

ASPIRING POWERS, REGIONAL RIVALS

TURKEY, EGYPT, SAUDI ARABIA,
AND THE NEW MIDDLE EAST

GÖNÜL TOL, DAVID DUMKE, EDS.



A COLLABORATION BETWEEN
THE MIDDLE EAST INSTITUTE AND
THE UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

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INTRODUCTION

GÖNÜL TOL

The Arab uprisings have dramatically transformed the geopolitics of the Middle East. Early hopes for a positive transformation gave way to dramatic intensification of violence, civil wars, and failed states. The uprisings not only transformed the internal dynamics of regional states, but they also led to a new regional order. The traditional great powers like Egypt, Syria, and Iraq are no longer major players.¹ Others such as Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia have started inserting themselves into regional decision-making.

All the while, U.S. influence in the region is in decline. Although the U.S. retains a significant military presence, the perception that it is withdrawing from the Middle East is strong.² Regional states increasingly believe that U.S. policy vis-à-vis the Middle East is confused and Washington's resolve to push for stability is weak. The regional insecurity, compounded by misgivings about the credibility of U.S. security guarantees, has paved the way for a pattern of intervention. Regional states think they must act unilaterally to deflect the threat emanating from escalating civil wars. In such a regional security dynamic, states are worried not just about

conventional national security threats but also regime survival.³

As the old regional order crumbles, states put forward their own projects for a new order and seek new allies. Russia is pleased to extend a helping hand and fill the American void. Moscow has emerged as a key power broker and military actor. Russia has not only become the key outside actor in the Syrian conflict. It has also developed a multi-faceted relationship with Turkey, boosted military ties with Egypt, become a significant player in Libya and a security broker between Iran and the Gulf countries, and expanded energy cooperation with Saudi Arabia.

An important component of this new regional order is the emergence of two rival camps, one between Turkey and Qatar and the other between Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the UAE, and Israel. The Middle East Institute's Turkish Studies and the University of Central Florida's Middle East and South Asia Initiatives launched a project to better understand the triangular relationship between three regional states — Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt — in an effort to gauge whether they can overcome their policy differences to play a constructive role in a “post-American” region beset by armed conflict and state failure.

Despite its domestic problems and the decline in its regional standing, Turkey remains an important actor that can complicate efforts to provide stability in the region. The Arab uprisings that began in 2010, as well as domestic developments, forced a change in Turkey's relations with the region. Military engagement has regained currency as a tool to project its power. From Syria and Iraq to Qatar, Kuwait, and Somalia, Turkey has extended its military muscle. But for a country that aspires to lead the region, relying on military might alone isn't enough. If Turkey wants to carve out a sphere of influence, it needs non-military tools as well, such as trade, cultural engagement, and alliances with key regional states.

Saudi Arabia is one of those key states. The region's center of gravity has shifted toward the Gulf in recent years. Due to its strategic location and huge financial resources, Saudi Arabia is one of the most important countries in the region. Its newly pro-active foreign policy under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman makes the kingdom's relations with regional powers very important for the Middle East and beyond.

Egypt was once the key actor in the region due its geography, size, history, and military strength. It has, however, lost its old standing and turned inward in recent years, particularly after the 2011 uprising, to deal with multiple political crises and economic problems. Yet, Egypt still wants to play a major role in regional affairs, and on issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict it still does.

As late as 2015, these three countries were hailed as the “Sunni vanguard” against an increasingly resurgent Iran.⁴ They were seen as the leaders of an

anti-Iran front that were united in their quest to curb its power. Although the anti-Iran sentiment has brought these countries together in some instances, their relationship with one another is too complicated today to form a united front. They have conflicting visions for the region and are willing to pursue aggressive policies to realize them. Whether they can reconcile those visions to play a constructive role in addressing regional problems is the topic of the chapters in this book. Authors analyze how their country of expertise sees its relationship with the other two states. Hakan Özoğlu's chapter provides an excellent overview of the ups and downs in relations between the Ottoman Empire and early Turkish Republic and Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Meliha Altunışık delves into the state of relations with Egypt and Saudi Arabia under Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party; she argues that these Arab countries were initially open to Turkey's activism in the region, but the way Turkey is perceived in these Arab capitals changed after the Arab uprisings. Abderahman Salaheldin's chapter focuses on how Egypt sees its role in the Middle East and its relations with the region's two heavyweights. David Dumke explains the Saudis' regional outlook and Riyadh's relations with Egypt and Turkey from 1932 to 2001. Thomas Lippman focuses on the Saudi vision for the Middle East and how Turkey and Egypt fit into that. Robert Mogielnicki analyzes the economic linkages between the three countries and concludes that deteriorating diplomatic and political relations have not affected their economic ties.

This study is a first attempt to understand the general state of affairs between three key regional countries. Given that regime survival has become one of the main priorities for all of these actors, more attention should be given to domestic factors in these countries to better understand the complex dynamics among them. We hope this collection of essays can serve as a first step in that direction.

ENDNOTES

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CHAPTER ONE

HEIRS OF THE EMPIRE: TURKEY'S DIPLOMATIC TIES WITH EGYPT AND SAUDI ARABIA UNTIL THE MID-20TH CENTURY

HAKAN ÖZOĞLU

At its peak, the Ottoman Empire controlled the entire modern Middle East, making it one of the most significant Islamic empires in world history. When the empire collapsed at the end of World War I, many new states emerged in its wake and established new diplomatic relationships. Turkey, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia became three of the major actors shaping the politics of the region in this era. To understand today's Middle East, it is necessary to explore the diplomatic relations between these three aspiring regional powers, which have long been volatile. Before doing so, however, it is critical to first briefly examine the history of Ottoman diplomacy and its legacies for the post-World War I states.

This essay aims to provide an overview of Ottoman/Turkish diplomatic ties with two key regional partners and rivals: Egypt and Saudi Arabia. It will begin by examining the late 18th century when the Ottoman Empire first sent professional diplomats overseas, most notably to Europe. It will then focus on Egypt and Saudi Arabia, two former Ottoman territories. Finally, it will conclude with the Cold War years, as the post-Cold War period requires a much more nuanced approach and is beyond the scope of this research.

OTTOMAN DIPLOMACY

In order to better understand the diplomatic history of Turkey, one must first understand the development of the Ottoman diplomatic mind. Ottoman diplomatic history can be broken down into two main periods: pre- and post-1793. The year 1793 marked the first time the Ottomans appointed full-time resident diplomats to other European countries. Before that point, they welcomed diplomats and diplomatic missions, but refrained from sending their own in return due to a long-standing policy under which the Ottoman sultans did not recognize other emperors as their equals. As a result, they relied on ad hoc diplomacy and sent messengers to communicate as needed, even though European empires had already established permanent diplomatic posts in Istanbul.

In this sense, the year 1793 was a turning point for Ottoman diplomacy. It was the first time in its 400-year history that the empire sent an ambassador to another empire, in effect admitting an end to its policy — and sense — of superiority. In practice, however, the Ottomans had acknowledged this on a number of previous occasions. For example, in 1606, the Ottoman sultan signed the Treaty of Sitvatorok with the Habsburg Empire in which the sultan recognized the Habsburg ruler as the *kaiser* (or “emperor”) as opposed to *Viyana beyi* (or “lord of Vienna”), the diminutive title previously used. Another such example is the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699 in which the title “prince of Moscow” was replaced by “tsar of Russia.” The Ottoman defeat preceding this treaty was the first major territorial loss of the empire’s European possessions and marked the beginning of the end of Ottoman supremacy in Central Europe.

Between the 18th and the 19th centuries, the Ottoman Empire became keenly aware of its shortcomings on the world stage in areas like the flow of information. Following his ascension to the throne in 1789, Sultan Selim III initiated a series of reforms designed to address the empire’s weaknesses. This era of Ottoman structural reforms began with the *Nizam-ı Cedid* (or “New Order”), which also included fundamental reforms to Ottoman diplomacy. The Ottoman state was mindful of the winds of political change in Europe following the French Revolution and needed to follow events on the continent more closely to inform its foreign policy decisions. Permanent diplomatic representations proved to be essential in this, since they could better keep up with developments in European capitals and report back to Istanbul. The empire was considerably weaker compared to earlier centuries and needed political alliances in Europe, but the Ottoman administrative structure was uninformed about the inner dynamics of European politics and unable to make sound decisions in regard to choosing allies. Selim III also had a personal interest in European politics and wanted to send the first diplomatic

envoy at an ambassadorial level to Paris. However, due to the unstable political environment after the French Revolution, London became his choice for the establishment of the first Ottoman embassy in 1793. Soon afterwards, Ottoman embassies in Paris, Vienna, and Berlin followed. Until World War I, Ottoman diplomacy focused on dealing with Western empires that were attempting to take over its European territories. Wars and the resulting international treaties occupied Ottoman diplomatic efforts during this period.

As noted above, the purpose of this essay is to survey Ottoman/Turkish relations with two countries that were once Ottoman possessions and later became either mandates or independent nations: Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Along with modern Turkey, these countries have considerable standing and influence in the Middle East as leading regional powers. In the past century, the relationship between these three countries proved to be quite tumultuous, and as the following essays in this book will make clear, they remain tense today.

OTTOMAN/TURKISH-EGYPTIAN RELATIONS

Ottoman-Egyptian relations began with Sultan Selim the Grim's (Selim I) 1517 invasion of Mamluk Egypt. Egypt occupied a special place in the Ottoman administration, as was evident in the privileged status of its Ottoman governors. Until the 19th century, they held the top administrative rank in the empire with the title *beylerbeyi* ("lord of lords"). During this time, Cairo was the empire's second-most-populous city after Istanbul.

Following Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798, the Ottoman central administration sent Muhammad Ali Pasha, an Albanian military commander, to Egypt to expel the enemy and protect Ottoman interests. During the 1821 Greek uprising, the sultan again turned to Muhammad Ali Pasha, the then governor of Egypt, requesting his assistance in suppressing it. In return, he was promised the governorship of Morea and Crete. However, Morea soon became part of the newly founded Greek state and the Ottomans could not fulfill their promise. In its stead, Muhammad Ali requested the governorship of Syria, a demand that the Ottoman sultan refused. This prompted Muhammad Ali to declare war on the Ottoman Empire, and his son, Ibrahim Pasha, successfully captured Syria and parts of Anatolia, ushering in the first difficult period in Ottoman-Egyptian relations. The war between the Ottoman Empire and Muhammad Ali's Egypt continued until 1841, when Great Britain brokered an agreement between the warring parties. According to this agreement, Muhammad Ali recognized the authority of the Ottoman Empire in Egypt and in return the Ottoman administration recognized Muhammad Ali's family as the hereditary governors of Egypt (known as the *khedives*).

During this period, Ottoman diplomatic interactions in Egypt were carried

out by messengers travelling back and forth between Cairo and Istanbul. Although Egypt was *de jure* an Ottoman territory, in practice it was an autonomous region in which Western powers exerted considerable influence over the administrative structure.

The operation of the early Ottoman diplomatic apparatus clearly left something to be desired as well. For example, in 1798, the newly appointed Ottoman diplomat in Paris, Seyyid Ali Efendi, failed to inform Istanbul that Napoleon had sent a massive expedition to invade Egypt. In fact, prior to the invasion, the Ottoman ambassador informed the sultan that Napoleon had no intention of attacking the empire. By the time the news reached Istanbul, Napoleon had already landed in Alexandria.

When the Suez Canal was inaugurated in 1869, Sultan Abdulaziz visited Egypt — the first such visit by an Ottoman sultan since the invasion by Sultan Selim I in the 16th century.¹ Ottoman-Egyptian relations worsened the following decade during the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, who relieved Khedive Ismail Pasha of his post and replaced him with his son, Muhammad Tawfiq Pasha, in 1879. This was a political act and made it clear that the Ottomans still exercised some form of authority in Egypt.² Sultan Abdul Hamid II never accepted Egypt's special status and always maintained that it had been stolen from the empire.³

In 1882, Egypt was invaded by Great Britain, at which time Istanbul appointed a high commissioner to Egypt to maintain diplomatic relations with Cairo. Between 1882 and 1914 Egypt was *de facto* a British mandate, even though it was still considered an Ottoman territory in terms of the international structure. Following the outbreak of World War I, however, Great Britain declared Egypt its legal mandate, and from 1914 to 1922, Ottoman diplomatic relations with Egypt were carried out via Great Britain. At the end of the war, the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne stipulated that Turkey would give up any claim to Egypt.

After the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, relations between Egypt and the newly formed Republic of Turkey were formalized. Although both countries wished to establish diplomatic relations with each other, the initial request came in 1925 from Egypt's ambassador in Rome to Turkey's ambassador there. Accordingly, on February 19, 1925, Egypt sent a diplomatic mission to Ankara. Turkey reciprocated the next year, and full diplomatic relations were established.⁴ It should be noted that Turkey advanced its diplomacy with Egypt through Britain, which exerted heavy control over the Egyptian government until the country's independence in 1952.

In the post-World War I period, there were many ups and downs in relations between Turkey and Egypt. Two examples include the abolition of

the caliphate and Egypt's hosting of opponents of the new Kemalist regime. Although the abolition of the sultanate and the self-imposed exile of Sultan Vahdettin in 1922 were welcomed in the Egyptian press and among Egyptian nationalists, Turkey's abolition of the caliphate in 1924 sparked the earliest and most significant crisis. The issue of the caliphate was more emotional than the sultanate, as the majority of Egyptians were Sunni Muslims and hence recognized the religious authority of the Ottoman caliph.⁵ The Ottomans captured Egypt in the 16th century and took the title of caliph for the Ottoman dynasty. For four centuries, Sunni Arabs recognized the Ottoman sultans as the caliphs of Islam. The abolition of this office shocked many and was widely perceived as an attack on Islam.

This political move by the Turks, which was largely the result of domestic power struggles, inevitably had international implications. Most significantly, it created a power vacuum for the leadership of the Sunni Islamic world, resulting in an immediate struggle to claim the title. In 1925, the Islamic Congress gathered in Cairo to elect a new caliph. King Fuad of Egypt unsuccessfully bid for the role, but did not receive any support from other Muslim countries. In fact, no candidate was successful in securing overwhelming support.

Tensions between Egypt and Turkey eased in 1927 when King Fuad visited Rome and declared that Egypt considered Turkey its elder brother.⁶ The main reason for this was the realization that both countries would benefit from friendly relations, especially when dealing with Western powers. In Egypt, Great Britain was facing resistance to its direct involvement and influence in governing. Many Egyptians also sympathized with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's successful struggle against British imperialist designs in Turkey. King Fuad's declaration of fraternal ties between Turkey and Egypt was aimed at creating a unified front against Britain and strengthening a political alliance with another Muslim country that had concluded a successful war against Western imperialism.

The establishment of the Kemalist regime in Turkey ignited opposition from those who disagreed with the country's new secular vision and leadership. Many traditionalist opponents who were exiled or forced to flee chose to settle in Egypt, where living conditions were better than in the rest of the Muslim world. In particular, Egypt provided a fertile environment for the activities (such as publishing) of Islamic-minded opponents, creating a recurring source of tension between the two countries.⁷ However, by 1926 Egypt and Turkey managed to mend their strained relations, even though the Egyptian public closely followed and hotly debated the radical Kemalist reforms, especially those related to Islam on clothing, the alphabet, and the calendar. These reforms, which aimed at reorienting Turkey toward the West, had a direct effect on the mindsets of many traditionalists. The Turkish hat reform of 1926

received significant attention, especially after the Egyptian government issued a memorandum signed by the president of Al-Azhar University and sheikh al-Islam of Egypt declaring those wearing Western headgear to be heretics.⁸ In response, the Turkish daily *Cumhuriyet* printed the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs' rebuttal claiming that Muslims could pray with Western headgear.⁹ Turkey's 1928 alphabet reform received a mixed and hesitant reaction in Egypt. The Egyptian newspaper *Wadi al-Nil* was ambivalent and stated, "only time will tell the result of the change."¹⁰ Coptic journalist Salama Musa supported the move and advocated for Egypt to follow suit,¹¹ but the initiative did not make much headway.

There were minor crises between the two countries during Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's presidency, especially because of criticism of the Turkish regime in the Egyptian press. In response to anti-Kemalist activities in Egypt in 1928, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk protested by not sending a congratulatory note to King Fuad on the anniversary of his ascension to the throne. In response, Fuad forbade Egyptians from attending any diplomatic events at the Turkish embassy in Cairo and he himself refrained from sending any congratulatory messages to Atatürk for Turkish national celebrations.

Arda Baş points to two other mid-level crises in bilateral relations around this time.¹² The first was over Egypt's citizenship law, which prohibited Turks living in Egypt from becoming Egyptian citizens. At the time, Egyptian law required one to have been born in Egypt and prove Egyptian ancestry to become a citizen, excluding many ethnically Egyptian Turks. The Turkish government suggested that in cases where there were conflicts between the Turks in Egypt and the government, mixed Turkish-Egyptian courts should decide the outcome. This proposal was flatly rejected by Egypt. When the Turkish ambassador, Muhiddin Pasha, wanted an audience with King Fuad in Alexandria, despite having a scheduled appointment, he was not allowed to see the king. Angry, the Turkish ambassador slammed the doors before leaving the monarch's summer palace, which only made the situation worse. The crisis ended when the Turkish ambassador apologized. Ultimately, Turkey asked Britain to assist in resolving the citizenship issue. Tensions were only relieved when the Egyptian government, in an act of goodwill, donated money to the Red Crescent relief fund after flooding in the Black Sea region and a major fire in Ankara in the late 1920s.

In 1930, a conflict emerged over opium when Egypt accused Turkey of being the main producer and distributor of the drug. Egypt claimed that it had over half a million opium users, which posed a grave danger to the country's well-being. According to Egypt, Turkey illegally produced and sold drugs to the Egyptian market and played a key role in global drug trafficking — accusations that were motivated in part by U.S. pressure. A cartoon published in Egypt at

the time depicted Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as a drug dealer, resulting in fierce objections from the Turkish ambassador, Muhittin Pasha, to the Egyptian Foreign Ministry. The following year on February 15, 1931, after discussing the issue, the Turkish parliament passed a law severely restricting and tightly monitoring poppy production. The Egyptian government responded with clear appreciation.¹³

Turkey-Egypt relations improved after 1931, especially after Turkish Prime Minister İsmet İnönü's interview in the Egyptian daily *Al Ahram* on October 21, 1931 in which he stated that Turkey supported full independence for Egypt.¹⁴ This declaration had its intended effect, and the Egyptian press subsequently published a number of favorable articles about Turkey and its economic policies. In the following years, both countries followed each other's internal affairs closely and newspapers dedicated ample space to news regarding the other's domestic and international affairs.

Turkey and Egypt also cooperated on issues related to the Islamic world. For example, the two countries exchanged views on the status of Jerusalem and Jewish migration to the city at the Islamic Conference in Jerusalem on December 7, 1931. Both sides agreed not to discuss the reinstitution of the Islamic caliphate at the conference. Turkey was anxious about the close relationship between King Fuad and the exiled Ottoman dynasty; however, its concerns proved to be groundless.

Turkish-Egyptian bilateral relations took a turn for the worse the following year as a result of the so-called Fez Incident, which took place during a diplomatic reception in Ankara on October 29, the anniversary of the founding of the Turkish Republic. The fez was widely worn in Egypt, but it was forbidden in Turkey following the Kemalist government's 1925 Hat Reform. The Egyptian ambassador, Hamza Bey, arrived at the reception wearing a fez. This angered Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who knocked the fez off the ambassador's head. As a result, the Egyptian foreign mission immediately left the reception, and the government registered a diplomatic protest and filed a complaint. The Turkish Foreign Ministry quickly apologized and assured the Egyptians that it would not happen again. The British high commissioner in Cairo, Sir Percy Lorraine, was reportedly instrumental in defusing tensions between the two countries.¹⁵ Atatürk himself took a further step to show his regret and visited the Egyptian embassy on March 26, 1933, joining the celebration for King Fuad's birthday.

After 1935, Turkey and Egypt became closer allies due to shared concerns over Italy's policies, which threatened the Mediterranean region. Atatürk's standing with the Egyptian public was elevated to such an extent that in 1936, Alexandria's Young Christians Society picked him as the most influential living politician. After Egypt signed a Treaty of Friendship with Great Britain in 1936, following Turkey's example, it also pushed for the removal of the capitulations

(agreements conferring special rights and privileges on Western citizens). Both countries had long suffered the negative effects of the capitulations on their economies and sovereignty.

Furthermore, Turkish Foreign Minister Tevfik Rüşdü Aras, the elected president of the League of Nations, was instrumental in Egypt's entry to the League. Such support was a clear indication that Turkey regarded Egypt as its equal in the international arena, which was greatly appreciated in Egypt. Additionally, Turkey was openly supportive of Egypt's desire for independence while negotiations with Great Britain were ongoing in 1936.

King Fuad died on April 28, 1936, shortly before the Egyptian-British Agreement was signed. During his reign, relations between Turkey and Egypt were volatile. Atatürk was never comfortable knowing that King Fuad had a desire to replace the Ottoman leadership in the region, and because of Turkey's pivot toward the West, one can argue that there was some validity to this claim. According to documents in the British archives, the volatile relations between Egypt and Turkey were due to Atatürk's mistrust of Fuad.¹⁶ When the king died, Atatürk sent full representation at the highest diplomatic levels to his funeral, although he himself did not attend. Nevertheless, the Egyptian government was pleased by Turkey's participation and the compassionate messages the Turks sent.

Turkey was also well represented at the ascension ceremony for the next Egyptian king, Farouk, on July 29, 1937. On his return to Turkey, the Turkish ambassador reported two interesting observations about it: First, the Egyptian government warned the new king not to have a very elaborate ceremony reminiscent of the former Ottoman sultans; and second, while the newly crowned king shook hands with the international diplomatic corps, he had a very long audience with the British ambassador.

On April 7, 1937, Turkey and Egypt signed a friendship agreement and agreed to cooperate on several issues, including the right to purchase property and residency permits in each other's countries. The agreement recognized a special status for the citizens of both countries as members of "most favored nations." In 1938, as a gesture of goodwill, Turkey donated land in Ankara to Egypt to build an embassy.

Throughout all of these positive exchanges, however, diplomatic cables make it clear that Turkey was still uneasy about the public debates in Egypt regarding the future of the caliphate. In a report sent to Ankara on March 15, 1937, the Turkish embassy in Cairo indicated that there were groups, supported by Italy, that wished to keep the issue alive. This rumor was traced back to British sources, which further indicated that if a new caliphate were to be established in Egypt, the Italians would exert considerable authority over it.¹⁷

Turkey's tumultuous relations with Egypt continued behind the scenes

until after the 1952 revolution in Egypt by the Free Officers. Following the regime change and Gamal Abdel Nasser's rise to power as president, suspicion between the two countries grew rapidly. Nasser had ambitions to champion Pan-Arabism as a political ideology and pursued a Third-Worldist policy,¹⁸ and as such sought to compete with Turkey as a rival regional power. Both of Nasser's major foreign policy goals ran counter to Turkey's pro-Western stance, and Turkey's decision to join pro-Western alliances such as the Baghdad Pact of 1955 was not welcomed by Egypt. Nasser actively lobbied against such alliances and openly criticized the countries that joined them, especially Iraq.

In 1954, Nasser expelled the Turkish ambassador in Cairo, Hulusi Fuad Tugay, due to his criticism of the Egyptian coup d'état and Nasser himself. In response, Turkey remained silent during the Suez Crisis of 1956, in which France, Great Britain, and Israel briefly invaded Egypt. Nasser was not pleased with Turkish Prime Minister Adnan Menderes' lack of support against Western imperialist designs. After Egypt emerged victorious, thanks to Soviet support, Nasser's feelings toward Turkey hardened, so much so that he supported Greece in its dispute with Turkey over Cyprus in the early 1960s. Relations rapidly deteriorated over the course of that decade as Turkey welcomed Egypt's separation from Syria after the failure of the United Arab Republic, Nasser's Pan-Arabist project. Turkey's support for the dissolution of this political experiment prompted Egypt to expel the Turkish ambassador once more during the Nasser era.¹⁹

Until the end of the 1960s, Turkey's relations with Egypt were tense. However, in 1967, both countries opened new consulates: Turkey in Alexandria and Egypt in Istanbul. By 1967, Turkey clearly viewed Egypt more favorably, as it sided with the Arabs during the Six Day War against Israel. Following Nasser's death in 1970, his successor, Anwar Sadat, pursued more Western-oriented policies, and Turkey and Egypt finally found themselves on the same page, firmly in the pro-Western camp during the Cold War period.

OTTOMAN/TURKISH-SAUDI RELATIONS

The Ottomans' prestige within the Islamic world grew when Sultan Selim I conquered Egypt and most of Arabia in the 16th century. As the new protector of the two holy cities of Islam — Mecca and Medina — the Ottoman Empire opened a new chapter in Islamic history. The Ottoman governor of Egypt initially administered these newly conquered territories, until the rebellion of Muhammad Ali of Egypt in the 19th century, as mentioned previously. Following this dispute, the Ottoman administration of Arabia varied, especially in the holy cities. From 1517 onwards, the Ottomans treated the region with great care given its religious significance, exempting the locals from tax and military service obligations. The office of the *sharif* of Mecca was maintained

and represented the imperial authority in the holy cities. Although this office existed until the end of the Arab Revolt of 1916, the official administrative structure in the Arabian Peninsula functioned semi-autonomously under the umbrella of the governorate of the Hijaz. The sharifs of Mecca always enjoyed a special status, even though their appointment to the office was strictly controlled by Istanbul.

In the early 19th century, the Ottomans faced a new challenge with the rise of the Wahhabi movement in the Najd region of the Arabian Peninsula. This puritanical Islamic movement, backed by the al-Saud family, became a threat to the stability of the Hijaz for the Ottomans. In 1801, while the Ottomans were dealing with the French invasion of Egypt, al-Saud forces captured the holy cities. Although the Ottoman governor of Jeddah, Serif Pasha, temporarily took back control, al-Saud forces finally defeated the Ottomans in 1806 and imposed strict Wahhabi practices, forbidding any mention of the name of the Ottoman sultan and caliph during Friday sermons.

The task of defeating the al-Saud forces was then given to Muhammad Ali Pasha of Egypt, who was successful in retaking Medina and Mecca in 1812 and 1813 respectively. Egyptian troops under Ibrahim Pasha, his son, followed the al-Saud forces to the Najd region, the stronghold of the Wahhabis. The defeat of the al-Saud forces brought the war to a close, ending the First Saudi State. Abdullah ibn al-Saud and his four sons were sent to Istanbul, where they were executed on December 17, 1819. Between 1818 and 1845 Muhammad Ali of Egypt administered the region in the name of Istanbul. However, as a result of the Egyptian-Ottoman War (discussed above), the Ottomans severed the administration of the Hijaz from Egypt and appointed Osman Pasha as governor.

The Second Saudi State came into existence between 1824 and 1891 when the exiled al-Saud family retook Najd and Riyadh. Due to an internal power struggle, the new state did not seek to expand its territory, and in 1891 the Ottoman-backed Rashidi dynasty took advantage of the infighting to occupy Riyadh, bringing the Second Saudi State to an end. The Saudi tribes fled into exile to Bahrain, Qatar, and Kuwait.

The Third Saudi State, established in 1902, is currently known as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. At the turn of the 20th century, the exiled al-Saud family regrouped and captured Riyadh from the Rashidi dynasty, the Ottoman authority in the region. Abdulaziz ibn Saud was the first ruler of modern Saudi Arabia and he spent the next three decades trying to reestablish his family's authority over Arabia, starting with the Najd region.

After the Arab Revolt of 1916, the last Ottoman forces defending the holy sites surrendered these cities to Sharif Abdullah on January 12, 1919 as a result of the Mudros Armistice. This marked the official end of Ottoman sovereignty

in the Arabian Peninsula and holy cities after four centuries. Following the capture of Mecca and Medina in 1924 and 1925, Hashemite rule in western Arabia was replaced by Saudi rule. At this time, the Ottoman Empire was fighting for its survival, and formal diplomatic relations with the al-Saud family were not established until the formation of the Turkish republic.

Although the Saudi state remained a protectorate of Great Britain from 1915 to 1927, in 1921, the al-Sauds won a decisive victory against the Rashidis, becoming the uncontested rulers of central Arabia. Ibn Saud consolidated his territories under the Sultanate of Najd, ultimately capturing the Hijaz in 1926. The Saudi administration considered the Kingdom of Hijaz and of Najd separate units. In 1932, the two kingdoms were united, forming modern Saudi Arabia under the name of the Kingdom of Hijaz.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's Turkey acknowledged King Abdulaziz al-Saud as the ruler of Arabia on Jan. 8, 1926, and in May of the same year Turkey became the first country to recognize the Kingdom of Hijaz as an independent country.²⁰ Although details about the motivation for this unexpected move are limited, it was likely due to a lingering grudge on the part of the Kemalists toward Sharif Hussein of the Hashemite family; as a result they would have been pleased to see Saudi forces topple him in the Hijaz. Ultimately, it was more of a pragmatic move than an ideological one. Sharif Hussein led the Arab Revolt of 1916 against the Ottoman Empire and had a very bad reputation among the founders of the Turkish republic, who were themselves former Ottoman army officers that had fought the rebellion. Recognizing Saudi over Hashemite rule in the Hijaz also stopped Sharif Hussein's dream of becoming the next caliph from going any further. After the abolition of the caliphate in 1924, Great Britain briefly supported Sharif Hussein's aspirations of assuming the title. The Saudis, however, made no such claims.

Shortly before official diplomatic relations were established between the countries, on March 26, 1926, the Saudi king invited the Turkish representatives to join the Islamic Congress that he was organizing in Mecca. The aim of this congress was to discuss the future of the Hijaz, home to the holy cities of Islam. What is significant is that the invitation went against the general attitude in the Arab world, which was to isolate Turkey due to its decision to abolish the caliphate. One can only speculate as to why the Saudis invited the Turks to the congress and chose not to isolate the Kemalists further. It is possible that they were seeking a regional ally beyond the Arab world. Although the former Ottoman regime persecuted the Saudi clan a century earlier, the political situation had changed considerably since then. Republican Turkey had one other important thing in common with the young Saudi state as well: neither was a mandate of a Western power.

Turkey read the invitation as a gesture of goodwill and agreed to send

representation. Unlike at the earlier Islamic Congress in 1925 in Cairo, the issue of the caliphate was not on the agenda. On May 25, 1926, Edip Bey joined the conference, representing Turkey. He was not very active in the deliberations and observed the fragmentation among delegations on many issues, most notably the Indian representation's objections to Wahhabi principles. The shortcomings of pan-Islamism were on full display. Even though one article of the concluding statement called for an annual gathering, it was never held again.

Immediately after recognizing Saudi authority, Turkey appointed Suleyman Sevkett, Mahmut Nedim, and Feridun Fahri as the first Turkish diplomatic representatives to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, albeit at a lower diplomatic rank than ambassador. Suleyman Sevkett arrived in Jeddah on May 25, 1926. When received by the king, he gave a speech indicating that the Republic of Turkey wished to establish relations with the kingdom on a positive footing, "Turks and Arabs are old friends with ties coming from the distant past. We Turks never forget the friendship given to us. It is to our mutual benefit to improve our friendly relations."^{21 22}

On August 3, 1929, Turkey signed a treaty of friendship with the Kingdom of Hijaz in Mecca. Article One states that Turkey recognizes the independence of the kingdom with all its territories, while another article acknowledges the residency rights of citizens in each other's territories.²³ This treaty can be considered the first of its kind that officially recognized the Saudi kingdom and initiated diplomatic relations on an equal basis in the international community.

When the kingdoms of Najd and Hijaz were unified under the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on September 22, 1932, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk sent his congratulations to the king, ahead of the rest of the world. During this period, Saudi-Turkey relations reached their peak with the visit of Abdulaziz's son, Prince Faisal, to Turkey on June 8, 1932. Faisal was received by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and was treated with great care and respect. The crown prince reciprocated by stating, "I am here as a representative of a foreign government; however, I come here as someone who feels the pain of separation and long for unity with the sibling country. Historical and political events that took place in the recent past have surely failed the sincerity and fellowship that our people feel for each other. Our two peoples are brothers and will remain so."²⁴ This warm visit was also doubtless a signal to the world that Turkey despised the former ruler of the Hijaz, Sharif Hussein, who led the Arab Revolt of 1916, and favored the rival Saudi administration over the Hashemites. The Saudi distaste for reinstating the office of the caliphate was another reason for Turkey's warm feeling toward the new rulers in Arabia.²⁵

Although the new Turkish republic emerged as a secular and Western-oriented country and the Saudi regime had a deeply conservative Islamic and

Wahhabi worldview, a political alliance must have seemed to both countries like the only viable alternative in the face of Western imperialism. After all, Turkey inherited the legacy of the Ottoman Empire, which ruled the region for four centuries, even though Kemalism as an ideology did not leave any room for Islam in the political sphere. The irony for Turkey was that the Kemalists, while fighting against the West, adopted Western political principles. In international politics, most alliances are formed on the basis of pragmatism rather than ideology. The rapprochement between Turkey and Saudi Arabia, an odd couple if there ever was one, can only be explained as pragmatism.

In the following years, Saudi-Turkish relations proved less than dynamic and did not progress much. Despite all the goodwill, diplomatic relations remained at the level of *charge d'affaires* between 1926 and 1942. The tensions between the two countries increased when Turkey became the first Islamic country to recognize the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. The Baghdad Pact of 1955²⁶ was another point of contention as well. Iraq was the only Arab country to join the pact, which was aimed at containing the Soviet threat. Saudi Arabia's objection stemmed mainly from its dynastic rivalry with Iraq and from the fear that it would diminish its prestige among other Arab countries. During the Cold War period, relations between the two countries were on the backburner and the Baghdad Pact remained a major thorn in the side of Turkey's relations with other Arab states, with the exception of Iraq.

CONCLUSION

The Ottoman Empire was the last Islamic empire to span three continents: Asia, Europe, and Africa. In the 17th century, it began a long period of stagnation and decline. This was evident in its slow loss of territory, first in Europe and then in the rest of the empire. It was during this time of decline that the Ottomans first established diplomatic relations with other European empires on an equal basis. Soon, however, especially after new nations emerged in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the Ottoman government felt the need to establish diplomatic contacts with countries in the Middle East as well, a vast territory once ruled by the Ottoman sultans. Establishing permanent diplomatic representations in the new Middle Eastern countries was a major shift for the Ottomans, dictated by the *realpolitik* of the era. By doing so, the Ottomans recognized the sovereignty of their former possessions, and in that sense, Ottoman (and later Turkish) relations with Egypt and Saudi Arabia are especially significant.

Both Egypt and the territory that later became Saudi Arabia held a special status in the Ottoman administrative system. Egypt, as a result of its geostrategic location, military considerations, and Western connection, became a hereditary governorship that later evolved into the Kingdom of Egypt. The

Arabian Peninsula was home to two of the holiest cities of Islam (Mecca and Medina) and the Ottoman administration was generally more lenient toward the region and its people. Turkey and Saudi Arabia enjoyed prestige in the region because neither country was ruled by nor gained independence from a Western mandatory power. A shared desire to resist Western imperialism also brought Egypt and Turkey together, and the emergence of the Republic of Turkey was a symbol of successful defiance of British dominance that garnered much respect in Egypt.

Despite all of this, relations between Turkey, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia have long been volatile as the three states have competed for regional dominance. This essay aims to provide a brief overview of the history of Turkey's relations with Egypt and Saudi Arabia in the hope that it will give the reader a better understanding of and appreciation for the dynamics shaping the region today. The power struggle between these three aspiring regional leaders is nothing new and, as other chapters in this book will make clear, continues to impact developments across the Middle East today.

ENDNOTES

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2. Khedive of Egypt Abbas II, *The Last Khedive of Egypt: Memoirs of Abbas Hilmi II*, (Ithaca Press, UK, 199), 43.
3. Tahsin Paşa, *Yıldız Hatıraları Sultan Abdülhamit* (Boğaziçi Yayınları, İstanbul) 148.
4. Semih Bulut, "Atatürk Dönemi Türkiye-Mısır İlişkileri (1926-1938)," *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi*, Vol: XXVI, No: 78, (Oct., 2010), 540.
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6. Baş, 45.
7. In particular, members of the group known as the 150ers were exiled from Turkey and ended up in Egypt. See, Ayten Sezer, "Mısır Basınında Atatürk ve İnkılapları" (translated from Richard Hattamer), *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi*, Vol: XVII, Number: 50, July 2001, p. 388.
8. Bernard Lewis, *Modern Türkiye'nin Doğuşu*. Trans. Metin Kıratlı, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2000), 269.
9. Yılmaz, "Türkiye'deki Şapka ve Kıyafet İnkılabının...", p. 100.
10. Sezer, p.7 as quoted in Baş, p. 43.
11. For more information on Musa see, Ibrahim A. Ibrahim, "Salama Musa: An Essay on Cultural Alienation," *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 15:3 (Oct., 1979): 346-57.
12. Baş, 46-47.
13. Baş, 47,
14. Bulut, 545.
15. Arda Baş (p. 50, fn 120) refers to a British archival source for this incident. Foreign Office, 371/16983, From G. Clerk to J. Simon, January 17, 1933.
16. Mustafa Sıtkı Bilgin, *Britain and Turkey in the Middle East: Politics and Influence in the Early Cold War Era*, (London & New York: IB Tauris, 2008), 99.
17. The source for this report was Turkish Republican Archives, April 19, 1937, 490.1.0.0, no: 585.18.5, as quoted in Baş, p. 59, fn. 168. I rely on his reporting.
18. Third-Worldism was a political ideology that aimed at creating unity among nations that did not want to take sides in the Cold War struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union. It emerged in the late 1940s and early 1950s.
19. The Turkey-Egypt dispute over Syria reached such a point that Turkish and Egyptian forces faced each other on the Turkish-Syrian border. See *Turkey in World Politics: An Emerging Multiregional Power*, eds. B. Rubin, K. Kirisci (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2001), 102.
20. İsmail Soysal, "Turkish-Arab Diplomatic Relations After the Second World War (1945-1986)," *Studies on Turkish on Turkish-Arab Relations*, (Annual, 1986), 250.
21. İsmail Soysal, "Turkish-Arab Diplomatic Relations After the Second World War (1945-1986)," *Studies on Turkish on Turkish-Arab Relations*, (Annual, 1986), 250.
22. My translation is very loose, based on the text provided by Mustafa Bostancı, "Suudi Arabistan Devleti'nin kuruluşu ve Türkiye-Suudi Arabistan ilişkileri (1926-1990)" Ph.D. Diss. Gazi Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, 2013.
23. *T.C. Resmi Gazete*, 31 Mayıs 1930, p.1507, Law No: 1621, p.1; *Düstur*, Üçüncü Tertip, C.XI, Başvekalet Müdevvenat Matbaası, Ankara, 1930, p.467.
24. See Bostancı, fn. 114 quoted Turkish daily newspapers. My translation of the Turkish text is not literal.
25. For more information on this point, see Bostancı, 141-42.
26. The Baghdad Pact was a defensive organization for promoting shared political, military, and economic goals founded in 1955 by Turkey, Iraq, Great Britain, Pakistan, and Iran. It was

formed to stop the expansionist aims of the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The United States supported the alliance from outside. Turkey allied with the West and became a member of NATO in 1952, and consequently was a major proponent of the pact. However, some Arab countries remained critical of the alliance. Some Arab countries viewed the pact as another means of Western dominance of the region and as part of an effort to eventually force them to recognize Israel.

CHAPTER TWO

TURKEY'S RELATIONS WITH EGYPT AND SAUDI ARABIA: FROM HOPES OF COOPERATION TO THE REALITY OF CONFLICT

MELIHA ALTUNIŞIK

Turkey's relations with Egypt and Saudi Arabia have been shaped by the fact that all three states are aspiring regional powers vying for influence in the Middle East.¹ As a corollary of this, in their regional policies these states not only try to expand their own influence, but also check that of others, which has limited their ability to form partnerships. In addition to the usual competition to gain regional influence, Turkey's relations with these two countries have also been influenced by its non-Arab character. Egypt and Saudi Arabia, two major Arab states, have been particularly keen not to let non-Arab members of the region into the Arab core.²

Additionally, since the beginning of the 21st century, Turkey's relations with Egypt and Saudi Arabia have also been affected by their domestic transformations. Changes in domestic politics, such as the coming to power of President Mohammed Morsi and later, President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi in Egypt; King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Saudi Arabia; and Prime Minister and later President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey have all influenced bilateral relations between the countries. These domestic transformations led to shifts

in their approach to foreign policy, as well as their view of themselves and their place in regional and global politics.

Domestic politics have also played a significant role due to the increasing fluidity between foreign and domestic policies — leaders in all of these countries have utilized foreign policy issues in domestic politics and their domestic political goals have influenced their foreign policy choices.

Finally, the evolution of the regional order as a result of the 2003 Iraq War and the Arab uprisings of 2010-12 created a volatile context that deeply affected the relationship between the three countries. While the post-2003 regional order created new possibilities for Turkey to play a more active role in the Middle East, regional politics in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings not only changed the nature of Turkey's involvement in the region, but also led to more resistance from the major Arab countries — mainly Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The same Turkish party was in power in both of these periods, but there were shifts in policy during the 17 years of AKP rule as a majoritarian government. In short, both agential factors and structural changes have been critical in shaping the relations between Turkey, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. This chapter aims to understand the ups and downs in Turkey's relations with Egypt and Saudi Arabia in the last decade, as well as to analyze and prioritize their causes by referring to domestic, regional, and international factors. Their relations are analyzed under two major transformations in the region: the 2003 Iraq War and the Arab uprisings. It is argued that both regional dynamics as well as shifts in Turkey's domestic and foreign policy since 2003 have influenced its relations with these two regional Arab powers.

THE POST-2003 REGIONAL ORDER AND TURKEY'S RELATIONS WITH EGYPT AND SAUDI ARABIA

The U.S. invasion of Iraq is generally considered a watershed moment that transformed regional politics. By changing the regime in Iraq, confronting and threatening Iran and Syria, and espousing an assertive democracy promotion agenda that also targeted its allies, the Bush administration's policies in the region created new conflicts and alliances. The Iraq War impacted Turkey's policy toward the Middle East in two ways. Firstly, this period witnessed the deterioration of Turkey-U.S. relations due to Turkey's unexpected decision not to support the war. Secondly, the rise of the Iraqi Kurds as key actors in the post-war Iraqi transition — and the main ally of the U.S. in Iraq — led to increased threat perceptions in Ankara. The AKP government's response was to improve its relations with its Middle Eastern neighbors, and to present itself as a moderate Islamist democratic model both to the region and to the U.S. and the E.U., which were looking for such models in the post-9/11 world. These two strategies sometimes clashed, as was the case with Turkey's engagement

with Syria, which was heavily criticized by the U.S. Overall, though, Turkey was able to present itself as a “benign power,”³ a model, and a mediator, all of which helped to increase its activism in the region.⁴

The second phase of Turkey's involvement post-2003, however, occurred in the context of declining U.S. influence in Iraq and beyond. This new strategic context led to Turkey's rising regional power aspirations, and during this period Ankara became more engaged within the Middle East. Especially after the Israeli wars in Lebanon (2006) and in Gaza (2008-09), the AKP government started to adopt anti-Israeli rhetoric which made it very popular with the public in the Arab world.⁵ It adopted a policy of soft-balancing against Iran in the region, while also trying to expand its influence in the Levant and in the Kurdish region of Iraq through the use of mainly economic means. Turkey's initial move to improve relations with the region after 2003 was welcomed by Egypt and Saudi Arabia, whereas the second phase of Turkey's activism led to suspicions about its new role.

The evolution of the AKP's foreign policy in the Middle East after 2003 was very much tied to the party's domestic face. In its early years, after coming to power with 34.28 percent of the vote, the party tried to consolidate itself, especially against other state actors such as the military, which aimed to limit its room for maneuver. During this period, the government worked to advance its relations with the E.U. — it was eager to implement E.U. reforms, especially those that would limit the military's political clout and serve its domestic interests. In this complex game, the AKP allied itself with the liberals and Kurdish actors. Thus, the de-securitization of Turkey's Middle East policy and its engagement with the Iraqi Kurds was very much in line with this general policy. Similarly, Turkey's Middle East activism was welcomed domestically, especially by the Anatolian businesses which constituted the backbone of the AKP. Turkey's growing interaction with the region provided increasing economic opportunities. Finally, Turkey's new policies were very much influenced by the AKP's ideology — at that point, a mixture of Islamic solidarity, the reinvigoration of its Ottoman past, and liberal economic policies. The theoretical framework for this approach was provided by Professor Ahmet Davutoğlu, who served as the chief foreign policy advisor to the prime minister from 2002 to 2009, the foreign minister from 2009 to 2014, and finally, the prime minister from 2014 to 2016.

RELATIONS WITH EGYPT

Egyptian-Turkish relations improved in the early 2000s, a reflection of the general improvement of relations between Turkey and Arab countries. This improvement manifested itself in the increasing number of high-level visits between the two countries. During President Hosni Mubarak's visit to Turkey

in 2007, a *Memorandum for a Framework for Turkish-Egyptian Strategic Dialogue* was signed and the first round of strategic dialogue took place in September 2008.

However, behind the façade of improving bilateral relations, Egypt and Turkey continued to diverge in terms of their strategic outlook. It was mainly Turkey that was pushing the relationship. This was in line with the AKP policy of improving relations with the Arab countries and Davutoğlu's vision of regional politics. He particularly valued closer ties with Egypt and Iran, as in his view Turkey, Egypt, and Iran constituted "the outer concentric circle in the region," which he thought would limit outside powers' intervention into the region.⁶

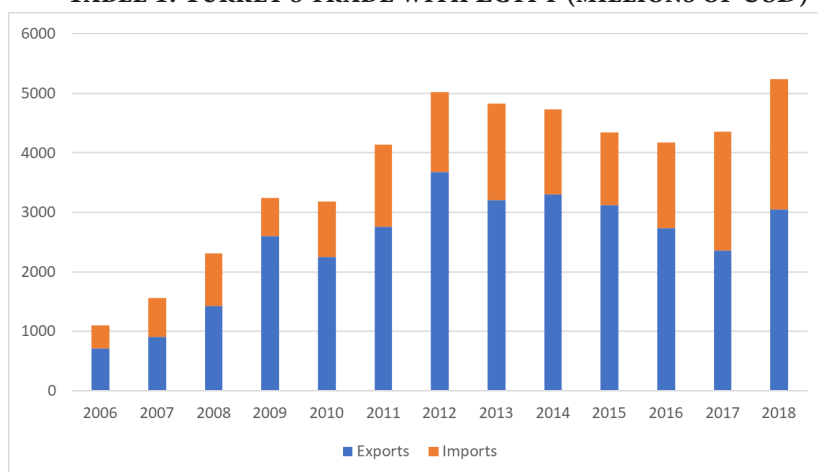
At first, Mubarak played along with Turkey's new engagement. In the 2000s, Egypt, along with Saudi Arabia, had become an important player in the alliance against Iran, whose power in the region was growing. This policy of containing Iran was one of the reasons why Egypt, as well as Saudi Arabia, could tolerate the new Turkish activism in the Middle East. However, this toleration had its limits. It soon became clear that Turkey was not interested in becoming part of the Saudi-led "Sunni bloc" against Iran. On the contrary, it had its own policy of engaging Tehran. Although Ankara was also disturbed by Iran's increasing influence in the region, unlike Egypt and Saudi Arabia, it chose to not to confront it openly due to its other, mainly economic, interests. Similarly, Turkey was, from the beginning, opposed to a military solution to the Iran nuclear crisis and actively worked for a diplomatic reconciliation. Turkey's relations with Iran and its part in the proposed nuclear swap deal disturbed the anti-Iranian alliance.

From Egypt's perspective, another significant strategic divergence point with Turkey emerged after the ascension to power of Hamas in 2006. Following this, the AKP government strengthened its ties with Hamas, played an active role in the mediation between Hamas and Fatah, and became increasingly critical of Israel, especially after the Gaza War of 2008-09. In response to the war, Prime Minister Erdoğan went on a tour of the region to discuss what could be done to end it, although this did not produce a result. After the war, the AKP government went on to openly criticize and challenge the Gaza blockade implemented by Israel and Egypt. Turkey's policy toward the Palestinian issue and its deteriorating relations with Israel disturbed the Mubarak regime. The AKP government's support of Hamas was particularly problematic for Cairo, which perceived Hamas not only as an obstacle to peace, but also as a threat to its regime due to its links with the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt. The Mubarak regime also did not appreciate what it perceived as Turkish encroachment on the only issue where Egypt had some influence in the region. Aware of such sensitivities, the AKP government stressed that Turkey's role on the Palestinian

issue was complimentary to that of Egypt and that Turkey was not trying "to steal a role from Egypt."⁷ Yet such assurances were not enough for Egypt.

However, the anti-Israeli rhetoric and policies of the AKP government made it very popular with the public in the Arab world, including in Egypt.⁸ This popularity disturbed the Arab regimes, as it was an implicit criticism of their inability to do the same. On the contrary, during this period, Egypt's relations with Israel were becoming closer, changing from "cold peace" to "strategic peace."⁹ As a result, Egypt-Turkey relations remained limited and the two countries were increasingly at odds politically. Mubarak's Egypt not only diverged from Turkey in terms of strategic goals and policies, it also perceived Turkey's increasing assertiveness in the region as a threat to its interests and to its perception of itself as a regional (read: Arab) leader — in contrast to the reality of its weakening role since the late 1970s.¹⁰

TABLE 1: TURKEY'S TRADE WITH EGYPT (MILLIONS OF USD)



SOURCE: TURKISH STATISTICS INSTITUTE (TUIK)

AVAILABLE AT [HTTP://TUIK.GOV.TR/PreTABLO.DO?ALT_ID=1046](http://tuik.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?ALT_ID=1046)

Despite problems in the political realm, economic relations between the two countries developed quite positively in the 2000s.¹¹ Intensifying its economic relations with the region was an important part of the AKP's policy in the Middle East.¹² Furthermore, Egypt's Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the U.S. and the E.U. made it an attractive target. Developing economic relations with Turkey and attracting Turkish investment was also in the interest of the Mubarak regime, which was trying to boost Egypt's struggling economy. On December 27, 2005, an FTA was signed and it came into force on March 1, 2007. As a result, the volume of trade between the two countries jumped

from \$1.1 billion in 2006 to \$3 billion in 2010 (Table 1). Turkey's exports to Egypt included automobiles, steel products, and minerals. Imports from Egypt comprised rice, coal, copper wires, oil, and chemical fertilizers.

The trade volume between the two countries was in Turkey's favor, and in order to introduce some balance, Turkey extended the free access of Egyptian industrial products to Turkey for 15 years. Furthermore, several Egyptian agricultural products received concessions as well.¹³ As a result, Egyptian exports to Turkey reached almost \$1 billion in 2010, up from just under \$300 million in 2005. This was partly due to an increase in exports from Turkish investments in Egypt. In fact, Turkish investment in Egypt itself also grew over this period, increasing from just \$60 million in 2005 to \$1.5 billion in 2009, focused mostly on chemicals, soap, textile, automotive, and food production.¹⁴ By 2013 there were more than 200 Turkish companies operating in Egypt with more than \$2 billion in total investment.¹⁵ It was estimated that by 2010, Turkish investments provided jobs for about 50,000 Egyptians.¹⁶

Tourism also flourished between the two countries. Approximately 42,000 Egyptian tourists visited Turkey in 2006, and this reached 67,000 by 2009. Similarly, Egypt became an attractive destination for Turkish tourists. The number of Turkish tourists visiting Egypt increased 37.5 percent to 64,000 in 2010 when compared to 2009.¹⁷

RELATIONS WITH SAUDI ARABIA

Turkey's relations with Saudi Arabia in the post-2003 era became much closer than its ties with Egypt. The change of regime in Iraq and the general activism of Iran in the Arab world was considered a more serious threat in Saudi Arabia than in Egypt. This was due to its implications for not only the regional balance of power, but also domestic security. This resulted in Saudi Arabia's efforts to lead a Sunni bloc and its perception of Turkey as a potential Sunni ally and counterweight to Iran.¹⁸

The AKP government, on the other hand, wanted to improve its relations with Riyadh both as part of its general Middle East policy, and for economic reasons. As a result, from 2001-11, the Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, emerged as an important focal point for Turkish foreign policy.

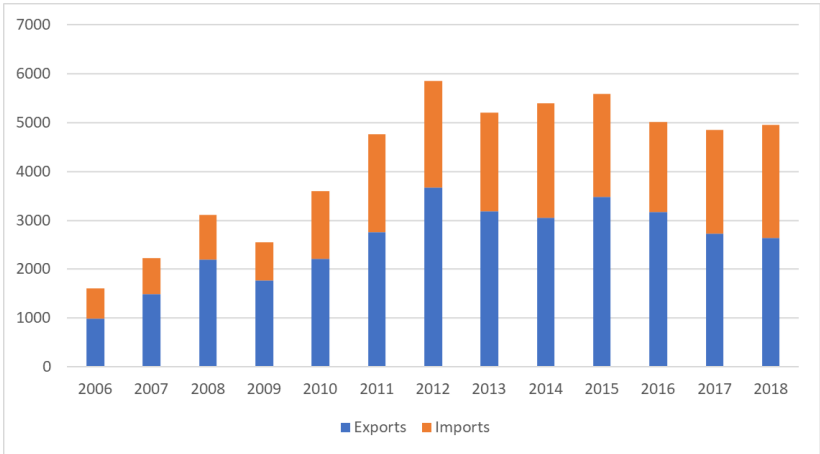
In August 2006, the late King Abdullah became the first Saudi monarch to officially visit Turkey since the kingdom's establishment in 1932.¹⁹ King Abdullah was accompanied by a 300-member delegation, and during the visit, six bilateral treaties on duties, trade, and transport were signed, as well as a memorandum of understanding pertaining to bilateral political consultations between the two foreign ministries. In addition, the Saudi-Turkish Joint Commission and the Saudi-Turkish Businessmen Council were established.²⁰ Saudi Arabia presented this visit as "a new chapter" in relations between the

two countries,²¹ and the kingdom's objective of getting Turkey's support for the so-called "Sunni camp" was hinted at in King Abdullah's statement:

*"The ties that bind our sibling country Turkey to us are not the usual ones, but rather spiritual ones which are based on shared beliefs, which is why any calculations of various financial interests in each other are useless in terms of making our relations more valuable. Likewise, any financial damage we incur to each other cannot weaken our relations."*²²

Following the visit, Turkey-Saudi relations began to improve on several fronts. The election of Turkish professor Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu by the foreign ministers of the member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) as the OIC's new secretary-general from December 31, 2004 until January 31, 2014 is one example: Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries supported his candidacy as the first Turkish diplomat to occupy the post. King Abdullah received Turkey's State Medal of Honor for his efforts to build cooperation between the countries, becoming the eighth foreign statesperson to receive it.²³ In 2010, during his visit to Riyadh, then Prime Minister Erdoğan was awarded the King Faisal International Prize for Serving Islam.²⁴ In the high-level visits, as well as regular dialogue meetings at the foreign ministry level, the two countries discussed regional issues, such as the Palestinian issue, developments in Iraq, and the political crisis in Lebanon.²⁵ All of these issues were related to Iran as its influence in these areas was increasing in the post-2003 Middle East.

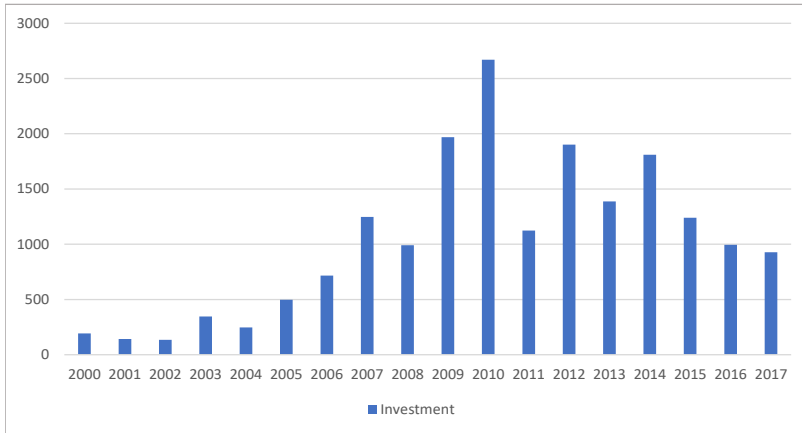
TABLE 2: TURKEY'S TRADE WITH SAUDI ARABIA (MILLIONS OF USD)



SOURCE: TURKISH STATISTICS INSTITUTE (TÜİK)
AVAILABLE AT [HTTP://TUIK.GOV.TR/PreTABLO.DO?ALT_ID=1046](http://tuik.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?ALT_ID=1046)

Improving ties between Turkey and Saudi Arabia led to the intensification of Turkey's relations with the GCC as a whole. In September 2008, Turkey and the GCC signed a memorandum of understanding to launch a strategic dialogue. The memorandum entailed an annual meeting to be held between the foreign minister of Turkey and that of the GCC state chairing the bloc's annual round.²⁶ The agreement also opened the door for a higher level of cooperation and coordination between Turkey and GCC member states first and foremost in the fields of politics, security, and development. The strategic dialogue between Turkey and the GCC was widely recognized in the Turkish and the Arab media as focusing on Iran. Ali Babacan, the Turkish foreign minister at the time, signed the agreement, declaring that “today, there is a belt of crisis in the Middle East, and it is unfortunately in an area between Turkey in the north and the Gulf in the south.”²⁷ Yet, Turkey was generally more cautious about presenting its increasing ties with Saudi Arabia and the GCC as being against Iran. Despite this, the intensifying strategic relations began to make it more difficult for Turkey to argue otherwise.

During this period, economic ties between the two countries also flourished. In particular, Turkey's exports to Saudi Arabia rose significantly — increasing from almost \$1 billion in 2006 to almost \$4 billion in 2012 (Table 2). Saudi investment in Turkey also rose, from \$498 million in 2005 to \$2.6 billion in 2010 (Table 3). Finally, Turkey became an attractive destination for Saudi tourists lured by Turkish TV series, which became very popular there.

TABLE 3: SAUDI INVESTMENT IN TURKEY (MILLIONS OF USD)

SOURCE: *THE CENTRAL BANK OF REPUBLIC OF TURKEY (TCMB)*, AVAILABLE AT [HTTPS://EVDS2.TCMB.GOV.TR/INDEX.PHP?EVDS/SERIEMARKET/#COLLAPSE_18](https://evds2.tcmb.gov.tr/index.php?evds/serieMarket/#collapse_18)

THE IMPACT OF THE ARAB UPRISINGS

The Arab uprisings had a tremendous impact on Turkey's foreign policy toward the Middle East. Turkey, like other countries, was caught by surprise when the Arab uprisings started in Tunisia and quickly spread to Egypt. Turkey's foreign policy in the post-Arab uprisings period can be divided into two parts. In the first phase, the AKP perceived the transformations in the Arab world as an opportunity to increase its influence in the region. It was thought that the removal of leaders like Mubarak — who were often seen as obstacles to Turkey's increasing role in the Middle East — and the coming to power of new regimes reflecting the popular will, would work to the country's benefit. Thus, regional transformations fueled Turkey's aspirations for power in the Middle East.

The AKP's approach to the Arab uprisings in the early years also reflected its reading of Turkey's history and the parallels it established with what was happening in the Arab world. According to this reading, "the Arab Spring was basically sweeping away culturally alienated political elites in the Middle East and bringing to power the authentic representatives of the peoples of the region" — as, it was implicitly said, had happened in Turkey with the coming to power of the AKP.²⁸ Thus, then Foreign Minister Davutoğlu characterized the process of political change taking place in the Arab world as both inevitable and irreversible. He argued that, "in this process, the place of Turkey is with the peoples of the region. Turkey will stand side by side with the peoples, their legitimate aspirations, and work tirelessly for the realization of these aspirations in a stable and peaceful fashion."²⁹

The second phase, however, exposed Turkey's limitations, with the toppling of President Morsi in Egypt and the rapid evolution of the Syrian uprising into a prolonged civil war involving regional and extra-regional powers. Especially after the onset of the Syrian civil war, the AKP government began to perceive developments in the Middle East in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings as more of a threat than an opportunity.

Since then, Turkey's Middle East policy has taken on different objectives. In neighboring countries, namely Syria and Iraq, Turkey began to focus on limiting Kurdish aspirations. The rise of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) among Syrian Kurds and its alliance with the U.S. was particularly disturbing for Ankara due to the PYD's links with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). When the PYD and its military arm, the People's Protection Units (YPG), began to expand the areas under its control in the name of the fight against ISIS, Turkey clearly perceived this as a threat. Consequently, the AKP government began to engage in a struggle in northern Syria aimed at limiting the influence of the PYD. In doing so, it aligned itself more closely with Russia and Iran due to the U.S.' open alliance with the PYD.

Domestically, this period has been characterized by significant changes in the AKP, its alliances, and the political system in Turkey in general. This period witnessed, on the one hand, increasing challenges to the AKP's rule, and, on the other, the consolidation of the party's, and especially Erdoğan's, power in the political system. The AKP was first challenged by the Gezi Park protests that spread to several cities in Turkey in the spring and summer of 2013.³⁰ Then came the collapse of the alliance between the AKP and the Gülen movement which culminated in an all-out war with the attempted coup in July 2016 and the purges that followed. In the meantime, the truce with the PKK fell apart in 2014-15.

Attacks from both the PKK and ISIS began to take place in different parts of the country. Finally, the Turkish economy also started to face difficulties that ultimately culminated in a financial and economic crisis in summer 2018. In this context, Erdoğan in particular took steps to increase his power. First, he was elected president by a popular vote in 2014. He then went on to change the political system in Turkey via referendum from a parliamentary system to a presidential one — becoming the first president under the new system.

This period also witnessed Erdoğan's efforts to lure the nationalist vote and eventually form an alliance with the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) following the 2016 coup attempt. These domestic developments initially meant Turkey's relative absence from regional politics. Then, especially with Davutoğlu's departure from office in spring 2016, there was a shift to a less ideological and more pragmatic foreign policy in the region, a continuation of emphasis on economic relations, and finally, increasing nationalism leading to a focus on

threat perceptions from neighboring countries.

RELATIONS WITH EGYPT

The AKP government openly supported the uprising against the Mubarak regime. A few days after the demonstrations started, Erdoğan called on Mubarak to listen to the voices of the people and leave. On February 1, 2011, while addressing the AKP parliamentary group, Erdoğan said:

*"Mubarak, we are human beings. We are not immortal. We will die one day, and we will be questioned for the things that we left behind. The important thing is to leave behind sweet memories. We are for our people. When we die the imam will not pray for the prime minister or for the president, but he will pray for a human being. It is up to you to deserve good prayers or curses. You should listen to the demands of the people and be conscious of the people and their rightful demands."*³¹

One day after the ouster of Mubarak, Erdoğan advocated for free and fair elections and a move to constitutional democracy in Egypt, "without allowing chaos, instability, and especially provocation."³² After the removal of Mubarak from power and the start of a transition period, Turkey intensified its relations with Egypt. It was clear that the AKP perceived the political transformation in Egypt as an opportunity for Turkey to develop better relations. As a result, Turkey, contrary to expectations, began to push for a strategic partnership with Egypt. Foreign Minister Davutoğlu stressed the significance of this relationship: "For the regional balance of power, we want to have a strong, very strong Egypt. Some people may think Egypt and Turkey are competing. No. This is our strategic decision. We want a strong Egypt now."³³

In March, then Turkish President Abdullah Gül visited Egypt and held talks with the head of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, as well as with several opposition leaders, including the head of the Muslim Brotherhood, Mohammed Badie, and some young activists who led the protests at Tahrir Square. Turkey also began to actively engage in Egypt's political transformation. Although it was previously shy about it, the AKP now started to openly present itself and its brand of moderate Islamism as a model for Egypt. Young opposition leaders, particularly from the Muslim Brotherhood, *al-Wasat*, and the April 6 Movement, visited Turkey. They met with President Gül, followed Erdoğan's election rallies, and visited the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP).³⁴ In the process, the AKP provided its expertise to the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP, *Hizb al-Hurriyya wa-l-Adala*), the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, and there

were consultations about election strategies and economic policies. The AKP provided advice, especially in the run-up to the presidential elections, “to correct the image that the Muslim Brotherhood aimed to monopolize political activity.”³⁵

Then Prime Minister Erdoğan visited Egypt on September 12-14, 2011 as part of a tour of three North African countries that had experienced uprisings. Erdoğan received a “hero’s welcome” in Egypt.³⁶ The visit highlighted important issues that would affect Egyptian-Turkish relations in the new era: 12 memoranda of understanding and protocols of cooperation were signed in various sectors, including the Joint Declaration on the Formation of Turkish-Egyptian Joint Cooperation Council. Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu visited Cairo five times in the period after Mubarak was overthrown.

The AKP government also pushed to expand economic ties with Egypt. The 280 businesspeople in Erdoğan’s delegation attested to this aim. During his visit, Erdoğan talked about practical assistance in the form of trade, investment, and financial aid. The two countries signed about \$1 billion in contracts in a single day, and Davutoğlu predicted that Turkey’s investment in Egypt would increase from \$1.5 billion to \$5 billion in two years, with total trade reaching \$10 billion by 2015.

Turkey committed to providing Egypt with \$2 billion, both to finance infrastructure projects and to contribute to its foreign currency reserves. The two countries also launched the Mersin-Alexandria roll-on, roll-off (Ro-Ro) transportation link, which was crucial given that Turkey was beginning to have difficulty transporting goods by land through Syria for export to the rest of the Middle East. Turkish investors in Cairo worked together with the transitional government, as well as the FJP, to share Turkish “experience in waste recycling and energy, street sanitation, and traffic management.”³⁷

Soon after Erdoğan’s visit, President Morsi visited Turkey. He attended the AKP congress and told its members that Egypt and Turkey had the common objectives of justice, peace, and stability.³⁸ During his visit, he also met with a group of businesspeople and emphasized the importance of intensifying economic and technological ties.³⁹ The success of the AKP’s economic policies was of particular interest to the Brothers, who were fully aware that reconstructing the Egyptian economy would be a priority.⁴⁰

In those early years, the Turkish model was quite attractive to both Islamists and liberals in Egypt, albeit for different reasons. For the Muslim Brotherhood, their association with the AKP was significant and helped to convince both liberals in Egypt and international actors that they would work with them if they came to power. The AKP’s success in a staunchly secular system in Turkey suggested to the Brothers that if they focused on economic and development goals, they could gain the support of diverse groups. For the liberal and secular

opposition, the Turkish model demonstrated the possibility of taming an Islamist party in a democratic system. As a result, many Egyptians had a positive view of Turkey and the possibility of closer cooperation with it. According to a survey by the Turkish think-tank TESEV designed to measure the public's attitude in the MENA region toward Turkey, 86 percent of Egyptians had favorable views of the country in 2011, and 84 percent in 2012.⁴¹

Despite the Muslim Brotherhood's changing position, the Turkish model was "widely favored within Egypt, at least up until mid-2013."⁴² After that, the polarization within Egypt increased, and both secular and liberal groups started to view Turkey's relations with the Muslim Brotherhood with suspicion. Furthermore, the Gezi Park protests in Turkey during the spring and summer of 2013 tarnished the AKP's image as a democratic government in the eyes of the Egyptian liberal and secular opposition.

Moreover, views about the AKP and Turkey within the Muslim Brotherhood were never monolithic. Despite their historical affinity for the National Vision movement in Turkey — and with it, personal familiarity with the leadership of the AKP from which it split — the old generation of the Muslim Brotherhood viewed Turkey and the AKP with suspicion. An example of this tension emerged during Erdoğan's visit to Egypt. When he stated in an interview with *Masr al-Youm* that a person can be religious, but the state should be secular, he was criticized by the Muslim Brotherhood. Essam el-Arian, the deputy leader of the Brotherhood's FJP, said: "We welcome Turkey and we welcome Erdoğan as a prominent leader, but we do not think that he or his country alone should be leading the region or drawing up its future."⁴³

Thus, the older generation acted within the framework of Arab nationalism, and the AKP's interest in Egypt was seen "interchangeably as interference in Arab, Egyptian, and regional affairs."⁴⁴ In comparison, the younger generation of the Muslim Brotherhood viewed the AKP with greater admiration.⁴⁵ For instance, the "Egyptian Current Party, which [was] made up of activists in their twenties and thirties, have explicitly stated that they want to emulate AKP."⁴⁶ Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, a former leader of the Muslim Brotherhood with closer ties to the younger generation, ran as an independent in the presidential race and openly called himself "Egyptian Erdoğan."⁴⁷

Morsi's ouster as a result of the *Tamarod* (rebellion) campaign and the July 2013 coup d'état that led to Sissi's rise to power resulted in a sharp deterioration in Egyptian-Turkish relations, as Turkey reacted harshly to the power shift. Erdoğan openly condemned the coup and the crackdown against the opposition, saying, "No matter where they are ... coups are bad. Coups are clearly enemies of democracy. Those who rely on the guns in their hands, those who rely on the power of the media cannot build democracy. ... Democracy can only be built [at] a ballot box."⁴⁸

Following Erdoğan's denunciation of the August 14 killings of Morsi supporters at the Rabaa and Nahda sit-ins, which he referred to as a "massacre of peaceful protesters," and calls for Egyptian prosecutors to put Sissi on trial, Cairo canceled a joint naval exercise with the Turkish navy planned for that October. The Egyptian Foreign Ministry accused Turkey of intervening in its domestic politics, and the escalating war of words eventually led to the downgrading of diplomatic relations.⁴⁹ Turkey also tried to refer developments in Egypt to international fora: In August 2013, Turkey asked the UN Security Council to impose sanctions on the Sissi regime, with no result. In response, during the 2015 UN elections, Egypt openly lobbied against Turkey's effort to obtain a seat on the UN Security Council.

Meanwhile, Turkey — along with Qatar and the UK — became one of the few countries to which leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood who were able to escape the coup fled. Among these, Turkey became the country where the Brothers could act most freely. Since then, the Muslim Brotherhood has established the Egyptian Revolutionary Council in Istanbul as an anti-regime platform, as well as TV channels operated by exiled Brotherhood members to propagate against the Egyptian regime.⁵⁰ Turkey has also hosted at least two conferences of the global Brotherhood in Istanbul as well.

Turkey's active support for leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood led to a further deterioration of relations between the two countries. Egypt has accused Turkey of meddling in its internal affairs, including providing support to the Muslim Brotherhood, which was outlawed as a terrorist organization in Egypt. The escalation continued when Egypt detained 29 people on suspicion of spying for Turkey.

The AKP government's strong reaction to the toppling of Morsi and its open support for the Muslim Brotherhood requires explanation. Turkey's initial support to Morsi could be partly explained by realist concerns. With the coming to power of the Muslim Brotherhood, the AKP saw an opportunity to establish closer ties with Egypt for the first time in its history. If realized, the establishment of such an axis could have transformed the balance of power in the entire region.

The AKP's strategic calculation was based on an ideological perspective. Its leadership counted on long-established ideological ties with the Muslim Brotherhood movement. These ties go back to Necmettin Erbakan's National Vision movement and were carefully built up during the period of AKP rule. Since the mid-2000s, the AKP had begun to further strengthen its ties with the Brotherhood, especially by using NGOs close to the government.⁵¹ It was thought that this ideological closeness would lead to a closer strategic relationship with Egypt as well. As was the case with the AKP's vision of the Middle East in general, the party's leadership failed to perceive that strong

Egyptian and Arab nationalist sentiment would impose constraints on this relationship, and indeed there were signs of this even at that early stage. Consequently, when Morsi was overthrown, the AKP government felt it was a strategic loss, given that it had invested so much in Egypt, and was building a new regional policy on a Turkish-Egyptian axis.

Yet, this does not fully explain the AKP's reaction — to this day, Turkey is one of only a few countries that refuses to recognize the Sissi regime. Another reason for this is domestic politics. Coming on the eve of the Gezi Park protests, the AKP government perceived the events in Egypt as something that could also happen in Turkey. Irrespective of whether this concern was warranted, Erdoğan used the example of Egypt in his domestic rallies extensively. As a result, at least in the early phases of the political change in Egypt, this became a useful domestic discourse.

A second and more significant reason for the durability of this split is ideology. The AKP leadership has become an ardent supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood movement throughout the Middle East, including in Syria, Yemen, the Palestinian territories, and Libya. Because of this, there are many in the AKP, including President Erdoğan, who do not want to give legitimacy to the new regime in Cairo. In fact, the issue of relations with Egypt has become deeply personal in Ankara. In a recent television interview, President Erdoğan, after harshly criticizing the execution of nine Muslim Brotherhood members in Egypt, said: "Now, I am answering those who wonder why Tayyip does not speak to Sissi, because there are mediators who come here sometimes, but I will never talk to someone like him."⁵² In fact, over the years, there were a few times where an opportunity for a potential thaw in relations between the two countries emerged, but they all eventually failed. For instance, after the mediation effort by Saudi Arabia's King Salman in April 2016, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry attended the 13th OIC summit in Istanbul, the first such visit by a high-level Egyptian official since the coup in Egypt. The same year, then Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım hinted at Turkey's willingness to restore ties, saying that there was no reason why Egypt and Turkey "should quarrel" and that "it is possible for our investors to travel to Egypt and develop their investments. This might lead in the future to a thawing of the climate ... a normalization of relations, and even of relations at the ministerial level."⁵³ It is clear that there have been efforts by both domestic and foreign actors to normalize relations between the two countries, but all of them have failed due to the reasons mentioned above.

In recent years, increased strategic competition between regional powers has also added a new dimension to mutual suspicions. In particular, Turkey's attempts to increase its presence and influence in neighboring Libya and Sudan have caused concern in Cairo. The AKP government has developed

close relations with Sudan since the mid-2000s. Recently, Turkey assumed administrative control over the Sudanese island of Suakin, a strategic foothold near the southern entrance of the Red Sea. Furthermore, in Libya, Turkey and Egypt back rival groups. While Turkey supports the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord formed as an interim government and backed by the U.N., Egypt supports the opposing faction, the self-styled Libyan National Army, based in the eastern part of the country and led by Field Marshall Khalifa Hifter. In June 2017, the Qatar diplomatic crisis added yet another point of contention. Several countries, including Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE, as well as Egypt, cut diplomatic ties with Qatar and imposed an economic blockade on it, accusing Doha of “terrorism.” Turkey was one of the countries that stood by Qatar throughout this crisis. Finally, the two countries have engaged in a strategic competition over the issue of sovereignty and exploration for natural gas in the eastern Mediterranean. Clearly, both Egypt and Turkey have been on different paths in terms of their policies and visions for the region, adding to their bilateral rivalry.

RELATIONS WITH SAUDI ARABIA

Unlike with Egypt, Turkey’s relations with Saudi Arabia continued for a period of time after the Arab uprisings, with both Ankara and Riyadh finding some common interests despite their diverging views on the uprisings. Syria was the main issue where the two countries found themselves on the same side. Both supported the uprising and pushed Bashar al-Assad to step down. To achieve this objective, they began to provide support to opposition groups. However, while both Saudi Arabia and Turkey aimed for regime change in Syria, they diverged in terms of their vision for a post-Assad Syria, as well as the kind of groups they would support.

More significantly, their policies in Syria began to differ over time as well. For Saudi Arabia, its interest in Syria was mainly about limiting the influence of Iran and Hezbollah, as part of its broader regional rivalry with the Islamic Republic. Turkey’s aims, however, have become multifaceted over time. Although limiting Iran was also an important aim for Turkey, Ankara soon became more interested in halting the growing Kurdish PYD influence on its southern border. By extension, this included managing and balancing its relations with the U.S. and Russia, both of which had become involved in the conflict.

A more significant conflict emerged between Saudi Arabia and Turkey over Egypt. As explained above, Turkey actively supported the uprisings and the political transformation there. After the toppling of President Morsi, Turkey became almost the only vocal critic of the coup and the Sissi regime, and even worked to actively undermine it. Saudi Arabia, by contrast, felt threatened by

the uprising in Egypt, worked to actively undermine it, and became one of the most important supporters — both politically and financially — of the Sissi regime. These divergent views on Egypt combined with Saudi Arabia's concerns about Turkey's close ties with the Muslim Brotherhood movement throughout the region led to a cooling of bilateral relations. This was reflected in a halt in high-level visits between the two countries, as well as Saudi Arabia's active campaign against Turkey's bid for non-permanent membership on the U.N. Security Council in October 2014.⁵⁴

Starting at the beginning of 2015, however, relations between the two countries began to improve, with Turkey making the overture. Erdoğan cut a trip to Africa short to attend King Abdullah's funeral in January 2015. Then, the AKP government extended its support to the Saudi intervention in Yemen a few days after the start of the operation. Erdoğan also became increasingly vocal in criticizing Iran's expanding role in the region. At a press conference in March 2015, Erdoğan said, "Iran is trying to dominate the region. Could this be allowed? This has begun annoying us, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf countries. This is really not tolerable and Iran has to see this."⁵⁵

At the end of 2015, King Salman invited Erdoğan to Saudi Arabia. This was followed by another visit to Riyadh in March and the Saudi king's visit to Ankara in April 2016. In those visits, the two countries decided to establish a Strategic Cooperation Council and emphasized cooperation and coordination on Syria, particularly against Iran and ISIS. In September, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef visited Turkey, his second visit in six months. In October 2016, the GCC designated the Gülen movement as a terrorist organization. In November 2016, the Security Dialogue with the GCC convened in Riyadh after a long recess and approved a 38-point statement advocating stronger economic and military ties and expressing support for the current Turkish regime, a shared commitment to the territorial integrity of Iraq, and a determination to join in the fight against terrorism.⁵⁶ This was followed by Erdoğan's Gulf tour in February 2017, when he visited Saudi Arabia, as well as Qatar and Bahrain. The visit was presented by Turkey as yet another example of "intra-regional solidarity."⁵⁷ It mainly focused on developments in Syria, and economic relations — as at this point Turkey's economy had begun to have problems. In the context of Syria, the visit was perceived as an attempt by Ankara to increase its room to maneuver through balancing its relations with Russia and Iran.⁵⁸

Following that visit, however, relations between Ankara and Riyadh began to deteriorate rapidly. The first sign of this came with the beginning of the so-called Qatar crisis in June 2017. Saudi Arabia, along with the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt, severed relations with Qatar on June 5th. Saudi Arabia, the hegemonic power in the GCC, seemed to have been disturbed by what it saw as Qatar's independent foreign policy initiatives and activism, especially its relations with

Iran and support for the Muslim Brotherhood, two main threats identified by these countries. In addition, Saudi Arabia was not happy about Qatar's close relations with Turkey and the small military base Turkey had established in the country in 2016. A Saudi-led group imposed an embargo on Qatar, shut their airspace to Qatari aircraft, and closed its only land border. A 13-point list of demands was presented to Qatar, including closing the Turkish military base and halting joint military operations inside Qatar. Turkey's response to the crisis was to upgrade its ties with Qatar. President Erdoğan called the isolation of Qatar "inhumane and against Islamic values."⁵⁹ In cooperation with Iran, Turkey provided food supplies to Qatar to alleviate shortages.⁶⁰ Turkey also deployed more troops to Qatar, and bilateral economic ties grew stronger after the crisis.

In addition to Turkey's relations with Qatar and its response to the crisis, Saudi Arabia started to publicly criticize the AKP government's ties with the Muslim Brotherhood. Rather than compartmentalizing its relations with Turkey as it had in the past, Riyadh began to portray Turkey's role in the region as a threat. Two factors may have contributed to this shift in the Saudi attitude toward Turkey. First, domestic political changes in Saudi Arabia seem to play a role. Turkey-Saudi relations took a negative turn with the rise of the king's son, Mohammed bin Salman, and his appointment as crown prince, replacing Mohammed bin Nayef, in late June 2017. The new crown prince adopted a more assertive foreign policy to achieve Saudi objectives, including its quest to be the regional leader. He also became quite vocal in his criticism of Turkey's role in regional politics.⁶¹ Second, the election of Donald Trump gave Saudi Arabia, which was very critical of the Obama administration's Middle East policy, new hopes of improving its relations with the U.S. and gaining American support for its regional policies.

In fact, in the last two years, the struggle for power and influence in the Middle East between the regional powers has only increased. A new dimension of this has been the emergence and consolidation of two rival camps, one between Turkey and Qatar and the other between Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the UAE, and Israel. Although Turkey's relations with the other members of this rival axis had deteriorated before, its ties with Saudi Arabia continued until late 2017. The deterioration of Turkey's relations with Saudi Arabia led to the crystallization of this axis in the region. The strategic competition between the two camps has even expanded to the Horn of Africa, where Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE have been actively seeking to acquire basing rights. Syria, once an area where Turkey and Saudi Arabia cooperated, has also turned into an arena where the two countries compete for influence. Recent reports about meetings between Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and the YPG are a stark example of how Saudi Arabia is working against Turkey's interests in Syria.

The killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul and the subsequent developments led to a further deterioration of relations between the two countries. Although President Erdoğan reiterated his respect for King Salman, he insisted that the murder was planned at the highest levels in Saudi Arabia. The steady release of the gruesome details of the journalist's murder by Turkey and Saudi Arabia's inability to deal with the crisis effectively tarnished the Saudi crown prince's carefully cultivated image. Turkey's call for an international inquiry into the murder led to a U.N. investigation. Whatever the results of this investigation, it is clear that the case has led to a further deterioration of relations between the two countries.

CONCLUSION

The AKP government has engaged with the Middle East to achieve regional influence, economic gains, and domestic political goals. In pursuit of these goals, Turkey has been challenged by regional transformations and external powers' policies in the Middle East. The changing dynamic in the region following the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the Arab uprisings of 2010-12 presented both opportunities and challenges for Turkey. Relations with Egypt and Saudi Arabia have been influenced by these changes.

In addition to these conjunctural factors, however, Turkey's relations with these countries have also been affected by long-term structural factors. Regional politics in the Middle East are very much influenced by the existence of an Arab core. Irrespective of the fact that the Arab states themselves engage in competition and rivalry, the existence of an Arab core means it is difficult for non-Arab states to be active in regional politics and become an aspiring regional power. This characteristic of the region's politics has influenced Turkey's relations with two aspiring Arab regional powers, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Aware of this fact, Turkey has tried to penetrate the Arab core through its special bilateral relations with particular Arab states. Up until the Arab uprisings, Turkey's close relations with Syria performed this function. After the Arab uprisings, Turkey hoped to develop strategic relations with Egypt, but that project failed with the toppling of President Morsi. Turkey later focused on further developing its relations with Saudi Arabia, but that also failed. As the regional competition intensifies with existing political elites, it is hard to imagine a major improvement in Turkey's relations with either Egypt or Saudi Arabia under current circumstances.

During the period under investigation, although political and diplomatic relations between these countries have soured, economic ties have not been affected in the same way. In the case of Egypt, there was even a sharp increase in trade in 2018 compared to the previous year. This goes against general

expectations, especially in the Middle East, where economic relations often go hand-in-hand with political relations. Considering that the Turkey-Egypt FTA expires in 2020, it will be interesting to see how the two countries deal with the issue of maintaining their mutually beneficial economic ties without having political ones. We may see further compartmentalization of relations between the countries if regional strategic competition continues to intensify.

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CHAPTER THREE

STRUGGLE FOR THE CENTER: EGYPTIAN RELATIONS WITH SAUDI ARABIA AND TURKEY IN THE SECOND DECADE OF THE 21ST CENTURY

ABDERAHMAN SALAHELDIN

Egyptian political leaders have long believed that their country should be the center of gravity in the Middle East and the bridge that connects this troubled part of the world to Europe, Asia, and Africa, citing geostrategic, demographic, cultural, and historical justifications to support this claim. For their part, both Turkey and Saudi Arabia have had the same ambitions for similar reasons, albeit with some minor differences in details. The recent history of the Middle East has been marked by cooperation and competition between these three countries, along with Iran, as they have sought to gain regional and international recognition of their central role.¹

Saudi-Iranian hostility and Egyptian-Turkish rivalry currently dominate regional politics and impact major powers' foreign policies toward the Middle East. There is close cooperation between the two Arab partners, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, against the non-Arab players, Turkey and Iran. However, this does not translate into a firm balance of power between two formidable alliances or well-defined axes. The four parties have maintained good relations and some back-channel contacts with many regional and international players that are sympathetic with their adversaries.

Turkish membership in NATO, Saudi Arabia's special relationship with the U.S., Europe's economic ties with Iran, and Egypt's improving relations with Russia even as it maintains its cooperation with the U.S. and Europe are but a few examples that blur the polarized divides between these two camps in the Middle East. The role of political Islam (whether Sunni or Shiite) is a major dividing line between the four regional powers and strongly connects their foreign policy rivalry to their respective domestic settings. Therefore, it is difficult for analysts to predict how these four pragmatic powers would behave in a situation of escalated conflict.

This chapter will try to explain, from an Egyptian perspective, factors that could be helpful when it comes to analyzing and predicting future Egyptian behavior in the short and medium run.

Egyptian foreign policy has always recognized the regional importance of both Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Former Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser spent most of the 1950s fending off Turkey's effort to promote the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), originally known as the Baghdad Pact or the Middle East Treaty Organization (METO). In the 1960s, Saudi Arabia helped the West to defeat Nasser's effort to lead a pan-Arab and pro-Soviet regional coalition. Turkey's extreme secularism, its membership of NATO, and its special relationship with Israel were sources of Arab suspicion until the end of the last century. However, since Egypt's opening to the West during Anwar Sadat's era in the 1970s and Turgut Özal's rapprochement with the Arab and Muslim worlds in the 1980s, there have been several forms and varying degrees of cooperation between the three countries.²

The following analysis will focus on the challenges and opportunities facing cooperation between the three countries as well as bilaterally between Egypt and both Turkey and Saudi Arabia during the present decade of the Arab Spring and its immediate aftermath. It will also attempt to look ahead to envision the future of bilateral and trilateral relations between these three countries.

EGYPTIAN-SAUDI ARABIAN RELATIONS

Over the last three decades, the Egyptian economy has not grown fast enough to buy the political approval of the lower classes, as has been the case in Saudi Arabia. Nor have Egyptians actively participated in electing their own governments, as their Turkish counterparts have. The Arab Spring shed a light on the decline of Egypt's regional influence and gave more weight to Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and smaller countries in the Gulf such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar. In addition, Saudi Arabia's dominant role within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has been eroded, and the other five smaller countries have gained more freedom and independence in running their foreign policies.

Turkey and Qatar supported the 2011 Egyptian uprising that was backed by the military and led to the election of an Islamist government and a Muslim Brotherhood president. When they failed to meet the Egyptian people's expectations, a second popular uprising erupted that was also backed by the military — this time with the support of the Saudi and the Emirati governments.

Interactions in the Middle East region today reflect post-Arab-Spring conflict and competition over stability versus change. Iran has joined the ranks of Turkey and Qatar in order to blur the Sunni-Shiite division and conflict that is used by the Saudis to agitate Sunni Arabs against the “Persian Shiites.” Israel, in turn, has been trying to join the Sunni pro-stability camp. This oversimplified framework of regional alliances may soon prove to be obsolete, however, because of recent dramatic changes, such as the Israeli rapprochement with the Arab Gulf states, including Qatar. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan could have exploited the murder in Istanbul of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi to improve relations with the Saudi royal family and the Trump administration in the United States. He chose otherwise, however, because of his domestic political considerations.³

Egypt continues to rely on Saudi and Emirati financial support to make up for its economic shortfalls and meet the demands of its rapidly growing population. The Saudi economy, however, is now overburdened by lower oil prices, the cost of the war in Yemen, and the Trump administration's requirement that Riyadh pay for U.S. protection by buying weapons and other products worth hundreds of billions of dollars. Subsidizing its own citizens might soon leave the Saudi government unable to help other friendly governments such as those in Egypt and Jordan.

Nevertheless, Egypt is heavily invested in developing greater economic integration with Saudi Arabia. Today, Saudi private investment in Egypt exceeds \$20 billion, and since the removal of the Muslim Brotherhood from power in 2013, the Saudi and UAE governments have provided nearly twice that much in assistance, investment, and bank deposits.⁴

Saudi Arabia and the UAE played a crucial role in supporting Egypt's second popular uprising, this time against the Muslim Brotherhood. They supported the military move on July 1, 2013 to replace the Brotherhood's president with the president of the Supreme Constitutional Court as a transition toward holding new presidential and parliamentary elections and adopting a new constitution. The two Gulf countries were also successful in helping the Egyptians reverse the initial reaction of the U.S. and some other Western nations against these developments. The late Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal made a number of public statements in late 2013 to support Egypt and reinforce what Saudi and Emirati officials were telling their Western counterparts behind closed doors following the change in government in July

2013. Both countries also joined Egypt in declaring the Brotherhood a terrorist organization.

In an interview with Bloomberg in late 2018 Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) cited the political change in Egypt in 2013 and removal of the Muslim Brotherhood as a Saudi victory over U.S. policy toward Egypt and other Arab Spring countries. MBS was alluding to Barack Obama's initial support for the Muslim Brotherhood government, in contrast with the views of Saudi Arabia and the Egyptian military, both of which backed the second uprising:

*"I believe, and I'm sorry if anyone misunderstands that, but I believe President Obama, in his eight years, he worked against many of our agenda — not in Saudi Arabia, but also in the Middle East. And even though the U.S. worked against our agenda, we were able to protect our interests. And the end result is that we succeeded, and the United States of America under the leadership of President Obama failed, for example in Egypt."*⁵

Egypt and Saudi Arabia have long had significant differences when it comes to foreign policy, and at times these have been settled by Egyptian military intervention in the Arabian Peninsula, such as during the 19th century or in the proxy war between the two countries in Yemen in the 1960s. Most of the recent differences have been related to bilateral issues (sovereignty over the islands of Tiran and Sanafeer), regional problems (Syria, Yemen, and Iran's Arab surrogates) and varying religious interpretations (Wahhabism vs. al-Azhar). Sometimes the two countries sought the same goal but differed on how to achieve it in a way that would give prominence to one of them. A clear example was Saudi Arabia's staunch opposition to an Egyptian proposal to establish a common Arab military force in the context of the Arab League. At almost the same time, Saudi Arabia formed a multinational Islamic force to fight the pro-Iranian Houthis in Yemen and a similar one for counterterrorism.

Today, both Egypt and Saudi Arabia, along with the rest of the GCC countries and Jordan, are more receptive to the U.S. idea of establishing a Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA) to deter potential Iranian aggression and for counterterrorism purposes. Egyptian officials might propose certain limitations on the use of their armed forces outside of Egypt and beyond the mere defense of the Arab Gulf countries against foreign intervention. U.S. and Saudi officials should recall that when former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak joined the U.S.-led international coalition to repel the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and deter threats to Saudi territory, he insisted that

Egyptian soldiers stop at liberating Kuwait and not try to invade Iraq or topple Saddam Hussein. The same Egyptian doctrine is still valid today.

It would be very difficult for any Egyptian leader, especially one with a military background, to commit Egyptian soldiers to fight a war against Iran, for example, unless it invaded an Arab Gulf country. Egypt has also abstained from supporting the military opposition against Bashar al-Assad in Syria, as the Saudis, Turks, and many Western nations did earlier. Cairo opted to only host the peaceful moderate Syrian opposition, which was more palatable to the Syrian and Russian governments. Most recently, the Saudi and Western position on Syria has changed to become closer to that of Egypt's.

Egypt also had a terrible experience during its military intervention in Yemen in the early 1960s. In 2015, both the Egyptian Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) and influential intellectuals in Egypt agreed that their country should never repeat that mistake. In joining the Saudi-led coalition, the Egyptian government was mainly concerned with achieving three objectives in Yemen: restoring order, not empowering radicals and terrorists, and weakening the Muslim Brotherhood's Yemeni affiliate, the Islah Party. Not all of these objectives were shared by the Saudis at all times, but they were continuously supported by the Egyptian public and military. Therefore, Egypt limited its participation to the naval and aerial blockade of Yemeni ports to prevent Iranian military supplies from reaching the Houthis.

Egypt and Saudi Arabia almost see eye-to-eye on how to deal with the Arab-Israeli conflict and both showed initial support of President Donald Trump's "deal of century." The two countries' position on Syria converged after Russia's intervention in favor of Assad and America's acquiescence. Saudi Arabia stopped backing radical Sunni militias and supported the Egyptian call for a political settlement between the regime and the Syrian opposition. With no significant Arab role, it is two non-Arab countries, Iran and Turkey, however, that have partnered with Russia in its effort to reach a cease-fire and political compromise, known as the Astana Process.⁶

EGYPTIAN-TURKISH RELATIONS

Egypt and Turkey have many commonalities, foremost regarding their geopolitical location, history, and cultural affinity. Throughout their history both nations have served as bridges between neighboring continents and civilizations, and both have made positive contributions to global culture and heritage. It is also noteworthy that they are both geographically bi-continental in nature, i.e. their territories span over two continents, a fact that has allowed them to enjoy multiple identities — Arab, Islamic, African, Asian, and Mediterranean in the Egyptian case and European, Islamic, Asian, and Mediterranean in the Turkish case. Moreover, both countries are home to

strategic international waterways: Egypt has the Suez Canal and Turkey has the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles.

As the two most powerful countries in the eastern Mediterranean, Egypt and Turkey undoubtedly have great influence in the region. Together, their population of 180 million people accounts for more than one-third of the Middle East's total. Combined, they have 1.7 million square kilometers of territory. In 2011, the two countries had a combined gross national product (GNP) of almost \$1 trillion. Today, their total GNP at purchasing power parity (PPP) exceeds \$3 trillion.⁷

In 2001 Ahmet Davutoğlu, who would go on to serve as the Turkish foreign minister during the Arab Spring and later as prime minister, published a book in Turkish entitled *Strategic Depth* while teaching political science and Middle Eastern politics at a Turkish university. This book turned out to be the foreign policy blueprint for Erdoğan's government and the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) after it came to power in 2002. It is interesting to note that the first official translation of this book was into Arabic and was published in Cairo 10 years after the Turkish version was first released. On the eve of the Arab Spring, Davutoğlu moved from his position as then-Prime Minister Erdoğan's foreign affairs advisor to become foreign minister.

In his book, Davutoğlu advocated the return of Turkey to its regional strategic depth in the Balkans and Middle East without giving up on its already strong ties with the West, its active participation in NATO, and its continued aspiration to join the EU. He cited historic, strategic, cultural, and religious reasons for this vision, which found natural support among the AKP government's Islamist constituency. Most of them were yearning to restore the glory days of the Ottoman Empire, and they wanted to revive their Islamic cultural traditions and historic ties with the Middle East that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had unsuccessfully tried to eradicate.

Since 2002, the AKP government has tried to open up to its immediate neighbors via trade, investment, and tourism. Turkey's Anatolian small and medium-sized businesses, which were primarily owned by conservative Islamists (known as "Green Money"), wanted access to nearby markets for their products. The AKP government offered each of its neighboring countries a three-fold proposal: a free trade agreement, visa-free entry, and a high-level strategic joint council. Before the Arab Spring, Turkey had at least one of these three forms of agreement with most countries in the Middle East and the Balkans. In 2010, before the Arab Spring and at the peak of Erdoğan's popularity in the Arab world after the *Mavi Marmara* incident (discussed later on in this chapter), Turkey moved a step further when it formed a sub-regional collective free trade and visa-free zone with Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan.

Egypt's free trade agreement with Turkey was signed in Cairo on December

27, 2005 after six rounds of negotiations and was implemented on March 1, 2007. In three years' time and on the eve of the Arab Spring, the trade volume between the two countries tripled and reached \$3 billion, two-thirds of which was Turkish exports to Egypt. Meanwhile, Turkish investments in Egypt also tripled to reach \$1 billion in 2011. The Turkish-Egyptian Businessmen Association (TUMIAD), which was established in 2003 in the Egyptian capital, Cairo, still has 733 Egyptian and Turkish active member companies. They include more than 90 Anatolian small and medium-sized businesses that moved their factories to new industrial zones in Egypt, which offered cheap energy and labor one-fifth of the cost in Turkey.^{8,9} Turkish textile and clothing products produced in Egypt also enjoy tariff-free access to the whole of the Arab world, most African countries through the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), and with the U.S. through the Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZ). The QIZ program was established by U.S. Congress in 1996 to build economic ties between Israel and its neighbors, and since the agreement took effect in February 2005, it has allowed products jointly manufactured by Egypt and Israel duty-free entry into the U.S. Eligible products must have at least 35% of their value added by QIZ factories, of which Egypt must contribute at least one-third (11.7%), while Israel must contribute 10.5%.¹⁰

GAFI statistics put Turkish investment in Egypt at around \$700 million, TUMIAD cites a much larger figure of \$2.5 billion of Turkish investment in over 200 factories in Egypt with annual exports of more than \$600 million.¹¹ Official Turkish trade statistics with Egypt over the last five years show that trade between the two countries has not been substantially negatively impacted by their deteriorating political relations.

BILATERAL TRADE STATISTICS (MILLION USD)

YEAR	EXPORTS	IMPORTS	VOLUME	BALANCE
2014	3,301	1,437	4,738	1,864
2015	3,129	1,216	4,345	1,913
2016	2,733	1,443	4,177	1,290
2017	2,360	1,997	4,357	363
2018	3,055	2,190	5,245	865

SOURCE: THE TURKISH STATISTICAL INSTITUTE (TUIK)¹²

Unlike some of the other countries in the region, however, Mubarak's government was reluctant to conclude either visa-free or high-level strategic council agreements with Turkey. Political relations between the two countries were not very intimate because of Erdoğan's connections with political

Islamists. Erdoğan also further aggravated the Egyptian leadership when he sided with the Palestinian Hamas faction, a Muslim Brotherhood affiliate, in its struggle to lift the siege on Gaza — an issue that would remain a major flashpoint.

In January 2010 AKP loyalists joined a ship carrying food, medicine, and construction materials to Gaza. When they were turned away by Israel, Egypt agreed to receive the ship at the Egyptian port of al-Arish and to have the supplies checked and delivered to Gaza across the Egyptian border. Turkish Islamists stormed the Egyptian border checkpoint with Gaza, trying to deliver truckloads of assistance without inspection. Egypt had to block them given its peace treaty obligations with Israel, which acts as the occupying power in Gaza. Egyptian police arrested the angry Turkish activists and did not allow the aid to be delivered until the required inspection and coordination were completed, damaging Turkish-Egyptian relations for some time.

Four months later, in May 2010, the Turkish ship *Mavi Marmara* joined another flotilla attempting to deliver supplies to Gaza. Had the *Mavi Marmara* been turned away by the Israelis and once again ended up at al-Arish port, it would likely have resulted in a bigger crisis between the two countries, and this is probably why some Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood leaders were on board the ship. But this time around the Israelis unintentionally prevented another blow to Egyptian-Turkish relations by storming the vessel while it was still at sea, capturing all its passengers after killing nine Turks, one of whom was also an American citizen.

In the last Arab summit before the Arab Spring, held on March 27-28, 2010 in Sirte, Libya, Secretary-General of the Arab League Amr Moussa called on Turkey to join the Arab regional system in a strategic dialogue as a friendly neighboring major power with strong historic, cultural, and economic ties to the Arab world. In September 2011, Erdoğan was invited to address Arab foreign ministers meeting in Cairo at the start of his Middle East tour to cheer the results of the Arab Spring. While winning over ordinary Arabs, particularly with his tough rhetoric against Israel, Erdoğan's growing popularity and clout was a headache for more cautious Arab leaders who could see their own influence overshadowed.

There were also other reasons for concern on the part of big Arab countries like Egypt and Saudi Arabia that made them reluctant to wholeheartedly accept this Turkish rapprochement. The first was the AKP's strong affiliation with political Islamic movements, especially the Muslim Brotherhood. Turkey was also portrayed for half a century as NATO's bulwark in the Middle East. Erdoğan himself was warmly welcomed in many Western capitals, where before 2012 Turkey was seen as a possible model for a Middle Eastern secular democracy whose population happened to be predominantly Muslim.

Mubarak, however, was more congenial to previous Turkish presidents since Turgut Özal. In 1998, he managed to defuse a crisis between President Süleyman Demirel's Turkey and President Hafez al-Assad's Syria over the latter's support for the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Hafez al-Assad ultimately agreed to end the PKK's presence in Syria, expelling its leader, Abdullah Öcalan, who was later apprehended in Kenya.

In July 2010, Mubarak received Turkish President Abdullah Gül as his guest of honor at a graduation ceremony for cadets from the Egyptian military academy. The old Egyptian leader, with his military background, wanted to show Erdoğan's partner a different kind of relationship with the military other than one of rivalry and tutelage that had dominated Turkey for half a century. Mubarak must have also wanted to strengthen Gül's hand domestically. Turkish newspapers ran pictures of Gül surrounded by Egyptian generals saluting the Turkish and Egyptian flags when they landed together from a military helicopter at the end of the parade. That is probably why Gül was the first head of state to visit Egypt in March 2011, three weeks after Mubarak stepped down and conceded power to his military generals.

In Cairo, Gül found the Egyptian domestic situation ripe for closer relations with Turkey. The Egyptian political leaders who supported the uprising were very eager to meet with him, particularly the "Young Revolutionaries." He impressed them as an intellectual with a Western education and millions of followers on Twitter. The young Egyptians reported on their meetings with him on Facebook while talking to him. He invited all of them to visit Turkey to see first-hand how its political model worked, especially while the AKP was preparing to win a landslide victory one month later.

A group of about 50 Egyptian "Youth of the Revolution" visited Turkey at Gül's invitation, with Turkey covering the costs. They spent about a week meeting with various AKP officials and shadowing Davutoğlu in his own election campaign for a parliamentary seat in his hometown of Konya. It is worth noting that these youth were observing, for the first time in their lives, a Western-style democracy in action in a predominantly Muslim country. They all spoke highly of the Turkish electoral model except for, strangely, those from the Muslim Brotherhood. They were more interested in learning how the AKP ran the country successfully for nine years and understanding Turkish civil-military relations. Turkish and Egyptian newspapers printed photos of the youths' meetings with Gül, Erdoğan, and Davutoğlu on the front page. Both sides played the Arab Spring card to maximize their domestic political gains.

According to a 2011 Arab public opinion poll conducted by the Brookings Institution and Zogby International, Turkey was found to be the biggest winner of the Arab Spring. "In the five countries polled, Turkey is seen to have played the 'most constructive' role in the Arab events. Its prime minister at the time,

Recep Erdoğan, was the most admired among world leaders, and those who envision a new president for Egypt wanted the new president to look most like Erdoğan. Egyptians wanted their country to look more like Turkey than any of the other Muslim, Arab, and other choices provided.”¹³

For their part, Tunisian politicians and leading officials made it no secret that they looked up to Turkey as a model for the reformed political regime they aspired to establish. Egyptian politicians did not have the same agreement about the Turkish model, however, especially the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood. In the aftermath of Mubarak’s overthrow and the establishment of Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood political party, the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), its representatives suggested that Turkey would provide a model for the FJP and the country. While this position has been maintained by some, such as Mohammed Badie, the spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, FJP deputy leader Essam el-Erian was a vocal critic of Erdoğan’s remarks, made on Egyptian television during a visit to the country in September 2011, that Muslims should not be wary of secularism.

Many Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood leaders believed that they should learn from the Turkish experience and use the AKP’s assistance to revive the Egyptian economy and to help build ties with some Western partners. Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood leaders were aware of the Turkish model’s favorable image in the U.S., Europe, and the rest of the Western world. They also thought, however, that Egypt could never be a secular state or else they would lose their legitimacy and popular support. In addition, they believed that they could not wait for a decade to get rid of military tutelage as the AKP did in Turkey.

As soon as the first Arab uprising took place in Tunisia, the AKP government asked the sitting Arab leaders to make political concessions, be receptive to the opposition’s demands, and substantially reform their political systems — a pattern it would repeat elsewhere as the protests spread across the region. In Tunisia and Egypt, the developments were swift, and their two leaders conceded their positions in a few days. In Syria, Libya, and Yemen, however, the sitting presidents did not give up their power peacefully and used military force against the opposition. The Turkish response in these cases was quite different and varied by state.

In Syria, with its adjacent borders, Turkey turned its former ally Bashar al-Assad into a public enemy. The AKP government hosted the Syrian opposition and provided them with weapons and free access to the long, ungarded Turkish-Syrian border. Turkey also acted as a hub for Western and Arab intelligence services that wanted to get rid of Assad. Erdoğan welcomed several million Syrian refugees and offered Turkish citizenship to the more educated among them. Turkey asked the EU for \$10 billion to establish a demilitarized zone in northern Syria and build new cities and villages to resettle the refugees.

Istanbul was, until 2016, the Mecca for the U.S., NATO, EU, and Arab countries when it came to discussing Syria's future.

In Libya, by contrast, AKP loyalists had major investment projects and were worried about losing them if Moammar Gadhafi remained in power after the uprisings. Therefore, Turkey was not enthusiastic about joining NATO in bombarding Gadhafi's troops. Ankara was similarly reluctant in Yemen because the conflict there involved Saudi-Iranian rivalry, in which Turkey did not want to take sides.

In Egypt things were much clearer and more decisive. From day one of the uprising, Turkey was against Mubarak and advocated for an immediate change of the regime. The AKP reached out to all political parties and groups in Egypt after Mubarak stepped down, giving special attention and training in political campaigning and government administration to the cadets of the Muslim Brotherhood.

With Mohammed Morsi's election as president in June 2012, relations between Egypt and Turkey reached a historical peak. Morsi visited Ankara in September to attend an AKP political conference to support Erdoğan. He was treated as a hero and a guest of honor. Again, both Morsi and Erdoğan were addressing their domestic constituencies and buttressing each other's political careers at home. Erdoğan provided \$2 billion in loans and credits to Cairo, which was experiencing serious economic problems and could not reach an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for loans to fund its huge balance of payments deficit. During Erdoğan's second visit to post-revolution Egypt in November 2012, 27 cooperation agreements in many fields were signed between the two parties, including the establishment of a high-level strategic council.

In just two years (2012-13) the number of official visits between Egypt and Turkey skyrocketed. It included officials at all levels, as well as politicians, businessmen, and intellectuals. Turks were happy to provide expertise to their Egyptian counterparts in all spheres of public life and government, from running an open market economy to dealing with transportation problems and recycling garbage. The trade volume between the two countries jumped from \$3 billion in 2011 to \$5 billion in 2013, two-thirds of which were Turkish exports to Egypt.¹⁴

Gradually, the two sides began to recognize differences between their domestic situations. The Muslim Brotherhood came to power with the protest vote of many groups that did not want a return to Mubarak's era. These groups spanned the political spectrum, ranging from religiously conservative Salafists to liberal revolutionaries. The Brotherhood itself did not have wide political support or the record of economic and social achievement that the AKP had after successfully ruling Turkey for nearly a decade.

After spending almost 80 years in the opposition, mostly underground, the Brotherhood also lacked a coherent political, economic, and social program to implement when it controlled both the executive and the legislative branches of the government in Egypt. For more than four decades, the Brotherhood's leaders built their popularity on opposing Mubarak's and Sadat's open-door policy and their peace agreement with Israel. Once in power, they woke up to the fact that they needed to negotiate an economic austerity agreement with the IMF to get \$4.8 billion in loans and a certificate of good health for the troubled Egyptian economy. Even their closest allies, such as Turkey and Qatar, were expecting and encouraging them to maintain peace with Israel, which was also vital to secure an opening with the U.S. and other Western powers.

In less than a year in power in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood turned numerous former domestic political allies into fierce opponents, alienated others, and scared off many bystanders. It was exactly the opposite of what the AKP had done in its first eight years in power in Turkey, when it was keen on gaining supporters, building alliances, and avoiding unnecessary confrontations.

AKP officials were closely following domestic developments in Egypt. They looked with admiration at Morsi's decision, only a few weeks after his inauguration as president, to retire the minister of defense, Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, and the military chief of staff, Gen. Sami Annan. The two generals had ruled the country since Mubarak's ousting and handed power over to Morsi on his election. AKP officials and media did not hide their euphoria about their Egyptian affiliates' success in achieving what it took them 10 years of trying to do in Turkey — and even then they could not fully manage. The Brotherhood's leaders refuted any claims that it was Erdoğan who advised them to sack the top generals. They publicly bragged that they would soon provide a new model for the entire Arab and Muslim world to follow.

Ironically, the Brotherhood picked Gen. Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi to become the new defense minister. Less than a year later, Sissi sided with another popular uprising against Morsi, forcibly removed him from the presidency, and imprisoned most Brotherhood leaders that attempted to organize resistance to the new interim regime. A year later Sissi overwhelmingly won a presidential election and was recognized internationally as Egypt's new president.

On the regional level, the Turkish role in Egypt and the rest of the Arab Spring countries was initially encouraged by Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The two countries consulted and coordinated with Turkish officials on every step regarding the Arab Spring countries, and Egypt was no exception. Iran, too, welcomed this special relationship between Egypt and Turkey. For a time it seemed as though Davutoğlu's prediction in his book, *Strategic Depth*, that Egypt, Turkey, and Iran would dominate the strategic space of the Middle

East and constitute its three main pillars was coming true. The trio's presidents met in early 2013 in Cairo at the Organization of Islamic Cooperation's (OIC) summit — the first visit of an Iranian president to Egypt since the Iranian revolution. Egyptian President Morsi announced that most crises in the region, especially the one in Syria, could only be solved through the joint efforts of the four major powers in the region: Egypt, Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia gave the idea a very cold reception, however, and let it die off without any further consideration.

From day one of the Arab Spring, Erdoğan was ready to switch from employing Turkish soft power to using more aggressive tools of intervention. On February 4, 2011 when Mubarak was still trying to hold onto power and signs of a civil war in Egypt were on the horizon, Erdoğan announced his country's willingness to join an international humanitarian intervention in Egypt. He offered Turkish ships carrying humanitarian assistance, and after Mubarak's departure, Turkey sent ships to evacuate Egyptians stranded by the Libyan civil war.

Erdoğan was also well aware of the Western plans against Gadhafi and in support of the Libyan rebels. However, Turkey had more than \$15 billion of investments in the country and thousands of Turks were working on these projects. Erdoğan was responding to domestic pressures when he showed reluctance about joining the French-led campaign to have NATO enforce the no-fly zone and bomb Gadhafi's troops. He made a compromise, agreeing to join the non-combatant NATO units enforcing the no-fly zone that was authorized by the Arab League and the United Nations. In return, Gadhafi allowed Turkish ships to dock at Libyan ports that were still under his troops' control to evacuate Turks and Egyptians from the country.

Assuming that political Islam would ultimately prevail in all Arab Spring countries, as it did in 2012 in Tunisia and Egypt, all the regional powers encouraged Turkey to play a moderating role to domesticate the new political power of the Islamists. Most of the important actors regionally and internationally were content with the growing special relationship between Turkey and the Arab Spring countries, most notably with Egypt. Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoğlu underlined the emergence of a new axis between Turkey and Egypt following Morsi's election, which he deemed "extremely important in order to maintain order and stability in the Middle East." He also alluded to Turkey's opposition to Saudi efforts to confront Shiite Iran and its surrogates. As he put it:

"Egypt is an important country connecting this area (north Africa) to other regions. Turkey considers the successful democratic experience of Egypt as the single biggest strategic asset in the region. Egypt and Turkey

are rapidly heading towards creating the most important bilateral axis in the region. Each and every success of Egypt is as precious as Turkey's own success. Therefore, we support all the economic and diplomatic moves that Egypt will make.

The Turkish-Egyptian axis is extremely important in order to maintain order and stability in the Middle East. For example, Turkey and Egypt worked side by side in achieving a ceasefire in Gaza in November 2012. Turkey believed that Egypt should be the main actor of this process. Also, Turkey does not want to be part of any plan that would mean the almost re-implementation of the Cold War parameters that could see Turkey and Egypt form two separate blocs. Turkey also does not want to see a new Cold War structure in the region built upon either religious or ethnic fragmentation. Therefore, Turkey is pursuing a foreign policy to limit the scope of such a culture of confrontation.”¹⁵

There are many reasons for the dramatic reversals in the regional strategic landscape that have taken place since 2013. Some of the most important include the failure of the Muslim Brotherhood to govern in Egypt, the military stalemate in Syria resulting from the intervention of Russia and Iran, and the unravelling of the Muslim Brotherhood conspiracy to stage a coup d'état in the UAE.¹⁶ Firstly, in July 2013, in response to a second popular uprising in Egypt, the military stepped in to topple President Morsi. The new government eventually banned the Brotherhood and jailed many of its members, including Morsi himself. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Jordan were the main backers of that change, and the U.S. and the EU acquiesced. This was a serious blow to Turkey's power projection and the new alliance it was forging with a Muslim Brotherhood-led Egypt.

Secondly, in post-revolution Tunisia the Ennahda government was unable to provide security and stability, and was ultimately forced out in 2014. It lost the ensuing parliamentary and presidential elections to its secularist rival, Nidaa Tunis. These two developments completely went against the AKP's predictions that Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated parties would perform well in free elections all over North Africa.

Finally, the growing chaos in Syria also ran counter to the AKP's policy goals and began to simultaneously destabilize and isolate Turkey. The resilience of the Syrian regime and the weakness of the opposition foiled Turkey's designs. It was soon evident that Assad still enjoyed considerable support nationally from minorities, regionally from Iran and Hezbollah, and internationally from Russia. The U.S. gradually understood that under these circumstances, the removal of Assad without a viable alternative would only lead to devastating

consequences for the security and stability of the region. As ISIS consolidated its power in Syria's north and east with a new offensive in 2014, the fight against jihadist groups became Washington's new leading priority, which benefited the Assad regime.

With the weakening of the moderate Sunni opposition and the collapse of the Free Syrian Army, Turkey committed itself to supporting Salafist groups, which cooperated with jihadists. In particular, Turkey backed Ahrar al-Sham (Islamic Movement of Free Men of the Levant), a Salafist organization fighting shoulder to shoulder with the al-Nusra Front, an offshoot of al-Qaeda in Iraq and Syria. By the end of 2013, Turkey's surrogates in Syria began to worry the Western countries, and later Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

In 2013, the Egyptian military sided with popular demand and overthrew the Muslim Brotherhood regime in Egypt, rounding up all of its leaders, including President Morsi. Both Saudi Arabia and the UAE wholeheartedly supported the move. The U.S. recognized the military stalemate in Syria following Russia's intervention and made a deal with President Vladimir Putin to destroy some Syrian chemical stockpiles rather than have an American-Russian military showdown in Syria. Only after the Russian military intervention in Syria and the 2016 failed coup d'état did Erdoğan change his Syria policy and join Russia and Iran in trying to find a settlement to end the war there.

In Libya, Islamists fared poorly in the elections but they did not want to concede power. Egypt and the UAE emerged as the main backers of the Tobruk-based, secularist Chamber of Deputies against the Tripoli-based General Nationalist Congress, which contained Islamist factions such as the Justice and Construction Party, a Brotherhood affiliate that was backed by Turkey and Qatar. Ultimately, Qatar emerged as the only Arab Gulf country that sided with Turkey in its Muslim Brotherhood-focused regional policy. Turkey also backed Qatar against the Saudi-led-blockade in 2016.

The U.S. and other Western countries adapted to the aforementioned developments and did not stick to the original script of letting elections empower political Islamists in the Arab Spring countries. For his part, however, Erdoğan did not alter his policies in response to these radical regional changes and the international concurrence.

Erdoğan's principal oversight though was to continue to believe that international support would align with his ambitious plan to empower Brotherhood-affiliated parties to govern in all the Arab Spring countries. Either because of domestic political considerations or mere stubbornness, he failed to pay attention to the signals that should have warned him to change his policy by mid-2013.

Since 2016, Erdoğan toned down his attacks against the new Egyptian leadership for banning the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization,

arresting its active members, and trying them for inciting violence. Ironically, Erdoğan himself took much harsher measures against Fethullah Gülen's movement in Turkey after accusing its members of being behind the failed military coup in 2016. Since May 2016, the Gülen movement has been classified as a terrorist organization by the Turkish authorities, even though Gülen himself condemned the coup and denied any involvement in it. Nevertheless, Erdoğan's government arrested, without trial, tens of thousands of soldiers, judges, educators, and journalists for their alleged affiliation with the Gülenist movement. Whenever his human rights record comes under attack by Europeans, he reminds them of their close cooperation with Egypt.

Turkey kept describing the 2013 political change in Egypt as a coup d'état and called for international sanctions against those who carried it out. Erdoğan also hosted the Muslim Brotherhood's leaders, who fled to Istanbul, providing them with funding and allowing them to launch satellite television channels attacking the new Egyptian leadership.

Egypt has restrained its response to Erdoğan's hostile public campaign. Cairo downgraded its diplomatic relations with Turkey from the ambassadorial to the chargé d'affaires level. Naval military exercises between the two countries were cancelled and a truck roll-on, roll-off (RORO) maritime transportation line, which coordinated shipping between the Turkish ports of Mersin and Iskenderun and the Egyptian ports of Alexandria, Damietta, and Port Said, also stopped operating. Otherwise, no measures were taken against Turkish businesses in Egypt. Both countries' Chambers of Commerce and industrialists have continued exchanging visits and developing ties. In 2017, Egyptian-Turkish trade decreased only slightly to a total of \$4.5 billion, down just 10% from the 2013 peak.¹⁷

No Egyptian official has responded publicly to Erdoğan's verbal attacks against the new leadership in Cairo, and they have largely faded away since the 2016 failed military coup in Turkey. Naturally, Egyptian diplomats have not been supportive of Turkey's efforts to take on important roles in prominent international organizations such as the UN Security Council or to select Istanbul as venue for international events. However, Egypt has abstained from any move that would prevent it from restoring normal relations and cooperation with Turkey in the event that Erdoğan changes his mind.

In the absence of good relations with Turkey, Egypt has developed closer ties with other nations in the eastern Mediterranean. Egyptian and Israeli companies agreed to use the existing gas pipeline between the two countries to transport Israeli offshore gas to be processed in Egypt. In 2010 that same pipeline was used to export Egyptian gas to Israel and Jordan. Plans were discussed to extend it to Syria and Turkey. Egypt also stood firmly by Cyprus against Turkish threats of using force to obstruct gas exploration efforts in

the economic zone of the so-called Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, an entity that is only recognized by Turkey.

When Egypt hosted the first meeting of the eastern Mediterranean energy ministers in 2019, bringing together Egypt, Cyprus, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, and the Palestinian territories in Cairo, Turkey was not invited. Parallel cooperation with Lebanon and possibly with Syria would enable the two countries to later join the newly formed Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF).

After a series of presidential summits, Egypt, Greece and Cyprus agreed in 2018 to the delimitation of an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the Mediterranean. The three countries denounced angry statements and threats made by Turkey against such cooperation. Egyptian analysts reminded the Turkish government of its own statements in 2013 about Egyptian naval prominence in the eastern Mediterranean region and advised Turkey to abstain from threatening to use force against Egyptian offshore exploration and production of gas. This issue remains a major point of contention and conflict.

With U.S. encouragement and new cooperation between Israel and many Arab countries in the fight against terrorism and Iran's expanding hegemony in the Arab world, there may well be valuable opportunities to mend fences between Turkey on one hand, and Egypt and Saudi Arabia on the other. While the fantasy of creating an Israeli-Sunni Arab alliance against Iran is just that, if Erdoğan were to stop intervening in Egyptian domestic affairs and give up his own unrealistic dreams of presiding over a neo-Ottoman Empire of Arab and Turkic nations ruled by political Islam, Turkey would likely be able to restore normal ties with both Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

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CHAPTER FOUR

SAUDI FOREIGN POLICY 1932-2001:

EGYPT, TURKEY, AND REGIONAL PRIORITIES

DAVID DUMKE

Saudi Arabia's foreign policy evolved continually over the first 70 years of its existence. In attempting to understand it during this period, one must start at home. Saudi Arabia's relationships with its neighbors and the broader global community were shaped by the modern kingdom's distinct phases of growth, which for organizational purposes line up with the reigns of its first five kings. During this time, relations with Egypt and Turkey have ebbed and flowed. Riyadh and Cairo have been bitter enemies and strong allies, and when convenient supported each other when it served their respective interests. There is little evidence, including during the period since the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, that suggests the checkered course of relations will change. Colored by Ottoman history, Riyadh's relationship with Ankara was extremely limited and minimal prior to the rule of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), with the states having vastly different ideologies and orientations with few overlapping interests; thus, while providing insight, the period tells us little about how their relationship might change.

Under King Abdulaziz al-Saud, commonly known as Ibn Saud in the West, Saudi Arabia expanded across the Arabian Peninsula, leading to consolidation,

growth, stability, and perhaps finally into the present period of strength wrapped in uncertainty. Traditionally, Saudi foreign policy has been both cautious and conservative, and until very recently, has been best characterized as reactive rather than assertive. Saudi moves, including those made recently by King Salman, have been undertaken with the goal of protecting the kingdom from regional threats while strengthening the al-Saud's position at home.

Much has been written about the central role of Islam in the Saudi state, and the religious dimension cannot be ignored. Saudi Arabia has long promoted global Islamic causes. Saudis feel, as the home of the Two Holy Mosques, a special obligation to promote and protect Islam, which was and remains a source of legitimacy for the al-Saud. For the purposes of understanding Saudi foreign policy, one must recognize that support of Islam, and more particularly the Wahhabi brand practiced in the kingdom, has also been a tool to support broader policy objectives. In this sense, Islam has been employed to further foreign policy goals. Similarly, while petroleum has heavily influenced Saudi policy at home and abroad, oil and the economic largesse deriving from it must be seen as another tool — and a profoundly powerful one — of foreign policy.

Above all, Saudi Arabia has valued stability in its foreign affairs. It has preferred balancing potentially harmful influences through its words, deeds, alliances, foreign aid, and military actions. In a sense, Saudi Arabia has pursued a Goldilocks foreign policy: not too hot, not too cold, but just right. The central mission has been to avoid or minimize threats from neighbors and global powers alike. Ideological threats, from the Saudi perspective, have come from the various “isms” — Zionism, pan-Arabism, communism, socialism, and for the most part liberalism in its different forms — including Western-styled democracy — and antithetical Islamic political ideologies. Many would also lump secularism into the mix, particularly the policies of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and Gamal Abdel Nasser, which downgraded the role of Islam in their respective nations.

George Washington said nations do not have permanent allies, but permanent interests. This rule can be applied most directly to the kingdom's most critically important strategic relationship since World War II — with the United States. It can also be applied to its relations with Cairo and Ankara. Strong ties to the United States have not been built on cultural bonds, ideological agreement, or a shared worldview. Rather, they have been based on overlapping interests, with Saudi decision-makers determining that Washington, and the global order it maintained until very recently, offered the kingdom opportune economic and security dividends which allowed Riyadh to promote domestic stability while containing regional and global threats. To be very clear, the U.S.-Saudi relationship has long been paramount to Saudi foreign policy. Its relations with Washington, at least prior to the 2003 American invasion of Iraq, have heavily

influenced, and often shaped, its relations with Egypt, Turkey, and other Middle East actors.

Established in 1932, Saudi Arabia is a relatively new nation-state, and its relative power is even more recent. Until the early 1970s, the kingdom was constrained by economic weakness, limited infrastructure, and a sparse population. Rapid population growth, urbanization, the development of modern infrastructure, and the procurement of vast quantities of military armaments coincided with an oil-backed economic windfall. These developments transformed Saudi foreign policy, leading to the present time, where Saudi Arabia has morphed into a regional powerhouse with significant global influence.

In the first seven decades of Saudi Arabia's existence, relations with Egypt and Turkey have waxed and waned as the threats and opportunities posed by both regional powers changed. Carved out of the Ottoman Empire, modern Turkey, even in its weakened form, still posed a potential threat to Saudi Arabia given its colonial legacy and, as the home of the last caliph, latent pan-Islamic credentials. Despite this, modern Turkey was founded with two fundamental goals: modernization and westernization. It largely recused itself from regional Arab affairs for decades, and was not a significant player, except in the Cold War context, until the rise of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Egypt detached from the clutches of the British Empire as the strongest Arab state, capable of shaping regional policy and the internal politics of its Arab neighbors. Eventually, exhaustion from repeated wars with Israel and near-bankruptcy from government decision-making, shorn much, but not all, Egyptian regional influence. These developments played out during the entirety of modern Saudi Arabia's history, requiring Riyadh to periodically adjust relations with Cairo and Ankara. What is certain is that what relations are today with each nation may not be the same tomorrow — interests remain, but alliances shift.

CONSOLIDATION: THE KING ABDULAZIZ ERA

While conventional wisdom holds that Ibn Saud established his kingdom through conquest, the Saudi state was created not by the sword alone, but through a combination of tribal warfare, negotiation, and international diplomacy. Abdulaziz had a keen sense of timing, and a knack for aligning with global powers only in so much as it did not greatly constrain his freedom of movement. While receiving economic aid and military support from the British, he did not surrender his freedom of movement. His decision to grant oil concessions to an American firm was a carefully calculated one, based largely on his determination that the U.S., unlike Britain or France, did not harbor imperialist ambitions.

Without recounting the various conquests of the Saud-led Ikhwan army, Abdulaziz's most formidable Arabian rivals, the Rashid and Banu Hashim, allied themselves, respectively, with the Ottomans and British. Obtaining adequate arms to oust the Rashid, whom he had already pushed out of Riyadh in 1905, was eased by World War I. The British, with advocates such as Captain William Shakespear and logic such as my enemy's enemy is my friend, armed the al-Saud in an effort to weaken the Ottoman hold on Arabia. The Banu Hashim, led by Sharif Abdullah of the Hijaz, was a tougher nut to crack, having been similarly if not more deeply allied to the British — both materially and, because of the legend of Lawrence of Arabia, emotionally. Yet in the wake of World War I, with the specter of the communist menace and the eventual onset of the global depression, attention was not fixed on the Middle East. Abdulaziz was largely unconstrained in his bid to unite the bulk of the Arabian Peninsula in his new, greatly expanded kingdom.

However, the placement of Hashemite monarchs on the thrones of Jordan and Iraq was seen as a serious threat to Saudi Arabia. With their roots firmly in the Hijaz, both Hashemite kingdoms had a historic claim to Mecca and Medina and did little to conceal their interest in returning. Their presence along the bulk of the northern Saudi border was menacing, and their existence challenged Saudi legitimacy in the recently conquered Hijaz region. Accordingly, Abdulaziz maintained cordial relations with Egypt to balance this threat.

In Saudi Arabia's infancy, neither Turkey nor Egypt were central to Saudi planning, with some exceptions. It was not clear whether the Ottoman Empire, or its greatly reduced successor the Republic of Turkey, would reemerge as a regional power. Thus, Abdulaziz kept a vigilant eye on Ankara, particularly as Mustafa Kemal Atatürk rallied Turkish troops and forced the Allies to sign the Treaty of Lausanne. That said, Atatürk's staunch secularism prevented fear of a reconstituted caliphate that could have threatened Saudi Arabia's Islamic credentials — which, along with a formidable tribal army and alliance network, was the source of Saudi political legitimacy.¹ Atatürk's turn away from the Arab world and Islam became more convincing as time passed. For example, in 1928 he changed the Turkish alphabet from Arabic to Latin, and banned the teaching of Arabic in schools.² In 1949, Turkey recognized Israel, becoming the first Muslim state to do so. In 1951, Turkey joined NATO, firmly casting its lot with the West.

Egypt's struggle for full independence and coherent leadership prevented it from becoming either an ally or adversary. Indeed, political paralysis caused by the unique three-legged ruling structure — the king, the Wafd-led parliament, and the British — delayed Egypt from assuming a regional leadership role, and kept Egyptian attention focused within its own borders. Israel's creation

further muddled the waters, with King Farouk waging a woefully unsuccessful, costly war with the emerging Jewish state.

However, Saudi perceptions of Cairo changed with the weakening and eventual collapse of King Farouk's hold on power, combined with the decline of British imperial power, global anti-imperial sentiment, and emergent Egyptian nationalism under the Free Officers. Farouk flirted with the idea of declaring himself caliph which, although the proposal never went further than Abdeen Palace, raised Saudi suspicions. Yet, Saudi Arabia did not play an active role, materially or rhetorically, in Farouk's ousting by nationalist Army officers in 1952. And, in fact, the fall of a monarchy, no matter how flawed, to the forces of nationalism still posed a potential threat to a fellow monarchy.

The problem of mandate Palestine was recognized by Abdulaziz. Yet initially his chief concern revolved around the Hashemites, who harbored ambitions of absorbing Palestine into their fold. The plight of the Palestinians themselves was at the time seen as further afield and of less critical importance to the Saudis.³ Yet Zionism was deemed alien to the region, and thus its injection into the mix, even before Israel declared statehood, was threatening to the Arab and Islamic world. This explains Abdulaziz's vehement opposition to the establishment of the Israeli state. Ibn Saud believed he had a binding promise from Franklin Roosevelt during their famous meeting on the Great Bitter Lake during the waning days of World War II.

Like the rest of the Arab world, Saudi Arabia supported Arab efforts, led by Egypt — under King Farouk and his successors — to eliminate, or at a minimum, contain Tel Aviv. Supporting Egypt, initially symbolically and later materially, bought Riyadh goodwill in Cairo. It was hoped that this would minimize the likelihood of Egypt supporting Hashemite claims on the kingdom, or from turning in its own right against the House of Saud. Indeed, while it was not a primary consideration, having Egypt, particularly under Nasser, tied up with Israel impaired Cairo's ability to act elsewhere in the region.

Turkey's decision to be the first Muslim nation to recognize Israel further alienated Ankara from Riyadh. In subsequent decades, Turkey would express increasing sympathy for the plight of the Palestinians. It also lent support, albeit symbolically, to the Arab nations during the 1956, 1967, and 1973 wars with Israel. It recognized the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) as the sole representative of Palestinian aspirations in 1975.⁴ Yet Turkey maintained relations with Tel Aviv as well. Turkish-Israeli relations in fact strengthened in the last two decades of the 20th century, eventually including economic, intelligence, and security cooperation. It was not until much later, with Erdoğan serving as prime minister, that Ankara's relationship with Tel Aviv cooled and Turkey assumed an active, albeit largely rhetorical, leadership role in opposing Israel on matters related to the Palestinians.

THE DANGEROUS DANCE: THE KING SAUD ERA

At the time of Abdulaziz's death in November 1953, Nasser had yet to emerge publicly as the real leader of the Arab Republic of Egypt. Moreover, the exact path of the Egyptian revolution remained unclear. King Saud inherited a secure kingdom, yet one that was only gradually accumulating the wealth that would soon transform it. It was weak militarily and largely incapable of pursuing a robust foreign policy. There were several potential enemies in the immediate vicinity: Hashemite Jordan, Hashemite Iraq, and an unstable Iran which had only recently witnessed the overthrow of the nationalist Mossadegh government in a coup backed by the CIA and MI6. British power was ebbing, even in the Gulf. Accordingly, the United States afforded military and economic protection — even though Saudi relations with Aramco were complicated, with Riyadh's coffers filled by Aramco, but also limited by its concession agreement.

King Saud is generally considered to be the least successful and most reckless of the Saudi monarchs. Unlike his deputy, rival, and later successor Faisal, Saud was not particularly worldly, which led to missteps during a particularly volatile period in modern Middle Eastern history. Saud, with Faisal as foreign minister, faced four primary foreign policy tests during his tumultuous reign: (1) a continued threat posed by Riyadh's Hashemite neighbors; (2) the rise of pan-Arab nationalism under the leadership of Nasser; (3) the growing centrality of the Cold War to geopolitics; and, (4) oil politics. These elements often overlapped, and while the kingdom made necessary course adjustments to guarantee its security, challenges were often made more complicated by the intense rivalry between Saud and Faisal.

The British attempt, with Washington's blessing, to create a northern shield against communist influence in the Middle East was coolly received by the Saudis. Riyadh saw the Baghdad Pact, crafted by Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Said and Turkish President Adnan Menderes, as a ploy to strengthen the Hashemite position vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia. Worse still, the pact's creation coincided with Saudi anger at the British over the Buraimi Oasis. This dispute centered on tribal land claims and the high probability of oil being discovered under it. After negotiations failed to resolve the issue, Saudi Arabia attempted to take the territory by force, only to be quickly evicted by the British-allied Trucial Oman Scouts. Accordingly, King Saud declined to join the pact. The Americans, sensitive to Saudi and Arab feelings, also declined to formally join the alliance, though they supported its anti-communist objectives.⁵

Nasser's ideology, which is embodied in his 1954 essay *Philosophy of the Revolution*, stressed the concentric circles around Egypt: the Arab world, the Islamic world, and Africa. Unity among these circles was key to power. Arab and Islamic unity, as seen by Nasser, posed a threat to Saudi Arabia. As he saw it, lingering colonialism and Western interference, directly and indirectly,

undermined the region's potential. By extension, conservative monarchies such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iraq, and Yemen, were little more than tools to be used to perpetuate outside interference. He saw oil as a potential weapon to be employed by the Arab world. Oil wealth, by unfair concession agreements, helped prop up Western-backed monarchies, but did little to benefit the Arab masses or strengthen their hand in geopolitics.⁶

Nasser saw Western attempts to counter the Soviet threat to the region by creating entities such as the Baghdad Pact or through policies such as the Truman or Eisenhower Doctrines as ultimately working to perpetuate Western influence in the region. Israel was accused of being another Western colonial construct. British efforts to maintain control of the Suez Canal were intended to facilitate the continued intrusion into Egyptian affairs. The Americans and British meddled in the internal politics of Syria, Lebanon, and most prominently in Iran — where the specter of nationalization of the oil industry resulted in a Western-orchestrated coup against Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh.⁷

The West believed Nasser's pan-Arabism, anti-colonialism, and leadership role in the Non-Aligned Movement threatened both political and economic interests to the ultimate benefit of the Soviets. For his part, Nasser was less concerned with the Cold War's ideological battles, but willing to play the game in order to best serve Egypt's needs. Failed attempts by the CIA's Kermit Roosevelt to bribe Nasser with a \$6 million gift — money later used to pay for the ostentatious, lotus shaped Cairo Tower, nicknamed either "Roosevelt's erection" or "Nasser's prick" depending upon one's opinion — coupled with futile negotiations with Washington over military aid and financing of the Aswan High Dam, pushed Nasser into the Eastern camp.^{8,9} Though warned repeatedly by Cairo, the Eisenhower administration was stunned by Egyptian agreements to purchase arms from Czechoslovakia and construct the dam with Soviet financing. The Suez Crisis and Tripartite Aggression boosted Nasser's regional popularity into the stratosphere. The Egyptian played his cards well, winning a monumental diplomatic victory, fatally damaging the British Empire's regional position, and, by effectively using Radio Cairo and other media outlets, scoring a massive public relations coup.

Riyadh was in a tough spot. King Saud was angered by British highhandedness on Buraimi and the lack of American support for the kingdom's position — issues which could justify allying with Nasser. Meanwhile, the Saudi public, like much of the Arab world, was as enamored with the Egyptian leader. King Saud responded by embracing, at least superficially, Nasser and his pan-Arab ideology. To highlight his newfound political shift, Saud went so far as to invite Egyptian military trainers to the kingdom, send a Saudi delegation to the 1955 Bandung Conference of newly independent African and Asian states, and make

contact with the Eastern bloc in an ultimately fruitless bid to obtain arms.¹⁰ All these moves, even if calculated and intended to appease the charismatic Egyptian leader, were viewed with supreme distrust by Crown Prince Faisal.

Recognizing Saudi public opinion, King Saud continued his vocal opposition to the Baghdad Pact. He also dragged his feet in extending the lease to the U.S. Air Force for use of Dhahran Air Base, terminated the American Point Four assistance program, and demanded and eventually received U.S. military assistance.¹¹ King Saud also pressed Aramco for a more equitable share of oil profits, including, as author Thomas Lippman has recently described in *Crude Oil, Crude Money*, attempting to create a monopoly, or at least secure a share of it, in the lucrative shipping sector. Among the many faults the Americans saw with the Saudi tanker deal with Aristotle Onassis, Washington believed the agreement could potentially benefit the Soviets.¹²

King Saud hosted Nasser on a visit to the Saudi capital in September 1956, at which time the Egyptian leader proposed a union of Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. This proposition was most unwelcomed by Saud, who was further spooked by the overwhelmingly warm greeting the charismatic Egyptian received from his subjects.¹³ Attempting to eliminate the threat, Saud was involved in a poorly planned plot to assassinate Nasser, an episode which caused great embarrassment and increased the Egyptian anger toward Riyadh;¹⁴ Nasser, armed with his potent megaphone, became a more committed adversary. King Saud then welcomed the Eisenhower administration's attempt, via the Omega Plan, to make him a counterweight to Nasser, projecting him as the conservative, Islamic alternative to Soviet-allied Egypt. The effort to make Saud into a "Muslim pope" was quickly abandoned by Washington.¹⁵

Saud made peace with the Hashemites, visiting Amman and Baghdad in 1957, mending ties with the fellow monarchs who faced similar pressure from Nasser. "If one king goes, the second will go, and after him how long will I last," commented Saud.¹⁶ Yet much to the horror of Riyadh, the Egyptian threat was demonstrated clearly in Iraq a year later when military officers, inspired by Nasser, violently overthrew the royal family. Jordan managed with great difficulty to avoid the same fate. Syria not only saw Nasser-allied leadership emerge, but formally joined, for a time, Egypt in the United Arab Republic.

While genuinely popular inside the kingdom where he was known for his profligate spending, which included spontaneous acts of charity, King Saud was a deeply flawed ruler. Foreign Minister Faisal, who eventually stepped in as prime minister before finally replacing Saud as king in 1964, was a much steadier hand. Faisal was better equipped by training and temperament to meet the challenge posed by Nasserist Egypt. The North Yemen Civil War proved to be a defining moment for the kingdom. Nasser deployed nearly 70,000 Egyptian troops to support republican factions who had ousted the monarchy in a coup.

During the course of the war, Riyadh provided funding and arms to royalists headed by Muhammad al-Badr, who waged a hit-and-run guerilla war against Egypt's conventional forces. The adventure drained Cairo of resources and diminished its military might at home at a relatively low cost.¹⁷ The Egyptian air force bombed Saudi targets in Jeddah and elsewhere. The Americans, who handed control over Dhahran to the Saudis in 1962, deployed the 524th Tactical Fighter Squadron to blunt the aerial Egyptian threat.

Turkey did not play a central role in the King Saud era, except on the periphery. In joining NATO and becoming a member of the Baghdad Pact, Ankara cast its lot with the West. Its more pressing concern was countering the communist threat posed by its historic rivalry with the Soviet Union, née Russia. Indeed, it can be fairly said that Riyadh's relationship with Ankara at the time was dictated by the Cold War, and thus largely managed by Washington. Secular Turkey largely adhered to Atatürk's tenet of avoiding any pan-Islamic cause.

A STEADY HAND: KING FAISAL

Serving as foreign minister, with one brief interlude, from the kingdom's inception until his death in 1975, King Faisal was able to manage regional ideological challenges, relations with Washington, growing oil wealth, the Cold War, and the Arab conflict with Israel in a manner which left Saudi Arabia in a much stronger position than it was during Saud's reign. Faisal was a man with very firm beliefs and clear objectives. He was a devout Muslim, which explains, both personally and diplomatically, his staunch opposition to communism. Islam also was the glue which kept the kingdom together, and its prominent role in all aspects of Saudi governance helped undermine the appeal of alternative governing models such as Nasserist socialism. It also helps explain Faisal's fervent opposition to Israel and Zionism, which led to unbending support of the Palestinian cause. This is not, however, to be confused with blind support for all Palestinian political movements, but for support of Arab military efforts vis-à-vis Israel. In fact, while Faisal allowed the moderate Fatah branch of the PLO to raise money and organize in the kingdom, he clamped down on more radical factions.¹⁸

It was under Faisal's watch that the power of Saudi oil wealth really began to make its mark, and this changed Saudi Arabia's relationship with Egypt, particularly as Cairo's strength ebbed. OPEC was created in 1960, and its influence on oil markets grew throughout the decade. Libya, Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the Trucial States (later the United Arab Emirates), and other oil states continued to get a greater say in oil production and profits which coincided with nationalization across the region. Because of Faisal's anger at Western support for Israel in the 1967 and 1973 wars, he opted to use the

oil weapon. Collectively, these developments forever changed the kingdom's course; Saudi Arabia would never again be a regional backwater but a regional power and global power-broker.

Saudi Arabia continued to provide military support to royalist forces in the North Yemen Civil War. However, the disastrous war with Israel in 1967 effectively exhausted Egypt — sapping Nasser's political strength and reduced his commitment to the conflict. The war in Yemen eventually petered out and an uneasy settlement was agreed to in 1970. Yemeni republicans assumed power and were recognized by King Faisal. The real battle, as both the Saudis and Egyptians had long since realized, remained with Israel.

Assuming power after the death of Nasser, Anwar Sadat recognized the necessity of courting Riyadh. While Sadat continued to negotiate for more and better Soviet weaponry, he also turned to Faisal for assistance — and received it. Saudi funding helped re-equip the Egyptian army, while the kingdom's diplomatic support helped Sadat extract Egypt from the Soviet camp and, ultimately, establish working relations with Washington. Sadat realized that Washington was the only viable player which could force Israel to the negotiating table. He used Riyadh, with strong albeit complicated ties to Washington, to get there. "Used" being the operative term, because shuttle diplomacy and what culminated in the Camp David Accords left Saudi Arabia feeling aggrieved. Egypt opted out of the Israeli conflict, leading to its exile, with grudging Saudi backing, from the Arab League.

After the 1967 war, the potency of Nasserism declined. Among other things, there emerged a collective feeling of failure not just in the man but in his ideology. There was a corresponding resurgence in Islamic identity, which Faisal fully supported. Suppressed by Nasser shortly after the Free Officers took power, the Muslim Brotherhood had long enjoyed a safe haven in Saudi Arabia, provided they did not engage in politics inside the kingdom. But Faisal became more active in supporting Islamic causes in the region, and throughout the globe. This can be seen in Saudi support for the creation of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Muslim World League, World Assembly of Muslim Youth, Islamic charity programs, and a variety of Islamic political movements which worked to counter communist and leftist political movements. Muslim Brothers and more radical spinoffs, which had significant influence in the kingdom's intellectual circles and connections to key princes, were widely employed in these Islamic projects, although this would eventually prove problematic.¹⁹ The Johnson administration encouraged Faisal's open advocacy of Islam as a means of undermining Nasser.²⁰

Initially, Saudi support for Islamic causes dovetailed with Sadat's political machinations. Like Faisal, Sadat saw leftists, which permeated the Egyptian power structure, as greater threats to stability. The Egyptian president welcomed

Islamic support, including from the Muslim Brotherhood, to counter this threat. Sadat even professed that he fought the 1973 “Ramadan War” under an Islamic banner.²¹ Only later did Sadat turn on the Islamists, who ultimately conspired, successfully, in an attempt to assassinate him. Saudi Arabia did not mourn his passing, but nor did they celebrate it, Sadat having become a Cold War ally of sorts.

Saudi Arabia’s support of the Arab cause in 1973, combined with the oil boycott and decision to nationalize Aramco, led to intense friction with the United States. While never moving past the proverbial drawing board, American concerns were so great that plans were supposedly drawn up to invade and occupy Saudi oil fields.²² That Saudi Arabia would risk invoking the wrath of Washington was a carefully calculated move; Faisal recognized that the kingdom had more and better diplomatic cards to play. While Aramco had yet to be fully nationalized, the greater threat to American economic interests lied in Saudi influence on the global supply of petroleum. With prices rising at the pump, far better for the Americans to come to an agreement with the kingdom than to further destabilize global energy markets. Riyadh also remained a bulwark against communism. Thus, U.S.-Saudi relations bent but did not break, and in time would be fully restored as Riyadh amply demonstrated its strategic importance to Washington, particularly after the fall of the shah later in the decade.

THE GOLDEN ERA: KING KHALED

King Khaled, who took the throne after Faisal’s assassination in 1975, oversaw a golden era of prosperity, with oil prices soaring to an all-time high and coffers filling to record levels. But the era was not without its challenges. Riyadh continued to toe a hard line on Israel, in a show of its commitment both to the Palestinians and the larger Islamic cause of freeing Jerusalem from Israeli control. Notably, relations with Egypt were severed after the Camp David Accords in protest of Egypt’s decision to enter a largely bilateral agreement brokered by Washington.

While these developments complicated U.S.-Saudi relations, the Iranian revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 increased Saudi-American cooperation on all levels. Iran posed a direct ideological threat which employed Islam not to justify obedience by the ruled to the rulers as religious obligation, but the violent overthrow of the political order. That Iran was Shi’a of course made this type of political Islam even more threatening. But its symbolism sparked other outbreaks of Islamic politico-religious fervor in the region, Shi’a and Sunni alike, including the siege of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, which embarrassed the al-Saud and directly challenged the family’s legitimacy. Riyadh backed Saddam Hussein, with whom they had repeatedly

clashed on issues ranging from oil production levels to Lebanon, during the Gulf War with Iran in an effort to contain Tehran.

Riyadh and Cairo found themselves on the same side of the Cold War. Accordingly, despite frayed relations there continued to be cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Egypt, which by the late 1970s had repositioned itself as an American ally. They also shared a common fear of radicalism of either the Islamic or leftist variety. Saudi Arabia tacitly backed Western-oriented Egypt during a series of border skirmishes with Moammar Gadhafi's Libya; it should be remembered that the Libyan radical had cloaked his revolution in Islamic terms deemed deviant by the Saudis.²³ Sadat, who had forged a strong working relationship with the shah, opposed the Islamic Republic of Iran — a sentiment shared by Riyadh. Though Turkey too was a member of the pro-American Cold War camp, it remained disinterested in Arab and Islamic matters. And, much to the chagrin of Riyadh, it developed strong economic ties to Iran after the revolution, taking advantage of the Islamic Republic's economic isolation to win favorable trading terms.²⁴

THE QUEST FOR STABILITY: THE KING FAHD ERA

Khaled left day-to-day governance to Crown Prince and Deputy Prime Minister Fahd, so his passing in 1982 did not greatly alter Saudi politics. Fahd gave generously to anti-communist causes, even in places such as Central America which posed little if any security concerns to the kingdom. Funding anti-communist movements was consistent with Saudi policy, and endeared Riyadh to the Reagan administration. Despite never being perceived as a particularly devout Muslim, Fahd greatly increased Saudi Arabia's investments in Islamic causes worldwide. In response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Fahd provided massive funding to both the *mujahideen* and the Pakistani government. Symbolically, but in recognition of the Saudis' sense of being the defenders of Islam, Fahd also adopted the title "Custodian of the Two Holy Places" in 1986.²⁵

As in the past but on a much greater scale, much of Saudi Arabia's Islamic support was provided through charity organizations which, ostensibly, paid for the construction of mosques, educational materials, and social welfare programs. While the bulk of the funding was delivered through charity organizations, the aid had a proselytizing effect of promoting the conservative Wahhabi variety of Islam practiced in the kingdom. Politically, it aimed to undermine communists and deviant Islamic entities. But in some cases, funds empowered radical organizations that much later were identified as terrorists.²⁶ While the Egyptians viewed Riyadh's approach with some trepidation, they supported it in so far as it undermined radical Egyptian groups such as Islamic Jihad and Gamaa Islamiya.

While Saudi Arabia had long offered the Muslim Brotherhood a safe haven, Riyadh did not support their efforts to undermine Egypt's political system under Hosni Mubarak.²⁷ Ties with Cairo flourished after the death of Sadat, marking the end of the "Arab Cold War." Riyadh worked well with Mubarak, who lacked the Camp David baggage of his predecessor. In words and deeds, Mubarak supported regional stability, offered a predictable leadership style, and harbored few regional ambitions. Principally, while reluctant to visibly support the peace process, Fahd accepted the principle of land for peace which Egypt had embraced; he proved more pragmatic and flexible than his predecessors. Riyadh also aligned with Egypt on Iran and Libya.

Saudi Arabia supported stabilizing Lebanon throughout its civil war, providing massive amounts of aid and repeatedly attempting to broker peace agreements between Lebanese factions and the various nations which backed them. It successfully extracted Egypt from the Lebanese conflict.²⁸ Later, King Fahd championed the Taif Agreement, which provided the political blueprint for ending the Lebanese civil war. Risk-averse Riyadh's willingness to flex its diplomatic and economic muscles in Lebanon, before, during, and after Taif, was notable. It suggested a Saudi recognition of its regional influence, and willingness to use its newfound weight. It also suggested at a very early point that Riyadh understood that the United States was unwilling and incapable to solve certain regional problems.

Saudi support for facilitating Egypt's return to the Arab League (and the return of its headquarters to Cairo) was repaid in spades after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990.²⁹ Egyptian diplomatic support was essential to securing Arab League backing of the kingdom. Mubarak also deployed some 30,000 Egyptian troops to the kingdom. Riyadh, in turn, provided economic support, including debt relief, to Cairo. Whereas it had once been a major bone of contention with Egypt, after Desert Storm Saudi Arabia fully participated in the rekindled Arab-Israeli peace process. Both Saudi Arabia and Egypt worked in close cooperation with the United States on this and other efforts. In fact, Riyadh and Cairo worked closest when Egypt, Saudi, and American interests converged.

Prior to the 1991 Gulf War, Turkey's most active working relationship with an Arab country was with Iraq. Ankara and Baghdad shared the challenge posed by Kurdish nationalism, as well as acrimonious relations with Syria. Yet Turkey supported the U.S.-Saudi led coalition during the war, allowing American warplanes to operate out of Incirlik Air Base — a decision hotly debated by the Turkish public.³⁰ Turkey later helped enforce the embargo against Iraq. Turkish moves were primarily made to appease the United States, but were appreciated by Saudi Arabia as well. Turkey also responded favorably to the peace process, and greatly expanded relations with Israel after it signed the Declaration of

Principles with the Palestinian Authority in 1993.³¹

In the wake of Desert Storm, Saudi Arabia enjoyed tight economic, political, and security relations with Cairo. While no longer the Arab heavyweight it once was, Egypt was still an influential player, and worked in lockstep with Riyadh to promote regional stability on most policy matters. Both nations were content with the continued isolation of Iraq, Iran, and Libya, and expansion of the Arab-Israeli peace process. In all these matters, both Arab nations were aligned closely with Washington. It was with great disappointment that the Clinton administration's efforts to broker a final, comprehensive peace agreement between the Palestinians and Israelis failed, for both nations banked on peace under American auspices ushering in an era of relative calm. The George W. Bush administration did not give the peace process immediate attention, and by the time it did, the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq had occurred. The Arab world has remained destabilized ever since, including during the turmoil of the Arab Spring in which Mubarak fell from power. With American attention turned elsewhere, and new challenges abounding, Saudi Arabia is once again stepping into a new regional role, with a somewhat reduced Egypt largely aligned with it — at least for the time being.

Turkey's re-emergence as Middle Eastern player was as meteoric as its precipitous fall from favor. The rise of the AKP in Turkey was initially welcomed in Riyadh. While Islamist, Erdoğan's government initially implemented largely secular economic policies that were viewed positively by Riyadh. Economic ties boomed, and Turkey's re-entry into regional policy matters was welcomed. Turkey offered a strong, supportive voice on Palestinian matters, which meshed well with Saudi Arabia's support for reaching a comprehensive peace treaty with Israel under the Abdullah Plan parameters. Additionally, despite its working relations with Tehran, Turkey offered a potential counterweight to Iran.

Things changed abruptly when Erdoğan opted to back the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Not only did the Muslim Brotherhood, which had fallen out of favor in Riyadh, and the AKP share an ideology, but Egypt and Turkey shared fragile democracy with a tradition of military involvement in the political process. But it didn't stop in Egypt; Erdoğan bet the house on Islamist parties during the Arab Spring, and in so far as Arab influence is concerned, lost. The list of grievances has grown since, as is outlined in other chapters. But it remains possible that Riyadh and Ankara, if the latter continues to be interested in the region, will find a way to work together, or at least reach an understanding as to rules governing their rivalry.

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CHAPTER FIVE

SAUDI ARABIA, EGYPT, AND TURKEY:

THREE REGIONAL POWERS ON THE BATTLEGROUND OF ISLAM

THOMAS W. LIPPMAN

To understand the deep aversion of Saudi Arabia to the growing religiosity of Turkish policies under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, it is useful to visit the Topkapı Palace Museum in Istanbul.

One of the chambers is a “Pavilion of the Sacred Relics,” a shrine devoted to objects and artifacts from the early history of Islam, including clothing, weapons, and drinking vessels said to have been owned or used by the Prophet Muhammad himself.

A lavish gold-trimmed companion volume, “The Sacred Trusts,” published by the Turkish Ministry of Culture, says that “The Companions of the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, loved him more than their own souls. Just as they practiced the essentials of the religion he preached, they also saved material objects connected with him as an expression of their love. Many of these sacred relics — including the Prophet’s clothing, his weapons, his staff, his flag, his tooth that broke at Uhud, and even strands of his hair — were passed on to future generations. Those fortunate persons who preserved them were anticipating blessings; that is, they were anticipating blessings stemming from love of God and His Prophet.” The text says that Muhammad not only

tolerated such sentiment but encouraged his followers in their reverence for such relics.

The curators of “The Sacred Trusts” were no doubt motivated by religious sentiment rather than politics, but in the context of today’s Middle East, the entire exhibition can be seen as an implicit rebuke of Saudi Arabia. The rigid form of Islam practiced in the kingdom prohibits prayers at shrines to human beings or reverence for relics like those at Topkapı. Such practices, in the Saudi view, amount to *shirk*, a forbidden deviation from absolute monotheism.¹ Religious authorities in Saudi Arabia, who regard their country as the global heart of Islam, have spent years tearing down houses and other buildings associated with Muhammad and his early followers because pilgrims prayed at them. An exhibition such as the one at Topkapı repudiates Saudi Arabia’s claim to be the repository of Muslim authenticity; it is a fitting symbol of post-Kemalist Turkey under the leadership of Erdoğan and of his vision of Turkey as the true center of Islam.

Many of the Topkapı relics came from the Hijaz, the Red Sea coastal region of what is today Saudi Arabia, where Islam originated in Mecca and Medina. During the centuries when the Ottoman Empire was the sovereign power in the Hijaz region and most of the Arab world, it was also the seat of the Islamic caliphate. The Ottoman Empire and the caliphate itself were abolished after World War I, and its former Arab lands were placed under the control of European powers. Turkey, the remnant state, turned its back on the Arabs, who had sided with their enemies during the war, and abolished religion from public life and political discourse. Secular Turkey yielded its position atop the hierarchy of Islam to the new kingdom forged from the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula by Abdulaziz al-Saud.

For the remainder of the 20th century, as the Arab countries gained independence and made their own political choices, Turkey was not part of their story. Aside from occasional military forays into Iraq in pursuit of Kurdish separatists who found refuge there, Turkey, a member of NATO, looked northward, toward a hostile Soviet Union, and westward, concerned more with seeking accession to the European Union and confronting the Cyprus issue than with the Arabs’ fratricidal politics. Nor did the Arabs wish it were otherwise. They had no desire for input from Ankara as they pursued their own interests.

Events in this century have altered that picture almost beyond recognition. Longstanding interests and partnerships are shifting in a landscape of moving parts. With admission to the EU nowhere in sight, Turkey has turned its attentions back toward the East. Erdoğan’s Islamist politics and regional ambitions, coupled with the war in Syria, have transformed Turkey into a major player among the Arabs. It is one of three major Sunni Muslim regional

powers in the region, along with Saudi Arabia and Egypt. If in harmony, the three would form an unrivaled power bloc that could stifle the ambitions of Shiite Iran, but they are not.

In a murky environment of conflicting agendas, shifting partnerships, and strong personalities, Turkey and Saudi Arabia are more rivals than partners, while Egypt, because of its multiple weaknesses, is unable to exert much influence on either of the others. After decades of uninspiring leadership, economic blunders, and separation from the Arab mainstream because of its peace with Israel, Egypt has lost its dominant position in Arab politics. A new generation hardly remembers the days when Egypt exerted power and set the Arab agenda through the charismatic Gamal Abdel Nasser.

Saudi Arabia has aspired to fill that vacuum of leadership, but it has failed to establish any region-wide strategy or vision behind which others could unite. Over the past decade, it has built a record of errors and false starts that have blunted the influence of its money: It failed to follow through on its commitment to ridding Syria of President Bashar al-Assad, leaving the field largely to others when it diverted its attention to Yemen. Its boycott of Qatar was embraced by Egypt but it has proved counter-productive, driving Qatar closer to Iran and Turkey. Saudi Arabia has failed to curtail the power of Hezbollah in Lebanon. Its campaign against the Yemeni rebels known as the Houthis has put Saudi Arabia into a tight embrace with the United Arab Emirates (UAE), but they have failed to forge a coherent policy just as they have failed on the battlefield. Even Egypt, which is heavily reliant on Saudi Arabia and the UAE for financial support, has limited its participation in the Yemen campaign.

Since the end of expansionist communism, Saudi Arabia has had only two essential strategic objectives: preservation of the regime and acceptance of its primacy in Islam, the latter being essential to the former.

THE TURKISH CHALLENGE

But Turkey has positioned itself to challenge Saudi Arabia's primacy in the faith. Its path to religious leadership, if indeed it exists, is irreconcilable with the views on Islamic governance of Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Turkey is deeply entwined with the Muslim Brotherhood, which Saudi Arabia and Egypt have declared to be a terrorist organization. Turkey has embraced Qatar, another country friendly to the Brotherhood, which Egypt and Saudi Arabia are boycotting for just that reason.

"The kingdom has to face two types of radical political Islam: an Iranian type and a Turkish type," said a Saudi Foreign Ministry official with long experience in Turkish affairs. "With the rise of Erdoğanism, Turkey took an interest in the Arab region and considered it ready for a regional hegemony project in which it can play a regional role competing with traditional regional powers such as

Saudi Arabia, Iran, Israel, and Egypt.”²

Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, who gained power by overthrowing a Brotherhood-led government, has aligned himself with Saudi Arabia’s impetuous — some would say reckless — Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the kingdom’s de facto ruler, while Erdoğan has gone his own way and is hardly an admirer of the crown prince. Erdoğan has not embraced the crown prince’s policy of all-out confrontation with Iran — on the contrary, he has cultivated closer relations with Turkey’s neighbor — nor has he acceded to a Saudi demand that he withdraw a contingent of Turkish troops from Qatar.

In that context, the murder of the Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in early October 2018, almost certainly by agents of the crown prince, handed Erdoğan an irresistible opportunity to embarrass the prince by parceling out grisly details of the crime.

As *The New York Times*’s correspondent in Istanbul wrote in late November 2018, “For weeks, the leader of Turkey has been trying to undermine his regional rival, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia, with a skillful drip of intelligence leaks linking the prince to a gruesome crime,” the murder of Khashoggi.³

Erdoğan “played that like a Stradivarius,” said Gregory Gause, one of the most knowledgeable scholars of Saudi and Gulf affairs in the U.S.⁴

“The Khashoggi affair has provided Ankara with a great opportunity to discredit the Saudi regime — especially the crown prince, whom Erdoğan detests — as well as drive a wedge between Saudi Arabia and the United States,” according to Mohammed Ayoob of Michigan State University. In addition, he wrote, the “recent rapprochement between Ankara, Moscow, and Tehran — which intends to protect the interests of all the three powers in Syria — indicates that a modus vivendi has been worked out between Iran and Turkey on defining their spheres of influence in Syria. This has upset the Saudis to no end because it relieves the pressure on Iran in the Fertile Crescent and, consequently, allows it to concentrate its energies on contesting ambitions in the Persian Gulf region and in Yemen.”⁵

The Turkish leader was certainly successful in undermining the Saudi crown prince’s stature among Americans, as reflected in the U.S. Senate’s unanimous vote to condemn the crime and his role in it. But that does not necessarily advance his agenda in the Middle East, which has run up against other obstacles. These were summarized in a report issued in late summer 2018 by the Congressional Research Service, the research arm of the Library of Congress:

“Turkey’s Middle Eastern profile expanded in the 2000s as Erdogan (while serving as prime minister) sought to build economic and political

linkages — often emphasizing shared Muslim identity — with Turkey's neighbors. However, efforts to increase Turkey's influence and offer it as a 'model' for other regional states appear to have been set back by a number of developments since 2011: (1) conflict and instability that engulfed the region and Turkey's own southern border, (2) Turkey's failed effort to help Muslim Brotherhood-aligned groups gain lasting power in Syria and North Africa, and (3) domestic polarization accompanied by government repression. Although Turkey shares some interests with traditional Sunni Arab powers Saudi Arabia and Egypt in countering Iran, these countries' leaders regard Turkey suspiciously because of its government's Islamist sympathies and close relationship with Qatar.”⁶

Those with experience in the Middle East will appreciate the irony of Saudi Arabia, a country built on a foundation of deeply conservative Islam, looking askance at Turkey, long a citadel of Kemalist secularism, because of its “Islamist sympathies.”

In Saudi Arabia, the faith is the state and the state is the faith. Institutions of religion and government overlap at every level, and the king presides over a system the Saudis depict as divinely ordained. Saudi Arabia's “Basic Law of Government,” promulgated by King Fahd in 1992, stipulates that its monarchical system fulfills “the principles of the Holy Koran and the Tradition of the Venerable Prophet.” In that system, it says, “Citizens are to pay allegiance to the King in accordance with the Holy Koran and the tradition of the Prophet.” Saudi schoolchildren are taught from an early age that their faith ordains obedience to the ruler.⁷

Saudi Arabia could align itself with Turkey on all manner of strategic and economic issues, as it does with the United States, but it will not accept rivalry in religion.⁸

When a high official of Erdoğan's ruling party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), made a speech in which he suggested Saudi Arabia was not competent to ensure the safety of pilgrims going to Mecca, a columnist for the kingdom's most popular newspaper blamed Erdoğan. He said Numan Kurtulmuş, deputy chief of the AKP, “would not have the courage to say what he did without his president's permission.” He said Erdoğan, through the Khashoggi case, “is in the front line in attacking the kingdom,” and denounced Turkey for supporting what he said was a plan sponsored by Iran and Qatar to create a consortium to manage the Holy Mosques of Mecca and Medina.⁹ Given the compliance of Saudi news outlets with government policy, that column almost certainly reflected government thinking.

Saudi Arabia is extremely sensitive to criticism of its stewardship over the

Holy Mosques, which was loud throughout the Muslim world after a deadly stampede during the pilgrimage of 2015. Turkish support for any plan to dilute Saudi control would infuriate the kingdom's leaders.¹⁰ Adel al-Jubeir, then Saudi foreign minister, said any proposal to internationalize management of the pilgrimage would be taken as a "declaration of war."¹¹

The Saudi leadership was traumatized when armed religious extremists took over the Grand Mosque of Mecca in late 1979. Ever since, it has made management of the holy sites and the pilgrimage a point of pride, even as it sometimes has denied pilgrimage visas to countries with which it was at odds. When Erdoğan says publicly that "Turkey is the only country that can lead the Muslim world," as he did two weeks after the death of Khashoggi, it represents an insult to the Saudis, as well as a challenge.¹²

The Saudis are unaccustomed to challenges on religious grounds such as the one they received recently from Ankara over the fate of three widely popular preachers whom they have imprisoned on terrorism charges, accusing them of being sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood and Qatar. On May 27, 2019, the pro-government Turkish newspaper *Yeni Şafak* published an open letter to King Salman written by Yasin Aktay, an advisor to Erdoğan, warning the Saudi monarch against executing Salman al-Awdah, Awad al-Qarni, and Ali al-Omari. In Aktay's words: "That which will bring disaster to you is executing Islamic scholars, which was recently announced. Scholars are the inheritors of prophets, and each scholar is a world on their own. The death of a scholar is like the death of the world. The killing of a scholar is like the killing of the world."

Erdoğan's advisor also argued that the fate of these three Saudi scholars is not merely a domestic issue for Saudi Arabia. "The matter of Islamic scholars is not an internal affair. The scholars in question are assets who are acknowledged and revered by the whole Muslim community. They are not your subjects; they are our common treasures, whose advice we heed, and who are beacons of light with their knowledge and stance. The sin of detaining them even an hour in the dungeon, let alone executing them, is enough to destroy an entire life."¹³

THE STRUGGLE OVER QATAR

This built-in tension between Saudi Arabia and Erdoğan's new Turkey has played out in the struggle over Saudi Arabia's tiny but spectacularly wealthy neighbor, Qatar.

Saudi Arabia and Qatar are Sunni Arab monarchies built on hydrocarbon wealth. Both are members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a six-member economic grouping of Gulf sheikhdoms, and both adhere to the form of Islam known in the West as Wahhabism. But Qatar, like some of the other small states in the GCC, is wary of Saudi dominance and goes its own way

politically. In the face of a boycott by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE, and Egypt — a boycott that closed borders, disrupted air traffic patterns, separated families, and forced the realignment of commerce — Qatar has found a welcome supporter in Turkey. Like Turkey, Qatar is sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood. Turkey stationed its military contingent in Qatar as a warning to the Saudis against invasion, which the Saudis reportedly contemplated.¹⁴

When Saudi Arabia issued an ultimatum listing conditions Qatar would have to meet for the boycott to be lifted, this was item 5: “Immediately terminate the Turkish military presence currently in Qatar and end any joint military cooperation with Turkey inside of Qatar.”¹⁵ Qatar has not complied, and has given no sign that it intends to capitulate or even to meet Saudi Arabia’s demands halfway.

“One of the more dangerous effects of the lingering boycott,” the analyst Hussein Ibish wrote recently, “is that not only Qatar but also Kuwait and Oman are becoming very nervous about what they see as an aggressive Saudi and Emirati effort to make all regional states conform to their agendas.

“This is exacerbating one of the main reasons for the boycott: the sense that Turkey, in conjunction with Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood parties, constitutes a third, Sunni Islamist, bloc in the Middle East competing with both the pro-Iranian and pro-Saudi and U.S. camps. While they won’t say so publicly, the boycotting quartet is increasingly concerned that, in a nightmare scenario, the Turkish-Qatari alliance could slowly begin to absorb other countries such as Kuwait and Jordan and constitute a real potential alternative set of allies against Iran for the U.S.”¹⁶

Turkey’s influence has already spilled over into Kuwait, another GCC state bordering Saudi Arabia that pursues an independent policy.

In September 2018, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman made his first official visit to Kuwait. As *The Economist* reported, “Billboards in Kuwait City extolled close relations. But his visit was anything but warm. Kuwait has tried to play mediator in the Qatar dispute. Prince Muhammad is unhappy with this and pressed the Kuwaitis to join the embargo. They refused. Kuwait also rebuffed his request to restart oil production in the ‘Neutral Zone,’ a strip of border territory where they share extraction rights. The trip was meant to last two days. The prince returned home within hours.”¹⁷

Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have since reached a tentative agreement on resuming oil production in the Neutral Zone, but at the same time Kuwait has signed a military cooperation agreement with Turkey, further eroding Saudi Arabia’s dominance in the GCC.

The shrill Saudi reaction to criticism of the kingdom’s management of the pilgrimage from one of Erdoğan’s senior associates reflects Saudi sensitivity about any challenge, real or imagined, to its role in the faith. There is a reason

why the king's official title, as the Turks well know, is "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques." But in the Saudi context the sensitivity is understandable because the kingdom regards itself as the true guardian of Muslim orthodoxy and resents others who aspire to share that leadership role.

"Saudi Arabia was and is intensely apprehensive of parliamentary Islamism that bases its ascension to power on popular support since it directly challenges the Saudis' absolutist Islamism," according to Mohammed Ayoob. "Ideologically, it represents a clash between Islamism from below — the Muslim Brotherhood and AKP models — and Islamism from above symbolized by the Saudi Arabian monarchy."¹⁸

ERDOĞAN AND THE KHASHOGGI MURDER

It is difficult to imagine that relations between Riyadh and Ankara will warm up any time soon after Erdoğan wrote an article in *The Washington Post* condemning Saudi Arabia in strong terms for the Khashoggi killing.

"We know the order to kill Khashoggi came from the highest levels of the Saudi government," Erdoğan's article said, without specifying which "highest levels" he was referring to. He complained that the Saudi consul in Istanbul had "lied through his teeth" about what happened to Khashoggi, and that Saudi Arabia's public prosecutor had refused to answer "even simple questions" about the investigation.

Erdoğan also said, however, that he "would like to stress that Turkey and Saudi Arabia enjoy friendly relations. I do not believe for a second that King Salman, the custodian of the holy mosques, ordered the hit on Khashoggi. Therefore, I have no reason to believe that his murder reflected Saudi Arabia's official policy."¹⁹ King Salman, the crown prince's father, still retains ultimate authority in Saudi Arabia, and most analysts interpreted Erdoğan's words as a statement that he does not seek or anticipate a complete rupture with the kingdom.

"There's not going to be some permanent rift between Riyadh and Ankara, but they weren't on the same page even before Khashoggi," Gregory Gause said.²⁰ Neither country wants further destabilization of its neighbors in a region already beset by conflict.

The Saudi Foreign Ministry official, reflecting his government's views, said that in Turkey's public statements it "declares that it does not want complete termination of relations, but at the same time it does not want complete openness in relations. It wants only to control the course of relations with Saudi Arabia and to employ any development, negative or positive, for the benefit of its regional agenda."²¹

A corollary of the divergence of interests between Turkey and Saudi Arabia is that they also differ sharply in their relations with the United States, still

the most important outside power with influence in the region. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Saudi Arabia's rulers are steadfast adherents to Washington's Middle East policies and strategies, and fully share the Trump administration's hostility to Iran. Riyadh's loyalty has only been enhanced by President Donald Trump's resolute support for the crown prince in the face of congressional outrage over the Khashoggi affair. The Saudi response was muted when, in the fall of 2019, the Trump administration proclaimed that Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank are not illegal. Turkey, however, has increasingly distanced itself from Washington, most recently in its decision to purchase the S-400 advanced missile-defense system from Russia.

The people of the Middle East tend to have long memories, often to the detriment of stability and constructive partnerships. Saudis all know that it was the Ottomans who were responsible for the destruction of the first Saudi state in 1818, just as Turks remember that the Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula sided with Britain against them in World War I and then united under Abdulaziz al-Saud to drive them out of the Hijaz region. The idea that their people would leave those events in the history books and form a new alliance, as the United States did with Japan and Germany, would not find fertile ground in popular opinion.

EGYPT'S COMPLICATED HISTORY

Egypt's historical grievances by contrast focus more on Britain, which dominated their country until Nasser and his Free Officers overthrew a compliant monarchy in 1952. But Egypt also has its own complicated history of difficulties and grievances with Saudi Arabia, on issues that had nothing to do with Turkey. Under Sissi, Egypt often defers to Saudi Arabia because of its endless need for cash, but the relationship between Cairo and Riyadh is not entirely one-way. Before the upheavals that shook the Arab world in 2011 and brought down the Egyptian government of Hosni Mubarak, Egypt and Saudi Arabia were rivals as often as they were friends.

In the 1950s, Nasser's Egypt turned itself into a strategic and economic partner of the Soviet Union at a time when Saudi Arabia was rigidly opposed to all forms of communism and any influence from Moscow. Egypt and Saudi Arabia supported opposite sides in the Yemeni civil war of the 1960s. Saudi Arabia gave refuge to members of the Muslim Brotherhood who fled Egypt to escape Nasser's effort to wipe out the organization. And Saudi Arabia shocked Egypt by refusing to accept Anwar Sadat's peace agreement with Israel. In 1979 Saudi Arabia joined almost all other Arab countries in boycotting Egypt and moving the headquarters of the Arab League from Cairo to Tunis. At the same time, the Saudis cancelled plans for a joint Saudi-Egyptian military manufacturing industry that would have created thousands of jobs in Egypt

and enhanced its regional standing.

Officially, if not in the memories of the citizenry, all those hatchets have been buried now as Sissi has generally aligned his policies across the board with those of Riyadh. Such a course may well reflect Sissi's personal preferences, but even if it does not, he has little choice. With a drop in revenue because of a decline in tourism, a stubborn extremist insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula, a relentlessly growing population that long ago outstripped the country's resources, and an anticipated decline in worker remittances from Saudi Arabia as the kingdom nationalizes its workforce, Egypt is heavily dependent on infusions of cash from the governments of Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Sissi is in no position to alienate his donors and supporters, the Saudis chief among them.

The Saudis embraced Sissi in 2013 when he seized control of Egypt by overthrowing an elected Muslim Brotherhood government. Cairo's streets were festooned with banners thanking the Saudis for their "brotherly assistance." When King Salman later visited Egypt, his visit lasted a week and included a speech before parliament.

Egypt had modern cities and large industries when the Gulf Arabs were still "shoeless goatherds," as Sadat called them, and its people have long resented the new oil wealth of Saudi Arabia and its neighbors, a sharp contrast to their own poverty. Thus the bilateral relationship with Saudi Arabia represents a delicate balance for the Egyptian leader, who is still trying to shore up his political legitimacy. He needs Saudi help, but from time to time he seems to feel a need to assert some independence. It has been widely reported in the region, for example, that Sissi refused a request from the crown prince to send ground troops to support Saudi Arabia's war against the Yemeni rebels known as the Houthis.

That request from Mohammed bin Salman was "a stunning move that showed his ignorance of the recent history of Yemen," the prominent Washington-based journalist Hisham Milhem wrote. "For President el-Sisi, who belongs to a generation of Egyptians who were haunted for years by their country's humiliating and disastrous Yemen war in the 1960's, that was a royal demand he could only refuse."²²

Sissi does not tolerate dissent any more than does Mohammed bin Salman, but nonetheless there was palpable public anger when he turned over to Saudi Arabia two small islands off the southern tip of Sinai in 2016. Tiran and Sanafir had been under Egyptian control since 1950, when Saudi Arabia yielded them to Egypt to preclude a possible attack by Israel. The Israelis did seize the islands during the 1967 war, but gave them back to Egypt after the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. The people of Egypt are well aware that it was their country, not Saudi Arabia, that fought the Israelis in 1967 and 1973, and that it was the diplomacy of their president, Sadat, not that of any Saudi, that secured the

return of Sinai and the islands through the peace treaty.

An Egyptian court ruled the transfer invalid, but Sissi's lapdog parliament voted to approve it anyway. That decision drew widespread criticism from Egyptians who accused Sissi of trading their land for money.

"Giving those islands to Saudi Arabia was very controversial. I can't believe it's popular with the military," which is Sissi's power base, said Michele Dunne, an Egypt specialist at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

"People are very mad about this. They sold their patrimony," said Barak Barfi, author of a recent study of Egyptian politics under Sissi.²³

Israel had to approve the transfer of the islands because, under the terms of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, Israel returned them to Egypt as part of its phased handover of the Sinai in the 1980s. It did not give them to Saudi Arabia, a country with which Israel is still technically at war. But Israel signed off on the transfer, in another sign of the growing cooperation between Israel and Saudi Arabia. Turkey's Erdoğan, by contrast, has become increasingly hostile in the tone of his rhetoric about Israel. "Turkey maintains relations with Israel, but these have become distant and — at times — contentious during Erdogan's rule," the CRS report on Turkey noted.²⁴

Saudi Arabia and Egypt could not have been pleased when a long article distributed by the news agency al-Jazeera — which is based in Qatar and funded by its government — said that such cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Israel indicates that "improved relations will help Israel further isolate the Palestinian leaderships in Gaza and the West Bank. That will add to the pressure on them to accept final-status arrangements on the best terms possible for Israel."²⁵ Articles such as that explain why the demands Saudi Arabia gave to Qatar as a condition of ending its boycott included shutting down al-Jazeera.

THE CAUSEWAY PROJECT

Saudi Arabia and Egypt have had sharp differences over tactics and objectives in Syria, but theirs will not be the voices that matter in whatever arrangements finally end that country's civil war. Neither has much influence, let alone control, over Turkey, Russia or Iran, the most important actors in that depressing drama. Riyadh and Cairo face bilateral decisions over matters they do control, beginning with the fate of the King Salman Causeway.

This on-again, off-again, multi-billion-dollar project, which Riyadh and Cairo have discussed for more than a decade, would link northwestern Saudi Arabia with Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt's southern Sinai by way of Tiran, one of the islands Sissi handed over.

There is no overland link now because any such route would have to pass through the sliver of Israel above the port of Eilat, at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba. Assuming that Saudi Arabia is not going to sign a peace treaty with

Israel any time soon, a causeway link between the kingdom and Egypt makes economic and political sense. It would expedite the pilgrimage to Mecca for Muslims throughout North Africa and the Sahel, increase tourism, and reduce the cost of freight transport between Saudi Arabia, which is increasingly manufacturing goods for export, and the largest Arab country. It would also benefit NEOM, the wildly ambitious, futuristic economic city that Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is planning for his country's northwestern corner.

Creation of new communities from scratch has been a staple of Saudi Arabia's economic planning for two decades. The results have been mixed, at best. Whether NEOM actually materializes, and whether it will attract the foreign investment it will need, remains to be seen, but the crown prince has made it a cornerstone of his Vision 2030 economic restructuring plan.

On its website, NEOM describes itself as "The world's most ambitious project: an entire new land, purpose-built for a new way of living." The project's advisory board reads like a guest list from Davos.

One of the features NEOM advertises is advanced-technology transportation, including "an awe-inspiring new bridge that will link Asia with Africa, a bridge whose unifying symbolism will be as strong as its iconic design."²⁶ That is the Sinai causeway project, which is to help develop NEOM into "a global hub for trade, innovation and knowledge."

President Sissi and King Salman finalized an agreement to proceed with the project during the king's visit to Egypt in 2016, the same visit during which Sissi returned the two islands to Saudi control. The Saudis would provide the money, because Egypt has no spare cash.

At an international investment conference in Riyadh in October 2018 — the one from which several prominent executives and financiers withdrew because of the Khashoggi affair — Nadhmi al-Nasr, NEOM's chief executive, said that the pace of planning was "greater than expected."²⁷ By December, reports in the construction trade press said that NEOM's airport was nearing completion and other components of the project were ready for contractors to submit tenders, but nothing in the Middle East is ever that simple.

Traffic arriving at the Egyptian end of the causeway would have to traverse most of the Sinai Peninsula in order to continue westward to Cairo and North Africa. But the Sinai has been insecure for years, plagued by a violent Islamic State (IS) insurgency that Egypt has been embarrassingly unable to put down. As one report in October 2018 put it, "The dedicated IS franchise group in the Sinai continues to gather momentum, particularly in the face of the ineptitude of Egyptian security forces. IS-affiliated militants have pursued a hybrid strategy of attacking both Egyptian security forces and civilian non-combatants, the latter part of the strategy introducing a highly sectarian

dimension to the conflict.”²⁸

So strong and persistent is the insurgency that Sissi was compelled to ask Israel for help. The Israelis were willing to provide air support to Egypt’s struggling forces, but that raises the question of whether the Saudis will want to forge ahead with a project that is, in effect, dependent on Israel for security, especially when Turkey has been taking a harder rhetorical line on Israel. In addition, causeway traffic would of course go both ways, raising the possibility that some terrorist elements in Sinai could cross into Saudi Arabia.

Additional uncertainty arises from doubts about the willingness of foreign investors to put money into NEOM. International outrage over the Khashoggi murder and the crown prince’s role in it have already scared off some foreign firms that were contemplating investments in Saudi Arabia. If there is no substantial development at NEOM, is the causeway project worth the money for the Saudis? How would Egypt react if Saudi Arabia dropped it?

It is possible that the King Salman Causeway may develop into a vital artery of international commerce, like the Suez Canal. But its prospects, like those of the entire region, cannot be predicted because uncertainty and violence prevail from Tunis to Aden.

There is no point in making predictions. Future relations among Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey will depend on developments and outcomes that are unknowable today: the durability of the Erdoğan and Sissi regimes, the outcomes in Syria, the stability of Iraq, the nationalist ambitions of the Kurds, the evolution of Iran after the passing of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, the sustainability of the Qatar boycott.

And of course, this being the Middle East, there is always the possibility of a “Black Swan,” some totally unforeseen event that changes the whole regional landscape. In the Middle East, it is safe to assume a gap between plan and achievement, between aspiration and fulfillment. And policies will change with events and personalities.

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CHAPTER SIX

THE POLITICAL VENEER OF ECONOMIC EXCHANGE: TURKISH RELATIONS WITH SAUDI ARABIA AND EGYPT

ROBERT MOGIELNICKI

Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt have been three key state actors in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) over the past decade. Yet Ankara's relations with Riyadh and Cairo, in particular, have proven contentious. Escalating tensions have not resulted in a decisive break of bilateral ties, however. Indeed, no formal boycott between any of the three countries exists — though the case of Qatar demonstrates that such a scenario remains a distinct possibility. In the case of both Turkish-Saudi and Turkish-Egyptian relations, there is a modest foundation of economic linkages that offers little insight into the future trajectories of economic ties between the countries. This chapter aims to elucidate these economic linkages by measuring the effects, if any, of political and diplomatic crises on Turkey's bilateral economic relations with Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

Warm relations between then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz al-Saud in the 2000s — symbolized by Erdoğan's receipt of the King Faisal Prize for Service of Islam — helped temper tensions in 2011. The two countries' diverging views on the threat of political Islam played out against the backdrop of a revolutionary wave sweeping across

the region. However, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) crisis of 2017 and Turkey's subsequent economic and military support for Qatar strained Ankara's relations with the new Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman. The relationship deteriorated further following the death of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in October 2018. President Erdoğan, however, was careful to avoid overt criticism of King Salman in the aftermath of the incident. These developments led observers to suggest that tensions are "spilling over into the economic realm,"¹ and that the Saudis are "leveraging their economic muscle to pressure Turkey."²

Changing political institutions in Egypt played an important role in shaping relations between Ankara and Cairo. A critical deterioration in the relationship followed the 2013 removal of former President Mohammed Morsi — an Islamist affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, a group with close links to Erdoğan's Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) — and the eventual ascension of President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, a leading figure within the Egyptian military. Erdoğan condemned Morsi's removal, permitted Egyptian Islamists and other critics of the government to settle in Turkey, and provocatively participated in a symbolic funeral prayer for the former president in June 2019. Egypt's government, for its part, expelled the Turkish ambassador in 2013 and issued various warnings to Turkey. For example, Egypt's Foreign Ministry warned Turkey to avoid drilling for natural gas west of Cyprus.³ The approaching deadline for the full implementation of a free trade agreement (FTA) between the two countries — signed in 2005 and implemented in 2007 — is considered a bellwether for the health of Turkish-Egyptian economic ties.

GDP TO POPULATION FIGURES

2018	GDP (BILLION USD)	POPULATION (MILLION)
KSA	782.5	33.7
TURKEY	766.5	82.3
IRAN	454*	81.8
UAE	414.2	9.6
ISRAEL	369.7	8.9
EGYPT	250.9	98.4

SOURCE: WORLD BANK

Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt possess outsized economic and demographic positions relative to other MENA countries. Saudi Arabia and Turkey have the two largest economies, with gross domestic products (GDPs) of \$782.5 billion and \$766.5 billion respectively in 2018. Separately, Egypt's population

of 98.4 million people remains the region's largest. Yet all three countries have confronted serious economic crises in the past few years: Turkey's beleaguered banking industry wreaked havoc on the value of the Turkish lira; Egypt enacted difficult reforms as part of a \$12 billion loan deal with the International Monetary Fund (IMF); and Saudi Arabia embarked on an ambitious economic diversification program following the collapse of oil prices in 2014/15.

This chapter aims to examine whether political disputes between these countries have disrupted economic linkages and — if so — how economic relationships are being reconfigured as a result. The working hypothesis is that the deterioration in Turkey's diplomatic relations with both Saudi Arabia and Egypt had a negative effect on bilateral economic ties. In order to test this, the chapter adopts a political economy lens, which helps to identify the winners and losers associated with particular government policies. The study primarily considers trade, investment, and people flows; however, other relevant factors are introduced to provide additional context on economic exchange between Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. The analysis focuses primarily on the years between 2011 and 2018, given the availability of data and length constraints of this work.

The work incorporates the methods of process tracing and stakeholder analysis. The former method is a useful technique for analyzing trajectories of change and, in the process, uncovering new causal insights and hypotheses.⁴ The latter method helps to identify the conflicts of interest and tradeoffs associated with managing complex, multilayered economic relations. This research design helps to illustrate the underlying institutional incentives shaping governments' abilities to adapt to acute changes in economic systems as well as address longer-term challenges. The chapter begins with an examination of Turkish-Saudi economic relations before analyzing Turkish-Egyptian ties. A brief third section qualifies the findings from the previous two case studies by highlighting broader global and regional trends that also shape bilateral economic relations.

TURKEY-SAUDI ARABIA TIES: A VOLATILE RELATIONSHIP

Bilateral trade flows between Turkey and Saudi Arabia have remained relatively constant since 2011, averaging approximately \$5.2 billion each year. The volume of bilateral trade jumped from a low of around \$4.76 billion in 2011 to a high of \$5.85 billion in 2012. Turkey's primary exports to Saudi Arabia include carpets, refined oil products, electrical panels, construction iron, and furniture, whereas Saudi Arabian exports to Turkey constitute a less diverse mix of oil and petrochemical commodities.⁵ Total bilateral trade volumes varied little over this period, making it hard to assess the impact of

political tensions. Moreover, the volumes were quite small as a percentage of both countries' total annual foreign trade, further reducing the symbolic impact of minor shifts year-on-year. Turkish-Saudi trade constituted just 1.4 percent and 1.2 percent of foreign trade in Saudi Arabia and Turkey during 2017.⁶

TURKEY-SAUDI ARABIA TOTAL ANNUAL TRADE VOLUME

YEAR	TOTAL TRADE (USD)
2018	4,954,540,691
2017	4,844,683,004
2016	5,007,310,081
2015	5,589,853,606
2014	5,390,277,775
2013	5,206,351,853
2012	5,847,654,814
2011	4,765,004,045

SOURCE: UN COMTRADE

A breakdown of imports and exports provides a finer grained analysis of recent trade dynamics between the two countries. Between 2016 and 2018, Saudi Arabia's imports from Turkey decreased by approximately \$500 million, whereas Saudi Arabian exports to Turkey increased by nearly \$700 million. A key explanation for these divergent import and export trajectories involves trends in the global oil market. The increase in the value of Saudi exports to Turkey partially correlates with rising global oil prices during this period, which also affect crude oil derivative products. For example, the vast majority of Saudi exports to Turkey in 2017 consisted of plastics and rubbers (66 percent), chemical products (18 percent), and mineral products (12 percent).⁷ The U.S. also pressured Saudi Arabia and other oil exporters to ensure a continuous supply of crude oil to countries with expiring Iranian oil import waivers. Therefore, the rise in the value of Saudi exports does not necessarily represent a significant increase in the quantity supplied.

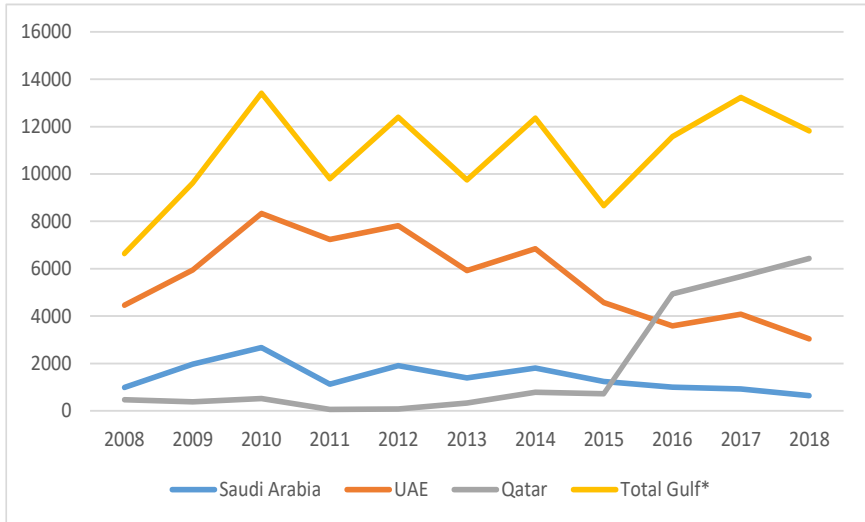
SAUDI BILATERAL TRADE WITH TURKEY (USD)

	IMPORTS	EXPORTS
2018	2,657,512,676	2,276,316,275
2017	3,016,624,570	1,783,556,665
2016	3,144,102,063	1,577,104,537
2015	2,975,845,586	1,721,672,019
2014	2,971,086,125	2,129,141,957
2013	3,115,293,227	1,806,964,924
2012	3,366,588,742	1,845,479,640
2011	2,359,586,149	1,682,523,436

SOURCE: UN COMTRADE

Foreign direct investment (FDI) flows between Turkey and Saudi Arabia offer another opportunity to assess how political conflicts impact economic linkages. According to the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), annual FDI inflows from Saudi Arabia to Turkey from 2003 to 2013 reached \$2.67 billion in 2010 before swinging downward to \$1.12 billion in 2011, a drop of nearly 59 percent.⁸ Saudi equity capital in Turkey — as measured by the Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey — peaked in 2010 at nearly \$2.7 billion but has steadily declined since 2014. In 2018, it hit a low of \$625 million, a level not seen since 2005. Turkish FDI in Saudi Arabia, by contrast, was a less important part of the bilateral relationship: Investment of \$48 million in 2013 represented the largest annual FDI outflow of the decade ending that year.⁹

The decline in FDI from Saudi Arabia since 2014 can be partially explained by the drop in global oil prices and consequent fiscal consolidation measures and other economic reforms intended to reduce Saudi Arabia’s annual deficit, recycle more capital domestically, and diversify the economy away from hydrocarbon revenues. Overall, Gulf FDI into Turkey, measured in terms of equity capital, did not decrease during this period. Although Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) gradually reduced their investments in Turkey, Qatar filled the vacuum. Qatar’s contribution to equity capital increased from \$715 million in 2015 to \$4.9 billion in 2016 — an indication that the beginning of a drastic rise in Qatari investments preceded the 2017 boycott and likely had its roots in the 2014 Saudi-Qatari rift. The eight-month rift between Qatar and some of its Gulf neighbors encouraged Doha to strengthen its linkages with other regional actors outside of the GCC. In 2018, Qatar accounted for around \$6.26 billion of Gulf equity capital in Turkey, equivalent to 54 percent of the total Gulf contribution.

FDI INTO TURKEY, EQUITY CAPITAL (MILLIONS USD)

SOURCE: THE CENTRAL BANK OF THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY (CBRT)

*NOTE: CBRT CATEGORIZES IRAQ & YEMEN AS "GULF ARABIAN COUNTRIES," BUT NEITHER HAS SIZEABLE INVESTMENTS IN TURKEY

The two countries established a Turkish-Saudi Business Council in 2003. The last official meeting of the council occurred in November 2016 in Istanbul, although members of its executive committee visited Riyadh in February 2018.¹⁰ As of December 2017, the Turkish Ministry of Trade listed 1,138 Saudi firms with foreign capital operating in Turkey, a relatively small portion of the 58,422 foreign firms registered with the ministry.¹¹ Turkey's 2018 currency and debt crisis and the ensuing monetary policy response have not increased confidence among foreign companies operating in the country. Once the largest buyers of Turkish real estate, Saudis purchased fewer homes than Iraqis, Iranians, and Russians in September 2019.¹² Moreover, the Riyadh Chamber of Commerce and Industry warned against investing in Turkey, citing the volatile economic and security situation.¹³

ANNUAL ARRIVALS FROM SAUDI ARABIA TO TURKEY

2018	747,233
2017	651,170
2016	530,410
2015	450,674
2014	341,786
2013	234,220
2012	175,467
2011	116,711
2010	84,934

SOURCE: TURKISH MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND TOURISM

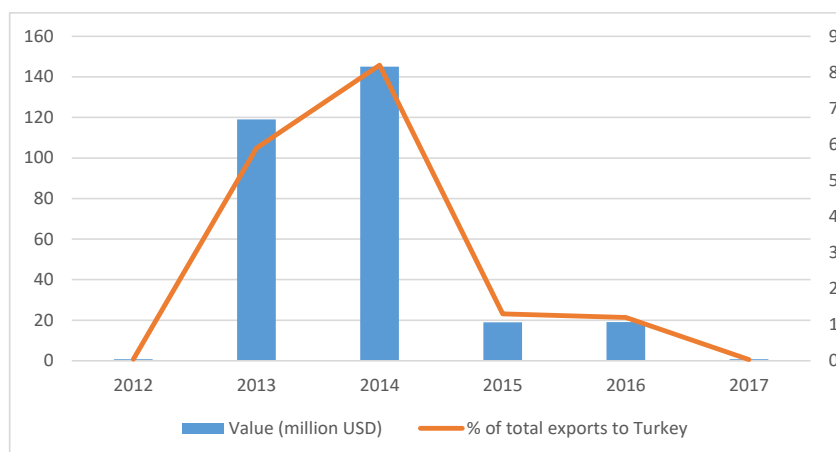
Any such warnings from Saudi government officials, however, do not appear to have substantially stemmed the flow of Saudi tourists to Turkey. In fact, their numbers have increased year-on-year over the past decade, reaching 747,233 in 2018. From January to July 2019, the number reached 370,265. Although this represented a 17 percent decrease from the same period a year earlier, Saudis nevertheless remain the largest national segment of Gulf visitors to Turkey.¹⁴ Saudi visitors are active participants in a tourism industry which contributed around 13 percent of Turkey’s GDP and provided approximately 8.3 percent of the country’s jobs in 2015.¹⁵ The rising number of Saudi tourist arrivals therefore supports one of Turkey’s main industries. Around 250,000 Turkish citizens also make the pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia each year for Hajj, and approximately 100,000 Turks live in the kingdom.¹⁶ According to UN figures on the international migration stock, the number of foreign-born Saudi residents in Turkey numbered 5,971 midway through 2019 — suggesting a figure much lower than the estimated number of Turks residing in Saudi Arabia.¹⁷ Nevertheless, Saudis purchased approximately 2.5 million square meters (around 27 million square feet) of land in Turkey between 2003 and 2019, equating to nearly one-sixth of the total sold to foreigners during that period.¹⁸

TURKEY-EGYPT TIES: A DRAWN-OUT DIVORCE?

While the total volume of Turkish-Egyptian bilateral trade is comparable to that of Turkey and Saudi Arabia, the corresponding investment and people flows between Turkey and Egypt are relatively low. A bilateral FTA, which was signed in 2005 and went into force in 2007, shapes the contours of trade ties between the two countries.¹⁹ In 2012, Turkey and Egypt signed an additional, three-year roll-on/roll-off (Ro-Ro) agreement, which facilitated

the transportation of Turkish vehicles to Egypt by sea. This permitted Turkish trading companies to access Gulf markets via Egyptian territory, thus circumventing the dangerous overland trade routes through Syria and Iraq. However, the Sissi administration chose not to renew the agreement in 2015, and its expiration forced Turkish firms to pay hefty transit fees at the Suez Canal or utilize trade routes through Iran — an ironic alternative for reaching the lucrative markets of Saudi Arabia and the UAE. For its part, Turkey opened an anti-dumping investigation of imports of polystyrene from Egypt and imposed a duty of 11.3 percent of the cost, insurance, and freight value.²⁰ The launch of an anti-dumping investigation in November 2014 and the subsequent duty, which came into force in January 2016, caused Egyptian polystyrene exports to Turkey to plummet.

EGYPTIAN STYRENE POLYMER EXPORTS TO TURKEY



SOURCE: THE OBSERVATORY OF ECONOMIC COMPLEXITY

Disruptions to economic agreements and the imposition of trade barriers likely hampered steady growth in trade volumes between the two countries. Indeed, Turkish-Egyptian bilateral trade dipped to around \$3.94 billion in 2016, down from about \$4.58 billion in 2015. Yet the aforementioned developments did not appear to cause substantial, lasting damage to trade ties: Bilateral trade returned to around \$5.33 billion in 2018. Egyptian exports to Turkey steadily increased from 2015 to 2018, exceeding \$2 billion in the latter year.

EGYPT'S BILATERAL TRADE WITH TURKEY (USD)

	TOTAL TRADE	IMPORTS	EXPORTS
2018	5,332,790,490	3,317,255,301	2,015,535,189
2017	3,953,630,606	2,087,108,110	1,866,522,496
2016	3,942,988,188	2,505,486,974	1,437,501,214
2015	4,579,760,880	3,307,749,461	1,272,044,419
2014	4,304,973,375	2,854,335,841	1,450,637,534
2013	4,372,361,049	2,626,283,710	1,746,077,339
2012	5,060,296,823	3,490,120,250	1,570,176,573
2011	4,167,438,435	2,638,658,697	1,528,779,738

SOURCE: UN COMTRADE

The function and direction of the trade relationship will be further shaped in early 2020 when the final status of the FTA becomes clearer. The business communities in both countries broadly support the cooperative framework. Turkey is likely to pursue renewal, given that integration with Egypt facilitates access to important global markets, such as Europe and the United States. Egypt’s FTA with the European Union provides an additional avenue for Turkish firms in Egypt to access European markets, while Egyptian qualifying industrial zones permit duty-free access to American markets as long as firms use a certain percentage of Israeli-made inputs.²¹

Historically, investment flows between Turkey and Egypt alternate between volatility and insignificance. From 2003 to 2006, outward flows of Turkish FDI into Egypt hovered between \$1 million and \$5 million. These investment flows increased to \$25 million in 2007,²² a likely effect of the FTA coming into force earlier that year. Significant year-on-year growth in FDI flows from Turkey to Egypt also occurred in 2011 (+77 percent) and 2013 (+89 percent). However, this growth only reached \$36 million in 2013, revealing that peak periods of annual Turkish investment in Egypt both before and after the politically contentious year of 2011 did not constitute different orders of magnitude.

Ongoing Turkish investments in Egypt, measured by Turkey’s central bank in terms of capital equity, reached a high of \$202 million in 2013. Net outflows of Turkish capital equity in Egypt occurred in 2016 and 2017, equating to \$4 million and \$8 million respectively, but investment figures bounced back to a positive \$167 million in 2018. Corresponding Egyptian investments in Turkey ranged from a paltry \$2 million in 2013 to \$4 million in 2018. Therefore, neither Turkey nor Egypt maintain substantial investment portfolios in each other’s economy — especially when compared to Saudi Arabia’s history of investments in Turkey.

Immigration between Turkey and Egypt resembles a trickle over the last decade. Formal migration figures from the UN indicate that less than 1,000 foreign-born individuals with Egyptian or Turkish citizenship resided in the corresponding countries as of 2017.²³ By the middle of 2019, the migrant stock of Egyptians in Turkey had reached 1,065 individuals. A glance at tourism statistics, however, offers a different picture. The number of Egyptians visiting Turkey has steadily increased over the past 15 years. In 2003, Egyptian tourist arrivals to Turkey numbered 30,556, and the figure reached 148,943 by 2018.²⁴

The issue of natural gas in the Eastern Mediterranean region also weighs heavily on Egyptian-Turkish relations. Egypt's Zohr Field — the largest gas discovery in the Mediterranean Sea — has reinvigorated Egyptian plans to become a regional gas export hub. As of August 2019, Zohr's gas output exceeded 2.7 billion cubic feet per day, a production target that was around five months ahead of the project's schedule.²⁵ Egypt also serves as a founding member of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), a cooperative organization intended to create a regional gas market, reduce infrastructure costs, and provide competitive prices,²⁶ along with Greece, Israel, Italy, Cyprus, Jordan, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Territories.

Notably absent from the EMGF is Turkey, which has asserted the right of Northern Cyprus — an entity that is not recognized internationally — to its share of the natural resources and has continued gas exploration activities in the broader region.²⁷ For its part, Turkey remains almost entirely dependent on imports of natural gas to meet domestic demand. It receives the majority of this gas via pipeline from Russia (53 percent), Iran (17 percent), and Azerbaijan (14 percent).²⁸ Turkey has enacted an energy strategy to reduce its overwhelming dependence on Russia, better utilize domestic energy resources, and position itself as a gas transit hub.²⁹ Greater cooperation with EMGF member states like Egypt could help Turkey achieve progress on multiple elements of this three-pronged energy strategy, but such a scenario appears unlikely in the near term.

THE EXTERNAL LOOMS LARGE IN TURKISH-SAUDI-EGYPTIAN RELATIONS

Turkey's bilateral ties with Saudi Arabia and Egypt did not form in a vacuum. Rather, global and regional developments have played an influential role in their evolution. Global trade tensions, the U.S. "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran, and low oil prices have reduced international demand for trade and investment across the broader Middle East. At the same time, major reform efforts tied to Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 economic development plan and IMF loan conditions in Egypt have further tightened the regional supply of capital for trade, investment, and disposable income. Rather than fostering collaboration, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, of which all

three states are members, has served as a theatre for the Turkish-Saudi rivalry.³⁰ Other multinational associations, such as the EMGF, exclude Turkey entirely.

Regional issues — notably the 2017 boycott and blockade of Qatar — have polarized the Middle East and complicated Turkey's ability to engage with regional actors. However, Turkey's emerging partnership with Qatar began before the crisis. As early as 2011, the two countries demonstrated shared visions concerning the role of Islamism in the region's political institutions. The 2014 Saudi-Qatari rift was followed by a spike in Qatari investments in Turkey beginning in 2016. Turkey's deployment of armored vehicles and military personnel to Qatar in the early stages of the 2017 boycott damaged relations with Riyadh and other Gulf Arab governments.³¹ The Turkish government described the actions as training exercises but has continued expanding operations at its base in Qatar.

Qatar redirected its trade routes and supply chains through Turkey — and other regional partners — to mitigate the negative economic impact of the 2017 boycott. Trade between the two countries reached an estimated \$2 billion in 2018, up from \$710 million in 2016, and the pair has engaged in currency swaps and double taxation avoidance agreements to further boost trade and investment.³² In August 2018, Qatar pledged \$15 billion in economic aid to help prop up Turkey's struggling banking sector. "Qatar's financial support [for Turkey] has never been lacking, especially in the most delicate moments such as the night of the 2016 coup d'état, or the devaluation of the Turkish lira in the summer of 2018 and more recently after the March 2019 elections," noted one researcher focusing on Turkey's relations with the Gulf.³³ In November 2019, Qatar expanded an existing currency swap agreement with Turkey from \$3 billion to \$5 billion to help boost Turkey's foreign currency reserves.³⁴

Differences regarding the conflicts in Syria, Libya, and the Horn of Africa also complicate Turkey's relations with Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The Syrian civil war cut off Turkey from Gulf markets and increased costs for its exporters. Turkey's role in the Libya conflict likewise placed it at odds with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which have supported forces loyal to the militia commander Khalifa Hifter, and was also of concern to Egypt — a country that borders Libya. In 2018, then Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir granted Turkey leasing rights over Suakin Island in the Red Sea despite Egyptian concerns that Turkey would use the island as a military post.³⁵ The nature of Ankara's expanding role in the greater MENA region presents obstacles to government-to-government outreach and initiatives with Riyadh and Cairo.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Analyzing Turkey's bilateral relationships with Saudi Arabia and Egypt from 2011 to 2018 in terms of the flows of trade, investment, and people

yields mixed results. Total trade volumes in each bilateral relationship are comparable, at around \$4-5 billion each year, and varied little over the period in question. Between 2016 and 2018, Saudi Arabia's imports from Turkey decreased by approximately \$500 million, whereas Saudi Arabian exports to Turkey increased by nearly \$700 million. The rise in the price of crude oil and hydrocarbon derivatives likely played a role. Turkish-Egyptian bilateral trade dipped to around \$3.94 billion in 2016 — down from about \$4.58 billion in 2015 — but bounced back to \$5.33 billion in 2018. The FTA between Turkey and Egypt is approaching a crucial deadline at the beginning of 2020: A failure to fully implement the agreement may disrupt bilateral trade flows. Broadly speaking, it does not appear that diplomatic and political tensions connected to regional events in 2011, 2013, and 2017 significantly impacted Turkey's bilateral trade with either Saudi Arabia or Egypt by the end of 2018.

Investment flows in most directions have been lackluster, with the exception of volatile Saudi investments in Turkey. From 2003 to 2013 annual FDI inflows from Saudi Arabia to Turkey reached a high of \$2.67 billion in 2010 before falling to \$1.12 billion in 2011, representing an annual drop of nearly 59 percent. Saudi equity capital in Turkey has decreased year-on-year from 2014 through 2018. A dramatic increase in Qatari investments offset the gradual decline of both Saudi and Emirati investments in Turkey. Investment flows between Turkey and Egypt remained low and volatile. Turkish equity capital in Egypt peaked in 2013 at \$202 million but then declined year-on-year from 2014 through 2017. Corresponding Egyptian investments did not exceed \$5 million in the period under observation.

Formal migration and tourism flows between Turkey and its two Middle Eastern neighbors have been either low and constant or high and growing. The annual number of Saudi tourists visiting Turkey has increased year-on-year over the past decade, reaching 747,233 in 2018. An estimated 250,000 Turkish citizens perform the Hajj each year, and another 100,000 Turks reside in Saudi Arabia; however, only a few thousand foreign-born Saudis live in Turkey. Similarly, the total international migration stock of Turkish or Egyptian citizens residing in Egypt or Turkey respectively numbered around 1,000 people in each case as of mid-2019. The number of Egyptians tourists visiting Turkey, though, has steadily increased over the past 12 years. Periods of diplomatic spats and political tension between 2011 and 2018 did not appear to negatively impact Saudi and Egyptian tourism flows into Turkey. Initial figures from 2019, however, suggest that the annual flow of Saudi tourists to Turkey is set to decline.

Peeling away the political veneer of Turkey's economic relationship with Saudi Arabia and Egypt reveals that trade, investment, and people flows do not necessarily move in concert. Between 2011 and 2018, bilateral trade volumes

remained relatively stable; FDI into Turkey steadily declined, as was the case with Saudi outflows, or dipped during specific years, as was the case with Egyptian outflows; and the numbers of Saudi and Egyptian tourists visiting Turkey increased year-on-year. The economic linkages examined in this article appeared not to be significant enough to act as a deterrent against derisory rhetoric but were important enough to prevent a decisive break in relations.

The data presented in this article does not support the argument that deteriorating diplomatic and political relations negatively influenced economic linkages in the Turkish-Saudi and Turkish-Egyptian contexts. However, it also cannot address two interesting counterfactuals: How would stronger relations with Saudi Arabia and Egypt affect the Turkish economy? And how would the balance of economic power between these three actors change if Qatar had remained a closely integrated member of the GCC? The relatively low levels of economic cooperation between Turkey and Saudi Arabia and Turkey and Egypt nevertheless reveals the vast economic potential associated with closer bilateral partnerships and should encourage future political economy studies of these three influential regional actors.

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CONCLUSION

GÖNÜL TOL

Domestic developments and regional dynamics have been the main drivers of the relationship between Turkey, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. While these factors have at times made cooperation easier, at other times they have driven a wedge between the three key regional actors and hampered it.

One of the most significant developments in Turkey's relations with Saudi Arabia and Egypt was the rise of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2002, which brought about a new era in Ankara's Middle East policy. The "post-Cold War warrior" of the 1990s became a "soft power," and the militaristic outlook of the previous Turkish governments toward the region gave way to a focus on diplomacy, trade, and cultural engagement. By the time the Arab uprisings spread across the region in 2011, Turkey had developed close political, economic, and cultural ties with almost all of the countries in the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Thanks to the rise of an Islamist-rooted party that advocated closer ties with the region, the long-standing historical enmity between Turks and Arabs slowly began to give way to a rapprochement.

Trade became an important pillar of Turkey's regional policy. The country's new elites were accompanied by hundreds of businessmen on their official visits to the region. Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt embarked on efforts to increase trade and investment, and Turkish products began to fill the shelves across the Middle East. Turkey became active on the diplomatic front as well. It played a key role in regional institutions and mediated between different Palestinian factions, Syria and Israel, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Iran and the West.

Turkey's pro-active diplomacy was facilitated by the post-2003 dynamics in the region. The U.S. invasion of Iraq and the ensuing decline in American influence in the Middle East created new possibilities for Turkey to play a more assertive regional role and for Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt to cultivate closer ties.

Saudi Arabia and Egypt initially welcomed the "new Turkey" and its involvement in the region. Disturbed by the growing Iranian influence in the post-2003 Middle East, Cairo and Riyadh saw Ankara as a strong Sunni partner that could enhance their regional interests. Despite policy divergences, the three countries sought closer cooperation.

But the Arab uprisings and domestic developments in Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt brought the three countries' differences to the fore. The uprisings that gave the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliates the chance to play vital roles in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya were welcomed by Turkey's Erdoğan, who had consolidated his position at home and saw the uprisings as an opportunity that would bring Islamists to power. Turkey cultivated close ties with Egypt's short-lived Muslim Brotherhood government. After it was toppled, the relationship between the two countries hit rock bottom. The Saudis were equally rattled by Turkey's close ties to the Muslim Brotherhood. After the appointment of Mohammed bin Salman as crown prince in 2017, Turkey-Saudi relations deteriorated further, as he pursued a more assertive regional policy and voiced strong criticism of Turkey's role.

The pre-uprising Middle East provided opportunities for Turkey, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia to cultivate closer ties in both the political and economic realms. Despite political tensions, economic relations between the three states remain largely intact, making trade and investment a potential area on which to build closer ties in the future. But for now the regional context offers little room for these countries to establish a strong enough alliance to address the other burning issues of the Middle East. After years of domestic turbulence, chaos, and civil war, the regimes in the region feel less secure. Countries like Egypt and Saudi Arabia have become progressively more disturbed by Turkey's increasingly nationalist rhetoric, which they think has imperial undertones, and its continued support for the Muslim Brotherhood. Making cooperation

even more difficult is the domestic transformations these countries have gone through in the last few years. With Erdoğan, Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, and Mohammed bin Salman in charge, confrontation is more likely than cooperation among these three key regional states.

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