in the northern part of Syria that would pose threat to the territorial integrity and security of Turkey, which shares 900-kilometer (560-mile) border with Syria. As Altunışık puts it “*for Turkey, managing the Syrian crisis is not a way to limit Iranian influence; instead, it is a means of protecting Turkey from chaos on its southern border*”.<sup>455</sup>

In the Syrian case, Saudi Arabia and Turkey were accused several times for providing logistical support to the radical groups in Syria fighting against the regime of Assad --- Turkey had denied such allegations. Ankara and Riyadh, two allies of the Washington, were also disappointed to see US inaction in the Syrian crisis. Saudi frustration over US position in the crisis has also led Saudi Arabia to reject the seat at the United Nations Security Council in 2013.

In sum, two countries although adopting different policies in the cases of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, Ankara and Riyadh managed to be in the same track in Syrian crisis with the goal of the overthrow of Assad and establish a more friendly government that will not pose a threat to the stability of the region. However, the only difference of Turkey and Saudi Arabia in the Syrian crisis is not the approaches of the two countries towards the crisis but also the differing views over the post-Assad era in Syria. While Saudi Arabia sought to strengthen its ties with Sunni Islamist groups within the Syrian opposition, Turkey called for the participation of all the groups to the post-Assad process. In the post-revolution era, Saudis are concerned over the rise of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, which is particularly supported by Ankara.

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<sup>455</sup> Altunışık, “Bitter Frenemies, The Not-Quite-Alliance Between Saudi Arabia and Turkey”

### 3.3.5.2. Turkish-Saudi Cold War on Egypt

In the post-2010 era, the policies of the two countries confronted in Egypt when the military takeover by General Abdul Fatah Al-Sisi ousted country's first-democratically elected President Mohammed Morsi, who enjoyed close ties with Turkish leadership during his one-year-presidency, in mid-2013. While Turkey strongly criticized the move saying the military intervention was unacceptable, Saudi Arabia threw its support behind Sisi in Egypt and backed his rule with providing financial aid. The harsh stance adopted by the Turkish government against the ousting of Morsi had put Ankara at odds with Riyadh, which was among the first countries to welcome the removal of Morsi from power. Turkey's ruling party Justice and Development Party (AK Party) had close relations with the members of Morsi's Islamist party, Freedom and Justice Party in Egypt. Morsi attached great importance to strengthen political and economic relations with Turkey, which in its part provided political and economic support to the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan).<sup>456</sup> Turkey considered the movement, which took the power in Egypt following the popular uprising that toppled former President Mubarak in 2011, as a new ally in the region which is being shaken by the Arab Spring wave in order to bolster its influence in the Middle East. Therefore, the overthrow of Morsi signified a loss of an ally.

In contrast, Riyadh did not have warm relations with Cairo during Morsi's term and had deep concerns towards the Ikhwan movement. Saudi perception towards the Ikhwan is shaped by the belief that the movement poses a threat to the survival and the stability of the kingdom. The deep antipathy towards Muslim Brotherhood strengthened after the movement won the elections in Tunisia and Egypt. The concern that the movement may export its revolutionary ideas to the Gulf, where the movement has a significant presence, and lead to the downfall of the regimes was the real motivation behind Riyadh's support to the overthrow of Morsi. Also, Saudi Arabia considers Ikhwan ideology as a challenge to its religious legitimacy, which is

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<sup>456</sup> Nael Shama, "Egyptian Foreign Policy from Mubarak to Morsi, Against the national interests", Routledge, 2014, pg.236

based on the Wahhabi thought.<sup>457</sup> As Khanna and Çağaptay puts it, “*The Saudis dislike the idea of an Islamic democracy led by the MB, because they still see it as tumultuous and destabilizing.*”<sup>458</sup> Turkey’s support for the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt and elsewhere was not welcomed by Saudi Arabia, which not only considers the presence of the movement as a threat but also Turkey’s combining of Islam and democracy as a threat to its own regional role.<sup>459</sup>

In March 2014, Saudi Arabia declared the Ikhwan as a terrorist organization,<sup>460</sup> the move followed by United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt also accused Turkey for supporting the Ikhwan movement in the region. Saudi move to announce the movement as terrorist came after Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan appreciated Ikhwan as an ally for establishing a new order in the Middle East. Furthermore, while Saudi Arabia issued a decision to ban the “four-finger Rabia sign”, which became a symbol of support to the pro-Morsi protests in Egypt, Erdoğan used the sign in the public rallies in order to show its support to the Ikhwan movement. According to Al-Rasheed, Erdoğan even asked Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal Faisal, “*How could a country claiming to uphold Islam and Sharia support the overthrow of an elected Islamist president who came to power after fair elections?*”<sup>461</sup> Sager explains the impact of the Arab Spring and the Egyptian crisis on Turkish-Saudi bilateral relations:

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<sup>457</sup> Guido Steinberg, “The Gulf States and the Muslim Brotherhood”, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, 21 March 2014, Available at: <http://pomeps.org/2014/03/21/the-gulf-states-and-the-muslim-brotherhood/>

<sup>458</sup> Soner Çağaptay & Parag Khanna, “Middle East reconfigured: Turkey vs. Iran vs. Saudi Arabia”, CNN, 13 September 2013, Available at: <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/09/13/opinion/khanna-cagaptay-turkey-iran-saudi-arabia/>

<sup>459</sup> Abdulmajeed al-Buluwi, “Saudi-Turkey cold war for Sunni hegemony”, Al Monitor, 1 April 2014, Available at: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/04/saudi-arabia-turkey-muslim-brotherhood-sunni-middle-east.html#ixzz3LCpvmqol>

<sup>460</sup> “Saudi: Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist group”, Al Arabiya News, 1 March 2014, Available at: <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/03/07/Saudi-Arabia-declares-Muslim-Brotherhood-terrorist-group.html>

<sup>461</sup> Madawi al-Rasheed, “Saudi Arabia and Turkey Falter over Egypt”, Al Monitor, 20 August 2013, Available at: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/tr/originals/2013/08/saudi-arabia-turkey-strained-relations.html#>

The Arab Spring phenomenon had a negative impact on the development of the relationship, as the crisis revealed the fact that the two leaderships have ideologically opposed positions. Turkey's support for the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and elsewhere was seen as interference in internal Arab affairs and was not acceptable to the Saudi leadership and other Gulf governments.<sup>462</sup>

Turkey, which had limited knowledge about the internal dynamics in Egypt<sup>463</sup>, failed to engage into dialogue with several groups in the country; rather ideologically aligned itself with the Ikhwan movement. Turkish government's ideological linkages clashed with the national interests and geopolitical priorities of Turkey. Turkish government's hard-line position towards Egypt had high costs. Cairo accused Ankara for intervening in the internal affairs of the country after Turkey heated up its rhetoric towards the Egypt and the countries supporting it. The tense relations between Cairo and Ankara led to the expulsion of the ambassador in the two capitals and downgrading of the diplomatic relations.<sup>464</sup> Ankara's harsh Egypt stance also cost Turkey's alienation with the Gulf countries, with the exception to Qatar, which also adopted pro-Muslim Brotherhood stance in Egypt. The opposing stance of Turkey and Saudi Arabia over the situation in Egypt had also put the political and economic investments both sides have developed over the last decade at risk. Both the Turkish and the Saudi media took a harsh rhetoric, criticizing each country's policies over Egypt. The cold war in the Turkish-Saudi press finds its expression in Al-Rasheed's words:

Since June 30, Turkish pro-government media excelled in reporting on Saudi and Gulf support for the coup, calling it the "collaborators' evil alliance," with sensational stories circulating in the press about an alleged statement by Dubai Sheikh Maktoum's daughter, Mahra, in which she stated, "The massacre in Egypt is done by our money." ....On the Saudi side, while the Turkish-Saudi

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<sup>462</sup> Interview with AbdulAziz Sager, *Chairman of the Gulf Research Center and President of Sager Group Holding*, 02 April 2014

<sup>463</sup> Yaşar Yakış, "Is pragmatism dawning on Turkey's Egypt policy", *Today's Zaman*, 6 November 2013, Available at: [http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist/yasar-yakis/is-pragmatism-dawning-on-turkeys-egypt-policy\\_330765.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist/yasar-yakis/is-pragmatism-dawning-on-turkeys-egypt-policy_330765.html)

<sup>464</sup> "Egypt downgrades diplomatic relations with Turkey, expels ambassador", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 23 November 2013, Available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/egypt-downgrades-diplomatic-relations-with-turkey-expels-ambassador.aspx?pageID=238&nID=58413&NewsCatID=359>

partnership is officially celebrated as a great new strategic alliance, the Saudi press occasionally launches attacks that undermine this veneer of cooperation. Accusations that “Sultan Erdogan” longs for the return of the Ottoman caliphate regularly appeared in the Saudi sponsored pan-Arab press.<sup>465</sup>

### 3.3.5.3. Turkish Model: Rise and Demise

“Turkish model” for the post-Arab Spring Middle East became one of the hot topics of the political discussion across the world while the region was shaken with the uprisings. Turkey was considered, by international media and many academic researchers, as a success story of economic development and political democracy.<sup>466</sup> Turkey was cited as a model for the future of the post-Arab Spring countries in its success in achieving balance between Islam and modernity and its policies towards the Western and the Islamic world. For the Arab world, Turkey, under the rule of the AK Party, was a source of admiration with its democratic regime and secular nature and Muslim identity. One main aspect of admiration for Turkey was its economic success that Tol elaborates as:

Turkey has built a productive and rapidly growing economy. It produces the equivalent of half the entire output of the Middle East and North Africa, where other big economies such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, dependent on gas and oil revenues, have not been able to raise productivity to global levels and create sufficient jobs. The AKP government has singled out economic interdependence as an important tool allowing Turkey “to gain depth” in its neighborhood and strengthen relations with Middle Eastern countries while generating sustainable economic development.<sup>467</sup>

As stated above several regional and domestic factors played role in increasing Turkish image in the eyes of the Arab world. In the domestic level, the growing of the Turkish economy, Turkey’s improving ties with the European Union, developing of the relations with the regional countries based on the motto of “zero problems with neighbors”, paved the way for the changing of the Turkish perception in the

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<sup>465</sup> Al-Rasheed, “Saudi Arabia and Turkey Falter over Egypt”

<sup>466</sup> Ayşe Buğra, “The Truth behind the “Turkish model”, OpenDemocracy, 25 August, 2014, Available at: <http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/ayse-bugra/truth-behind-turkish-model>

<sup>467</sup> Tol, “The “Turkish model” in the Middle East”

Middle East. Ankara's accession talks with the EU and its reform process also played a significant role in enhancing Turkey's position in the region.

In the regional level, the developments such as, Turkey becoming a strategic partner for GCC, an observer for Arab League, Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu's leadership in OIC, Turkey's role United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and its mediation efforts between parties in the region have raised Turkey's image in the Arab world. Also, Turkish parliament's refusal to allow American troops to use its territory as a second front in a war against Iraq in 2003 increased Turkey's prestige on the Arab streets.<sup>468</sup> Needless to say, Turkish soap operas -- considered as Turkey's main influential export to Middle East -- played a significant role in increasing Arab curiosity towards Turkey and boosting tourism.

Arab's admiration of Turkey reached to its peak following Turkey's condemnation of the Israel's military operation to Gaza in 2008-2009, Erdoğan's Davos reaction in 2009 and Mavi Marmara incident in 2010. Regarding the Mavi Marmara, which aimed to deliver aid to Gaza, Samaan notes as, "Many people in the Arab world saw the event as confirmation of Turkey's support for the Palestinian cause and, by the summer of 2010, Arabic newspapers were hailing Erdoğan as "the new Nasser".<sup>469</sup> Ankara's strained relation with Israel, with whom it had enjoyed close cooperation during 1990s, contributed to Turkey's increasing prestige in the Arab world.

However, over the recent years, the positive climate between Turkey and the Arab world has been severely tested and the admiration for the Turkish model has appeared to decline. According to Kirişçi, Turkey's credentials began to weaken in the Middle East due to some developments, which he lists two of them: Turkey's policies in the Syrian conflict and Egyptian crisis and its stance during the Gezi park protests.<sup>470</sup> Kirişçi says that "Turkey increasingly became embroiled in the regional

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<sup>468</sup> Tol, "The "Turkish model" in the Middle East"

<sup>469</sup> Jean-Loup Samaan, "The Rise and Fall of the "Turkish model" in the Arab World", Turkish Policy Quarterly, Vol.12 No.3, 2013

<sup>470</sup> Kemal Kirişçi, "The Rise and Fall of Turkey as a Model for the Arab World", The Brookings Institution, 2013



conflicts rather than an arbiter of them”<sup>471</sup>—referring to Turkey’s active involvement in the conflict in Syria, with whom it had cultivated political, cultural and economic relations after Adana Accords. Turkey’s policies in Syrian crisis had serious implications on Turkey’s security, economy and regional position. The crisis dealt a severe blow to Turkey’s image in the region. Turkey active involvement to the crisis with backing of the Syrian opposition, which is consisted of Sunni majority, was criticized by both the Shiites in the region and by its own Alevi community.<sup>472</sup> As a result of this policy, Turkey’s relations with Iraq and Iran also strained. Even for those who support the fall of Syrian regime in the Arab world, according to Samaan, “Turkey’s assertiveness has been progressively seen as ill-advised and perilous, leading to an escalation of the conflict.”<sup>473</sup>

In addition to Syria, Turkey’s respond to the military overthrow of the Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi in 2013 further harmed Ankara’s image in the Arab world. Turkey’s harsh criticism of the new administration in Cairo and its support to the Muslim Brotherhood movement was not welcomed by the Gulf countries that supported the overthrow of Morsi. As a result, Turkey’s relations not only deteriorated with the most influential country in the Arab world, Egypt, but also with the Gulf countries, in particular with Saudi Arabia. Turkey’s stance in Egypt was considered as interference in the domestic affairs of a country.

In addition to Syria, Iran, Iraq, Egypt and the Gulf countries, the strained relations with Israel due to “one minute” crisis and Mavi Marmara incident led to the conclusion by the commentators that “zero problems with neighbors” has turned to a policy of “zero neighbors without problems” or “full-problem policy with neighbors” in the Middle East. It would not be wrong to say that the Arab Spring became a serious challenge to Turkey’s “zero problems with neighbors” policy.

Turkish model, which was praised for its success in achieving democracy, particularly lost its importance in the eyes of the Arabs after the Gezi Park protests that started in May 2013. As Kirişçi notes, “the brutal police repression used against

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<sup>471</sup> Kirişçi, “The Rise and Fall of Turkey as a Model for the Arab World”

<sup>472</sup> Tol, “The “Turkish model” in the Middle East”

<sup>473</sup> Samaan, “The Rise and Fall of the “Turkish model” in the Arab World”

the anti-government protests in Istanbul and across Turkey coupled with Erdoğan's choice of denigrating language toward the protestors raised doubts about the quality of Turkey's democracy."<sup>474</sup> Gezi Park demonstrations had repercussions on the vogueish "Turkish model" in the Arab world<sup>475</sup> as it brought questions in minds over the democratic credential of Turkey.

To sum up, although as a consequence of the Arab Spring wave, Turkey was cited as a model for the regional countries with its democratic structure, stable political environment and successful economic growth, with the failure of the "zero-problem policy" with regional countries, the admiration for Turkish model declined dramatically. The Syrian and the Egyptian crisis revealed the fact that zero-problem policy, which was praised in theory, lost its credibility in practice.

## **Conclusion**

In the domestic level, the change in the governments of Turkey and Saudi Arabia in the early 2000s, paved the way in opening a new page in Turkish-Saudi relations. With AK party taking the office in 2002 with a new vision and policy, based on zero-problem policy with neighboring states, the 2000s witnessed a period of improving of Turkey's relations with the Middle Eastern countries. On the Saudi side, King Abdullah's taking the office in 2005, with an active approach towards the regional countries; relations with Turkey developed even more rapidly. In the regional level, the rapid changes in the Middle Eastern landscape in the aftermath of the 2003 Iraq invasion have led to the improvement in the bilateral relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia. The concerns over uncertainty in post-Saddam Hussein era in Iraq and the emergence of new challenges in the region have contributed substantially for Turkish-Saudi cooperation. Also, the rising Iranian's influence in the region became one of the most crucial developments that further improved the dialogue between Ankara and Riyadh. Two countries sought similar goals and cooperated in face of problematic issues in the region; such as Lebanese crisis, Palestinian issue and the

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<sup>474</sup> Kirişçi, "The Rise and Fall of Turkey as a Model for the Arab World"

<sup>475</sup> Samaan, "The Rise and Fall of the "Turkish model" in the Arab World"

future of Iraq. Arab Spring has also further pushed two countries to cooperate in order to maintain stability and secure common interests in the region.

However, the positive climate between Turkey and Saudi Arabia severely tested with the crisis in Egypt in 2013 that led to the overthrow of Morsi government. The interests of the two countries – for the first time – apparently confronted. The government under the rule of AK Party strongly supported Muslim brotherhood movement and regarded the movement as a an ally in the post-Arab Spring Middle East, while Saudi Arabia, which considers the movement as a serious threat to its stability, didn't welcome Turkey's this attitude. The confrontation of the policies in Egypt strained Turkish-Saudi ties and raised questions over the future of Turkish-Saudi relations. Arab Spring, in general, and Turkey's troubled relations with its neighbors, in particular, led to the failure of Turkey's "zero-problem policy" and eventually resulting in the decline for "Turkish model" in the Middle East.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **CONCLUSION**

As intended, this thesis covers the relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia within the context of internal, regional and international dynamics during the decade of the 1990s and the 2000s. While examining the relations, the study underlined the different factors – domestic, regional and international -- that affected the characteristic of relations during the two periods. After evaluating all these factors, the thesis found out that a combination of regional and international factors pushed two countries towards cooperation when it came to the developments regarding the balance of power in the region. When the developments were mostly about the power distribution in the region, both Turkey and Saudi Arabia approached towards each other positively with keeping aside their domestic considerations. For instance, despite having different political systems, historical tradition, ideology and regional goals, Ankara and Riyadh cooperated in face of several developments, such as US invasion of Iraq in 2003, rising of the Iranian influence in the region, escalation of Palestinian-Israeli conflict and Lebanese crisis, in order to secure regional dynamics in their favor. These developments, which shifted the balances in the region, pushed two countries towards cooperation despite having opposing visions regarding the Middle East.

The end of the Cold War had a significant impact on the domestic and foreign policies of the two countries. It not only changed the dynamics and the balances in the region but also led to the emergence of several challenges in the region that pushed Turkey and Saudi Arabia closer. Until the 1990s, Turkish and Saudi approach towards the each other was shaped by mutual suspicions. In Turkey, the ruling elite adopted a pro-western foreign policy orientation and pursued a distant policy towards Middle East and Saudi Arabia in order to preserve the secular state structure and western values. While Saudi Arabia, which viewed Turkey's secular understanding

as a threat to its political regime, did not have any interest to engage into relations with Turkish state. However, the collapse of the Cold War political system pushed Turkey and Saudi Arabia to redesign their foreign policies. Two countries were in the same camp during the Cold War era against the communist threat of the Soviet Union. In the post-Cold War era, the two countries engaged into efforts to carve out a new role in the Middle East.

The course of the relations particularly seemed to change with the First Gulf war (1990-91), in which Turkey and Saudi Arabia took part in the same camp against Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq. Turkey's active support for the US-led coalition and its key role in supporting the UN sanctions imposed to Saddam regime received great appreciation from Saudi Arabia, which was the main player of the war. The role of the Turkish President Turgut Özal, who sought to develop close relations between Arabs and Turks, in pushing Turkey to pursue an active policy in the region, had a significant impact on Turkish-Saudi relations.

Despite the role of the regional and international developments in Turkish-Saudi rapprochement, the bilateral relations between two countries did not see much improvement in the 1990s. Turkey adopted security-oriented policies towards Middle East due to the threat of terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which intensified its attacks against Turkey from neighboring countries, particularly Syria. On the other side, Saudi Arabia was engaged into efforts to support Syrian claims in Damascus' disputes with Turkey. In such an environment, mutual distrust and suspicion dominated the relations.

Against this background, after signing of the Adana agreement with Syria in 1998 and with the elimination of the PKK threat after the capture of its leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1999, Turkey's relations with the Middle Eastern countries -- including Saudi Arabia -- started to normalize. Particularly with domestic transformations in Turkey and Saudi Arabia in the early 2000s, the relations between the two countries entered a new phase. After a long standoff in the bilateral relations between two countries in the past, King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud's taking the office as the new monarch in 2005 and the conservative Justice and Development Party (AK

Party)'s coming to power in Turkey in 2002 with a new discourse towards Middle East that sought to strengthen Turkey's relations with the regional countries, the bilateral relations seemed to deepen with common regional and strategic interests. The mutual visits from the both sides and the signing of several agreements between two countries seemed to further improve the ties.

On the Turkish side, the economic considerations and the enhancement of its position in the Middle East and the Arab world played a significant role in its approaching to Riyadh, while on the Saudi side, the adverse impact of the 9/11 attacks and the US invasion of Iraq which strengthen the Shiite position in the country as well as the rising Iranian influence in the region had an important impact on Saudi regime's considering Turkey as a potential partner. In other words, while the concern over the maintenance of integrity of the kingdom and the political regime pushed the Saudi Arabia to consider Turkey as a balancing power in the region to cooperate, the goal of increasing its regional influence motivated Ankara to cooperate with Riyadh. It seemed like Turkey and Saudi Arabia agreed on the fact that without mutual cooperation it would be quite difficult for two countries to maintain the balance in the region in favor of their own interests while Iran was expanding its regional influence.

The rapid changes in the Middle Eastern landscape in the 2000s, particularly in the aftermath of the 2003 Iraq invasion, have led to the improvement in the bilateral relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Particularly, the emergence of new challenges in the region has contributed substantially for the start of a new era in Turkish-Saudi relations and has forced two countries to consider each other as a regional partner to fill the power vacuum in the region and to counter Iran's expansionist policies in the region.

Upon the context mentioned above, the thesis underlines that domestic factors did not play much role in shaping the foreign policy decisions of Ankara and Riyadh when these developments were related to the balance of power in the Middle East. For the sake of their regional interests, Turkey and Saudi Arabia did not allow their domestic differences to come to surface and affect their cooperation.

Yet, the thesis argues that domestic factors can act as a limiting force on this cooperation especially if the regional developments carry an ideological nature. That is, if the regional and international developments are related to balance of power, these developments positively affect the course of the relationship. However, if the nature of the regional development is about ideology, we see that domestic factors act as a limiting factor in Turkish-Saudi relationship.

The best case to show the degree to which domestic ideological considerations drove foreign relations is the especially the Egyptian crisis, which is the part of the post-2010 developments in the Middle East. The Egyptian crisis revealed the fact that the ideological differences, different political motivations and leadership goals of the two heavyweights of the Middle East seemed to remain as a challenge in front of Turkish-Saudi cooperation. The regional goals of Ankara and Riyadh and the ideological rift between two heavyweights came to the surface with the Egyptian crisis, in particular, and the Arab Spring, in general.

Post-2010 developments in the region are about ideological struggle which brings out domestic differences between two countries. As stated in the previous chapter, there is a difference of perception towards the post-2010 developments in the region in the Saudi and the Turkish side. The two countries, which managed to keep aside their differences when cooperating against Iran's expansionist policies, failed to establish the same cooperation when it came to Muslim Brotherhood.

During the Arab uprisings, which changed the balances in the region, two countries did not see eye to eye that much, however; Ankara and Riyadh enhanced their cooperation in the Syrian crisis, in which two countries seek for the fall of the Syrian President Bashar al Assad. In this regard, both Turkey and Saudi threw their support behind the Syrian opposition forces wrestling to topple Assad regime. However, both support different groups in the opposition coalition with different motivations regarding the post-Assad era. Ankara's motivation was to ensure formation of a Sunni and Turkey-friendly government in Syria – something that does not comply with Riyadh's strategic calculations. Syria was the first area of rivalry based on ideological differences.

With the ouster of Egypt's first democratically elected President Mohammed Morsi with military intervention in 2013, the relationship between Turkey and Saudi Arabia strained as the two countries adopted an opposing stance towards toppling of Muslim Brotherhood leader in Egypt. Two countries' differing stances in the Egyptian crisis - - with Turkey supporting Morsi and Saudi Arabia backing military intervention -- seemed to hurt the relations between two countries. Saudi Arabia, in the Egyptian crisis, seemed to reveal its domestic concerns over democracy and the Muslim Brotherhood movement.

While two countries, in one stage, share common concerns over Iranian influence and regional issues, in a separate stage, are involved into an "ideological proxy war", which seemed to preponderate over the mutual concerns regarding the Middle East region. Two countries have common aims but have different methods in reaching those aims and these methods lead to competition. This thesis argues that if the ideological nature of the keeps continuing, a competition between Turkey and Saudi Arabia is more likely than cooperation.

The study finds out that beside the ideological nature of the regional developments, there are several issues between Turkey and Saudi Arabia that may lead two countries to compete rather than cooperate. These issues include the competition over the regional leadership, Palestinian issue and the Egyptian question. Particularly the struggle on who controls the leadership in the region seemed to be an important obstacle in relations. Neither Riyadh considers positively Turkey's increased activism in the Middle East, nor Ankara want to see Riyadh's regional influence at its own expense.

The struggle over the leadership of the region is also linked to the difference in two countries' promotion of their own Sunni understanding -- Turkey represents moderate Sunni version while Saudi Arabia Wahhabi Sunni vision -- a factor that seems to push two countries towards rivalry. The Turkish structure, which combines democracy with Islam, seemed to be considered as a challenge by Saudi regime to its regional role and the political system, which is shaped by the Wahhabi understanding. Turkish leadership's political motivations towards the region which is



based on supporting conservative Islamic movements, such as Muslim Brotherhood, which is considered by Saudi regime as a threat to its survival and values of Wahhabism, seemed to contribute to the factors that lead to the competition between Turkey and Saudi Arabia in the region. Although, two countries have majority of Sunni population and have similar concerns regarding the rising Shiite influence in the region, the struggle to control the Sunni Muslim world and the Middle East seemed to be an obstacle in Turkish-Saudi cooperation.

As stated previously when balance of power becomes the priority, domestic factors do not have much importance; however these factors can still affect the foreign policy when domestic considerations are in question. During the field research of this study, it was also related to the author that Turkey-Saudi relations could not be developed on a sustainable basis if the two countries do not prevent the ideological differences (domestic factors) from interfering in their strategic calculations. That is; if the ideological differences related to the regional developments rage on, Turkish-Saudi cooperation seemed quite difficult to be achieved. The thesis concludes that when the regional development related to ideology prevents the two countries to make an interest calculation, domestic factors seems to play a pivotal role in affecting relations.

When taking into account the factors mentioned above, the study reaches to the conclusion that despite several mutual interests, including regional and economic interests, the different domestic considerations of the two countries likely to influence the foreign policy decisions and thus seemed to hamper the possibility of cooperation between Turkey and Saudi Arabia, two important regional countries.

While writing this thesis, significant developments took place in Turkish-Saudi relationship. Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah passed away on Jan.23, 2015. Upon this important development, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan suspended his African tour for a day in order to attend the funeral of the king and declared a day of mourning over king's death. After a period of political standoff between Ankara and Riyadh over Egypt, Erdoğan also paid an official visit between Feb. 28 and March 2 to the kingdom upon the invitation of the new King Salman, who ascended to the

throne after the death of King Abdullah. After new king's coming to power in the kingdom; there were several opinions among analysts claiming that King Salman's ascending to throne may lead to possible Turkish-Saudi rapprochement or a change in Saudi approach towards the Egyptian crisis.

When concluding this study, it is important to mention that it is too early to predict on how the relationship between Ankara and Riyadh will develop during the rule of new king as the domestic considerations of the two countries are constant and still an ideological confrontation is a topic. However, the relations may show a change if the new king and the Turkish administration gives priority to the balance of power in the region rather than ideological differences as how the two countries did in the past few years. While the region is experiencing significant changes, Ankara and Riyadh may re-calculate their regional interests and seek ways to overcome the ideological confrontation between two countries.

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## APPENDICES

### A-TURKISH SUMMARY

Bu tezin temel amacı, 1990'lar ve 2000'ler boyunca Türk-Suudi ilişkilerinin değişen doğasını içsel, bölgesel ve uluslararası gelişmeler bağlamında incelemektir. 2000'li yıllarda Türkiye'nin genelde Orta Doğu ülkeleri özelde ise Suudi Arabistan ile ilişkilerinin geliştiği görülmektedir. İki ülke arasında karşılıklı üst düzey ziyaretlerin gerçekleştiği ve bölgesel konularda ikili işbirliğinin yapıldığı 2000'li yıllar, Türk-Suudi ilişkilerinde önemli bir dönüm noktası teşkil etmektedir. 2000'li yıllarda iki ülke arasında gelişen ilişkilerin seyrini anlayabilmek için, tez özellikle 1990'larda Türkiye ve Suudi Arabistan arasındaki ilişkileri analiz etmektedir.

2000'li yıllarda iki ülke arasındaki gelişen ilişkilere rağmen, Türk-Suudi ilişkileri üzerine haber analizleri ve bazı makaleler istisna olmak üzere bilimsel bir çalışma bulunmuyor. Gerek Türk gerekse Suudi dış politikası üzerine yazılmış birçok kitap olmasına rağmen, Türk-Suudi ilişkilerine yönelik literatür çok sınırlı görünmektedir. Yukarıda bahsedilen duruma dayanarak, konu üzerine birincil kaynak olma özelliğini taşıyan bu tez Türk-Suudi ilişkilerini kapsamlı bir biçimde ele alarak literatüre benzersiz bir katkı sunmayı hedeflemektedir. Türk-Suudi ilişkilerini farklı açılardan anlayabilmek adına, bu tez iki ülke arasındaki ilişkileri iç, bölgesel ve uluslararası olmak üzere üç bölümde incelemektedir.

Üstelik bu tezi önemli kılan özelliği bir saha çalışmasının ürünü olmasıdır. Konu üzerine sınırlı kaynakların olması sebebiyle, saha çalışması esnasında tezi zenginleştirmek için Suudi akademisyenler, diplomatlar, gazeteciler ile röportajlar yapılmıştır. Tez boyunca, Suudi ve Türk akademisyenlerin görüşlerine genişçe yer verilmiştir. Tartışılan konuyla ilgili literatürün az olmasına rağmen, bu çalışmada kitaplar, akademik makaleler, iki ülke arasında imzalanan anlaşmalar ve haber analizlerinden yararlanılmıştır. Bu nedenle, bu tez metodolojik olarak sadece

röportajların ürünü değil aynı zamanda 1990'lı ve 2000'li yıllarda Türk ve Suudi dış politikaları üzerine ilgili kitaplar, makaleler, gazete ve web sitelerinin analizlerini kapsamaktadır. Ayrıca, konuyla ilgili resmi bilgiler için Türk Dışişleri Bakanlığı ve Suudi Dışişleri Bakanlığı internet sayfalarından yararlanılmıştır.

Bu çalışma, içsel, bölgesel ve uluslararası etkenlerin ikili ilişkiler üzerindeki etkisini kapsamlı bir biçimde incelediğinden, tezin araştırma sorusu hangi etkenlerin iki ülke ilişkilerini geliştirdiği ve ve/veya sınırlandırdığı ve bu etkenlerin ne ölçüde 1990'lı ve 2000'li yıllarda Türk-Suudi ilişkilerini etkilediğidir.

Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Lozan Anlaşması'nı imzalayarak Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun eski topraklarında kurulan ülkelerin bağımsızlığını tanıdı.<sup>476</sup> Suudi Arabistan Krallığı 1932 yılında kurulduğunda, Türkiye ilk tanıyan ülke oldu ve yeni kurulan Arap ülkesi ile bir dostluk anlaşması imzaladı. Ancak, Türkiye ve Suudi Arabistan arasındaki ilişkilerin kurulmasından bu yana, iki ülke arasındaki ilişkiler sınırlı kalmıştır. Cumhuriyet döneminde, Türkiye'nin genelde Arap Dünyası özelde ise Suudi Arabistan ile ilişkilerinde çok gelişme görülmemiştir. Ulus inşası çabaları ile meşgul olan Türkiye'deki yöneticiler yönünü Batıya yönelmeyi tercih etmiş, Orta Doğu'ya mesafeli kalmış, bölgedeki çatışmalar ve savaşlardan uzak durmaya yönelik bir politika izlemiş ve laik devlet yapısını korumak için Batı dünyası ile yakın ilişkiler kurmaya öncelik vermiştir.

Ülkeyi modernleştirme çabası Batı yönelimli bir dış politika çizgisinin benimsenmesine yol açmıştır. Türkiye'nin seküler devlet yapısı, Vahhabi ideolojiyi benimsemiş Suudi Arabistan'ın siyasi sistemi için tehdit olarak algılanmış ve Riyad Ankara'yı potansiyel bir bölgesel ortak olarak görmemiştir. Diğer taraftan, Türkiye için, Arap Dünyası geride kalmışlığı sembol ederken, Orta Doğu da Türkiye'nin uzak durması gereken riskler ile dolu bir bölgeyi temsil ediyordu. Dolayısıyla, geçmişten gelen önyargılar, iki ülkenin benimsemiş olduğu farklı siyasi yapılar ve ideolojik yaklaşımlar nedeniyle iki ülke arasındaki ilişkiler sınırlı kalmıştır.

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<sup>476</sup> Muhittin Ataman, "Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?" SETA | Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research | July, 2012 | Brief No: 57



1932 yılında kurulan Suudi Arabistan Krallığı Suud ailesi tarafından yönetilen mutlak monarşidir. Ülke, hem yürütme hem de yasama gücünü elinde tutan Başbakan aynı zamanda silahlı kuvvetlerin başkomutanı olan Kral tarafından yönetilmektedir. Suudi Arabistan Kralı, ülkenin diplomatlarını ve büyükelçilerini atama yetkisini elinde bulundurmaktadır.<sup>477</sup> Krallığın kuruluşundan bu yana, kurucusu Abd al-Aziz bin Abd-al Rahman al Saud'un oğulları ülkeyi yönetmektedir. Kralın yönetemediği durumlarda, aynı zamanda başbakan yardımcısı olan veliaht prens, devreye girer. Suudi Arabistan'da siyasi partiler bulunmamakla birlikte, muhalefet yasaktır. Suudi Krallığı Kuran'ı Kerim'i anayasa olarak kabul etmektedir ve ülke şeriat yasalarına göre yönetilmektedir.

Suudi Arabistan'ın siyasi ve sosyal yapısında, 18. yüzyılda Muhammed bin Abdülvahhab tarafından başlatılan Vahhabi ideolojisi oldukça etkilidir. Ülke, meşruiyetini 1744 yılında Muhammed bin Abdülvahhab ile Muhammed bin Suud arasında imzalanan ittifaka dayandırmaktadır. Ulema, ülkenin gelenek ve toplumsal değerlerini korumanın yanı sıra Suudi rejiminin kararlarını meşrulaştırmakta da önemli bir rol oynamaktadır.<sup>478</sup> Örneğin, 1990-91 Körfez savaşında Kral Fahd'ın Amerikan askerlerinin krallıkta konuşlandırılmasına izin vermesi, ülkedeki dindarlar tarafında sertçe eleştirilmiştir. Bu dönemde, Ulema ülkedeki tansiyonun azalması yönünde çok etkili bir rol oynamıştır.

Suudi Arabistan, İslam'ın iki kutsal şehri olan Mekke ve Medine'ye ev sahipliği yapmaktadır. Bu iki önemli şehre ev sahipliği yapmak Suudi Arabistan'ı Arap Dünyası ve Müslüman âleminde önemli bir ülke haline getirmiştir. Arabistan aynı zamanda zengin petrol rezervleri ve stratejik konumu sebebiyle özel bir önemde sahiptir. Ülke, dünyanın bilinen petrol rezervlerinin yüzde 25'inden fazlasını elinde tutmaktadır.<sup>479</sup> Ülkenin toplam nüfusu yaklaşık 28 milyondur.<sup>480</sup>

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<sup>477</sup> Sherifa Zuhur, "Saudi Arabia, Middle East in Focus", ABC-CLIO, 2012, pg.85

<sup>478</sup> Zuhur, "Saudi Arabia, Middle East in Focus", pg.95

<sup>479</sup> Saudi Arabia profile, BBC News, 2 December 2014 (last updated), Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14702705>

<sup>480</sup> See, <http://data.worldbank.org/country/saudi-arabia>

Tehdit algısı da bir ülkenin dış politika kararlarını belirlemede önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. İran'ın bölgedeki yayılcı politikaları ve nükleer sorunu, El Kaide terörü, Irak'taki istikrarsızlık ve Arap Baharı, Suudi Arabistan için öncelikli dış tehditler olarak kabul edilmektedir. Suudi Krallığı'nın iç tehdit olarak gördüğü unsur ise toplam nüfusun yaklaşık yüzde 15'ini oluşturan ve ülkenin doğu bölgesinde bulunan Şii nüfustur. Riyad, İran'ın bu Şii nüfus üzerindeki olumsuz etkisini bir tehdit olarak algılamaktadır. Suudi dış politika motivasyonları çoğunlukla bölgedeki İran etkisini kırmaya yöneliktir.

Öte yandan, 1923 yılında kurulan Türkiye Cumhuriyeti parlamenter temsili demokrasiye sahip bir ülkedir. 1946 yılından bu yana, ülke çok partili sistemi benimsemiştir. Devletin başı olan Cumhurbaşkanı çoğunlukla sembolik bir konuma sahiptir. Bakanlar kurulu ile birlikte ülkeyi yönetme gücünü elinde tutan hükümetin başında ise başbakan vardır. Türk siyasi yapısı kuvvetler ayrılığı ilkesine dayanmaktadır. Yürütme gücü Bakanlar kurulunun yasama gücü Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi'nin elindedir. Yargı gücü ise bağımsızdır. Türk Anayasası devletin yönetim kurallarını ve ilkelerini ve vatandaşlara yönelik devlet sorumluluğunu belirtmektedir.

Hükümetin yanı sıra, ordu geniş siyasi yapının bir parçası olarak kabul edilebilir. Ordu uzun yıllar Türkiye'nin iç ve dış politikası üzerinde önemli bir etkiye sahipti. Cumhuriyet ilkelerinin koruyucusu olarak kendini gören ordu, devletin laik değerlerine yönelik tehdit algıladığı dönemlerde sivil yönetime müdahale etmiştir.<sup>481</sup> Türkiye 1960, 1971 ve 1980 yıllarında üç kez askeri müdahale, 1997 yılında ise silahsız bir askeri müdahale yaşamıştır. Geçici askeri yönetim döneminden sonra hükümet sivil politikacılar iade edilmiştir. 2002 yılından bu yana, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi ülkede iktidara sahiptir. Türkiye'nin toplam nüfusu yaklaşık 81 milyondur.<sup>482</sup> Ayrıca, NATO ülkesi olan Türkiye, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nden

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<sup>481</sup> Turkey profile, BBC News, 28 August 2014 (last updated), Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17988453>

<sup>482</sup> CIA Factbook, See <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tu.html>

sonra örgüt içinde ikinci büyük orduya sahiptir.<sup>483</sup> Türkiye, 2005 yılında Avrupa Birliği'ne tam üyelik müzakerelerini başlatmıştır. Ekonomik kalkınma düzeyi de bir ülkenin dış politikasının şekillenmesinde önemli bir rol oynar.<sup>484</sup> Büyüyen sanayi ekonomisi ve yatırıma açık ekonomik yapısı ile Türkiye dünyanın 18. büyük ekonomisine sahiptir.<sup>485</sup>

İki ülkenin siyasi, sosyal ve ekonomik yapısına dair genel bir bilgi verdikten sonra, Türk-Suudi ilişkilerini 1990'lar ve 2000'lerde etkileyen önemli içsel, bölgesel ve uluslararası gelişmelere analiz etmekte fayda olacaktır. Uluslararası düzenin Soğuk Savaşın sona ermesi ile değişmesi ve bu değişimin Türkiye ve Suudi Arabistan'ın dış politikaları üzerine etkisi akademik camia tarafından bir hayli ilgi görmüştür. Meliha Altunışık ve Alexander Murinson gibi bazı akademisyenler, Soğuk Savaşın sona ermesi ile değişen uluslararası düzenin, Türkiye'nin dış politikası üzerinde önemli etkileri olduğunu iddia etmektedirler. Uluslararası sistemin değişmesi iki ülkenin dış politika kararları üzerinde etkili olacak pek çok faktörün ortaya çıkmasına yol açmıştır. Sovyet tehdidinin ortadan kalkması, iki ülkenin de dış politika çizgilerini yeniden tanımlamaya itti. Bu bağlamda, Muhittin Ataman, Soğuk Savaşın bitmesinin Türkiye'nin genelde Körfez ülkeleri ile özelde Suudi Arabistan ile yakınlaşmasını kolaylaştırdığını ifade etmektedir.<sup>486</sup>

Soğuk savaşının sona ermesi sonrası en önemli bölgesel gelişme 1990-91 Körfez savaşı olmuştur. Hamit Batu'nun da iddia ettiği üzere savaş, Türkiye'nin bölgeye yönelik geleneksel yaklaşımdan sapmasına yol açtı.<sup>487</sup> Bu tez, 1990'ların başındaki en önemli bölgesel gelişme olan Körfez Savaşı'nın, Türkiye'yi aktif bir dış politikaya izlemeye ittiğini belirtmiştir. Körfez savaşının Türk dış politikası üzerindeki etkisi üzerine farklı akademik görüşler mevcuttur. Philip Robins, Sabri

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<sup>483</sup> "Turkey and the European Union: Domestic Politics, Economic Integration and International Dynamics", Ed: Ali Carkoglu & Barry Rubin, Routledge, 2003, pg.42

<sup>484</sup> Hans. J. Morgenthau, "Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace", Ed: Kenneth W. Thompson, McGraw-Hill, 1993, pp. 133-134.

<sup>485</sup> See, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/turkey/overview>

<sup>486</sup> Ataman, "Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?"

<sup>487</sup> Hamit Batu, "Turkish Foreign Policy in a Changing World, Studies on Turkish-Arab Relations", 6 (1991), pg. 85

Sayarı, Alan Makovsky ve William Hale bazı akademisyenler Körfez savaşı ile birlikte Türk dış politikasında Orta Doğu'ya yönelik önemli değişiklikler olduğunu iddia ederken, Nur Bilge Criss gibi bazı akademisyenler Körfez Savaşı ile birlikte Türkiye'nin dış politikasında bir sapma olmadığını altını çizmiştir.<sup>488</sup>

Bu tezin ikinci bölümünde Türkiye ve Suudi Arabistan arasındaki ilişkilerin gelişmesinde önemli bir rol oynayan Körfez Savaşına özel bir önem verilmiştir. Türkiye'nin Körfez Savaşı'nda koalisyon güçlerinin yanında yer alması genelde Orta Doğu ülkeleri özelde ise savaşta önemli bir rol oynayan Suudi Arabistan tarafından hoş karşılanmıştır. Fakat iç siyasi istikrarsızlıklar, komşu ülkelerden Türkiye'ye karşı saldırılarını yoğunlaştıran terör örgütü Kürdistan İşçi Partisi (PKK) ile ilgili güvenlik kaygıları, Suriye ve Irak ile su anlaşmazlığı gibi konular sebebiyle Türkiye'nin Orta Doğu ile olan ilişkileri 1990'lar boyunca sınırlı kalmıştır. Daha öncede belirtildiği üzere, 1990'lı yılları boyunca Türkiye'nin Orta Doğu'ya yönelik dış politikası üzerine yazılmış birçok eser mevcuttur. Nilsu Gören, 1990'lı yıllarda Orta Doğu bölgesinin Türkiye'nin güvenlik kaygılarının kaynağı olduğunu iddia etmektedir.<sup>489</sup> İran, Irak and Suriye ile gergin ilişkiler ve bu ülkelerden kaynaklanan PKK tehdidi 1990'lı yıllar boyunca Türkiye'yi güvenlik odaklı bir dış politika benimsemeye itmiştir. Bu politika ve bu ülkelerden kaynaklanan tehdit algısı Türkiye'nin bölgede aktif bir politika izlemesini sınırlandırmıştır. 1990'lar boyunca 1980'lerden beri Türkiye'nin toprak bütünlüğüne ve güvenliğine karşı ciddi bir tehdit oluşturan PKK terörü, Ankara'nın Orta Doğu'ya yönelik dış politikasının şekillenmesinde önemli bir etken olmuştur.

Bu tez, Türkiye'nin güvenlik odaklı dış politikasını ve Suudi Arabistan'ının Suriye'nin Türkiye karşıtı söylemlerine destek verişini 1990'lı yıllarda Türk-Suudi ilişkilerinin olumsuz etkileyen faktörler olarak belirlemiştir. Türk dış politikasının kapsamlı bir biçimde ele aldığı "Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy Since

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<sup>488</sup> Nur Bilge Criss, "Turkish Foreign Policy Toward the Middle East", MERIA Journal Volume 1, No.1, 1997

<sup>489</sup> Nilsu Gören, "Lessons Learned: The Turkish role in arms control and regional security talks in the Middle East", Edited by: Chen Kane & Egle Murauskaite, "Regional Security Dialogue in the Middle East, Changes, Challenges and Opportunities", Routledge, 2014, pg. 137

the Cold War” adlı kitabına Philip Robins, bir ülkenin dış politikasının belirlenmesine tehdit algısının önemine değinmiştir.<sup>490</sup> Türkiye’nin Suriye ile PKK ve su meselesi yüzünden yaşadığı gerginliğin Türkiye’nin Arap dünyası ve Suudi Arabistan ile ilişkilerine olumsuz bir etkisi olmuştur.

Bazı akademisyenler ise Türkiye’nin bölge ile sınırlı ilişkilere sahip olmasını 1990’lardaki iç istikrarsızlığa bağlamaktadırlar. Örneğin, Muhittin Ataman “Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners” başlıklı yazısında 1990’larda Türkiye’de yaşanan siyasi istikrarsızlık sebebiyle Ankara ve Riyad arasındaki ilişkilerde inişler ve çıkışların olduğunu iddia etmektedir.<sup>491</sup> Ömer Taşpınar 1990’ları, Kürt ayrılıkçılar ile savaşın, laikler ve İslamcılar arasındaki kutuplaşmanın, ekonomik krizin ve sistemik yolsuzluğun yaşandığı “kayıp on yıl” olarak tanımlamaktadır.<sup>492</sup>

Philip Robins ise koalisyon hükümetleri dönemini, liderler arasındaki rekabetin dış politikada “parçalanma ve rekabet”e neden olduğu bir dönem olarak karakterize etmiştir.<sup>493</sup> Robins, iç politikada rekabetin ve istikrarsızlığın dış politika üzerindeki etkisini vurgulamak için ise Temmuz 1994- Haziran 1997 döneminde Türkiye’de dokuz dışişleri bakanının olduğunu belirtmiştir. Tezde, yukarıdaki görüşler ile benzer görüşlere sahip birçok Suudi akademisyen bulunmaktadır. Ancak bu tez, Türk iç politikası hükümet değişikliklerine uğramış olsa da 1990’lar boyunca Türkiye’nin bölgeye yönelik politikasının belirlenmesinde hükümet değişikliklerinden daha çok PKK tehdidinin etkili olduğunu savunmaktadır. Orta Doğu’ya yönelik Türkiye’nin dış politikasının tutarlı ve güvenlik kaygıları ile belirlenmiş olduğu savunulmuştur. Tez, 1990’larda Türkiye’nin nihai hedefinin PKK tehdidini ortadan kaldırmak ve bu hedefe ulaşabilmek için Suudi Arabistan dahil olmak üzere bölge ülkelerine yönelik ödün vermeyen bir politika izlemesinin kaçınılmaz olduğu vurgulanmaktadır.

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<sup>490</sup> Philip Robins, “Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy Since the Cold War”, C. Hurst & Co, London, 2003, pg. 189

<sup>491</sup> Ataman, “Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?”

<sup>492</sup> Ömer Taşpınar, “Turkey’s Middle East Policies Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism”, Carnegie Middle East Center, No.10, 2008

<sup>493</sup> Robins, “Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy Since the Cold War”, pg. 64

1990'ların sonlarına kadar Türkiye Orta Doğu'ya yönelik temkinli ve güvenlik temelli bir dış politika izlemiştir. Karşılıklı tehdit algılamaları ve güvensizlik Türk-Arap ilişkilerine hükmetmiştir. Bu durum, 1998 yılında Suriye ile Adana Anlaşmalarının imzalanması ve özellikle 1999 yılında PKK lideri Abdullah Öcalan'ın yakalanmasından sonra önemli ölçüde değişmeye başlamıştır. Bu gelişmeler ile birlikte Türkiye'nin PKK'ya yönelik güvenlik kaygıları ve tehdit algısı azalmaya başlamıştır.

Bu tez, eski Dışişleri Bakanı İsmail Cem'in bölgesel temelli dış politika yaklaşımının Türkiye'nin komşu devletler ile ilişkilerinin normalleşmesi sürecinde etkili olduğunu vurgulamaktadır.

2002'de Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi'nin (AK Parti) iktidara gelmesiyle birlikte Türkiye'nin Orta Doğu ülkeleri ile ilişkileri daha da derinleşmeye başlamıştır. Yeni yönetim aktif, dinamik, maksimum işbirliği ve çok boyutlu bir dış politika anlayışını benimsemiştir. AK Parti'nin dış politika vizyonunun oluşturucularından Ahmet Davutoğlu, Türkiye'nin Osmanlı mirasına sahip çıkmasının ve tarihsel önyargıların ortadan kaldırılmasının önemini vurgulamıştır.

AK Parti'nin Orta Doğu politikasında “komşular ile sıfır sorun” yaklaşımı önemli bir yer edinmiştir. Bu tezde, AK Parti'nin kendi vizyon ve politikalarını önceki dönemde Orta Doğu'ya yönelik başlatılan aktivizm üzerine inşa etme fırsatı bulduğu belirtilmektedir.

Tezde AK Parti'nin, önceki dönemde Orta Doğu'ya yönelik başlatılan aktivizm üzerine vizyonunu ve politikasını oluşturma fırsatı bulduğu belirtmektedir. Meliha Altunışık önceki dönem hükümeti ile AK Parti'nin ilkeleri arasında benzerlik olduğunu, fakat AK Parti'nin bu ilkeleri daha kapsamlı bir biçimde uygulamak için daha fazla fırsat bulduğunun altına çizmektedir.<sup>494</sup> Altunışık, “Turkish Foreign Policy in the 21st Century” başlıklı makalesinde iç, bölgesel ve uluslararası gelişmelerin AK Parti'nin bölgedeki rolünü artırttığını ve kendi politikalarını

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<sup>494</sup> Meliha Altunışık, “Turkish Foreign Policy in the 21st Century”, CIDOB International Yearbook, 2011

uygulamak için uygun bir zemin yarattığını savunmuştur. Bölgesel ve uluslararası gelişmeler, AK Parti hükümetinin Orta Doğu ülkeleri ile ilişkilerini geliştirmekte önemli rol oynamıştır. Pro-aktif dış politikası çerçevesinde, Türkiye Suudi Arabistan ile birçok anlaşma imzalayarak ve çeşitli konularda işbirliği yaparak siyasi ve ekonomik ilişkilerini geliştirmiştir.

Türkiye ve Suudi Arabistan'da 2000'lerin başında yaşanan iç dönüşümlerin her iki ülkenin dış politikasında önemli etkisi olmuştur. 2005 yılında Suudi Krallığının başına geçen Kral Abdullah bin Abdül-Aziz Al-Suud aktif, çok boyutlu ve faydacı bir anlayışı dış politikada esas almıştır. Türk-Suudi ilişkileri Kral Abdullah döneminde daha da ilerleme fırsatı bulmuştur. İki ülkede yaşanan iç dönüşümler, Türkiye ve Suudi Arabistan'ın farklılıklarını bir kenara bırakmasına ve ilişkileri olumlu etkilemesine neden olmuştur.

Tezin son bölümünde, 2010 sonrası bölgesel gelişmelerin Türk-Suudi ilişkilerine üzerindeki etkisine önem verilmiştir. Bölgedeki dengeleri değiştiren Arap Baharının Türk-Suudi ilişkileri üzerinde önemli bir etkisi olmuştur. Suriye'de, Devlet Başkanı Beşar Esad rejimi konusunda ortak tutum sergileyen Türkiye ve Suudi Arabistan, Mısır'da Cumhurbaşkanı Muhammed Mursi'nin askeri darbe sonucu görevden alınması karşısında farklı tutum takınarak, ters düşmüşlerdir. Türkiye'nin darbe karşıtı tutumu ve Müslüman Kardeşler Teşkilatı'na verdiği destek Müslüman Kardeşleri bir tehdit olarak algılayan Suudi rejimi tarafından hoş karşılanmamış, bu durum iki ülke arasındaki ilişkileri olumsuz etkilemiştir.

Bu tez, Türk-Suudi ilişkileri üzerine oluşacak literatüre daha iyi bir anlayış sunmak amacıyla ikili ilişkileri içsel, bölgesel ve uluslararası bağlamda ele almıştır. Daha önce belirtildiği gibi, bu tezin araştırma sorusu, hangi etkenler 1990'lı ve 2000'li yıllarda Türk-Suudi ilişkilerini etkilemiştir.

İkili ilişkiler incelenirken, tez Türk-Suudi ilişkilerini etkileyen birçok etkeninin olduğu sonucuna varmıştır. Bu etkenler değerlendirildikten sonra tezde, bölgedeki güç dengesi ile ilgili bölgesel ve uluslararası faktörlerin iki ülkeyi işbirliği yapmaya ittiği belirtilmektedir. Eğer bölgesel gelişmeler bölgedeki güç dağılımı ile ilgiliyse,

Türkiye ve Suudi Arabistan farklılıklarını bir kenara bırakıp, işbirliğine yanaşmıştır. Örneğin, farklı siyasi sistemleri, tarihsel geleneği, ideolojileri ve bölgesel hedefleri olmasına rağmen, Ankara ve Riyad, İran'ın artan etkisi, Filistin meselesi, 2003 yılında ABD'nin Irak'ı işgali ve Lübnan krizi gibi çeşitli gelişmeler karşısında bölgedeki dinamikleri kendi lehlerine çevirmek için işbirliği yapmışlardır. Bölgedeki dengeleri değiştiren bu gelişmeler, Orta Doğu'ya yönelik farklı hedefleri olmasına rağmen iki ülkeyi aynı safa getirebilmiştir.

Yukarıda belirtilen çerçeve üzerine, bölgedeki güç dengesi söz konusu olduğundan Türkiye ve Suudi Arabistan'ın birbirilerine olan yaklaşımlarında iç faktörler etkili olmamıştır. Ancak, Tez bölgesel gelişmelerin yapısı, güç dengesi yerine ideoloji ile ilgili olduğunda iç faktörlerin iki ülke arasındaki işbirliğinde sınırlayıcı bir etkisi olduğunu savunmaktadır. Kısacası, bölgesel ve uluslararası gelişmeler güç dengesi ile ilgili olduğu durumlarda Türk-Suudi ilişkilerinde olumlu bir gelişme olmaktadır. Fakat gelişmelerin yapısında ideolojik farklılık söz konusu olduğunda iç faktörler devreye giriyor ve Türk-Suudi işbirliğinin önünde önemli bir engel teşkil edebiliyor.

Türkiye ve Suudi Arabistan'ın ideolojilerin karşı karşıya geldiğini gösteren en iyi örnek Mısır krizidir. Mısır krizi, iki ülkenin ideolojik farklılıklarının, farklı siyasi motivasyonlarının ve bölgedeki liderlik hedeflerinin Türk-Suudi işbirliğinin önünde ciddi bir engel olabileceğini ortaya çıkarmıştır.

2010 sonrası bölgesel gelişmeler iki ülke arasındaki farklılıkları ortaya çıkaran ideolojik mücadeleye neden olmuştur. Önceden de belirtildiği gibi, Suudi ve Türk tarafında 2010 sonrası bölgesel gelişmelere yönelik bir algı farklılığı vardır. İran'ın yayılmacı politikalarına karşı işbirliği yapan ve bu işbirliğini yaparken ideolojik farklılıklarının işbirliğini olumsuz etkilemesine izin vermeyen iki ülke, Müslüman Kardeşler söz konusu olduğunda farklılıklarının üstesinden gelmekte başarısız olmuşlardır.

Bir yandan, İran tehdidine karşı ortak kaygılar paylaşan iki ülke, öte yandan "ideolojik bir savaş" içerisinde bulunmaktadır. İki ülkenin ortak amaçları olmasına karşın bu amaçlara ulaşmada farklı yöntemler izlenmektedir ve bu yöntemler iki ülke



arasında rekabete yol açmaktadır. Bu tez, bölgesel gelişmelerin ideolojik yapısının devam etmesi ve iki ülkenin ideolojik farklılıklarını bir kenara itmemesi durumunda Türk-Suudi işbirliğinden çok Türk-Suudi rekabetinin yaşanabileceğini savunmaktadır.

Bu çalışma aynı zamanda bölgesel gelişmelerin ideolojik yapısından öte iki ülke arasında rekabete yol açacak başka konuların varlığından da bahsetmektedir. Bu konular; bölgesel liderlik üzerinde rekabet, Filistin meselesi ve Mısır sorunudur. Özellikle bölgedeki liderliğinin kimin kontrolünde olacağı mücadelesi, ikili ilişkilerin önünde önemli bir engel gibi görünüyor. Ne Suudi Arabistan, Türkiye'nin Orta Doğu'da artan aktivizminden memnun, ne de Türkiye kendi pahasına Suudi Arabistan'ın bölgesel etkisinin arttığını görmek istemiyor.

Tez, bölgedeki liderlik mücadelesinin iki ülkesini farklı Sünni anlayışı benimsemiş olması ile de ilgili olduğunu savunmaktadır. Türkiye ılımlı Sünni yaklaşımı benimserken, Suudi Arabistan Vahhabi yaklaşımını kabul etmiştir. Bu durum iki ülkenin bölgedeki etkilerini artırmak için rekabete sürükleyecek faktörlerden biri olarak belirtilmiştir. Tezde, kimin Sünni Müslüman alemini kontrol edeceği mücadelesi Türk-Suudi işbirliği önünde engel gibi gözükmektedir.

Daha öncede belirtildiği üzere, güç dengesi öncelik olduğu durumlarda iç faktörler ikili ilişkiler üzerinde çok önemli bir etkiye sahip olmamaktadır. Fakat iç farklılıklar söz konusu olduğunda bu faktörler dış politikayı etkileyebiliyor. Saha araştırmasından, Suudi tarafından yapılan açıklamalar eğer Türkiye ve Suudi Arabistan ideolojik farklılıkların ilişkileri etkilemesine izin vermeden ve sürdürülebilir temelde geliştirmeyi başaramaması durumunda Türk-Suudi işbirliğinin elde edilmesinin oldukça zor olacağı sonucuna varılmıştır.

Yukarıda belirtilen etkenler ele alındığında, tez karşılıklı ortak çıkarlara rağmen, iki ülkenin iç faktörlerindeki farklılıklarının işbirliğinin önünde engel olma olasılığına vurgu yapmaktadır.

## APPENDICES

### B- TEZ FOTOKOPİSİ İZİN FORMU

#### ENSTİTÜ

Fen Bilimleri Enstitüsü	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Uygulamalı Matematik Enstitüsü	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enformatik Enstitüsü	<input type="checkbox"/>
Deniz Bilimleri Enstitüsü	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### YAZARIN

Soyadı : Cengiz  
Adı : Sinem  
Bölümü : Uluslararası İlişkiler

#### TEZİN ADI (İngilizce) :

TEZİN TÜRÜ : Yüksek Lisans  Doktora

1. Tezimin tamamından kaynak gösterilmek şartıyla fotokopi alınabilir.
2. Tezimin içindekiler sayfası, özet, indeks sayfalarından ve/veya bir bölümünden kaynak gösterilmek şartıyla fotokopi alınabilir.
3. Tezimden bir (1) yıl süreyle fotokopi alınamaz.

TEZİN KÜTÜPHANEYE TESLİM TARİHİ: 1.4.2015