

# Turkish-Saudi Relations: A Regional Perspective (2003-2015)

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## Abstract

The article aims to understand how the relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia have evolved in the 2000s, through applying the regional level of analysis. It examines how the regional relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia, which ranges between regional cooperation and regional competition, affected the political, economic and military relations between Ankara and Riyadh through the period of study between 2003 until 2015 and how Saudi- Turkish relations affected Iran's regional status. The hypothesis posed in response to the question is the regional context, which impacted the Turkish-Saudi relations positively after the US invasion of Iraq and negatively during the Arab uprisings and more specifically in the Egyptian uprising in 2013. In case, of Syria, the high level of coordination appeared since 2014. The Regional Security Complex Theory, Securitization and De-Securitization will be implemented to understand the regional interaction between Turkey and Saudi Arabia in the Middle East and its effects on Iran.

**Keywords:** Turkish foreign policy, Saudi foreign policy, Iran Regional Status the Middle East and the Arab Spring.

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## Introduction

Since the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932, the relations between the two countries are highly dependent on the regional conditions in the Middle East and the ways in which each country approach and responds to situation. The bilateral relations is affected (positively or negatively) to the meta-events that takes place in the Middle East policies affecting both countries and the approach each country adapts in dealing with it. The paper argues that the regional meta-events in the Middle East and the way each country is dealing with them have an impact on Turkish-Saudi bilateral relation. In 2003, and with the US invasion of Iraq and the rise of a pro-Islamic Justice and Development Party (AKP) with its new approach to the Middle East, the Turkish-Saudi relations started to enter in a momentum. After 2003, the profile of the relations between the two countries achieved historical records in the number of high level visitations, number of bilateral agreements, the trade balance, size of investment, arms sales and more importantly the improvement of the perception of Turkey in Saudi Arabia and the perception of Saudi Arabia in Turkey.

The meta-event of the popular uprisings in some Arab countries had some negative and positive impacts on the Turkish-Saudi relations, as both countries adopted different approaches to the uprisings due to the contradicting regional interests. Initially Turkey perceived the uprising as an event that would lead to a harmonic relation between Arab societies and their new rulers and as a step towards ensuring regional peace and security, while the Saudis

regarded the uprisings as an event that would lead to chaos and instability for a long time. The difference in the two countries' approaches and their regional ambitions were very noticeable in the course of events in Egypt either during the anti-Mubarak uprising in 2011 or the political change that followed in July 2013. The Turkish-Saudi relations had lost the momentum it gained after the US invasion of Iraq, the high level of official visitations became decreased, the trade balance did not achieve high records similar to the previous period, political relations deteriorated as Saudi Arabia lobbied against Turkey in the elections of the United Nations Security Council in 2014. However, "Riyadh and Ankara at 2015 agreed to set up a strategic cooperation council to strengthen military, economic and investment cooperation between the two countries, the keystone of this strategic cooperation council will be the mechanisms of activating the alliance should developments in Syria require intervention to counter Russian protection of Bashar al-Assad. Other challenges include reconciling Turkish hostility to the Kurdish organizations and the aspirations of the Kurds, with Saudi Arabian neutrality in this matter"(Dergham, Huffingtonpost, 2016).

The article focuses on the regional level of analysis in order to understand how the relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia have evolved in the 2000s and affected Iran. The paper uses the Regional Security Complex Theory as a theoretical framework to understand the regional interaction between Turkey and Saudi Arabia and the overlapping of their regional and national interests during the period under study in addition to using conceptual frameworks like Securitization and De-securitization which proved its usefulness in understanding how Saudi Arabia and Turkey securitized the regional outcomes of the war on Iraq in 2003 and the Arab uprisings in 2011.

## I- History

Due to differences in foreign policy, ideology and political systems, no effort was exerted for developing the bilateral relations between

Turkey and Saudi Arabia until mid-1960s (Sharma, 2016). In the 1970s, the relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia began to develop as a result of number of incidents, which took place in that period. Turkey started to adopt a different orientation in its foreign policy with wide international support to its Cyprus cause in the early 1960s and 1970s. It sought rapprochement with Muslim countries, became a member of the OIC in 1969 and established official relations with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1975 (Arkan, 1993: 102). In response to these developments, Saudi Arabia reacted positively and did not oppose Turkey's military intervention in Cyprus 1974. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia was one of the main destinations sought by the Turkish migrants in the 1970s and the 1980s, who worked in Saudi's infrastructure projects. In the 1980s, upon the adaptation of the economic liberalization program by Turgut Özal's government in Turkey, Saudi Islamic banks started to flourish in the Turkish economy. Many Islamic NGOs were established in Turkey and Saudi Arabia developed economic ties with the pro-Islamic Turkish businessmen and politicians (widely known in Turkey by the followers of Milli Görüş) (Koni, 2012: 98-99). The changes in Turkish foreign policy proceeded by the domestic changes and rise of Islamic-based political figures in the mid- 1980s which encouraged Saudi Arabia to invest in the Turkish market. In 1985, three big Saudi Islamic financial institutions like: Albaraka Turk Özel Finans, Faisal Finans (owned by Prince Mohamed Al-Faisal Al-Saud) and Family Finans were opened in Turkey (Uras, May2011:Milliyet). Saudi Arabia developed financial partnerships with the main figures of the Anavatan Party (ANAP) or those political figures known for their pro-Islamic orientation through the financial institutions. Korkut Ozel (the brother of president Turgut Ozal) and Eymen Topbas were in the founding committee of the Albaraka Turk Özel Finans, while Prince Mohamed Al-Faisal chose Salih Özcan and Tefvîk Paksu to establish Faisal Finans.

During the Persian Gulf War in 1991, both countries were on

the same side of the international coalition led by the United States against Saddam Hussein in Iraq and Saudi Arabia helped Turkey financially through loans in order to overcome the bad repercussions of the war on the Turkish economy (Fiker Center for Studies, April 2015). However the relations witnessed a cooling at the end of 1990s as a result of the deterioration of Turkish-Syrian relations over Syria's support to the Kurdistan Worker Party (PKK) and the problems on the usage of the Euphrates river, where Saudi Arabia lobbied against Turkey's request for a loan from the World Bank to finance building dams on the Euphrates River which goes from Turkey to Syria (Altunışık, 2012 Foreign Affairs). The Saudi's perception of Turkey is more influenced by the Islamic conservative and Arabism worldviews. According to Wahhabism, Secularism is a non-Islamic discourse and the Turkish government was not regarded as an Islamic government. Based on Arabism perspective, Saudi Arabia opposed Ankara's high cooperation profile with Israel in the late 1990s as well as Turkish stance against Syria in the water disputes, which led the relations between the two countries to stagnation.

The paper utilizes the Regional Security Complex in understanding how Turkey and Saudi Arabia recognize each other as important actors in the region and how they assumed Iran either as threat or opportunity especially during the Arab uprisings in 2011. Moreover, the paper applies the concepts of Securitization and De-Securitization in understanding how Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iran securitized regional issues differently which led to a different regional behaviours towards the developments in Iraq after 2003, Lebanon after 2006, Egypt after 2011 and Syria after 2011 as two regional powers in the Middle East.

A regional security complex is 'a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot reasonably be considered apart from one another' (Buzan, 1983: 106). *Securitization* and *De-securitisation* found its place in the definition of RSC. Securitization is the intersubjective

establishment of an existential threat, which demands urgent and immediate attention, as well as the use of extraordinary measures to counter this threat (Ibid:24-25). The first step towards a successful securitization is called a securitizing move. Securitization is largely based on power and capability and therewith the means to socially and politically construct a threat (Taureck, 2006: 2).

The *geographical factor* is regarded as a necessary element in a regional security complex. The physical adjacency tends to produce more security interaction among neighbours than among countries in different complexes. The impact of geographical proximity on security interaction is strongest and most obvious in the military, political, societal, and environmental sectors (Buzan, & Waever, 1998: 201).

The invasion of Iraq in 2003 had left significant implications on the Arab Regional System and revealed the degree of the weakness that had infected the main parts of the system: the insufficiency of the Arab states and the League of Arab States to face foreign interventionist policies of great powers (like the US) and regional powers (like Iran and Turkey) in the Arab internal affairs, the disability to take common actions within or outside the Arab League to deter these interventions and marked the shift towards a new Middle East based on US dominance (Salem, June 2008). The Arab states' response to 2003 Iraq invasion, and their distinct national foreign policies, exhibits their acceptance of the de-facto situation created in the region, their cohabitation with the situation and later extension of relations and interactions with non-Arab countries like Turkey (which was the case for most of Arab countries) or Iran (mainly Syria). The League of Arab States failed to hold an urgent summit to discuss the repercussions of the US invasion, unlike the similar cases such as 1967 war and Palestinian Intifada of 1988 and 2001, and contrary to league's charter which asks Arab member states to hold summits when the Arab National Security comes under threat (Salem, Opcit).

Saudi Arabia was hardly keen on the US military operations that started in Iraq and it cooperated militarily in a low profile (Gause, 2009: 295). Meanwhile Saudi Arabia allowed the United States to use Prince Sultan base as a command and control centre for U.S. aircraft. U.S. aerial re-fuelling tankers, reconnaissance planes and other noncombat aircraft were allowed to land and take off there.

Saudi Arabia supported the Sunni and Arab Nationalist Iraqis by using the Wahhabi-Salafi religious rhetoric in support of the Iraqi Sunnis against Shi'a and dumping the insurgency strategies (Gause, 2007: 3-4). The aim of using the Wahhabi card in the Sunni-Shi'a issue in Iraq and other countries of the region was mobilizing public opinion in Saudi Arabia (as well as Egypt and Jordan) in support for confrontation with Iran. This policy did not aim sectarian conflicts, which eventually backfired at home and significantly affected the social peace of the Arab countries. However it helped in mobilizing the Arab Sunnis of Iraq for taking all possible measures to secure their existence in the country.

Turkey gave different and contradictory signals about its decision for taking part in the war besides the United States. On one hand it was suspicions about consequences of the war on Iraq's territorial integrity, Kurdish rise and the future of ethnicities in its neighbouring countries. On the other hand, Turkey started negotiations with the US on its conditions for taking part in the military operations. Turkey asked for increasing military contingent in north Iraq instead of Turkey to settle the refugees and to counter any possible wave of violence from the PKK. It also asked for being the mere foreign military power present in North Iraq, putting limitations on the political future of Kurds in Iraq and the status of Mosul and Kirkuk besides securing an economic aid package from the USA to face the possible negative repercussions of the war on the Turkish economy (Altunışık, 2006: 185).

Ankara played mediatory roles within the Iraqi political theatre in order to prevent the escalation of domestic rivalry between Sunni

and Shi'a that would lead to the division of Iraq. Iraq's disintegration could increase the possibility of the having an independent Kurdish state in the north, which would leave negative repercussions on Turkey's national security. These were parts of Turkey's regional mediation policy to boost its credit and provide it with political influence in regional theatres.

However, these policies did not prevent Turkey from choosing its favourable candidate in 2010 Iraqi elections. Further reports have revealed that Turkey would favour to see Ayad Allawi as Iraq's Prime Minister in 2010 March elections through pressuring Kurds to accept his premiership (Taha, 2010) and the visits of Allawi before the elections included Turkey besides Saudi Arabia. Turkey's support for Iraqi Sunni is not for sectarian reasons; in fact sectarianism could harm Turkey's relations with their Shi'a counterparts, and lower its credentials for playing regional mediatory roles. Moreover, this policy can harm Turkish economic interests in the Shi'a dominated regions of Iraq.

## II- The Regional Context

When Israel launch a military operation on Lebanon in 2006, the Saudi has an adversarial position toward *Hizballah's* ( Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, June 2006,). The Saudi's stance toward *Hizballah* did not change after the 2006 war, or during the internal conflict in May 2008. Saudi Arabia supported the Lebanon government and its critiques on *Hizballah* and Iran were harsh.

During the internal clashes in Lebanon in the summer of 2008 between the 8 March Alliance and the March 14 Alliance, when the threat of a new Lebanese civil war and destabilization of the region has raised, Turkey feared a big blow to its economic interests in Lebanon and in its neighbouring countries. The Turkish government was asked by the Lebanese government to interfere in the crisis and to mediate in the talks between the opposing groups. Unlike Saudi Arabia, Turkey did not have any prejudgement on Syria and Iran's role in Lebanon as

long as its economic interests were safe. Accordingly, Turkey perceived its inclusion negotiation for in finding a solution in Lebanon as a necessary to move on an agreement. Turkey had used its good efforts in Syria and Iran, and Prime Minister Erdoğan used his good relations with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Iranian President Ahmadinejad to practice more pressure on March 8 Alliance in the talks (Daily Star, May 2008). Turkey mediated directly between the Lebanese government of the March 14 Alliance and other regional supporters of the March 8 Alliance in cooperation with Qatar to reach Doha agreement, which ended the Presidential elections crisis in Lebanon. Later Erdogan was invited to attend the ceremonial swearing of Lebanese President Michael Suleiman who visited Turkey in 2008 to be the first Lebanese President visiting Turkey in 54 years (ORSAM, Report No 5, August 2009).

The new outcomes of the regional security complexes created in Iraq and Lebanon have affect both Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Both Turkey and Saudi Arabia saw a convergence in the regional interests in Iraq since both countries were worried by the repercussions of the US invasion in 2003. The Turks and Saudis shared fears about Iraq's territorial integrity and they considered the rise of Iran's influence problematic. With respect to Lebanon, their stance was divergent, as Saudi Arabia continued to support the March 14 Alliance while Turkey preferred to play the mediatory role between the March 14 Alliance and the March 8 Alliance, since Turkey was trying to avoid a direct conflict with Iran.

The perception of the regional role for both countries had changed and this contributed positively in developing the bilateral political, economic and militarily relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia. In Saudi Arabia there was a consensus that adopting Turkey as a regional ally, (member of NATO, candidate for EU membership and with its rising economy) can play a key role in regional grand strategy against Iran and would contribute to the Saudi policy of rolling back the Iranian influence and fixing back the regional balance

of power.

On the other hand, there was an increasing support from different Turkish political actors (secular liberals, Islamists and conservatives) to the new foreign policy of Turkey and its openness towards the Middle East. In order to be able to play an active role and mediate in different regional conflicts, developing good relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia is considered to be an essential step as Saudi Arabia has a wide influence and presence in the different regional conflicts.

The bilateral economic relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia received more attention in Turkey than Saudi Arabia. In their statements, in r press conferences during visits to Riyadh or during receiving Saudi officials, Turkish officials (the President, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister) often refer to the size of bilateral trade volume, unlike the Saudis who pays more attention to the political aspects of the relations and the environment surrounding the economic relations with Turkey. All these have provided the Saudi investors with assurances that Turkey is a good place for investment.

The Turkish exports to Saudi Arabia have increased more than three times since 2005 until 2013, figure 1. The trade volume between the two countries has been boosted in this period 7 times bigger than the volume in 2001 as shown in figure 2.

Figure 1- TurkStat: Turkish Exports to Saudi Arabia in USD  
Thousand

2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
962,156	983,226	1,486,917	2,201,875	1,768,216	2,217,645	2,763,475	3,676,611	3,191,481

(Source: [www.turkstat.gov.tr](http://www.turkstat.gov.tr))

Figure 2 – TUIK: Trade Volume between Turkey and Saudi Arabia in  
USD Billion

2003	2005	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
1.7	2.8	3.9	5.5	3.3	4.6	6.2	8.0	7.3

(Source: [www.turkstat.gov.tr](http://www.turkstat.gov.tr))

The US invasion of Iraq created new political configurations in the Iraqi theatre and the repercussion of the war on Iraq spread over to Middle East countries like Lebanon. Turkey and Saudi Arabia has securitized these repercussions and perceived them as a source of threat on their national and regional interests. They found themselves on the same line in some issues like protecting the territorial integrity of Iraq, fearing of the rise of Iran’s influence, supporting Ayad Allawi in 2010 elections and sharing the need for restoring stability in Lebanon upon the Israeli war in June 2006 and internal clashes in May 2008. On the other hand, the degree of rapprochement created out of the new regional outcomes has helped both countries to discover their potentials in pushing their bilateral relations on the political, economic and the military level. Turkey has benefited politically and regionally from having good ties with Saudi Arabia, the same is true about the Saudi Arabia. Turkey started to attract Saudi capital in its market and Saudi Arabia made use of the Turkish construction companies in its infrastructure projects. The Saudis also benefited from the Turkish military products and participated in the Anatolian eagle exercise, which is held annually in Turkey.

	Iraq	Lebanon
Convergences	Territorial Integrity of Iraq. Fear from Iranian rising influence. Support Sunni in 2010 elections.	Keeping Lebanon stable and curbing the crises of the Israeli attack in 2006 and the domestic clashes in 2008 not to escalate regionally.
Divergences	Securitization and De-securitization of Shi’a. Different agendas behind supporting Iraqi Sunnis. Different approach to Iran’s rising influence.	Different approaches towards the Crisis. Different rhetoric. Different approaches to Hizballah, Iran and Syria.

This section is an attempt to examine the transformations in the regional landscape on the outbreak of the Arab uprisings in the late 2010, as well as the regional dimension of the Egyptian uprisings in 2011 and 2013 and the Syrian uprising in 2011. It will consider how

the Turkish foreign policy and Saudi foreign policy reacted towards the Arab uprisings.

The Arab uprisings took place in December 2010 has left the political geography of the Arab spring countries with major transformations that keeps the region in a state of uncertainty like the reproduction of old problems in a new context within these countries, the empowerment of non-state actors vis a vis state actors, and questioning the existence of some regional structures mainly the Arab Regional System (Aras & Folk, 2015: 327).

The uprising in Egypt, the most populated Arab country and the traditional leader of the Arab world, can be stated as the strongest start point of the uprisings' spill over to other countries. It was Egypt that took over the international as well as regional agendas and convinced the

The timing of the Arab uprisings was simultaneous with a steady loss of Riyadh's grip on the regional balance of power towards Iran and the heavy setbacks of its Arab nationalist/Sunni allies in Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine. Saudi Arabia started to watch its regime falling down one after the other in the first half of 2011 as a result of popular uprisings against regime's leaders like President Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali (with exception to Muammer Qaddafi of Libya). The protests in Bahrain against al-Khalifa royal family, if succeeded, would be a start of other uprisings in Saudi eastern Shi'a provinces and in other GCC countries. The uprising in Yemen, which is regarded by the Saudi's as their backyard, has forced Riyadh to play a role in smoothing a power transition from Ali Abdullah Saleh to his vice president Abd Rabou Mansour Hady (a Saudi ally) (Rieger, 2014).

After the departure of Mubarak, Saudi Arabia worked on asserting its regional leadership and extending its leverage on the new Egypt through its financial capabilities and its Salafi allies who were rising popularly in the street. Riyadh declared providing USD 4 billion to support the Egyptian economy in form of "soft loans, deposits and

grants” (Razzouk, 21 may 2011). With the rise of Mohamed Morsi to power in Egypt, Saudi Arabia feared shifts in Egypt’s regional stance towards Iran. Saudi Arabia was concerned that Egypt might aspire for different lines under rule of the Brotherhood in alliance with Turkey. Thus they tried to deal with Egypt under Morsi and keep the channels open, unlike other GCC countries such as UAE, which considered Morsi’s rise to power in Egypt as a threat. Saudi Arabia signed a deal to provide Egypt with loans estimated by USD 500 million on June 24<sup>th</sup> 2013 and provided Egypt with USD 750 million as credit line of oil imports (Egypt Independent, June 2003). Saudi Arabia was the first country visited by President Mohamed Morsi on July 12<sup>th</sup> 2012 in order to assure the kingdom that Egypt will not seek rapprochement with Iran on the expense of Egyptian-Saudi relations and to assure the Saudi’s of Egypt’s opposing stance on Bashar al-Assad in Syria. Yet Saudi Arabia did not respond positively to Morsi’s initiative during Mecca summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in August 2012 over Syria and the Saudi envoy attended two summits of this initiative (Farouk, 2014:20-22).

After the military coup against Mohamed Morsi, Saudi Arabia was the first country to congratulate the president of the interim period Adly Mansour. Saudi Foreign Minister Saud Al-Faisal paid a visit to Paris in August 2013 (Al-Shaq Al-Awsaat, August 2013), where he met the French president Francois Hollande, the British Foreign Minister William Hague and the advisor of the German chancellor Cristopher Hsken to ask the EU to ease pressure on Egypt. The Saudi government declared that it will substitute any cut in the American and western aids to Egypt in case it took place. When Washington decided to suspend military aid to Egypt, Saudi Arabia along with the UAE brokered a deal worth USD 2 billion of weapons from Russia to Egypt (Egypt Independent, February 2014).

Turkey started to follow a ‘Democracy Promotion’ agenda after the policy of Zero Problem with Neighbours that resulted in strong economic, political and military relations between Turkey and Arab

countries. Decision makers in Turkey started to talk about a 2.0 version of Zero Problem with Neighbours, as Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu argued that “Turkey developed ties with these regimes because at the time they were not at war with their own people. But when they preferred to suppress the demands of their citizens, we sided with the people and still remain committed to the same democratic vision for our region”(Davutoglu, 2012:3-4). In addition to that, circles in Turkish foreign policy started to raise other principles above the Zero Problem with Neighbours like the importance of achieving balance between security and freedom. According to Ahmet Davutoglu: “ We advised the regimes to no longer ignore their people’s quest for democracy and asked them to establish the balance between freedom and security. If security is sacrificed for freedom, it will lead to chaos, while if freedom is sacrificed for security, it will result in dictatorial regimes” (Ibid) Turkey’s vision for the region out of the so called ‘Balance between Freedom and Security’ was about establishing a stable regional order where the new regimes enjoys a harmony with their societies after abandoning the notion of stability built on autocratic regimes(Kardas,2012:6).

After the fall of Mubarak, Turkey utilized its soft power and public diplomacy to build strong relations with the Muslim Brothers, whose ideological background is in consistent with the ruling AKP in Turkey. Since mid-2011, the relations between Turkey and Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) (the Muslim Brotherhood’s political party) started to develop significantly.

The AKP ruling party has securitized the downfall of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt as a kind of threat on their power in Turkey. Istanbul has witnessed large protests in May 2013 upon government’s plan to restructure the famous Taksim square, which widely spread to whole Turkey known by Gezi park protest (Akyol, Al-Monitor, May 2013). Ahmet Davutoğlu who later became a Prime Minister in August 2014 said that “That they did not succeed in doing

it in Turkey; they went to make it in Egypt and the brought General al-Sisi to power”( Sabah Newspaper, May 2015).

The Turkish momentum that had started with the rise of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt began to witness a shutdown. Turkey cut its diplomatic relations with Egypt, risked its warm relations with Riyadh and lost good political relations with Syria, Iran, Israel (upon Mavi Marmara incident in 2010), where the head of foreign policy advisors of the Prime Minister Erdoğan, Ibrahim Kalin named, the “precious loneliness” (TV24, August 2013).

Syria has for many decades been the bellwether of Arab politics, especially in times of intense ideological competition. This is due to its strategic location between the two traditional centres of Arab power, i.e. Egypt and Iraq, and the perception that regards Syria as heartland of nationalism. (Ayoob, 2012: 48-47)

The uprising against Assad represented an opportunity for Saudi Arabia to regain the regional balances of power it lost to Iran with the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the negative developments in Lebanon upon the assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri in 2005 (Gause, 2011:16). Moreover any political change in Syria would enable Riyadh to bring Syria back into its Arab, and Sunni sphere of its influence after its long time connection to Iran. The space that would be left by the fall of Assad’s regime would remove *Hizballah’s* power in Lebanon who uses Syrian territories in getting financial and military support from Iran.

Saudi Arabia managed to practice influence over the Syrian opposition groups rather than the Muslim Brotherhood who were supported by Turkey and Qatar. Saudi Arabia pressed on enlarging the opposition front to prevent full control of the Muslim Brothers on Syrian opposition and the first two chairmen of the Syrian Opposition Coalition, Sheikh Moaz Al-Khatib and Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jurba (who hold close ties to King Abdullah), were widely supported by Riyadh inside the coalition against the Muslim Brotherhood figures.

Turkey assumed that the regime in Syria would be toppled in a short time either by the people of Syria (like in Tunisia and Egypt) or through external intervention (like in Libya), and thus from the beginning it wanted to take a clear, strong stance to be able to play an active role in the process later (Altunisik, 2013).

Turkey took part in the international platform created entitled “Group of Syria Friends” and hosted the second meeting of the group in April 2012 and called for suspension of diplomatic ties with Assad regime and decided to set up a Sanctions Working Group, in order to achieve greater effectiveness in the enforcement of the restrictive measures.

The Turkish involvement in the Syrian crisis brought about wide challenges to the Turkish government since Assad stayed in power and did not fall as quickly as it was expected. Assad started to represent a serious threat on Turkey’s national security. The Kurdish issue is one of the main security problems in the Turkish-Syrian security complex, as the PKK remained an open gate for Assad to harass Turkey (Ibid).

The Egyptian and Syria cases have showed how the popular uprisings in the Arab countries have created complicated consequences in the Middle East and that the approaches of Turkey and Saudi Arabia toward this event witnessed points of divergences and convergences. They utilized different tools in dealing with the outcomes of the uprising and adopted different agendas for pursuing their different regional interests and ambitions. The Egyptian uprising was a good model for examining the divergence of the Turkish and Saudi policies and how their interests overlapped and how they securitized the course of events during the Egyptian uprising as a threat on their interests. While in the Syrian Uprising, the Turkish and the Saudi stances have witnessed stations that ranged from convergence and cooperation.



Egyptian Uprising		Syrian Uprising
Convergences		Supporting the uprising. Supporting Refugees. Opposing Assad regime on the international level. Supporting the Anti-Assad military and political opposition groups.
Divergences	Muslim brotherhood Vs. Army The different adaptation of Egypt in the FP of Saudi Arabia and Turkey.	Diverging on Muslim Brotherhood in Syrian opposition. Supporting Different groups and no coordination.

III- Implication on Iran

The role of Iran and the impact of the rise of Iranian influence on rapprochement between the two regional powers is one of the main issues that were considered in the Turkish and Saudi relations. The balance of power in the region which slopes towards Iran is an important factor in the development of the relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia. The Palestinian issue, Syrian conflict, Iranian nuclear program and instability in Iraq push the two countries towards each other. Iran continued to rise regionally and this did not force Turkey and Saudi Arabia to mend their ideological differences which appeared during the Egyptian political change in July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2013 and afterward. Turkey wanted to counter balance Iranian power in the region through soft balancing. Ankara specifically would undermine Tehran's influence in Palestinian politics and its dominance in Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria by getting closer to those states itself, while “Saudi Arabia, in the eve of the US invasion of Iraq, began building alliances with states that shared its outlook, a "Sunni axis," like Egypt and Jordan and it wanted to include Turkey.

Tehran appeared as an important actor in Iraq after 2003, and in Lebanon during Israeli attack in 2006 and 2008 issue on *Hizballah* and in Palestine during the Israeli attack on Gaza in 2009. The rise of

Shi'a dominated governments in Iraq with strong ties to Iran had a psychological effect on the Arab world. The Arab leaders were concerned over regional balance of power that had shifted for the first time toward a non-Arab regional order successfully.

The Saudis want Turkey as a counterbalance as they mistrust US intentions toward Iran. But this expectation in Riyadh is likely to be misplaced. Turkey has strong economic connections with Iran. In order for Turkey to project its power in the region it requires cordial relations with Iran in order to promote its business and political influences in places like Iraq. Turkey is increasingly dependent upon energy from Iran, particularly since its relations with its other energy supplier Russia are very tense after shooting down a Russian plane (Jerusalem Post, 2016). It appears the Turks have concluded that the best position for them is to balance between the Gulf States and Tehran, not fully committing to either side, yet seeking economic benefit from both.

Iran policy showed clearly how the Arab Regional System (which Saudi Arabia is a member of) reacted passively toward the Iranian influence and the spill over of the Iraqi effect (Korany, 2013:37). While Saudi Arabia regarded Iran as the source of regional instability along with Syria, Turkey approached Iran and Syria to form an anti-Kurdish coalition (as these countries share the same fear of the regional spill over of the Iraqi-Kurdish autonomy) and it activated the High Security Commission between Ankara and Tehran to discuss the Kurdish insurgent activities in their countries who founded their training camps in the Kandil mountains in the independent Kurdish Northern Iraq (Oguzlu, 2008: 10).

Unlike Iran, Turkey has become a country of quick and unusual foreign policy reactions. The list of regional issues that cause troubles for Ankara is long, and that makes its foreign policy a bit unstable. In contrast, Tehran refrains from abrupt foreign policy reactions, an important difference that might give Iran an advantage. Iranian political elites likely think that they have a historic opportunity (since

the revolution) to come back into the international system through legitimate mechanisms. Not wanting to lose this opportunity, Tehran acts calmly, even on critical matters. A deep examination of what Iranians say about regional issues reveals that Iran is not much concerned about Turkey's capacity to harm its interests. As a result, Iran will be the more tolerant partner in the Turkey-Iran compartmentalization strategy, lest its grand strategy of reviving links with the global Western system be at risk. (Bacik, 2016: 3-4)

### Conclusion

The article found that there is a convergence between the regional interests of both Saudi Arabia and Turkey as it appeared in the Iraqi case after the US invasion in 2003, the Syrian civil war after 2011 and slightly over the Lebanese conflict during the Israeli attack in 2006 and domestic clashes in 2008. However there are divergences and tensions between their interests in these cases and a wide divergence in the Egyptian case as well. These divergences is the result of distinct domestic policies and the differences of the political systems in both Ankara and Riyadh and how the governments in Ankara and Riyadh conduct their foreign policies.

The Regional Security Complex Theory that was adopted in the study explained how Turkey and Saudi Arabia recognize each other as important actors in the region and how they interacted after the US invasion of Iraq 2003 and during the Arab uprisings in 2011. The regional interaction between Turkey and Saudi Arabia started since the war on Iraq in 2003 and continued during the Arab uprisings as they have interests in the regional issues of Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine and Egypt which ranges between convergence and divergence. Therefore, the regional interaction between Turkey and Saudi Arabia will probably neither reach a complete convergence and permanent alliance nor total divergence and enmity.

The concepts of securitization and de-securitization were found important in understanding how Turkey and Saudi Arabia securitized

regional issues, how their regional behaviours differed over these issues. It was argued how the two countries' regional ambitions and foreign policy agendas are different after the war on Iraq and during the Arab uprisings. Both Ankara and Riyadh deal with these security issues in a different way as a result of their different regional ambitions and the rivalry between them, in a way that refutes the arguments that call for forming a political alliance between Turkey and Saudi Arabia against Iran and keeps limitations on their regional relations. However sharing common interests in the region from time to time might allow them to enter in alliances (like supporting Allawi in Iraq in 2010 and opposing Assad regime in Syria) while different agendas and perspectives will remain.

In Iraq, the stance of Saudi Arabia and Turkey with regard to the US invasion of Iraq was similar. Saudi Arabia was reluctant to take part in the operation and asked the US administration not to consider using its bases in any operation against Iraq. On the Turkish side, the Turkish Grand National Assembly had turned down a Memorandum of Understanding between Turkey and the USA that granted the US troops access to Iraq from Turkey. Moreover their political stances were the same on this topic; both decided not to gamble their strategic relations with the unipolar superpower (the USA), and both countries contributed militarily in a narrow way to the operation. Ankara and Riyadh shared the same threats and nearly the same repercussions in the aftermath Iraq. However, their causes, their behaviours and their agendas were different. They shared the fear of Iraq's disintegration: Saudi Arabia feared the rise of Shi'a sub-state identity in Iraq which would agitate the Shi'a community in Saudi Arabia to call for a change and leave the Iraqi Sunni Arabs out of any economic resources: a blow up to the Saudi leadership in the Arab Regional Context and the Muslim world. Ankara feared the rise of Shi'a sub-state and more so the Kurdish autonomous region in Iraq that would facilitate the rise of a regional wave of Kurdish independence, and consequently threaten the territorial integrity of

Turkey. Both countries worked on countering this issue through coordination and regular consultation of their high official bilateral visits, but they did not follow the same policy line on this issue.

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## روابط ترکیه و عربستان: چشم انداز منطقه‌ای (۲۰۰۳-۲۰۱۵)

ناصر پورابراهیم

عضو هیئت علمی دانشنامه جهان اسلام و دانشجوی دکتری روابط بین الملل  
دانشگاه خاورمیانه ترکیه

هدف مقاله حاضر بررسی تحولات روابط ترکیه با عربستان از اوایل سال ۲۰۰۰ در چارچوب سطح تحلیل منطقه‌ای است، که شامل رقابت و همکاری میان دو بازیگر در برهه‌های مختلف بوده است. سوال پژوهش حاضر چگونگی تاثیر تحولات منطقه‌ای بر روابط دوجانبه اقتصادی، سیاسی و نظامی آنکارا و ریاض در فاصله سالهای ۲۰۰۳-۲۰۱۵ و تاثیر آن بر جایگاه منطقه‌ای ایران است. بهبود روابط ترکیه و عربستان بعد از تهاجم آمریکا به عراق در ۲۰۰۳، واگرایی روابط در انقلاب مصر ۲۰۱۳ و درجه بالایی از همگرایی در بحران سوریه ۲۰۱۵ فرضیه اصلی پژوهش حاضر است. نظریه مجموعه امنیت منطقه‌ای و مفاهیم امنیتی شدن و غیر امنیتی شدن؛ چارچوب نظری مورد استفاده برای فهم تعامل منطقه‌ای میان ترکیه و عربستان و تاثیر آن بر ایران خواهد بود.

**کلیدواژه‌ها:** سیاست خارجی ترکیه، سیاست خارجی عربستان، جایگاه ایران، خاورمیانه.