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THE RELATIONS BETWEEN TURKEY AND GULF
COOPERATION COUNCIL COUNTRIES IN THE 2000S

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**THE RELATIONS BETWEEN TURKEY AND GULF COOPERATION
COUNCIL COUNTRIES IN THE 2000S**

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ABSTRACT

THE RELATIONS BETWEEN TURKEY AND GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COUNTRIES IN THE 2000S

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Turkey's relationship with the Gulf Arab States has gained momentum in the new millennium. There exists a wide range of arguments regarding the improvement of relations in political, economic and cultural fields and the factors leading to this development. In this study, the factors that shape the relations between Turkey and member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (the GCC) are analysed multidimensionally within the framework of domestic, regional and international factors as from the 2000s onwards.

In this context, the policy assumed by AKP towards the Gulf Arab States, effects of new power balances emerging as a result of regional developments and reflections of the Middle East policy by the US in the new millennium over Turkey and the GCC countries relations are examined. Also, the effects of "Arab Uprising" process, which started in 2010, on relations between Turkey and the GCC countries are analysed.

Keywords: Turkey, Turkish Foreign Policy, Gulf Cooperation Council (the GCC), Arab Spring, AKP Rule

ÖZ

2000'Lİ YILLARDA TÜRKİYE KÖRFEZ İŞBİRLİĞİ KONSEYİ ÜLKELERİ İLİŞKİLERİ

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Türkiye'nin Körfez Arap ülkeleri ile ilişkileri yeni yüzyılda ivme kazanmıştır. Siyasi, ekonomik ve kültürel alanlarda gelişen ilişkiler ve bu gelişime yol açan muhtemel faktörlere ilişkin çok çeşitli görüşler öne sürülmüştür. Bu çalışmada, Türkiye ile Körfez İşbirliği Konseyi(KİK) üye ülkeleri arasındaki ilişkileri şekillendiren etmenler çok yönlü olarak ele alınmış ve söz konusu ilişkiler iç, bölgesel ve uluslararası düzey çerçevesinde irdelenmiştir.

Bu bağlamda, AKP'nin Körfez Arap devletlerine yönelik politikası, bölgesel gelişmeler sonucunda oluşan yeni güç dengelerinin ilişkilere etkisi ve ABD'nin yeni bin yılda sürdürdüğü Ortadoğu politikasının Türk-Körfez Arap ülkeleri ilişkilerine yansımaları ön plana çıkarılmıştır. Ayrıca, 2010 yılında başlayan Arap Ayaklanması sürecinin Türkiye-KİK ülkeleri arasındaki ilişkilere etkisi incelenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türkiye, Türk Dış Politikası, Körfez İşbirliği Konseyi (KİK), Arap Baharı, AKP Yönetimi

To my wife

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AKP	Justice and Development Party
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FSA	Free Syrian Army
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GMEI	Greater Middle East Initiative
ICI	Istanbul Cooperation Initiative
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham
KİK	Gulf Cooperation Council
MIT	National Intelligence Agency
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OIC	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
PKK	Kurdistan Workers Party
TBMM	Turkish Grand National Assembly
TSK	Turkish Armed Forces
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
YPG	People's Protection Units

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: LITERATURE REVIEW

With the foundation of the Turkish Republic, Turkish foreign policy underwent dramatic changes in its relations with the Gulf Arab States. And when the 21st century came, these changes acquired a divergent dimension. Academic studies on the relations between Turkey and the GCC countries have so far remained limited. However, with the dramatic improvement of relations particularly in the last ten years, there has been an increase in academic papers on this issue. In this context, this study examines the improving relations in the new millennium and aims to contribute the literature. The objective of this thesis is to analyse domestic, regional and international factors molding Turkey's relations with the GCC in the 21st century through the multidimensional approach.

Within this context, why have the relations portraying an uneven route in the 20th century grown into a strategic partnership at the beginning of the 21st century, and how? Why was Turkey seen as a role model for the states in the region? How can the agents determining and affecting Turkish foreign policy approaches towards Gulf Arab states be identified? What are the expectations and limitations of Turkey's relations with the GCC countries? In this regard, what kind of changes occurred from the point of Turkey-GCC relations following the Arab Uprisings?

After its withdrawal from Arab territories subsequent to the 1st World War, Turkey followed a secular, nationalist, western and neutral foreign policy and its main objective was westernization since the proclamation of the Republic. The westernization process in Turkey was set into motion as a security strategy aiming at guaranteeing the survival of the newly born Turkish Republic.¹ As for the relations of newly founded Republic with Arab region during this period, they were affected by

¹ Tarık Oğuzlu, "The Future of Turkey's Westernization: A Security Perspective," *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 9, No: 3 (2007), p. 50.

the relations with France and Britain which were hegemonic powers of that time and dominating over the region. Turkey's involvement in the Middle East remained very limited during the Republican period. To the Kemalist elite, the Middle East was only to be dealt with when Turkey's national security was threatened.²

The foreign policy during one party rule was shaped mainly by domestic reforms. According to Brown, there were four goals of Turkish foreign policy of the 20th century. First, ensuring the country's territorial integrity at all cost, second, to become accepted as part of Europe and the West, third, ensuring the well-being of ethnic Turks abroad, and last, not to be involved in the conflicts of others, to maintain neutrality.³ It can be said that the goals noted above were results of Turkish Republic's westernization and nation-state building process and they were congruent with the reforms of domestic policies. The efforts exerted for removing culture and values of Arab tradition, which was marginalized during the process of building nation-state, from the society were also constituting main axis of foreign policy approach to the Arabs at that time. However, as Nafi states neither the idea of nationalism nor the emergence of the nation-state could break Turkish-Arab relations completely.⁴

With the end of the Second World War, the period characterized by bi-polar international system started. And then, the territorial demands of Soviet Union, one of the two super powers of that time, from Turkey raised security concerns of Turkey and as of that date, Turkey's national security had been inextricably linked to the international politics of the region.⁵ As a result, the founders of the Republic left the impartiality policy, deciding to take part in West Block and security structures of it and realized this goal by becoming a member of NATO in 1952. The western

² Emel Parlar Dal, "The Transformation of Turkey's Relations with the Middle East: Illusion or Awakening," *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 13, No: 2 (2012), p. 247.

³ Cameron S. Brown, "Turkey in the Gulf Wars of 1991 and 2003," *Turkish Studies*, Vol: 8, No: 1 (2007), pp. 89-91.

⁴ Basheer M. Nafi, "The Arabs and Modern Turkey: A Century of Changing Perspectives," *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 11, No: 1 (2009), p. 78.

⁵ Lenore Martin, "Turkey's National Security in the Middle East," *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 1, No: 1 (2000), p. 95.

character of Turkish politics aspired by ruling elite was solidified during the Cold War period through Turkey's alliance with NATO. Since that period, Turkish foreign policy toward the Arab states were drafted pursuant to both cultural and political policies of USA, existing in the region as a hegemonic power. However, foreign minister of the Republic at the end of the 1990s, Ismail Cem period can be seemed as an exception to this. Within this scope, the "containment"⁶ policy implemented by USA with the aim of limiting its opponent Soviet Union influence and the sub-factor of this policy aiming to decrease Soviet influence in the Middle East constituted the major axis of Turkey's foreign policy toward the Arab geography.

But, Turkey's Cyprus conflict after the 1960s can be regarded as an exception. During this period, as Turkey could not get the necessary support from its Western allies and became isolated at international arena as a result, Turkey brought some political and economic initiatives oriented to the Middle East. However, these initiatives remained limited and ineffective due to such reasons as negative perspective of the regional states on Turkey, and secular foreign policy tendency still existing in Turkish foreign policy and also the dominating security-based foreign policy perceptions, resulted from Cold War conditions.

Afghanistan conquest by the Soviet Union in 1979 and Iranian revolution occurring in the same year enabled USA to carry out "green belt"⁷ policy in the region. According to this project, southern borders of Soviet Union shall be restricted by Muslim states and it shall preclude the Soviet Union from expanding to the south. USA support for mujahideens in Afghanistan, the 1980 military coup in Turkey and the following political developments as well as transition to liberal economy model,

⁶ Containment is a foreign policy pursued by the United States after the Second World War in order to limit the Soviet Union especially in Europe. For more details see: Robert S. Litwak, "Rogue States and U.S. Foreign Policy: Containment after the Cold War," (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2000).

⁷ According to Mehmet Şahin, While the Soviet Union endeavoured to be influential in the region by promoting those anti-Western and nationalist forces seeking independence, the US chose to be part of the game by supporting Islamist groups directly and indirectly, as in the case of Afghanistan, against the Soviets which Washington described the 'evil empire'. To this end, the US created a 'green belt'. This policy bore fruit as a significant international jihadist group, fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan under US auspices. see: Mehmet Şahin, "US' Moslem Warriors" *Akademik Orta Dogu*, Vol. 3, Issue 1, (2008) p43-52.

supporting Iraq in its war against the radical Iran and encouraging Gulf Arab states to set common security mechanisms (the GCC) can be seen initiated with the relevant policy. The six Gulf States, consisting of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait and United Arab Emirates, gathered and founded Gulf Cooperation Council (the GCC) on May 25, 1981. The main objective of the GCC was drafted as protection of member countries' internal and external security and stability in regime, and realization of these goals through the principle of collective defence.⁸



Map 1. The Gulf Cooperation Council Countries (Bahrain, Qatar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, United Arab Emirates)

Source: Adapted from bilaterals.org (<http://www.bilaterals.org/?-GCC-&lang=en>)

In the 1980s, the improvement in Turkey- Gulf Arab relations was the result of policies based on liberal economy model as well as the changing rhetoric of the Turkish state stressing on Turkey's Muslim identity. Özal initiated an economic liberalization campaign that included privatization and opening up Turkish economy

⁸ Burhan Dinç, "Son Dönemde Türkiye-Körfez İşbirliği Konseyi İlişkileri," *Orsam*, 26 Kasım 2010, <http://www.orsam.org.tr/tr/yazigoster.aspx?ID=1292>.

to foreign investment through liberalization of the Turkish economy.⁹ During this period, Gulf Arab states increased their investments in Turkey, particularly in banking and real estate sectors. Also, Gulf Arab states' enthusiasm for improving the relations with a Turkish administration stressing its Muslim identity can be regarded as the other driving force for the relations.

As for the reasons restricting Turkey's relations with Gulf Arab countries, they can be ranked as secular nature of Turkish foreign policy despite the emphasis on its Muslim identity, prioritizing security policies, despite the economic and political initiatives it made, and on the other side, distrust by Arab states against a secular Turkey and their reluctance of carrying relations with Turkey forward.

With the end of Cold War in 1990, Turkish foreign policy makers tried to produce an anti-thesis against the claims asserting that Turkey's geopolitical importance during Cold War period decreased. In this regard, Turkey chose to prove its own strategic significance to its western allies through supporting the war coalition created by USA against Iraq, in 1991. Nevertheless, this attempt harmed Turkey politically and economically with the end of the First Gulf War and this case formed the basis for internal and external problems it had during the 1990s.¹⁰

On the one hand, Kurdish conflict as well as economic and political crisis, and on the other hand, Turkish military's move to the center of the authority in reaction to this conflict, and high ranking military relations with Israel by the military directing Turkish foreign policy were determining factors of the politics conducted by Turkey towards Arab states. During this process, Gulf Arab countries followed a foreign policy pursuant to regional policies of USA, on which they are dependent in terms of security policies, against Iran deemed as the main threat against themselves and they gave limited response to improving of Turkey's relations with Israel and their relations with Turkey remained stable. Ismail Cem' efforts for improving relations

⁹ Kürşad Turan, "Changes in Turkish Foreign Policy: A Shift or a Passing Interest?" *Akademik Bakış*, Cilt. 6, Sayı: 11 (2012), p. 73.

¹⁰ Mustafa Aydın, "Turkish Foreign Policy during the Gulf War", *Cairo Papers in Social Science*, Vol.21, No: 1 (1998).

with Arab states in this era gave limited results due to political conjuncture of the region.

Once the new millennium came, one of the most essential foreign policy agendas of USA, the hegemonic power of unipolar global system, was the fight against radical Islamic terrorism. In this context, 9/11 attacks led to significant changes in Turkish foreign policy and national security perceptions of it, like the other states in the region. As Martin states, at the beginning of the millennium, Turkey's search for national security compels it to become more actively involved in the international politics of the Middle East than its Kemalist antecedents.¹¹ Turkey's engagement in the conflicts breaking out in the Middle East at that time and the progress in its relations with the GCC countries have been subject to various arguments.

The first of these arguments is related to the domestic political transformation initiated by the AKP's rise to power in 2002. Indeed, coming to power of a movement representing political Islam with a large majority caused substantial alterations in Turkey's Middle East policy. After the policies of Ismail Cem for improving relations with Arab states, as Uslu states, the new Middle East approach of the AKP government represents the abandonment of the former Turkish policy of avoiding involvement in the region or being active in the region on behalf of the West.¹² It can be said that Turkish foreign policy have dealt with the Middle East issues when compared to the former periods.

According to Aras, Turkey's new foreign policy towards the Middle East region is closely linked to the domestic political transformation of Turkey under the AKP rule which included changes in the national security understanding, shift from bureaucratic-authoritarian tradition to civilian and societal foreign policy making and economic liberalization and stability.¹³ He adds that the domestic reforms and growing economic power have enabled Turkey to emerge as a peace-promoter in

¹¹ Martin, *Turkey's National Security in the Middle East*, p. 102.

¹² Nasuh Uslu, "Türkiye'nin Yeni Ortadoğu Yaklaşımı," *Bilig*, No: 52 (2010), pp. 147-180.

¹³ Bülent Aras, "Turkey and the Middle East Frontiers of the new Geographic Imagination," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 61, No: 4 (2007), pp. 471-488.

neighbouring regions.¹⁴ However, the recent domestic and regional developments seem to have refuted this argument. Also he argues that AKP opted for a more neo-conservative ideology (dominant ideology in USA around the same period) with a liberal economy model, and these domestic changes led to a radical transformation of foreign policy.¹⁵ According to him, Turkey's transformation put an end to the Cold War style security-state apparatuses and changed the framework of domestic and foreign policy. Turkey's contribution to the Middle East security can be analysed under two main categories. First, its emergence as a role model in the Middle East, and second, active role it has adopted as a peace-promoter.¹⁶ He underlines that Turkish foreign policy in neighbouring regions does not assume a hegemonic role for Turkey but targets an inclusive approach for building peace and security based on dynamics within the region.¹⁷

However, Turkey's policy for the civil war in Syria which started in 2011 have caused debates over the peace-promoter role mentioned above, arguing Turkey's desire for becoming a hegemonic power in the region. Attributing all of these changes merely to AKP rule and excluding international actors, and international conjuncture enabling this political transformation would be misleading. Economic and political performance of AKP surely matter. But, the developments at the regional level laying the basis for this performance and more importantly, the international factors drafting the framework of this transformation clearly take precedence over the former.

In this context, Dal argues about societal aspect of Turkey's involvement. Dal states that Turkey's new Middle East policy under the AKP government is based on civilizational discourse and geopolitical approach that show us Turkey's engagement

¹⁴ Bülent Aras, "The Davutoğlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy," *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 11, No: 3 (2009), p. 128.

¹⁵ Bülent Aras, "Turkey's New Dynamics in Domestic and Foreign Policy," *Journal of Balkan and New Eastern Studies*, Vol. 12, No: 1 (2010), pp. 1-2.

¹⁶ Bülent Aras, "Turkey and the GCC: An Emerging Relationship," *Middle East Policy*, Vol 12, No: 4 (2005), p. 90.

¹⁷ Aras, *The Davutoğlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy*, p. 131.

with the region is not only at a political level but also at societal level and this will transform Turkey into a political power in the region.¹⁸ In this case, reflections of Turkey's new "civilizational" rhetoric, neo-Ottomanism by Arap policy-makers, have caused various debates over Turkey's Middle East policy.

Some academicians expressing the alterations in Turkey's Middle East foreign policy through domestic factors probes the tie between these changes and political actors. In their article, Özcan and Usul argue that AKP's foreign policy has a multidimensional character, different from the previous one-dimensional foreign policy and under AKP rule, the Turkish governments policy has deviated from that of USA.¹⁹ And they insist that main theme behind the new Turkish foreign policy is the new political elite in Turkish politics and these new policies are leader-driven.²⁰ However, what is overlooked in this argument is that, whether substituting traditional decision-making mechanisms of Turkish foreign policy with the leader-driven policies is positive or not still remain arguable.

In this context, Kirişçi argues that Turkey's "demonstrative effect"²¹ and its functions which are being trading state, democratization experience, and the positive image of Turkey's new foreign policy, makes the Turkish model of interest to the Middle East.²² As Başkan argues, Turkey has a deficiency of necessary resources²³ to

¹⁸ Dal, *The Transformation of Turkey's Relations with the Middle East*, pp. 245-267.

¹⁹ Mesut Özcan and Ali Resul Usul, "Understanding the 'New' Turkish Foreign Policy: Changes within Continuity is Turkey Departing from the West," *Uluslararası Hukuk ve Politika*, Cilt. 6, No: 21 (2010), pp. 103-104.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

²¹ Kirişçi argues that it is this "effect" that makes the Turkish model of interest to the Middle East and that this "effect" is a function of three developments: the rise of the "trading state", the diffusion of Turkey's democratization experience as a "work in progress", and the positive image of Turkey's "new" foreign policy. see: Kemal Kirişçi, "Turkey's 'Demonstrative Effect' and the Transformation of the Middle East," *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 13, No:2 (2011), pp. 33-55.

²² Kemal Kirişçi, "Turkey's 'Demonstrative Effect' and the Transformation of the Middle East," *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 13, No: 2 (2011), pp. 33-55.

²³ Birol Başkan, "Turkey-GCC Relations: Is There a Future?" *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 13, No: 1 (2011), p. 161.

further its participation in regional politics, and Turkey's soft power tools has become ineffective especially after Arab Uprising period. There exist arguments prioritizing economic relations in terms of the progress of affairs between Turkey and the GCC countries in the 2000s. According to Hürsoy, although there are some explicit and security dimensions to Turkish foreign policy in the Gulf region, the overall rationale is economic.²⁴ She argues that bilateral economic objectives which are being pursued in the Gulf will inevitably generate a more substantial political and strategic role for Turkey.²⁵ According to Öniş, neo-liberal policy²⁶ implemented by Turkey at the beginning of the 2000s have taken effect in Turkish foreign policy. Öniş states that AKP made vigorous commitments in privatization, social failures and redistribution in state-based forms which are perspectives of the regulatory neo-liberal paradigm.²⁷ In the same article, Öniş also deals with foreign policy rhetoric and domestic support relation. In this regard, he states that pro-active foreign policy, an approach based on Turkey's soft power and the image projected was that of a "strong and caring Turkey" helped to bolster the AKP's popularity in the domestic politics.²⁸ He concludes his article with AKP's conservative globalism policy style which brings together globalism and nationalism in a conservative way.²⁹

In the 2000s, there were improvements in the economic relations between Turkey and the GCC countries. On the one hand, AKP's economic initiatives, and on the other hand, partially changed investment policies of the GCC countries in different countries instead of investing in their usual regions such as USA and Europe under adverse psychologic circumstances inflicted by September 11 attacks, can be

²⁴ Siret Hürsoy, "Turkey's Foreign Policy and Economic Interests in the Gulf," *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 14, No: 3 (2013), pp. 503-520.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 503-520.

²⁶ For more details about neo-liberal ideology see: Rachel S. Turner, "*NEO-Liberal Ideology: History, Concepts & Policies*," (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008)

²⁷ Ziya Öniş, "The Triumph of Conservative Globalism: The Political Economy of the AKP Era," *Turkish Studies*, Vol: 13, No: 2 (2012), pp. 141-145.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

remarked as two reasons of these improvements in the economy field. However, it is not possible to assess these economic improvements between the parties without figuring on the policy and security aspects of the matter and regional and international context directing the relations.³⁰ Tür adds that Turkey's increasing economic relations with the Middle East have three main reasons. First is the region's proximity and the attractiveness of its oil rich economy; second, Turkey's search for new markets and the Middle East has emerged as an alternative for this; and third, the rising economic actors- so called Anatolian tigers- who feel ideologically close to the Muslim nations of the Middle East.³¹ Finally, she explains that the improvement in Turkey-the GCC countries relations resulted from the country's economic performance, and AKP's vision of integration with the Middle East countries and its links with the business community.³² Starting in 2010, Arab uprisings and following political events affected economic relations between Turkey and the GCC countries and justified the argument remarked above.

Energy policies are also important elements determining economy policies between the parties. In this respect, Han states that Turkey's energy strategy in the Middle East has increasingly become integrated with Turkish foreign policy.³³ And he adds that Turkey's opportunistic approach in this issue restrained it from realizing its target.³⁴ Indeed, energy policies have constituted a significant part of the relations in the 2000s. But, it can be said that such kind of policies influencing regional balances are not completely determined by bilateral and regional relations.

Other view in this issue is based on constructivist approach. Sadık argues that the end of Cold War offered a window of opportunity for Turkish foreign policy to expand to

³⁰ Özlem Tür, "Economic Relations with the Middle East under the AKP-Trade, Business Community and Reintegration with Neighbouring Zones," *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 12, No: 4 (2011), p. 593.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 594.

³² Tür, *Economic Relations with the Middle East*, p. 599.

³³ Ahmet K. Han, "Turkey's Energy Strategy and the Middle East: Between a Rock and a Hard Place," *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 12, No: 4 (2011), p. 603.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 603.

the Middle East, recently referred to as the Greater Middle East.³⁵ As remarked above, changes in the international context have affected Turkish foreign policy approach especially towards the Middle East. And he continues with the neo-realist approach which puts forward system analyses, saying that improvement in Turkey's relations with the Middle Eastern countries are based on the changing structural dynamics of the international system.³⁶ Then he adds that end of the Cold War constitutes a "permissive cause" for Turkey's enhanced activism in the Greater Middle East.³⁷ According to him, transforming identity of Turkish foreign policy has paved the way for the construction of an identity-based Turkish foreign policy.³⁸ Here, following the transition to the unipolar system, USA's identity-based policy towards the Middle East on grounds of radical Islamic terrorism reveals the argument that Turkey has been encouraged to employ an identity-based foreign policy in its relations with the states in the Middle East.³⁹

Turan analyses the effect of international context over Turkish foreign policy. According to him, there are two areas that AKP's foreign policy differs from the previous one. First is the political area, such as Palestinian issue, where Turkey diverges from the Western line, and second is the method of involvement in the region by using soft power instead of hard power.⁴⁰ He emphasizes two difficulties. First, peace-making role of Turkey has become impossible due to the conflict with Israel, and secondly, Turkey lacks economic and diplomatic resources needed for peace-making efforts.⁴¹ Lastly, he argues that if the stakes in the conflict rises to

³⁵ Giray Sadık, "Magic Blend or Dangerous Mix? Exploring the Role of Religion in Transforming Turkish Foreign Policy from a Theoretical Perspective," *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 13 No: 3 (2012), p. 298

³⁶ Sadık, *Magic Blend or Dangerous Mix?*, p. 308.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 314.

³⁹ For details about Turkey' identity-based policy see: Giray Sadık, "Magic Blend or Dangerous Mix? Exploring the Role of Religion in Transforming Turkish Foreign Policy from a Theoretical Perspective," *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 13 No: 3 (2012), pp. 301-305

⁴⁰ Turan, *Changes in Turkish Foreign Policy*, pp. 82-83.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

global scales, the involvement of non-Middle Eastern actors would severely limit Turkey's ability and this brings forth Turkey's obligation to follow Western policies on the region.⁴² We can exemplify the last argument with Western intervention to Libya in 2011 and Syria policy of Turkey after 2011.

The progress of Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East and Turkish-GCC relations are explained through a combination of factors by Altunışık and Martin. In the essay written by them, the change in Turkish foreign policy is categorized under two sub-categories. The first one is "adjustment change" which refers to a change in the level of effort.⁴³ They state that Turkey did make same efforts like AKP did, to get involved in the Middle East politics before the AKP rule.⁴⁴ The second one is "program change" which refers to Turkey beginning to use different means⁴⁵ in achieving its foreign policy objectives in the region.⁴⁶ In the context of this category, Turkey mainly pursued its goals through diplomatic relations rather than military force, focused on its soft power assets, emphasized engagement and economic independence, and promoted mediation roles.⁴⁷ Turkey's foreign policy change has led the arguments that the West has presented Turkey as a role model for the countries in the region in their fight against radical Islamist movements in that region.

⁴² Turan, *Changes in Turkish Foreign Policy*, p.83.

⁴³ Meliha Altunışık and Lenore G. Martin, "Making Sense of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East under AKP," *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 12, No: 4 (2011), p. 570.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 570.

⁴⁵ According to Altunışık and Martin, In the 2000s, Turkey mainly pursued its goals through diplomatic negotiation rather than military force, focused on its soft power assets, emphasized engagement and economic interdependence, and promoted mediation roles. Thus, clearly Turkey began to use different means in achieving its foreign policy objectives in the region. This represented an important contrast with Turkish foreign policy in the region for most of the 1990s which was highly securitized and used mostly military means (balancing alliances, military relations, military threats and interventions). For details see: Meliha Altunışık and Lenore G. Martin, "Making Sense of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East under AKP," *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 12, No: 4 (2011), p. 571.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 571.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 571.

These foreign policy instruments employed by Turkey are preferred intentionally in order to show Turkey under an administration representing “moderate Islam” as a role model for the states in the region, as USA’s fight against radical Islamist movements at that region continued and these instruments were bolstered with AKP’s domestic transformations at home.

Finally, Altunışık and Martin concluded that the balance of power changes provided opportunities for more Turkish involvement in the region which were more influenced by domestic politics, including the coming to power of the AKP, structural transformations of the Turkish economy with its new actors and political changes.⁴⁸

The objective of this thesis is to analyse the change in relations between Turkey and GCC countries in the 2000s with combination of factors. In this respect, the relations shall be examined at domestic, regional and international levels. In this context, Buzan and Waever’s Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) can be referred. According to Buzan, the central idea in RSCT is that, since most threats travel more easily over short distances than over long ones, security interdependence is normally patterned into regionally based clusters: security complexes.⁴⁹ He also states that, security complexes may well be extensively penetrated by the global powers, but their regional dynamics nonetheless have a substantial degree of autonomy from the patterns set by the global powers.⁵⁰ Finally, he adds that RSCT distinguishes between the system level interplay of the global powers, whose capabilities enable them to transcend distance, and the subsystem level interplay of lesser powers whose main security environment is their local region.⁵¹ In this regard, RSCT provides a basis for the important argument of this thesis asserting that global powers affect regional policies

⁴⁸ Altunışık and Martin, *Making Sense of Turkish Foreign Policy*, p. 584.

⁴⁹ Barry Buzan, and Ole Waever, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 4.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

of Turkey and the GCC countries, as well as the other essential component of this thesis arguing that the relations between Turkey and the GCC countries following Arab Uprisings period are based on regional and security issues and it seems to relate with these issues also in the future.

It is foreseen that historical change and progress of Turkish foreign policy in Middle East is mostly affected by the international context and this case continues in the 2000s. I argue that although the regional developments and domestic transformation in Turkey have a substantial effect on Turkish foreign policy and this effect gradually increases, this domestic transform in the 2000s cannot be examined independently from international context of that time and the USA' policy towards Turkey. So, I argue that Turkey's transformations at domestic level at the beginning of the 21st century seems to be similar with the domestic transformations in the 1950s and in the 1980s.

The organization of this thesis is as follows. After a literature review of Turkish foreign policy to the Middle East in the 21st century remarked in the introduction chapter, the second chapter is reserved for a brief historical background of the relations between Turkey and Gulf Arab states in the 20th century. In the third chapter, domestic, regional and international factors molding relations in the 21st century are analysed. Fourth chapter is focused on the progress of the Turkey-GCC countries relations after Arab Uprisings in the context of insurgent countries cases. The last chapter is devoted to political-security, economic-energy, and socio-cultural aspects of the relations in the 21st century. The last chapter is reserved for conclusion remarks.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF TURKISH AND GULF ARAB STATES RELATIONS

2.1. Turkish-Gulf Arabs Relations until the 20th Century

The background of Turkish-Arab relations date back to the first years of Islam. Conquest movements by Islam armies reached to Central Asia, where Turks were already settled at that time, and Turks' Islamization process gained momentum. Following adoption of Islam by Turks, migration movements towards the West increased and they set to share the same geography with Arabs. As Turks proceeded to adapt Islam in the subsequent centuries, their culture and language were deeply influenced by Arab civilization.⁵² Turks became one of the most two essential actors within Islamic community as of the 11th century, broadening Islamic conquests to Christian geography of Europe as well as bearing a protector character for Muslim communities.

Turks began to rule over Mesopotamia, Syria, Egypt and Arabian Peninsula from the beginning of the 16th century on. During this period, Ottoman State was settled on Persian Gulf coasts under the reign of Sultan Selim I, but it proved to gain an actual control over the area when Sultan Suleiman I acceded to power.⁵³ Ottoman State ruled over the Arabian Peninsula through sheikdoms existing there and Makkah Sheriff Husayn, thus social life across the area was preserved. Emerging in Najd district in the middle of the 18th century, Wahhabism⁵⁴ started to menace the

⁵² Caesar E. Farah, *"Arabs and Ottomans: A Checkered Relationship"* (Istanbul: ISIS, 2002), p. 348

⁵³ Zekeriya Kurşun, *"Basra Körfezinde Osmanlı-İngiliz Çekişmesi: Katar'da Osmanlılar 1871-1916"* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2004), p. 21

⁵⁴ Wahhabism is founded by Muhammad ibn Abd-al-Wahhab in the middle of the 18th century. Wahhabism is the official sect of the Saudi Arabia. For more details see: Rifat Türkel, "Etkileri Açısından Vehhâbilik (Suûdi Arabistan Dışı Ülkeler Örneği)," *International Journal of Social Science*, Volume 6, Issue 8 (2013), p. 699-718. Also see: Ahmad Moussalli, "Wahhabism, Salafism and Islamism: Who Is the Enemy?" *Conflicts Forum: Beirut - London – Washington*, (2009).

authority of Ottoman state there, under Saudi Dynasty's leadership and substantially crippled Ottoman's authority, which had already started to decrease there.

Another subject afflicting with Ottoman State in the 19th century was nationalism. Nationalism is the main matter canalizing Arab-Turkish relations throughout the 19th and particularly in the 20th centuries. Karpaz argues that Ottoman State was resigned to Europe's ward destroyed its credibility and prestige before Arabs along with the other components of the State.⁵⁵ Under these circumstances, Ottoman State attempted to protect its territory against nationalist movements through the policies of modernization and reinforcing central administration, and Arab rulers were disturbed by these policies.

The other actor challenging the Ottoman State over this area during the 19th century was Great Britain. Desiring to guarantee the sea route streaming toward India and taking advantage of the trade existing across Iran and Persian Gulf, Great Britain gradually acted against policies of Ottoman State, bearing control of these regions. When it became obvious that England had come to stay, Sultan Abdul Hamid II began to show an active interest in preventing the loss of the Arabian sheikdoms. But this interest came a little too late.⁵⁶

In short, actual control of Ottoman State over Arabian Peninsula was dramatically reduced due to such factors as Wahhabism impairing the central administration, which was already feeble except for in Hejaz territory, and British attempts to settle on Persian Gulf towards the end of 19th century and the long distance existing between the region and Ottoman State's centre, as well as Ottoman's failure in ruling there effectively.

2.2. Relations at the Beginning of the 20th Century

The authority of Ottoman State in Arabian Peninsula was stronger when compared to the other regions. Despite all efforts exerted by the British, Arab community settled

⁵⁵ Kemal. H. Karpaz, *Ortadoğu'da Osmanlı Mirası ve Ulusçuluk*, trans. Recep Boztemur (Ankara: İmge Yayınevi, 2001), p. 146.

⁵⁶ Farah, *Arabs and Ottomans*, p. 531.

there continued to support Ottomans, expecting it to strengthen itself through prospective reforms and bear caliphate position. But, this attitude assumed by the Arabs was not proved to be a long-term commitment as a consequence of Party of Union and Progress' coming to power and its subsequent policies.

According to Karpat, the major fracture within Turkish-Arab relations, stems from the policy undertaken by Party of Union and Progress, envisaging conversion of multinational Ottoman State to a centralized national Turkish State and its employing secularism to this end, during the years 1908-1911.⁵⁷ Nafi also remarks on the same issue that the last decade of Ottoman State was the most turbulent in the relations between the Arabs and the Turks. Pressures of the modern state, centralization policies and nationalism played their part in raising doubts about the future of Ottoman League. But the final partition of the empire was certainly the result of defeat in World War I.⁵⁸ Prior to World War I, one third of Ottoman State's army was comprised of Arabs, mostly within Arab territories. This case can be regarded as a fidelity and dependence sign of Muslim Arabs towards Ottoman State.

However, the uprising led by Makkah Sherif Husayn against Ottoman State in 1916 remarkably changed the course of bilateral relations. According to Aziz el-Azmeh, the revolt by Sherif Husayn, who exploited nationalism as a way of his propaganda, but basically aimed at saving his own dominance over the region, is rather far away from bearing Arab character and eligible for being discarded from the literature on Arab nationalism.⁵⁹ This uprising bolstered by the British did not spread widely and most of Arab community carried on supporting the Ottoman State. In fact, this uprising proved to be important after the fall of Ottoman State, succeeded by foundation of Turkish Republic. Although it was clear for the founders the Republic that Sherif's uprising was not representing the whole Arabs, this event was converted

⁵⁷ Karpat, *Ortadoğu'da Osmanlı Mirası ve Ulusçuluk*, p. 164.

⁵⁸ Nafi, *The Arabs and Modern Turkey*, p. 64.

⁵⁹ M. Talha Çiçek, "Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Ders Kitapları Çerçevesinde Türk Ulus Kimliği İnşası ve 'Arap İhaneti'," *Divan*, Vol. 17, No: 32 (2012), p. 173.

to “Arab betrayal” in time as a part of the nation-building process and gained a lion’s share in view of Arab perception.⁶⁰

With the end of First World War, Ottoman State was obliged to withdraw from all of Arab territories it once possessed. Revolting against Ottomans upon encouragements by the British, Hashimi Dynasty was conflicting with Saudi Dynasty when Ottoman State stepped in breakup process and Turks engaged in a War of Independence in Anatolia. While the Arab dream for uniting the Arabs came to an end as a result of internal conflicts and British policies, Turks were struggling to defend the remaining piece of land against European imperialism. During the War of Independence period, Turkish-Arab relations was one of mutual cooperation against imperialism, under the existing authority of the Caliph.⁶¹ In that period, it was clearly noted on the National Pact text, drawing political borders of Turkish liberation that Arabs were required to establish their own state on the regions they were predominating. Proposing a cooperation in the fight against hegemonic powers of Europe, Ottomanism and desire for preserving the Caliphate as a cornerstone were existing among Turkish leaders, it was evidently remarked in the National Pact that Turks lost their interest in reigning over Arab territories.

2.3. Turkey and Gulf States Relations after the Foundation of the Turkish Republic

In the aftermath of the victory in Turkish National War of Independence and the Lausanne Treaty, a new Turkish State was founded in Anatolia. Turkey declared to the world that it abandoned Middle East territories.⁶² From that time on, Turkey embraced the policy of Westernization, which was espoused also by Ottoman State throughout the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th, as a primary target of newly-founded state and proceeded on this route by radical reforms in a short span of time, with the proclamation of republic.

⁶⁰ Op. cit., p. 171.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 179.

⁶² Sabit Duman, “Türkiye’nin Ortadoğu Politikası (1923-1938),” *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi*, Vol. 1, No: 1 (2000), p. 142.

Westernization and efforts to build a nation-state were undoubtedly the basic factors assigning Turkey's relations with Arabs thereafter. The republican elite ruling Turkey after 1922 was comprised of army officers who were not forgiving the "Arab betrayal".⁶³ The republican elite were also regarding Arab/Islam civilization as an obstacle for transition of Turks to Western civilization and they desired to erase each component while thereof from political and social memory of that time.

In a sense, reform actions were being conducted by Turkey, oriented to adapt political and social life of the West, Arabs were fighting for liberation against imperial states of the West. This contrast caused the two parties to gradually drift apart from each other. In this respect, as Arab's strive for liberation is also related to nationalization process, Arab's nation-state building propaganda declared Ottoman State as the scapegoat for downgrading Arab communities. As for the Turkish perspective, "Arab betrayal" was stressed frequently during the period characterized by the policy of nation-state building and this contrast formed a basis for the perception proposing purification of Turks from Arab culture.

The most essential factor effecting Turkish relations with Arabs was surely the abolition of caliphate, decided by the parliament in 1924 and withdrawal of Turks from Arab territories was also effective over the abolition thereof. With this decision, leadership role assumed by the Turks over Islamic communities for nine centuries also came to an end. As the notorious reputation of Turks within Arab communities was gradually increasing, Atatürk stated that Turkish State was standing next to Arabs and supporting them during their fight against European imperialism. Alphabet reform, adoption of western legal code, educational and cultural reforms are the other significant steps on Turkey's path to build a secular and nationalist nation-state, which dissociated it from Arab/Islam tradition. These reforms, oriented to build a nation-state, have always been the main factors restricting Turkey's relations with Arab countries throughout Republic Era.

Under Atatürk's rule, Turkish foreign policy with respect to Middle East is characterized by impartiality policy. Accordingly, Turkey abstained from the

⁶³ Karpat, *Ortadoğu'da Osmanlı Mirası ve Ulusçuluk*, p. 165.

conflicts bursting within Arab states or others between Arab states and mandatory ones, and it minimized its interest for the region. There are miscellaneous reasons for this impartiality policy embraced by Turkish Republic. Domestic reasons are shaping Turkey's westernization policy and its breaking each kind of connections with Arabs, as well as regional reasons like absence of an independent Arab state, except for Saudi Arabia, and international reasons like existing authorities of imperial states in the region.

There occurred two vital developments affecting Turkish-Arab relations at that time. First one is the resolution of Mosul problem in 1925 through the League of Nations, the other one is Hatay issue which was resolved with France in 1939. Although both of the issues were common problems of Turkish and Arab nations, the resolution was reached only by intervention of Western countries.

During the Republic Era, Turkey's first relation with Gulf countries was built with Saudi Arabia during Atatürk's rule. Saudi Arabia was one of the few Arab States that became independent after the First World War. And Turkey was the first country to recognize King Abdul Aziz who declared himself king of Saudi Arabia on January 8, 1926 after the annexation of Hejaz to Najd and the adjoining territories.⁶⁴ Turkey's being pioneer in recognizing Saudi Arabia is a remarkable act, when one thinks it did not forget the betrayal of Hashimi Dynasty, lived in the same region and acted against Turks in the past. The first political act concluded by Turkey with an Arab country, which was Saudi Arabia, was the friendship treaty on 3 August 1929.⁶⁵ Foreign minister of Saudi Arabia, Emir Faisal visited Turkey on 8-12 June, 1932⁶⁶ and bit of the delivered friendship messages.

In short, Turkish foreign policy was bearing a secular, nationalist, and at the same time impartial character during Atatürk's rule and domestic reforms were effective

⁶⁴ Muhammed Nouredin, "Arab-Turkish Relations during the Atatürk Era," *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi*, Vol. 1 (2000), p. 156.

⁶⁵ İsmail Soysal, "70 Years of Turkish-Arab Relations and an Analysis on Turkish-Iraqi Relations," *Studies on Turkish-Arab Relations*, Vol. 6 (1991), pp. 46-47.

⁶⁶ Adnan Şişman, "Atatürk Döneminde Türkiye-Suudi Arabistan İlişkilerinin Başlaması ve İlk Diplomatik Temaslar," *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi*, Vol. 1 (2000), pp. 170-172.

and determining over the relations in spite of developments at regional and international levels.

2.4. Turkey and the Gulf Arabs during and after the Cold War Period

It is very hard to prove an ongoing relationship between Turkey and Arab countries during Second World War. Foreign policy principles specified by Atatürk were prevailing during İnönü's rule, who was the most significant actor canalizing Turkish foreign policy following the death of Atatürk.⁶⁷ However, in the aftermath of Second World War, international system was altered and so the explicit impartiality policy of Atatürk's time was substituted by the notion of joining Western bloc in the face of Soviet threat against Turkey. Turkey's desire for security shelter of Western Bloc against territorial demands of Soviet Union, depicted major axis of foreign policy practices followed for nearly forty years within Cold War period. Turkey's relations with the Arab countries have been greatly affected by the political conjuncture of the world, in particular, by the state of relations between the two super-powers, on the one hand, and the regional or bilateral disputes and interests between Turkey and Arab countries on the other.⁶⁸ Turkish foreign policy cruising on secular- nationalist but independent path converted to a status completely dependent on Western Bloc and got based on security concerns. First result of this alteration was proved to be the recognition of Israel, which had undermined relations of Turkey with Arab countries for a long time.

Although Turkey voted against Israel at partition plan dated November 29, 1947, the plan was certified and Turkey pursued the policy of recognizing the state of Israel, boundaries of which were ascertained by this plan.⁶⁹ According to Yarar, the recognition of Israel was based on Turkey's lack of strength, geo-political necessity

⁶⁷ Hasan Duran and Ahmet Karaca, "Tek Parti Dönemi Türk-Arap İlişkileri," *Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi İİBF Dergisi*, Vol. 16, No: 3 (2011), p. 209.

⁶⁸ Soysal, *70 Years of Turkish-Arab Relations*, p. 23.

⁶⁹ Kamuran Gürün, *Dış İlişkiler ve Türk Politikası*, (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Yayınları, 1983), pp. 344-345.

and national security concerns.⁷⁰ Karpat claims that Turkey is being the first Muslim country to recognize Israel and launch diplomatic accreditation with Israel is a result of depicting itself together with foreign policy of West/the USA.⁷¹

2.4.1. Democrat Party Era and the 1960s

It can be said that threats by one superpower against Turkey obliged Turkish authorities to shelter under the other superpower. Thus, Turkey was encouraged to perform in a manner consistent with USA, supporting state of Israel and bearing an indispensable shelter qualification for Turkey. Nevertheless, this matter always posed a dramatic obstacle for Turkish-Arab relations. As a matter of fact, Saudi King described this matter as an impediment in bolstering relationship with Turkey, during the visit by Turkish foreign minister to Riyadh, in September 1957.⁷² Turkey preferred to follow a balanced and impartial policy regarding relations with Israel and Arab countries. To illustrate, Turkey recalled its ambassador to Israel during Suez Crisis of 1956, but it also abstained from going beyond by adopting a manner Arab states expected a Muslim country to do.

As stated above, Turkey attended to Western Bloc, violating the principle of impartiality after Second World War. During Democrat Party rule, this approach was accompanied by the Turkish Foreign Policy deployed beside USA/West alliance, resulting in qualifying Turkey as an outpost of the West by states of the region. Turkey employed Middle East part of containment policy, which was carried out by USA and intended to limit Soviet Union with outbreak of Cold War, as a major axis in its relations with countries of that region. And it achieved this objective by Baghdad Pact concluded in 1955, but could not get the results it desired. Turkey's policies towards the Middle East caused countries of the regions to move away

⁷⁰ Erhan Yazar, *Filistin Sorunu Temelinde Türk Dış Politikası ve İsrail Devletini Tanıma Süreci*, (Ankara: Siyasal Kitabevi, 2006), pp. 311-313.

⁷¹ Karpat, *Ortadoğu'da Osmanlı Mirası ve Ulusçuluk*, p. 169.

⁷² Behçet Kemal Yeşilbursa, "Demokrat Parti Dönemi Türkiye'nin Ortadoğu Politikası (1950-1960)," *History Studies*, Middle East Special Issue (2010), p. 87.

gradually, between the years of 1950-1960 when Democrat Party governed.⁷³ Indeed, effects of Middle East policy, pursued by the Democrat Party rule, remained to be prevalent at the beginning of the 1960s.

At the beginning of the 1960s, the most essential issue specifying Turkish foreign policy was Cyprus. Developments in Cyprus and “Johnson’s Letter⁷⁴” sent by USA president Johnson to Turkey, remarking that Turkey shall not be supported on the mentioned issue, although it took place in Western Bloc, caused to question of Turkey’s western-based acts. In 1965, the decision concluded by the General Assembly of United Nations against Turkey on Cyprus issue isolated Turkey regarding the issue, impairing relation with USA and this provided Turkey to head for Middle East.⁷⁵ Hence, the most remarkable change in Turkish foreign policy in the middle of 1960s was reconstructing bridges with the Arab world.⁷⁶ Throughout this period, Turkey followed a policy differing from USA for the first time since Cold War started. Isolated in the matter of Cyprus, Turkey was in pursuit of international support and this situation was the agent determining Turkey’s approach during the 1967 Arab-Israel War. Dominating Arab World until the war of 1967, nationalism idea was superseded by a serious trauma and different pursuits. With the Arab defeat against Israel in the June 1967 War, Arab consciousness of the shared history of what is common with the Turks would quietly and slowly begin to grow, because of Turkish people showing solidarity with the Palestinians, and according to Nafi, Palestine became one of the few areas that Turks and Arabs had a common cause.⁷⁷ However, there were some limits for efforts exerted on a convergence with

⁷³ Hasan Duran and Ahmet Karaca, “1950-1980 Döneminde Türkiye-Ortadoğu İlişkileri,” *C. Ü. İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Dergisi*, Cilt. 14, Sayı. 1 (2013), p. 125.

⁷⁴ The United States ‘Johnson Letter’ delivered to Turkish Prime Minister Ismet Inonu, For more details see: Baskın Oran, “*Türk Dış Politikası (1919-1980) c1*,” (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002). Also see: Suha Bolukbasi, “The Johnson Letter revisited” *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 29, Issue 3 (1993) p. 505.

⁷⁵ Nevin Balta, *Milliyet’ten Yansımalar Türk Dış Politikası 1950-1980*, (Ankara: Lazer Yayınları, 2005), p. 137.

⁷⁶ Willam Hale, *Türk Dış Politikası 1774-2000*, trans. Petek Demir, (İstanbul: Arkeoloji ve Sanat Yayınları, 2003), p. 176.

⁷⁷ Nafi, *The Arabs and Modern Turkey*, pp. 69-70.

Arab world. These limits can be classified as strictly secular foreign policy oriented to West, which had molded Turkish foreign policy since the 1920s, and the distrust existing in Arab communities in the face of Turkey and their skeptical approach, and above all the ongoing conditions of bipolarization system, however much it dimmed out.

2.4.2. Turkey and Gulf Arab Countries Relations in the 1970s

Turkey-Arab world relations improved rapidly during the 1970s but it was not a deviation from Kemalist Turkish foreign policy and of course both sides economies were not deep enough to develop and advance long-living relations was impossible because of instability and political turmoil at the region.⁷⁸

Political instability in Turkey during the 1970s, Cyprus intervention dated in 1974 and succeeding American embargo and oil crisis on 1973 were the main developments affecting Middle East policy of Turkey.

Turkish economy was remarkably inflicted by the oil crisis on 1973 and Turkey strived for improving its economic relations with Gulf Arab States, supplying Turkey with oil. Cyprus intervention left behind a politically and diplomatically isolated Turkey in the international arena and Turkey tried to get rid of this isolation through political supports by Muslim countries participating in the Organization of Islamic Conference, where Saudi Arabia was influential. Moreover, close diplomatic relations were established by Turkey with the other Gulf Arab states such as Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, and United Arab Emirates, all of which became independent successively.

When it comes to the end of 1970s, there occurred two main incidents, affecting both Turkey and other states in the region and their relationship among each other. First one is the occupation of Afghanistan by Soviet Union in 1979, and the other is the Islamic Revolution in Iran, which participated in Western Bloc at that time. Occupation of Afghanistan by Soviet Union was employed as a basis for “Green Belt” policy carried out by USA. As per this policy, Islam would be followed as the

⁷⁸ Sedat Laçiner, “Turkish Foreign Policy (1971-1980): Ideologies vs. Realities,” *Uluslararası Hukuk ve Politika*, Cilt. 6, Sayı: 21 (2010), p. 91.

main tool for preventing Soviet Union from expanding over the South, in other words Middle East. The project was actualized through mujahideen opposing to the occupation in Afghanistan, and existing monarchic administrations in Gulf Arab states and liberal model in Turkey. As for the change Turkey was expected to undergo, it was rendered possible by the military coup on September 12, 1980. Turkey's relations with Arab countries was affected after the coup. Forming the framework of Turkish foreign policy regarding Arab states and embraced by Turkish authorities as well, this model of course was not the only determinant for this topic.

With Iranian Islamic revolution in 1979, both Turkey as a member of Western Bloc and Gulf Arab states guarded by USA started to undergo political changes. As a Shiite revolt, Iranian revolution was interpreted by Gulf Arab states as a threat for their own internal securities, bearing the power of igniting profound Shiite minority settled within their territories. And the rhetoric and acts of Iranian regime implying the export of the revolution was interpreted as an explicit threat at regional level. With regard to Turkish foreign policy, Iranian Islamic Revolution made itself evident only after Iran-Iraq war started due to both domestic political crisis and military coup, and plans for a transition to liberal economy which can be classified as offshoot of liberal model, in Turkey.

The first response by USA/Western Bloc in the face of Iranian revolution was supporting Iraq during in its war against Iran. During this war, Gulf Arab states also supported Iraq economically and Turkey embraced economic advantages yielded by the war, it chose to remain impartial.

Second response by the USA to Iranian revolution was revealed in the form of constructing military bases in Gulf Arab states, concerned about internal security across their territories, and encouraging cooperation among related countries in order to ensure their security against internal and external threats. The six Gulf States, consisting of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait and United Arab Emirates, gathered and founded the Gulf Cooperation Council (the GCC) on May 25, 1981. The main objective of the GCC was drafted as protection of member countries' internal and external security and stability in regime, and realization of these goals

through the principle of collective defence.⁷⁹ Foundation of the GCC did not cause any changes on Turkey's foreign policy towards the region, and Turkey did not build an institutional relationship with the Council, but instead, carried on bilateral diplomacies with relevant countries.

2.4.3. Özal Era and the 1990s

Following the military coup of September 12, 1980, Turkey started to improve its relations with the Middle East, particularly with Gulf States and enhanced its activities within Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC).⁸⁰ USA's changing Middle East policy, and regional effects of Iranian revolution were affected Turkey's approach towards the region. It goes without saying that domestic political developments of countries were also proved to be effective. The relations between Turkish Republic and Gulf Arab states were considerably restricted until Özal period, which started in 1983. With Özal period, relations with Gulf Arab States gained momentum, especially at economic field. Turkey diversified its endeavours for cooperation with Gulf Arab States, in the aftermath of the transition to liberal economy.

In the 1980s Arab States showed greater interest in the direction which Turkey was to take. One reason for this was the revolution of Iran in 1979 which has changed the regional dynamics in the Middle East. Second, Özal's policy of strengthening and broadening relations with the Arab countries.⁸¹ When viewed from Gulf Arab countries, Özal's rule indeed made it easier for investments by Gulf capital to expand in Turkey thanks to both the law on property acquisition of foreigners and freedom of founding private financial houses during the subject period.

Turkey's relations with Arab states were affected by the end of Cold War in the beginning of the 1990s. And its relations with Middle East countries were shaped in

⁷⁹ Dinç, Son Dönemde Türkiye-Körfez İşbirliği Konseyi İlişkileri.

⁸⁰ Melek Fırat ve Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, "1980-1990 Arap Devletleriyle İlişkiler" Baskın Oran (ed.), *Türk Dış Politikası, Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar, Cilt II*, (İstanbul: İletişim, 2001), pp. 125-127.

⁸¹ Nafi, *The Arabs and Modern Turkey*, p, 71.

line with regional security concerns, growing up when domestic problems counted, throughout the 1990s.⁸² The first trigger for this concern was the First Gulf War, initiated by the USA/West coalition powers including Turkey against Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Benefiting of economic advantages of Iran-Iraq war and bolstering commerce with Middle East countries, Turkey was, however, harmed by the First Gulf War both economically and politically. According to Uzgel, waiting economic support from both USA and Gulf countries, Turkey could not get this support and it became the mostly affected state by the embargo imposed on Iraq.⁸³ Improving its power owing to authority gap in Northern Iraq, PKK was the most remarkable political damages of First Gulf War over Turkey. During this period, Turkey could not enhance its relations in the defence with Gulf Arab countries, regarded as a potential market and the fact that the related countries did not abide by their promises on recovering losses of crisis time was a clear manifestation that Arab countries did not regard Turkey as an ally for ensuring regional stability.⁸⁴

In the aftermath of First Gulf War, Turkey was dragged in a variety of political and economic turmoil at domestic level and the endeavours of building bridges with Muslim populated countries by Refah-Yol government, remained inconclusive. The most remarkable one of these efforts was the attempt by Erbakan to constitute D-8⁸⁵, devoted to improve cooperation among Muslim countries. Erbakan's project for the Muslim D-8 was welcomed by many Arabs but Egypt and Saudi Arabia were not comfortable until this effort to turn Turkey into a leading regional power, which was seen highly unrealistic by many people as well.⁸⁶ The fact that this effort proved abortive confirmed that short-dated Refah-Yol government could not provide any

⁸² Fırat ve Kürkçüoğlu, 1990-2001 Arap Devletleriyle İlişkiler Baskın Oran (ed.), p. 551.

⁸³ İlhan Uzgel, "1990-2001 ABD ve NATO'yla İlişkiler" Baskın Oran (ed.), *Türk Dış Politikası, Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular. Belgeler, Yorumlar, Cilt II*, (İstanbul: İletişim, 2001), pp. 257-258.

⁸⁴ Fırat ve Kürkçüoğlu, 1990-2001 Arap Devletleriyle İlişkiler, Baskın Oran (ed.), p. 553.

⁸⁵ "Developing Eight" (D-8) is an arrangement for development cooperation among Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey. For more see: T.C Dışişleri Bakanlığı, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/_d-8_.en.mfa (accessed on June 15, 2015).

⁸⁶ Nafi, *The Arabs and Modern Turkey*, p, 72.

improvements on constant relations with Middle East and relatively growing one with Israel.

When it comes to the end of the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s, foreign policy conducted by İsmail Cem towards Gulf Arab countries was proved to be far away from improving bilateral relations between the parties. Gulf Arab countries were not in pursuit of help from any other party other than USA against Iranian regime, perceived as the most vital threat.

The most significant improvement molding relations between Turkey-Gulf Arab states was the terrorist attack against USA on September 11, 2001. It was not an attack of ordinary type and it caused USA military intervention to Middle East region and Islamic world and seriously affected domestic and regional affairs, and bilateral policies between Turkey and the GCC countries.

CHAPTER III

MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACH TO TURKEY AND GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL RELATIONS DURING THE FIRST DECADE OF THE 2000s

3.1 Introduction

When the 2000s started, Turkey was struggling with domestic political conflicts left from the 1990s and instability caused by economic crisis of 2001. In the aftermath of this crisis, economic reforms initiated by Kemal Derviş were converted to economic stability. On the other hand, Kurdish issue, covering country's agenda for a long time, entered in a constant process upon the capture of Abdullah Öcalan in 1999. With the decision proposing the start of negotiations on full membership, European Union (EU) and probable reforms were forming the main agenda of Turkish foreign policy at that time. With respect to relations with Gulf Arab countries, it can be said that the closest relations between Turkey and Israel that can be assumed as the most remarkable agenda topic in the beginning of the 2000s. Despite reactions of Arab countries to this affair, Turkey did not hesitate in altering the course of balance policy, which had been followed for years during Arab-Israel conflict. So, it could be said that Turkey Gulf Arab states relations were not enough strong during this period.

As for developments at regional level, it is seen that the new actor of Middle East geography was the so called global Islamic terrorism. Anti-American/Western rhetoric and actions of this organization, called as "Al-Qaeda, as of the end of the 1990s caused global actors to turn their faces to Middle East. The attack plotted against USA, the sole super power of that time, and subsequent developments changed balances of power within Middle East and laid the groundwork for producing and implementing global policies since the First World War.



Map 2. Turkey and the Middle East

Source: Adapted from (http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-QPNUvBk8yc8/UiDCgwHD60I/AAAAAAAAAGEK/_6FDdfGlv8/s640/Middle-East-map23.gif)

Playing an important role in both relations among Gulf countries and the other countries as well as Gulf States-Turkey relations, USA affected both domestic politics of these countries and regional dynamics through regional policies it carried out and a range of wars against the Islamic terrorism. Within this direction, it is necessary to evaluate factors specifying Turkey-GCC relations at the beginning of the 21st century as per domestic, regional and international contexts.

3.2. Domestic Dynamics on Turkey-GCC Countries Relations

In this part of the study, political transformation of Turkish foreign policy under AKP rule as of 2002 and its outcomes regarding national scopes shall be highlighted and analysed with respect to Turkey-GCC multilateral relations. It embodies domestic dynamics as one of the factors that molds relations between Turkey and the GCC and opens new paths for political manoeuvres at national and international levels with reference to political discourse and practices.

The domestic factors can be classified as accession to power of the AKP with political Islamist identity, Turkey's EU membership process, Turkey's transition to neo-liberal economy model, Turkey's policy-making through common historical and cultural components with Arab countries and attitudes of Gulf Arab countries toward Turkey during this time.

3.2.1. AKP's Accession to Power in 2002

In 2002, while USA invasion of Afghanistan in the fight against global terrorism and on the eve of waging war against Iraq, Turkey was also undergoing political changes. Because of the protracted coalition governments and economic crisis in 2001, AKP achieved a majority in the parliament and rose to power in 2002 elections. As a matter of fact, AKP government basically carried on the policies initiated by the previous government, revising economy policy started by Kemal Derviş in 2001 and embracing transition process to neo-liberal economy and improving it, and making structural reforms oriented towards EU full membership. However, it is clear that Turkey experienced some changes in relations to its foreign policy and other fields. Altunışık and Martin states that Turkey's involvement in the Middle East has become more comprehensive, "multi-faceted", and deeper under AKP.⁸⁷ Turkey's deeper involvement in the Middle East and Gulf is primarily a response to changes in Turkey's security environment. The end of Cold War reduced Turkey's dependence on USA for its security.⁸⁸ In other words, the security concerns prevailing in Turkish foreign policy were modified with the end of Cold War conditions.

The other development was the acceleration of economic and political reforms and steps taken in these areas thanks to achieving political stability that gained the government self-confidence started to assume more active roles in foreign policy. Turkey began to emphasize its relations with the regional countries, demonstrated an eagerness to play the role of mediator, promoted its soft power, and engaged in

⁸⁷ Altunışık and Martin, Making Sense of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East under AKP, p. 571.

⁸⁸ F. Stephen Larrabee, "Turkey and the Gulf Cooperation Council," *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 12, No: 4 (2011), p. 690.

increasing economic relations with the region.⁸⁹ Underlying the democracy and proving the possibility of an administration by a movement bearing Islamic character in a secular country, Turkey tried to enhance its effectiveness over the other Arab countries. Simultaneously, strained between sectarian conflicts and radical Islamists, Gulf countries desired to embrace such middle ground policies through Turkey recording dramatic economic, political and cultural transformations.

As Larrabee states, the expansion of Turkey's ties with the GCC has been part of a broader effort by the ruling AKP to strengthen ties with Middle East.⁹⁰ The prejudicial perspective against Arabs as of the last period of Ottoman Empire until the beginning of the 2000s was changed after AKP's rise to power. Mentality change has arisen for both parties although not comprehensive and cooperation particularly in economic and political scopes have increased.

The other remarkable change that Turkish foreign policy underwent during AKP rule was the decreasing role of the secularist Turkish Armed Forces (TSK)' in foreign policy. This decline in the army's activities in Turkish foreign policy provided a basis for Turkey to emphasize its Muslim identity in respect to foreign policy and to take advantage of this identity in its relations with Arab countries.

Relations between Muslims with the modern state bearing western texture has always been problematic. Presenting his own Muslim identity through conflicts with modernism and failing to find a place for this identity in modern state apparatuses, many individual has adopted reactionary approaches against western democracy at Muslim states. The vision presented by AKP represented a fresh start for the debate about Islam and the modern state and what it means to be a Muslim in the modern world.⁹¹ The occurrence of a structure which was able to reach state apparatus together with its Muslim identity in a country ruled by western democracy sense was attention-grabbing for Gulf Arab countries like the other Muslim populated ones.

⁸⁹ Altunışık and Martin, *Making Sense of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East under AKP*, p. 569.

⁹⁰ Larrabee, *Turkey and the Gulf Cooperation Council*, p. 690.

⁹¹ Nafi, *The Arabs and Modern Turkey*, p. 73.

Within this framework, a Turkish government for the first time since Ottoman era was welcomed by Arab communities. As for AKP administration, it did not retrain benefiting from this tendency by Arab communities in domestic policy of Turkey.

To sum up, it can be said that Turkey's relations with Gulf Arab countries has gained a momentum under the administration of AKP, rising to power and conducting policy with an Islamic identity. The most evident outcome of this case can be qualified as the dramatic increase in the number of mutual official visits. Indeed, in the last decade, the number of high-level visits from both sides has increased. However, it is disputable that this has made a big contribution on relations.

3.2.2. Turkey's European Union Accession Process

Turkey's negotiations with the EU on full membership and structural reforms on his own laws has taken effect over the policy towards Arab countries. There has been more emphasis on engagement, economic interdependence and soft power, along with the Turkey's EU accession process in the 2000s, so Turkish foreign policy tools have changed.⁹² Hence, it can be said that one of the fact that Turkey preferred to employ a foreign policy based on mutual economic inter-dependence, democratization and cooperation with Middle East countries, instead of security-based foreign policy of American style, can be regarded as a change resulting from negotiation process conducted with the EU, besides other factors such as domestic politics and international conjuncture.

Moreover, the GCC countries' efforts for improving relations with the EU in the face invasion of Iraq and extremely aggressive policies adopted by the USA against Islamic radicalism, coincided with Turkey's endeavours for building relations with the EU. At the same time, there also existed initiatives for the region by the EU within the framework of European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)⁹³ and it helped set up a new dialogue mechanisms.

⁹² Altunışık and Martin, *Making Sense of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East under AKP*, p. 578.

⁹³ The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is aimed at the political and economic stabilisation, modernisation and democratisation of the EU's neighbouring countries in Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean region. see details: Iris Kempe, *Leibniz Information Centre for Economics*,

One of the other common policies of parties regarding the region was their postures against Iran's nuclear activities. The EU, the GCC and Turkey have adopted the same policy line to deal with the problems associated with a nuclear-free Iran but opposed USA military attack on this issue.⁹⁴ Turkey's relations with the EU, despite not determinant for relations with the GCC countries, were proved to be an effective instrument for its economic and political reforms as well as for its foreign policy.

3.2.3. Economic and Commercial Factors

It is possible to track the attempts by Turkey in order to improve economic relations with Gulf Arab countries back to the petroleum crisis of the 1970s and embargo imposed on Turkey. However, Turkey's economic policy based on import substitution, and its secular, and security-based foreign policy during that period, and also discreet attitude of Gulf Arab countries towards Turkey prevented these initiatives.

With Turkey's transition to liberal economy model in 1980, economic and commercial relations between the parties began to improve. Turkey has long been searching opportunities to establish a legal frameworks for its relations with the GCC countries by signing and ratifying a series of agreements since the 1980s and these efforts gained a special momentum with the election of the moderate Islamist AKP in 2002.⁹⁵ Undoubtedly, AKP's rise to power and transformations in foreign policy conducted by it can be regarded as important factors. However, it is not possible to appraise these developments independently from the regional and international developments.

Indeed, Turkey entered a process of economic restoration. The "strong economy" program implemented in 2001 under the leadership of Kemal Derviş, Minister of State responsible for economy, was a major step for Turkey's encounter with

<http://www.econstor.eu/dspace/bitstream/10419/41995/1/539672262.pdf>. (accessed on June 16, 2015).

⁹⁴ Aras, Turkey and the GCC, p. 93.

⁹⁵ Hürsoy, Turkey's Foreign Policy and Economic Interests in the Gulf, p. 509.

“regulatory neo-liberalism” in the context of emerging post-Washington consensus.⁹⁶ Basic arguments of neo-liberal theory, the free trade, cooperation and mutual dependence were transferred to Turkish economic structure prior to AKP government. AKP government accelerated neo-liberal economic transformation within this context.

Economic factors have been an important driver of the expansion of Turkey’s relations with the Gulf States.⁹⁷ When Turkey’s relations with Gulf Arab countries are analysed, it is clear that economic ties have always played a considerable role. Hence, it was the fact also during the beginning of the 2000s. The distinctive character of this period when compared to others is causes and effects of bilateral. With regard to Turkey, it has reached the current position owing to the new political and economic liberalization policies and efforts of interaction with Arab communities by the new government, and as of Gulf Arab countries, they has reached their current position due to developments imposed by regional and international conjuncture. One of the impositions is the toughening atmosphere that emerged after 9/11 leading to a diversification of the GCC investments.⁹⁸ Another one can be classified as the greatly increased amount of funds available to the GCC states due to the increase in oil prices, and their searching new markets to invest these funds other than USA and Europe.⁹⁹ Moreover, it is evident that Gulf States no longer believed their relationship or investments in USA to be as strategically valuable¹⁰⁰ as a result of USA’s shift in its policy targeted for the region, especially after the 2008 financial crisis, such as negotiations with Iran, which Gulf countries were not familiar with.

⁹⁶ Öniş, *The Triumph of Conservative Globalism*, p. 139. For “regulatory neo-liberalism” see same article p. 139.

⁹⁷ Larrabee, *Turkey and the Gulf Cooperation Council*, p. 691.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 692-693.

⁹⁹ Robert Olson, “Turkey’s Relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council from 2003 to 2007: New Paradigms?,” *Meditarranean Quarterly*, Vol. 19, No: 3 (2008), p. 69.

¹⁰⁰ Sean Foley, “Turkey and the Gulf States in the Twenty-First Century,” *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 14, No: 3 (2010), p. 33.

Since the beginning of the 2000s, the trade volume between Turkey and the GCC countries has steadily increased in many different sectors until recent years.¹⁰¹ The foremost among these can be remarked as agriculture, industry and especially construction, as there are significant numbers of Turkish workers in a variety of the GCC countries.¹⁰²

Furthermore, Turkey's new endeavours within the energy scope have become main targets in Turkish foreign policy. Turkey is aiming to diversify its energy supply mostly from the GCC countries and Iraq in order to meet its rising energy demand by ten percent per year since 2000.¹⁰³ The basic reason for this initiative is an effort to decrease its dependency on Russia and Iran in view of energy supply. Hence, a new project envisaging the construction of pipeline between Turkey and Qatar was at the parties' agenda, however it was not realized.

Another sector availing economic relations is tourism. From this point of view, it was the facilitations applied to visa requirements and Turkey's image change before the relevant countries which provided Turkey to become a natural tourist destination for the GCC countries¹⁰⁴.

Nafi states that business, investment and trade relations between Turkey and the Arab countries have grown to the unprecedented levels, both as a result of official agreements or by private initiatives.¹⁰⁵ One of the most significant agreement concluded between Turkey and the GCC is the "Free Trade Agreement"¹⁰⁶ in 2005. After this step economic relations were flourishing and brought Gulf investors to the Turkey's giant projects.

¹⁰¹ Hürsoy, *Turkey's Foreign Policy and Economic Interests in the Gulf*, p. 513.

¹⁰² Aras, *Turkey and the GCC: An Emerging Relationship*, p. 96.

¹⁰³ Hürsoy, *Turkey's Foreign Policy and Economic Interests in the Gulf*, p. 511.

¹⁰⁴ Aras, *Turkey and the GCC: An Emerging Relationship*, p. 96.

¹⁰⁵ Nafi, *The Arabs and Modern Turkey*, p. 73.

¹⁰⁶ Free Trade Agreement signed between Turkey and GCC countries at Manama on 2005.

It is necessary to highlight some phenomena in reference to these developments. As Hürsoy states, although Turkey's trade with the GCC countries has grown and investments of these countries have increased in Turkey since 2002, none of those statics come even close to Turkey's economic relations with the EU.¹⁰⁷ The most prominent commercial partner of Turkey, Europe is naturally sustaining this leadership for years and Turkey's economic relations with Arab countries cannot be qualified as an alternative to this leadership. And in fact, the most major commercial partner of Gulf Arab countries is USA and the EU. It can be said that improvements in Turkey-GCC relations have been perceived as if there was a boom, as economic relations between the parties stayed under the potential cooperation and dependence level in the past.

3.2.4. Other Domestic Factors

The most remarkable innovation applied to foreign policy towards Gulf Arab countries during the new millennium is "common values" approach, disregarded and abstained from stressing them explicitly throughout republic history. Rising to power with its Islamic identity, AKP' leader and Davutoğlu, previously served as a key advisor and then foreign minister, have always employed a rhetoric stressing the existing common cultural and historical ties and Muslim brotherhood.¹⁰⁸ Within this context, one essential component of Davutoğlu's (also AKP's) vision is to make negative images prejudices to Middle East matter of the past.¹⁰⁹

Indeed, both of the parties have portrayed a new approach leaving the alienation rhetoric used by the two during both nation-state building and fight for independence processes. The most evident outcome of this case can be qualified as the dramatic increase in the number of mutual official visits. The visit by King of Saudi Arabia to Turkey in 2006 after 40 years and its recurrence in 2007, Riyadh visit by president of Turkish Republic in 2009, and successive visits by the kings of Bahrain, Kuwait,

¹⁰⁷ Hürsoy, *Turkey's Foreign Policy and Economic Interests in the Gulf*, p. 516.

¹⁰⁸ For details see: Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Stratejik Derinlik" (İstanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2009). pp. 414-415

¹⁰⁹ Aras, *The Davutoğlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy*, p. 128.

Qatar and contacts by high ranking officers of Turkey with Gulf countries can be counted within this scope.

The high ranking Turkish officers' and Davutoğlu's reference to historical and cultural affinities provide advantages to Turkey in its involvement in neighbouring regions.¹¹⁰ One of these advantages is the role of mediation undertaken by Turkey for regional conflicts. Turkey's active peace-making role in the region will surely serve the interests of the GCC which attempt to build a security regime in the Gulf.¹¹¹ With the self-confidence gained through increasing economic power and the Muslim identity integrated into its foreign policy discourse, Turkey didn't hesitate to play active mediator role for the settlement of Syrian-Israel and also Israeli-Palestinian conflicts in contrast to policies of the past.

3.3. Regional Dynamics on Turkey-GCC Countries Relations

Some of the factors affecting Turkey-GCC relations in the 21st century are undoubtedly the developments occurring at regional level. The most remarkable one is the war initiated by USA against Iraq in 2003 following the 9/11 attack plotted against it. The process starting with the invasion of USA over Iraq caused a visible changes on the balances of foreign policies followed by the countries in the region. Bearing a critical position for regional dynamics, Iraq's cut off from the region caused a power vacuums to arise and new actors to take advantage of these vacuums. Iran is the foremost one of the subject actors. Iran's interfere in the Iraq's internal affairs provoked security concerns for Turkey and the GCC countries, like the other actors in the region and even more, and caused them to pursue new paths in order to cope with this case. To this end, the GCC countries exerted their efforts to find new allies, excluding USA, at regional and international levels and their relations with Turkey and Turkey's image got changed. Finally, the most important and long dated problem of the region, Israeli-Palestinian conflict has also kept its seat as an effective factor over Turkey-GCC relations such as Israel-Hezbollah war on 2006 and Israel' "Cast Lead" operation at Gaza Strip on 2009.

¹¹⁰ Op. cit., p. 131.

¹¹¹ Aras, *Turkey and the GCC: An Emerging Relationship*, p. 97.

3.3.1. 2003 Iraq War

In contrast to the atmosphere prevailing during the First Gulf War, supported at international arena including Turkey and Gulf Arab countries, Second Gulf War raised security concerns of Turkey and Gulf Arab countries and backlashes by the communities. So, USA invasion of Iraq in 2003 was the catalyst of transformations and new dynamics that affected the regional balance of power.¹¹² From the point of GCC, it was a fatal threat of Sunnite Iraq's demolition, having played the buffer zone role against Iran all the time. From the point of Turkish foreign policy, it is seen to be on two horns of a dilemma prior to Iraq War on 2003. In other words, during the 1991 war, on one hand Turkey had strongly support USA but in exchange lost in trade and gained only unstable borders¹¹³, on the other hand the decision makers were pondering on the risk of being excluded from the new balances to occur within Iraq if it did not take part in the war.

In this setting remarked above, Turkey offered a motion to enable set of a front line in Northern Iraq by USA soldiers through the passage in Turkey's territories, to the parliament and it was rejected by TBMM (Grand National Assembly of Turkey) on March 1, 2003. According to Gözen, the reason why the memorandum was rejected is illegitimacy of war, pressure of Turkish public opinion, lack of agreement on cooperation and legacy of 1991 war.¹¹⁴ There exist a consensus on results of rejection of the memorandum. Gözen remarks that this decision improves Turkey's image in the Arab and Islamic World.¹¹⁵ Uslu tells that this decision provided a Turkey image in Arab world contrasting with the traditional one.¹¹⁶ Hürsoy admits that TBMM's

¹¹² Valeria Talbot, "Turkey-GCC Relations in a Transforming Middle East," *ISPI*, Analysis No: 178 (2013), p. 2.

¹¹³ Foley, *Turkey and the Gulf States in the Twenty-First Century*, p. 30.

¹¹⁴ Ramazan Gözen, "Causes and Consequences of Turkey's out-of War Position in the Iraq War of 2003," *Turkish Yearbook*, Vol. 36 (2005), pp. 73-99.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 73-99.

¹¹⁶ Nasuh Uslu, "Türkiye'nin Yeni Ortadoğu Yaklaşımı," *Bilgi*, No.52 (2010), p. 156.

decision provided relations between Turkey and the GCC to gain momentum,¹¹⁷ while Aras adds that the March 2003 motion was a historical point for Turkey and it served to increase Turkey's prestige at both regional and international levels.¹¹⁸ Despite the accuracy of all these assessments, it is necessary not to rule out effects of this decision over Turkey-USA relations and reflections of it on the resolution for Iraq War. Because, Turkey was excluded from the table concerning Iraq in a way exactly what Turkish authorities were concerned prior to the war and improved its contacts with the GCC countries, sharing the same opinion -Iran' influence over Iraq-with itself on the issue.

Indeed, Turkey and the GCC countries share a similar security perspective when it comes to Iraq.¹¹⁹ Both of the parties were concerning of a probable increase in Iran's regional power as a result of the instability existing in Iraq and for Turkey's part, a Kurdish state to be settled in the North of Iraq and for the GCC countries' part, a Shiite state to be founded in the South of Iraq was highly alarming possibilities. At the same time, occurrence of terrorist organizations availing from power vacuum in Iraq was also another problematic matter. This common threat increased the motivation of both parties to cooperate in building common fronts against it.¹²⁰ In fact, both of the parties encountered similar terrorist actions with each other in the 2000s and they delivered statements criticizing regional policies of USA as a responsible for the acts.

The other outcome of 2003 Iraq War is the hate arousing against USA in Arab communities. Mobilizing the dynamics of the region, this occasion made the GCC countries concern about critics and assaults to be made toward their own regimes due to their alignment with USA, and they tries to diversify foreign relations with the other countries, diminishing the dependency on USA.

¹¹⁷ Hürsoy, *Turkey's Foreign Policy and Economic Interests in the Gulf*, p. 516.

¹¹⁸ Aras, *Turkey and the GCC: An Emerging Relationship*, p. 91.

¹¹⁹ Hürsoy, *Turkey's Foreign Policy and Economic Interests in the Gulf*, p. 506.

¹²⁰ Aras, *Turkey and the GCC: An Emerging Relationship*, p. 92.

In conclusion, 2003 Iraq War and succeeding events have broadened common foreign policy field of Turkey and the GCC countries and provided grounds for a closer cooperation between the two.

3.3.2. Iran and Regional Politics

There exist some reasons for the increase in Iran's influence in Middle East politics. They can be classified as its potential to intervene in domestic politics of the other countries through Shiite minorities assumed to be protected under the aegis of Iran, and its initiatives oriented to nuclear weapon production, and moral superiority achieved in Israeli-Palestinian issue and finally its featuring in Iraqi politics after Iraq war.

Iran pursued two essential goals after the revolution in 1979. First one is the export of Islamic revolution to other countries in the region and the second is achieving political advantages through intruding politics of corresponding countries thanks to Shiite minorities. The former goal became invalid in the aftermath of the war with Iraq between of 1980-1988, while the later was achieved in consequence of USA intervention to the area, displacing regional balances in favour of Iran. Indeed, Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI)¹²¹ project formed by USA for the region facilitated Iran's dreams over the region most, because of the Iraq' instability after the invasion of this country on 2003. Menacing the GCC countries with Shiite minorities existing there, Iran did not abstain from cooperating with Turkey with regard to Kurdish minority it hosted, though.

Iran's efforts to develop its nuclear capacity has remained on the agenda of the whole region and international powers for a long time. If reviewed as regional level, Iran

¹²¹ According to Sinkaya, GMEI is the traditional US stance of favouring the Middle Eastern status quo was replaced by a policy of actively promoting liberal democracy, market economies and educational reforms. Bayram Sinkaya and Hüseyin Bağcı, *"The Greater Middle East Initiative and Turkey: The Akp's Perspective,"* https://www.academia.edu/264984/THE_GREATER_MIDDLE_EAST_INITIATIVE_AND_TURKEY_THE_AKP_S_PERSPECTIVE. (accessed on June 16, 2015). Also see: Christopher Candland, *"The U.S. Greater Middle East Initiative: Implications for Persian Gulf Economies and Politics (1),"* <http://academics.wellesley.edu/Polisci/Candland/USGMEI.pdf> (accessed on June 16, 2015) and Marina Ottaway and Thomas Carothers, *"The Greater Middle East Initiative: Off to a False Start,"* <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/Policybrief29.pdf>. (accessed on June 16, 2015).

shall gain an important leverage in the event it becomes the second biggest nuclear power other than Israel. Turkey played an active role in this matter through diplomatic resolutions, objecting to military interventions. Turkey does not feel a strong military threat from Iran, however, it is worried about the regional nuclear balance.¹²² Although the GCC countries were initially content with strict approaches by Israel and USA against Iran, it proved to be rather worrying for them that USA initiated bargain with Iran. The GCC countries, perceiving an Iran with nuclear power as a direct threat to themselves, desired to build mechanisms on security co-operation with other countries in the region as well as Turkey and their loss of credibility at USA compared to the past is implying that regional dynamics will undergo remarkable transformations in the future. As remarked above, such an effective role Iran is playing in the Middle East is based on the fact that Iran availed itself of the authority gap, arising in Iraq policies after the war in 2003.

Actual division of Iraq, which was qualified as a buffer zone against Iran for projections of Arab security concerns, to three parts after the conquest by USA and Iran's dominance over Iraq through the Shiite weighted government, as a result of withdrawal of the USA' armament from the region, caused alterations in foreign policy paths of regional actors, particularly Gulf Arab States and Turkey. Hürsoy states that the GCC countries would prefer that before a power vacuum in Iraq be filled by Iran, Turkey should move in to fill part of the void created by the withdrawal of US forces.¹²³ However, this role, casted for Turkey by Gulf Arab countries, is too beyond Turkey's depth, as Turkey in contrast to Iran lacks the sufficient power and instruments in Iraq, such as Shiite militias. Although Turkey also does not want to see an increase of Iranian influence in Iraq and it maintains close ties to the Gulf,¹²⁴ it can be said that after the Iraq war on 2003, Turkey' position in Iraq has weakened.

¹²² Larrabee, *Turkey and the Gulf Cooperation Council*, p. 696.

¹²³ Hürsoy, *Turkey's Foreign Policy and Economic Interests in the Gulf*, p. 506.

¹²⁴ Larrabee, *Turkey and the Gulf Cooperation Council*, p. 696.

In addition, during his visit to Turkey in 2006 and 2007, Saudi king regarded Turkey as a potential countervailing power against Iran's increasing power and hoped Turkey attendance to an anti-Iranian coalition to be founded, but Turkey does not join anti-Iranian coalition. Because, in many respects, Iran is even more critical to Turkey than the other the GCC states¹²⁵. The other reason is the fact that Turkey's need for energy still exists in respect to Iran. Thus, Turkey is successfully navigating between the GCC states and their competitor Iran without adversely harming its own relations with either side.¹²⁶ In short, Turkey avoided attending to an anti-Iranian Sunnite bloc and adopted a pragmatist policy, protecting the balance between both of the parties. Arab Gulf States, except for Saudi Arabia, avoided portraying an explicit hostility against Iran, although they were concerned of the possibility of Iranian dominance over the Gulf area.

In summary, Turkey-GCC relations have increased while Iran is starting to gain power and spread is efficiency within the area, but the efforts of Gulf countries for building a security based Sunnite bloc as a balance against Iran and including Turkey in it were of no use as Turkey preferred to deploy itself at a balanced point between the parties.

3.3.3. Approaches of the GCC Countries on Turkey

When the relations between Turkey and the GCC improving in the 2000s are analysed in view of approaches of Gulf Arab countries to Turkey, there exist some changes. Martin classifies these changes as a moderate Islamist government's rising to power, and strategy of the government not to blindly follow USA policies in the Middle East and its balancing Iran with the large conventional military force.¹²⁷

As for Foley, not only has bilateral trade and investment blossomed, but Ankara and the GCC governments have also synthesized their approaches toward many foreign

¹²⁵ Birol Başkan, "Turkey-GCC Relations: Is There a Future?," *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 13, No: 1 (2011), p. 165.

¹²⁶ Hürsoy, *Turkey's Foreign Policy and Economic Interests in the Gulf*, p. 505.

¹²⁷ Lenore G. Martin, "Turkey and Gulf Cooperation Council Security," *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 10, No: 1 (2009), pp. 82-83.

policy changes in the Middle East.¹²⁸ Also, Nafi remarks that common problems are Iran's nuclear weapon activities, and radical Islamic terrorism, as well as the necessity for stability in Iran preserving its territorial integrity.¹²⁹

Ayhan emphasizes that Turkey is regarded as a suitable partner for Gulf Arab countries as it doesn't challenge monarchical regimes, and it is anti-radical Sunnite, as well as its economic structure, military power capable of challenging Iran and its NATO membership¹³⁰. Hürsoy also tells that especially Saudi Arabia deems Sunnite Turks as a balancing power against Iran.¹³¹ Başkan argues that the GCC needs the protection of a super power and Turkey lacks the necessary resources and the GCC must develop security instruments for its own.¹³²

In the 2000s, the alterations in politics, economy and security scopes have affected approaches of the parties to each other as well. In contrast to economy-based policy adopted by Turkey, Gulf Arab countries embraced a security-based approach and both of the parties preferred to sustain relations around the policies they adopted. During this period, common historical ties and Islamic values were emphasized, and the increase in communication and transportation means, and bilateral visits of high-ranking authorities rendered changes in perspective of subject countries possible.

3.3.4. Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The other regional matter affecting Turkey's relations with Gulf Arab countries is Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the 2000s, for some views, Turkey-Israeli relations were seeing better days. Even the accession to power of an Islamic party did not change this and Turkish government created to itself a new policy space using this case such as to be a mediator between Israel and Palestine. Turkish policy-makers

¹²⁸ Foley, *Turkey and the Gulf States in the Twenty-First Century*, p. 29.

¹²⁹ Nafi, *The Arabs and Modern Turkey*, p. 77.

¹³⁰ Veysel Ayhan, "Türkiye-Körfez İşbirliği Konseyi İlişkilerinde Yeni bir Dönem: Yüksek Düzeyli Stratejik Diyalog," *Ortadoğu Analiz*, Cilt. 1, Sayı: 7-8 (2009), p. 120.

¹³¹ Hürsoy, *Turkey's Foreign Policy and Economic Interests in the Gulf*, p. 506.

¹³² Başkan, *Turkey-GCC Relations: Is There a Future?*, pp. 161-162.

consider the Palestinian question an area of responsibility an opportunity to claim a constructive Turkish role in the Middle East.¹³³ Wishing to follow an active policy through good relations with both of the parties, Ankara government has offered to play a mediating role in Palestinian-Israeli peace efforts.¹³⁴

This role played with a success at the beginning, was abandoned on the grounds that Israel state implemented rigid policies on Arabs and it became inevitable for Turkish administrators to use anti-Israel political discourse and relations with Israel deteriorated. On several occasions, Turkish spokesmen, including the prime minister, voiced their protest over the harsh Israeli treatment of the Palestinians.¹³⁵ The most remarkable ones of these discourse and actions are “one minute” scold of Turkish prime minister in 2009¹³⁶ and the Israeli raid on Mavi Marmara¹³⁷ ship, sent to Gaza with permission and support of Turkish government, for providing humanitarian aid to the region.

Both of the cases remarked above visibly resonated with Arab communities and provided Turkish flags to flutter in Arab streets for the first time since Ottoman Era. These events, causing excitements in Arab communities, however were not welcomed nor supported by Arab governors, caused Turkey to be perceived in the pursuit of regional power, dreaming of neo-Ottomanism.

¹³³ Aras, *Turkey and the Middle East Frontiers of the new Geographic Imagination*, p. 478.

¹³⁴ Martin, *Turkey and Gulf Cooperation Council Security*, p. 75.

¹³⁵ Nafi, *The Arabs and Modern Turkey*, p. 75.

¹³⁶ For more details about “one minute” scold of Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan at Davos see: Emre Erdoğan, “Dış Politikada Siyasallaşma: Türk Kamuoyunun “Davos Krizi” ve Etkileri Hakkındaki Değerlendirmeleri,” *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Cilt 10, Sayı: 37 (2013), pp. 37-67.

¹³⁷ For more details about “Mavi Marmara” see: Tezcan Durna and Burak Özçetin, “Mavi Marmara on the News: Convergence and Divergence in Religious Conservative Newspapers in Turkey,” *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, No: 5 (2012) pp. 261–281. On 31 May 2010 Israeli commandos attacked a flotilla of aid ships (organized by the Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief-İnsani Yardım Vakfı-İHH2) that were attempting to break an embargo on traffic to Gaza; nine Turkish citizens were killed and many others injured. This event caused reactions both in Turkey and abroad. The Turkish media covered the developments in detail and harshly criticized Israel’s attack. Durna and Özçetin, *Mavi Marmara on the News*, p. 265

3.4. International Dynamics on Relations

As stated previously, the significant factor determining Turkish foreign policy towards Middle East is the policy of western powers, particularly USA, carried out in the area in line with their own relations. This case can be regarded as an outcome of the foreign policy perception born by the bi-polar system prevailing across the world. However, when it comes to the 21st century, it seems that the driver for Turkish foreign policy toward countries in the Middle East was an extension of USA policies in the region, according to developments occurred. Within this context, the Greater Middle East Initiative carried out by USA for the region and initiated by conquest of Afghanistan had a significant effect on Turkey's Middle East policies during the first years of the 21st century.

3.4.1. USA and Greater Middle East Initiative

The reason for desire of USA devoted to bear hegemonic power in the Middle East was ensuring security of Israel, as well as the existence weapon and oil lobbies which have always had a powerful effect over administration of USA. Holding the primary energy sources throughout the world, this geography is at the same time one of the regions where arms trade is conducted intensely. These facts can be deemed explicit signs of the USA's Middle East policies and its desire for being unrivaled in the region.

With the end of Cold War, uni-polar system made USA lose its enemies and once the 21st century started, the new enemy it chose was radical Islam and global terrorism inflicted by it. 9/11 attacks against itself can be regarded as a stepping stone for the USA to dive through the Middle East, seemed to host radical Islam. And as a concept, it employed Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI), bearing structural changes for the region. For Aras, this project is a part of Bush administration's attempts to transform the globe into a safer place for USA and its policies.¹³⁸ Yurdusev says that the idea for a project to bring democracy to the states of Middle East in particular and Muslim societies in general may be traced back to the

¹³⁸ Aras, *Turkey and the GCC: An Emerging Relationship*, p. 93.

aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and the growth of Islamic extremism.¹³⁹ Also Dilek states that GMEI is the project of ensuring and broadening room for manoeuvre and advantages of USA over energy sources and realizing all this through the neo-liberal market economy.¹⁴⁰ It can be said that none of the imported projects, oblivious of the realities existing in the region, could be realized and such kind of projects in any region which remained to be source of conflict must be analysed taking account of the American failure in Iraq.

When looked from Turkey's perspective, Ankara understood GMEI as a crucial aspect of USA Middle East policy.¹⁴¹ Curious USA policies, Turkish foreign policy did not rule out this opportunity. While attending the G-8 summit at Sea Islands, Georgia, on 8-9 June 2004, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan committed his government to participate in the US GMEI.¹⁴² The fact that a prime minister bearing political Islam background embraced this project at a co-chairmanship level shows Turkish foreign policy did not undergo any change in these years in the approach to Middle East.

Within this framework, GMEI had an effect also on Gulf Arab states relations with Turkey. According to Olson, Turkey's participation in the GMEI gathered steam in the late 2005 with the commitment of Arab Gulf countries to invest in the Turkish economy.¹⁴³ One of the basic arguments of GMEI, neo-liberal economic policy was completed during AKP rule and this played a key role in Gulf Arab capital's tending towards Turkey. The project seems to have become invalid with the failure of USA in Iraq and handover of the USA administration. However, the subsequent steps

¹³⁹ A. Nuri Yurdusev, "The Greater Middle East Initiative and Democracy in Muslim States: A Turkish Perspective," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, Vol. XVIII, No: 2 (2006), p. 74.

¹⁴⁰ Oğuz Dilek, "Amerika'nın Yeni Ortadoğu Düşüncesi Düşük Yoğunluklu Demokrasi," *Akademik Araştırmalar Dergisi*, Sayı: 42 (2009), pp. 1-10.

¹⁴¹ Robert Olson, "Relations among Turkey, Iraq, Kurdistan-Iraq, the Wider Middle East and Iran," *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No: 4 (2006), p.16.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

taken shows us that this project still have influence on incidents occurring in the region.

Another international aspect of Turkey-GCC relations is the relations with NATO. Cooperation with the NATO and the GCC as part of the ICI¹⁴⁴ (Istanbul Cooperation Initiative) agreed upon at the June 2004 NATO summit held in Istanbul.¹⁴⁵ Including Qatar, Bahrain, UAE and Kuwait as member states since 2006, this organization did not prove to be an agent for Turkey to play active role in the Gulf region through NATO, in contrast to what is expected. On the other hand, Arab Gulf countries think that security ties with NATO countries might contribute to their regimes' stability.¹⁴⁶

Finally, it goes without saying that security relations between the GCC and USA started to change somewhat. Although USA still has a strong military existence in the region, this case is not permanent. Başkan argues that USA' strong existence in the region can change in the future due to such factors as the transition in global system from uni-polar to multi-polar, weakening in USA willingness to keep a huge military existence in the Gulf and legitimacy problem of Arab states resulting from the rising of anti-Americanism in the region.¹⁴⁷ Larrabee also says that American's commitment to the Gulf rulers is much less certain before.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ The İstanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) was launched at the Summit meeting of NATO Heads of State and Government held on 28 June 2004 in İstanbul, Turkey. Four countries have since joined the initiative: Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. The ICI is based on the premise that the security and stability of the Gulf region is of strategic interest to Alliance - just as the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic area matters to the Gulf Region. The ICI partnership also aims at enhancing security and regional stability through a new cooperative engagement with the countries in the security field. It addresses common security challenges, in a way that responds to the specific needs of the countries involved. The Initiative is open to all countries in the region which subscribe to its aims, particularly the fight against terrorism and countering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, starting with but not only limited to the individual members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (the GCC). see: *North Atlantic Treaty Organization* http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2014_04/20140331_140401-factsheet-ICI_en.pdf. (accessed on June 17, 2015).

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁴⁷ Başkan, *Turkey-GCC Relations: Is There a Future?*, pp. 161-162.

¹⁴⁸ Larrabee, *Turkey and the Gulf Cooperation Council*, p. 697.

In line with all these developments, pursuits of Gulf Arab countries of an alignment with regional actors as well as their endeavours of setting common the GCC defence system can be interpreted as reflections of USA' desire for shifting its military existence in Pacific region, over the Gulf region. Recent developments in the region would show that Turkey-GCC relations take form and improve according to Turkey's attempts and approaches at military field through both bilateral relations with Gulf countries and institutional affairs with the GCC.

CHAPTER IV

DIMENSIONS OF TURKEY AND GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COUNTRIES RELATIONS IN THE 2000s

4.1. Political & Security Relations

4.1.1. Political Relations

In the 2000s, relations between Turkey and the GCC countries had a significant coverage. Both of the parties exerted effort for improving political relations and in contrast with the previous years, they endeavoured for building in-depth relations instead of superficial one.

USA invasion of Iraq in 2003 and emerging regional balances as a result should be regarded as one of the most prominent factors leading political relations to improve. In the new millennium, every step taken USA created a condition in favour of Iran, thus the GCC states started to feature different alternatives like Turkey. According to Oktav, this can be explained by two reasons. Firstly, the GCC states want to diversify their security relations and secondly, Turkey is a country who has not got any problem with manner of the GCC regimes and their close relations with USA.¹⁴⁹ With regard to Turkey, economic impulses lie at the bottom of efforts to improve relations with the GCC states and classified as an Islamist party, AKP's rising to power and its cultural proximity can be regarded as affirmative developments for political relations. According to Martin, common policies of both parties, as well as Iraq issue, have taken form in line with Iran's nuclear weapon initiative and fight against Islamic terrorism.¹⁵⁰ Both Turkey and the GCC states have cooperated against the nuclear weapon initiative which would provide Iran with a significant hegemonic

¹⁴⁹ Özden Zeynep Oktav, "Opportunities and Challenges in GCC-Turkey Relations" Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), *GCC-Turkey Relations: Dawn of a New Era*, (Cambridge: Gulf Research Centre, 2015), p. 33.

¹⁵⁰ Martin, *Turkey's National Security in the Middle East*, p. 87.

power. In addition, political cooperation opportunities in the matter of radical Islamic terrorism, which has become an important problem for both sides, have emerged.

There exist various arguments about improving relations in the 2000s. With regard to the transformation of Turkish foreign policy, Coşkun emphasizes that Turkey's relations with the GCC states have improved within the framework of Turkey's "Strategic Depth" doctrine and two main wings of the subject doctrine are historical and geographic position born by Turkey.¹⁵¹ According to Foley, both Turkey and the Gulf States saw each other a viable alternative to their old strategic partners in the West.¹⁵² Then, he adds that limitations exist between both sides, which are ranged as Turkey's approach to Iran, inadequate economic relations and their linkages to West.¹⁵³

There is mutual benefit in developing relations and inter-dependence between Turkey and the GCC states; the GCC states need a balancing of power and Turkey needs partners for its regional influence and new markets for its growing economy,¹⁵⁴ says Ataman. In this respect, Oktav states that Turkey's regional policies need to be framed in a mutual trust for sustainability of relations with the GCC countries.¹⁵⁵ There exists another argument stated by Uzayr, and he argues that the GCC states need to strengthen its ties with Turkey, as Turkey can play crucial role on balancing of power in the region.¹⁵⁶ While Başkan says Turkey's historical experience can play

¹⁵¹ Bezen Balamir Coşkun, "Soul Searching in the Gulf: From the Ottoman Age of Exploration to Strategic Depth and Trading State," Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), *GCC-Turkey Relations: Dawn of a New Era*, (Cambridge: Gulf Research Centre, 2015), p. 56.

¹⁵² Foley, *Turkey and the Gulf States in the Twenty-First Century*, p. 33.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹⁵⁴ Muhittin Ataman and Gülşah Neslihan Akkaya, "Turkey and the Gulf after the Arab Spring: Old Friends, New Partners" Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), *GCC-Turkey Relations: Dawn of a New Era*, (Cambridge: Gulf Research Centre, 2015), p. 80.

¹⁵⁵ Oktav, *Opportunities and Challenges in GCC-Turkey Relations* Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 42.

¹⁵⁶ Sufyan Bin Uzayr, "How will the Gulf Cooperation Council React to a U.S-Iran Nuclear Deal?" *Foreign Policy in Focus*, Feb 5, 2014. <http://fpif.org/will-gulf-cooperation-council-react-u-s-iran-nuclear-deal/>

an important role in order to help the GCC states in their state building projects¹⁵⁷, Mason insists that Turkey's preference for an independent foreign policy had an important impact on relations.¹⁵⁸ And lastly, Dilek and İşeri argue that Turkey and the GCC countries together has gained greater strength in response to Iraqi situation, USA retreat from Middle East issue after Obama administration, and the outbreak of the Arab Uprisings.¹⁵⁹

The basic factor ensuring the improvement of political relations between Turkey and the GCC states has been regional policies of USA. First, "war on terrorism"¹⁶⁰ doctrine dislocated the balance of power in Middle East, paving the way for regional alliances, and then, these alliances flourished thanks to Obama's pivot strategy of shifting its forces from the Middle East to the Pacific region.¹⁶¹ From the perspective of the GCC states, due to changes in the dynamics of relations with USA, they are worried about abandonment¹⁶², as also Shahji recorded.

When improvement of Turkey-GCC countries relations in the new millennium is analysed, Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu's election as the chairman of Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) seems to be an important point in view of improving relations with the GCC. Then, the first initiative as to institutionalization of relations between Turkey and the GCC states can be regarded as Memorandum of Understanding concluded in Manama for the first time in 2005. Following this, truly a historical milestone in the relations, on September 2, 2008, the GCC foreign

¹⁵⁷ Başkan, Turkey-GCC Relations, p. 167.

¹⁵⁸ Robert Mason, "Towards a Strategic Partnership? Turkish Foreign Policy and GCC Alliance Building in the Era of the Arab Spring" Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), *GCC-Turkey Relations: Dawn of a New Era*, (Cambridge: Gulf Research Centre, 2015), p. 181.

¹⁵⁹ Oğuz Dilek and Emre İşeri, "Waiting for (Soft) Balancing: Turkey's Reciprocal Engagement with the GCC against Iran's Rising Power in Post-American Iraq" Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), *GCC-Turkey Relations: Dawn of a New Era*, (Cambridge: Gulf Research Centre, 2015), p. 99.

¹⁶⁰ George W. Bush used the term "War on Terror" after the 9/11 attack.

¹⁶¹ Raghid al-Solh, "GCC Countries Rethink Their Regional Role", *Al Monitor*, April 7, 2014. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2014/04/new-regional-role/>

¹⁶² Abdullah K. Al Shayji, "The GCC-U.S. Relationship: A GCC Perspective," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 21, No:3 (2014), p. 62.

ministers declared Turkey a strategic partner¹⁶³, which has provided Turkey to be the first country as a strategic partner outside the Gulf region.

After Turkey was conferred the status of “strategic partner”, Istanbul hosted “The First Joint Ministerial Meeting of the GCC Turkey High Level Strategic Dialogue” on July 8, 2009.¹⁶⁴ The second one of this meeting was held in Kuwait on October 17, 2010 and the parties concluded a “joint action plan” encompassing the 2011-2012 years, as well.¹⁶⁵

This plan is a blueprint for strategic relations between Turkey and the GCC, which would develop relations in a variety issues,¹⁶⁶ Coşkun states. Beyond that, the signing of Memorandum of Understanding in Jeddah, on December 2011 laid the foundation for a regular dialogue at the ministerial level, was an important step taken on the way to building institutionalized relations with the Gulf countries.¹⁶⁷ And lastly, the 4th Joint Ministerial Meeting that took place in Istanbul in January 2012, all sides expressed common views on a series of issues.¹⁶⁸ All these developments ensured consolidation of institutional relations between Turkey and the GCC countries and provided an access to new levels in relations.

Another denominator for improving political relations is the increasing number of bilateral high-level visits. After a period of forty years, Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz visited Turkey in 2006 and one year later he made another visit to Turkey. On the part of Turkey, there occurred visits to Gulf countries at both presidential and prime-ministerial levels, as well as an intense traffic of visits by

¹⁶³ Başkan, *Turkey-GCC Relations*, p. 161.

¹⁶⁴ “Körfez Arap Ülkeleri İşbirliği Konseyi (KİK), *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanlığı*, June 28, 2015. <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/korfez-arap-ulkeleri-isbirligi-konseyi.tr.mfa>

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Coşkun, *Soul Searching in the Gulf*, Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 47.

¹⁶⁷ Oktav, *Opportunities and Challenges in GCC-Turkey Relations* Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 35.

¹⁶⁸ Konstantinos Zarras, “Prospects of GCC-Turkey Cooperation and the Syrian Crisis”, Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), *GCC-Turkey Relations: Dawn of a New Era*, (Cambridge: Gulf Research Centre, 2015), p. 202.

Gulf countries to Turkey. Like brothers meeting after long years passed, this visit traffic helped potential relations between the two parties to revive, but unfortunately could not create the momentum necessary for making use of these opportunities.

It is possible to attribute this abeyance of putting political improvements into practice to such reasons as regional policy change implemented by USA and incidents broken out during Arab Uprisings period. Playing an active role in foreign policies of both Turkey and the GCC states, USA gave authority to Obama administration and followed a relatively independent policy from its allies, which dramatically affected regional foreign policies of both sides. There occurred two main enforcements of policy change implemented by USA. First one is negotiation process between the White House and Iran on nuclear weapons issue, and the second is the common objective of USA and Iran within the scope of fight against ISIS, which has emerged as a pivot actor in the region recently. During this period, characterized by developments in favour of the USA-Iran alliance, Turkey and the GCC countries seem to have wavered in their foreign policies which have always taken form pursuant to the controversy between USA and Iran, actually.

Following Arab Uprisings, the developments in the region also have played an essential role on evolution of political relations between Turkey and the GCC. Despite explicit support Turkey has given to Gulf countries in Yemen and Bahrain issues, incidents in Syria and Egypt have proved to be controversial issues between the two parties. Gulf states' support to military coup in Egypt, except Qatar, and declaration of Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization by Saudi Arabia on March 2014¹⁶⁹ in contrast with Turkey's foreign policy strategy based on supporting Muslim Brotherhood have fairly caused political relations to freeze. As Oktav states, Erdoğan' support of Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt endangered Turkey's energy and trade relations with the region.¹⁷⁰ Syria case has been another controversial topic between the two parties as Turkey and Qatar supported different opposing groups

¹⁶⁹ Al Shayji, *The GCC-U.S. Relationship*, p. 63.

¹⁷⁰ Oktav, *Opportunities and Challenges in GCC-Turkey Relations* Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 39.

while the other Gulf States, especially Saudi Arabia, produced a Syria policy through Salafi groups. In this regard, Al-Buluwi argues that there is a cold war between Turkey and Saudi Arabia for Sunni hegemony in the region.¹⁷¹ He also insists that the democracy, Ottoman heritage and a powerful economic and political position all contribute to making Turkey Saudi Arabia's main competitor in the Sunni political world.¹⁷²

In the beginning of 2015, following the death of Saudi King Abdul-Aziz, King Salman came to power and carried out some administrative policy changes in foreign policy of Saudi Arabia, leading some positive developments in relations with Turkey, as stated before. Indeed, when regime opponents gained some important achievements in Syria, Turkey-Saudi relations were interpreted as gaining momentum again in some arguments. In this regard, Idiz remarks that Turkey will maintain its realistic approach to Saudi Arabia under King Salman, regardless of existing differences.¹⁷³ The commentaries on probable solutions for eliminating political conflicts between Turkey and the GCC have gained momentum recently.

4.1.2. Security Relations

Another aspect of relations between the two parties has been the security issue in recent years. While Turkey's basic concern over the region was Kurdish issue prior to the beginning of the 2000s, as for the GCC states, Iran was assumed to be the greatest threat. In the beginning of the 2000s, however, both of the parties had to make amendments on their security policies as a result of events succeeding Iraq invasion by USA. During this period, the increase in Iran's military power and initiatives for nuclear weapons and Islamic terrorism practices have made Turkey and the GCC states to affiliate toward each other in view of regional security perceptions.

¹⁷¹ Abdulmajeed al-Buluwi, "The Saudi-Turkey Cold War for Sunni Hegemony," *Al-Monitor*, April 1, 2014. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/04/saudi-arabia-turkey-muslim-brotherhood-sunni-middle-east.html>

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Semih İdiz, "Erdoğan's Saudi Dilemma," *Al-Monitor*, January 27, 2015. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/01/turkey-saudi-arabia-muslim-brotherhood.html>

According to Başkan, the GCC states' security structure rely on the protection of USA. But four reasons have changed the GCC states' security approach in the region. First, the system changed from unipolar to the multi-polar way, second USA' impact on the GCC countries relations with others, third, arising of the anti-Americanism in Middle East, and last USA unwillingness of keeping huge military forces in the Gulf area.¹⁷⁴ Due to these reasons, Turkey's possible balancing role against Iran has come to the fore from the point of Gulf states. In this matter, Başkan admits that Turkey could not play this critical role but for example through NATO, Turkey could steer the GCC states to develop their common defence system.¹⁷⁵ In this sense, Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI), which was initiated by NATO in 2004 and is including the GCC states other than Saudi Arabia and Oman as member states, seems to be an important development as Turkey also played an important role in the foundation of this cooperation initiative.¹⁷⁶

Following Arab Uprisings, both of the parties seem to have compromised in security issues, except Egypt. Bearing similar approaches to uprisings, Turkey and Gulf States were on the opposite poles with regard to Egypt dossier and they supported different opposing groups in Syria.

There exist developments in defence industry commerce between the parties, as well. In 2012, Saudi Arabia was Turkey's third largest defence industry customer with Turkish exports valued at \$99 million or 7.8 percent of Turkey's entire defence and aerospace exports. Turkish exports to UAE totaled \$ 101 million and to Bahrain \$ 91 million. Three Gulf countries accounted for nearly a quarter of all Turkey's defence exports in 2012.¹⁷⁷ It could be said that increasing in defence industry commerce between Turkey and the GCC states shall be the most essential part of relations. Because, with regard to the GCC states, security matters comprise the driving force

¹⁷⁴ Başkan, *Turkey-GCC Relations*, p. 161.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

¹⁷⁶ Gülşah Neslihan Akkaya, "Körfez İşbirliği Konseyi Krallar Kulübü ve Değişen Bölgesel Düzen", *Seta Analiz*, No:70 (2013), p. 26.

¹⁷⁷ Talbot, *Turkey-GCC Relations in a Transforming Middle East*, p. 9.

in relations with Turkey. Even though economic affairs take place in the foreground regarding Turkey, cooperation in defence industry can be regarded as a key point for the relations to gain a strategic quality and mutual benefit.

4.2. Economic Relations

The improvement of the relations between Turkey and the GCC states comes into prominence in economic scope mostly. From the point of Turkey, this can be explained through neo-liberal economy model followed by AKP, coming to power in 2002, following the economic crisis in 2001 and Islamic character of this administration. From the perspective of the GCC states, they have been making great efforts to change their energy dependent economy structure and political status.¹⁷⁸ With regard to the region, the shift in regional powers after Iraq invasion of USA and regional effects of succeeding Arab uprisings can be regarded as the other influential factors on economic relations. With regard to international politics, USA initiatives for conquering Middle East within the framework of “war on terror” doctrine which resulted in quests for new investment regions of Gulf capital and the economic conditions created by 2008 financial crisis are also included in the agents canalizing economic relations between Turkey and the GCC countries.

In this respect, Tür argues that Turkey’s trade with the region has developed under the shadow of political developments, and cooperation at the political level was then reflected at economic level.¹⁷⁹ Tür highlights that improving economic relations can be explained by three factors within the framework of Turkish foreign policy. First, region’s proximity and attractiveness of its oil-rich company, second, Middle East has emerged as alternative for Turkey’s searching of new markets and last, both sides are Muslim nations and they feel ideologically close.¹⁸⁰ Then, she adds two potential roadblocks for the relations. First, business relations should be institutionalized, and

¹⁷⁸ Ömer Akkaya, “The Future Role of the GCC in Turkey’s 2023 Economic Vision,” Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), *GCC-Turkey Relations: Dawn of a New Era*, (Cambridge: Gulf Research Centre, 2015), p. 112.

¹⁷⁹ Tür, *Economic Relations with the Middle East under the AKP*, p. 593.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 593.

second, dissatisfaction with the asymmetrical trade agreements may arise suspicion of Turkey's policies in the region.¹⁸¹

According to Oktav, AKP government strengthened trade-based relations with the GCC countries.¹⁸² Then, she adds that the growing role of trade and diplomacy rather than military security in shaping Turkey's relations with the Arab world had a very positive impact on rapprochement between the GCC states and Turkey.¹⁸³ Lastly, Oktav argues, if both sides view their improving bilateral relations as beneficial to their own economies, they will gloss over their diverging interests.¹⁸⁴

In addition to all reasons remarked above, there are other reasons directing future of the relations such as the decreasing bias between the parties, bilateral high-level visits and their role in eliminating economic conflicts, reforms amended on its laws by Turkey pursuant to neo-liberal policies, Gulf States' desire for varying their investment portfolios as a result of the remarkable increase in the funds based on escalating petroleum prices and lastly, Gulf Arabs' perception of Turkey as a counter-entity against Iran in the region and their desire for including Turkey in their own political and security strategies via economic binds.

With the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) concluded in Bahrain in 2005, the parties have agreed on boosting mutual cooperation and improving economic relations. Finance and banking sectors and agricultural sector are the primary investment areas of Gulf capital in Turkey.¹⁸⁵ As for Turkey, it has maintained trade with Gulf Arab states through exports in especially construction sector, iron-steel, oil industries.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 600.

¹⁸² Oktav, *Opportunities and Challenges in GCC-Turkey Relations*, Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 30.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 43

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 43.

¹⁸⁵ Fahri Türk, "Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi İktidarında Türkiye Körfez Ülkeleri (Suudi Arabistan, Katar, ve Kuveyt) İlişkileri," *Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Dergisi*, Vol. 1, No: 2 (2009), p. 26.

If the foreign trade as of the year 2002, witnessing AKP's rise to power (see Table 1.), between Turkey and the GCC states is analysed, there exists a numerical increase. Whereas the foreign trade volume was recorded as \$1.5 billion in 2002, it ascended to \$ 20 billion in 2012, and it was around \$16 billion in 2014. Although the economic relations seem to have improved, it is hard to prove an economic boom when we consider the quality and the fertile environment of international conjuncture. Whereas Turkey's domestic income was \$ 200 billion in 2002, it is around \$800 billion today.

<u>Year</u>	<u>2002</u>	<u>2002</u>	<u>2012</u>	<u>2012</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>2014</u>
<u>Country</u>	<u>Export</u>	<u>Import</u>	<u>Export</u>	<u>Import</u>	<u>Export</u>	<u>Import</u>	<u>Export</u>	<u>Import</u>
Saudi Arabia	554	120	3.676	2.171	3.191	2.014	3.047	2.343
Quwait	139	26	290	278	334	290	372	196
Bahrain	16	18	208	158	199	172	204	294
Qatar	15	10	257	466	244	373	344	394
UAE	457	100	8.174	3.596	4.965	5.384	4.655	3.253
Oman	31	0.7	268	52	373	150	491	101
Total	1.212	274.7	12.873	6.721	9.306	8.383	9.113	6.581

Table 1. Turkey's Trade with the GCC Countries (Billion Dollars)

Source: Adapted from Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu (TÜİK, Turkish Statistical Institute). www.tuik.gov.tr

Thus, Turkey has quadrupled its economic volume, however relations with the GCC states, which are wide potential markets for Turkey, do not seem to have increased to the extent it is supposed to be. Under the convenient conditions provided by neo-liberal economy which has come into prominence since the beginning of the 2000s, we see that economic relations with the subject countries have stayed below its potential rate and figures do not mean much. As an illustration, it is argued that the increasing foreign trade rates with UAE stems from Turkey's making payments through gold commerce via this country in return for natural gas imported from Iran according to some analyses. Also, during this period witnessing an increase in volumes of Gulf Arab States' funds, and their desire for varying their economies, it is

arguable that Turkey is regarded as a sufficient partner in commerce for those countries. If we tackle the relations in terms of quality, it can be said that the fact that relations have remained restricted excluding some specific areas.

Years	UAE	Saudi Arabia	Quwait	Qatar	Bahrain	Total
2002	1	0	0	0	4	5
2003	0	0	0	0	0	0
2004	0	5	38	0	0	43
2005	1625	2	20	0	24	1671
2006	1548	22	123	0	89	1782
2007	183	10	77	0	36	306
2008	148	1312	330	126	47	1963
2009	6	34	73	0	96	209
2010	104	39	193	52	0	388
2011	89	8	43	50	5	195
2012	52	439	271	46	131	939
2013	176	39	185	469	11	880
2014	115	33	234	8	35	425
2015	12	6	9	0	0	27
Total	4059	1949	1596	751	478	8833
FDI of Turkey%	3,3%	1,6%	1,3%	0,6%	0,4%	7,2%

Table 2. The GCC Countries Foreign Direct Investment to Turkey (Billion Dollars)

Source: Adapted from T.C. Ekonomi Bakanlığı (T.C. Ministry of Economy) www.ekonomi.gov.tr

When Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) by the GCC states in Turkey are examined (see Table 2.), an increase between 2005 and 2008 years draws the attention. In this period, when unproblematic political relations were reigning, investment by Gulf States in Turkey relatively increased. But it seems that neither of the parties gave up their traditional partners. Global financial crisis in 2008 pulled down FDI figures and political developments and conflicts which emerged following 2010 have affected investment relations.

In conclusion, I argue that whereas economic figures illustrate a remarkable increase, if we examine the real conditions and other data, the subject increase seems normally and does not carry a capacity enabling for changing relations due to recent political developments between both parties.

The other aspect of relations between Turkey and the GCC states is based on energy sector. Akkaya records two points on this topic. First, the need to meet Turkey's energy demand, second, the diversification of energy supply destinations (for the Gulf States) and energy suppliers (for Turkey)¹⁸⁶.

From the first perspective, Han states that over the last couple of years, Turkey's energy strategy in the Middle East has increasingly become integrated with Turkish foreign policy.¹⁸⁷ Indeed, Turkey initiated a very hard work for cooperation with Gulf States in order to cover its energy need, but it fell behind the level it aimed. In this point, Han argues that the style of Turkish energy diplomacy is opportunistic.¹⁸⁸ When we look at Turkey's energy policy toward Gulf Arab States in this period, it seems to be deficient in long-term strategies and deprived of the tools necessary for supporting this policy.

From the second perspective, Turkey's policy based on being energy corridor also seems to have failed. The project envisaging oil and natural gas pipelines that will stream from Gulf Arab states to Europe to pass through Turkey has faced the reality that such kind of large-scale projects cannot be realized without support of global actors. Secondly, as Han states, Qatar and other energy-rich countries of the Gulf do not seem very interested in providing Turkey a strategic advantage to becoming an energy corridor.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Akkaya, *The Future Role of the GCC in Turkey's 2023 Economic Vision*, Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 122

¹⁸⁷ Han, *Turkey's Energy Strategy and the Middle East*, p. 603.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 613.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 610.

4.3. Socio-Cultural Relations

In the new millennium, socio-cultural relations can be regarded as the other factor affecting Turkey the GCC countries relations. According to Akkaya, the most remarkable factor making political and economic relations between Turkey and the GCC gain momentum is probably swift increase in socio-cultural relations.¹⁹⁰ Lucini says, in 2002, it is possible to see that Arab attitudes toward Turkey were only less negative than those of countries Israel, USA and the UK.¹⁹¹ In fact, similar of the “traitor Arab” perception which was driven forward during nation-state building process in Turkey emerged as “hostility against Turks” across Arab states. Oktav explains elimination of this adverse perception in the 2000s with the strong base of AKP’s support base, which identifies more closely with the Muslim Arab world than with the West.¹⁹²

As for Akkaya, the basic reasons for such a change are the rejuvenation in tourism sector, popularity of Turkish TV series in Arab states, initiation of student exchange programs and increasing number of language courses.¹⁹³ Lucini adds that international media events with a high media impact, like criticism of Israel by Turkey at international area level and the Mavi Marmara incident in 2010 helped to reinforce the role of Turkey as a friendly Muslim actor in the region.¹⁹⁴

Mason also stress the popularity of Turkish TV series all over the Middle East, saying that this helps to attract a significant number of tourists which has doubled Saudi visitors between 2008 and 2012.¹⁹⁵ Lucini agrees on the success of Turkish TV

¹⁹⁰ Akkaya, *Körfez İşbirliği Konseyi Krallar Kulübü ve Değişen Bölgesel Düzen*, p. 24.

¹⁹¹ Marc Saurina Lucini, “Turkish TV Series in the Gulf Countries: Identification and Collective Imagination,” Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), *GCC-Turkey Relations: Dawn of a New Era*, (Cambridge: Gulf Research Centre, 2015), p. 247.

¹⁹² Oktav, *Opportunities and Challenges in GCC-Turkey Relations* Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 34.

¹⁹³ Akkaya, *Körfez İşbirliği Konseyi Krallar Kulübü ve Değişen Bölgesel Düzen*, p. 24.

¹⁹⁴ Lucini, *Turkish TV Series in the Gulf Countries*, Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 248.

¹⁹⁵ Mason, *Towards a Strategic Partnership?*, Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 170.

series in Arab countries as Turkish drama has become a kind of first contact with the Turkish culture for the GCC countries people.¹⁹⁶ She concludes that as bilateral relations, we can affirm that the series have unquestionably contributed, alongside political moves and diplomacy, to changing negative perceptions about Turkey.¹⁹⁷

In addition to all agents remarked above, the increase in communication and transportation means, proliferation of social media usage among the people, and conservatism tendency of Turkish society because of Islamic identity of administrators and as a result Turkish society's breaking down prejudices against Arab societies, and finally AKP government's employing populist rhetoric intended for Muslim geographies also as a tool in domestic policies are the other factors playing role in the transformation of socio-cultural relations between Turkey and the GCC countries.

¹⁹⁶ Lucini, *Turkish TV Series in the Gulf Countries*, Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 261.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

CHAPTER V

TURKEY AND GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COUNTRIES RELATIONS AFTER ‘ARAB UPRISINGS’

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter of thesis, I analyse effects of Arab Uprisings, starting in 2010 and still proceeding, on relations between Turkey and the GCC countries. The Uprisings were sparked by the first protests that occurred in Tunisia on December 18, 2010 following Mohammed Bouazizi's self-immolation in protest of police corruption and ill-treatment. Within a year, this wave left major changes in its wake: revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt that culminated in the downfall of these two regimes; a civil war in Libya resulting in the fall of its regime; civil uprisings in Syria and Yemen; major protests in Bahrain, Jordan, Morocco, Algeria, Oman, Iraq, and minor protests in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan. In all of these Arab countries, the protests have taken the form of sustained campaigns involving thousands of ordinary citizens using the same techniques of civil resistance: strikes, demonstrations, marches and rallies.¹⁹⁸

While the evolution of relations between Turkey-GCC countries prior to inception of Arab Uprising are admitted by everyone, there exist various arguments concerning the reasons of the evolvment. Widespread protests first in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, then in Yemen, Bahrain and Syria caused a regional and global powers to reconsider their policies in view of this new and highly unclear atmosphere.¹⁹⁹ Taking form after

¹⁹⁸ Kamal Eldin Osman Salih, "The Roots and Causes of the 2011 Arab Uprisings," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 35 Issue: 2 (2013), p. 184.

¹⁹⁹ Helin Sarı Ertem, "Arab Spring and the 'Regionalization' of the Kurdish Problem: Possible Outcomes for Turkey and the GCC" Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), *GCC-Turkey Relations: Dawn of a New Era*, (Cambridge: Gulf Research Centre, 2015), p. 211.

the First World War, Middle East, however, witnessed a chaos environment again after nearly a hundred years. On this issue, Heydemann and Leenders state that between December 2010 and April 2011, the political landscape of the Arab world began its transformation in half a century.²⁰⁰ In this chapter, the analysis is about effects of Arab Uprisings on Turkish foreign policy and the GCC countries through domestic, regional and international factors.



Map 3. Arab Uprisings

Source: Adapted from Al Jazeera
(<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/spotlight/2011/02/2011222121213770475.html>)

5.2. Arab Uprisings and Turkish Foreign Policy

Practices of Turkish Foreign policy targeted for expansion to the Middle East have undergone changes like the whole region and world after the beginning of the 2000s. According to Ertem, after some hesitation and a “wait and see” period, Turkey started with a prudent approach towards these uprisings, although it often underlined the significance of Arab peoples’ democratic demands.²⁰¹ Benefiting both the internal

²⁰⁰ Steven Heydemann and Reinoud Leenders, “Authoritarian Learning and Authoritarian Resilience: Regime Responses to the Arab Awakening”, *Globalizations*, Vol. 8, No:5 (2011), p. 647.

²⁰¹ Ertem, *Arab Spring and the ‘Regionalization’ of the Kurdish Problem*, Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 215.

and external advantages of their active foreign policy towards Middle East region, policy-makers of Turkish policy were caught unprepared for the uprisings in Arab streets just like everyone else. Following this process, some factors shaping attitude of Turkey's foreign policy has come to the fore.

Raising to power in a new millennium, AKP government portrayed dramatic improvements in the Middle East policy due to the convenience of international conjuncture and regional developments. However, Arab Uprisings which started at 2010 have been undermining the very international environment AKP found conducive for its foreign policy.²⁰² Pursuing an expansion policy to Middle East through definite means and indefinite objectives, Turkish government quickly lost the gains it obtained in a short time, although it assumed its gains to be permanent, in the wake of changes in the region. Regarding these developments, in the post-Arab Uprisings era Turkey' geopolitical and economic interests have faced challenges and at times have been undermined by developments on the ground, but its quest to consolidate and if possible enhance its presence and influence in the region has remained the same.²⁰³ Foreign policy tools employed by Turkey during this period in order to attain its objectives varied due to international conjuncture and some characteristic tools of the foreign policy which were left previously started to be used again.

As Dal remarks, Arab Uprisings pushed Ankara to persist in its dualistic approach toward both its trans-Atlantic allies and its Middle Eastern neighbours at the same time and this dualistic approach of Turkish decision-makers reflects the rise of pragmatism and rational flexibility in Turkey's new foreign policy agenda.²⁰⁴ According to Oğuzlu, Turkish foreign policy has gained a very eclectic and pragmatic character recently, albeit the liberal rhetoric and position it employs all the

²⁰² Birol Başkan, "Ankara Torn Apart: Arab Spring Turns into Turkey's Autumn," *Yearbook*, (November 2011), p. 1.

²⁰³ Meliha Benli Altunışık, "Turkey as an 'Emerging Donor' and the Arab Uprisings", *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 19, No: 3 (2014), p. 345.

²⁰⁴ Dal, *The Transformation of Turkey's Relations with the Middle East*, p. 258.

time.²⁰⁵ It is essential to stress that Turkish foreign policy has converted to an eclectic structure shuttling between the “West” and the “East” instead of pursuing the pragmatist one it followed since the foundation of state. Because, the “monist” Western approach of Turkey has undergone some changes, though relatively, for the first time during this period. Oğuzlu also says that Turkey’s following a liberal and value-driven policy in rhetoric, but actually a realist and balance policy in practice caused Turkey to give an irresolute impression to the external world. He defends that the problematic aspect of this approach for Turkey is the realpolitik practices conducted by a country focusing its foreign policy on moral transformations.²⁰⁶ Indeed, Turkey’s portraying a status on the horns of a dilemma has caused it to lose its credibility before the “West” and prestige before the “East”. In this respect, Turkey’s policy of conducting foreign aid allocation can be given as example. As Altunışık states, although human concerns may have an impact on foreign aid allocation of Turkey, it is ultimately tied to political interests in the domestic and foreign policy realms.²⁰⁷ Humanitarian aid policy of Turkey did not get its worth due to the fact that Turkey couldn’t realize ethical rhetoric it employed, in political deeds.

Some arguments related to the transformation of Turkish foreign policy is based on the security. According to Oktav, with the initiation of Arab Uprisings in Middle East, the topic dominating Turkey’s relation with this region proved to be security concerns.²⁰⁸ In this regard, it is possible to witness a Turkey embracing traditional security-based foreign policy again. Undoubtedly, domestic political issues also have an effect on this issue. In fact, discontinuance of some cases concerning Turkish Armed Forces and acquittal of staff from the TSK and the National Intelligence Agency’s (MİT) indicate that Turkish government started to reconsider security issues in its foreign policy. The other argument based on security issue is made by

²⁰⁵ Tarık Oğuzlu, “Komşularla Sıfır Sorun Politikası ve Arap Baharı: Tıkanmışlık Durumunun Bir Analizi”, *Orta Doğu Analiz*, Vol. 4 No: 42 (2012), p. 52.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-48.

²⁰⁷ Altunışık, *Turkey as an ‘Emerging Donor’ and the Arab Uprisings*, p. 349.

²⁰⁸ Özden Zeynep Oktav, “Arap Baharı ve Türkiye-Körfez Devletleri İlişkileri”, *Orta Doğu Analiz*, Vol. 5, No: 51 (2013), p. 70.

retired general Kuloğlu stating that all of the issues cannot be solved only through “soft power” as it can be seen in Libya crisis and “hard power” should be applied as well.²⁰⁹

It proved to be indispensable for Turkey, recently asserting to be a regional power, to appreciate the necessity of supporting an American-style soft power together with the American-style hard power in Middle East. In an environment where Iran comes to the fore with its army, paramilitary power, organizations affiliated to itself and even with the Shiite population in Arab countries patronized by it, as well as Saudi Arabia bolstering politics in the region through Salafi jihadists and huge financial power, Turkey failed to act in a deterrent manner against such cases as its military aircraft was shot down and, its diplomats were taken as hostages. Taking into account of all these cases, it is a contrast for Turkey to regard itself as an independent actor featuring in the Middle East.

The most essential tool of foreign policy recently, soft power does not make much sense in an unstable Middle East. Turkey’s advance in gaining a regional power shall gain a dramatic momentum through “fortified soft power²¹⁰” ensured by military components. Military contracts concluded between Turkey and Qatar and founding a military base for the first time in this country can be regarded as critical events to this end. In this respect, Turkish military’s presence in the region can improve the effectiveness of Turkish foreign policy. Thus, Gulf Arab states shall embrace Turkey as a secondary ally in addition to the USA for the supply of military training, equipment, strategy and other components of defence industry, which are crucial for Arab states, and Turkey shall record progress in its regional efficiency.

One of the basic arguments of Turkish foreign policy, “non-interference in domestic affairs” of other states was put aside with the start of the Arab Uprisings. In this respect, Akıllı states that Turkish Republic has pursued the principle of “non-

²⁰⁹ Armağan Kuloğlu, “Libya Harekatı, Gelişmeler ve Türkiye”, *Ortaoğu Analiz*, Vol. 3, No:28 (2011), p. 70.

²¹⁰ “Soft power” amplified with “hard power”.

interference in domestic affairs” towards Arab states²¹¹, recent experiences are refuting this argument. According to Oğuzlu, while it is easy and legitimate for Turkey to support regime shifts in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, it is a revolution for Turkish foreign policy to do the same in Syria case and this refers a remarkable deviation from status quo inclined foreign policy line of Turkey,²¹² stressing Syria policy of Turkey. Oktav also remarks that Incidents following Arab Spring and particularly effects of the subject incidents spreading to Syria made Turkey to choose up its own side.²¹³ Thus, Turkey’ foreign policy has come up hard against a regional reality that is, transitional and turbulent.²¹⁴ Both of the policies remarked above have been followed by the same team of Turkish authorities and this is an explicit irony, probably to be disposed as a sign of lack of vision for Turkish foreign policy in the future.

Finally, highlighting effects of Arab Spring on Turkish Economy, Oktav notes that Turkey’s desire to substitute the economic losses resulting from deteriorative relations with Iran and Syria and markets lost swiftly forced it to modify foreign policy.²¹⁵ However, it is obscure how to substitute economic loses with neighbouring countries with relatively far Gulf countries.

To sum up, Turkish foreign policy has experienced remarkable changes with the Arab Uprisings. Together with “zero problem” policy with neighbouring states, carried out in the beginning of the 2000s, and “soft power” tools triggered by neo-liberal economy model, there has been a return to security-based foreign policy which was previously the primary component of Turkish foreign policy and the

²¹¹ Erman Akıllı, “Türk Dış Politikası Zemininde Arap Baharı”, *Ortadoğu Analiz*, Vol. 4, No:37 (2012), p. 45.

²¹² Oğuzlu, *Komşularla Sıfır Sorun Politikası ve Arap Baharı*, p. 54.

²¹³ Oktav, *Arap Baharı ve Türkiye-Körfez Devletleri İlişkileri*, p. 73.

²¹⁴ Zarras, *Prospects of GCC-Turkey Cooperation and the Syrian Crisis*, Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 206.

²¹⁵ Oktav, *Arap Baharı ve Türkiye-Körfez Devletleri İlişkileri*, p. 76.

principle of “non-interference in domestic affairs” of other countries has been put aside.

5.3 Arab Uprisings and Regional Issues

It is evident that Arab Uprisings effect spreading in the region has also reached to the relations between Turkey and the GCC states. Until this period, both parties had formed their own foreign policies in line with domestic issues and following Arab Uprisings they began to take unsteady regional balances into consideration and adopt new foreign policies accordingly. As Altunışık notes, the actors deployed out of the region had inferior roles when compared the others located in the region and the roles played by the former had undergone changes, during this process.²¹⁶ In fact, emerging of new regional actors after the Arab Uprisings and their replacing some of the powerful regional actors’ role has caused significant transformations in the Middle East region.

5.3.1 Kurdish Issue

The Kurdish population is also one of the new actors emerging following the inception of Arab Uprising. In fact, the Iraqi Kurds had already taken their place in regional equations drafted by intervention of the USA to Iraq. However, the main effect of Arab Uprisings on Turkey has been the escalation of national Kurdish movements based on the Iraq events.²¹⁷ Turkey had to devise new policies after its red lines were violated and scratched out in Northern Iraq and this case influenced its Middle Eastern policies. Turkish foreign policy is committed to “respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the countries of the region”, taking into account that the Kurdish question occupies the first place in Ankara’s security agenda.²¹⁸ The primary factor specifying regional policy of Turkey has been

²¹⁶ Meliha Benli Altunışık, “Ortadoğu’da Bölgesel Düzen ve “Arap Baharı”,” *Ortadoğu Analiz*, Vol. 5 No: 53 (2013), p. 77.

²¹⁷ Erol Kurubaş, “Arap Baharında Eklemlenen Kürt Bölgeleri ve Türk Dış Politikasına Etkileri”, *Ortadoğu Analiz*, Vol. 5 No: 54 (2013), p. 21.

²¹⁸ Zarras, *Prospects of GCC-Turkey Cooperation and the Syrian Crisis*, Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 203.

the nationalist Kurdish movement (YPG) emerging in Syria. Indeed, Turkey started to review its security policies succeeding the ongoing events in southern part of its territory as of 2013. Ertem states that, with the spread of the Arab Uprisings to its neighbourhood, Turkey has been forced to re-evaluate its Kurdish problem and relations with the PKK within a broader regional perspective as the current regional balances might soon change due to new conditions.²¹⁹ Trying to resolve its domestic PKK conflict in one sense, Turkey on the other hand assumed a position against PYD movement, emerging in Syria as a remarkable actor. During this period, Turkey tried to create an alternative for a nationalist Kurdish entity in southern part of its borders while PYD, with the support of USA, proceeded its fight against Islamic State in Iraq and ash-Sham (ISIS) which founded a state in Iraq and Syria. And the subject atmosphere led to accusations against Turkey of support to the ISIS.

Through improving relations with the actual Kurdish state in Iraq, Turkey has not only regulated its policies against the Kurdish movement and PKK, but it also assumed this autonomous state as an alternative partner to the other Kurdish movements. The GCC states are not happy about the surprising rapprochement between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds since they do not consider the Iraqi Kurds as independent political actors.²²⁰ Turkey has always regarded PKK movement as a major threat to state security and despite reactions by Arab states, it gave up the policy based on territorial integrity of Iraq, which was defended previously by itself.

In the final period, Turkey's endeavours for intervention to Syria in order to limit efficiency of USA supported YPG movement have been argued widely. But Turkey did not give up the endeavours despite this arguments, explicitly revealing its posture about the relevant issue. However, under this circumstances it does not seem possible that Turkey could take further steps against YPG in the north Syria.

²¹⁹ Ertem, *Arab Spring and the 'Regionalization' of the Kurdish Problem*, Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 231.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

5.3.2 Iran and Arab Uprisings

Regional dynamics, varying as a result of American intervention to Iraq, accelerated Iran's progress on its track aspiring to become the most effective power in the region in the 2000s. During that process, Turkey tried to follow a policy of balance between Iran and Gulf Arab states through discreet relations with the former and improving alliances with the later. This situation did not change in the early periods of Arab Uprisings, as well. Although Turkey's following an active foreign policy with regard to Arab Uprisings and improving its relations with the states which were on the edge of revolution are not welcomed by Iran, this has not affected relations with Iran adversely.²²¹ However, both sides, portraying similar approaches to regime shifts in Tunisia and Egypt cases, were polarized at different directions against the intervention of NATO to Libya and particularly the incidents in Syria.²²² In Syria case, while Iran strictly supported the existing regime, Turkey displayed an anti-regime posture with the other regional actors. In this crisis, Turkey and the GCC states cooperates in account of Iran's containment issue.²²³ Turkey's leaving its Iran policy which was followed in the beginning of the 2000s, is without any doubt based on security concerns it has. Fearing of losing its political advantages in Syria as it was in Iraq case, Ankara government did not hesitate to set a sectarian affair with the GCC states. However, although Turkey made concessions in its traditional foreign policy approach, it is arguable that its Syria policy did not proceed expectedly as a result of some strategic errors and this case made Turkey to encounter new regional threats.

Turkey's attitude assumed against Iran's nuclear program before 2010 has changed in the wake of events breaking out during Arab Uprisings. In this regard, although it has produced a different policy for a while, the GCC and Turkey have found a common

²²¹ Hakki Uygur, "İran ve Arap Baharı," *SETA Analiz*, No: 52 (2012), p. 26.

²²² *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²²³ Zarras, *Prospects of GCC-Turkey Cooperation and the Syrian Crisis*, Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 204.

interest in making the region a nuclear weapon free zone.²²⁴ While USA and Iran were searching reconciliation on this issue, actors in the region were uncomfortable with these developments and they associated close relations against Iran' gaining strength to the detriment of themselves. Undoubtedly, this case remains to be vital for relations between Turkey and the GCC states.

5.3.3 The GCC States and Arab Uprisings

With the inception of Arab Uprisings, the GCC states firstly took some precautions against expansion threat of the incidents to their territories. Thus, Gulf States tried to preserve their regimes through regulations implemented in domestic policies and economic initiatives. In this regard, pragmatism is identified as the primary motivation guiding policy-makers in the GCC with regard to both domestic and regional events.²²⁵ After the incidents spread across the region, Gulf States taking initiative embarked on new policies. And the GCC states have decided to support some uprisings, especially by promising generous assistance funds.²²⁶ Ignoring regime shifts in Tunisia and Libya, Gulf States regarded uprisings in Bahrain as a serious threat against their entities. From the "inside" angle the regimes of the Gulf States have considered the Arab Uprisings a threat to their stability, consequently warranting a determined coercive response²²⁷ especially after Bahrain incidents.

After that, the GCC support has gone both to authoritarian Sunni regimes threatened by a Shiite opposition representing the majority of the population, and to anti-authoritarian Sunni movements battling non-Sunni regimes.²²⁸ The GCC states' attitude has laid the groundwork for sectarian policies in the region, when Iran is taken into consideration.

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 205.

²²⁵ Silvia Colombo, "The GCC and the Arab Spring: A Tale of Double Standards", *The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 47 No: 4 (2012), p. 111.

²²⁶ Sally Khalifa Isaac, "Explaining the Patterns of the Gulf Monarchies' Assistance after the Arab Uprisings", *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 19 No: 3 (2014), p. 419.

²²⁷ Colombo, *The GCC and the Arab Spring*, p. 114.

²²⁸ Ibid., p. 121.

Following Bahrain crisis, Gulf countries has accelerated initiatives for adopting a common attitude. It is the other effect of Arab Uprisings that Gulf countries became convinced to bolster cooperation in security issues within the GCC and their distrust of USA in Iran issue made them to collaborate politically, as well.²²⁹ However, this need of collaboration has not been felt equally in all of the GCC states. Especially Saudi Arabia and Qatar has shown different approaches toward the uprisings. Saudi Arabia has adopted a more conservative approach, whereas Qatar displayed a more progressive attitude, particularly in Libya and Syria.²³⁰

For Saudi Arabia's part, Riyadh has sought to preserve the status quo across the region helping its allies retain power while also seeking to prevent the emergence of pro-democracy Islamist movement in Egypt.²³¹ Qatar, however, supported the revolution in Egypt in contrast to other member states and reacted against the military coup following the revolution, based on its independent foreign policy behaviour. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia has intended to increase its regional power. In this regard, Kingdom is working to solidify its leadership over the Gulf States through further institutionalization of the GCC.²³² In the face of Saudi's attitude, Oman and UAE have abstained from becoming a party to the issue for fear of harming relations with Iran, Qatar however resisted as it would limit itself.

Finally, it is evident that the GCC countries, except for Qatar, look at international politics through domestic lenses when their relations with Muslim Brotherhood movement are taken into consideration. Any increase in efficiency of the movement has been regarded as a challenging factor to Gulf monarchies.²³³ In this respect, concerned about the Saudi' Muslim Brotherhood's ideological competition to the

²²⁹ Muhittin Ataman and Gülşah Neslihan Demir, "Körfez Ülkelerinin Ortadoğu Politikası ve Arap Baharına Bakışları", *Seta Analiz*, No: 52 (2012), p. 23

²³⁰ Colombo, *The GCC and the Arab Spring*, pp. 123-124.

²³¹ Simon Mabon, "Kingdom in Crisis? The Arab Spring and Instability in Saudi Arabia", *Contemporary Security Policy*, iFirst (2012), p. 21.

²³² Saud Mousaed Al Tamamy, "Saudi Arabia and the Arab Spring: Opportunities and Challenges of Security", *Journal of Arabian Studies*, Vol. 2 No: 2 (2012), p. 155.

²³³ Akkaya, *Körfez İşbirliği Konseyi Krallar Kulübü ve Değişen Bölgesel Düzen*, p. 17.

Wahhabi groups allied with the ruling family, Riyadh has constantly suppressed Muslim Brotherhood movements and affiliates at home, under the guise of an escalation in surveillance and repression since 2011.²³⁴ As for Qatar, it has supported Muslim Brotherhood movement like Turkey both in Syria and Egypt and it has been exposed to harsh reactions of Gulf countries in this issue. Hence, it had to change its position related to Muslim Brotherhood due to oppression and isolation carried out by the Gulf States against itself.

In conclusion, approaches of the GCC states towards uprisings have varied and this has prevented the states to act mutually in the light of regional developments and caused them to get too weak to achieve foreign policy objectives. But, the handover in Saudi monarchy in 2015 and implies of political changes to be employed by the new Saudi King have given rise to comments regarding somewhat probable political changes in the region.

5.4. USA and Arab Uprisings

In the beginning of new millennium, 9/11 attacks occurring in USA and military intervention by Washington to Middle East as a result caused various consequences for both Turkey and the GCC. Firstly, after USA military involvement in Iraq, the traditional balance of power consisting of Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia was destroyed, producing a power vacuum in the Persian Gulf.²³⁵ Secondly, Turkey's National Assembly' rejection of the March 1 resolution and its being isolated from Iraq policies, foundation of an autonomous Kurdish administration in the region have led Turkish foreign policy to divert from its usual path. Thirdly, interventions of USA towards to Iraq and Afghanistan has benefitted Iran mostly and caused remarkable concerns for the other states in the region. And finally, the "war on terror" triggered the intense militarization of USA-Arab States relations, and this led to a growing opposition on the public level in Middle East and had a deep negative impact on

²³⁴ Colombo, *The GCC and the Arab Spring*, p. 118.

²³⁵ Özden Zeynep Oktav, "The Gulf States and Iran: A Turkish Perspective", *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 18 No: 2 (2011), p. 136.

mutual perceptions.²³⁶ However, despite all these adverse developments, USA' regional policy have always been a determiner for both of the parties. In other words, despite the AKP foreign policy-makers efforts, Turkey's Middle Eastern policy has still not become fully independent from that of its western allies, especially from USA.²³⁷

On the other hand, Oktav and Ertem state that Turkey and the GCC states has not altered the fact that the Gulf is still heavily dependent on American military capabilities to be able to stand up against its arch rival, Iran.²³⁸ They also state, Turkey' maneuvering capability in the Gulf is also dependent on USA' strategic interests in this region, although Ankara approaches to the Gulf essentially on an economic level rather than a political level.²³⁹ Oktav adds that many analysts state that Gulf security is a "sub-regional complex"²⁴⁰, constructed around the position of USA.²⁴¹ It could be said that, all of the arguments stated above summarize the fact

²³⁶ Ibid., pp. 144-145.

²³⁷ Dal, *The Transformation of Turkey's Relations with the Middle East*, p. 258.

²³⁸ Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem, "Introduction: Shaping a New Era in Turkey-GCC Relations" Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), *GCC-Turkey Relations: Dawn of a New Era*, (Cambridge: Gulf Research Centre, 2015), p. 18.

²³⁹ Ibid., p. 18.

²⁴⁰ see: Buzan, Barry, and Ole Waever (2003) *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp.51-52. Subcomplexes have essentially the same definition as RSCs (Regional Security Complex) , the difference being that a subcomplex is firmly embedded within a larger RSC. Subcomplexes represent distinctive patterns of security interdependence that are nonetheless caught up in a wider pattern that defines the RSC as a whole. The clearest example is in the Middle East, where distinct subcomplexes can be observed in the Levant (Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria) and in the Gulf (Iran,Iraq, GCC), but where there is so much overlap and interplay that the two cannot be disentangled (all of the Gulf states are hostile to Israel, rivalry between Syria and Iraq, etc.). Subcomplexes are not a necessary feature of RSCs, but they are not uncommon either, especially where the number of states in an RSC is relatively large. The device of subcomplexes eliminates most of what might otherwise occur as disturbing cases of overlapping membership between RSCs: e.g., if the Gulf and the Levant were seen as separate RSCs, Iraq would be a member of both but, with these as subcomplexes, Iraq can be a member both of the Gulf subcomplex and of the wider Middle Eastern one.

²⁴¹ Oktav, *The Gulf States and Iran*, p. 141. This indicates that Gulf security is a subregional complex constructed around the position of the United States. Throughout history, different types of security

that USA plays an important role in Turkey's Middle East policy and its relations with the GCC states, as well as foreign policies of the GCC states.

Middle East policy of USA was directly affected by the handover in state administration prior to start of Arab Uprisings in 2010. As soon as raising to power, Obama administration retracted military units deployed in Iraq, referring that he shall not pursue the same policy with the prior administration. This policy change is interpreted under two main reasons by Oktav and Ertem. Firstly, the transformation of the international system from uni-polarity to multi-polarity and secondly, the relative economic power of USA, suffering from strategic over-extension, has declined to a large extent which have been also affected by its financial resources problem.²⁴² Altunışık also says that Washington's focusing its attention on Asia, new intervention perception by Obama administration and a tendency to employ different policy tools constitute the other extends of this new era.²⁴³

Qualified as a huge economic burden for economy of USA, Middle East interventions performed by Bush administration were abandoned as a result of the 2008 financial crisis. Furthermore, USA administration has taken some steps in order to improve relations with Islamic world. And Pacific region has been deemed as a primary security problem by the Obama administration and it has deployed military units in this region. With regard to these developments, it should be stressed that USA has exhibited some clear initiatives with the aim of separating its policies from its strategic partners in Middle East. Hence, instead of focusing on Turkey and the GCC states' desire for making their own policies independent from USA, it is more reasonable and realistic to highlight the fact that USA has made efforts to get rid of military and economic burden of the region, including Israel.

regimes set up by hegemonic powers have characterized the international relations of the region. Pax Britannica lasted from 1918 to 1971, when the British forces withdrew. It was replaced by Pax Saudi-Iranica, a product of the Nixon strategy of using proxy powers to maintain U.S. influence.

²⁴² Oktav and Ertem, *Introduction* Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 17.

²⁴³ Altunışık, *Ortadoğu'da Bölgesel Düzen ve "Arap Baharı"*, p. 78.

When regional developments following Arab Uprisings initiated in 2010 are taken into consideration, it is arguable that the significant factor affecting Turkey-the GCC relations is still the American factor. In contrast to its prior practices, the USA for this time has not intervened in the region and this case has affected regional balances and affairs. In this direction, Dilek and İşeri argue that Washington's decision to assume a lower profile in the regional balance of power has ushered in a whole new constellation of power balancing involving Turkish, the GCC countries, and Iranian proponents.²⁴⁴ In contrast to the other two actors, Iran has been proved to be the most beneficial actor, benefiting regional and international conjuncture with an independent policy than USA.

In fact, the passive role played by USA does not mean a total withdrawal by it from the region as USA has tried to act mutually with its partners after Arab Uprisings, as well. When its relations with Turkey are analysed, both Turkey and USA employed a position of supporting the transformations in the region, and from the perspective of Turkey, uprisings offered an opportunity to mend fences with USA and increase Turkey's importance in the eyes of Obama administration²⁴⁵, as Altunışık said.

Stressing contrasts in Turkey's rhetoric and practices, Oğuzlu remarks that Turkey appears like a state serving Western powers' interests.²⁴⁶ When the recent practices of Turkish foreign policy are taken into consideration, this argument does not seem realistic. Because, Ankara government, which used to adapt its policies in line with USA' hegemonic power in the region, seems to have embarked on different quests due to the absence of the hegemony this time. As Dilek and İşeri notes on this matter that Ankara, upon seeing a retreat of American military and political presence from

²⁴⁴ Oğuz Dilek and Emre İşeri, "Waiting for (Soft) Balancing: Turkey's Reciprocal Engagement with the GCC against Iran's Rising Power in Post-American Iraq" Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), *GCC-Turkey Relations: Dawn of a New Era*, (Cambridge: Gulf Research Centre, 2015), p. 95.

²⁴⁵ Meliha Benli Altunışık, "The Middle East in Turkey-USA Relations: Managing the Alliance", *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 15 No: 2 (2013), pp. 168-169.

²⁴⁶ Oğuzlu, *Komşularla Sıfır Sorun Politikası ve Arap Baharı*, p. 49.

the region, tentatively divorced itself from its previous policy of befriending Iran and moved closer to the GCC states in their mounting rivalry with Iran.²⁴⁷

Policy change applied by USA has caused similar effects on the GCC states as well, as they are militarily dependent on it. Such political incidents as Iraq' conquest and succeeding Iranian dominance over it, silence of USA against overthrown Mübarek administration, nonfulfillment of military aid expected by Syria from USA and finally nuclear negotiations made ,despite Israeli opposition, between Iran and USA have led the GCC states to tend towards different quests. Thus, Dilek and İşeri say that the GCC states embarked on varying from their security dependency away from USA through building up security relations with others, in particular Turkey.²⁴⁸ The military operation commenced against Houthis in Yemen in 2015 under the leadership of Saudi Arabia and the “joint Arab military force²⁴⁹” envisaged to be to this end should be analysed in this sense.

In conclusion, both Turkey GCC relations and their individual policies in the region have been basically influenced by the policy changes carried out by USA, through more cost-efficient ways such as air support to PYD and nuclear negotiations with Iran. As a result, if the developments occurring in Syria are appraised, as Oktav states, no policy employed against the interests of a global actor like USA shall last long.²⁵⁰

5.5. Turkey-GCC Countries Relations and Arab Uprisings

Improving in the 2000s, relations between Turkey and the GCC states have acquired new dimensions following the Arab Uprisings. First reason for this can be regarded

²⁴⁷ Dilek and İşeri, *Waiting for (Soft) Balancing*, Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 95.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

²⁴⁹ The Arab Gulf countries grouped in the Gulf Cooperation Council (the GCC) plus Egypt, Jordan and Morocco can put together an impressive military force with a formidable air power and navy as well as a sizeable land force. see: Riad Kahwaji, “Iranian threat, ISIS catalysts for joint Arab force,” *The Arab Weekly*, May 1, 2015. <http://www.thearabweekly.com/pdf/2015/05/01-05/p07.pdf>. (accessed on June 19, 2015).

²⁵⁰ Oktav, *Arap Baharı ve Türkiye-Körfez Devletleri İlişkileri*, p. 76.

as policy change of USA as it made its policies independent from both of its allies, and the second one is re-drafting of Middle East borders.

With the relations after 2010, both of the parties have found common maneuvering areas, but they also have followed some policies different from each other at the same time. Firstly, Turkey-GCC relationship share a common interest in regional stability.²⁵¹ But their stance on the scope and depth of the uprisings has been quite different. The GCC states wanted to prevent uprisings from reaching their regimes while Turkey desired to emphasize political reforms at uprising in Arab countries.²⁵² Secondly, as Tamamy insists that Turkey has been the only regional power with which Saudi Arabia has been able to cooperate since the advent of the Arab Spring in January 2011.²⁵³ And Ataman remarks that Gulf countries' need especially for Turkey has increased with Arab Uprisings²⁵⁴ as a regional power. While these arguments are highly reasonable, the main reasons for the cooperation can be classified as the coherence in both sides' political interests, quest for an ally instead of USA which preferred to passively act in the region, and desire for limiting Iran' influence which always benefitted this process, and the affinity of both sides in domestic and regional security quests.

According to Oktav, however, this situation has three main reasons. Firstly, on the issue of containment of Iranian hegemonic aspirations in the region with the toppling of Assad regime. Secondly, containment of Iranian nuclear aspirations and finally,

²⁵¹ Zarras, *Prospects of GCC-Turkey Cooperation and the Syrian Crisis*, Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 203.

²⁵² Ataman and Akkaya, *Turkey and the Gulf after the Arab Spring*, Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 74.

²⁵³ Al Tamamy, *Saudi Arabia and the Arab Spring*, p. 152.

²⁵⁴ Ataman and Demir, *Körfez Ülkelerinin Ortadoğu Politikası ve Arap baharına Bakışları*, p. 26.

their volatile relations with USA.²⁵⁵ And Zarras additionally attaches importance to Palestinian issue on cooperation field.²⁵⁶

Undoubtedly, relations between Turkey and the GCC have ascended to more significant dimensions. However, this have not decreased diversity of views of the both sides, but increased on some issues. In this respect, Tamamy reviews policies Saudi Arabia in view of Turkey, ranging adverse reasons as Turkish political rhetoric in Palestinian issue, second Kurdish issue restricts its capability, third the gap between rhetoric and action of Turkish authorities, four, Turkey aims to enhance its position on region and finally both sides do not agree on certain vital Middle Eastern issues. So he says that these relations is not strategic but tactical.²⁵⁷ Indeed, there exists a visible stagnation in Turkey-Saudi relations due to the factors ranged above during the period till new king's raising to power in 2015.

As Al-Shammri states that Turkey's political posture towards Arab Uprising has caused Saudi Arabia to gradually ignore its strategic partner, Turkey.²⁵⁸ The most obvious conflict between the two parties have proved to be divergent opinions on Muslim Brotherhood movement, of course. The Saudi government feels extremely threatened by the support given by Turkey to Muslim Brotherhood.²⁵⁹ The basic reason of this was undoubtedly the toppling of Mobarek regime, which was an ally of Saudi Arabia, and the new foreign policy implemented by ruling Muslim Brotherhood. The other reason is related to the domestic statute of Saudi Arabia. The

²⁵⁵ Oktav, *Opportunities and Challenges in GCC-Turkey Relations*, Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), pp. 42-43.

²⁵⁶ Zarras, *Prospects of GCC-Turkey Cooperation and the Syrian Crisis*, Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 206.

²⁵⁷ Al Tamamy, *Saudi Arabia and the Arab Spring*, p. 152.

²⁵⁸ Abdullah Alshammri, "Suudi Arabistan'ın Dış Politikasında Yeni Rota: Fırsatlar ve Zorluklar," *Ortadoğu Analiz*, Vol. 6 No: 61 (2015), p. 74.

²⁵⁹ Oktav, *Opportunities and Challenges in GCC-Turkey Relations* Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 38.

Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab region now considers Turkey to be proof that the movement can bring about the desired changes in the Arab and Islamic world.²⁶⁰

For many, the election won through democratic ways for the first time in Egypt's history and putting Turkey forward as a role model surely have harassed monarchically administered Gulf countries -except Qatar- particularly Saudi Arabia. In response to this, a military coup supported by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and UAE toppled the government in Egypt and this caused Turkey to stay as an onlooker in Egypt. The same problem has arisen in Syria case, as well. The affiliation with Muslim Brotherhood would bring Turkey closer to Qatar than Saudi Arabia on Syrian dossier Talbot says.²⁶¹ However, Turkey's cooperation with Qatar was not long termed. Upon strict oppressions by Gulf countries, Qatar has given up its support to Muslim Brotherhood. In the last analysis, the handover in Saudi Arabia administration and new administration's perceiving Iran as the main threat instead of Muslim Brotherhood have effected Turkey-GCC relations affirmatively and this improvement has taken effect in Syria, with the success of Syrian opponents against Syrian regime at north Syria territories.

To sum up, Turkey-GCC relations have become closer during Arab Uprisings. But, this was not the case for all countries witnessing uprisings. Both of the parties have shared almost the same position in Tunisia and Libya cases, and Turkey has supported the GCC states in Yemen and Bahrain cases, or stayed silent. As for Egypt, there existed strictly different approaches between Turkey and the GCC, and regarding Syria, they supported different groups despite standing on the same side.

5.5.1. Tunisia

Called as "Arab Uprisings", the process displacing all power balances in Middle East region started in Tunisia in 2010 for the first time. When the process of regime shift began in Middle East with the revolt in Tunisia, Turkey like the rest of the world was

²⁶⁰ Samia Berkadi, "Gulf States Rethink Ties to Muslim Brotherhood," *Al-Monitor*, November 18, 2012. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2012/11/gulf-states-starting-to-view-muslim-brotherhood-with-suspicion.html>

²⁶¹ Talbot, *Turkey-GCC Relations in a Transforming Middle East*, p. 9.

caught by surprise and struggled to form a policy.²⁶² Following these unexpected events, both Turkey and Arab countries embraced discreet policies. As a matter of fact, Ben-Ali administration had to hand over the government through a soft transition in Tunisia, where violence did not occur. After the toppling of Ben-Ali Turkey's relations with Tunisia expanded; Ankara got involved in Tunisia's post-election political transformation process.²⁶³ The most powerful party of Tunisia, which grew stronger following the uprising process, al-Nahda and AKP has built strong ties and Turkey has been deemed as a role model. These are appreciated as an achievement in view of Turkish foreign policy. In this respect, to further cooperation in different fields, two countries also signed a cooperation agreement for development and technical assistance in October 2012 calling for cooperation in the areas of variety aspects.²⁶⁴

When its relation with the GCC countries are taken into consideration, Turkey's policy has not encounter any conflicts resulting from Tunisia issue. Gulf States has employed economic tools in their Tunisia politics however they have abstained from taking effective steps to this end. Official Gulf assistance for the Tunisian government after the uprising has been neither generous nor rapidly promised.²⁶⁵

It can be said that the least problematic state for Turkey-GCC relations has been Tunisia considering Arab Uprisings. In the last instance, however, qualified as Tunisia's AKP, al-Nahda' losing control of the parliament cannot be respected as an affirmative result for Turkey.

5.5.2. Libya

Turkey seems to have carried out a different policy when compared with the GCC states on Libya, adversely affected by the Arab Uprisings. In Libya, Turkey was critical of NATO' involvement there and kept channels open with the Qaddafi

²⁶² Turan, *Changes in Turkish Foreign Policy: A Shift or a Passing Interest?*, p. 79.

²⁶³ Altunışık, *Turkey as an 'Emerging Donor' and the Arab Uprisings*, p. 342.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.342.

²⁶⁵ Isaac, *Explaining the Patterns of the Gulf Monarchies*, p. 424.

regime.²⁶⁶ It is clear that Turkey adopted a pragmatist approach in its policies as Turkish administrators have shown an approach contradicting with political perception they originally aim to form in Middle East through the support given to authoritarian regime in Libya.

The most essential reason for this approach of Turkey is based on economic affairs with Libya. Libya has long been one of the prominent Arab countries, with which Turkey had development significant financial ties.²⁶⁷ Acting with economic impulses in Libya, Turkey opposed to any probable Western intervention. Hence, in the beginning of March 2011, Prime Minister Erdoğan called the idea of a NATO intervention as “absurd and unthinkable”. However, within a couple of weeks, Turkey found itself in a position of supporting the coalition forces led-NATO bombardment of Libya.²⁶⁸ As Turan states, Libyan crisis showed that when the conflict was small with only regional consequences Turkey would be allowed to play a significant role, but when there were larger issues at stake it would have to follow its Western allies’ policy line.²⁶⁹ Indeed Turkey’s retreat in its Libya policy implies the continuance of traditional western foreign policy.

In contrast with Turkey, the GCC states -especially Qatar and UAE- supported the opposition group in Libya and contributed to NATO intervention. According to Ertem, Turkey’s supporting and financing opposition wing in Libya stem from Turkey’s traditional policy based on adaptation to fluctuant conditions.²⁷⁰ Ertem also notes that “idealist side” of Turkish foreign policy is expected to go hand in hand with its traditional “realist reflexes”²⁷¹ in Libya case.

²⁶⁶ Altunışık, *The Middle East in Turkey-USA Relations: Managing the Alliance*, p. 169.

²⁶⁷ Ertem, *Arab Spring and the ‘Regionalization’ of the Kurdish Problem*, Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 221.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

²⁶⁹ Turan, *Changes in Turkish Foreign Policy*, p. 81.

²⁷⁰ Ertem, *Arab Spring and the ‘Regionalization’ of the Kurdish Problem*, Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 223.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

In conclusion, Turkey's Libya policy did not cruise on the same route with Western powers and the GCC states initially, and Turkey had to revise its policy as a result of the events. Many researchers say that this case has not only demonstrated limits of Turkey's foreign policy and but also reminded Ankara government of unfavourable results of its foreign policy strategies.

5.5.3. Egypt

Regime shift process in Egypt and following incidents are the most remarkable controversial matter in Turkey-GCC relations. While Turkey and the GCC states have followed similar policies regarding the states witnessing uprisings, both of the parties other than -Qatar- have employed a different policy from each other in Egypt issue.

Having rooted relations with Egypt, Turkey explicitly responded the political incidents broken out there. While Egypt was plunged into uprisings, Turkish Prime Minister clearly stated that Mobarek administration had to leave authority. Identified with Tahrir square which is located in Cairo, revolution process has proved to be an issue interesting Turkey closely. In this regard, Ertem argues that the so-called "Tahrir Revolution" in Egypt once again brought up the point whether Turkey could be a role model for the Arab World.²⁷² Indeed, during his visit to Egypt after the revolution, Erdoğan virtually drafted a route map, exemplifying Turkey's secular state structure. Turkey acted in a manner consistent with USA during revolution process in Egypt and both of the parties regarded regime shift affirmatively.

Throughout all these developments, Gulf countries -especially Saudi Arabia- were both harassed by toppling of Egyptian regime identical with their own regimes and they were uncomfortable with Turkey's coming into prominence as a regional power. However, the main issue harassing Gulf States was the USA's approach to the

²⁷² Ibid., p. 219.

revolution in Egypt. USA government's abandonment of Mobarek was the straw that broke the camel's back as far as the Gulf States are concerned²⁷³, Mason says.

Muslim Brotherhood's rising to power after the elections in Egypt and the foreign policy followed by it dramatically disturbed the traditional actors of the region. The close relationship between the elected president Muhammed Morsi and Turkey as well as the diplomatic convergence with Iran for the first time in years have alarmed particularly Gulf States. In July, 2013, following nearly one-year long Morsi administration, the military coup conducted by General Sisi was supported by the Gulf monarchies. In this respect, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and UAE allegedly gave \$ 12 billion to support to a post-Morsi government.²⁷⁴ Ataman and Akkaya argue that there exist two reasons leading Gulf support to Egypt coup. First, Muslim Brotherhood came to power through democracy and second, this democratic experience was seen as a threat for Gulf monarchies.²⁷⁵ In addition to all these reasons, Egypt's diplomatic convergence with Iran after the revolution which dislocated regional balances, and its highly close relationship with Turkey have laid the groundwork for support to military coup bestowed by both the Gulf States and USA, caring about Israel' security.

AKP government, on the other hand, reacted to the military coup in Egypt. This vary of views has led negative results for relations between Turkey and the GCC countries, except for Qatar. As there was not any country criticizing the military coup in Egypt across the world, Turkey was put on the spot and it became isolated in the region. In this regard, the AKP's unwavering support of Morsi seriously endangered Turkey' trade and investment, which had increased considerably then²⁷⁶, says Altunışık. Furthermore, Turkey's major economic became the interruption of

²⁷³ Mason, *Towards a Strategic Partnership?*, Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 175.

²⁷⁴ Ertem, *Arab Spring and the 'Regionalization' of the Kurdish Problem*, Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 220.

²⁷⁵ Ataman and Akkaya, *Turkey and the Gulf after the Arab Spring* Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 71.

²⁷⁶ Altunışık, *Turkey as an 'Emerging Donor' and the Arab Uprisings*, p. 343.

unrecorded hot money flow. Despite its anti-military coup rhetoric, AKP government does not seem to have acted sincerely. As Ertem states, however, condemned the Egyptian coup, Turkey did not show any strong reaction against three the GCC states which fully support the coup.²⁷⁷

Consequentially, Turkey and the GCC states have been deployed in different positions regarding Egypt issue. Thus, Turkey' relations particularly with Saudi Arabia started to have a rough time. According to Oktav, the rift over Egypt showed the limits of Turkey's democracy promotion policy towards the Middle East.²⁷⁸ And Ertem also adds the Egyptian coup can be considered as the end of the Turkish model²⁷⁹ for Arab world.

Finally, Saudi King Selman's rise to power in 2015 and his more moderate policy when compared with the one implemented by his predecessor imply that relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia may improve again and this will affect regional policies.

5.5.4. Bahrain

The most menacing incident of Arab Uprisings process with regard to Gulf countries have occurred in Bahrain on February 14, 2011. The public revolts in Bahrain alarmed the predominantly Sunni Gulf monarchies since they were perceived as Shiite-led.²⁸⁰ As a matter of fact, this prevailing threat perception has stemmed from existence of Shiite minorities in the Gulf States. Iran' desire for interfering domestic policies of the Gulf States through Shiite minorities has led monarchic regimes to take severe measures. To this end, Saudi Arabia and UAE provided Bahrain with military forces and helped Sunni administration in Bahrain to repress the uprising.

²⁷⁷ Ertem, *Arab Spring and the 'Regionalization' of the Kurdish Problem*, Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 220.

²⁷⁸ Oktav, *Opportunities and Challenges in GCC-Turkey Relations* Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 40.

²⁷⁹ Ertem, *Arab Spring and the 'Regionalization' of the Kurdish Problem*, Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 221.

²⁸⁰ Isaac, *Explaining the Patterns of the Gulf Monarchies*, p. 416.

So, it can be said that the civil rebellion in Bahrain is a major sign for the inevitable cooperation to be set among Gulf States when their national structures and political entities are threatened.²⁸¹

Turkey's attitude to Bahrain uprisings was keeping silent. Turkey has been quite understanding Saudi Arabia's intervention in Bahrain.²⁸² Turkey's subject approach can be explained under two reasons. First, Turkey's having similar troubles with Gulf States regarding the minorities and second one Turkey's concerns over any probable harm on political and economic relations with Gulf countries as well as its non-interference policy to domestic affairs of Gulf countries.

5.5.5. Yemen

There occurred another regime shift in Yemen part of Arab Uprisings. No matter how Saudi Arabia supported Yemenite President Salih, it had to withdraw this support in due course. Yemen has always meant to be a prominent actor for security policy implemented by Saudi Arabia. Existence of a powerful al-Qaeda organization in Yemen and Shiite minority (Houthis) settling on the Saudi border pose an obvious threat for the kingdom.

Therefore, reiterating its position in Bahrain case, Turkey has not played an active diplomatic role in the crisis in Yemen.²⁸³ It can be said that Ankara has not hesitated to leave its policy on the issues directly affecting Saudi Arabia's security.

In fact, after a Shiite minority called Houthis took control in Yemen and toppled the government in 2015, the "Joint Arab Military Force" formed by leadership of Saudi Arabia intervened in the subject country. President Erdoğan verbally supported this intervention to Yemen and did not waver in condemning Iran.

²⁸¹ Ataman and Demir, *Körfez Ülkelerinin Ortadoğu Politikası ve Arap baharına Bakışları*, p. 12.

²⁸² Başkan, *Ankara Torn Apart*, p. 2.

²⁸³ Larrabee, *Turkey and the Gulf Cooperation Council*, p. 696.

As a conclusion, military interventions conducted by Saudi Arabia in Bahrain and Yemen has not affected Turkey-GCC countries relations adversely, on the contrary resulted affirmatively.

5.5.6. Syria

Developments in Syria have important role on Turkey-GCC countries relations. Turkey recorded its most remarkable success of foreign policy, which was renewed in the 2000s, in relations with Syria. However, with the civil rebellions initiated on March 2011, Turkey's Syria policy became reversed. At the beginning of rebellions, Turkey encouraged Assad to adopt certain reforms in order to prevent the opposition movement from gaining momentum.²⁸⁴ But, as these efforts yielded no result, Turkey employed some foreign policy tools, which were not used before, in Syria case which was regarded as a domestic issue by Prime Minister Erdoğan. In this regard, supporting the opposing group called Free Syrian Army (FSA) with USA, Saudi Arabia and Qatar through both diplomatic and military means, Turkey opened the gates of its territories to hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees as well.

In the aftermath of all these developments, there occurred a range of events Turkey had not reckoned before. On one hand playing an active role in toppling the administration in Syria, Turkey, on the other hand, unwittingly formed a basis for foundation of a new autonomous Kurdish region by PKK which is the most remarkable national security problem of it.²⁸⁵ Specified as Syria wing of PKK, PYD took control over some districts along Turkey's southern border. Turkey's fail in taking necessary steps for countering ISIS led critics of its Western allies and USA to improve cooperation with Kurdish groups.

Also the GCC countries supported anti-regime groups in Syrian crisis as Turkey did. In this regard, Saudi Arabia's main motivation was preventing Iran from establishing Shiite crescent in the region²⁸⁶ Ataman and Akkaya argue, as this policy adopted by

²⁸⁴ Turan, *Changes in Turkish Foreign Policy*, p. 81.

²⁸⁵ Kurubaş, *Arap Baharında Eklemlenen Kürt Bölgeleri ve Türk Dış Politikasına Etkileri*, p. 21.

²⁸⁶ Ataman and Akkaya, *Turkey and the Gulf after the Arab Spring* Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 73.

Gulf States was not agreed upon by Western states, Turkey came into significant position in the GCC countries' foreign relations. Motivated by the similar case, Turkey tried to compensate the position it lost in Iraq with Syria, and commenced cooperation with Saudi Arabia and Qatar. This caused Turkey to be seen as a promoter for jihadist organizations and sectarian policies, in order to topple Syrian regime by its Western allies. In face of this situation, Turkish foreign policy, many have argued whether the relevant Syria policy is adopted by Turkish Republic or by just an Islamist minority administering the state. To explain to its public, the Turkish government claims that its Syrian policy is a value-based policy.²⁸⁷

When international dimension of Syria crises is analysed, Russia and China come forth as promoters of Damascus administration, on the contrary side are European countries and USA located. However, indifference of Western countries especially USA towards Syria dossier and their reluctance to take efficient steps can be explained by two reasons. First, the political and religious extremism of groups like ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra causes a great deal of concern in Western States supporting the anti-government forces.²⁸⁸ Second, withdrawn from Iraq, Obama administration hesitated to directly intervene in Syria crisis²⁸⁹, as Altunışık says.

When Turkey's relations with western countries are analysed with regard to its Syria policy, there exist similar arguments. As Turan insists, the pro-western character of Turkish foreign policy became especially clear during the Syrian crisis.²⁹⁰ Also, Başkan argues that the crisis in Syria has escalated and proved to be beyond Turkey's power to solve it, Turkey began to play with the idea of collaborating more with USA and other European powers.²⁹¹ And lastly Oğuzlu remarks that Turkey's

²⁸⁷ Ertem, *Arab Spring and the 'Regionalization' of the Kurdish Problem*, Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 226.

²⁸⁸ Zarras, *Prospects of GCC-Turkey Cooperation and the Syrian Crisis*, Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 200.

²⁸⁹ Altunışık, *Ortadoğu'da Bölgesel Düzen ve "Arap Baharı"*, p. 77.

²⁹⁰ Turan, *Changes in Turkish Foreign Policy*, p. 81.

²⁹¹ Başkan, *Ankara Torn Apart*, p. 2.

explicit hesitation in taking initiatives despite the willingness of regional leadership and portrayal of a country engaged in policies implemented by global actors, especially USA, are implying that Turkey's Syria policy is currently stuffed.²⁹² Indeed, recent developments in Syria show that Turkey's Syria policy is congested and proved to be out of its power, transforming to even a national security matter.

Insufficient response of the GCC states and Turkey to Iran's sectarian policies carried out in Syria results from divergent opposing groups they support. Many claim that Saudi Arabia favours radical Islamic groups like al-Nusra much more than Turkey and Qatar, which seem to be closer to the moderate Syrian opposition groups affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood that Riyadh dislikes.²⁹³ However, the handover in Saudi administration and moderate Iran perception of the new administration instead of a major threat perception enabled opposing groups in Syria to recover and get new achievements against the ongoing administration. Some analyses interpret this state as a collaboration in Syrian opponents, between Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

On the other hand, ISIS existence in the region and operations conducted against it by support of USA have pushed the fight between opponents and the regime aside. As for Turkey, the most vital conflict has become existence of the national Kurdish movement PYD, which seems to share half of Syrian border of it. So, developments seem inevitable recently when Turkey is discussing use of military ways in Syria.

5.6. Conclusion

It could be said that relations between Turkey and the GCC countries have improved in general during Arab Uprisings and security aspect of relations has become crucial for both. Both of the parties, deployed at the same side regarding each country witnessing uprisings -except Egypt- have benefitted from regional co-operations as powerful actors in the region. It is evident that the basic trigger of such a co-

²⁹² Oğuzlu, *Komşularla Sıfır Sorun Politikası ve Arap Baharı*, p. 48.

²⁹³ Ertem, *Arab Spring and the 'Regionalization' of the Kurdish Problem*, Özden Zeynep Oktav and Helin Sarı Ertem (ed), p. 213.

operation was due to the revisions made by USA policy-makers on Middle East dossier and USA' liberalizing itself from its strategic allies.

In this period characterized with constantly changing regional powers, it can be argued that both Turkey and the GCC countries could meet a range of intricate occasions blended with some opportunities.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

When Turkey-GCC countries relations in the new millennium are examined, some domestic factors seem to have been influential with regard to progress of relations.

Considering Turkish foreign policy, Kurdish issue comes to the forefront as the most critical conflict. Forming domestic policy area and security of Turkey for years, this issue has become the most significant agenda topic for Turkish foreign policy, following the events in Iraq and then Syria. This conflict which has converted to a regional matter through Turkey's contributions needs to be sorted out peacefully within domestic political environment of Turkey as it means a lot in view of Turkish foreign policy's future.

Secondly, there exist a dramatic incoherence regarding foreign policy as Middle East policy specified by Turkish policy-makers have not been embraced at each level of the country, especially in the army, thus leading an abstain from taking concrete steps.

Thirdly, this much is certain that the political tension between Turkish Government for a long time constitutes an impediment for Turkey to achieve its regional foreign policy targets.

Considering regional developments, the key issue which is directing and likely to direct the relations between Turkey and the GCC countries is seen to be developments in Syria dossier. Existence of ISIS in the region as an actor and fight against this organization have become main parts of Syria conflict. USA' legitimating the Kurds in Syria like in Iraq, in favour of settling a regional territory, under the pretext of fight against ISIS has caused ringing alarm bells in Ankara. Upon progress of the nationalist Kurdish movement, YPG, which is classified as

PKK of Syria and controlling nearly half of Turkey-Syria border line, some speculations about Turkey's probable military intervention to Syria have emerged lately. USA policy in Syria which is low-cost and conducted through non-Islamic structures has revealed again that Ankara should be ready for any kind of initiatives, including military options in order to preserve its own interests. It is important that Turkey be in cooperation with Gulf countries against Iran, which is supporting Syrian rule by every means available. Especially after the shift in Saudi Arabia administration, Turkish and Saudi efforts for compromising in their Syria policies can be regarded as a critical and inevitable act for achieving regional goals of the parties.

Considering international factors, the most remarkable incident directing relations between Turkey and the GCC countries has proved to be the policy change carried out by USA administration especially after the 2008 financial crisis. Due to such reasons as high-costed wars conducted by Bush administration causing anti-Americanism in Islamic states and 2008 financial crisis which rendered the subject war unsustainable and USA strategy for intensifying its military forces in Pacific, Washington has chosen to liberalize its regional policy conducted through strategic allies for a long time. In this respect, adapting their security policies with regard to the position embraced by USA, Turkey and the Gulf Arab countries have failed to produce healthy and balanced foreign policies in the region. Thus, the primary policy of global actors envisaging fight against ISIS has not been adopted by Turkey and Gulf States, Iran, however, acting mutually with USA has legitimized its Syria policy and had a strategic edge over the other regional actors.

Also the nuclear agreement concluded between Iran and P5+1 states is one of the most essential factors likely to unsettle regional balances. As per the subject convention, Iran's nuclear operations shall be supervised and in return, the embargo imposed on Iran shall be revoked. This is likely to cause adverse effects on Turkey and especially Saudi Arabia whereas it denotes an important diplomacy achievement for Iran in region politics, especially in Iraq and Syria issues. Iran' resolving its problems with the West shall have an effect on Turkey's position and statute before the Western states.

There exists a wide range of cooperation possibilities in political field with regard to the progress of relations between Turkey and the GCC states. Both side' mutual act at international platforms is important for both sides which have converted to natural allies as borders and balances of region is being re-shaped. Another cooperation field shall be transfer of Turkey's state administration tradition which has continued for many centuries to Gulf States which are not experienced enough in this matter. It is probable that both parties will compromise in controversial issues through actual and official supports to each other, as well as political favours. Finally, it is remarkable that there are other cooperation options in cultural, social and educational fields.

The reality that both of the parties need to compromise in policy and security fields in order to improve economic relations has reflected to relations between Turkey and the GCC countries in the last twelve years. Some fundamental steps must be taken by the parties for improving relations, which have been better relatively in the 21st century. These steps can be summarized as follows: common production of agricultural products desperately needed by the Gulf states, second, Turkey's supplying Gulf states with qualified labour force, third, covering and varying energy need of Turkey which is at the top of foreign policy issues, fourth, free trade zones and lifting strict visa requirements, using local currencies in foreign trade between the parties and finally pouring of Gulf currency to Turkey market profoundly. Thus, economic relations between Turkey and the GCC countries shall record progress as desired. Finally, it is probable that security relations between the parties will record remarkable progress in the coming years.

Assumed to be balancing power against ascending Iran threat of the 2000s, Turkey seems to be unwilling to do this role during Arab Uprisings process. In reply to Iran' playing its regional cards well and intervening in domestic policies of Arab States through Shiite minorities to this end, and conspiring operations through its militia forces, Turkey's deprivation of necessary foreign tools to employ efficiently in the region, have showed that Turkey does not have desire to be against Iran.

Therefore, my argument is that the main policy expected improve relations between Turkey and the GCC countries should be cooperation in security and military fields. In this respect, Turkish defence industry should increase its capacity and perform

exports to Gulf Arab states. Also, Turkey might supply Gulf Arab States with qualified military stuff, desperately needed by the subject countries, as Turkish army has adequate qualified members within itself, together with supplying military training and equipment. Finally, If Turkish army exists in Gulf Arab States without combat power and close combat, relations for both parties will reach a strategic point, and political and economic relations will gain strength. The recent convention concluded between Turkey and Qatar which encompasses the foundation of a military base in Qatar is of great importance regarding progress of bilateral relations.

In conclusion, my argument is Turkey-GCC countries relations in the 2000s is still at limited level despite the economic and political developments and increase in high-ranking bilateral visits between the parties. And the relations are not probable to record any change at this stage. However, Turkey's increasing military relations with Gulf Arab States after it has achieved consensus in state organs and resolved domestic problems shall avail Turkey in both regional foreign policy and its relations with the GCC states.

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APPENDICES

A. TURKISH SUMMARY

Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin kurulmasıyla birlikte Türk yöneticilerinin Arap toplumlarına yönelik yaklaşımlarında ciddi değişiklikler meydana gelmiştir. 21. yüzyıla girildiğinde ise bu değişim farklı bir boyut kazanmıştır. Türkiye-Körfez İşbirliği Konseyi (KİK) ülkeleri ilişkileri hakkında son dönemlere kadar akademik çalışmaların sayısı sınırlı kalmıştır. Fakat özellikle son on yılda ilişkilerin belirgin bir şekilde artmasıyla bu konuda ki yayınlarda da bir artış olmuştur. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma yeni yüzyılda gelişen ilişkileri ve bu ilişkileri etkileyen faktörleri iç, bölgesel ve uluslararası çerçevede çok boyutlu düzlemde incelemiş ve alana bu konuda katkı sağlamayı amaçlamıştır.

Yeni bin yıla girildiğinde tek kutuplu küresel sistemin baskın gücü ABD'nin, en önemli dış politika gündemi radikal terör örgütleri ile mücadele etmek olmuştur. Bu çerçevede ABD'ye yapılan 9 Eylül 2001 saldırıları tüm dünyada ve özellikle Ortadoğu coğrafyasında ciddi değişimlerin önünü açmıştır. Tezin ilk bölümünde, Türkiye'nin bu dönemde Ortadoğu'daki politik sorunlarla iç içe oluşu ve KİK ülkeleri ile ilişkilerinin gelişimi hakkında çeşitli yaklaşımlar ele alınmıştır.

Bunlardan ilki Türkiye'nin iç politik gelişimleriyle ilgilidir. 2002'de Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi'nin (AKP) iktidara gelmesi ve akabinde başlayan iç değişim bazılarına göre Ortadoğu politikasında ki değişimin en önemli sebebidir. Bu görüşe göre siyasi islamı temsil eden bir hareketin Türkiye'de tek başına iktidara gelmesi Türk dış politikasının Ortadoğu'ya yönelik yaklaşımında önemli değişimlere sebep olmuştur. Yine AKP hükümetinin medeniyet söylemleri ve bölgesel meselelerde sosyal kültürel mesajlara ağırlık vermesi de bir başka görüşe göre değişimin önemli bir nedenidir. Bir

diğer görüş ise, Türk politikasında ki yeni seçkinlerin dış siyasete yenilik getirmeleri ve bu siyasetin lider eksenli olarak sürdürülmesi etken olmuştur. Bu açıdan, tüm bu gelişmelerin Türkiye-KİK ülkeleri ilişkilerinin gelişmesinde önemli bir katkı sağladığı denilebilir.

İkinci olarak, 2000'li yıllarda Türkiye-KİK ülkeleri ilişkilerinin gelişimine dair analizlerde, ekonomik ilişkileri ön plana çıkaran görüşler de mevcuttur. Bu dönemde, Türkiye'nin neo-liberal ekonomik politikaları ve KİK ülkelerinin, 11 Eylül saldırılarının neden olduğu tahribatın etkileri altında geleneksel yatırım alanlarından farklı yerlere açılma politikaları iki tarafın ekonomik ilişkilerinin gelişmesine katkıda bulunmuştur. Fakat ekonomik ilişkilerde yaşanan bu artışın ilişkileri geliştirse bile ilişkileri yönlendirdiği konusunda yapılan analizler eksik kalmaktadır. Burada, iki taraf arasındaki politik gelişmelerin ekonomik gelişmelere yön verdiği şeklinde ki Özlem Tür'ün görüşü daha belirleyici görünmektedir. İki taraf arasındaki enerji politikaları da ilişkiler üzerinde etkili olmuştur. Lakin bölgesel dengeleri etkileyecek büyük enerji politikalarının, ikili ve bölgesel ilişkilerden ziyade küresel sonuçlar doğurması bu konuda ileri adımlar atılmasının önünde engel teşkil etmektedir.

Bu konuda bir başka görüş ise tek kutuplu sisteme geçilmesinden sonra ABD'nin radikal teröre karşı mücadele kapsamında Ortadoğu'ya yönelik politikasında kimlik siyasetini ön plana çıkarması ve aynı dönemde Türkiye'nin bölge ülkeleriyle ilişkilerinde kimlik temelli dış politika anlayışıyla hareket etmesini beraberinde getirdiği şeklindedir.

Yine 21. yüzyıl da Ortadoğu'ya yönelik Türk dış politikasının gelişimi ve bu dönemde Türkiye-KİK ülkeleri ilişkilerinin faktörlerin birleşimi ile açıklanabileceği görüşü de mevcuttur. Bu tezin yazımında, bu görüş ön plana çıkarılmıştır. Bu bağlamda, iki taraf arasındaki ilişkiler iç, bölgesel ve uluslararası düzeyde incelenmiştir. Bu çerçevede, küresel güçlerin Türkiye'nin ve KİK ülkelerinin ikili ve bölgesel politikalarını etkilediği ve aynı zamanda, Arap Uyanışı sonrası dönemde Türkiye-KİK ilişkilerinin,

bölgesel zemine ve güvenlik temeline dayandığı ve önümüzdeki dönemde de bu gelişmelere bağlı olduğu savı işlenmiştir.

Çalışmanın ikinci bölümünde ise 21. yüzyıla kadar ki dönemde Türk-Arap ilişkileri genel olarak ele alınmıştır. Türk-Arap ilişkilerinin tarihi İslamiyetin ilk yıllarına kadar uzanmaktadır. Türklerin İslamiyeti kabulünden sonra Türklerin Orta Asya'dan batıya doğru göç hareketleri hız kazanmış ve neticesinde 11. yüzyıldan itibaren Araplarla aynı coğrafyayı paylaşmaya başlamışlardır. 16. yüzyıl başından itibaren ise Türkler, Ortadoğu coğrafyasının neredeyse tamamında hakimiyet kurmuşlardır. Osmanlı Devleti bu dönemden itibaren, Arabistan yarımadasını Körfez Şeyhlikleri ve yerel idareciler aracılığıyla yönetmişlerdir.

20. yüzyıla gelindiğinde milliyetçi hareketlerin ve sömürgeci güçlerin etkisiyle Osmanlı Devleti'nin bu bölgede hakimiyeti oldukça azalmıştır. 20. yüzyılın başlarında İttihat ve Terakki Partisi'nin yönetime el koyması ve Türk milliyetçiliğini yönetimde ön plana çıkarması Arap toplumlarında huzursuzluğu daha da arttırmıştır. 1. Dünya Savaşı'nın başlamasıyla birlikte Arap coğrafyasında Mekke Emiri Şerif Hüseyin'in öncülüğünde Arap isyanı başlamış fakat bu durum Arap toplumunda pek karşılık bulamamıştır. 1. Dünya Savaşı'nın bitimiyle, Osmanlı Devleti'nin elinde Arapların çoğunlukta olduğu bir toprak parçası kalmamıştır.

Türk Milli Mücadelesinin kazanılması ve sonrasında 1923'te imzalanan Lozan Antlaşması ile Türkiye, Ortadoğu topraklarını resmen terk ettiğini kabul etmiştir. Cumhuriyetin kurulmasından sonra Türklerin Araplarla ilişkisini etkileyen en önemli faktör 1924 yılında halifelik kurumunun ilga edilmesi olmuştur. Atatürk döneminde Ortadoğu coğrafyasına yönelik dış politikanın temelinde tarafsızlık ilkesi ön plana çıkmıştır.

Soğuk Savaş döneminde ki ilişkilere baktığımızda ise Türk-Arap ilişkilerinin belirli bir seviyede kaldığını söyleyebiliriz. Bu dönemde ilişkileri etkileyen en önemli unsur İsrail Devleti'nin kurulması ve Arap-İsrail savaşları olmuştur. Türkiye'nin bu konuda genelde tarafsız bir politika

izlemesi Araplar nezdinde pek hoş karşılanmamıştır. Yine bu dönemde Kıbrıs sorunu ve 1973 petrol krizi ilişkilerin gelişimi açısından öne çıkan konular olmuştur.

1979'da, İran Devrimi'nin gerçekleşmesi ve Sovyetler Birliği'nin Afganistan'ı işgali, 1980'de Türkiye'de yaşanan askeri darbe ve 1981'de Körfez ülkesinin, Suudi Arabistan, Katar, Bahreyn, Umman, Kuveyt ve Birleşik Arap Devletleri, bir araya gelerek Körfez İşbirliği Konseyi'ni kurması ilişkiler açısından önemli gelişmeler olarak sıralanabilir. 1980'li yıllarda Türkiye'de Özal hükümetinin liberal ekonomik politikaları ve Arap ülkelerine yönelik dış politikada değişime gitme çabaları, Körfez ülkelerinin ise Türkiye'ye yatırım hamleleri, Türkiye ve Körfez ülkeleri arasında yakın ilişkiler kurulmasını beraberinde getirmiştir.

Soğuk Savaşın bitmesi ve 1991'de Irak'ın koalisyon güçlerince işgali bölgesel güç dengelerinin değişmesine de yol açmıştır. Bu dönemde Türkiye-Körfez Arap ülkeleri ilişkileri sınırlı düzeyde kalmıştır. Bunun bir nedeni Türkiye'nin iç sorunlarına ağırlık vermesi iken diğer nedeni ise Körfez ülkelerinin İran tehdidi karşısında siyasi pozisyonlarını değiştirmek istememelerinden kaynaklanmıştır. 2000'li yıllara girerken İsmail Cem'in dışişleri bakanlığı döneminde Türkiye, Ortadoğu coğrafyasına yönelik aktif bir dış politika izlemiş fakat iç, bölgesel ve uluslararası gelişmelere bağlı olarak iki taraf arasındaki ilişkiler istenen düzeye getirilememiştir.

Yeni yüzyıla girerken Türkiye-Körfez Arap ülkeleri ilişkilerini etkileyen en önemli gelişme, 9 Eylül 2001'de ABD'ye yönelik yapılan terör saldırıları olmuştur. Bu gelişme uluslararası ve bölgesel dengeler açısından değişimlere sebep olmuş, bölge ülkelerinin iç ve dış politikalarında ve tabii ki Türkiye-KİK ilişkileri üzerinde ciddi etkiler doğurmuştur.

Tezin üçüncü bölümünde, 2000'li yıllarda ki Türkiye-KİK ilişkileri çok boyutlu olarak iç, bölgesel ve uluslararası bağlamda ele alınmıştır. İlişkiler üzerinde etkili olan iç faktörlere baktığımızda ilk olarak Türkiye'de 2002 yılında iktidara gelen AKP'nin etkisi incelenmiştir. Türk siyasi hayatında

siyasi islamı temsil eden bir partinin tek başına ve büyük çoğunlukla iktidara gelmesi önemli değişimlere de sebep olmuştur diyebiliriz. Bu çerçevede, 2001 yılında yaşanan ekonomik kriz sonrası hayata geçirilen neo-liberal ekonomik modelin devam ettirilmesi, AB üyelik süreci çerçevesinde uyum yasalarının çıkarılması, genelde müslüman ülkelere ve özelde Ortadoğu ülkelerine yönelik geliştirilen ve müslüman kimliğine vurgu yapan siyasi ve sosyal söylemlerin artması 2000'li yıllarda Türkiye-KİK ülkeleri ilişkilerinin gelişiminde de etkili olmuştur.

Öte yandan, ilişkilere etki eden bir diğer faktör ise ekonomik ve ticari ilişkiler de meydana gelen artış olmuştur. Bu dönemde karşılıklı olarak ekonomik faaliyetler hız kazanmış ve çeşitli alanlarda işbirliği sağlanmış ve birtakım antlaşmalar imzalanmıştır. Ayrıca, yine karşılıklı olarak yüksek düzeyli ziyaretlerin sıklaşması ve bunun ilişkilere yansımaları olumlu gelişmeler olarak görülebilir.

İlişkileri etkileyen iç faktörlerden bir diğeri ise taraflar arasında ortak tarihi ve kültürel bağlara yapılan vurguların artması ve ötekileştirici dilin terkedilerek tarafların birbirlerine karşı kullandığı dilin yumuşaması olmuştur.

İlişkileri etkileyen bölgesel gelişmelere baktığımızda ilk olarak ABD'nin 2003 yılında işgal ettiği Irak sorunundan bahsetmek gerekmektedir. Türkiye açısından bakıldığında Irak'ın işgali, kendisi için hem iç hem de bölgesel sorunlara neden olmuş ve gelişmelerden olumsuz etkilenmiştir. KİK ülkeleri açısından bakıldığında ise, İran tehdidine karşı kendilerine her zaman tampon görevi görmüş Sünni Irak devletinin yok olması ve bölgede oluşan boşluktan İran'ın güçlenerek çıkması kendileri için ciddi bir güvenlik sorunu haline gelmiştir. Bu çerçevede, bu dönemden itibaren Irak konusunda, Türkiye ve KİK ülkelerinin politikaları birbirlerine uyumlu hale gelmiştir.

İlişkileri etkileyen bölgesel gelişmelerden ikincisi, Ortadoğu'da etkisini arttıran İran konusu olmuştur. KİK ülkeleri için en ciddi tehdit olarak görülen İran'ın, Irak'ta varlığını güçlendirmesi, körfez ülkelerinde mevcut

Şii nüfus üzerinden içişlerine müdahale etmesi ve nükleer kapasiteye sahip olma faaliyetleri, Körfez Arap ülkelerinin politikalarında değişime sebep olmuştur. Geleneksel müttefikleri olan ABD'nin, tüm bu gelişmeler karşısında körfez ülkelerinin güvenlik kaygılarını paylaşmaması, KİK ülkelerinin bölgesel ittifaklar arayışına girmesinde etkili olmuştur. Bu bağlamda, körfez ülkeleri Türkiye'yi İran karşısında dengeleyici bir güç olarak görmüş ve 2000'li yılların ortasından itibaren Türkiye ile ilişkilerini geliştirme yoluna girmişlerdir. Türkiye bu dönemde, her ne kadar İran'ın bölgede etkisini arttırmasını hoş karşılamasa da, körfez ülkelerinin öngördüğü şekilde Sünni blok içine girerek İran karşıtı bir politika izlemekten de kaçınmıştır.

Bölgesel gelişmeler açısından ilişkilere etki eden bir diğer unsur da İsrail-Filistin çatışmasında Türkiye'nin takındığı tutum olmuştur. Özellikle Türkiye başbakanının uluslararası platformlarda Arapları destekleyen konuşmaları ve Türkiye-İsrail ilişkilerinde oluşan gerginlik körfez ülkeleri yönetimleri için olmasa bile Arap toplumu nezdinde Türkiye'nin önemini arttırmıştır.

Türkiye-KİK ülkeleri ilişkilerini etkileyen uluslararası dinamiklere bakıldığında ABD'nin bölgeye yönelik politik yaklaşımının önemli bir yer tuttuğu söylenebilir. ABD'nin 2003'te Irak'ı işgali ve 2009'da Irak'ta askerini geri çekerek İran'ın burada etkisini arttırmasına sebep olması hem Türkiye hem de Körfez Arapları için olumsuz bir durum olarak görülmüştür. Yine ABD'nin Büyük Ortadoğu Projesi kapsamında bölgenin güç dengelerini değiştirecek politikalar üretmesi ve müslüman toplumlar nezdinde nefret kazanması her iki taraf açısından önemli sorunların yaşanmasına neden olmuştur. Aynı zamanda, ABD ile İran arasında nükleer faaliyetler konusunda antlaşma sağlanması körfez ülkeleri için ciddi endişelere sebep olmuştur.

Yukarıda sayılan nedenlere ek olarak ABD'nin, 2008'te finansal krize girmesi ve sonrasında yönetime gelen Başkan Obama'nın, ABD'nin Ortadoğu politikasında önemli değişiklikler yaparak askeri müdahalelere

sınır koyması ve Basra Körfezi'ndeki askeri gücünün bir kısmını Pasifik bölgesine taşıyacağını açıklaması, körfez ülkelerinin İran tehdidi karşısında en önemli güvenlik müttefiği olan ABD'ye alternatif bulma çabalarını da beraberinde getirmiştir.

Körfez ülkelerinin NATO ile işbirliği yapma kapsamında Türkiye'nin öncülük ettiği İstanbul İşbirliği Girişimi'ne üye olmaları, AB ile ilişkilerini geliştirme girişimleri, ortak Arap askeri gücü oluşturma faaliyetleri ve Türkiye'yi de kapsayacak şekilde İran'a karşı Sünni blok oluşturma çabaları bu çerçevede değerlendirilebilir.

Dördüncü bölümde, 2000'li yıllarda Türkiye-KİK ülkeleri arasındaki ilişkilerin politik, güvenlik, ekonomik ve sosyal boyutları ele alınmıştır. Bu dönemde taraflar arasında ki politik gelişmeler ivme kazanmıştır. İlk olarak, 2004 yılında İslam Konferansı Örgütü başkanlığına ilk defa Türkiye'den bir ismin seçilmesi önemli bir gelişme olarak görülebilir. İkincisi, KİK'in 2008 yılında Türkiye'yi stratejik ortak olarak ilan etmesi ilişkilerin önemli bir boyuta ulaşmasını ve kurumsallaşmasını sağlamıştır. Üçüncüsü, karşılıklı olarak iki taraf liderlerinin ziyaretlerindeki artışı gösterebiliriz.

Taraflar arasındaki güvenlik ilişkilerine bakıldığında bölgesel sorunlar hakkında genel olarak bir uyum olduğu söylenebilir. Şöyle ki, her iki tarafta İran'ın bölgesel politikalarından ve etkisinin artırmasından rahatsızlık duymuş ve gerek Irak sorununda gerekse nükleer faaliyetleri konusunda endişeleri paylaşmışlardır. Buna rağmen, KİK ülkelerinin İran karşısında etkili olacak Sünni blok oluşturma çabaları ise Türkiye tarafından pek karşılık görmemiştir. Bu dönemde taraflar arasında savunma sanayi ticareti alanında da bazı gelişmeler kaydedilmiş ve Türkiye'nin körfez ülkelere yönelik askeri ürün ihracatında artış sağlanmıştır.

2000'li yıllarda ekonomik ve ticari ilişkilere göz atıldığında en fazla gelişimin bu alanda olduğu söylenebilir. Türkiye'nin yüzyılın başında neo-liberal ekonomiye geçmesi ve bu yönde reformlar yapması ve iktidarın müslüman ülkelere yönelik açılım yapma isteği, bunun karşılığında körfez

ülkelerinin de petrol fiyatlarında meydana gelen artışla fonlarını farklı ülkelere yönlendirme politikası ve Türkiye'deki iktidarla yakın ilişkiler kurma yönünde adımlar atması, üst düzey ziyaretlerin ekonomik problemleri aşılmasında önemli rol oynaması ve son olarak Körfez Arap ülkelerinin bölgedeki İran tehdidine karşı dengeleyici güç olarak gördükleri Türkiye'yi ekonomik olarak ihya edip karşılığında siyasi destek istemeleri gibi nedenler, ilişkilerin gelişiminde önemli etkenler olmuştur.

AKP'nin iktidara geldiği 2002 yılından günümüze, Türkiye-KİK ülkeleri arasındaki ticarete bakıldığında yaklaşık on katlık bir büyümeden söz edilebilir. Fakat hacim olarak ekonomik ilişkiler gelişmiş görünse de ticaretin niteliği ve uluslararası konjonktürün uygunluğu göz önüne alındığında ekonomik ilişkilerde bir patlamadan söz edilemez. Körfez ülkelerinin fon yatırımından Türkiye'nin yeterince faydalanamadığını da 'doğrudan dış yatırım' rakamlarından görülmektedir. Ayrıca nitelik ve çeşitlilik açısından bakıldığında belirli sektörler dışında ekonomik ilişkilerin sınırlı olduğu görülmektedir. Dolayısıyla ekonomik ilişkilerin henüz potansiyelinin altında olduğu kanısına varılabilir.

Bu dönemde enerji alanında da özellikle Türkiye'nin boru hattı projeleri için çabalar sarf ettiği görülmektedir. Fakat bu projelere hem büyük yatırımların gerekmesi hem de coğrafi uzaklık sebebiyle enerji alanında ilişkiler gelişmemiştir.

Son olarak, Türkiye-KİK ülkeleri ilişkilerinin sosyo-kültürel gelişimine baktığımızda bu dönemde iyi gelişmeler yaşandığı gözlemlenmektedir. Her iki tarafında birbirlerine karşı geçen yüzyıldan kalma önyargılardan uzak bir dil tercih etmeleri, kültürel ve tarihsel bağların ve ortak müslüman kimliğinin ön plana çıkarılması, Türkiye Başbakanı Erdoğan'ın İsrail aleyhinde uluslararası arenada yaptığı çıkışların Arap toplumunda karşılık bulması ve nihayetinde Türk dizilerinin Arap toplumunda uyandırdığı etkiler göze alındığında kültürel ilişkilerin geliştiğini söyleyebiliriz. Buna ek olarak, yeni yüzyılda iletişim ve ulaşım olanaklarının artması, karşılıklı olarak vize uygulamalarının kaldırılması, sosyal medya kullanımının

yaygınlaşması gibi etkenler de ilişkilerin gelişiminde önemli nedenler olarak yer almaktadır.

Beşinci ve son bölümde, 2010 yılında Tunus'ta başlayan Arap Ayaklanmalarının Türkiye-KİK ülkeleri ilişkilerine etkisi, iç, bölgesel ve uluslararası faktörler çerçevesinde incelenmiştir.

Arap Ayaklanmasının başlamasıyla birlikte diğer aktörler gibi Türkiye'de hazırlıksız yakalanmıştır. Bu dönemde, Türk dış politikasının değişimine dair çeşitli görüşler sunulmuştur. Bunlardan ilki, Türk dış politikasının düalist yapıya dönüştüğünü savunurken bir diğeri ise dış politikanın güvenlik boyutunun ön plana çıktığını öne sürmüştür. Dolayısıyla, Türkiye'nin 2000'li yıllarda kullandığı 'yumuşak gücün' yanında çıkarlarını koruması için mevcut şartlarda 'sert güc'ünde kullanılması gerektiği yönünde görüşler ortaya çıkmıştır. Ayrıca Arap Ayaklanması sonrası dönemde Türkiye'nin geleneksel dış politika ilkesi olan başkalarının iç işlerine karışmama ilkesinin de terk edildiği görüşü de ön plana çıkmıştır.

Arap Ayaklanması bölgesel gelişmeler üzerinden değerlendirildiğinde, ilk olarak bölgesel gelişmelerin doğrudan ve artan biçimde Türkiye-KİK ilişkileri üzerinde belirleyici olduğu görülmektedir. Türkiye açısından bakıldığında Kürt sorununun Suriye'deki gelişmeler sonucunda uluslararası bir boyut kazandığı ve sorunun çözümünün daha da zorlaştığı söylenebilir. Suriye'nin kuzeyinde Kürt kantonlarının kurulması, Kürt milliyetçiliğinin yayılması ve PKK'nin bu bölgede etkinliğinin artması Türk dış politikası üzerinde ciddi etkilerde bulunmuştur.

ABD'nin Irak'a müdahalesiyle değişen bölgesel dengeler, 2000'li yıllarda İran'ın bölgesel güç olma yolunda ilerleyişini tetiklemiştir. Türkiye bu dönemde, bir yandan İran'la ilişkilerini sürdürürken öte yandan Körfez Arap devletleri ile ilişkilerini geliştirerek iki taraf arasında dengeli bir dış politika sürdürmeye gayret etmiştir. Fakat 2011 yılında Suriye'de başlayan ayaklanmalar sonrası Türkiye ile İran'ın politikaları farklılaşmış ve Türkiye bütünüyle körfez ülkeleriyle hareket etmeye başlamıştır. Yine, İran'ın

nükleer kapasiteye sahip olması konusunda Türkiye olumlu bir tutum içerisindeyken son dönemde bölgede yaşanan gelişmeler nedeniyle bu tutumunu sürdürmekten vazgeçmiş ve Batılı devletler ile İran'ın nükleer faaliyetlerini kısıtlayan antlaşmasını olumlu karşılamıştır.

KİK ülkelerinin Arap Ayaklanmalarına yaklaşımlarına bakıldığında ilk dönemlerde olayların kendi ülkelere sıçramasına karşı bazı tedbirler aldıkları görülmüştür. Olayların farklı ülkelere yayılmasıyla birlikte, Körfez Arap ülkeleri insiyatif olarak ve özellikle ekonomik anlamda muhaliflere yardım da bulunarak müdahil olmuşlardır. Fakat ilerleyen dönemlerde Körfez ülkeleri arasında bazı politik farklılıklar da ortaya çıkmıştır. Özellikle Mısır'daki olaylarda Katar ile diğer üye ülkeler arasında görüş ayrılıkları baş göstermiştir.

Türkiye-KİK ilişkilerinin Arap Ayaklanması sonrası seyrinde uluslararası gelişmelere bakıldığında özellikle ABD'nin bölgeye yönelik politikaları önemli bir yer teşkil etmektedir. Arap Ayaklanmaları öncesinde ABD yönetiminde meydana gelen değişim bu ülkenin Ortadoğu politikalarına da yansımıştır. Obama yönetimi, ilk iş olarak Irak'ta bulunan askerlerini geri çekerek bölgede oluşan güç boşluğunun İran tarafından doldurulmasına olanak sağlamakla kalmamış aynı zamanda Basra Körfezinde mevcut bulunan askeri varlığında da azalmaya gidileceğini açıklamıştır. Şüphesiz bu kararların altında 2008 yılında yaşanan finansal krizin yanı sıra, Ortadoğu coğrafyasında ABD'ye yönelik nefretin artmasının da büyük payı vardır. Bu bağlamda, Arap Ayaklanmaları sonrasında ABD'nin bölgesel politikaları nispeten pasif kalmış ve direkt müdahalelerden kaçınmıştır. ABD'nin çıkarlarını düşük maliyetli seçeneklere ağırlık vererek koruma yönündeki iradesi, bölgedeki askeri ve mali yükten kendini kurtarma çabaları ve Ortadoğu'daki stratejik müttefiklerinden farklı politik uygulamaları doğal olarak Türkiye-KİK ilişkilerine de yansımıştır.

2010 sonrası Türkiye-KİK ilişkilerinde, hem her iki tarafın ortak hareket alanları artmış hem de bazı konularda görüş farklılıkları ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu dönemde, iki tarafın politik çıkarlarının uyduğu, yine her iki tarafında

bölgede askeri müdahalelere mesafeli duran ABD'nin yerine farklı güç arayışlarına girdiği, bu süreçten kazançlı çıkan İran'ı sınırlama isteği ve bu kapsamda iç ve bölgesel güvenlik anlayışlarının benzeştiği söylenebilir. İki taraf arasındaki görüş farklılıklarının temelinde ise Müslüman Kardeşler oluşumuna yaklaşımları yatmaktadır. Özellikle Mısır konusunda, Suudi Arabistan, Kuveyt ve Birleşik Arap Emirlikleri farklı bir tutum takınırken, Türkiye ve Katar Müslüman Kardeşleri destekleyici bir politika tercih etmişlerdir.

Beşinci bölümün bu kısmında, Arap Ayaklanmalarının meydana geldiği ülkelerdeki gelişmelerin ilişkilere etkisi irdelenmiştir. İlk olarak 2010 yılında Tunus'ta başlayan ayaklanmalar karşısında hem Türkiye hem de körfez ülkeleri temkinli bir politika sürdürmüşlerdir. Tunus'ta iktidarın değişmesi ile birlikte Türkiye bu ülkeyle yakın ilişkiler kurmuş, körfez ülkeleri ise ekonomik yardımlar yapmakla yetinmiştir.

Libya'da ayaklanmaların başlamasıyla birlikte Türkiye'nin ekonomik nedenlerle rejimin yanında yer aldığı görülürken Katar ve Birleşik Arap Emirlikleri ise bu ülkeye karşı kurulan koalisyonda rejim karşıtlarının yanında yer almıştır. Daha sonra ki süreçte Türkiye muhalifleri desteklemeye başlamış ve dış politikasını revize ederek geçiş sonrası hükümete destek olmuştur.

Mısır'da meydana gelen gelişmelerde ise Türkiye ve Katar dışındaki KİK ülkeleri arasında ciddi politik ayrışma yaşanmıştır. Türkiye, Katar ile birlikte Müslüman Kardeşler yönetimini desteklerken diğer körfez ülkeleri Mısır'da Müslüman Kardeşler iktidarını alaşağı eden darbe yönetimini desteklemişlerdir. Suudi Arabistan, Müslüman Kardeşler sorununu iç tehdit olarak algılamış ve bunun sonucunda Türkiye ile ilişkilerine mesafe koymuştur. Aynı zamanda, KİK üyesi Katar yaptırımlar sonucunda diğer körfez ülkelerinin pozisyonuna gelmek durumunda kalmıştır. Sonuçta, Mısır konusunda yaşanan gelişmeler Türkiye-KİK ülkeleri ilişkileri bakımından olumsuz sonuçların doğmasına neden olmuştur.

Bahreyn’de yaşanan gelişmeler ve Körfez Arap ülkelerinin bu ülkeye askeri müdahaleleri karşısında Türkiye’nin tutumu sessiz kalmak olmuştur. Körfez ülkelerinin güvenliğini doğrudan ilgilendiren bu konuda Türkiye, körfez devletlerinin içişlerine karışmama ve azınlıklar konusunda hassasiyet gösterme pozisyonunda bulunmuştur.

Benzer olarak Yemen’deki gelişmelerde de Türkiye, KİK ülkelerinin askeri ve siyasi müdahalelerine destek olmuş ve ayaklanmaların meydana geldiği diğer ülkelere yönelik politikasını Yemen’de göstermeye kaçınmıştır.

Son olarak Suriye’deki gelişmelere bakıldığında Türkiye-KİK ilişkilerini en çok etkileyen gelişmelerin bu ülkede yaşandığını söylemek mümkün olacaktır. İlk olarak, Türkiye’nin komşusu Suriye’deki gelişmelere doğrudan müdahale etmesi, geleneksel dış politikasından büyük bir sapma olarak değerlendirilmiştir. İkinci olarak, Suriye’nin kuzeyinde Kürtlerin kantonlar kurarak önemli bir güç haline gelmesi Türk dış politikasının temel gündem maddesi haline gelmiştir. Üçüncü olarak, Türkiye’nin ve KİK ülkelerinin, Suriye’de muhalifleri desteklemesi fakat bu konuda uyum sorunu yaşamaları politik açmazların doğmasına sebep olmuştur. Dördüncüsü, Suriye meselesinde, İran dışında Rusya’nın aktif bir rol alarak rejimi desteklemesi bölgedeki güç dengelerinin yeniden oluşmasına olanak vermiştir. Son olarak, ABD’nin Suriye meselesini tamamen İŞİD temelinde ele alması ve stratejik ortaklarının beklediği şekilde askeri müdahalelerden kaçınması, Türkiye’nin ve KİK ülkelerinin hem iç hem de bölgesel ölçekte politikalarını etkilemiştir.

Arap Ayaklanmaları sürecinde Türkiye-KİK ülkeleri ilişkilerinin genel olarak geliştiğini, tarafların politik çıkarlarının –Mısır dışında- uyuştüğunu, ilişkilerde güvenlik boyutunun ön plana çıktığını fakat taraflar arasında uyum sorununun aşamadığı söylenebilir.

Tezin son bölümünde ise sonuç kısmı yer almaktadır. 2000’li yıllarda, Türkiye-KİK ilişkilerinin her anlamda gelişmeler kaydettiği söylenebilse de, ilişkilerde büyük atılımların gerçekleştiğini söylemek mümkün

görünmemektedir. Arap Ayaklanmaları sonrasında her iki tarafın bölgesel dış politikalarında ve çıkarlarında bir uyuşma söz konusu olsa da, belirli bir politik uyumdan, yapısal farklılıklar nedeniyle, söz edilememektedir. İlişkilerin önümüzdeki dönemde güvenlik eksenli olarak devam edeceği, iç ve bölgesel gelişmelerin sonucuna bağlı olarak ilişkilerin bugünkü durumundan daha ileriye taşınmasının mümkün olmadığı ve hatta ilişkilerin seyrinin geriye doğru gideceği kanısındayım.

B. TEZ FOTOKOPİSİ İZİN FORMU

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YAZARIN

Soyadı : PALANCI

Adı : MEMET CAN

Bölümü : ULUSLARARASI İLİŞKİLER

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