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Turkey and Saudi Arabia: Newly Discovered Partners?

Muhittin Ataman



ABSTRACT

When we consider Saudi Arabian large population, territories and natural resources, it is obvious that it will continue to preserve its geopolitical, geo-economic and geo-cultural importance in future. The assumption of King Abdullah as the ruler of the country provided an opportunity to restructure the country's foreign policy. The new king began to follow a more pragmatic, rational, interdependent, multilateral and multidimensional foreign policy. He pursues an active foreign policy required to be less dependent on a single state (the United States) and on a single product (oil).

Due to their different regime types and ideologically-oriented foreign policies, relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia did not progress throughout the 20th century. However, Ankara and Riyadh improved their bilateral relations during the AK Party government and the reign of King Abdullah. Parallel to its new foreign policy principles such as zero-problems with neighbors, maximum cooperation, pro-activism, rhythmic diplomacy, the AK Party improved its relations with Saudi Arabia. King Abdullah responded accordingly. In addition, recent developments such as the Arab revolts in the region push the two countries to improve their cooperation further.



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Author: Muhittin Ataman
Research Assistant: Gülşah Neslihan Demir

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TURKEY AND SAUDI ARABIA: NEWLY DISCOVERED PARTNERS?

I. INTRODUCTION: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was established as a result of the competition between two Arab families (Sheriff Hussein and Abdul-Aziz bin Saud) supported by the British against the Ottomans after the First World War. Due to its geostrategic, geo-cultural and most importantly geo-economic characteristics, Saudi Arabia is considered as one of the most significant states of the Muslim world and the Middle East. Saudi Arabia, under the rule of the oldest and the most stable kingdom of the Arab world, has been following a policy dependent on oil and the West. After securing national stability through the Saudi dynasty, close relations were established with the British.

Traditional Saudi Arabian foreign policy has been determined by four basic objectives. These are the preservation of an Islamic way of life in both domestic and foreign settings, the maintenance of territorial integrity, national prosperity, and the continuation of the royal regime.¹ Security, political, and economic needs of the country have been provided in the framework of these four factors. Since its independence, Saudi administrations were heavily dependent on the West in achieving these objectives. Saudi Arabia, which became dependent on the US in the wake of the Second World War, collaborated with the "Christian" West against the "atheist" Soviet Bloc and opposed the reformist Egypt under the leadership of Nasser and other Soviet collaborators.

With the increase of defamation campaigns in the West against Islam and Muslims after the Cold War, the Saudi administration found it more difficult to initiate relations with the West without incurring political and social problems. Riyadh, which based the existence of the state and the legitimacy of the al-Saud family upon the Islamic sources, was stuck between the anti-Islam/anti-Muslim West and its Muslim people. As both the exclusionist developments in the Western world against Islam and Muslims and the awareness of the Saudi people increased, there was less chance for Saudi authorities to

1. Muhittin Ataman, "Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," in Wolfgang Gielert ve Kemal Inat (Ed.) **Foreign Policy in the Greater Middle East: Central Middle Eastern Countries**, Berlin, Germany: Wiessenschaftlicher Verlag, 2005, pp. 85-102, p. 86.



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achieve a balance between the two sides. The understanding of peaceful coexistence was damaged as a result of serious changes in mutual perceptions.

Since the executors of the September 11 attacks were mostly Saudi Arabian citizens, Saudi Arabia, one of the closest regional allies and strategic partners of the US for decades, became for the first time the subject of discussion in the American media and political circles. The American perception and the general image of the country were significantly changed. As will be explained in the following pages, Saudi Arabia experienced a significant restructuring in its relations with the US after this event, which is considered as a milestone for all Middle Eastern states. The US began to redefine the Middle Eastern political, economic, and social structures in the framework of the Greater Middle Eastern Project (GMEP). Analyses and plans made regarding the future of the region demonstrate that both domestic and foreign policies of Saudi Arabia would not be as “stable” and “problem free” as they used to be. In the wake of September 11, the Wahhabi version of Islam replaced the Shi’a version, which was “otherized” after the Islamic revolution as a dangerous ideology and as a fundamentalist understanding.

However, the mutual relations did not come apart because of the interdependence between the two countries— the American dependence on oil and the Saudi dependence on US support for the continuation of its regime and economic interests. With the outbreak of the Arab Spring at the end of 2010 and the spread of uprisings to many regional countries, mutual relations between the Kingdom and the US significantly improved. Even though the main quest of uprisings were/are greater political participation, political freedoms, and better economic conditions, Washington and Riyadh remained on the same side throughout the process. In particular, they have strengthened their relationship during the Syrian crisis.

II. RESTRUCTURING IN SAUDI ARABIAN FOREIGN POLICY: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL AND MULTILATERAL FOREIGN POLICY UNDERSTANDING

Compared with the previous period, Saudi Arabia has been trying to integrate with international society and to open its society, politics, and economics to the world since King Abdullah came to power in 2005. It began to take on more responsibilities within international organizations and to sign and internalize more international documents such as the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization. The significant increase in the interactions of Saudi authorities (visits of Saudi authorities to other states and visits of foreign officials to the country) since 2005 is an indication of the Saudi integration with international society. The most radical foreign policy breakthrough in the kingdom’s history was achieved in 2006, the first year of King Abdullah,² with the transformation, diversification, and restructuring in both domestic and foreign policy. With the help of

2. Muhittin Ataman, “Suudi Arabistan 2006,” in Kemal İnat ve Muhittin Ataman (Ed.), *Ortadoğu Yılıığı 2006*, Ankara: Nobel Yayın Dağıtım, 2007, pp. 217-246.

the increasing critiques from the US and other Western countries, the Saudi Kingdom began to instigate a multidimensional and interdependent foreign policy in order to secure self sufficiency and to decrease its dependence on foreign powers.

Saudi Arabia intensified its foreign political activities in order to ensure a great deal of goals: maintaining its territorial integrity and national security, preventing likely regional Iranian hegemony, thwarting the emergence of any challenging power in the Gulf directed to its regional hegemony, avoiding conflicts or tensions with its longtime collaborator (the US), maintaining its status in the Arab world, and preventing any radical political change in the region.³ As mentioned by the Crown Prince Saud Al-Faisal in one of his interviews, Saudi Arabia began to follow a multilateral and independent foreign policy. For example, the country began diversifying its weapon sources. Al-Faisal attributed this to three rationales: "First, we do not want to depend on one source. Second, we want to buy the most sophisticated weapons for our armed forces. Third, we want to transfer information technologies."⁴ This means that Riyadh was trying to get rid of its traditional Western dependency by finding new political and economic partners and by initiating a new process of cooperation.

The elderly King Abdullah began to make foreign visits previously unprecedented in the country's history.⁵ Leading businessmen of the country accompanied the king during these visits, as opposed to members of the Saudi Dynasty. This demonstrates the change in foreign policy understanding as well as the domestic political mindset. King Abdullah undertook an active foreign policy in order to make Saudi Arabia effective in multilateral and international platforms and to end the longtime dependency on one state (the US) and one product (oil). He attempted to secure a respectable position for his country in the Middle East and in the Arab and Muslim worlds.

Saudi Arabia underwent a favorable and dynamic economic period due to the rising prices of oil and its membership in the World Trade Organization in 2005. The new king tried to use the prosperity brought by these two developments in a different direction. Saudi Arabia's relatively open economic foreign policy allowed for diversification of the kingdom's economy in terms of both production of goods and finding new trade partners. As a result, Saudi Arabia is nowadays more integrated with the world in political, economic, social, and cultural spheres.

Several significant multilateral meetings organized by King Abdullah can be considered as indications of his active, multidimensional and multilayered foreign policy, especially in the cultural realm. The King arranged an international conference called the "International Islamic Dialogue Meeting," which brought 600 state representatives,

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3. Abdulbari Atwan, "Suudi Arabistan Neyin Peşinde?" **Radikal**, 11 February 2007.

4. Tariq Alhomayed, "Asharq Al-Awsat Interviews Saudi Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz," **Asharq Al-Awsat**, 8 January 2007.

5. King Abdullah made a historic 14 day visit to four important Asian states (China, India, Pakistan and Malaysia) in January 2006. He became the first king visited China ever, India in fifty years and Pakistan in thirty years. He made official visits to Spain, France and Poland on 18-24 June 2007. This highest level visit was the first to Spain in 27 years. He became the first Saudi king who visited Poland ever. He visited four European countries (England, Italy, Vatican and Germany) in November 2007. During his visit to Italy, he visited Vatican and met with Pope Benedictus the 16th, the leader of the Catholic world.



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thinkers, and scholars together to discuss inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue among Muslims.⁶ The King established the Dialogue of Followers of Religions and Cultures, a platform aspiring to improve the culture of dialogue in the world. Furthermore, the King called for a World Dialogue Conference, held in Madrid, in which academics and leaders from different religions in 54 countries discussed the culture of tolerance.⁷ These two meetings in the cultural sphere are politically significant since the Kingdom, which is traditionally fundamentalist and exclusionist, began to embrace other thoughts, ways of life, and civilizations. The King also organized the International Energy Conference in Jeddah in June 2008, in which 36 countries, including the leading oil exporters and importers in the world, discussed the stability of the global energy market.⁸

Redefinition of Saudi-American Relations

Saudi-American relations moved along an unstable track since the September 11 attacks. Emerging problems between Washington and Riyadh caused significant changes in their perceptions and approaches towards one other. For instance, many Americans claimed that the Saudi Kingdom should be destroyed for supporting radical Islam and spreading international terrorism. The paradoxical dimension in Saudi-American relations has continued. Sometimes it is claimed that the traditional alliance between the two states will deteriorate; at others, it is emphasized that the two need each other. On the one hand, there is a strong suspicion against a country ruled with a religion-centered anti-Westernist understanding by the West; on the other hand, Saudi Arabia is a longtime ally of the US and the West in the region.

Interdependence between these two countries, the largest consumer and the largest producer countries of oil in the world, will continue in future. The US is still the biggest trading partner of the Kingdom. Saudi businessmen are among the largest investors in the United States and the Kingdom is one of the leading buyer countries of American treasury bonds. American dependence on oil and natural gas still continues. President Bush's two visits to the Kingdom in 6 months demonstrated this American dependence, both economic and political. In return, the President hosted the King in his farm located in Texas, again showing his gratitude for the continuous support.⁹

When Washington faced a predicament after the invasion of Iraq, it needed the help of Saudi Arabia, its traditional ally. Vice President Cheney asked Riyadh to support American policies in Lebanon and Iraq during his meeting with King Abdullah in November 2006.¹⁰ However, American invasion of Iraq did not solve a regional problem; on the contrary, it brought a Shi'a administration to power. This new condition, which disturbed all Sunni states and communities in the region, was/is one of the results of American failure in Iraq. Saudis, who pursue leadership of the Arab world and include

6. "Mekke'deki Diyalog Toplantısı Övgü Topladı," *Zaman*, 7 June 2008.

7. "Suud Kralı, Dini Liderleri Diyalog İçin Madrid'te Buluşturdu," *Zaman*, 18 July 2008.

8. "Petrol Üreten Ülkeler Bir Araya Geliyor," *Zaman*, 13 June 2008.

9. "Kralın At Çiftliğinde Petrol Pazarlığı," *Radikal*, 16 January 2008.

10. "US Seeks Saudi Help," *Herald Sun*, 27 November 2006.

a considerable Shi'a minority in the oil-rich regions of the country, were among the countries most influenced by the American failure. As a result, the Kingdom increasingly deviated from the American perspective regarding regional issues.

Saudi Arabia will be among the first states to play a decisive role in a possible American intervention against Iran. American officials need the support of Saudi Arabia and other Sunni Arab states against the challenge of Al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran. In this framework, the US administration agreed to a \$60 billion arms deal with Saudi Arabia in 2010 in order to balance the Iranian regional influence as well as to fortify its bilateral security relations. Through the biggest arms deal in US history, the US administration agreed to sell 84 F-15 fighter jets, upgrade 70 existing Saudi F-15s, and to sell helicopters, missiles, bombs, delivery systems, and accessories such as night-vision goggles and radar warning systems.¹¹

Yet, although Riyadh is one of the significant supporters of the American struggle against international terrorism, it is reluctant to follow the US in all matters. For instance, it declined the American demand to raise oil production and to reduce oil prices. Riyadh has also called on Washington to follow an impartial policy towards the Middle East and to stop the Israeli atrocities.¹² Therefore, considering that bilateral relations cannot be limited to security and oil issues, both sides will have to reconsider and redefine their alliance based upon the recent developments in the region. During the Obama Administration relations between these two states have improved. They continue to cooperate in the struggle against international terrorism and preserving the security and status quo of the region, as well as for the stability of the energy market and economic development.¹³

A More Active Role in the Arab World

Saudi Arabia has recently taken significant steps to play a more active role in the Arab world. It canalized all political, economic and cultural recourses and opportunities. For example, it uses the most sacred cities of Islam (the source of legitimacy) and oil money (the source of wealth) to be perceived as a legitimate regional power. Riyadh began to develop an "Islamic" and "traditional" Arab identity and to strengthen Arab unity, and it emphasized taking a common attitude in regional questions such as Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq.¹⁴ For instance, the Kingdom revitalized the Peace Plan prepared by King Abdullah regarding the Palestinian problem. Continuing its active regional leadership policy, the Kingdom has struggled with Egypt to become the "guardian" of the Arab world and the hegemon of the region. It has followed and has taken initiatives in regional and global developments such as the proliferation of nuclear weapons, international terrorism, energy supply, the Palestinian issue, the Iraqi invasion and the

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11. Ewen MacAskill, "US Congress Notified over \$60BN Arms Sale to Saudi Arabia," *The Guardian*, 21 October 2010.

12. Khaled Almaeena, "Return to Reason, Mr. President," *Arab News*, 15 January 2008; Raid Qusti, "This Is Not the Time for Provocation: Saud," *Arab News*, 15 January 2008.

13. Al Toraifi, "America, Saudi Arabia and the World," *Asharq Alawsat*, 30 Haziran 2010.

14. Samir Al-Saadi, "Kingdom Calls for a Stronger Arab League," *Arab News*, 27 August 2006.



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Lebanese crisis. It tried to become part of the solution processes. As a result, the Kingdom has become an active regional player and an influential representative of the Arab world in global platforms such as the G-20.¹⁵

Saudi Arabia always emphasized Iraq’s security, stability, independence, territorial integrity, and unity of its peoples. Demanding the continuation of Iraq’s stability, Riyadh had to take an anti-American stance time to time to oversee regional balances and promote Iraq’s territorial integrity. During the 2007 Arab League Summit Meeting, King Abdullah emphasized that “Iraq experienced a civil war under an unfair invasion.” Since the first day of the Iraqi invasion, the Kingdom followed a balanced policy toward all sides of Iraqi politics. It asked for a common administration in Iraq comprised of Sunnis, Shi’as, and Kurds, rather than a predominantly Shi’a government.¹⁶ In this context, King Abdullah took the required steps to prevent denominational conflicts by meeting with Iraq’s leading Sunni and Shi’a authorities in October 2007. He claimed that denominational and ethnic separation of the country would only exacerbate the country’s problems.

Saudi Arabia has provided the biggest material support to Palestinians and offered the most concrete political proposal for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While Riyadh, has tried to keep Hamas away from anti status quo powers such as Iran, it has also mediated between the conflicting sides in spite of American and Israeli opposition to the formation of a unity government. Riyadh attempted to guide the Arab states in following a “balanced” anti-Israeli policy; that is, one that neither ignores the Palestinian conflict, nor opposes the American-led pro-Israeli international bias. King Abdullah mediated between Hamas and Al-Fatah during the 2006 Palestinian civil war. As a result of his efforts, Al-Fatah leader Mahmud Abbas and Hamas leader in-exile Khaled Mashal reached an agreement on 28 February 2007 and declared the “Mecca Declaration” to arrange the main principles of a unity government. King Abdullah’s plan stipulating the normalization of relations between Israel and the Arab states in exchange for the withdrawal of Israel from all occupied territories and the return of all Palestinian refugees to their homes was unanimously accepted in the Arab League Summit Meeting held in 2007. Riyadh called for support of the plan in the Annapolis Conference, organized by the US on the Palestinian problem and held in November 2007.

Saudi Arabia has followed an active policy regarding the Lebanese domestic conflict. Riyadh asked for an independent country with a stable and strong central government and insisted on a dialogue between the antagonist sides to maintain stability.¹⁷ Saudi Foreign Minister Saud Al-Faisal prepared a plan to end the tension between Lebanon and Syria. King Abdullah attempted to the end disputes not only between the pro-Western government and anti-Western Hezbollah, but also between Sunni and Shi’a groups.¹⁸ Saudi Arabia, aspiring for political and economic leadership of the Arab world, also took significant positive steps towards the Gulf States, Yemen, and Jordan.

15. “Mısır’la Arabistan Arasında G-20 Kavgası,” *Zaman*, 25 November 2008.

16. Omer Taspınar, “The Saudi-American Connection,” *Today’s Zaman*, 21 May 2007.

17. P. K. Abdul Ghafour, “Kingdom Calls for Dialogue in Lebanon,” *Arab News*, 5 December 2006.

18. “Hezbollah Seems to Agree with Saudi Arabian Arbitration,” *Today’s Zaman*, 6 January 2007.

After a summit meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in Doha on 3-4 December 2007, the member states signed an agreement and declared a common market and promised to use a common currency called Al-Khaleeji in near future.¹⁹ Yemen is in accession negotiations and expects to be a full member of GCC in 2015. Jordan's membership application was accepted and Morocco was invited to join GCC by GCC member countries in 2011.²⁰

Saudi Arabia continued its Arab opening until the break of the Arab Spring. The Kingdom improved its relations with Assad Regime in Syria and the Lebanese government and tried to cooperate with other Arab countries to preserve the regional status quo. This is why; it supported the Yemeni government during its struggle against Shia Huthi guerillas and Sunni al-Qaida militants. The Saudi administration intervened into the conflict and the crisis was transformed into an international problem. When Saudi forces attacked the Huthi guerillas, they attacked back on Yemeni and Saudi forces located in Saudi territories on November 3, 2009.²¹ Upon the failure of the Saudi and Yemeni armed forces, American forces intervened on the side of the governments in January 2010.²² In the Iraqi crisis, the Kingdom tried to balance the Iranian influence in the country and invited different Iraqi political groups and actors such as Kurds, Sunnis and Shias to Riyadh for consultation and abandoned its non-interventionist policy. In this context, the Kingdom began to fix its relations with the Arab states and to use its soft power, i.e. humanitarian assistance and development, in neighboring regions. It tried to improve its relations with its historical rival Jordan and it began to fix its relations with Syria after mutual visits by King Abdullah and Syrian President Assad in 2009. In the same year, Riyadh sent an ambassador to Damascus, which it had withdrawn after the assassination of then Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri in 2005. Furthermore, King Abdullah and Assad held a meeting in Lebanon in July 2010 to find a solution for the Lebanese crisis.

Regional Rivalry with Iran

Saudi Arabia had to be part of the anti-Iranian alignment offered by the US on the one hand but find ways of cooperation with Iran in different issue areas on the other. The Kingdom is among the first of those directly influenced by the American-Iranian conflict. Saudi officials have to be careful in their dealings with their longtime ally and supporter and one of their most important neighbors. The Kingdom especially faces a dilemma with Iran's development of nuclear energy and weapons of mass destruction issue. Although Riyadh finds anti-Iranian measures proposed by the US problematic in terms of regional stability, it claims that a nuclear Iran will cause more instability. Saudi Arabia advocates a diplomatic solution to the nuclear problem between Iran and global powers and eradicating of weapons of mass destruction in the region.

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19. P. K. Abdul Ghafour, "GCC Common Market Becomes a Reality," *Arab News*, 1 January 2008.

20. "Jordan, Morocco to Join GCC," *Khaleej Times*, 11 May 2011,

21. Mai Yamani, "Saudi Arabia Goes To War," *The Guardian*, 23 November 2009.

22. Muhittin Ataman ve Nuh Uçgan, "Suudi Arabistan 2010," in Kemal Inat ve Muhittin Ataman (Ed.), *Ortadoğu Yılı: 2010*, İstanbul: Açılım Yayınları, 2011, pp. 217-246.



The Kingdom does not want Iran, the biggest threat perceived by Riyadh, to be too powerful in the region; therefore, it has continued its anti-Iranian rhetoric and policy. The regional Shi'a formation under the patronage of Iran after the Iraqi invasion irritates the Saudi Arabian regime.

In contrast to the increasing tension between the US and Iran, Saudi-Iranian relations have improved. Although it is one of the first countries that would confront with Iran in a regional Shi'a-Sunni conflict, a considerable improvement can be observed in the multidimensional economic and political relations between the two states. Both states are reluctant to transfer to a Western-style political system, opposed to the import of a Western-style liberal democratic understanding and political regime in the Middle East, and prefer to preserve a state structure based upon their historical heritage and cultural codes.²³ The Kingdom invited Iran to the summit of the Gulf Cooperation Council in 2007, which was established against the Islamic Iran. This invitation resonated both in the region and the world. Ahmedinejad attended the summit and offered a cooperation package consisting of twelve points, including free trade, oil, and natural gas to the Council. This demonstrated the possibility of cooperation between the Gulf countries and Iran and the possibility for Arab countries to pursue interdependent policies.²⁴ Furthermore, acting on the invitation of King Abdullah, Iranian President Ahmedinejad visited Mecca and Medina to perform Hajj in 2007. During his visit, Ahmedinejad held a meeting with the King that emphasized cooperation and solidarity among the Muslim nations.

But in spite of these common attitudes and positive developments, the Kingdom does not want Iran, the biggest threat perceived by Riyadh, to be too powerful in the region; therefore, it has continued its anti-Iranian rhetoric and policy. The regional Shi'a formation under the patronage of Iran after the Iraqi invasion irritates the Saudi Arabian regime. Saudi officials fear that strengthening Iran will harm the legitimacy of their regime and instigate anti-Shi'a sentiments in their country. Furthermore, Riyadh sometimes accuses Iran for the instability in Lebanon due to its control on Hezbollah and claims that Iran has tried to expand its sphere of influence in the region.

With the change of the regional balance-of-power in favor of Iran after the domination of Shi'a political parties in Iraq and Lebanon, Saudi Arabia has increased its anti-Iranian rhetoric. Saudi Arabia, who supported the initiative of the UN Security Council permanent members and Germany, pursued a pro-American policy in the case of the Iranian nuclear issue. Supporting a nuclear weapons-free region, Saudi Arabia called on Iran to fulfill the conditions set by the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). As a result, Iran accused the Saudi administration for attacking the Shi'a Huthi guerillas in 2009 and 2010. With the break of the Arab Spring, especially in the cases of Bahrain and Syria, these two countries have begun to pursue more radical and more sectarian policies against one another.

New Openings with New Partners

Saudi Arabia materialized new foreign policy openings by interacting with countries from different parts of the world. Riyadh recently began to improve its cooperation

23. "Saudi Arabia, Iran Denounce Bush's New Appeal for Democracy," *Daily Star*, 2 February 2006.

24. "Körfez'den ABD'ye İran Mesajı," *Aksiyon Dergisi*, No: 679, 10 December 2007.

with global and regional powers in order to decrease its dependence on the US and recently improved close relations with different Asian, European, and African countries. The most recent improvement in Riyadh's relations with China, India, and Russia can be analyzed in terms of its diminishing its dependence on the US. As an indication of an increasing independent foreign policy, the Kingdom welcomed anti-American leaders such as Chavez of Venezuela, Ahmedinejad of Iran, and Putin of Russia to the country. King Abdullah took significant steps with several Asian states. During his first year as king in 2006, he made a historic 14-day visit China, India, Pakistan and Malaysia accompanied by five planes full of ministers, bureaucrats, and businessmen. Some observers considered this visit as a "strategic change" and "rebalancing" of the Kingdom's foreign policy and "the beginning for a new period" for the state.²⁵ The King discussed the possibility of cooperation between the second biggest consumer of oil in the world (China) and the biggest exporter of oil (Saudi Arabia) especially in energy and trade sectors. As a result, China has occupied a more significant place in Saudi foreign trade. By 2010, when the trade between the two countries reached almost \$40 billion, Saudi Arabia became the biggest trade partner of China in the Middle East. And when China signed a free trade agreement with the Gulf Cooperation Council, Saudi Arabia gave permission to Chinese energy companies to search for oil and natural gas.²⁶ King Abdullah became the first king to visit India in fifty years and Pakistan in thirty years. By visiting these two adversary powers at the same time, he demonstrated the new multilateral foreign policy orientation of the country.

Saudi Arabia has also developed bilateral relations with Russia and Japan. In 2007, Russian President Putin became the first Russian leader to visit the Kingdom. The two countries agreed to cooperation on regional and global questions, and the Iraqi and Palestinian problems in particular. The Saudi administration tried to get rid of its Western dependence by improving its bilateral relations with Russia in both economic and trading sectors as well as in security and weapon areas. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited the Kingdom on 28 April 2007 and met with King Abdullah and many other Saudi authorities. During his visit, Abe promoted bilateral cooperation in economic areas such as energy, investment, trade, and development.²⁷ Steps were taken in order to establish a "multilayered relationship" between the two countries. The two countries signed an agreement to for cooperation on air services in 2008 and a convention to avoid double taxation in 2010.²⁸

Saudi Arabia initiated new dialogues with different European countries as well. The King made official visits to Spain, France, and Poland on 18-24 June 2007. Many agreements were signed during this first visit to Spain. While in France, he discussed many

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25. Harsh V. Pant, "Saudi Arabia Woos China and India," *Middle East Quarterly*, v. 13, n. 4, Autumn 2006.

26. Chris Zambelis, "Shifting Sands in the Gulf: The Iran Calculus in China-Saudi Arabia Relations," *China Brief: A Journal of Analysis and Information*, c. 10, n. 10, May 13, 2010, s. 4-7.

27. "Abdullah, Abe to Discuss Key Issues," *Arab News*, 28 April 2007.

28. "Signing of the Convention between the Government of Japan and the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Tax Evasion with Respect to Taxes on Income," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan Web Page*, 15 November 2010, http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2010/11/1115_02.html.



During his first year as king in 2006, he made a historic 14-day visit to China, India, Pakistan and Malaysia accompanied by five planes full of ministers, bureaucrats, and businessmen. Some observers considered this visit as a “strategic change” and “rebalancing” of the Kingdom’s foreign policy and “the beginning for a new period” for the state.

regional and international issues such as Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, nuclear proliferation and international terrorism. He became the first Saudi king to visit Poland. The king visited four other European countries (England, Italy, Vatican and Germany) in November 2007. During his historic visit to Italy, he visited the Vatican and met with Pope Benedict, the leader of the Catholic world. The King met with President Horst Kohler and Prime Minister Angela Merkel in Germany. Leaders of England and France visited the Kingdom in return in 2008 and discussed many political and economic issues. The Kingdom has signed various agreements with European states to improve its relations in different issue areas. For example, Riyadh signed an agreement with Sweden (the Swedish Defense Research Agency) in 2005 and renewed it in 2010. According to that agreement, Sweden has helped Saudi Arabia, its largest trading partner in the Middle East with the construction of an arms factory that will produce anti-tank missiles.²⁹ While Sweden sold Riyadh some €330 million in defense technology in 2011, Finland has also received an export permit to deliver 36 grenade launchers to the Kingdom. In addition, Germany is preparing 270 Leopard 2 tanks for delivery and the United Kingdom is providing fighter jets. The EU is currently the world’s largest exporter of weapons to Saudi Arabia. The EU countries sold military equipments and licenses worth \$4.34 billion to the Kingdom in 2010.³⁰ May 2012 was declared as “Europe Month in Saudi Arabia” in order to improve cultural and social interactions between the two sides.

III. RELATIONS BETWEEN TURKEY AND SAUDI ARABIA

Turkish-Saudi relations began with the emergence of the al-Saud Family as a political actor in the second half of the 18th century. Saudi Arabia was established by al-Saud family after the First World War as a result of a long struggle against the Ottoman Turks. The al-Saud family revolted many times against the Ottomans from the end of 18th century to the 1920s; all Saudi revolts, which were both political and religious, were cracked down by Ottoman (and Egyptian) forces. Because of the conflicting political and religious understandings between the Wahhabi Saudis and the traditional Sunni Ottomans, the negative perception of Turks and Turkey in the Kingdom, and the influence of the British colonialists, bilateral relations between Ankara and Riyadh were generally characterized by conflict. Conflicting political regimes and different economic and social structures contributed to this tension. While the Kingdom employs the sharia/religious law, has a traditional social structure, and an autarchic economic system, Turkey has a strictly secular political system, a relatively Westernized social structure, and a liberal economic system. Even though Turkey became the first country to recognize the Saudi Kingdom when it was established in 1932, and more than 100,000 Turks lived in the Kingdom, bilateral relations between the two states remained low-profile.

29. “Anger over Sweden’s ‘Secret’ Saudi Arms Plant,” *Aljazeera Web Page*, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/europe/2012/03/20123718144905918.html>.

30. “EU Nations Sell the Most Arms to Saudi Arabia,” *Der Spiegel*, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/eu-makes-controversial-weapons-sales-to-saudi-arabia-a-822288.html>.

Relations during the Ottoman and Republican Eras (1745-2002)

The Wahhabi movement emerged as the most important religious and political threat to the Ottoman rule in the Arabian Peninsula. Wahhabis, who tried to establish a state based on the radical and revolutionary religious thoughts of Abdulwahhab, fought with the traditional Sunni Ottomans. When Abdul Aziz bin Saud invaded most of the Arabian Peninsula, including Hejaz, at the beginning of the 19th century, the Ottomans attacked the Wahhabi forces with the help of Muhammad Ali of Egypt. The Wahhabi forces were defeated and some of their leaders were sent to Istanbul where they were executed. However, in a very short period of time, Turki bin Abdullah gathered his fellow Wahhabis and declared the “first” Wahhabi state in 1821. Although it was not an independent state, it was free from Ottoman domination. The “second” Saudi state was established in 1902 by Abdulaziz bin Saud, who made an agreement with the British government during the Balkan and the First World wars for foreign support. The British promised bin Saud all lands that he occupied for his pro-British policy and support against the Ottomans. Abdulaziz bin Saud, who captured the Hassa region in 1913 and Hejaz after the First World War, proclaimed himself as “the King of Najd and Hejaz.” The “third” Saudi state was recognized in 1927 and was renamed in 1932 as “the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.”

With the signing of the Lausanne Treaty, the Republic of Turkey pursued a status quo-oriented foreign policy and accordingly recognized the independence of states founded on the former territories of the Ottoman State. Turkey signed a friendship treaty with the newly-founded Saudi state. Nevertheless, due to their different regime types and ideologically-oriented foreign policies, both Turkey and Saudi Arabia did not expand much effort to improve their bilateral relations; as a result, relations between the two countries did not improve further throughout the Kemalist period. Throughout the 20th century, only King Faisal visited Turkey in 1966 for several hours to attend an international conference. No Saudi king ever paid an official visit to Turkey throughout the 20th century in the context of bilateral relations.

When significant developments in bilateral relations began to take place in Turkey's political and economic realm during the Özal period, Turkey initiated a process of comprehensive economic and political restructuring. In this framework, Özalist Turkey improved its relations with Muslim countries, the Middle Eastern countries in particular, and embraced a positive approach towards Saudi Arabia in order to achieve its export-oriented economic model and to secure its oil demand. Improving relations were followed by bilateral visits between the two countries. While President Kenan Evren and Prime Minister Turgut Özal visited Riyadh in 1984 and 1985 respectively, the Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdulaziz came to Turkey in 1984. Turkish private actors such as construction companies also began to invest in the Kingdom.

Bilateral relations between Ankara and Riyadh entered a new phase during the first Gulf War. Turkey's regional policy that was in line with the UN Security Council Resolution and the American position attained Saudi confidence and appreciation. Saudi Arabia gave \$1.2 billion to the Turkish government and \$1 billion to the Turkish de-

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Saudi Arabia preferred to improve its cooperation with Turkey under Erdoğan's leadership and to pursue similar policies towards the region. The new leadership of AK Party and other national and regional developments contributed to the normalization and improvement of relations between the two countries since 2003.

fense fund in order to compensate Turkey's economic losses during the war. As a sign of improving bilateral relations, Turkish Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel visited the Kingdom in 1993. With the end of the Cold War, both countries pursued similar foreign policy orientations. That is, while they continued to ally themselves with the West, both Ankara and Riyadh began to diversify their foreign policy approaches.

Due to the political instability in Turkish domestic politics in the 1990s, there were ups and downs in bilateral relations. Bilateral relations improved at least in rhetoric during Erbakan's short-term government in 1996, but the strained political climate in the aftermath of the 28 February post-modern coup caused another rupture. The radical secularist understanding of the military-backed coalition government in Turkey reversed the route of bilateral relations and Ankara returned to its traditional approach of mistrust and neglect. Some low-scale crises such as the demolishment of Ajyad Tower, built in Mecca during the Ottomans, created further resentment between Riyadh and Ankara. However, when the AK Party came to power in 2002, a new period began in relations between the two countries.

Relations during the AK Party Period (2003-present)

The AK Party began to restructure Turkey's domestic politics and foreign relations, including its relations with Muslim countries. The Party reoriented its foreign policy by declaring significant principles such as zero-problems with neighbors, maximum cooperation, and pro-active, dynamic, and multidimensional foreign policy. In this sense, Turkey tried to solve bilateral problems and to increase cooperation with other countries, neighboring countries in particular. Parallel to this new understanding, the AK Party improved its relations with Saudi Arabia, which was still dependent on the West. Both Ankara and Riyadh attempted to decrease their dependence on global powers. Therefore, each country pursued a regional policy that did not alienate the other and did not increase their dependence on the West. While Turkey preferred a *regional* policy attempting to solve *regional* problems via *regional* dynamics, Saudi Arabia pursued a regional policy that did not marginalize Turkey in the Middle East. Saudi leaders thought that if Turkey was marginalized because of its increased regional initiatives, Ankara could get closer to Israel and the West and turn its back on regional countries, which would be contrary to the interests of Arab peoples. The Saudi Administration feared the re-establishment of a new Turkish-Israeli alliance in the region. Throughout the Kemalist leadership period, the more Turkey improved its relations with Israel and the West, the more it turned its back on the Arab peoples. Therefore, Saudi Arabia preferred to improve its cooperation with Turkey under Erdoğan's leadership and to pursue similar policies towards the region.³¹ The new leadership of AK Party and other national and regional developments contributed to the normalization and improvement of relations between the two countries since 2003.

31. "Türkiye'yi İsrail'e Kaptırmayalım," *El-Cezire Gazetesi*, Başyazı, 3 Mayıs 2005'ten çeviren *Radikal*, 4 May 2005.

Saudi Arabia and Turkey adopted relatively independent regional policies and agreed to cooperate in maintaining regional stability. Both countries reoriented their regional foreign policies as a result of domestic, regional, and international developments. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, when al-Qaeda, which caused the deterioration of Saudi Arabian relations with the West, began to challenge the authority of al-Saud family, the Kingdom decided to cooperate with Turkey against regional transnational threats. The struggle against transnational terrorism aggravated similar concerns among Saudi and Turkish authorities and the two began to understand and recognize their political differences. While Saudi Arabia began to acknowledge Turkey's pro-Western policy and its secular political system, Turkey gave up the "otherization" of the Kingdom. And although they were unable to stop the events in Iraq, both countries were concerned about the American invasion and adopted similar stances in the Iraq's Neighboring Countries Platform.

After the increase in mistrust between the Western countries and Saudi Arabia as a result of the September 11 attacks, the Kingdom began to look to alternative countries for partnership, especially for investment and economic cooperation. Turkey, as one of the fastest growing economies in the world and as an emerging regional power, was considered one of the best candidates for economic and political cooperation. The Saudi administration began to see Turkey as a military power to balance regional threats and to prevent instabilities, and as an economy with which it could increase bilateral trade and initiate joint projects.

In this context, Saudi Arabia and Turkey launched many economic initiatives. They signed the treaty establishing the Turkish-Saudi Business Council in 2003. In May 2005, Ankara and Riyadh decided to establish an investment fund in order to encourage Gulf country private and governmental investments in Turkey; the fund is to be governed by an international body and to be coordinated by the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce and Jeddah Chamber of Trade and Commerce.³² Moreover, Turkey and Saudi Arabia agreed to cooperate on regional political and social problems and to utilize regional dynamics in solving these problems. They signed a cooperation agreement on 12 February 2005 to fight transnational terrorism.³³ Thus, political elites of the Kingdom have tried to benefit from Turkey's military, political, and economic leverage in their dealings with regional political, economic, and cultural problems.

One of the best indications of the improvement of bilateral relations between the two capitals has been the high level official visits. The first visit by King Abdullah to Turkey in 2006 should be considered a milestone in Turkish-Saudi relations. This visit was historical due to several factors. It was the first top-level visit from Saudi Arabia to Turkey (besides King Faisal's few hours in Istanbul).³⁴

The participation of a large delegation made this meeting even more significant. Unlike the traditional royal trips, King Abdullah visited Ankara with a large delegation

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32. "Arap Sermayesine Fon," *Radikal*, 10 May 2005.

33. P. K. Abdol Ghafoor, "Kingdom, Turkey Ink Landmark Security Pact," *Arab News*, 13 February 2005.

34. "Suudi Arabistan Kralı Türkiye'deydi," *Anlayış*, September 2006, n. 7.



King Abdullah revisited Turkey in 2007 in order to congratulate Abdullah Gül on his presidential election and to exchange views with Turkish authorities about the Middle Eastern peace process.

including 400 ministers, businessmen, bureaucrats, and family members.³⁵ The two governments signed many agreements during this historical visit. Turkish and Saudi businessmen and entrepreneurs signed many agreements for common investments.³⁶ Businessmen from the two countries exchanged views in order to find investment opportunities and improve commercial relations. Saudi public and private institutions planned to invest \$25 billion in energy, finance, tourism, petroleum chemicals, and communications areas in Turkey. Turkish businessmen and companies currently handle \$30 billion in projects in Saudi Arabia.³⁷

The visit of 32,000 businessmen and tourists to Turkey in 2005 also indicates the increasing Saudi interest in Turkey.³⁸ Just before the global economic crisis, bilateral trade volume between Ankara and Riyadh increased to more than \$5.5 billion. It decreased somewhat because of the crisis, but remains much higher than it used to be. While Turkey sells industrial materials, textiles, agricultural products, machines, automobiles, and similar industrial goods, it mainly imports oil from the Kingdom.³⁹ Saudi Arabia and Turkey have also signed six agreements regarding political consultation, cooperation in exchanging state archives, encouraging and maintaining investments, prevention of double taxation, cooperation in the health sector, and transportation of passengers and cargo. King Abdullah's visit added a new security dimension into the bilateral relationship. The national and regional security questions were major discussion points since the regional security vacuum increased as a result of developments in Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, and Palestine. The Kingdom has been trying to get reduce its American dependency in the wake of 9/11 attacks in light of the increasing Western critiques of Wahhabi Islam and the Saudi Administration. Being concerned about the unilateral and conflictual American/Israeli-centered regional policies, the Saudi government improved its military and political relations with Turkey. Despite the Saudi dependence on American weaponry, the Saudi authorities began to exchange regional views with their Turkish counterparts.

King Abdullah revisited Turkey in 2007 in order to congratulate Abdullah Gül on his presidential election and to exchange views with Turkish authorities about the Middle Eastern peace process. President Gül welcomed the King at the airport and awarded him the State Medal of Honor, which has been granted to only seven foreign statesmen. In return, in a ceremony held at Çankaya Presidential Palace, King Abdullah granted the King Abdulaziz Medal of the First Degree to President Gül and awarded the Abdulaziz Legion of Honor to Prime Minister Erdoğan.⁴⁰ During this second visit, the two countries emphasized the necessity to diversify and improve relations. President Gül and King Abdullah signed a memorandum of understanding for strengthening

35. "Saudi King Abdullah to Visit Turkey on August 8," *Today's Zaman*, 3 September 2006.

36. "Kral 6 Anlaşma, Dostluk ve Milyar Dolarlık Yatırım Bıraktı," *Yeni Şafak*, 12 August 2006.

37. M. Ghazanfar Ali Khan, "Kingdom, Turkey Set to Boost Trade Ties," *Arab News*, 11 August 2006.

38. "Saudi King Abdullah to Visit Turkey on August 8," *Today's Zaman*, 3 September 2006.

39. "Suudi Arabistan Ülke Bülteni, Haziran 2010_Tr.Pdf," *Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler Kurulu*, http://www.deik.org.tr/Konseylcerik/1270/Suudi_Arabistan_Bülteni.html.

40. "Al Madalyanı Ver Madalyamı," *Radikal*, 10 November 2007.

political and economic cooperation between the two countries and a convention on the avoidance of double taxation. Having similar opinions about the problems in the Middle East, Riyadh and Ankara shared views regarding the Palestinian, Lebanese, Iraqi and Kurdish issues, and voiced opposition to both Iranian regional dominance and US intervention in regional issues.

While Turkey has been pursuing policy that does not alienate Iran in regional issues, Saudi Arabia accelerated a process of rapprochement with Turkey. Although Ankara and Riyadh try to be in contact with Iran, they initiated a process of establishing a Sunni cooperation against an Iran-led Shiite regional block. For example, upon the invitation of another Sunni state, Pakistan, ministers of foreign affairs from seven Sunni countries gathered in Islamabad on 25 February 2007. Pakistan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Egypt, and Jordan attended the meeting where the countries tried to adopt a common attitude towards regional problems. In the joint declaration, the priority was given to the Palestinian issue, the territorial integrity of Iraq, and Lebanese politics. These countries stated that the problem regarding Iran's nuclear energy production must be resolved through peaceful means.⁴¹

Parallel to the close relations between public institutions of the two countries, private sectors also increased their cooperation. For instance, The National Commercial Bank, which is the largest bank in Saudi Arabia, paid \$1.8 billion and acquired 60 percent of the shares of the Türkiye Finans Katılım Bankası belong to Ülker and Boydak groups.⁴² Ziraat Bank was granted a fully authorized banking license in Saudi Arabia in 2008. Ziraat Bank announced that it will establish seven additional branches in the country after its first branch opened in Jeddah.⁴³ Moreover, one of the leading Turkish communication companies, Yüksel Consortium won a water transportation tender in Saudi Arabia worth \$383 million. A Turkish construction firm, Yüksel Construction, also won the Saudi Arabia Eastern Region Water Pipeline Project tender of \$372 million in March 2008.⁴⁴

The strong relationship between Saudi Arabia and Turkey has continued in recent years. Multilateral active foreign policies adopted by Turkey and Saudi Arabia influenced the two countries to cooperate on regional and bilateral issues. Saudi Arabia's Chief of the Naval Forces Admiral Fahd bin Abdullah Mohammed al-Suud and the head of Shura Council Abdullah Bin Mohammed Bin Ibrahim al-Sheikh paid official visits to Turkey in 2009. In addition to official visits, the head of the Saudi Arabian Security Council Prince Bender Bin Sultan Bin Abdul-Aziz al-Suud and Prince Abdulaziz Bin Mohammed Bin Fahd al-Suud spent their holiday together with their families in Turkey in the same year. Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Ali Babacan accompanied a delegation visiting Jeddah in September 2008 to participate in the first ministerial meeting of the High Level Strategic Dialogue mechanism between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries

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41. "Ortadoğu İçin Sünni Dayanışması," *Radikal*, 26 February 2007.

42. "Türkiye Finans Suudi NCB'ye Satıldı," *Aksiyon*, n. 659, 23 July 2007.

43. "Ziraat Cidde'de Şube Açacak," *Hürriyet*, 6 February 2009.

44. "Turkish Firm Wins Saudi Project," *The New Anatolian*, 3 July 2007.



Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan visited the Kingdom twice in 2010. During his second visit, Erdoğan was awarded with the King Faisal International Prize, which is considered the Nobel Prize of the Arab world.

and Turkey.⁴⁵ It was the first regular consultation process between the GCC and a country. Babacan underlined that institutionalization of relations with the GCC countries will serve common interests and pave the way for cooperation. Minister Babacan took part in the meeting held by the Organization of Islamic Conference in Jeddah at the beginning of 2009 while Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan paid a one-day visit to Riyadh.⁴⁶ In February 2009, President Abdullah Gül paid a visit to Saudi Arabia. Gül called on Saudis to use Turkey for economic investment, education, tourism, and health services. President Gül, who was welcomed at the airport by the King, became the first president of a Muslim country who addressed the Saudi Shura consultative assembly.⁴⁷

Political, economic, and social relations between Turkey and the Kingdom continued to improve in 2010 and 2011 with mutual and rhythmic visits. Among others, Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan visited the Kingdom twice in 2010. During his second visit, Erdoğan was awarded with the King Faisal International Prize, which is considered the Nobel Prize of the Arab world. This prize was awarded due to his services to Islam; for example Erdoğan's courageous conduct towards Israeli President Peres during the Davos meeting in 2009.⁴⁸ Ankara and Riyadh signed a military cooperation agreement during Saudi Deputy Defense Minister Prince Sultan's visit in May 2010. After signing treaties to protect mutual investments and to avoid double taxation, Turkish-Saudi trade increased to \$4.65 billion by the end of 2010. According to the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the number of Saudi bookings increased by 75 percent.⁴⁹

Turkey and Saudi Arabia had been strongly dependent on the Western, especially American, support for decades. Recently both countries have tried to diversify their foreign relations without abandoning their friendly relations with the West. On the one hand, they have tried to improve their relations with other global powers to decrease their dependence on the West. On the other, they have improved bilateral and multilateral regional cooperation to decrease their dependence on global powers. The above-mentioned developments are indications of the improvement of bilateral relations in all spheres.

IV. SAUDI AND TURKISH APPROACHES TOWARDS THE ARAB REVOLTS: POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Considering its large population, large geography, and rich natural resources, it is clear that Saudi Arabia will remain a significant player in Middle Eastern politics. King Abdullah, who initiated a comprehensive reform program, has been pursuing a more pragmatic, rational, and economy-oriented foreign policy. He declared that "Saudis cannot remain the same while the world changes," and he accordingly built up a regional and

45. "Türkiye ile KİK Arasında Mutabakat Muhtırası İmzalandı," *Hürriyet*, 3 September 2008.

46. "Başbakan Erdoğan, Suudi Arabistan'a Gitti," *Hürriyet*, 3 January 2009.

47. Sultan Sooud Al-Qassemi, "Turkey and Saudi Arabia: The Buildup to Syria," *Today's Zaman*, 18 August 2011; Zeynep Gürçanlı, "Gül'den Suudi Arabistan'a 4 Çağrı," *Hürriyet*, 3 February 2009; "Gül: Terörle İşimiz Olmadı," *Hürriyet*, 4 February 2009.

48. "Erdoğan Awarded 'Nobel Prize' of Arab World," *Hurriyet Daily News*, 1 Aralık 2010.

49. Al-Qassemi, "Turkey and Saudi Arabia: The Buildup to Syria,"

global network “to develop bilateral and multilateral relations with countries all around the world in all fields” by scattering dependencies or “managed multi-dependence.”⁵⁰

However, rapidly changing global balances, the rising anti-Islamism in the West and regional instabilities have attracted regional and global intervention into Saudi politics. The Kingdom has to determine its foreign policy orientation according to both regional and global developments. Recent political openings of the Kingdom are indications of a new period of the country’s political and diplomatic orientation. Since King Abdullah came to power, the Kingdom has restructured and diversified its foreign policy and initiated a process of integration with the world community via internal and international openings and membership in international organizations.

By following a multi-lateral and multi-dimensional foreign policy Saudi Arabia and Turkey emerged as the most influential regional powers. Additionally, the possible production of nuclear weapons by Iran, the security of energy routes, and the Palestinian question made the two countries more interdependent. Both Ankara and Riyadh oppose the production of nuclear weapons by Iran or any other regional country. Both countries, which depend on the stability of the energy market, defend the security of energy routes. And Turkey and the Kingdom see the creation of a Palestinian state as a pre-condition of regional stability.

The Arab revolt, which has determined Middle Eastern politics since its inception at the end of 2010, required further cooperation between Turkey and the Kingdom. There are several factors that significantly influence both Saudi and Turkish regional foreign policies since the outbreak of the Arab revolts. The ramification of the revolts has been a change in regional power balances, and these new balances will influence Middle Eastern politics and Turkish-Saudi relations as well.

The continuation of the status quo and the pace of the changes

While both Turkey and the Saudi Kingdom do not support ruptures in the regional political system, they do not think the same thing about the continuation of the status quo and the pace of regional changes. Even though they differ on the speed of changes, both Saudi Arabia and Turkey prefer a gradual change and reform in the regional system, rather than revolutions, which may cause chaotic developments. They prefer it to maintain regional stability and both asked for a deliberate process of change. But once they think that political and social change is unavoidable, they begin to support popular demands. Therefore, both countries developed their relations with all regional states and all regimes, secular or traditional, in order to maintain regional stability. While Saudi Arabia has been supporting Islamic groups in general, which are the leading actors of the revolts, Turkey has been developing good relations with all ethnic and sectarian groups, including the Islamic ones.

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50. Gerd Nonneman, “Introduction,” in Gerd Nonneman (ed.), *Analyzing Middle East Foreign Policies and the Relationship with Europe*, New York: Routledge, 2005, pp. 1-5, p. 3.



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Saudi Arabia has been spending huge amounts of money and sending military troops, as in the Bahraini case, to keep the wave of the revolts away from its country as much as possible. Saudi Arabia will continue to try buying allies and regional stability by spending more money. However, Saudi leaders will soon learn that there are many things that money and the wealth of the country cannot buy such as freedom and ethnic and cultural values. While the Kingdom is quite successful in providing “bread,” it does not have the political will in providing freedom for its people.

Turkey, on the other hand, asks regional countries, including Saudi Arabia, to initiate comprehensive reform programs to provide both wealth and freedom for their peoples. With its strong economic structure, its stable political system, and its influential soft power, Turkey needs to encourage Riyadh, one of the potential partners, to be more responsive to its people’s demands. However, cooperation with pro-status quo Riyadh will erode the power of Turkey in the eye of the Arab revolutionaries. Therefore, for Saudi Arabia, acting with Turkey requires supporting the revolutionaries in Libya, Tunisia, and Syria. Cooperation between Turkey and Saudi Arabia will benefit Saudi Arabia more than Turkey. Acting with Turkey, the most popular regional country in the Arab streets, will bring the Kingdom closer to the revolutionaries and new regional power circles.

Regional power balances and the threat from Iran

One of the main pillars of Saudi and Turkish regional policies is the fear of Iran and balancing against possible Iranian hegemony. For instance, both countries tried to contribute to the reconstruction process of the country and supported Iyad Allawi during the Iraqi parliamentary elections held in 2010, in order to ensure Iraq was away from Iranian control. However, Ankara and Riyadh pursue different policies regarding Iran. While Turkey mainly follows a supra-sectarian regional policy and oppose Western military intervention, the Kingdom encourages the West to punish Iran. Saudi Arabia is especially concerned about the Iranian objective of creating a Shia region (*Shia Crescent*) in the Middle East. This would contain Saudi activities and compel the Kingdom to make all its regional plans based upon anti-Iranianism.

In this context, Saudi Arabia seeks cooperation with Turkey, another regional Sunni state concerned about Iranian regional hegemony. Saudi leaders are convinced that without Turkey, which nowadays claims influence in global power calculations as well as in the Arab streets, it is quite difficult to overcome the regional rivalry with Iran. The longtime regional balance between the moderate axis of Riyadh-Cairo and the radical Tehran-Damascus axis ended with the revolts in 2011. The Arab revolts struck countries from both axes and harmed both sides. The loss of Egypt meant more for Saudi Arabia, since it was not only the loss of an ally, but also changed the regional balances previously in favor of the Kingdom. For today’s regional power calculations in which Egypt lost its leverage, the Kingdom needs Turkey, the only possible regional power to fill the gap as an ally in its struggle against Iran, which still uses a conflictual discourse for the Middle East.

The type of political regimes: new circumstances, new political elites

A new tension line between Islamic and secular groups emerged in the region. So far all regimes overthrown by the rebels (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya) were secular authoritarian republican regimes. Two other secular republics (Syria and Yemen) are faced with strong popular protests and opposition movements. If the emerging Islamic governments exclude secular groups and national minorities, they will continue the ethnic and/or sectarian politics of the previous regimes which may cause further political, economic, and social instability in their respective countries. Upon the possibility of being criticized by global powers, especially the Western powers, Saudi Arabia may turn to Turkey for supporting its regional policy of consolidating traditional administrations. Turkey, whose concern about the regional chaos may influence its domestic as well as foreign policy, may support the Saudi regional policy and prefer a gradual change of the traditional monarchies and an evolution of the regional political system.

Saudi Arabia had been supporting Islamic movements until very recently against secular republican regimes. However, one of the main concerns of Saudi leaders is the success of Islamic movements which will cause the erosion of the belief in the supremacy of monarchic political systems. The emergence of elected Islamic governments will erode the legitimacy of regional family administrations if they can deliver what they have promised. Therefore, in the long run, the Kingdom might face increasing pressure from “popular” and democratic” Islamic movements. Cooperation with Turkey, the most democratic country of the region and another country that has close relationship with Islamic movements, will strengthen the Saudi relations with the newly emerging “Islamic” regimes. Saudi Arabia and Turkey need to act together for conciliation between the new political powers and political elites of the old regimes. However, the political participation of youth and women, who make up 65 percent of the total population (28 million), remains to be solved. Saudi authorities are reluctant to speed up social and political reforms.

Saudi Arabia and Turkey pursue similar policies towards the regional Islamic movements, which have been leading the Arab revolts along with other parts of society. While the Kingdom began to question the new discourse of the Islamist groups, it has been supporting Islamic movements for decades. On the other hand, Turkey began to improve its relations with these groups only after the AK Party took power. Islamic movements, which have replaced the nationalists of the Cold War, now represent the powers of change. While Saudi Arabia was supporting the status quo during the Cold War era, it can lead the powers of change (Islamic movements) using a huge amount of money for internal stability and political legitimization for foreign recognition. By doing so, Saudi Arabia could diverge the Islamic movements from Iranian conflictual discourse and build an area of regional active cooperation. Saudi Arabia and Turkey can (and should) work together in convincing Western powers about the Islamic movements that they are legitimate political actors refraining from all kinds of illegality.

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After the fall of republican regimes in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia and the increasing instability in Syria and Yemen, Turkey and Saudi Arabia remain two politically stable and economically well-being prosperous countries in the region.

Relations with the West: Close relations with the West

Both Saudi Arabia and Turkey have had close relations with the Western world, the US in particular, for decades. Both countries benefitted from the American nuclear umbrella throughout the Cold War. However, as the US security umbrella lost influence in the region and Saudi-American relations began to sour post-9/11, both Saudi Arabia and Turkey began to give priority to regional dynamics rather than to the preferences of global powers. Therefore, both countries increasingly need one another in solving regional problems. Western powers have to revise their regional policies under these changed circumstances. With the emerging system, they will be unable to support the corrupt regimes in exchange for oil and natural gas and they will be unable to give unconditional support for the aggressive Israeli policy. Therefore, Western states also need to take new regional dynamics into consideration. Change in the policies of Western states, which are still dependent on Turkish and Saudi support, will permit Turkey and Saudi Arabia to improve their cooperation further.

When taking the popular demands of the Arab revolts into consideration, one may infer that the process of change may cause the revival of a civilizational political discourse. It is indispensable that the states who want to take part in the reconstruction of Islamic civilization be more flexible, open to change, and propose non-Western as well as Western solutions to regional problems. Considering its economic wealth, political stability, social development, and human resources, Turkey will play a decisive role in this reconstruction. As a country that calls for more democracy, more political participation, and more economic development, Turkey has been pursuing a humanitarian discourse in its relations with the Middle Eastern countries. The more civilizational emphasis by Turkey and Saudi Arabia in foreign policy, the more likely they will pursue a non-Western policy and lessen their dependence on the Western powers.

V. CONCLUSION

Although Saudi Arabia initiated changes in many areas, it still represents the regional traditional political system—namely, monarchies. The Kingdom began to take regional and global developments into consideration and to open its economy and politics to the world. Compared to the previous kings, King Abdullah achieved significant restructuring in both domestic and foreign policy of the country. While he continues to maintain close relations with the US, he began to improve relations with the European countries, as well as other global powers such as Russia, China and India. Furthermore, after the break out of the Arab uprisings, Saudi Arabia consolidated its relations with the other countries with traditional political systems, the Gulf monarchies.

Saudi Arabia and Turkey did not have friendly relations for a long time. Saudi Arabia was established as a kingdom after a long struggle against the Ottoman state and Turkey was established as a Western-style republic representing the modern face of the Middle East. While Turkey recognized the Kingdom immediately after it was declared, it did not enter into close relations as part of its Westernist policy orientation. On the oth-

er hand, Saudi Arabia, representing the traditional political system (traditional monarchies), has close relations with the West, but keeps its traditional institutions. However, changing conditions and regional developments increasingly force the two countries to act together.

With the spread of the Arab revolt throughout the Middle Eastern countries, the regional political, economic and social system will be restructured. After the fall of republican regimes in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia and the increasing instability in Syria and Yemen, Turkey and Saudi Arabia remain two politically stable and economically well-being prosperous countries in the region. The two countries need to cooperate in the following issue areas:

- Turkey and Saudi Arabia need to use an inclusive political discourse. Therefore, Turkey should convince Saudi Arabian leaders to cease their sectarian rhetoric and change their priorities accordingly. Similar to Turkey, Saudi Arabia also should initiate dialogue with political and social groups belong to different sects and religions. Organizing and financing intercultural international meetings are symbolic indications of Saudi Arabian political discourse. Following Turkey, the Kingdom should cease its sectarian regional policy and open its political system to the world.
- They should oppose the production of nuclear weapons and advocate for a nuclear free region, including both Iran and Israel. They should be in touch with Iran, while trying to balance its influence. They should not repeat the Western (American and Israeli) conflictual discourse and should not “otherize” Iran. As two significant Sunni states, they can improve their relationship with other regional Muslim and Arab countries and pioneer coordination among Muslim countries.
- They should work together in solving regional problems utilizing regional instruments such as the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation, the headquarters of both of which are located in the Kingdom, and cooperate with regional actors including regional states and transnational actors. They also should be in tandem with Western global powers since it is quite difficult to achieve regional stability without the consent of these global powers.
- Ankara and Riyadh have to put the differences between both states aside as they work through this transition period. Democratic, secular Turkey and monarchical, religionist Saudi Arabia should continue consultations regarding the regional developments, i.e., Syria. Saudi Arabia and Turkey can exert more pressure and influence when their efforts are combined.
- Turkey cannot be successful in its unilateral regional policies. Therefore, it needs Saudi Arabia more than ever (especially after the regime changes in Iraq and Egypt and state failures in the region), since Riyadh is one of the few regional states that has maintained the stability of its state structure.

Ankara and Riyadh have to put the differences between both states aside as they work through this transition period. Democratic, secular Turkey and monarchical, religionist Saudi Arabia should continue consultations regarding the regional developments.

When we consider Saudi Arabian large population, territories and natural resources, it is obvious that it will continue to preserve its geopolitical, geo-economic and geo-cultural importance in future. The assumption of King Abdullah as the ruler of the country provided an opportunity to restructure the country's foreign policy. The new king began to follow a more pragmatic, rational, interdependent, multilateral and multidimensional foreign policy. He pursues an active foreign policy required to be less dependent on a single state (the United States) and on a single product (oil).

Due to their different regime types and ideologically-oriented foreign policies, relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia did not progress throughout the 20th century. However, Ankara and Riyadh improved their bilateral relations during the AK Party government and the reign of King Abdullah. Parallel to its new foreign policy principles such as zero-problems with neighbors, maximum co-operation, pro-activism, rhythmic diplomacy, the AK Party improved its relations with Saudi Arabia. King Abdullah responded accordingly. In addition, recent developments such as the Arab revolts in the region push the two countries to improve their cooperation further.

Muhittin Ataman

After graduating from Ankara University (Faculty of Political Science), Ataman completed his Masters Degree at University of Central Oklahoma and his Doctorate at University of Kentucky. Ataman's main research interests are Turkish foreign policy and Middle Eastern politics. His articles are published in leading journal such as Middle Eastern Studies, Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs, Journal of South East Asian and Middle Eastern Studies and Alternatives. Ataman is professor of International Relations at Abant İzzet Baysal University and works as Secretary General of Inter-University Board, based in Ankara. He is also a foreign policy researcher at SETA.

SETA | FOUNDATION FOR POLITICAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH

Nenehatun Caddesi No: 66 GOP
Çankaya 06700 Ankara TÜRKİYE
Ph: +90 312.551 21 00 | Fax : +90 312.551 21 90
www.setav.org | info@setav.org

SETA | Washington D.C. Office

1025 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 1106
Washington, D.C., 20036
Ph: 202-223-9885 | Fax: 202-223-6099
www.setadc.org | info@setadc.org