# TURKEY'S FLUCTUATING RELATIONS WITH IRAN, 2002-2019: THE REGIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

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## ABSTRACT

TURKEY'S FLUCTUATING RELATIONS WITH IRAN, 2002-2019: THE REGIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

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This thesis examines Turkey's fluctuating foreign policy attitudes toward Iran between 2002-2019 based on the regionalist perspective. While there was a significant improvement in Turkey's relations with Iran in the early 2000s, Turkish foreign policy attitude toward Iran became tense following the Arab Uprisings that started in 2011 and has become manageable again since 2016. To understand such a floating change of relations between two regional powers, this thesis uses the regionalist perspectives of both Buzan and Wæver's Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) and Lake and Morgan's theory of regional orders. In this sense, it focuses on the *local security externalities* of Middle Eastern security complex and analyzes to what extent they have an impact on the regional positions of both Turkey and Iran. By considering their relations with the extra-regional powers and non-state armed groups in the region, it argues that the regional level, where the actions of both local and global actors intersect, is the most appropriate level of analysis for understanding Turkey-Iran relations during this period.



**Keywords:** Regional Security Complex Theory, Theory of Regional Orders, Turkey, Iran, Foreign Policy

# ÖZ

TÜRKİYE'NİN İRAN İLE DEĞİŞEN İLİŞKİLERİ, 2002-2019: BÖLGECİ PERSPEKTİF

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Bu tez 2002-2019 yılları arasında Türkiye'nin İran'a yönelik değişen dış politika tutumunu bölgeci perspektif ile ele almayı amaçlamaktadır. Buna göre, 2000'lerin başında Türkiye'nin İran ile ilişkileri önemli biçimde iyileşme gösterirken 2011'de başlayan Arap İsyanları sonrası gergin bir hal almıştır ve 2016 sonrası tekrar yönetilebilir bir hale gelmiştir. İki bölgesel güç arasındaki değişken ilişkileri anlamak için bu tez Buzan ve Wæver'in Bölgesel Güvenlik Kompleksi Teorisi (RSCT) ile Lake ve Morgan'ın bölgesel düzenler teorisini kullanmaktadır. Buna göre, Orta Doğu güvenlik kompleksinin *yerel güvenlik dışsallıklarına* odaklanılmış olup bunların Türkiye ve İran'ın bölgesel pozisyonlarına nasıl bir etkide bulunduğu analiz edilmektedir. Bu iki devletin bölge-dışı güçler ve devlet-dışı silahlı gruplarla olan ilişkileri de göz önünde bulundurularak, bu tez hem yerel hem de küresel aktörlerin eylemlerinin kesiştiği bölgesel düzlemin bu dönem boyunca Türkiye-İran ilişkilerini anlamak için en uygun analiz seviyesi olduğunu savunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler**: Bölgesel Güvenlik Kompleksi Teorisi, Bölgesel Düzenler Teorisi, Türkiye, İran, Dış Politika

*Dedication to my whole family,*

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

PLAGIARISM ..... iii
ABSTRACT ..... iv
ÖZ ..... v
DEDICATION ..... vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT ..... vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS ..... ix
LIST OF TABLES ..... xiii
LIST OF FIGURES ..... xiv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS ..... xv
CHAPTERS
1. INTRODUCTION ..... 1
1.1. The Place of This Study in the Literature on Turkey-Iran Relations ..... 7
2. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ..... 17
2.1. The Regionalist Perspective in the Discipline of International Relations ..... 18
2.2. Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) ..... 21
2.3 Regional Security Complexes as Local Security Externalities ..... 26
2.4. Differentiating the Regional Level from the Other Levels in the IR Theory ..... 32
2.5. The Middle East as a Regional Security Complex ..... 36
2.6. The Concept of Regional Power in the Regional Security Complexes: How to Explain Their Behavior in the Middle East ..... 43
2.6.1. The Regional Powers' Responses to Local Security Externalities of the Middle East ..... 48
3. THE HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION TO TURKISH-IRANIAN RELATIONS: THE REGIONALIST PERSPECTIVE ..... 53
4. TURKEY'S COOPERATION WITH IRAN IN THE POST-2003

MIDDLE EAST: THE REGIONALIST PERSPECTIVE ..... 66
4.1. Local Security Externalities of the post-2003 Middle Eastern Security Complex: Regional Instability and Polarization ..... 69
4.1.1. The Rise of Anti-Western 'Radical' Camp and its Local Security Externalities for Regional Powers ..... 71
4.2. The Regional Reasons for Turkey's Increasing Cooperation with Iran ... 74
4.2.1. The Rise of Kurdish Separatism ..... 75
4.2.2. Turkey's Deteriorated Relations with the US in the post-2003 Middle East: The Quest for a Regional Balancer ..... 83
4.3. The Consequence of the *Local Security Externalities*: Turkey's Rising Cooperation with Iran ..... 91
4.3.1. The Increasing Security Collaboration ..... 91
4.3.2. Turkey's Support for Iran's Nuclear Program and Active Diplomatic Relations ..... 96
4.3.3. The Economic Dimension of Regional Cooperation ..... 101
4.4. The AKP's Axis Shift or Regional Shifts of Power? ..... 106
5. THE CHANGING REGIONAL CONTEXT AND TURKEY'S ESTRANGED POLITICAL RELATIONS WITH IRAN BETWEEN 2011-2016 ..... 111
5.1. Local Security Externalities of the post-2011 Middle Eastern Security Complex: Diminishing the Role of the US and Power Vacuum in Iraq ..... 113
5.2. Local Security Externalities of the post-2011 Middle Eastern Security Complex: The Arab Uprisings and 'Competitive Interference' of Regional Powers ..... 117
5.3. The Local Security Externalities of the Syrian Civil War: The Divergent National Interests of Turkey and Iran ..... 123
5.3.1. Initial Foreign Policy Responses of Turkey and Iran toward the Syrian Civil War ..... 125
5.3.2. The First Discursive Indicators of Turkish-Iranian Regional Tension after the Syrian Civil War ..... 130

5.3.3. The Regional Tension over NATO Missile Shield and Patriot Missile ..... 135
5.3.4. Violent Non-State Actors and Extra-Regional Powers in the Syrian Civil War: A New Competition Field between Turkey and Iran ... 140
5.3.4.2. Iran's Position and Escalation of Turkish-Iranian Regional Tension ..... 148
5.4. Why did Turkey-Iran Tension not Turn into a Conflict? The Regional Security Interdependences of Neighbor Countries ..... 158
6. THE REGIONAL CONTEXT BRINGS TURKEY AND IRAN BACK TOGETHER (2016-2019) ..... 166
6.1. Local Security Externalities of the post-2016 Middle Eastern Security Complex: The post-2016 Syrian War Power Shifts ..... 168
6.1.1. Turkey and Iran's Position in the post-2016 Syrian Civil War ..... 169
6.1.2. Turkey's Quest for a Regional Partner: Its Deteriorated Relations with the United States and Arab Countries ..... 172
6.2. Regional Collaboration among Russia, Turkey, and Iran: The Astana Process ..... 180
6.3. A New Regional Convergence between Turkey and Iran about the Syrian Civil War? ..... 184
6.3.1. The Regional Cooperation against the Independence Referendum of the KRG ..... 192
6.3.2. The 'Temporal' Convergence of Turkish-Iranian Regional Strategies: The Qatar Crisis ..... 199
6.3.3. The Regional Economic Interdependence between Turkey and Iran in the post-2016 Middle East: Turkey's Attitude toward Iran in the face of the US Sanctions ..... 204
6.4. The Regionalist Review of Turkey's Realignment with Iran the Post-2016 Middle East ..... 206
7. CONCLUSION ..... 211
REFERENCES ..... 220

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: CURRICULUM VITAE..... 273
APPENDIX B: TURKISH SUMMARY/TÜRKÇE ÖZET ..... 276
APPENDIX C: THESIS PERMISSION FORM / TEZ İZİN FORMU ..... 295

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1. Two of the Regional Powers in the Middle East: Turkey and Iran.... 48
Table 2.2. Local Security Externalities of the Middle East and Turkey's Changing Relations with Iran (2002-2019)..... 52
Table 4.1. Local Security Externalities of the Middle East and Turkey's Relations with Iran (2002-2011) ..... 68
Table 4.2. The High-Level Official Visits between Iran and Turkey during 2002-2011..... 101
Table 5.1. Local Security Externalities of the Middle East and Turkey's Relations with Iran (2011-2016) ..... 113
Table 5.2. The High-Level Official Visits (Presidential Level) between Iran and Turkey during 2011-2016..... 164
Table 6.1. Local Security Externalities of the Middle East and Turkey's Relations with Iran (2016-2019) ..... 168
Table 6.2. Turkey's Trade Volume with Iran (2016-2019)..... 205
Table 6.3. The High-Level Official Visits (Presidential Level) between Iran and Turkey during 2016-2019..... 210

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1. The Relationship between the RSCT and Theory of Regional Orders ..... 31
Figure 4.1. Turkey-Iran Trade Volume (2001-2011) ..... 104
Figure 5.1. Turkey's Trade Volume with Iran during 2011-2016..... 160

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| AKP | Justice and Development Party |
| BOTAŞ | Turkish Petroleum Pipeline Corporation |
| CAATSA | Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act |
| CENTO | Central Treaty Organization |
| CIS | Commonwealth of Independent States |
| EU | European Union |
| EUCO | European Council |
| ECO | Economic Cooperation Organization |
| DAESH | Islamic State of Iraq and Syria |
| FSA | Free Syrian Army |
| GNA | Government of National Accord |
| GCC | Gulf Cooperation Council |
| HLCC | High Level Cooperation Council |
| IAEA | International Atomic Energy Agency |
| ICG | International Crisis Group |
| ILSA | Iran and Libya Sanctions Act |
| IR | International Relations |
| IRGC | Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps |
| ISIS | Islamic State of Iraq and Syria |
| JCPOA | Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action |
| KDP | Democratic Party of Kurdistan |
| KRG | Kurdish Regional Government |
| MENA | Middle East and North Africa |
| MES | Middle Eastern Studies |
| MB | Muslim Brotherhood |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| NPT | Non-Proliferation Treaty |

| | |
|---|---|
| OIC | Organization of Islamic Conference |
| OOB | Operation Olive Branch |
| OPS | Operation Peace Spring |
| PKK | Kurdistan Workers' Party |
| PJAK | Kurdistan Free Life Party |
| PLO | Palestine Liberation Organization |
| PMF | Popular Mobilization Forces |
| PUK | Patriotic Union of Kurdistan |
| PYD | Democratic Union Party |
| RCD | Regional Cooperation for Development |
| RSC | Regional Security Complex |
| RSCT | Regional Security Complex Theory |
| SDF | Syrian Democratic Forces |
| SNC | Syrian National Council |
| TAA | Train, Advise, Assist |
| TRR | Tehran Research Reactor |
| TPAO | Turkish Petroleum Corporation |
| UAE | United Arab Emirates |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNSC | United Nations Security Council |
| US | United States |
| USSR | Union of Soviet Socialist Republics |
| WMD | Weapon of Mass Destruction |
| YPG | People's Protection Units |

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

The problematique directing this thesis derives from Turkey's fluctuating relations with Iran between 2002-2019. While there was a significant improvement in Turkey's relations with Iran in the early 2000s, Turkish foreign policy attitude toward Iran became tense following the Arab Uprisings in 2011 and has become manageable again since 2016. Such a floating change of relations between two countries in such a short period and under the rule of the same party in Turkey is not common and hence provides a compelling puzzle. The main questions here are that "what are the reasons for Turkey's foreign policy change toward Iran?" and "which theoretical approach can explain Turkey's changing relations with Tehran?"

The literature regarding Turkey-Iran relations during the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi [AKP]) period has mostly prioritized the domestic transformation in Turkey, pointing to the decreasing the power of security-oriented Kemalist elite, de-securitization of political Islam and Kurdish issue in domestic politics, the active foreign policy strategy of the conservative toward the Middle East, the economic activism of the Anatolian tigers in the region.[1] While these factors are all relevant for shaping Turkish foreign policy toward Iran during the AKP period, they are not the main dynamics behind the changing nature of the relations between two countries. The

[1] For more detail, see Stephanos Constantinides, "Turkey: the emergence of a new foreign policy the neo-Ottoman imperial model", *Journal of political and military sociology* 24, no. 2 (1996); Ahmet Sözen, "A paradigm shift in Turkish foreign policy: Transition and challenges." *Turkish studies* 11, No.1 (2010); Alexander Murinson. "The strategic depth doctrine of Turkish foreign policy." *Middle Eastern Studies* 42, No.6 (2006); Galip Dalay and Dov Friedman, "The AKP and the Evolution of Turkish Political Islam's Foreign Policy." *Insight Turkey* 15, no.2 (2013); Aaron Stein and Philipp C. Bleek, "Turkish-Iranian Relations: From" Friends with Benefits" to" It's Complicated", *Insight Turkey* 14, no.4 (2012).

AKP foreign policy officials have interpreted Turkey-Iran relations in the context of regional dynamics and have changed their foreign policy attitudes toward Iran accordingly.

In this regard, this study argues that the main reason behind Turkey's fluctuating relations with Iran was the changing regional dynamics in the Middle East. Accordingly, even if there have been changes in foreign policy orientation of the AKP government throughout these years, they have become self-evident in Turkey's regional policies in the Middle East. Furthermore, the international competition among extra-regional powers have continued to be reflected in the Middle East between 2002-2019. Hence, this thesis does not underestimate the role of unit-level and international systemic-level on Turkey's foreign policy toward Iran during the AKP period. On the contrary, it argues that regional level contains both levels since it is "*where the extremes of national and global security interplay and where most of the action occurs*". [2] In this regard, even though AKP's foreign policy strategy is significant for Turkey-Iran relations during this period, it can become influential *through* the regional level. In other words, when Turkish foreign policy elites have pursued foreign policy attitudes toward Iran, their foreign policy behaviors have taken place within the constrains and opportunities at the regional level. Similarly, the international system level can be involved into the analysis since competition among great powers and their conflicting roles in regions can be comprehended through analyzing the regional security dynamics.

The regional level is significant for security of states in the sense that "*many threats travel more easily over short distances than over long ones. The impact of geographical proximity on security interaction is strongest and most obvious*

[2] Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003): 43.

*in the military, political, societal, and environmental sectors*". [3] As two neighboring countries, Turkey and Iran share 560 km long border and their border security has been to a great extent dependent on each other. In retrospect, on the one hand, there have been several security protocols between two countries against Kurdish separatism and other threats to their border security. On the other hand, the regional context of the Middle East has been a source of competition and tension between two countries. Hence, the Turkey-Iran relations operates within the regional dynamics of the Middle East that have varied between 2002-2019.

The regional level in the thesis is used based on regional sub-systems, more particularly Regional Security Complexes (RSCs). Even though the concept of RSC is a part of Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) that was first written by Barry Buzan in 1991, and updated by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver in 2003, this thesis aims to use more broader version of this concept studied in the literature on regional orders and structures. Accordingly, this thesis uses both Buzan and Wæver's RCST and David A. Lake and Patrick M. Morgan's theory of regional orders to comprehend the complex nature of Middle East RSC and its impact on the Turkish-Iranian relations.[4] In this regard, the concepts of '*regional security complex*' and '*local security externalities*' picked from these respective theories constitute backbones of this thesis.

Having considered '*regional security complex*' as '*local security externalities*', this thesis argues that the regional membership is not mutually exclusive, and states can be a member of more than one regional security complex. This perspective opens a road for the active involvement of great powers in a region and, in return, their quasi-regional actorness in a relevant region. Thus, the

[3]Ibid, ,45-46.

[4] Buzan and Wæver, *Regions and Powers.* David A. Lake and Patrick M. Morgan, *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World* (Pennsylvania, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010)

existence of great powers and their '*local security externalities*' for a region can be regarded as significant variables for impacting the relations among other regional actors. This point of view is crucial for the Middle East RSC between 2002-2019 since it witnessed critical '*local security externalities*' of the extra-regional powers, the United States (US) and Russia, which have influenced the relations between Turkey and Iran.

In terms of the role of Iran and Turkey in the Middle East, this thesis accepts these two countries as regional powers. Hence, the changing regional dynamics and the intervention of the great powers into the Middle East have a special importance for Turkey and Iran. Due to their ambition to increase their sphere of influence in the region, these regional powers tend to be more sensitive to regional power shifts and respond differently than other units in the region. Hence, any regional power shifts and foreign policy change of extra-regional powers are highly influential on their foreign policy behaviors and relations between them. The changing relations (cooperation and competition) between Turkey and Iran, as two of the regional powers in the Middle Eastern regional security complex, should be conceptualized within the framework of this approach.

Following the introduction chapter, within which the general framework of the thesis is revealed, the second chapter deals with the theoretical and conceptual account. Accordingly, it aims to explain the regionalist perspective in IR discipline and reviews how the regional systems were studied in the literature. Afterwards, Buzan and Wæver's RSCT and Lake and Morgan's theory of regional orders are examined through emphasizing the concepts of '*regional security complex*' and '*local security externalities*' in respective theories. Then, the chapter locates the regional level in agent-structure problem in the IR and demonstrates the strengths of the regionalist perspective. Later, it gives a place to the general features of Middle East as a regional security complex since it is the main independent variable of the case study in this thesis. The last part of the

chapter connects the RSCs with the concept of regional power and explains this thesis' position regarding the regionalist perspectives. Having adhered to theoretical and conceptual framework, it eventually builds hypotheses about the foreign policy responses of the regional powers in RSCs.

The third chapter reviews historical background of Turkish-Iranian relations from the regionalist perspective. Accordingly, it demonstrates that the cycle of conflict, competition, and cooperation between two countries goes back to the sixteenth century, when they were the Sunni Ottomans and the Shiite Safavids. Even though we cannot mention about today's modern Middle East until the end of the World War I, their pre-modern relations have been always impacted by their geographical proximity, regional context, and the role of outside powers. The chapter continues with the regional developments following the two World Wars, the Cold War, the 1979 Iran's Islamic Revolution, the Iran-Iraq War, and the post-Gulf War period. Accordingly, it examines how these regional dynamics have been primary to affect Turkish-Iranian relations.

The fourth chapter analyzes to what extent the *local security externalities* of the Middle Eastern security complex during 2002-2011 pushed Turkey and Iran increase their cooperation. Accordingly, the US invasion of Iraq/its long-term military presence and instability in the region as well as the rise of Kurdish separatism converged the regional interests of two regional powers. Due to Turkey's increasing concerns about the PKK (the Kurdistan Worker's Party) terrorist threat and deteriorating the relations with the US and Israel in the region, the Turkish foreign policy officials sought to find a regional partner that could be cooperated against common concerns. Their geographic proximity and common concerns made Iran a significant regional partner during this period. Even though they have competed over influencing the actors in post-2003 Iraq, their cooperation in the region exceeded their competition. In return, the Turkish foreign policy actors increased their cooperative policies and discourses toward Iran during this period.

The fifth chapter deals with the period between 2011-2016 and points out that how the post-2011 Middle East *local security externalities* diverged the interests of Turkey and Iran. Accordingly, as two regional powers, both Turkey and Iran have sought to increase their influence in the regional context of the post-Arab uprisings and became increasingly competitive toward each other. Under the changing conditions of the Middle Eastern security complex, Turkish foreign policy elites were concerned about the regional position of Iran and did not hesitate to criticize Iran's regional policies especially after the Syrian civil war broke out. Furthermore, due to the US' withdrawal decision from Iraq and its less direct military involvement in the region, this period witnessed more permissive regional context for the regional powers. Hence, as two of the regional powers, Turkey and Iran could find more opportunity to increase their influence in the region which resulted in their regional competition.

The sixth chapter demonstrates that the post-2016 period witnessed a normalization of relations between Turkey and Iran due to the changing regional power of distribution. As two regional powers, Turkey and Iran had still divergent regional positions, but they were determined to manage their disagreements for regional stability and autonomy during this period. From the Turkish perspective, the changing regional context, Turkey's deteriorated relations with other regional powers (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt), as well as Russia's role, as the most influential extra-regional power in the region during this period, had an impact on more cooperative Turkish foreign policy attitudes toward Iran. Furthermore, the increasing power of the Assad regime with the military support of Russia and Iran; the growing threat of the YPG (People's Protection Units) and ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) against Turkish national interests; the disagreements of Turkey-US relations in the northern Syria have pushed Turkey to revise its foreign policy orientation toward the Syrian civil war. Hence, the new foreign policy orientation has obliged Turkey's regional cooperation with Iran and Russia to maintain its regional interests.

The thesis concludes with the seventh chapter within which there are summary of the theoretical account, the review of the findings from the different time periods, the current Turkish-Iranian relations, and a final argument.

### 1.1. The Place of This Study in the Literature on Turkey-Iran Relations

As two ancient and significant regional actors in the Middle East, the relations between Turkey and Iran have been subject to a great number of works of historians, political scientists, journalists, and IR scholars. The literature regarding Turkey-Iran relations has revolved around five core issues between two countries. There have been significant debates about the Kurdish issue in determining the relations between two countries since the establishment of the Turkish Republic. Furthermore, more broader themes such as their economic/energy ties, the role of ideology, the regional politics, and their alignment to or balancing vis-à-vis the external powers have been frequently studied in the literature. Despite the high number of works on the relations between two countries from several theoretical approaches, it can be observed that the regionalist works that emphasize on Turkish-Iranian relations between 2002-2019 are still unelaborated. The last decades have witnessed more regionalist studies on Turkey-Iran relations, however, there has been still a gap in the works that use different regionalist concepts to grasp complex nature of the relations between two countries.

When we look at the approaches of outstanding works in the literature regarding the Turkey-Iran relations during the early Republican period of Turkey, we can observe that the scholars have analyzed Turkey-Iran relations by considering the Kurdish tribes' problems and the wider regional security threats. Accordingly, they have argued that two countries have established friendship pacts such as Turkey-Iran Friendship and Security Agreement, the Sa'dabad Pact, the Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) and CENTO (Central Treaty Organization) due to the external threats coming from the Mussolini's Italy or the Soviet

Union. [5] For instance, Çetinsaya analyzed the relations between two countries from the early 1820s by focusing on the regional balance of power, the role of external powers, the Kurdish groups that were used against each other, economic cooperation which, he argued, will be recurrent patterns in Turkey-Iran relations.[6] In his another article, Çetinsaya pointed out that the last two centuries of the history of Turkey-Iran relations have been dependent on the borders (and the problems about the Kurdish tribes spreading along the common border) and Iran's relations with the major powers (the threat of Iran's invasion by the Soviet Union/Russia or becoming its client state) and Turkey's serious concerns about it. [7]

The literature concerning the relations between Turkey-Iran relations after the Iran's Islamic Revolution has involved the role of 'ideology' as a determinant for their relations. Due to the Iran's Islamic revolution and subsequent emergence of contradiction between theocratic Iran and secular Turkey, the scholars have started to analyze the domestic sources of foreign policy behaviors of two countries, in this sense, *Innenpolitik* approach has gained more importance in the literature of Turkey-Iran relations. For instance, Sinkaya examined the ideological tensions between two countries in the 1990s due to alleged role of Iran in the rise of radical Islamists in Turkey.[8] Özcan and Özdamar agreed that

[5] İbrahim Erdal "Atatürk Dönemi (1923–1938) Türk-İran İlişkileri ve Sadabad Paktı." *Karadeniz Araştırmaları* 34 (2012); Zubeida Hasan, "Iran, Pakistan and Turkey-Regional Cooperation for Development",*Pakistan Horizon* 17, no. 3 (1964); Ahmet Özgiray, "İngiliz Belgeleri Işığında Türk-İran Siyasi İlişkileri (1920-1938)", *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi* 11, no.33(1995); Onur Ay, "Why did Turkey Become a Part of Sa'dabad Pact?", *Journal of Political Sciences & PublicAffairs* 4, No.3 (2016).

[6] Gökhan Çetinsaya, "Essential friends and natural enemies: the historic roots of Turkish-Iranian relations", *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 7, No.3 (2003).

[7] Gökhan Çetinsaya, "Tarihsel Perspektifte Türkiye–İran İlişkileri ve Nükleer Sorun." *SETA İran Dosyası* (2006).

[8] However, it is significant to note that he pointed out that even though the ideology had a primary role in foreign policy of Iran in the 1980s, the relations between two countries were

there were mutual accusations between two countries due to the ideological differences particularly following the first half of the 1980s. [9]

Narlı's article analyzed more on the sociological impacts of Iran's Islamic Revolution on Muslim population in Turkey and in return the relations between two countries.[10] Likewise, in one of his articles, Aras analyzed Turkish foreign policy toward post-revolutionary Iran by considering the domestic dynamics and examining Turkish politicians' attitudes toward the threat of Iran's exporting its Islamist regime.[11] This threat perception, Oktav argued, started to change with the rise of *Refah* (Welfare) Party and was replaced by normalization of their relations which later become reversed with the Turkish military decree and the closure of the *Refah* Party. [12] In parallel with Oktav's argument, Aras and Polat emphasized the possibility of changing perceptions of two countries toward each

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determined by pragmatism. In contrast, although the role of ideology in Iran's foreign decreased in the 1990s, two countries experienced serious ideological tensions in the 1990s. Bayram Sinkaya, "Turkey-Iran Relations in the 1990s and the Role of Ideology." *Perception Journal of International Affairs* 10, No. 1 (2005).

[9] Nihat Ali Özcan and Özgür Özdamar. "Uneasy neighbors: Turkish-Iranian relations since the 1979 Islamic revolution." *Middle East Policy* 17, No.3 (2010).

[10] Nilufer Narlı, "Cooperation or Competition in the Islamic World: Turkish-Iranian Relations from the Islamic Revolution to the Gulf War and After ", *Cahiers detudes sur la Mediterranee Orientale et le Monde Turco-Iranien* 15 (1993). Nail Elhan's analysis of the impacts of Iranian Islamism on Pro-Iran and Iran-Inspired Islamism in Turkey can be another example of engagement of external and domestic politics. Nail Elhan, "İran Devrimi'nin Türkiye'de Yansımaları: 'İrancılık' ve 'İrancı' İslamcılık", *Türkiye Ortadoğu Çalışmaları Merkezi* 3, No.2 (2016).

[11] Bülent Aras,"Turkish foreign policy towards Iran: Ideology and foreign policy in flux", *Journal of Third World Studies* 18, No.1 (2001)

[12] Özden Zeynep Oktav, "Changing Security Perceptions in Turkish-Iranian Relations." *Center for Strategic Research of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey* (2004).

other with the desecuritization process of Kurdish and Islamist questions in Turkish politics. [13]

In addition to the *InnenPolitik* approaches on Turkey-Iran relations, more systemic approaches, particularly derived from the neorealist logic, have taken a place in the literature on Turkey-Iran relations following the Iran's Revolution. One of the most frequently cited work is Elik's book that analyzes Turkey-Iran relations according to the concept of Middle Power states (MPs). According to Elik, diplomatic, security and energy relations between two countries during 1979-2011 can be best understood by the concept of MPs since they have some unique features that "distinguish them from great power and small power behavior" and have a limited room for maneuver due to the intervention of superpowers and great powers.[14] However, for Elik, Turkey's adopting an approach of 'zero problems with neighbors' in its relations with Iran despite the US sanctions demonstrates that the MPs have to a certain extent independent foreign policy.[15]

Olson's use of omnibalancing theory to the Turkey-Iran relations is another outstanding approach in the literature that considers both external and internal threats while analyzing foreign polices of Iran and Turkey. [16] Accordingly, he

[13] Bülent Aras and Rabia Karakaya Polat. "From conflict to cooperation: Desecuritization of Turkey's relations with Syria and Iran." *Security Dialogue* 39, No.5 (2008). Similarly, Çağla Lüleci's master thesis within which she analyzed the domestic sources of Turkey's desecuritized foreign policy discourses toward Iran can be classified in the same category. Çağla Lüleci, "From Securitization to Desecuritization: Decoding Turkish Foreign Policy towards Iran", (Master's Thesis, Dokuz Eylul University, 2013).

[14] Suleyman Elik, *Iran-Turkey Relations, 1979-2011: Conceptualizing the Dynamics of Politics, Religion and Security in Middle-Power States,* (New York, Routledge, 2012), 22.

[15] Ibid, 22.

[16] The omnibalancing theory was put forward by Steven David to explain the alignment of the Third World. Steven R.David, "Explaining third world alignment." *World Politics* 43 No.2, (1991).

pointed out the importance of the blend of external/internal threats of both Kurdish and Azeri separatism for determining Turkey-Iran relations. [17] He also focused on Islamist fundamentalism and Kurdish separatism as an internal/external threat for Turkey coming from Iran and analyzed how they have adversely impacted on Turkey-Iran relations from 1997 to 2000. [18] For Olson, internationalization of these issues requires a compromise between two states, otherwise they would be weakened in the regional and international arena.[19] Similarly, in his recent article, Sinkaya analyzed the role of Kurdish issue on Iran-Turkey relations from the Iranian perspective and examined how the Kurdish issue has created a security problem for both countries and has been a root of both cooperation and competition for their relations by considering the current developments in the Northern Syria. [20]

Charountaki's recent book, *Iran, and Turkey: International and Regional Engagement in the Middle East,* has provided an encompassing examination of Turkey-Iran relations by offering a multi-actor approach based on national, regional, and international levels. She argued that Iran-Turkey relations can be best understood by examining several actors such as the non-state groups, regional actors and major powers which can be a critical alternative for the IR

[17] Robert W.Olson, *Turkey-Iran relations, 1979-2004: Revolution, Ideology, War, coups and geopolitics* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2004).

[18] Robert Olson, "Turkey-Iran relations, 1997 to 2000: The Kurdish and Islamist questions", *Third World Quarterly* 21, No.5 (2000). Robert Olson's some other works are also in conformity with this thinking. Robert Olson, "The 'Azeri'question and Turkey-Iran relations, 2000–2002", *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 8, No. 4 (2002). Robert Olson, *Turkey's relations with Iran, Syria, Israel, and Russia, 1991-2000: the Kurdish and Islamist questions* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2001).

[19] Ibid.

[20] Bayram Sinkaya, "The Kurdish question in Iran and its effects on Iran-Turkey relations", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no. 5 (2018).

discipline that has mainly focused on the global powers. [21] According to Charountaki, there have been 'polygonal interrelations' among Turkey, Iran, Syria, Iraq, Kurds, the US and Russia that requires a model of multi-dimensional interrelations. [22]

In parallel with the these works, there are other studies that analyze Turkey-Iran relations according to survival strategies of states such as balancing or bandwagoning. For instance, Kang and Kim contend that Turkey and Iran cooperation in the Middle East is derived from their bandwagoning strategy with the US given their restricted choices vis-à-vis the US grand strategy. [23] Similarly, Flanagan dealt with the Turkey-Iran relations within the scope of their relations with the major powers such as Russia and the US.[24] Criss and Güner approached their relations within the Turkey-Iran-Russia nexus in the region which was also dependent on the strategic interests of the US and Europe. [25] The impact of the regional context on their relations was also examined by Cornell who located Turkey and Iran alongside with Pakistan and China to analyze their positions and relations in the Central Asia. [26]

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[21]Marianna Charountaki, Iran *and Turkey: International and Regional Engagement in the Middle East* (London, New York: I.B.Tauris&Co. Ltd, 2018).

[22] Ibid, 195.

[23] William Kang and Jaechun Kim, "Turco-Iranian Alignment: Balancing or Bandwagoning with the US", *Journal of International and Area Studies* 23, No. 1 (2016).

[24], Stephen J. Flanagan, "The Turkey–Russia–Iran Nexus: Eurasian Power Dynamics." *The Washington Quarterly* 36, No.1 (2013).

[25] Nur Bilge Criss and Serdar Güner. "Geopolitical Configurations: The Russia-Turkey-Iran Triangle", *Security Dialogue* 30, No.3 (1999).

[26] Svante E. Cornell, "Regional politics in Central Asia: the changing roles of Iran, Turkey, Pakistan and China" in *India and Central Asia: Building Linkages in an Age of Turbulence*, ed. Svante E. Cornell (New Delhi: SAPRA Foundation, 2003).

The domestic changes (the AKP's coming to power in Turkey) and international/ regional developments (9/11 events and the US's invasion of Iraq) in the early 2000s have significant repercussions in the literature on Iran-Turkey relations. On the one hand, there have been studies that have argued for the AKP's Islamic leanings and its new foreign policy orientation in favor of active relations with the Middle East and adopting 'zero problems with neighbors' have improved Turkey's relations with Iran. [27] On the other hand, other studies have emphasized the importance of economic and political convergence of two countries in the changing Middle East. For instance, Sinkaya wrote that the role of ideology in Turkey-Iran relations was replaced by the pragmatic calculations of each side in the 2000s such as trade interactions and security cooperation. [28] Similarly, Karacasulu and Karakır explained Turkey-Iran rapprochement in the 2000s by strategic and pragmatic considerations of both countries derived from their security and economic convergence rather than the ideological one.[29]

The energy politics in Turkey-Iran relations has been frequently studied in the literature while explaining their rapprochement in the 2000s. For instance, Seni emphasized the role of natural-gas agreement between Turkey and Iran that provided a "secret non-aggression policy" between two countries. [30] Similarly,

[27] Constantinides, "Turkey: the emergence of a new foreign policy the neo-Ottoman imperial model", *Journal of political and military sociology* 24, no. 2 (1996); Sözen, "A paradigm shift in Turkish foreign policy: Transition and challenges. Murinson. "The strategic depth doctrine of Turkish foreign policy." Dalay and Friedman, "The AKP and the Evolution of Turkish Political Islam's Foreign Policy." Stein and Bleek, "Turkish-Iranian Relations: From" Friends with Benefits" to" It's Complicated".

[28] Bayram Sinkaya, "Rationalization of Turkey-Iran Relations: Prospects and Limits", *Insight Turkey* 14, no. 2 (2012).

[29] Nilüfer Karacasulu and İrem Karakır, "Iran-Turkey Relations in the 2000s: Pragmatic Rapprochement", *Ege Academic Review* 11 (2011).

[30] Nora Seni, "Turkey-Iran: A Cordial Agreement?", *Hérodote2,* no.169 (2018). See also Ellen R.Wald, "Turkey, Iran: Energy, Economy, and Politics in the Face of Sanctions", *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 17, no.3 (2018).

Ünver argues that "natural-gas partnership" between Iran and Turkey and exporting of Iran's gas to Europe via Turkey is determinative for their relations. [31] Even though the natural gas interaction has been a significant for Turkey-Iran relations, Kalehsar argues, it has been also accompanied by the problems of "mistrust and periodical disputes" derived from pricing and transaction interruption since their first agreement during Erbakan period. [32] For Ünal and Ersoy, even though there have been 'chronic mistrust and unresolved disputes' between two countries, "the energy trade between Turkey and Iran serves a crucial asset with its enormous volume, the pragmatism of geo-economics continues to overweigh the geopolitical concerns in Turkish-Iranian relationship". [33]

As there has been radical regional changes and the active international intervention into the region following the Arab uprisings and the Syrian civil war, Turkey-Iran relations have experienced a serious tension and the more recent studies have revolved around examining their ongoing relations despite the divergence in their national interests. In this regard, Sinkaya used the concept of 'compartmentalization' while explaining the economic and energy cooperation between two countries following the nuclear agreement between Iran and P5+1 and argued that despite their geopolitical competition in the region, Turkey and Iran have compartmentalized their multilayered relations and managed to keep their diplomatic, political, and economic relations alive. [34] In

[31] H.A**kı**n Ünver, "Turkish-Iranian Energy Cooperation and Conflict: The Regional Politics", *Middle East Policy* 23, No.2 (2016):141.

[32]Omid Shokri Kalehsar, "Energy factor in Iran-Turkey relations", *Energy & Environment* 26, No.5 (2015).

[33] Serhan Ünal and Eyüp Ersoy. "Political Economy of Turkish-Iranian Relations: Three Asymmetries," *Middle Eastern Studies/Ortadogu Etütleri* 5, No.2 (2014).

[34]According to Sinkaya, "when they cannot afford abandoning dividends of cooperation, the acting governments tend to compartmentalize their relations in order to differentiate sources of

parallel with this thinking, Tahiroglu and Taleblu explained the current relations between Turkey and Iran in the region as the concept of 'frenemy' since they have maintained a delicate balance between the areas of cooperation and conflict. [35]

Furthermore, more regionalist approaches, which have examined the structural impacts of the Arab uprisings and the Syrian civil on the Iran-Turkey relations alongside with the Iraq and the Kurdish Regional Government, has been frequently used by the scholars those have tried to analyze the tension between two countries. [36] According to Pieper, the impact of the Turkey's alignment with the Western world and its regional and pragmatic geopolitical position has been influential on Turkey's Iran policy in the new Middle East following the Syrian civil war. [37] These regional developments, Ayman pointed out, encouraged Turkey and Iran to have regional aspirations and seek to become a regional hegemon which has been not possible so far due to their limited capacities vis-à-vis the external powers. [38] Keyman and Sazak interpreted the latest regional

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conflict and possible forms of cooperation". Bayram Sinkaya, "Iran and Turkey Relations after the Nuclear Deal: A Case for Compartmentalization", *Ortadoğu Etütleri* 8, No.1 (2016).

[35] According to Tahiroğlu and Taleblu, "frenemies are able to straddle the grey area between adversary and alliance, and concurrently castigate and embrace one another". Merve Tahiroğlu and Behnam Ben Taleblu, "Turkey and Iran: The Best of Frenemies," *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 14, No.1 (2015).

[36]Fred H. Lawson, "Syria's mutating civil war and its impact on Turkey, Iraq and Iran," *International Affairs* 90, No.6 (2014). S. Gülden Ayman, "Turkey and Iran: Between friendly competition and fierce rivalry," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 36, No.1 (2014). Majid Rafizadeh, "Odd Bedfellows: Turkey and Iran." *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 14, No. 4 (2016). Idrees Mohammed, "Turkey and Iran Rivalry on Syria," *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations* 10, No. 2-3 (2011).

[37]Moritz Pieper, "Turkish Foreign Policy toward the Iranian Nuclear Programme: In Search of a New Middle East Order after the Arab Spring and the Syrian Civil War," *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations* 12, No.3 (2013).

[38] S. Gülden Ayman, "Regional Aspirations and Limits of Power-Turkish-Iranian Relations in the New Middle East," *Etudes Helléniques/Hellenic Studies* 20, No.1 (2012).

positions of Turkey and Iran as "two modes of engagement", which can be a source of conflict in the region. On the one hand, they argued, Turkey has tried to be 'more engaged with the global actors' and adopted 'humanitarian diplomacy approach', on the other hand, Iran has kept its isolation and sought to exert hegemonic policies in the region which in return has created a contradiction in their foreign policies. [39]

This thesis locates itself within the regionalist perspectives that aims to interpret the fluctuating relations between Turkey and Iran. However, it aims to bring a new perspective to the regionalist approaches by synthesizing different regionalist concepts and applying them to the Turkish-Iranian relations. Having used both Buzan and Wæver's RSCT and Lake and Morgan's theory of regional orders, this study aims to conceptualize the *local security externalities* of both Middle Eastern security complex and the extra-regional powers within it. Hence, it aims to provide an encompassing regional explanation for Turkish-Iranian relations in the last two decades. In this manner, this study seeks to fill the gap in the literature by elaborating different regionalist approaches and creating new hypotheses for the recent Turkish-Iranian relations.

[39] E. Fuat Keyman and Onur Sazak, "Turkey and Iran: the two modes of engagement in the Middle East," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 17, No.3 (2015).

# CHAPTER 2

## THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter aims to give a comprehensive understanding of the regionalist perspective in IR discipline. The regional level in the thesis is used based on regional sub-systems, more particularly RSCs. Even though the concept of RSC is a part of Regional Security Complex Theory that was first written by Barry Buzan in 1991, and updated by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver in 2003, this thesis aims to use more broader version of this concept studied in the literature on regional orders and structures. Accordingly, the regionalist perspective in this thesis is more extensive version of RSCT and aims to have more comprehensive regionalist account.

The first part of the chapter explains the general framework of the regionalist perspective and summarizes how the regional systems were studied in the literature. Afterwards, both Buzan and Wæver's RCST and Lake and Morgan's theory of regional orders are examined by revealing this thesis's position about their arguments. In this regard, the concepts of '*regional security complex*' and '*local security externalities*' picked from these respective theories constitute backbones of this thesis. Then, the chapter locates the regional level in agent-structure problem in the IR and demonstrates the strengths of the regionalist perspective. Afterwards, it gives a place to the general features of Middle East as a regional security complex since it is the main independent variable of the case study in this thesis.

After explaining the features of RSCs as a structure, the chapter continues with the significant units of RSCs, regional powers, since both Turkey and Iran are regarded as regional powers in the Middle East. It focuses on the features and

behavioral patterns of regional powers in the face of regional power shifts. The last part of the chapter connects the RSCs with the concept of regional power and explains this thesis' position regarding the regionalist perspectives. Having adhered to theoretical and conceptual framework, it eventually builds hypotheses about the foreign policy responses of the regional powers in RSCs.

## 2.1. The Regionalist Perspective in the Discipline of International Relations

The basic idea behind the regional states systems can be comprehended with Hans Mouritzen's argument that the states are 'nonmobile' since they have fixed territories. Hence, each state is a part of a relatively stable regional context which consists of geographically proximate units. In this sense, states' particular 'location in the system structure' make territoriality and geographical proximity significant. [40] Even though some sectors in the new security understanding is deterritorialized, most particularly in the economic and environmental spheres, the 'territoriality' is still main determinant for both security and insecurity definitions of states. In other words, the territoriality and proximity are significant for (in)security of states in the sense that "*many threats travel more easily over short distances than over long ones*.".[41]

The literature on regional systems or 'subsystems' traces back to 1960s with several outstanding works on regions and basically argues that the regional level is the main determinant for explaining states' foreign policy behaviors. For instance, in his article named *Middle East as Subordinate International System* that published in 1958, Binder proposed a 'middle ground' approach between foreign policy theory and systemic international relations theories. He applied his regional perspective to the Middle East and argued that '*Middle Eastern patterns are relatively independent of the 'rules' regulating the dominant bipolar*

[40] Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, (London, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998),10.

[41] Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers,* 45-46.

*system*'.[42] Similarly, Michael Brecher applied his theory of subordinate state system to analyze the foreign policy behaviors of Southern Asia. He argues that '*the study of subordinate systems would help to resolve a sterile debate on the merits of deductive and inductive approaches to a more rigorous discipline of international relations*.'[43] Zartman applied the concept of subordinate state system to Africa within which he defines geographic region as 'a territorial base and identification area'. [44]

Cantori and Spiegel's article 'International Relations of Regions' offered a comparative approach for comprehending the role of regions (subordinate state systems) in the international relations. They defined regions as '*areas of the world which contain geographically proximate states forming, in foreign affairs, mutually interrelated units*'. [45] As a significant contribution to the discussions on the regional systems, Thompson's article '*The Regional Subsystem: A Conceptual Explication and a Propositional Inventory*' published in 1973 reviewed twenty-two identification of regional systems. However, he derived four necessary conditions for emergence of regional system, which constitute the basis for current academic debates of regions:

- There is 'a particular degree of regularity and intensity' among actors that 'a change at one point in the subsystem affects other points',
- There is proximity among actors,

[42] Leonard Binder, "The Middle East as a Subordinate International System", *World Politics* 10, no.3 (1958): 427.

[43] Michael Brecher, "International Relations and Asian studies: the Subordinate State System of Southern Asia", *World Politics* 15 (1963): 219.

[44] I.William Zartman, "Africa as a Subordinate State System in International Relations", *International Organization* 21, no.3 (1967): 547.

[45] Louis J. Cantori and Steven L. Spiegel. "The International Relations of Regions." *Polity* 2, no. 4 (1970): 398.

- Both internal and external actors acknowledge the regional system ‘as a distinctive area or ‘theatre of operation’,
- There are ‘at least two and quite probably more actors.’[46]

Even though regionalist scholars have converged on the importance of regional level of analysis in international relations, they have diverged on their perspective on how regions should be studied. According to some scholars, international politics has certain rules, and these rules can be applied to all regions. Hence, international relations can be implemented to all regions without modifications. From this perspective, ‘one can generalize from the regional to the global, or vice versa’. For instance, Stephen Walt (1987) studied regional alliances, within which geographical proximity is significant, to test general theory of balancing or John Mearsheimer (1983) sought to apply why deterrence has failed in some regions. [47] On the other hand, some analysts argue that each region has unique characteristics. The area-studies literature is an example of this approach. In this understanding, assumptions, variables, and propositions can be relevant in one region and cannot be applied to other one. [48]

The third approach in the regionalist perspective, locates itself between these two perspectives. Lake and Morgan call it as the *comparative approach* and argue that regional and global levels are different since ‘regions affect behavior and constitute a different level of analysis’. Moreover, each region does not have unique features because ‘*regions also differ in their characteristics, not in terms*

[46] William R. Thompson, “The Regional Subsystem: A Conceptual Explication and a Propositional Inventory”, *International Studies Quarterly* 17, No.1 (1973): 101.

[47]David A. Lake and Patrick M. Morgan, “The New Regionalism in Security Affairs”, in *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World* eds. David A. Lake and Patrick M. Morgan (Pennsylvania, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 8.

[48] Ibid, 8.

*of the variables but in the values attached to those variables*'.[49] In this understanding, distribution of power and structure in each region and each case might vary across bipolarity, unipolarity and multipolarity. For instance, Middle East, Latin America, or South Asia have different power polarities, but they can be analyzed in the same regional parameters and can be compared to one another. In this sense, '*it is possible to generalize about regions while predicting different patterns of behavior from their individual traits.*' [50] As it will be explained below, both Buzan and Wæver's RSCT and Lake and Morgan's regional systems theory adopt comparative approach.

## 2.2. Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT)

The regional studies acquired a new analytic dimension with the concept of 'regional security complex' devised by Barry Buzan in 1991 within which he identified a particular kind of region 'united by common security problems'. [51] In his book called *People, States and Fear: The National Security Problems in International Relations*, Buzan defined a security complex as '*a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another*'. [52] Like the previous definitions of region, Buzan listed the ties that construct a security complex as geography, political, strategy, history, economy, and culture. [53]

[49]Ibid, 9.

[50]Ibid, 9.

[51] Ibid,11.

[52] Barry Buzan, *People, States, and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations*, (Sussex, Wheatsheaf Books, 1983), 106.

[53]Ibid, 106.

The concept of regional security complex became particularly significant with the end of the Cold War which increased the importance of the regional level in the international relations. According to Lake and Morgan, "*the regional level stands more clearly on its own as the locus of conflict and cooperation for states and as the level of analysis for scholars seeking to explore contemporary security affairs*". [54] Accordingly, during the Cold War period, geopolitical and ideological superpower rivalry (the US and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics/USSR) penetrated almost all regions in the world. Hence, "*the rigid structure of superpower bipolarity*" of the Cold War did not allow regional and local actors to have an autonomous role in their region. [55] With the end of the Cold War and the removal of excessive intervention of the rival superpowers, regions could bring their historical, political, cultural, economic, and religious features to the surface. Even though the intervention of the superpowers into regions has persisted in the post-Cold War period, their impact on regions has been slighter than it was in the Cold-War era. In Buzan and Wæver's words, '*the regional level of security has become both more autonomous and prominent in international politics, and that the ending of the Cold War accelerated this process*". [56]

The concept of regional security complex was updated and theorized under the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) by Buzan and Wæver in 2003 to analyze security in the post-Cold War that traditional security studies could not do. [57] To explain the relevance of the regional level in the world politics, they defined nine 'regional security complexes' in their book: Africa, the Balkans,

[54] Lake and Morgan, "The New Regionalism in Security Affairs", 6.

[55] Buzan and Wæver, *Regions and Powers,* 3.

[56] Ibid, 3.

[57] The first version of the theory was written by Buzan and Wæver in 1983 and then considerably modified in 1998 and 2003. Buzan, *People, States, and Fear*. Buzan, Wæver and Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis.* Buzan and Wæver, *Regions and Powers*.

CIS-Europe, East Asia, EU-Europe, the Middle East, North America, South American and South Asia. Regional security complexes are significant for security of members states. [58] According to Buzan, a 'region' refers to "*subsystem of economic, political and security relations that exist among a set of states whose fate is that they have been locked into geographical proximity with each other*". [59] Hence, geographical proximity and being part of the same regional security complex are critical for understanding the situation of amity and enmity between states.

As 'regionally based clusters', regional security complexes are also identified as '*durable patterns of amity and enmity taking the form of subglobal, geographically coherent patterns of security interdependence*'.[60] Regional security complexes have distinctive features that differentiate them from other grouping of states. In the first place, they have 'boundaries' that separate them from the neighbors. For instance, Middle East regional security complex has different dynamics from the Balkans or East Asian RSC. Secondly, regional security complexes are involved more than one autonomous unit and there is no higher authority above these units which refers to anarchic structure. Like distribution of power in the international level, there is distribution of power among the actors in the regional level which can lead to balancing, bandwagoning or forming alliances. Furthermore, due to their common history, the relations among units in RSCs can be socially constructed which determines their amity and enmity. [61]

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[58] Barry Buzan, "Regional Security Complex Theory in the Post-Cold War World", in *Theories of New Regionalism* eds. Fredrick Söderbaum and Timothy M.Shaw (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003),141.

[59] Barry Buzan, *People, States, and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era* (New York, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 188.

[60] Buzan and Wæver, *Regions and Powers*, 45.

[61] Buzan and Wæver, *Regions and Powers*, 53.

RCST is a mixture of several theoretical approaches since it involves both materialist and constructivist elements. On the one hand, it is based on the conceptualization of 'bounded territoriality' and 'distribution of power' that are pertinent to Waltz's neorealism. For instance, Buzan and Wæver regard "regional security complexes (RSCs)" as "*sub-systems-miniature anarchies-in their own right and by analogy with full systems they have structures of their own*".[62] While the concept of 'structure' belongs to global level in neorealism, it is adapted to regional level of analysis in RSCT. [63] Even though RCST is regarded as '*complementary to the neorealist perspective on system structure*', its regional level of analysis and its constructivist elements detracts it from neorealism. [64] Neorealism is inadequate to explain the dynamics other than polarity (unipolarity or multipolarity) in the systemic level because it strictly emphasizes on the causal forces of the systemic level. [65]

On the other hand, RSCT contains constructivist components because it emphasizes the role of securitization on amity and enmity derived from 'the political processes by which security issues get constituted'. [66] Within the context of the RSCT, Buzan and Wæver revised the definition of regional security complexes as follows; *a set of units whose major processes of securitisation, desecuritisation, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another*'.[67]

[62] Buzan, "Regional Security Complex Theory in the Post-Cold War World", 143.

[63] Buzan and Wæver, *Regions and Powers*, 4.

[64] Ibid,11.

[65] Ibid,6.

[66]Ibid, 4.

[67] Buzan, Wæver and Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, 201.

From this perspective, in addition to the role of objective reality, security can be 'socially constructed' by the actors.[68] Accordingly, amity and enmity between states in regional security complexes is not only dependent on the distribution of power but also on the 'actions and interpretations of actors.' Wendt, for instance, acknowledges the link between two theories and argued that his social theory is applicable to regional security complexes. [69]

Regarding to regional membership, Buzan and Wæver emphasize the exclusive nature of RSCs and argue that one state cannot be a member of more than one regional security complex. In Buzan and Wæver's words, "all states can be located in one and only one RSC". [70] If a state remains in between two or more regions, then it is described as an 'insulator' in Buzan and Wæver's theory. Furthermore, insulators have a passive role since they 'define and occupy the boundaries of indifference between the self-contained dynamics on either side of them".[71] For instance, in contrast to this thesis's argument, the RSCT regards Turkey as an 'insulator' country between European and Middle Eastern regional security complexes. [72] However, Buzan and Wæver acknowledges that Turkey started to challenge its insulator status '*by increasingly playing an active role*

[68] Buzan and Wæver, *Regions and Powers*,142.

[69] RSCT has ties-even less- with the globalist perspective due to their multilayered understanding of security including transnational, economic, cultural, and environmental ones. For instance, 'regional economic groupings' is regarded as a reply globalization process. However, the 'territorial logic' of security regionalist approach distinguishes it from the globalist approach. Buzan and Wæver, *Regions and Powers*,40.

[70] Ibid,483.

[71] Buzan, *People, States, and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, 196.

[72] As it will be seen below, this thesis revises the theory and regards the post-2003 Turkey as a part of the Middle Eastern RSC due to its intensive 'security interdependence' with the region.

*from its insulator position*". [73] For the RSCT, the insulator position of Turkey is still problematical, in Buzan and Wævers's words, "*Turkey is in many ways the best case to explore in detail in order better to understand the nature of an insulator state*". [74]

Furthermore, Buzan and Wæver acknowledges the difficulty of analyzing the relationship between great powers and RSCs. [75] They explain the involvement of global powers in regions by the mechanisms of '*penetration*' and '*overlay*'. In this understanding, global powers can ally with local powers in the region (penetration) or 'come to dominate a region so heavily that the local pattern of security relations virtually ceases to operate" (overlay). [76] In RSCT, the role of great powers in the regional dynamics does not go beyond these two mechanisms and the extra-regional powers are not regarded as a member of a regional security complex due to exclusive nature of RSCs. However, as it will be explained below, Lake and Morgan argue that the penetration of a great power in the regional security complex can be so durable and intensive that it should be accepted as a member of that region for a specific time. Due to the US long termed and heavy penetration in the post-2003 Middle East, this thesis advocates that the US acted as a regional actor which had a great impact on the foreign policies of the rest of the regional countries.

### 2.3 Regional Security Complexes as Local Security Externalities

Based on Buzan's concept of regional security complex, Lake and Morgan constructed a theory of regional orders within which they explained the

[73] Buzan and Wæver, *Regions and Powers*, 485.

[74]Ibid.

[75] Buzan and Wæver, *Regions and Powers*,199.

[76] Ibid,46.

significance of regional system structure. As Buzan argued, during the Cold War, bipolar international structure overshadowed the regional level. However, with the end of the Cold War, in Lake and Morgan's words, '*regional conflicts are more likely to stay regional, responding to their individual circumstances and developments*'. [77] In this understanding, '*less competitive global relations free regions to develop along their own paths*' and increased the importance of regional level in the world politics. [78]

Lake and Morgan identified a regional security complex as '*a set of states continually affected by one or more security externalities that emanate from a distinct geographic area."*[79] As the previous definitions of regional security complex, there is high security interdependence among members and '*any significant security-development inside any member have a major impact on the others*'. [80] This definition constitutes both material and ideational elements and closely related to Buzan's regional security complex theory. However, Lake argues that both Thompson's definition and Buzan's conceptualization fails to distinguish regional interactions from global ones and conceptualize regional systems as 'local externalities.' [81] Accordingly, '*if the local externality poses an actual or potential threat to the physical safety of individuals or governments in*

[77] Lake and Morgan, "The New Regionalism in Security Affairs", 6.

[78] Ibid,6.

[79] Ibid, 12.

[80] Ibid, 12.

[81] David A.Lake, "Regional Security Complexes: A Systems Approach", in *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World* eds. David A. Lake and Patrick M. Morgan (Pennsylvania, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 48.

*other states, it produces a regional security system or complex*'. [82] In other words, it is regarded as '*transborder but local externality*'. [83]

Lake's concept of 'externality' is mostly used in economics and can be regarded as costs (negative externalities) and benefits (positive externalities) that have an impact on other actors apart from 'the actor that create them'. It is also known as *spillover* or *neighborhood effect*. [84] In this understanding, several externalities including security dilemma and climate change have a global impact. The regional systems, on the other hand, have '*local transborder externalities create costs and benefits that affect only a limited number of states*.' [85] The logic behind the local externalities can be better understood in the following paragraph:

> Regional powers can only project force over limited distances, threatening their neighbors or perhaps their neighbors once removed, but not others who lie beyond their reach. It is these local externalities that create the set of interacting states that constitutes a regional system, and such local security externalities that create a regional security complex. It is the limited scope of such externalities that differentiates reginal system from the global system and regional security complexes from the global security complex.[86]

Like RSCT, geographical contiguity is significant since '*states mostly fret about and confront military threats nearby (or even within)*'. [87] Security of states are generally affected by positive and negative security externalities of their

[82] Ibid,49

[83] Ibid,48.

[84]Lake, "Regional Security Complexes: A Systems Approach", 49.

[85] Ibid,50.

[86] Ibid,50.

[87] Patrick M. Morgan, "Regional Security Complexes and Regional Orders" in *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World* eds. David A. Lake and Patrick M. Morgan (Pennsylvania, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 29.

neighbors. However, security of state does not contain only physical safety of the state 'from physical harm and military coercion by external sources' but also political, economic, environmental and societal security.[88] These security externalities or 'spillovers' constitute a regional system which host 'the strategic interactions' among its units. [89] In this sense, the interdependence among regional units and 'localized nature of many externalities' constitutes regional security complexes.[90]

However, unlike RSCT, Lake and Morgan claim that 'geographical proximity is not a necessary condition for a state to be member of a complex' since great powers have a capacity to be central actor in a distance regional security complex. [91] While Buzan and Wæver's regional theory argues that great powers can only be part of RSCs by mechanism of *penetration* and *overlay*, Lake and Morgan acknowledge that the great powers can be a part of RSCs with their durable military and political existences in a distance region. Accordingly, if security externalities of a specific region affect a state for prolonged period, it can be regarded as a part of that regional security complex. [92] For Morgan, the criterion of membership of the 'outside' state to the RSC is as follows:

> What if the 'outside' state has the greatest military strength (or nearly so) regularly deployed in the areas for years, is a party to important alliances there, participates in nearly all important negotiations about conflict and security there, fights major wars there, is even regarded is even regarded by some

[88] Ibid, 22.

[89] Lake and Morgan, "The New Regionalism in Security Affairs", 13.

[90] Lake, "Regional Security Complexes: A Systems Approach", 51.

[91] Lake and Morgan, "The New Regionalism in Security Affairs", 12.

[92] Lake, "Regional Security Complexes: A Systems Approach", 50.

> members as the greatest military threat they face? For all intents and purposes, when it comes to security and conflict, the 'outside' state is inside'.[93]

In this regard, while the geographical proximity is primary concept of a regional system, an outsider's '*active durable presence of important military forces, major security commitments and profound security involvements over a lengthy period to supplement a geographical criterion*'.[94] Considering these conditions, as an extra-regional great power, the US has been a part of Middle Eastern regional security complex in the part of the period studied in this dissertation, specifically from post-2003 period until the Obama administration's decision to have more passive role in the region (i.e. military withdrawal decision from Iraq in 2011). [95] In this sense, the US has been a regional actor even though it is not positioned '*within the immediate area from which the externality originates*'. [96] Furthermore, according to this understanding, Russian durable military presence in the Middle Eastern security complex and its active involvement in the security interdependence since 2015 has made it a strong candidate for regional membership.

[93] "Regional Security Complexes and Regional Orders", 29.

[94] Ibid, 29

[95] In fact, the US has been actively involved in the Middle Eastern security complex since the end of the World War II. Particularly, in the post-World War II, it pursued a 'containment' strategy in the Middle East to prevent the spread of communism. In this sense, the Middle East has turned into a competition field between the US and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The US began to have more active military presence in the region since 1980s for securing its interests. For instance, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) was established in 1983 to guarantee security 'for the region's stability' and has played primary roles in the US military operations in the region. In 2014, due to the ISIS threat, the US established Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) and re-intervened in Iraq upon request of Iraq government. "About CJTF-OIR", *Operation Inherent Resolve: One Mission, Many Nations*, https://www.inherentresolve.mil/About-CJTF-OIR/ (Accessed on 10 May 2020). Atallah S.Al Sarhan "United States Foreign Policy and the Middle East", *Open Journal of Political Science* 7 (2017): 463.

[96] Lake, "Regional Security Complexes: A Systems Approach", 50.

All in all, in contrast to RSCT, Lake and Morgan's approach to extra-regional great powers' membership to regional security complexes is closer to this thesis's case study and time period. Accordingly, as it will be seen below, both the US and Russia have acted as quasi-regional actors in the Middle East and have affected the rest of the regional actors' (in)security situations. In this sense, Turkey's fluctuating relations with Iran have been to a great extent affected by the security externalities created by these outsider-insiders between 2002-2019. As Lake argues, even though local externalities constitute a distinct geographical situs, '*these externalities are not necessarily limited in their effects of states within a particular geographic neighborhood*.' [97]

In this sense, based upon both RCST and Lake and Morgan's theory of regional order, this thesis argues that the regional security complexes have both material and ideational clusters that affects its members. However, unlike RSCT, it argues that the security externalities originating from the security complex does not affect only the member states but also 'outsiders', mostly great powers, that intervene in the security interdependence for a considerable period. In this sense, that 'outsider' that involves in the security complex turn into a regional actor for a period. In return, its 'security externalities' in the region becomes one of the most significant variables that affect the relations among the rest of regional actors. As we visualize this argument, it can be as follows:

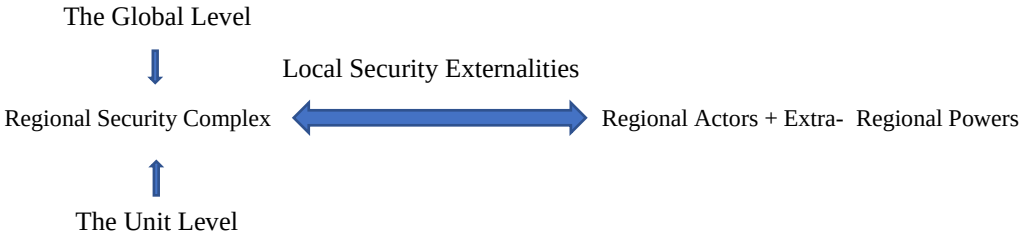


**Figure 2.1.** The Relationship between the RSCT and Theory of Regional Orders

[97] Ibid, 50.

## 2.4. Differentiating the Regional Level from the Other Levels in the IR Theory

After elaborating the different approaches in the regionalist perspective, it is significant to analyze its position in the IR theory. The emergence of regionalist perspective to international security was a response to the international political developments such as the end of the Cold War that increased the relevance of the regional level for determining foreign policy of states. Accordingly, the international politics necessitated more flexible level of analysis based on *'the integration of the findings of area specialists and international relations students*'. [98] Hence, to comprehend its role in the discipline, it is significant to evaluate the regionalist perspective within the context of the agent-structure problem in the IR.

In the IR discipline, theories have often analyzed foreign policy cases in terms of either structure or agent-centered perspective which constitute two opposite ends of the spectrum. The debate regarding whether agents or structures are the main unit of social analysis goes back to the works of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber. [99] Thus, it shows itself as "the agent-structure problem" in the IR theory given the existence of the wide range of theoretical positions with different ontological and epistemological premises. [100] In this respect, a group of scholars (classical realists and liberals) defend that human agents are the most significant actors to shape the social world on the one hand; on the other hand, other group of scholars (neorealists, neoliberals and world system theorists) give privilege to the

[98] Thompson, "The Regional Subsystem", 91.

[99] Walter Carlsnaes, "The Agency-Structure Problem in Foreign Policy Analysis", *International Studies Quarterly*, 36, No.3 (1992): 249.

[100] This dichotomy is also related with David Singer's concept of 'level-of-analysis'. See J. David Singer, "The Level of Analysis Problem in International Relations", *World Politics*, 14, No.1 (1961); Alexander E. Wendt, "The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations", *International Organization*, 41, No.3 (1987).

structure for its transformative role on the human agents. [101] The agent-structure problem in IR discipline is also related with the "the level of analysis problem" which has been generally associated with J. David Singer's work. Levels can be described as '*locations where both outcomes and sources of explanations can be located*'. [102] Accordingly, there is '*the micro- or macro-level of analysis*' that a social observer can prefer while examining the social phenomenon 'which [also] referred to the national sub-systems or the international system.[103]

At one hand of the spectrum, structural realism (neorealism) led by Kenneth Waltz, which has dominated the IR theory for decades, adopts systemic level of analysis when it tries to explain "how states behave in the international system". [104] As it is explained below, in contrast to analysis of human nature and national characteristics of states, structural realism assumes that international structure is determinative for constraining the behavior of states with its 'anarchic' character.[105] With these assumptions, neorealism has been the most dominant theoretical perspective within International Relations (IR) discipline since it has been regarded as the most powerful theory that could explain the causes of war and power politics in international relations. However, even though it has strengths due to its broad perspective, it has also disadvantages derived from "the necessary dearth of detail". [106] In this regard, its theoretical dominance has not been immune from critics toward its ontological, epistemological, and

[101] Wendt, "The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations", 335.

[102] Buzan, Wæver and Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, 5.

[103] Singer, "The Level of Analysis Problem in International Relations", 77-78.

[104] Wendt, "The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations", 335.

[105] Kenneth N. Waltz, "Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory", *Journal of International Affairs* 44, No.1, (1990): 34.

[106] Singer, "The Level of Analysis Problem in International Relations", 80.

methodological position especially given its inability to explain change in the world politics such as the end of the Cold War.

On the other side of the spectrum , for explaining 'other forces', there are agent-oriented approaches, also called as *Innenpolitik* theories, which argue that human agents and domestic political dynamics are significant to understand foreign policy outputs of states.[107] Classical liberal theories and its derivatives (such as commercial liberalism, liberal inter-governmentalism or democratic peace theory) argue that domestic dynamics such as state-society relations, interest groups or ideology of state elites are critical for foreign policy decisions of states. [108] However, these approaches have not been always capable of bringing explanations to "why states with similar domestic systems often act differently in the foreign policy sphere and why dissimilar states in similar situations often act alike". [109] Furthermore, as Singer claimed, they are inclined to make "exaggeration of the differences among our sub-systemic actors" that makes comparative analysis inconvenient. [110] *Innenpolitik* approaches are inadequate to analyze 'national security' of states '*without a grasp of the systemic or subsystemic context in its own right*'. [111] In this sense, without considering the systemic and subsystemic level of analysis, their pure unit-level perspective comes short of explanatory power.

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[107] Gideon Rose, Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy", *World Politics* 51, No. 1 (October 1998): 148.

[108] Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Steven e. Lobell, and Norrin M. Ripsman, "Introduction: Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy", in *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, eds. Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 4.

[109] Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy", 148.

[110] David Singer, "The Level of Analysis Problem in International Relations", 83.

[111] Buzan and Wæver, *Regions and Powers*, 43.

The regionalist perspective locates itself in the middle of micro-level (national) and macro-level (system) of analysis and seeks to find '*the territorially intermediate levels of analysis somewhere between the global and the national layers*'. Accordingly, the regional level of analysis allows '*some reduction in the complexity of world politics*' and provide more encompassing analysis of relevant case study.[112] For instance, regarding the Middle Eastern regional subsystem in 1957, Binder argued that the systemic analysis is insufficient to comprehend the regional dynamics since it has autonomous rules and power distribution. [113] On the other hand, the regional level of analysis distinguishes itself from *Innenpolitik* approaches since it acknowledges systemic patterns and impacts of a regional context. According the regionalist perspective, '*both the security of the separate units and the process of global power intervention can be grasped only through understanding the regional security dynamics*.'[114]

Regional security complexes also have constructivist connotations because they involve '*the fears and aspirations of the separate units*' derived from the mutual interpretations and actions of the units. In order to understand threat perceptions of two units at the regional level, it is not sufficient to analyze only regional 'distribution of power', it is also necessary to examine '*historical hatreds and friendships*' that can shape the nature of current relations between units. For instance, for the RSCT, the '*patterns of amity and enmity are influenced by various background factors such as history, culture, religion, and geography, but to a large extent they are path-dependent*'.[115] Similarly, Lake and Morgan gives importance to both 'perceptions and self-consciousness' and 'security

[112] Thompson, "The Regional Subsystem", 91.

[113] Leonard Binder, "The Middle East as a Subordinate International System", 427.

[114] Buzan and Wæver, *Regions and Powers*, 43.

[115] Ibid, 50.

interdependence' in regional security complexes. [116] In this sense, the regionalist perspective seeks to offer a more integrative, encompassing, and earthly theoretical approach that can examine states' foreign policy behaviors in a regional level where material and constructivist elements are intertwined.

### 2.5. The Middle East as a Regional Security Complex

The Middle East has been long neglected area in the IR discipline since there has been an interdisciplinary gap between the IR and Middle Eastern Studies (MES) for years. Their lack of communication has been part of 'the Area Studies Controversy' which originally referred to disagreement between 'area studies' and 'disciplinary social science'. [117] On the one hand, the IR theorists have long regarded the Middle East as "an intellectual laboratory" that could test their generalizable theories; on the other hand, Middle Eastern scholars have tended to see the Middle East as a unique and incommensurable region in the world politics. [118]

One of the difficulties regarding in-depth analysis of the Middle East by the IR scholars has been the dominance of the structural realism in the IR discipline. However, the more challenging theories have emerged to the structural realism, the more interaction between the IR discipline and MES have been formed. Accordingly, the newly emerged IR theories have been more concerned about the 'supra- and sub-national challenges to the state system', the role of ideology,

[116] Morgan, "Regional Security Complexes and Regional Orders", 31.

[117] Mark A. Tessler, Jodi Nachtwey and Anne Banda, *Area Studies and Social Science: Strategies for Understanding Middle East Politics*, (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 8.

[118]Morten Valbjørn, "Toward a 'Mesopotamian turn': Disciplinarily and the study of the international relations of the Middle East." *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 14, no. 1 (2004): 48.

religion and nationalism in foreign policy decision of states.[119] The emergence of the constructivist studies, post-modernist and post-colonial theories that emphasize the role of identity and discourses have made a substantial effort for analyzing different regions in the world including the Middle East.

However, it is unattainable to analyze the Middle Eastern states' foreign policies only from one angle since there have been several determinants (national, transnational, regional and international) in the Middle East. [120] For instance, structural approaches such as structural realism and world system theory have been sufficient to analyze the region in terms of military and economic distribution of power, respectively. However, the role of sectarianism, for instance in Iraqi politics, or the importance of nationalism and self-determination for the Kurdish society in the region cannot been comprehended by these theoretical approaches with their systemic level of analysis.

On the other hand, even though constructivist studies have revealed the importance of ideas and beliefs in the analysis of the Middle Eastern states, their analysis have been deficient without considering the material distribution of power among the Middle Eastern states, explaining the role of external powers, particularly the US and Russia in the Middle East, arms race and energy politics in the region. For instance, constructivist approaches can explicate the role of social interaction on spreading democratic norms throughout the region during the Arab Spring period, however, it cannot clarify the material and military

[119] Valbjørn "Toward a 'Mesopotamian turn'", 48.

[120] Fred Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations: power, politics and ideology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 67. Gerd Nonneman, *Analyzing Middle East Foreign Policies and the Relationship with Europe*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2005), 3. Furthermore, Hinnebush claims that the foreign policy of the states in MENA are influenced by three levels: the global level, the interstate environment, and the trans-state environment. Raymond Hinnebush, *The International Politics of the Middle East*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 3.

dynamics within the Syrian civil war, and the involvement of the local, regional and international factors in the war.

The Middle Eastern politics has a challenging systemic pressure on its members which in return affect their foreign policy outcomes given the long-lasting wars and conflicts within and across state borders. The foreign policy options of regional countries are highly shaped by the Middle Eastern regional context which is generally regarded as the "*culture of hard security built around concepts of containment, deterrence, counterterrorism, and political violence continues to prevail*".[121] Accordingly, the region reflects 'primitive' anarchic order where there is minimum degree of institutionalization regarding the norms and rules between states which in return led to the high threat perceptions toward one another. [122] Buzan and Wæver argues that '*the perennially conflictual character of the Middle East makes it a near perfect example of classical, state-centric, military-political type RSC*".[123] Under the circumstances, balancing and alliances are regarded as the most preferable relationship models in the region, even though they are not perennial. [124] In such an environment, it is impossible to think foreign policy choices of states without considering the systemic constraints of the regional context.

[121] Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Middle East Middle Powers: Regional Role, International Impact", *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 11, No.42, (Summer 2014): 30. Bassma Kodmani, "The Imported, Supported and Homegrown Security of the Arab World", in *Rewiring Regional Security in a Fragmented World*, eds. Chester A.Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson and Pamela Aall,(Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2011), 226. Similarly, Yaniv argues that the Middle Eastern region is highly convenient to the insecure world as the realist scholars described. Avner Yaniv, "Alliance Politics in the Middle East: A Security Dilemma Perspective", in *The Middle East in Global Strategy*, ed.Ariel Braun, (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press and Mansell Publishing, 1987).

[122] Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Raymond A. Hinnebush, *Syria and Iran: Middle Powers in a penetrated regional system*, (New York: Routledge, 1997), 13.

[123] Buzan and Wæver, *Regions and Powers*, 217.

[124] Ibid,13.

As all other regions in the world, the Middle East is a region marked by interaction of several material and ideational dynamics of local, regional, and global level. However, the regional level of analysis is likely to have more explanatory power since it is '*where the extremes of national and global security interplay, and where most of the action occurs*'. [125] According to Buzan and Wæver, the Middle East 'covers a region stretching from Morocco to Iran, including all of the Arab states plus Israel and Iran'. [126] Their theory regards Turkey as an 'insulator' country between European and Middle Eastern regional security complexes. [127] However, in accordance with Lake and Morgan's theory of regional order, this thesis revises the RCST and regard the post-2003 Turkey as a part of the Middle Eastern RSC due to its intensive 'security interdependence' with the region.

The Middle East has autonomous regional dynamics, despite the long-lasting global penetration to the region.[128] Even if the great powers intervene into the region, they tend to act like regional actors based upon the rules of the regional game. As one of the members of the third world, Middle East has witnessed intensive military, political and economic relations with the Western world, especially with European states throughout the modern history of world politics.

[125] Ibid, 43.

[126] Ibid,187.

[127] Ibid,187. For diverse territorial boundary definitions of the Middle East, see Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East: A Brief History Of The Last 2,000 Years*, (New York, Scribner, 1995), G. H. Blake, "International Boundaries and Territorial Stability in the Middle East: An Assessment", *GeoJournal* 28, No. 3 (1992); Leonard Binder, "The Middle East as a Subordinate International System", *World Politics 10*, No. 3 (1958); Michael Brecher, "The Middle East Subordinate System and Its Impact on Israel's Foreign Policy", *International Studies Quarterly* 13, No. 2, (1969). .

[128] Buzan and Wæver, *Regions and Powers*, 187.

[129] Since the end of the World War I, the region has been composed of post-colonial states (Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia are exceptions to this), durable conflicts, tribes and clans-mostly Arabs-, inter-Arab rivalries, sectarian division between Sunni and Shiite groups, the conflict between Israel and Arab states over the Palestinian issue and continuous penetration of the global powers. [130] Furthermore, '*the state-to-nation imbalance in the Middle East*' have made the regional states to be more inclined to experience civil wars. [131]

During the Cold War, two superpowers, the US, and the Soviet Union, have involved in this regional mess due to their ideological and strategic interests. With their intervention in the region, the Middle East was divided into two domains of the so-called 'communist' and 'free' worlds and led to new regional balancing and amity/enmity relations among regional actors. [132] On the one hand, Turkey, and Iran (until the Islamic Revolution in 1979) became strategic partners with the Unites States. On the other hand, the Soviet Union sought to counter the US influence in the region through maintaining strategic ties with Syria, PLO, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Algeria, and Yemen in the 1950s and 1960s. This clear-cut division blurred with the shift of Egypt's side following the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. [133]

[129] Fred Halliday, "The Middle East and 'Conceptions' of International Society" in *International Society and the Middle East* eds. Barry Buzan and Ana Gonzalez-Pelaez (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1.

[130] Ramazan Erdağ, *Libya in the Arab Spring: From Revolution to Insecurity* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 13.

[131] Ibid, 13.

[132] Buzan and Wæver, *Regions and Powers*, 198. Erdağ, *Libya in the Arab Spring*, 14.

[133] Buzan and Wæver, *Regions and Powers*, 198.

According to Buzan and Wæver, during the Cold War, the global powers' heavy armament and economic support to the regional actors influenced the Middle Eastern regional security complex. Their intervention frequently changed the regional balance of power (mostly, on behalf of Israel) and created alignment shifts throughout the Cold War. However, even though both superpowers allocated many resources into the Middle East, they could not maintain total control over foreign policies of their regional clients. The regional or domestic circumstances frequently restricted their capacity to fully manipulate their junior partners. For instance, they could not control the events caused to the 1973 War within which Egypt even exiled the Soviets from its territory. In addition, the US was not able to control Israeli foreign policy toward the Palestinians or Arab and Iranian strategies about the oil price. Hence, according to Buzan and Wæver, their impact on the Middle East had '*a marginal role in shaping the powerful military-political security dynamics at the reginal level*'. [134]

In the post-Cold War period, according to the RSCT, the regional level has gained its significance and autonomy due to removal of 'security overlay' of the bipolar international structure. The removal of the Soviet influence in the region and the Gulf War of 1990-91 have dramatically impacted the Middle Eastern RSC. In the first place, the US 'unipolar' intervention in the region sought to decrease the interstate conflict (but not domestic ones) by weakening Iraq vis-à-vis its neighbors. However, by weakening Saddam regime, the US unintentionally caused the empowerment of Iran in the region which referred to failure of 'the dual containment' policy of the US. [135] Furthermore, the Western powers, particularly the US, increased their position in the region by forming alliances with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states which turned the GCC

[134] Ibid, 200.

[135] Buzan and Wæver, *Regions and Powers*, 201.

states into a kind of 'protectorate status vis-à-vis the West'. [136] Their military agreements with the US, Britain and France further increased their tension with Iran which has lasted until today.

Even though the Gulf War can be regarded as the very last important interstate war in the region, the challenges to the security of regional states have dramatically increased in the post-Cold War period. In this regard, the new threats took the shape of religious fundamentalism and ethno-nationalism that has increased concerns of regional states regarding their territorial integrity. For instance, regarding the Palestinian issue, the struggle between Israel and the non-state actors including Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah has intensified and caused several military clashes. Furthermore, increasing autonomy of Iraqi Kurds in the Northern Iraq following the Second Gulf War increased concerns of regional states; Turkey, Iran, and Syria. Especially, towards the end of 1990s, the PKK has been a source of tension in Turkey's relations with both Syria and Iran. In this sense, depending on the context, Turkey's relations with Syria and Iran has involved both cooperation and conflict about the Kurdish issue in the 1990s regional context.

All in all, it can be said that even though the Middle Eastern regional security complex has autonomous regional dynamics, the involvement of extra-regional powers has been always a significant part of the region. In addition to the local security externalities of the regional actors (both states and non-state groups), extra-regional states have critical externalities that have affected the foreign policy behaviors of the regional states. As it is explained below, the US' invasion of Iraq in 2003 and its durable military presence in the region had a substantial role for Turkey's foreign policy relations with Iran. Similarly, in the post-2011 period, the security externalities of both US and Russia have been a significant independent variable that have impacted Turkey's foreign policy preferences toward Iran.

[136] Ibid, 201.

## 2.6. The Concept of Regional Power in the Regional Security Complexes: How to Explain Their Behavior in the Middle East

To complete the answer to the fundamental question of this work 'why did Turkey cooperate with Iran between 2002-2011 and compete with it in the post-2011 Middle East'? we need to look at regional power approach which is a part of regionalist perspective. The relations between Turkey and Iran, as two of the regional powers in the Middle Eastern regional security complex, should be conceptualized within the framework of the regional power approach. Having explained regional-level theorizing in the previous part, it is significant to locate the concept of regional power in it. In this way, their cooperation and competition as well their relations with extra-regional powers in the region can be built on a solid ground.

To begin with, it is significant to note that the concepts of 'middle power', 'traditional middle power', 'emerging middle powers' and 'regional powers' have been frequently studied and defined differently in the literature.[137] Ambiguous borders between concepts and overlapping roles of states have caused different analyses in different case studies. For instance, Russia is regarded both as a regional and a major power or Australia is accepted both as a regional and a traditional middle power. [138] Or, while there was a consensus that Australia, Canada, Norway, and Sweden were middle powers, this consensus was shaken with the recent classification of new states including Argentina,

[137] For more detail, see Eduard Jordaan, "The concept of a middle power in international relations: distinguishing between emerging and traditional middle powers" *Politikon* 30, no. 1 (2003). Andrew Carr, "Is Australia a middle power? A systemic impact approach", *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 68, no.1 (2014). Nukhet A. Sandal, "Middle powerhood as a legitimation strategy in the developing world: The cases of Brazil and Turkey." *International Politics* 51, no. 6 (2014).

[138] Emel Parlar Dal, "Conceptualising and testing the 'emerging regional power' of Turkey in the shifting international order", *Third World Quarterly* 37, No.8 (2016):1.

Brazil, Nigeria, South Africa, and Turkey as middle powers. [139] In this regard, the conceptualization of states is generally varied according to the context and level of analysis.

Defining regional powers is more explicit task due to clear boundaries of regional level of analysis that distinguish it from other levels of analysis. Furthermore, due to narrowness of its domain, it is easier to observe the consequences of its foreign policy behaviors and objectives. In the first place, a regional power is supposed to be 'economically, politically and culturally interconnected with the region'. [140] A regional power is an actor in the regional security complex 'whose power capabilities in a region significantly outweigh those of other actors within the same region and whose power is, to a high degree, based on its leadership role within the region'. [141] In this regard, the '*perceptual dimension*' is also significant regarding its position in the region, accordingly, "a state either self-identifies itself as a regional power, or it is identified by 'others' inside and outside the region as such". [142]According to Nolte's conceptualization of regional power, a regional power can be identified as a state,

- which claims to be a 'leading position' in a specific region that is 'geographically, economically and politically delimited'

[139] Jordaan, "The concept of a middle power in international relations", 165.

[140] Detlef Nolte, "How to compare regional powers: analytical concepts and research topics", *Review of International Studies* 36, No. 4 (October 2010): 893.

[141] Martin Beck, "The Concept of Regional Power as Applied to the Middle East" in *Regional Powers in the Middle East: New Constellations after the Arab World* ed. Henner Fürtig (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014),4.

[142] Şaban Kardaş, "Turkey: A regional power facing a changing international system" *Turkish studies* 14, no. 4 (2013): 642. Nolte, "How to compare regional powers", 893.

- which has a sufficient 'material (military, economic, demographic), organizational (political) and ideological resources' for its regional power claims,
- which has an impact on 'regional affairs (activities and results)'.[143]

To exercise its power in the region, regional powers tend to 'bear a special responsibility for regional security and for the maintenance of order in the region'. [144] For this purpose, regional powers are likely to apply '*crisis management and mediation activities*' as well as engage with regional and international organizations. [145] Furthermore, they tend to use their *soft-power capabilities* since they do not have sufficient power resources to influence regional affairs through using sole hard-power capabilities. Hence, regional powers exercise their power in the region by cooperating with other regional actors (if necessary, extra-regional powers) and using multilateral measures. [146] On the other hand, to protect their regional power, they may seek to 'exclude outside powers' from their regional domain of influence. [147] Elik contributed to this understanding by stating that Middle Eastern 'middle powers' (or 'regional powers') 'seek to maximize autonomy by *balancing* regional impact of great power'. In this regard, they tend to vary their ties to lessen their dependence on the core state (the US) and 'maintaining the balance of power in the region'. [148] Furthermore, as it will be explained below, the relations among regional powers

[143] Nolte, "How to compare regional powers", 893.

[144] Ibid, 890.

[145] Dal, "Conceptualising and testing the 'emerging regional power' of Turkey in the shifting international order",4.

[146] Beck, "The Concept of Regional Power as Applied to the Middle East",4.

[147] Nolte, "How to compare regional powers", 896.

[148] Elik, *Iran-Turkey Relations, 1979-2011,* 24.

can be impacted by the partnership of one of the regional powers and great powers in the region.

Regarding the regional powers in the Middle East, it has been argued that there has been no regional hegemon but competing regional powers in the region. According to Al Tammamy, 'the distribution of power among the principal countries in the region makes it difficult for a single country to exercise a hegemonic agenda over the entire region and gives rise to the formation of power clusters among them'. [149] Indeed, the Middle Eastern security complex has following features that has made regional hegemony unattainable: 'high power dispersion'; competitive behaviors and hard-power use; 'low global-power capabilities' and lack of regional development initiatives; 'the distinct role of the US as a quasi-regional-power'.[150]

Indeed, it has been widely accepted that various Middle Eastern states have sought to act as a regional power including Egypt, Iraq (in the 1980s), Saudi Arabia, Israel, Iran and Turkey. These states have considerably higher power capacities (in terms of hard and soft power) comparing to other Middle Eastern states such as Kuwait, Lebanon or Tunisia. [151] In Ehteshami's words, MENA 'middle powers/regional powers' (Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Turkey), '*project influence, exert pressure and try and drive agendas which are of direct interest to them. Some work together, some times, but they did not have any*

[149] Thomas Richter, "Saudi Arabia: A Conservative P(l)ayer on the Retreat?" in in *Regional Powers in the Middle East: New Constellations after the Arab World* ed. Henner Fürtig (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014),206.

[150] Beck, "The Concept of Regional Power as Applied to the Middle East", 5. For more detail, see Ian S.Lustick, "The Absence of Middle Eastern Great Powers: Political 'Backwardness' in Historical Perspective", *International Organization* 51, No.4 (1997).

[151] Ibid, 5.

*meaningful strategic partnerships with each other*". [152] However, none of these states have enough capabilities to declare its hegemony against all others in the region. Hence, depending on the regional context, they have used different strategies to increase their regional status such as soft/balancing or bandwagoning with the extra-regional powers in the region. [153]

In this regard, in accordance with these studies, this thesis locates Turkey and Iran in the Middle Eastern regional security complex and define them as regional powers.[154] As Ehteshami argues, as other MENA 'middle powers/regional powers', Iran and Turkey do not fulfill all criteria of middle power status such as having outstanding national wealth or considerable military forces-alongside with nuclear program-. [155] However, 'they exert great influence in their own subsystem, despite each of them suffering from profound structural weakness'.

[152] Ehteshami, "Middle East Middle Powers", 36.

[153] The concepts of balancing and bandwagoning are parts of balance of power theory of Kenneth Waltz. Accordingly, "bandwagoning refers to joining the stronger coalition, balancing means allying with the weaker side". The important determinant of these foreign policy acts is power capabilities. Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass., Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1979), 126. However, Stephen Walt revised the theory and argued that states do not balance or bandwagon by just calculating power capabilities, they behave according to their perceived threats. Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987). In this thesis, balancing against the US or Russia does not refer to traditional balancing behavior. Given their limited capabilities, regional powers can only make soft balancing against the great powers. Robert Pape describes soft balancing against the US as "actions do not directly challenge US military preponderance but that use nonmilitary tools to delay, frustrate, and undermine aggressive unilateral US military policies". Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States", 10. T.V. Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy", *International Security* 30, No.1 (2005).

[154] Systemic approaches categorize Turkey and Iran in a different way based on their relations with the great powers. For instance, several studies acknowledge Turkey as a bridge, pivot, swing, trading, rising power or BRICS' based upon Turkey's role in the international system. Or, based on the international distribution of power, Turkey and Iran have been described as a small-size, middle power, or middle-sized power. Kardaş, "Turkey: A regional power facing a changing international system".

[155]Ehteshami, "Middle East Middle Powers", 35.

[156] In other words, it can be said that they have relatively more capabilities (both hard and soft-power) than other regional units and seek to preserve-if possible, increase- their power in the region.

Given their ambition and self-identification as a regional power, both Turkey and Iran have sought to exert their power and influence in the Middle Eastern security complex. To exercise their power, they have both balanced against each other or balanced against other regional actors, including extra-regional actors. In addition, given the US existence and interests in the region, they often need to choose 'whether to bandwagon with the United States or with another potential regional power'. [157] Hence, any regional power shifts and foreign policy change of extra-regional powers are highly influential on their foreign policy behaviors and relations between them.

**Table 2.1.** Two of the Regional Powers in the Middle East: Turkey and Iran.

| Country | Population (mn) | GDP ($bn) | Military Expenditure ($bn) | Armed Forces (000s) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Turkey | 82.3 | 771,35 | 19 | 512 |
| Iran | 81.8 | 445,3 | 13 | 563 |

Source: 2017-2018 World Bank Database.

### 2.6.1. The Regional Powers' Responses to Local Security Externalities of the Middle East

Based on the above theoretical and conceptual discussions, this thesis seeks to construct some hypotheses and assumptions that establish a framework for Turkey-Iran relations in the Middle East between 2002-2019. Accordingly, for understanding the case of Turkish-Iranian relations, it is significant to examine regional level which has been the main determinant for their fluctuating relations

[156] Ibid, 47.

[157] Beck, "The Concept of Regional Power as Applied to the Middle East", 8.

during the specific period under examination. As two of the regional powers in the Middle East, Turkey-Iran relations have changed according to regional dynamics in the Middle East wherein global and unit level intersect. In this regard, Buzan's concept of *regional security complex* that prioritizes the geographical proximity and security interdependence among regional units is a point of departure for the regionalist perspective of this thesis.

However, to 'escape Buzan and Wæver fallacy'[158], this study does not strictly adhere to their RCST due to its theoretical deficiencies and prefers to be more encompassing for understanding regional security interdependencies among states that belong to more than one RSC. Buzan and Wæver's conceptions of RCSs are mutually exclusive and one state cannot be a member of more than one RSC. In other words, overlapping membership is not possible in their understanding. For conceptual clarity, they separate 'mutually exclusive RSCs, insulator states, and global actors.'[159] However, their rigid categorization restricts the fertility of empirical world and prevents us from understanding the situation of countries that are influenced by several security complexes (i.e.Turkey) and extra-regional powers (i.e. the US) that are involved in security interdependence of a region.

At this point, Lake's concept of *local security externalities* assists us to analyze regional security complexes and regional-global nexus in more comprehensive way. The concept of *local security externalities* prioritizes the importance of region as a geographical whole for producing security interdependence for its regional members. However, the concept of *local security externalities* makes it possible for a state to belong to more than one RSC. The geographical proximity and regional security interdependence are still main determinant in this understanding. It just eliminates the ambiguous position of insulator states and

[158] This idiom was borrowed from Kardaş's article. Kardaş, "Turkey: A regional power facing a changing international system". 646.

[159] Buzan and Wæver, *Regions and Powers*, 48.

allows us to incorporate extra-regional powers, that act as quasi-regional actors, to the analysis of regional security complex. The important consequence of this for this study is to locate Turkey-Iran relations in the Middle Eastern security complex that have been influenced by both regional dynamics and the existence of the extra-regional powers (the US and Russia) between 2002-2019.

Regarding the units in a regional security complex, it is significant to categorize whether they are regional powers or not. Due to their ambition to increase their sphere of influence in the region, regional powers tend to be sensitive to regional power shifts and respond differently than other units in the region. In every circumstance, they are likely to aim to raise their regional status at the expense of other regional powers which can be observed in Turkey-Iran relations especially in the post-2011 Middle East. Furthermore, regarding their relations with extra-regional powers, regional powers tend to 'maximize autonomy by balancing regional impacts of great power', which can be seen in Turkey's cooperation with Iran following the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. [160]

In this sense, it can be argued that regional powers are susceptible to power changes in regional security complexes which produce *local security externalities* for both regional units and extra-regional powers. Hence, any cooperation and competition between regional powers need to be evaluated within this context. As we seek to build hypotheses for Turkey-Iran relations in the Middle Eastern regional security complex by considering the above concepts, they can be as follows:

> H.1. The relations between regional powers are highly sensitive to *local security externalities* of an RSC. In other words, the main determinant that impact their foreign policy behaviors and the relations between one another is regional security interdependences.

[160] The argument can be seen in Elik's book on Turkey-Iran relations. Elik, *Iran-Turkey Relations, 1979-2011*, 23.

H.2. Regional powers can cooperate with other actors and non-state actors to diminish the power of other regional powers in the region.

H.3. Due to their power constraints, regional powers can cooperate with each other against common threats that affect their national security.

H.4. When great powers tend to act as regional actors in a regional security complex, the relations between regional powers are prone to be cooperative due to their will to increase regional autonomy and thus their weight as regional powers.

H.5. A regional power seeks to prevent any partnership between extra-regional power and another regional power in the region. Hence, it can increase its regional cooperation with that regional power to prevent its bandwagoning with extra-regional power.

H.6. During the times of regional powers shifts, regional powers are inclined to compete with the rival regional powers to maximize their powers and influence in the region.

H.7. During the times of diminishing the roles of extra-regional powers in the region, regional powers may find a space for claim their regional hegemony. Competition may arise between regional powers.

Having considered these hypotheses, the next chapters locate the relations of two regional powers, Turkey, and Iran, in the Middle Eastern security complex and examine to what extent their relations have been impacted by *the local security externalities* of the region and extra-regional powers that acted as quasi-regional actors in the Middle East (2002-2019). As it is explained above, the main source of their (in)security is regional dynamics since geographical proximity increases the extent of threats for states and their relations highly depend on the regional level. Hence, the next chapters analyze the role of regional security interdependences (military, political and economic) and the regional existence of extra-regional powers on both cooperation and rivalry between Turkey and Iran.

**Table 2.2.** Local Security Externalities of the Middle East and Turkey's Changing Relations with Iran (2002-2019)

| **Time Period** | **The Role of Extra-Regional Powers and Local Security Externalities of the Middle Eastern Security Complex** | **Foreign Policy Responses of Regional Powers: Turkey's Changing Relations with Iran** |
|---|---|---|
| 2002-2011 | The US invasion of Iraq<br>The Kurdish autonomy in the Northern Iraq | Turkey-Iran cooperation<br>Quest to increase their regional autonomy against the US |
| 2011-2016 | The US withdrawal decision from Iraq<br>Regional Power Shifts: The Arab Uprisings and the Syrian Civil War | Turkey-Iran competition to fill the power vacuum and increase their influence in the region |
| 2016-2019 | Russian active role in the Syrian civil war<br>Empowerment of the Assad Regime<br>Turkey-US Disagreement on PYD/YPG<br>Turkey's Deteriorated Relations with core Arab states | Turkey-Iran manageable competition<br>Badwagoning with Russia |

# CHAPTER 3

## THE HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION TO TURKISH-IRANIAN RELATIONS: THE REGIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

> *The Ottoman-Safavid conflict should be considered within the framework of the entire geopolitical pattern of the Middle East and Transoxiana at the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth rather than within the simplistic framework of Shiism versus Sunnism.* [161]

On reviewing the history of Turkish-Iranian relations, one can observe the critical role of the regional context within which two countries have pursued their foreign policy strategies. The *local security externalities* of the Middle East and the role of the extra-regional powers in the region have been always paramount for their relations. Turkey and Iran, as two border countries, have for centuries been in spiral of conflict, competition, and cooperation in the Middle East. On the one hand, Iran's geographical position assisted it to exercise its soft-power over both Muslim (particularly Shiite) and non-Muslim societies in Central Asia and the Caucasus as well as keeping its control on significant regions including oil-rich Persian Gulf. On the other hand, Turkey's eastern borders have tied it to historically critical trade routes across Asia and its location has made it been surrendered by significant seas: the Caspian, Black, Marmara, Aegean and Mediterranean.[162]

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[161] Adel Allouche, "*The Origins and Development of the Ottoman-Safavid Conflict (906–962/1500–1555)*", (PhD. diss., The University of Utah, 1980), 4-5.

[162] Nihat Ali Özcan and Özgür Özdamar, "Uneasy neighbors: Turkish-Iranian relations since the 1979 Islamic revolution" *Middle East Policy* 17, no. 3 (2010), 101.

Their competition goes back to the sixteenth century, when they were two rival neighbor imperial powers, the Sunni Ottomans, and the Shiite Safavids. [163] Even though there was no regionalization trend in pre-modern times, their geographical proximity and the geopolitics in their neighborhood have inherently led their competition because both empires had capabilities to exercise their power in the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. [164] Their imperial conflicts were largely derived from their will of dominating 'the fertile territories of Mesopotamia and the Caucasus'. [165] As they were two neighbor imperial powers, it was inevitable for them to compete over regional domination of the same border areas and trade routes that would consolidate their supremacy vis-à-vis the other. [166]

In the early sixteenth century, the Sunni Ottoman Empire's supremacy in the Middle East was challenged by the expansion of the Shiite Safavid Empire in most of Persia, Afghanistan, and Iraq.[167] It was inevitable for two empires to conflict with each other since '*the supporters of the Safavids, known as the qizilbash, belonged in their majority to the Turkoman tribes in Anatolia*'. [168] Hence, with its Twelver Shiism, the Safavids started to have an immense influence on the Turkmen and Kurdish tribes in the eastern rank of the Ottoman

[163] Several historians argue that the history of their relations dates back to earlier centuries since it is thought that two societies knew each other before Turkic tribes' migration to Asia Minor. See Bayram Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, (İstanbul, Institut français d'études anatoliennes, 2019).

[164] Özcan and Özdamar, "Uneasy neighbors", 101.

[165] Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, 5.

[166] Ibid, 5.

[167] Akhilesh Pillalamarri, "Exactly 500 Years Ago, This Battle Changed the Middle East Forever", the National Interest, August 23, 2016, https://nationalinterest.org/feature/exactly-500-years-ago-battle-changed-the-middle-east-forever-17445 (accessed on 24 September 2020).

[168] Allouche, *The Origins and Development of the Ottoman-Safavid Conflict*,3.

territory and became a threat for the Ottoman territorial integrity. It was the beginning of a centuries-long competition for mutual intervention of each other's population with their religion and culture.

Their competition for dominating the overlapping border areas became manifest with soft-power competition between the Shiite dervishes (Qızılbash) under Safavid Shah Ismail and the Ottoman Empire, a leader of orthodox Sunni Islam. The cycle of the war and peace between two imperial domains started with the Battle of Chaldiran (1514) and lasted for approximately 200 years until the fall of the Safavids. [169] The Chaldiran battle was the beginning of series of long-lasting wars between two empires to gain control over Caucasian and Mesopotamian soils including Tabriz and Baghdad. The Safavids' successors (Nader Shah, Karim Han Zand and the Qajars) and the Ottoman empire continued to wage war against each other to consolidate their power vis-à-vis the other.[170] It is significant to note that the regional context and their relations with other regional powers, including the Uzbeks, the Mamluks and extra-regional powers, the Europeans, had a significant role on their competition with each other. [171]

The main struggle for power between the Ottomans and the Safavids continued until the Ottomans retook Iraq from the Safavids and two powers signed the Treaty of Qasr-ı Shirin (Treaty of Zuhab) in 1639. This treaty put an end to 150-year history of recurrent war cycles between two powers via determining the

[169] Christian H.Heller, "Great Power Competition in the Age of Islam Contemporary Lessons from the Ottoman–Safavid Rivalry", *MCU Journal* 9, No.2 (2018):28.

[170] Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*,6.

[171] Allouche, *The Origins and Development of the Ottoman-Safavid Conflict*, 5.

borders between the Ottomans and the Safavids.[172] Even though there were several treaties between the two powers, the Treaty of Qasr-ı Shirin has been regarded as the most significant one and has become a reference point for their foreign policy elites. [173] However, despite the territorial settlement, their geographical proximity and struggle for manipulating the Kurdish and Azeri nationalists in each other's territory continued to escalate their tension and resulted in the war in 1821-23.[174] In addition, the role of extra-regional powers have been always paramount in their relations since they have maintained counter-alliances against each other for increasing their own power. A strategic partnership between the Qajar dynasty of Iran and Russia against Ottomans during the Russian-Ottoman war in1877-78 can be a significant example of this during the nineteenth century.[175]

The Middle East witnessed dramatic transformations following the World War I which ended up with the Anglo-French control of region. The colonial powers in the region drew the map of the modern Middle East by dividing and maintaining different forms of control in almost all states in the region. [176] Under these circumstances, three nation states in this new region were able to escape from direct colonial rule: Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia. As the countries of our inquiry, the Ottoman Empire was replaced by the Turkish Republic in 1923 and

[172] Meliha Benli Altunışık, "Iran-Turkey Relations: Between Rivalry and Competition", in *Shocks and Rivalries in the Middle East and North Africa* eds. Iman Madsour and William R.Thompson (Washington DC, Georgetown University Press, 2020), 129.
[173] Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, 6.

[174] Gökhan Çetinsaya, "Essential friends and natural enemies: the historic roots of Turkish-Iranian relations", *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 7, No.3 (2003):116.

[175] Altunışık, "Iran-Turkey Relations", 129.

[176] Eugene L.Rogan, "The Emergence of the Middle East into the Moderns State System", in International Relations of the Middle East ed. Louise Fawcett (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013), 49.

Iran's Pahlavi Dynasty was established in 1925 by Reza Khan which would govern Iran until the Islamic Revolution in 1979. [177] However, the foreign policies of these new states were to a great extent shaped by the realities of the region being in the shadow of foreign control during this period.

Having preserved their independence in the region dominated by colonial rule, both Turkey's Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and Iran's Reza Khan were united in their ideals of modernization, anti-imperialism, and nationalism which contributed to their regional rapprochement. [178] In addition, the British domination in the Middle East and the Soviet influence over the Caucasus pushed them to become 'status quo powers' dedicated to protecting their 'sovereignty and territorial integrity'.[179] However, despite their cooperation against the extra-regional powers, the existence of ethnic minorities in their territories continued to increase their threat perceptions toward each other. Accordingly, there were a series of tribal uprisings on their borders; while Iran was suspicious about Turkey's possible support to Iranian Azeris against Tehran and Turkey was concerned about Tehran's manipulation on Kurdish nationalists in the eastern Turkey. [180]

After experiencing tensions in the border areas, Turkey and Iran consequently agreed on a non-aggression (Saadabad) treaty in 1937, alongside with Iraq and Afghanistan.[181] The treaty is regarded as the first regional security cooperation of

[177] Ibid, 50.

[178] Altunışık, "Iran-Turkey Relations", 129.

[179] Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, 7.

[180] Altunışık, "Iran-Turkey Relations", 130.

[181] Accordingly, the contracting states must avoid 'any interference in each other's internal affairs'; have a respect to 'the inviolability of their common frontiers'; and involve in 'no event to resort, whether singly or jointly with one or more third Powers, to any act of aggression

the modern Middle Eastern security complex. Even though some scholars argue that the purpose of the treaty was regional protection against external threats such as Mussolini's Italy, the Soviet Union and Britain, this explanation alone is not sufficient to analyze the regional cooperation among these countries. [182] The border security against the Kurdish uprisings and prevention of their infiltration into neighbor states were overwhelmingly important especially for Turkey, Iran, and Iraq.[183] Furthermore, as countries on the road to modernization, Turkey and Iran might have been willing to be regional leaders via their agreement on peaceful settlement of disputes. [184]

The regional context of the Middle East was again transformed with the devastating consequences of the World War II. During the war years, Turkey's relations with Iran was interrupted since Iran became occupied by Great Britain and the Soviet Union between 1941-46. Even though Turkey was able to escape from the direct effects of the war, Soviet assistance to Kurdish and Armenian separatist activities in the region increased Turkey's concerns about its national security. [185] The region also witnessed significant changes in terms of balance of extra-regional powers in the post-war years that impacted the axis of Turkey and Iran. Accordingly, the British and French domination in the Middle East was

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directed against any other of the Contracting parties'. "Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and Turkey: Treaty of Non-Aggression", *WorldII League of Nations Treaty Series*, http://www.worldlii.org/int/other/LNTSer/1938/163.html (accessed on 24 September 2020).

[182] Mustafa Serdar Palabıyık, "Sadabad Paktı (8 Temmuz 1937): İttifak Kuramları Açısından Bir İnceleme", *Ortadoğu Etütleri* 2, no. 1 (2010): 173.

[183] Ibid, 173.

[184] Ibid,171.

[185] Çetinsaya, "Essential friends and natural enemies", 125.

replaced by the US and the region became a competition field between the US and the Soviet Union. [186]

During the heyday of the Cold War years, the regional level was under the shadow of the bipolar international system. All the regional actors were a part of the global confrontation between the US and the Soviet Union. Under these circumstances, given Turkey and Iran's threat perceptions from the Soviet Union, they both became a part of the Western camp and maintained close economic and military relations with the US.[187] Furthermore, both countries were concerned about the rise of Arab nationalist regimes (including Egypt, Syria, Libya and South Yemen) which were allied with the Soviet Union against the Western domination in the region. [188] To overcome these threats in the region, Turkey and Iran took the lead of the establishment of the Baghdad Pact in 1955, which was later renamed as CENTO in 1959. [189] The economic, technical, and cultural cooperation between two countries (alongside with Pakistan) was also institutionalized by RCD in 1964. [190]

As the Cold War's intense competition began to soften, the regional developments in the 1970s began to diverge national interests of Turkey and Iran. The oil crisis of 1973 increased the economic and military power of oil-rich Iran which in turn contributed to its regional power. On the other hand, Turkey's

[186] Fred Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics, and Ideology*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), 95.
[187] Ibid, 97.

[188] Ibid, 99.

[189] The other parties of the pact were Iraq, Pakistan and Great Britain. "The Baghdad Pact (1955) and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO)", *U.S. Department of State Archive*, https://20012009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/lw/98683.htm (accessed on 24 September 2020).

[190] Behçet Kemal Yeşilbursa, 'The Formation of RCD: Regional Cooperation for Development,' *Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no.4 (2009).

economy was adversely affected by the oil crisis and its military intervention in Cyprus in 1974 led to the US arms-embargo which further diminished its regional power. [191] Hence, the regional balance of power between Turkey and Iran changed in favor of Iran which had also close relations with the US during this period. Under these circumstances, Turkey was concerned about the rise of Iran's regional power and its close links with the US. More importantly, Iran's assistance to Iraq's Kurds against the Iraqi government once again triggered Turkey's concerns about Iran's strategy of provoking Kurdish nationalism against its neighbors.[192] In this regard, even though both countries were member of the Western camp, the regional competition and 'mutual distrust' between two countries prevented them from becoming regional allies during this period. [193]

The regional context of the Middle East witnessed a radical development with the Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979. The Western-oriented Shah regime was replaced by anti-American, 'independent' and 'non-aligned' Iran. [194] This change had serious repercussions for Iran's regional position, for instance the new regime immediately announced Iran's withdrawal from CENTO. Even though Iran's Islamic regime was entirely opposite of Turkey's secular regime, this domestic difference did not create serious tension between the two countries during the 1980s. Contrary to the expectations, the relations between Turkey and Iran were cooperative during the 1980s. Turkey became one of the first countries to recognize the new regime on its borders, because the Turkish government was highly concerned about Iran's falling into the Soviet domain of influence. In this

[191] Çetinsaya, "Essential friends and natural enemies", 127.

[192] Altunışık, "Iran-Turkey Relations", 131.

[193] Barın Kayaoğlu, 'The Limits of Turkish-Iranian Cooperation; 1974-80,' *Iranian Studies*, vol.47, no.3 (2014).

[194]Çetinsaya, "Essential friends and natural enemies",127.

regard, Turkey gave a priority to establishing stable relations with Iran and maintaining its territorial integrity in the region. [195] Yet, one of the most significant reasons of cooperative relations between Ankara and Tehran can be found in the regional context. The outbreak of the eight-year Iran-Iraq war in 1980 pushed Turkey and Iran to develop their economic relations in the region. In terms of Iran's perspective, ensuring Turkey's neutrality during the war and maintaining economic ties with Turkey was vital. [196] From Turkish perspective, domestic needs for Iranian oil and its export-oriented trade policy made Turkey's economic relations with its belligerent neighbor essential during this period.[197]

Even though Turkey had concerns about Iran's relations with the Iraqi Kurdish parties against the Baghdad government during the 1980s, this did not turn into an explicit tension between two countries. The beginning of the PKK's major attacks against Turkey in 1984 further increased Turkey's threat perceptions against the Kurdish separatist movements. Hence, Iran's relations with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) of the northern Iraq, which had also close links with the PKK, was a source of apprehension for Turkey. [198] However, under the circumstances of the region, the two countries did not want to put their economic profits at risk and agreed on a security protocol for mollifying the concerns of each other. According to the 1984 security protocol, '*they would prevent the activities of any group or movement that threatened security of the other*'.[199]

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[195] Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, 11.

[196] Altunışık, "Iran-Turkey Relations", 131.

[197] Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, 11.

[198] Özcan and Özdamar, "Uneasy neighbors", 108.

[199] Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, 11.

However, the regional context radically changed with the end of the Iran-Iraq war, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the Gulf War of 1990-91. In contrast to cooperative relations of the 1980s, these developments created a regional competition between Turkey and Iran over the Caucasus, the Central Asia and Iraq.[200] In the first place, following the end of the Cold War, as two powerful regional actors, Turkey and Iran found an opportunity to influence the newly independent states in the Caucasus and Central Asia. As it was explained above, these regions were already a sphere of historical competition between the Ottomans and the Safavids. In the post-Cold War period, their competition on these regions revolved around two domains. First, they sought to be a model country (the Turkish model vs. Iranian model) for the newly independent Muslim states. Second, they competed over transportation routes for oil and gas in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan.[201] Furthermore, Turkey's close relations with Azerbaijan increased Iran's concerns about Turkey's possible use of Turkish nationalism on Iran's Azeri Turkish population.[202] Even though their competition over Azerbaijan about the 'Karabakh conflict, oil/gas production and transportation negotiations' continued, their regional rivalry on the Caucasus and the Central Asia in general were not long-term.[203] Russia's 'near-abroad' policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia once again prevented Turkey and Iran from playing assertive roles in this region which in return calmed down their competition. [204]

[200] For more detail, see Bayram Sinkaya, "Turkey-Iran Relations in the 1990s and the Role of Ideology" *Perception Journal of International Affairs* 10, no. 1 (2005).

[201] Ibid,12.

[202] Altunışık, "Iran-Turkey Relations", 132.

[203] Sinkaya, "Turkey-Iran Relations in the 1990s and the Role of Ideology", 13.

[204] Furthermore, in geographical terms, these two countries were dependent on each other. While Turkey was dependent on Iran for reaching the Caucasus and Central Asia, Iran regarded Turkey as a bridge for reaching the West. Hence, they sought to find ways of not intensifying their tensions. Sinkaya, "Turkey-Iran Relations in the 1990s and the Role of Ideology", 1.

In the second place, the regional context in the Middle East escalated the regional competition between Turkey and Iran in the early 1990s. The power vacuum in the Northern Iraq was already a source of their regional rivalry since they still did not trust each other' intentions about the Kurdish groups. When the Iraqi Kurdish civil war erupted during the mid-1990s, they took side with rival Iraqi Kurdish parties. Turkey's support to the KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) and Iran's assistance to the PUK was even called as a kind of 'proxy war' between two countries.[205] Furthermore, Turkey made several cross-border operations in the northern Iraq for fighting PKK militants during this period. Turkey's military interventions in the northern Iraq was a source of concern for Tehran in the sense that Turkey's capturing oil-wealth Mosul region would shift the regional balance of power in favor of Turkey. [206] On the other hand, Turkey had serious apprehensions about Iran's harboring and supporting PKK militants in its domain in northern Iraq and two countries had several crises about the PKK problem. [207]

The post-Gulf War Middle East also witnessed a more active involvement of the US in the region which adversely affected Turkey-Iran relations. Turkey's alliance with the US and strategic partnership with Israel in the region increased threat perceptions of Iran during this period. From Iranian perspective, the US and Israel sought to reshape the Middle East within which they were eager to isolate Iran.[208] Iran regarded Turkey's regional cooperation with Iran's

[205]Gareth H.Jenkins, *Occasional Allies, Enduring Rivals: Turkey's Relations with Iran*, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (2012), 21.

[206] Sinkaya, "Turkey-Iran Relations in the 1990s and the Role of Ideology", 9.

[207] For more detail, see Jenkins "Occasional Allies, Enduring Rivals", Sinkaya, "Turkey-Iran Relations in the 1990s and the Role of Ideology", Özcan and Özdamar, "Uneasy neighbors".

[208] It is argued that for the US, the Soviet threat was replaced by Iran after the end of the Cold War. Richard Herrmann, "The Middle East and the new world order: rethinking US political strategy after the Gulf War", International *Security* 16, no. 2 (1991): 47.

opponents as a 'hostile action against the revolutionary regime'. [209] In return, to change the regional balance of power, Iran maintained close relations with Russia and Syria at the expense of Turkey's interests. [210] Hence, when they had tense relations, these two regional powers did not hesitate to form alliances with extra-regional powers and other regional actors against each other.

It has been generally argued that the tension between Turkey and Iran in the 1990s were mainly derived from their ideological difference after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. [211] However, even though there were cooperative relations between secular Turkey and Islamist Iran during the 1980s, two countries witnessed several ideological crises during the 1990s. [212] Even though there was no regime change or radical ideological change in respective countries, their relations experienced fluctuations in the post-1979 period. Hence, this thesis argues that the change in their relations did not mainly arise from the domestic context but the changing regional context in the Middle Eastern security complex. While the *local security externalitie*s of the Middle East in the 1980s were permissive for their cooperation, the changing regional dynamics increased their threat perceptions toward each other. The ideological crises between two countries in the 1990s were repercussions of their competition in the regional level.

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[209] Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, 12.

[210] Ibid, 12.

[211] For more discussion, see Sinkaya, "Turkey-Iran Relations in the 1990s and the Role of Ideology". Bülent Aras, "Turkish foreign policy towards Iran: Ideology and foreign policy in flux." *Journal of Third World Studies* 18, no. 1 (2001). Bülent Aras and Rabia Karakaya Polat, "From conflict to cooperation: Desecuritization of Turkey's relations with Syria and Iran." *Security Dialogue* 39, no. 5 (2008). Robert Olson "Turkey-Iran relations, 1997 to 2000: The Kurdish and Islamist questions." *Third World Quarterly* 21, no. 5 (2000). Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Süleyman Elik, "Turkey's Growing Relations with Iran and Arab Middle East", *Turkish Studies* 12, no. 4 (2011).

[212] Sinkaya, "Turkey-Iran Relations in the 1990s and the Role of Ideology", 1.

All in all, when we examine the relations between two countries in retrospect, we observe the critical role of the regional context within which both Turkey and Iran had assertive roles. As two regional powers, both Turkey and Iran have been eager to increase their sphere of influence in their region. Their neighborhood and geographical proximity led to their regional competition for playing a role in overlapping territories. In the meanwhile, their geographical proximity and the challenging nature of the Middle Eastern security complex pushed two countries cooperate since they have been dependent on each other against common security threats. Hence, the complex relationship of cooperation and competition between Turkey and Iran has been historically derived from the regional dynamics. As it will be explained below, their floating relations in the post-2002 period should be evaluated from this perspective.

# CHAPTER 4

## TURKEY'S COOPERATION WITH IRAN IN THE POST-2003 MIDDLE EAST: THE REGIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

> *"…recent developments in our region have serious repercussions on a global scale. This situation has made the intensive contacts and mutual visits between two major countries of the region, Turkey and Iran, mandatory".* [213]
>
> (Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Prime Minister of Turkey, 2006)

As two of the regional powers in the Middle East, Turkey-Iran relations have witnessed one of its brightest periods between 2002-2011 since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. In comparison to the tension between two countries particularly in the 1990s, the AKP government's foreign policy attitudes toward Iran has been to a great extent amicable and cooperative. There were mutual amicable discourses between the two countries like never before, the official visits dramatically increased, various military, political and economic agreements were signed, and Turkey undertook a significant mediator role regarding the nuclear dispute between Iran and the P5+1 countries. Thus, the question arises: given their regional competition, why did Turkey-Iran relations experience a significant cooperation during 2002-2011 period?

Regarding Turkey's cooperative relations with Iran, it is largely acknowledged that the AKP's coming to power in 2002 has created significant changes for Turkish foreign policy understanding. Accordingly, it has been argued that the AKP's foreign policy vision, namely "the Davutoğlu Doctrine", political Islamist roots of the AKP foreign policy elites and the economic activism of the Anatolian tiger in the region allowed Turkey to improve Turkey's foreign policy

[213] "Erdoğan İran'a gitti", *Hürriyet*, December 2, 2006, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/basbakan-erdogan-irana-gitti-5543948 (accessed on 10 October 2019).

relations with the Middle East and particularly, Iran. From this perspective, the new 'dynamic and multi-dimensional' foreign policy orientation of the AKP extended Turkey's links from the West to the Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Balkans and more importantly the Middle East.[214]

While these factors are relevant for shaping Turkish foreign policy toward Iran during the AKP period, they are not the main dynamics behind the changing nature of the relations between two countries. As it will be seen below, the main reason for improvement of Turkey-Iran relations during this period was the *local security externalities* of the Middle East. The US invasion of Iraq/ its long-term military presence and instability in the region as well as the rise of Kurdish separatism converged the regional interests of two neighbor countries. Due to Turkey's increasing concerns about the PKK terrorist threat and deteriorating the relations with the US and Israel in the region, the Turkish foreign policy officials sought to find a regional partner that could be cooperated against common concerns. Their geographic proximity and common concerns made Iran a significant regional partner during this period.

In this regard, even though AKP's foreign policy strategy is significant for Turkey-Iran relations during this period, it can become influential *through* the regional level. The new unstable and challenging regional context made Turkish foreign policy makers to extend their regional cooperation with their neighbors. The '*zero problems with neighbors*' and '*security and stability not only for itself, but also for its neighboring countries*" can be considered within the new dynamics of the post-2003 Middle Eastern security complex.[215] As Larrabee argued, this new understanding showed itself with Turkey's improving relations

[214] Bülent Aras and Hakan Fidan, "Turkey and Eurasia: Frontiers of a New Geographic Imagination," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 40 (2009): 202-203. See also İbrahim Kalın, "Debating Turkey in the Middle East: The Dawn of a New Geo-Political Imagination?", *Insight Turkey* 11, No. 1 (2009).

[215] Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision", 79.

with Iran and Syria, its more active role in Palestine-Israel conflicts, and closer connections with the Arab countries in general. [216]

Furthermore, when Turkish foreign policy elites have pursued foreign policy attitudes toward Iran, their foreign policy behaviors have taken place within the constrains and opportunities at the regional level. Even though the removal of the Saddam regime rose the competition between Turkey and Iran- as two of the regional powers-for influencing the political actors in Iraq, their common concerns on the Kurdish empowerment in the Northern Iraq exceeded their competition in the region. The power vacuum in the region has allowed Turkey to have more active and responsible foreign policy role in the regional issues. On the other hand, the same power vacuum increased the PKK terrorist acts and made Turkey's national borders more vulnerable. Hence, the AKP foreign policy officials have interpreted Turkey-Iran relations in the context of regional dynamics and have pursued their foreign policy behaviors toward Iran accordingly. In this regard, Turkey' increasing cooperation with Iran during this period should be analyzed by considering the critical dynamics at the regional level.

**Table 4.1.** Local Security Externalities of the Middle East and Turkey's Relations with Iran (2002-2011)

| **Time Period** | **The Role Local Security Externalities and Extra-Regional Powers of the Middle Eastern Security Complex** | **Foreign Policy Responses of Regional Powers: Turkey's Relations with Iran** |
|---|---|---|
| 2002-2011 | The US invasion of Iraq<br>The Kurdish autonomy in the Northern Iraq | Turkey-Iran cooperation<br>Quest to increase their regional autonomy against the US |

[216] F.Stephen Larrabee, "Turkey Rediscovers the Middle East", *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2007, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/turkey/2007-07-01/turkey-rediscovers-middle-east (accessed on 26 September 2018).

### 4.1. Local Security Externalities of the post-2003 Middle Eastern Security Complex: Regional Instability and Polarization

The regional context of the Middle East experienced significant changes due to the influence of 9/11 attacks on the US and the subsequent US invasion of Iraq in 2003.[217] The United States has acted as a *quasi-regional actor* in the Middle East since its invasion of Iraq in 2003 and its subsequent military and political presence in the region. As it is explained below, the subsequent *local security externalities* of Iraq's invasion have caused convergence of Turkey and Iran as two of the regional powers in the Middle Eastern security complex. Before explaining Turkey's foreign policy responses to the regional dynamics for preserving its status and national security and its relations with Iran, it is significant to overview the consequences of the US foreign policy in the region which have clashed with the region's own dynamics and resulted in challenging security situation for the rest of the regional actors.

Close to seventeen years after the occupation of Iraq, the Middle East is a region still in an instability. This unilateral intervention of the US in Iraq in 2003 has been accepted as one of the most vital events in the Middle East region since the end of the Cold War.[218] Given the 'artificial' nature of statehood of Iraq and the

[217] The 9/11 events made the "global war on terror" as a new priority of the government of George W. Bush (2001-08). Accordingly, the Bush administration defined Iraq, Iran and North Korea as the 'axis of evil' that posed a threat for both homeland safety of the US and the world security. "Text of President Bush's 2002 State of the Union Address", *The Washington Post*, January 29, 2002, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/onpolitics/transcripts/sou012902.htm, (accessed on 24 January 2018) In this regard, the Bush administration claimed that Saddam regime stocked weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and continuously assisted the al-Qaida terrorist organization that had carried out the 9/11 attacks. The consequence of this argument was the US Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in 2003 which had profound impacts on both Iraqi politics and the entire region.

[218] Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the US, the Bush administration defined the Bush doctrine and the 2002 National Security Strategy that consisted of "preventive war" against terrorist states via unilateral operations. In this regard, it claimed that Saddam regime stocked weapon of mass destructions (WMDs) and continuously assisted the al-Qaida terrorist organization that had carried out the 9/11 attacks. In addition to the Saddam regime in Iraq, Iran and North Korea constituted the "axis of evil" that posed a threat for both homeland safety of the

existence of diverse ethnic and sectarian groups, the outcome in Iraq became shelter for radical groups that led to long-lasting instability in the Middle Eastern security complex.[219] It did not only restructure Iraq's internal political dynamics but also had a *neighborhood effect* on the entire region in the sense that it did not only have an impact on the Arab states but also on the foreign policy strategies of non-Arab regional powers such as Turkey and Iran which have sought to play a more regional role in the post-2003 Middle East.[220]

Even though the external penetration has been long-lasting reality of the Middle East, long-term military presence of the US and its acting as an '*insider*' caused overwhelming reactions and resistance of the regional actors. The US occupation of Iraq also demonstrated the limits of the US power in the region which has had its own dynamics and a relative autonomy. Despite its compelling existence, the Bush administration witnessed resistance and unexpected results in the region. In the first place, those Sunni Iraqis, who have become disadvantaged group due to the US-led occupation, started riots against the occupant forces on the ground and their insurgency found support from Sunni jihadi transnational groups in the

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US and the world security. According to Hinnebush, this "axis of evil" approach was just the tip of the iceberg given the US global grand strategy and the aim of consolidating US existence in the oil-rich Gulf region. The neo-con administration aimed to replace the Iraq regime with more stable, democratic and the US-friendly government and in return expected to transform the Middle East in favour of pro-US groups vis-à-vis the radical ones. Hinnebusch, "The American Invasion of Iraq", 10,11, 20. "Text of President Bush's 2002 State of the Union Address".

[219] Apart from that, one of the most compelling short-term problems derived from two Gulf Wars was immense numbers of Iraqi refugees which have reached to 4.2-4.8 million internal and external refugees and have challenged both Iraq and its neighbor countries. See W.Andrew Terrill, "Regional Spillover Effects of the Iraq War", *Strategic Studies Institute* (December 2008). Hinnebusch, "The American Invasion of Iraq", 17.

[220] Several scholars argue that until the 2003 Iraq War, the regional balance of power has always included Arab states and Iran. In the post-Iraq war, the balance of power shifted to non-Arab powers, the United States, Iran and Turkey. Frederic Wehrey, Dalia Dassa Kaye, Jessica Watkins, Jeffrey Martini, and Robert A. Guffey. "An Altered Strategic Landscape: The Shifting Regional Balance of Power" in *The Iraq Effect: The Middle East After the Iraq War* (RAND Corporation, 2010):18.

region.[221] Iraq became 'international brigade' for radical Islamists, mostly Wahhabi fundamentalists, coming from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria and Yemen. They were organized and united against the pax-Americana order in Iraq and they resisted the US through being suicide bombers and launching attacks against the Shiite population and the US targets on the ground. [222] Hence, the post-war Iraq has experienced the rise of sectarian politics which had been already the fact of the country and had spill-over impacts for the entire region.[223]

### 4.1.1. The Rise of Anti-Western 'Radical' Camp and its Local Security Externalities for Regional Powers

Despite the US' aims to stabilize the region, the post-2003 regional politics witnessed contrary developments due to its historical, ethnic, and sectarian cleavages. Having certified Buzan and Wæver's definition of Middle East security complex as "*perennial conflict formation*", the post-2003 regional context created several conflicts and wars that has destabilized the region for all the regional actors.[224] In the first place, the region witnessed the rise of anti-Western 'radical' camp with the election triumph of Hamas in Palestine, the empowerment of Hezbollah in Lebanese politics and the rise of Iran's impact all over the region. The elimination of the Saddam regime, as the Iran's traditional

[221] Cleveland and Bunton, *A history of the modern Middle East*, 512.

[222] Philip Robins, "The War for Regime Change in Iraq" in *International Relations of the Middle East* ed. Louise Fawcett (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013), 310.

[223] In January 2005, the democratic election held in Iraq and resulted in the victory of the Shi'a parties and eventually establishment of a 'national unity' government under the leadership of Nuri al-Maliki. However, However, the Sunni Arab minority, which had been predominant since the emergence of Iraqi state after the First World War, felt increasingly alienated by Shia domination over ministries and Iraq's parliament witnessed several deadlocks due to the sectarian polarization William L. Cleveland and Martin Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East* (Boulder, Westview Press, 2013), 512.

[224]Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 187.

adversary in the Gulf, allowed Iran to further its influence and power in the region. With the rise of Shiites in Iraqi politics, Iran could increase its political linkages and influence in Iraq. In addition, due to its alliance with Syria, Iran broadened its influence beyond the Gulf and consolidated its partnership with Hamas and Hezbollah. [225]

Due to their regional competition and zero-sum nature of Middle Eastern politics, Turkey was not comfortable about excessive rise of Iran's power in the region. As a regional power, Turkey aimed to increase its influence and fulfill the power vacuum following the removal of the Saddam regime. Hence, it was concerned about Iran's growing influence on the Shiite groups and the possibility of nuclear-armed Iran at the expense of Turkey. Their will of balancing each other's strength showed itself in the 2005 Iraqi elections. While the Turkish government supported the secular pan-Iraqi group of Ayad Allawi, Iran arranged an alliance of Shiite parties under the name of United Iraqi Alliance (UIA). [226] In this way, both countries sought to diminish each other's soft power over the political groups in Iraq. However, as it will be explained below, common threats to their national security (PKK/PJAK) and presence of extra-regional power (the US) in the region made them cooperate with each other during this period.

In contrast to Turkey's relative moderate position toward Iran due to their common threat perceptions, Arab countries and the GCC with Shiite minority population were extremely uncomfortable about the rise of Iran in the region and the Shiites in Iraqi politics. Hence, in a nutshell, the post-Iraq war regional order was characterized by a new '*regional Cold War*' between the GCC, Jordan,

[225] Altunışık, "Explaining the Transformation of Turkish-Syrian Relations: A Regionalist Approach", 183.

[226] Soner Cagaptay, "Next-up: Turkey vs Iran", *The New York Times*, February 14, 2012, https://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/15/opinion/next-up-turkey-vs-iran.html (accessed on 1 June 2020). "Iran in Iraq: How much influence? *"International Crisis Group/Middle East Report 38*, March 21, 2005, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iran/iran-iraq-how-much-influence (accessed on 10 May 2020).

Egypt, Israel and the US on the one side, and those who opposed the former group's authority, namely Iran, Syria, Hamas and Hezbollah.[227]

The regional instability showed itself in the both 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war in Lebanon and the Gaza War (2008-2009) between Israel and Hamas which the former US Secretary Condoleezza Rice depicted as 'the birth pangs of a new Middle East". [228]These two wars indicated that the "regional cold war" has been intact. Hezbollah and Hamas connected with Iran still represented anti-Western 'radical' camp, whereas 'moderates' led by Egypt and Saudi Arabia were regarded as pro-Western ones.[229] While the objective of the former camp was to weaken the US and Israeli domination in the region, the latter one sought to limit the Iran's and its allies' influences. In this setting, these two camps saw Iraq and Lebanon as instruments to increase their leverage vis-à-vis each other. [230] This regional bipolarity demonstrates that the regional leverage of non-Arab regional powers, Iran, and Israel, increased in the post-2003 region.

Under these circumstances, as another non-Arab regional power, Turkey initially sought to maintain its relations with both camps in the '*New Cold War'* of the region. Turkey did not commit itself directly to these opposing camps, instead, it had an opportunity to play a mediator role which Bank and Karadag called it as

[227] Morten Valbjorn and Andre Bank (2012), "The New Cold War: rediscovering the Arab dimension of Middle East regional politics", p.5

[228] Condoleezza Rice, *Special Briefing on Travel to the Middle East and Europe*, U.S. Department of State Archive, July 21, 2006, https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/69331.htm (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[229] Morten Valbjorn and Andre Bank (2012), "The New Cold War: rediscovering the Arab dimension of Middle East regional politics",6, 18.

[230] Ibid, 183.

"*Ankara Moment*". [231] As it will be explained below, even though Turkey shared concerns of Syria and Iran regarding the US military presence in the region, it did not become the part of their axis and preferred not to be stuck in the regional bipolarity. [232] In accordance with the foreign policy behavior patterns of regional powers, it tried to increase its *soft power capabilities* and *mediation activities* in the region. For instance, with its relatively neutral position in the inter-Arab conflict, Turkey played a mediating role in peace talks between Syria and Israel throughout 2008 until the outbreak of Gaza war. [233] However, especially after the Gaza war, Turkey's criticisms toward Israel increased and the relations between two countries deteriorated which led to questions regarding Turkey's position above the regional cleavages. [234]

Having overviewed general characteristics of the regional politics in the post-2003 Middle East, it is significant to analyze the regional cooperation areas of Turkey and Iran derived from their common threats and regional positions.

### 4.2. The Regional Reasons for Turkey's Increasing Cooperation with Iran

Despite their regional competition, as a regional power, Turkey's primary foreign policy concerns differed from its Arab neighbors and pushed it to increase its regional collaboration with Iran in the new regional security interdependencies. In accordance with the hypotheses about regional powers and RSCs in the theory section, we can argue that Turkey increased its cooperation with Iran during this period due to the following propositions:

[231] Bank and Karadag, "Before the Arab Revolts and After", 114.

[232] Altunışık, "Explaining the Transformation of Turkish-Syrian Relations: A Regionalist Approach", 184

[233] André Bank and Roy Karadag. "The 'Ankara Moment': the politics of Turkey's regional power in the Middle East, 2007–11", *Third World Quarterly* 34, no.2 (2013): 300.

[234] Altunışık, "Explaining the Transformation of Turkish-Syrian Relations", 184.

1. The Turkish foreign policy in the post-Iraq war has been to a great extent shaped by the threats and challenges coming from its southern periphery. For increasing its power in the region, Turkey had to protect its national interests against the increasing empowerment of the Iraqi Kurds in northern Iraq and the PKK's territorial use of northern Iraq. Similarly, Iran shared similar concerns about PJAK (the Party of Free Life of Kurdistan), Iranian version of PKK, and responded Turkey's cooperation in a positive way. Hence, they increased their cooperation against common threats.

2. The US military presence and its acting as a regional actor increased concerns of both Turkey and Iran. As regional powers, both Turkey and Iran sought to increase their regional autonomy vis-à-vis the US long-term military presence in the region. Furthermore, Turkey's relations with the US deteriorated due to the issues-explained below- during the Iraq war and Turkey could not get sufficient US support against the PKK threat. Similarly, Iran was already in target list of the Bush administration and was threatened by the US military existence in the region. Due to their escalating threat perceptions, they increased their cooperation with each other in the region.

After summarizing the above *local security externalities* that increased Turkey-Iran cooperation during this period, we can examine these externalities in detail:

### 4.2.1. The Rise of Kurdish Separatism

*H.3. Due to their power constraints, regional powers may cooperate with each other against common threats that affect their national security.*

In the post-2003 Middle Eastern Security Complex, the Turkish government were mainly concerned about the territorial integrity of Iraq and the rise of Kurdish power in the Northern Iraq. As the regionalist perspective argues, the

geographical proximity and neighborhood effect increased the extent of threats for Turkey's national security. Similarly, as the border country, Iran was also concerned about a new organization of Iranian Kurds, PJAK, which had close links with PKK. Hence, having left aside their regional competition, two regional powers started to increase their cooperation against common threats on their borders.

It should be noted that the rise of Kurdish autonomy in the Northern Iraq after the 1991 Gulf War has been one of the primary concerns of the previous Turkish governments. [235] In this sense, the regional landscape of the post-1991 Middle East pushed Turkey to cooperate with Iran and Syria against Iraqi Kurds and to hold ad hoc series of conferences in 1992 to avoid the establishment of Kurdish state in Northern Iraq. [236] Furthermore, during the same period, the regional concerns allowed Turkey and Iran to cooperate against illegal border movements through bilateral agreements in 1993.[237] These regional collaborations could continue until 1995 when Turkey and Iran encountered with each other due to their support to opposing factions in the Iraqi Kurdish civil war. [238]

[235] In the Northern Iraq, the Kurdish groups have gradually increased their autonomy since the 1991 Gulf war which started with the emergence of the 'safe havens' and the 'no-fly zone'. Given that Kurds are the largest ethnic group without a state in the Middle East and live in the borders between Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, this development was a critical development for the regional states that have hosted them. Aylin Ünver Noi, "The Arab Spring, Its Effects on the Kurds, and the Approaches of Turkey, Iran, Syria, and Iraq on the Kurdish Issue", *Middle East Review of International Relations* 16, No.2, (June 2012):15. Michael Eppel, "Kurdish Politics and the Shaping of Post-Saddam Iraq", in *Post-Saddam Iraq: New Realities, Old Identities and Changing Patterns*, eds. Amnon Cohen and Noga Efrati (East Sussex: Sussex Academic Press, 2011),125.

[236] Gunter, "Turkey and Iran Face off in Kurdistan", 35

[237] Noi, "The Arab Spring, Its Effects on the Kurds, and the Approaches of Turkey, Iran, Syria, and Iraq on the Kurdish Issue", 19.

[238] Turkey supported Barzani's KDP for getting rid of PKK and maintaining Iraqi-Turkish oil pipeline active, Iran sought to support the PUK with the aim of increasing its influence in Iraq and balancing the power of Turkey and the US on its western borders. When the civil war broke out between KDP and PUK in May 1994, these two countries took sides with opposing parties.

However, the removal of the Saddam regime during the 2003 Iraq war increased the maneuver of the Iraqi Kurds and became a more serious concern for Turkey and Iran. Throughout and aftermath of the Iraq war, the US supported the Kurds against the Arabs, and the Shia against the Sunnis and relied on the Shia and Kurds while constituting Iraqi security forces during the war. [239] In this sense, the sectarian-ethnic balance of power has tilted towards both Shiite and Kurdish groups at the expense of the Sunni-Arab minority. These new power dynamics gave an opportunity to the Iraqi Kurds to realize their nationalistic ideals in the Northern Iraq, even though it has been challenging and tough journey given the regional and international dynamics.

It can be said that from 2003, Kurds' goal to empower Kurdish autonomy in Iraq came to reality and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has emerged as a de jure autonomous region in Iraq which was officially accepted by the Iraqi constitution in 2005. [240] Before the Iraq War, Turkey repeatedly declared that establishment of Kurdish state in the Northern Iraq would be its 'red line' and a reason for intervention into the Northern Iraq. [241] Given the 'securitized' character of the Kurdish issue for traditional Turkish foreign policy making, any possibility of Kurdish independence has been perceived as a threat to territorial

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Gunter, "Turkey and Iran Face off in Kurdistan", p.35 Ünver Noi, 19. Gunter, "Turkey and Iran Face off in Kurdistan", p.33

[239] Hinnebusch, "The American Invasion of Iraq", 19.

[240] Michael Eppel, "Kurdish Politics and the Shaping of Post-Saddam Iraq", in *Post-Saddam Iraq: New Realities, Old Identities and Changing Patterns*, eds. Amnon Cohen and Noga Efrati (East Sussex: Sussex Academic Press, 2011),125.

[241] "Kürt devleti savaş nedeni", *Hürriyet*, July 31, 2002, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/kurt-devleti-savas-nedeni-88210 (accessed on 26 March 2020).

integrity of Turkey.[242] Under these circumstances, KRG's main Kurdish parties, Jalal Talabani's PUK and Masood Barzani's KDP emphasized their commitment to be part of Iraq to mollify regional concerns. [243] However, the KRG has remained a focal center of political and cultural events of Kurdish groups from Turkey, Iran and Syria which has made Turkey's concerns intact.

More importantly, given the power-vacuum in the region, the PKK found more opportunity to launch operations against Turkey from the Northern Iraq. [244] On September 2, 2004, the PKK/Kongra-Gel abandoned its unilateral ceasefire it had announced in 2000 and declared that Turkish government did not make any effort to improve Kurdish rights. [245] Within the context of their 'second insurgency', more than 2000 PKK members were claimed to infiltrate into

[242] Since the establishment of Turkish Republic, the existence of the Kurdish population, that had to live in Turkey, Iran and two new Arab states, Syria and Iraq following the First World War I, has constituted a problem for new national identity of Turkey. The nationalist demands of Kurdish groups intensified with the establishment of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, the PKK, which started its armed struggle in 1984. The history of Turkish Republic has been full of Kurdish uprisings which started with the Shaykh Said Rebellion of 1925 and continued during the 1930s. Kurdish nationalist movement showed itself during the 1960s and mid-1970s with publication of Kurdish-language journals and newspapers. Following the Gulf War in 1991, de facto autonomy of Kurds in the Northern Iraq and the mass flow of Kurdish refugees from Iraq into Turkey further challenged Turkey's struggle with the PKK. Together with its securitized state policies toward Kurds during this period, these consequences of the Gulf War led to the intensification of the suicide bombing attacks of the PKK in the 1990s, which made it the top priority of the Turkish foreign policy makers. Even though Turkish military had an advantageous position in its struggle against the PKK by 1999 following its arrest of the PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan and the PKK's ceasefire declaration, the death toll among Turkish and Kurdish had already reached approximately 35,000. Noi, "The Arab Spring", 16. Shifrinson, "The Kurds and Regional Security",2. Pınar Tank, "Analysis: The effects of Iraq War on the Kurdish Issue in Turkey", *Conflict, Security&Development* 5, No.1 (2005): 70.

[243] "Turkey, Iraqi Kurds and Iran: The Battle for Northern Iraq", *The Economist*, March 20, 2003, https://www.economist.com/special-report/2003/03/20/the-battle-for-northern-iraq (accessed on 25 March 2020). Bayram Sinkaya, "The Kurdish question in Iran and its effects on Iran-Turkey relations" *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no. 5 (2018): 852.

[244]Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shifrinson, "The Kurds and regional security: An evaluation of developments since the Iraq war", Crown *Center for Middle East Studies. Middle East Brief* 14 (2006): 3.

[245] Meliha Benli Altunışık, "Turkey's Iraq Policy: the war and beyond", *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 14, No.2 (2006): 192.

Turkey from mountainside of the Northern Iraq in 2004. [246] During the same year, the armed conflict between the Turkish security forces and the PKK terrorists escalated in the eastern and south-eastern parts of Turkey. [247]

As one of the most provoking terrorist attacks of the PKK during this period, on October 21, 2007, the PKK attacks from the Northern Iraq against the Turkish Commando Brigade in Hakkari, Dağlıca killed 12 Turkish soldiers. It has caused several mass protests asking Turkish military action against PKK and led the Turkish parliament's authorization of Turkish military's cross-border operation in the Northern Iraq. [248] However, this cross-border operation did not stop subsequent PKK attacks that killed 17 Turkish soldiers in Semdinli in 2008 and perpetrated its attacks in Diyarbakır that killed one civilian and in İstanbul-Gungören that killed 18 civilians. [249]

During this period, the PKK also started to target civilians in the Western cities of Turkey, Kuşadası minibus bombing in 2005, PKK bomb attacks in Marmaris and Antalya in 2006 and bomb attack at a shopping center in Ankara in 2007 are

[246] "Kongra-Gel, Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress (KADEK) and Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), *Global Security*, https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/pkk.htm (accessed on 25 March 2020).

[247] "PKK'nın Ateşkes Bozduğunu Açıkladıktan Sonra Çıkan Çatışmalar", *CNN Türk*, June 11, 2004, https://www.cnnturk.com/2004/turkiye/06/11/pkk.8217.nin.ateskes.bozdugunu.acikladiktan.sonra.cikan.catismalar/12740.0/index.html (accessed on 25 March 2020).

[248] Sumedha Senanayake, "Iraq: Attacks on Turkish forces increase pressures to act against PKK", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, October 25, 2007, https://www.refworld.org/docid/4728682da.html (accessed on 13 October 2019).

[249] "Newsletter: 4/2008- Pkk Terrorist Attacks Continue Unabated", *Turkish Embassy in Bratislava*, October 13, 2008, http://bratislava.emb.mfa.gov.tr/Mission/ShowAnnouncement/115668 (accessed on 10 October 2019).

significant indicators of PKK's this strategy change. [250] Similarly, a bomb attack against military service car in front of a school caused the death of at least five students in Diyarbakır in 2008. [251] Due to all these reasons, increasing empowerment of the Iraqi Kurds in Northern Iraq and the PKK's use of northern Iraq for its activities were the most significant concerns of Turkish foreign policy elites after the 2003 Iraq war. In this sense, Iran's support to Turkey's struggle on PKK terrorism was invaluable for Turkey's national interests in the region.

Similar to Turkey's concerns in the post-2003 regional context, Iran has been concerned about transnational threats that would weaken Iran's internal stability, namely Sunni radicalism and ethnic secessionism.[252] Iran has had tense relations with its Kurdish population located in the north-western provinces and any possibility of creation of Kurdish state would create a threat for Iran's own national territorial integrity. [253] Furthermore, Iraq's territorial integrity and stability would diminish the spillover effect of the Iraq's civil war and cease the military presence of the US in the region.[254] The then-Iranian President

[250] "PKK'nın 14 yıl önceki Kuşadası Saldırısında Hayatlarını Kaybeden Üç Genç Şehit Sayıldı", *Haber Türk*, February 17, 2019, https://www.haberturk.com/aydin-haberleri/66918631-pkknin-14-yil-onceki-kusadasi-saldirisinda-hayatlarini-kaybeden-3-genc-sivil-sehit-sayildi (accessed on 10 October 2019). Görkem Barındık," Türkiye'de yaşanan terör olayları:. 1993-2018", *Indigo*, January 8, 2018, https://indigodergisi.com/2018/01/turkiye-teror-olaylari-1993-2018/ (accessed on 10 October 2019). "Newsletter: 4/2008- Pkk Terrorist Attacks Continue Unabated".

[251]"Timeline: PKK attacks in Turkey", *Aljazeera*, October 20, 2011, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/europe/2011/10/201110191644415202 46.html (accessed on 10 October 2019).

[252] Altunışık, "Explaining the Transformation of Turkish-Syrian Relations: A Regionalist Approach", in *Turkey-Syria Relations: Between Enmity and Amity*, eds. Raymond Hinnebusch and Özlem Tür (New York: Routledge, 2013):183. Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Iran's International Posture after the Fall of Baghdad", *Middle East Journal* 58, no.2 (2004): 187.

[253] Ray Takeyh, "Iran's New Iraq", *Middle East Journal* 62, No.1 (2008): 27.

[254]Iran was still in the list of targets of the Bush administration and existence of approximately 150,000 US troops in Iraq and wide-ranging US deployments – containing its Fifth Fleet- in Persian Gulf states such as Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar continued to threaten its national security. Ray Thakey, "Iran's New Iraq", *Middle East Journal*, 62, No.1 (2008):23.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad indicated, "*The more this government [Iraq] is successful in establishing security, the weaker the foreigners' reasons and pretext will be to continue their occupation in Iraq*." [255]

The Qandil Mountain was now a safe haven for the terrorist activities of the PKK that constituted a threat not only for Turkey but also for Iran since 2004. [256] In 2003, as a branch of the PKK, the PJAK (The Party of Free Life of Kurdistan) was established in Iran to struggle against the Iranian government for the sake of self-determination for Iranian Kurds and has increasingly been a threat for the Iranian government since then. [257] With approximately 3000 combatants, the PJAK has used same bases in the Qandil mountains and started a conflict with the Iranian security forces in 2004.[258] During three-week long Kurdish uprising in 2005 and the clash between the PJAK and Iran security forces in North-West Iran, it is argued that approximately 100 Iranian security forces were killed by PJAK.[259] For the Iranian government, the PJAK was systematically funded by the Bush administration that sought to destabilize Iran.[260]

[255] Takeyh, "Iran's New Iraq", 28.

[256] Bayram Sinkaya, "Rationalization of Turkey-Iran Relations: Prospects and Limits", *Insight Turkey* 14, no.2 (2012): 143.

[257] James Brandon, "Iran's Kurdish Threat: PJAK", *Terrorism Monitor* 4, No.12 (2006): 1.

[258] "Iranian troops attack Kurdish PJAK rebel bases in Iraq", *BBC*, July 18, 2011, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14189313 (accessed on 26 March 2020).

[259] "Seven terrorists arrested in Iran", *Hürriyet*, April 11, 2006, https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/seven-terrorists-arrested-in-iran-4237929 (accessed on 25 March 2020).

[260] Thomas Renard, "PJAK in Northern Iraq: Tangled Interests and Proxy Wars", Terrorism Monitor 6, No.10 ( 2008): 1.

Similarly, PJAK killed 24 Iranian military members in 2006 as a response to alleged death of 10 Kurds in Maku by Iranian security forces. [261] It can be also said that the PJAK militants have targeted not only security forces but also "government buildings and critical infrastructure, including energy pipeline". [262]

The intensive clashes between PJAK and Iranian security forces have continued until the ceasefire declaration of the PJAK in July 2011. [263] Even though Iran government has demanded total 'withdrawal' of the PJAK forces from the border of the country, it can be said that the frequency and intensity of their clash has been reduced since then. [264]

Given the rise of the terrorist attack of the PKK and PJAK in the region due to the power vacuum in Iraq, the Iranian government shared Turkey's concerns about Iraq's territorial integrity and the US military presence in the region. The then-Foreign Minister of Iran, Kamal Kharrazi stated that "*Iran and Turkey, as two of the major states share common concerns [about Iraq]. We have common interests about the future of the region*". [265] Iran's perspective toward PJAK and PKK was interpreted as follows:

[261] "Tehran faces growing Kurdish opposition", *The Washington Times*, April 3, 2006, https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2006/apr/3/20060403-125601-8453r/ (accessed on 1 November 2019).

[262] Sinkaya, "The Kurdish question in Iran and its effects on Iran-Turkey relations", 844.

[263] Ibid, 844.

[264] "Iran rejects PJAK's ceasefire, demands withdrawal", *Reuters*, September 5, 2011 https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-iran-pjak-ceasefire/iran-rejects-pjaks-ceasefire-demands-withdrawal-idUKTRE7841MM20110905 (accessed on 9 October 2019).

[265] "Türk-İran görüşmesi yararlı", *Hürriyet*, April 6, 2003, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/turk-iran-gorusmesi-yararli-138477 (accessed on 1 October 2019).

> Iran handles its policy against the US efforts to isolate Iran and the Kurdish issue in the Northern Iraq in the same framework. Tehran argues that the US supports PJAK. Some Iranian officials believe that PKK has become a power used by everyone in the recent years. Some Iranian officials think that PKK is being used by the United States to create a turmoil in the region.[266]

Thus, it can be said that despite the Iran's threat for Turkey's interests in the 1990s given its logistic support to PKK, the 2000s regional conjuncture and their common threats such as the US military presence in the region and the emergence of PJAK threat for Iran made the Iranian regime collaborate with Turkey in terms of Kurdish separatism. The threats and challenges coming from the regional reality pushed these regional powers to cooperate and balance against common threats. As it will explained below, Turkish officials were not comfortable to rely solely on the US and its security umbrella for its national interests in the region; instead, they needed to find a regional partner that shared similar concerns with Turkey, and it was none other than Iran.

### 4.2.2. Turkey's Deteriorated Relations with the US in the post-2003 Middle East: The Quest for a Regional Balancer

> *H.4. When great powers tend to act as regional actors in a regional security complex, the relations between regional powers are prone to be cooperative due to their will to increase regional autonomy and thus their weight as regional powers.*

Turkey's worsening relations with the US in the new regional context was also another reason that made the Turkish government maintain closer relations with the regional countries that perceived threatened by the Iraq war. As it was explained above, Turkey was negatively influenced by the US invasion of Iraq. Apart from its adverse regional consequences, the US-Turkey relations started to deteriorate during this period because of the Turkish Parliament's rejecting the US troop proposal on March 1, 2003. After long discussions, the Turkish

[266] "İran'ın PKK ve PJAK'a bakışı", *BBC Turkish*, August 17, 2006, http://www.bbc.co.uk/turkish/news/story/2006/08/060817_iran_pjak.shtml (accessed on 1 October 2019).

parliament rejected the US proposal, which would locate more than 60,000 US troops within the Turkish soil and send off Turkish troops into Iraq. It created a crisis between Turkey-US and diminished Turkey's leverage during the war.[267]

Turkish Parliament's rejection of the March 1 Motion was a critical divergence given the close alliance between Turkey and the US in the post-Cold War period. It can be said that this event has decreased the mutual trust between two countries. During this period, the critical voices from the US government toward Turkey have arisen, for instance the US deputy defense secretary Paul D. Wolfowitz argued that both the Turkish government and military had a critical mistake '*by not opening its doors to the American military during the Iraq war*' and said that Turkey should return from the mistake by thinking '*how we [Turkey] can be as helpful as possible to the Americans*'. [268] The Turkish government refused the US criticisms of Wolfowitz and the then Prime Minister of Turkey (PM) Erdoğan said that "*Turkey, from the beginning, never made any mistake, and has taken all the necessary steps in all sincerity*.". [269]

During the war, the Turkish government's trust toward the US further diminished due to the humiliating capture of the Turkish Special Forces members by the US military personnel in Northern Iraq, known as the Sulaymaniyah event. It is also known as the Hood event which took place on July 4, 2003 in the city of Sulaymaniyah in the Northern Iraq. The US military personnel captured 11 Turkish military members by throwing a hood over their heads. After Turkey's protests to the US, they released the Turkish soldiers

[267] "Turkey rejects US troop proposal", *CNN International*, March 2, 2003, http://edition.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/meast/03/01/sprj.irq.main/, (accessed on 10 September 2018). Altunışık, "Turkey's Iraq Policy", 190.

[268] Marc Lacey, "Turks reject US criticism of opposition to Iraq", The New York Times, May 7, 2003, https://www.nytimes.com/2003/05/07/international/worldspecial/turks-reject-us-criticism-of-opposition-to-iraq.html (accessed on 30 March 2020).

[269] Lacey, "Turks reject US criticism of opposition to Iraq".

approximately sixty hours later. Later, the common Turkish-US investigation commission reached a decision to work more meticulously together in Iraq to avoid experiencing such an upsetting affair again.[270] However, this symbolic event demonstrated the insecure nature of Turkey-US relations in the new regional context.

Turkey's post-2003 relations with the US in the region confronted full of uncertainties and mutual suspicions. One of the primary disagreements between the US and Turkey was based on their perceptions toward the Kurds in Iraq. The US' support to the Kurds of Iraq which started during the Gulf War of 1990-91 by creating "safe havens" in north of Iraq had lasted during the 2003 Iraq War. [271] As it was explained above, Turkey's main concerns about the Iraq were related with the Kurdish issue and the collaboration between Iraqi Kurds and the US caused anxiety among Turkish foreign policy elites. [272] Furthermore, the inability or the reluctance of the US to deal with the PKK in the Northern Iraq made Turkish officials feel uncertain and unconfident about the future of Iraq and Turkey's future position in the region. [273] According to Cagaptay, in the wake of the Iraq War, the Turkish officials would welcome '*even symbolic US action against the PKK*'. As it will be seen below, in contrast to the US's ambiguous support to Turkey against the PKK and territorial integrity of Iraq, Iran demonstrated its support for Turkey in its struggle against the PKK. [274]

[270] Jeffrey Donovan, "US /Turkey: Ties Hit New Low After Raid On Turkish Forces", RFERL, July 7, 2003, https://www.rferl.org/a/1103730.html (accessed on 30 March 2020).

[271] Ramazan Gözen, "Causes and Consequences of Turkey's Out-of-War Position in the Iraq War of 2003", *The Turkish Yearbook* 36, (2005): 90.

[272] Altunışık, "Turkey's Iraq Policy", 190.

[273]See, Altunışık, "Turkey's Iraq Policy", 190 Henry J.Barkey, "Turkey and Iraq: The Making of a Partnership", *Turkish Studies* 12, No.4 (2011): 3.

[274] Soner Cagaptay, "Where Goes the US-Turkey Relationship?", *Middle East Quarterly* 11, No.4 (2011).

During this period, the Northern Iraq was not the only issue that Turkey and the United fell apart from each other. The US administration's '*axis of evil*' policy and threat perceptions toward Turkey's immediate neighbors, Iran, and Syria, have created concern for Turkish political leaders. The prospective US intervention to Iran or Syria would further destabilize the region and would bring further anarchy and chaos in Turkish borders. [275] According to Turkish government, the peace process in the Middle East cannot be realized by excluding Iran and Syria, instead diplomatic process and communication with these regimes are significant for their transformation into democratic regimes.[276] Furthermore, Turkey has shared common security concerns with Iran and Syria about the rise of Kurdish nationalism, hence their isolation would be contradictory to Turkey's interests. [277]

Even though the bilateral crisis between Turkey and the US did not last for a long time, the Turkish government has approached the US' foreign policy strategies in the Middle East more cautiously like the most countries in the world.[278] During this period, Turkish political leaders began to criticize the US' policies in the Middle East when they did not match its own policies in the region. Furthermore, they started to question the superiority of the US in the global scale and the unipolar international system. In this direction, they began to emphasize that the solutions of the international problems cannot lie in one center, hence Turkey began to undertake roles in the international organizations

[275] Tarik Oğuzlu, "Middle Easternization of Turkey's Foreign Policy: Does Turkey Dissociate from the West?", *Turkish Studies* 9, no. 1 (2008): 8.

[276] Ibid, 9.

[277] Ibid, 9.

[278] Şaban Kardaş, "2000'li Yıllarda Türk-Amerikan İlişkileri" in *Türkiye'de Dış Politika* ed.İbrahim Kalın (İstanbul, Meydan Yayıncılık, 2011), 28.

such as the UNSC, G-20, Islamic Conference Organization, and the European Council. [279]

Turkey's deteriorated relations with the US in the post-Iraq Middle East was highly appreciated by Iran. As one of the regional powers, Iran has been uncomfortable about close alliance between the US and Turkey, which has been in favor of Turkey's regional power. Furthermore, even though Iran increased its leverage in the region because of the removal of the Saddam regime and empowerment of the Shiites in Iraq, the US military existence in the region was a significant challenge for the Iranian regime. Iran was on the target list of the Bush government and was accused of '*sponsoring terror [and] threatening American and our [American] friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction*'. [280] Hence, Iran needed Turkey's close neighborhood under the US containment of Iraq and Afghanistan. It sought to take the advantage of a tension within the Turkish-US relations after the Turkey's refusal to allow the US to use its soils for the Iraq invasion. It was one of the regional reasons that Iran accelerated its assistance to Turkey against the PKK threat and won Turkey's collaboration in the region.[281]

In the post-2003 regional context, Turkey's relations with Israel, another regional power, began to shatter due to their different threat perceptions. While Turkey's primary concerns were the possibility of the Kurdish independence in the Northern Iraq and the escalation of PKK attacks, Israel was concerned about

[279] Kardaş, "2000'li Yıllarda Türk-Amerikan İlişkileri", 28.

[280] "Text of President Bush's 2002 State of the Union Address", *The Washington Post*, January 29, 2002, https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/onpolitics/transcripts/sou012902.htm (Accessed September 10, 2019).

[281] Soner Cagaptay, "Arab Spring heats up Kurdish issue", *Jane's Islamic Affairs Analyst*, March 2012

the empowerment of Iran and its proxy terrorist groups, Hezbollah and Hamas. [282]

It has been even claimed that Israel has been in favor of establishment of secular Kurdish government in the region which would reduce its own exclusion in the region and increase its defense ability vis-à-vis the weapons of mass destruction of Iran. [283] Furthermore, the claims regarding Israel's training of Kurdish Peshmerga in Northern Iraq further diminished Turkey's trust toward Israel. [284]

In the meanwhile, the Turkish government's pro-Palestinian stance has dramatically increased since the Gaza War on December 27, 2008. Even though Turkey had continued to mediate between Israel and Syria throughout 2008, Israel's attacks on Gaza provoked reactions of Turkish leaders which peaked up during the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2009 within which Erdoğan showed his opposition to Israel's policies. [285] Furthermore, Turkey reduced the military cooperation level with Israel by taking Israel out from its air force drill, Anatolian Eagle, which had been realized with Israel, NATO, and the US since the mid-1990s. [286] Apart from its domestic repercussions, the discourse battle between Turkey and Israel were welcomed by Iranian policy makers who

[282] Tarık Oğuzlu, "The Changing Dynamics of Turkish-Israel Relations: A Structuralist Realist Account", *Mediterranean Politics* 15, No.2 (2010): 281.

[283] Banu Eligür, "Crisis in Turkish-Israeli Relationship (December 2008- June 2011): From Partnership to Enmity", *Middle Eastern Studies* 48, No.3 (2012): 431. Oğuzlu, "The Changing Dynamics of Turkish-Israel Relations", 281.

[284] Eligür, "Crisis in Turkish-Israeli Relationship", 431.

[285] Bank and Karadag, "The 'Ankara Moment'", 297.

[286] Soner Çagaptay, "Is Turkey Leaving the West?: An Islamist Foreign Policy Puts Ankara at Odds with its Former Allies", *Foreign Affairs,* October 26, 2009, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/turkey/2009-10-26/turkey-leaving-west (accessed on 10 May 2020).

consistently appreciated Turkey's position during the Gaza war and expressed their content to Turkey's convergence with the Muslim world. [287]

The tension between Turkey and Israel was further increased following to the "Mavi Marmara (or Flotilla) crisis" on May 31, 2010 which refers to Israeli raid on the humanitarian flotilla headed for Gaza. Turkish government denounced Israel for its "state terrorism" and diplomatic relations between two countries fell to the lowest point in their history. [288] Erdoğan's below statement reflects the deterioration of their relations:

> Israel has been destroying her defense shields one by one, losing one by one her alliance points, isolating herself. The Israeli administration, generating grudges and hatred in the Middle East, is setting dynamite off in regional peace, as an instability is spreading, Pandora's Box comes out like iodine.[289]

This tension between Turkey and Israel and Turkey's support to Palestinians were also highly welcomed by the Iranian authorities. In October 2009 meeting, soon after the Davos Summit, Iran's Supreme Leader Khamenei complimented Turkey's stance on the Palestinian issue and argued that it became more powerful in the Muslim world. [290] Furthermore, in 2011, Khamenei told the

[287] Bayram Sinkaya, "Başbakan Erdoğan'ın Tahran Ziyaretinin Sonuçları ve Türkiye-İran İlişkilerinin Sınırları", *Ortadoğu Analiz* 1, No.11 (2009):21.

[288] Some scholars argue that Turkey-Israel relations are generally different from the leaders' public discourses which are mostly based on populism. Ziya Öniş, "Multiple Faces of the 'New' Turkish Foreign Policy: Underlying Dynamics and a Critique", *Insight Turkey* 13, No.1 (2011):52. William Hale, "Turkey and the Middle East in the 'New Era'", *Insight Turkey* 11, No.3 (2009): 150.

[289] Recep Tayyip Erdogan, "Full Text of Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Speech on Israel's Attack on Aid Flotilla", *Dissident Voice*, June 2, 2010, https://dissidentvoice.org/2010/06/full-text-of-recep-tayyip-erdogans-speech-on-israels-attack-on-aid-flotilla/ (accessed on 15 October 2019).

[290] Larrabee and Nader, *Turkish-Iranian Relations in a Changing Middle East*, 15.

then-President Gül[291] that Turkey changed its position in the Muslim world in a positive way; its independent foreign policy attitude against the West, its reaction to the Zionist regime and its supportive stance toward the Palestinian people made Turkey closer to the Islamic Ummah. [292] Hence, any division between Turkey and the Western positions were perceived by the Iranian regime as Turkey's returning to the Muslim world by reconsidering its commitment to the Western intentions. [293] More importantly, as a regional power, Iran was not willing to see unproblematic relations between other regional powers or regional-great power cooperation in the region which would be threatening to its regional status.

Under these new regional circumstances, in contrast to tense relations with the US and Israel, Turkey's convergence of interests with Iran, which was basically based on the common concerns about the rise of Kurdish separatism, contributed to Turkey's increasing cooperation with Iran. In a highly unstable and conflict-driven region, the US' acting as a regional power and its lack of sufficient support to Turkey against the PKK issue made Turkey to seek for a regional partner. Hence, maintaining new ties with its border neighbor, Iran, was both "soft balancing" against the US and Israel as well guaranteeing its security in the region.[294] Accordingly, as it will be exemplified below, the improvement of the relations between Turkey and Iran have been to a great extent influenced by the

[291] Abdullah Gül was the 11th President of Turkey from 2007 to 2014.

[292] B Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, 18. "Leader meets with Turkish President",Khmanei.ir , February 14, 2011, http://english.khamenei.ir/news/1418/Leader-Meets-with-Turkish-President (accessed on 25 March 2020).

[293] Sinkaya, "Rationalization of Turkey-Iran Relations", 147-48.

[294] Robert Pape describes soft balancing against the US as "actions do not directly challenge US military preponderance but that use nonmilitary tools to delay, frustrate, and undermine aggressive unilateral US military policies". Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States", 10. T.V. Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy", *International Security* 30, No.1 (2005).

new regional context and the distribution of power in the region during this period.

### 4.3. The Consequence of the *Local Security Externalities*: Turkey's Rising Cooperation with Iran

As Buzan and Wæver argued, "*many threats travel more easily over short distances than over long ones. The impact of geographical proximity on security interaction is strongest and most obvious in the military, political, societal, and environmental sectors*".[295] Turkey-Iran cooperation during this period affirms this premise. Given the compelling regional dynamics in the post-2003 Middle East, the Turkish government increased its regional and bilateral collaboration with Iran as one of its oldest and closest neighbors in the region. Accordingly, Turkey's security, diplomatic and economic relations with Iran were significantly improved during this period. Erdoğan's statement demonstrates the Turkish foreign policy attitude toward Iran during this period:

> Our friendly relations [with Iran] are satisfyingly improving based on the principles of non-interference and good neighborhood. Turkey proposes for the peace of region and the world: 'Be friendly to your neighbors'…And we have built our 7-year ruling period on making friends with both our neighbors and the external world. We have been successful about this; we have been following this [principle] determinedly for 7 years.[296]

#### 4.3.1. The Increasing Security Collaboration

As the most compelling regional reason, the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the subsequent empowerment of the Kurdish groups in the Northern Iraq have brought the security concerns of two countries together. Accordingly, both

[295] Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers*, 45-46.

[296] "Komşularınla dost ol", *Sabah*, October 28, 2009, https://www.sabah.com.tr/siyaset/2009/10/28/komsularinla_dost_ol (accessed on 5 October 2019).

Turkey and Iran have been suffering from the Kurdish separatism in their own countries and emergence of independent Kurdish state in the Northern Iraq have increased their threat perceptions. Hence, in the aftermath of the Iraq war, both countries have agreed on supporting the Iraq's territorial integrity and military collaboration against the Kurdish separatism in the region. As the PKK found more opportunity to deploy and train its militants in the Qandil Mountains due to the vacuum of the authority in the Northern Iraq, Iran's supportive military operations against the PKK became highly important for Turkey's strategic interests.[297]

When it comes to the concrete steps of Iran and Turkey for security cooperation during this period, it started with Erdoğan's visit to Tehran in July 2004 and two countries agreed on a security protocol and emphasized their struggle against the PKK for the sake of regional security. [298] During this visit, the Iranian government recognized KADEK and Kongra-Gel as part of the PKK and defined them as terrorist organizations. It was a significant political gain for the Turkish government given the Iran's military support to PKK members in the 1990s due to its strategic interests.[299]

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[297] "PKK", *Republic of Turkey: Minister of Foreign Affairs*, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/pkk.tr.mfa (Accessed September 26 2018). Namık Durukan, "İran'dan KADEK'e büyük operasyon", *Millliyet*, July 30, 2003, http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2003/06/30/dunya/adun.html, (Accessed September 26 2018).
İnat, Aslan and Duran, *Dış Politika: AK Parti'nin 15. Yılı*, 246.

[298] Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, 20.

[299] In return, Turkey adopted clearer stance against People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran. See "Tahran'dan PKK Garantisi", *Milliyet*, July 29,2004, http://www.milliyet.com.tr/amp/siyaset/tahrandan-pkk-garantisi-340412 (accessed on 1 October 2019), "Tahran PKK'yı Terör Örgütü olarak kabul etti", *Milliyet*, July 30, 2004, http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr/%C4%B0ran%20Atom%20Enerjisi%20Kurumu%20Ba%C5%9Fkan%C4%B1/ (accessed on 26 September 2018) Sami Kohen, "Kim daha kazançlı?", *Milliyet*, July 31, 2004 , http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr/ (accessed on 19 December 2017)

During the 12th session of the Turkey-Iran High Security Commission in April 2008, Turkish and Iranian officials repeated their cooperation against terrorism and signed an agreement to improve their cooperation about border security, intelligence exchange and standing up against organized crime. [300] Prior to the meeting, Iran's deputy interior minister in charge of security, Abbas Mohtaj said that Iranian government regarded the PKK and PJAK a '*single terrorist organization under two different names*.' [301] More importantly, this collaboration between two countries against the PKK and PJAK terrorist organizations was also publicly confirmed by the Chief of General Staff, İlker Başbuğ who said that "*We are sharing intelligence with Iran, we are talking, we are coordinating. When they start an operation, we do, too*". [302] This statement is significant since this was the first time that a Turkish military elite confirmed about the Turkish-Iranian military cooperation against the Kurds.[303]

Furthermore, two countries have continued to make security cooperation in their borders. For instance, in August 2008, they signed a cooperation agreement in fighting drug smuggling, organized crime, and terrorism. According to the agreement, two countries would basically combat against 'organizing supply, preparation, propaganda, and any other activities of various groups, criminals and terrorist organizations which threaten the national security and sovereignty of the other side in their own territories' by sharing information, intelligence and

[300] Daphne McCurdy, "Turkish-Iranian Relations When Opposites Attract", *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 7, No.2, (2008): 98.

[301] Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, 20. Tolga Demiryol, "The Limits to Cooperation Between Rivals: Turkish-Iranian Relations Since 2002", *Ortadoğu Etütleri* 4, no. 2 (2013):122.

[302] "Turkey and Iran Unite to Attack Kurdish Rebels", *The New York Times*, June 6, 2008, https://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/06/world/europe/06kurdish.html (accessed on 26 September 2018).

[303] "Turkey and Iran Unite to Attack Kurdish Rebels", *The New York Times*, June 6, 2008, https://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/06/world/europe/06kurdish.html (accessed on 26 September 2018).

experience to each other. [304] Furthermore, the joint working group consisting of equal numbers of members from Turkey and Iran would inspect the implementation of the agreement and solve the problems arising from the implementation of the agreement. [305]

However, it should be noted that due to their national interests and regional competition, the security cooperation between Turkey and Iran has not been problem-free. To give an example, following the PKK attacks in Dağlıca in October 2007, the then Turkish foreign minister, Ali Babacan, went to Tehran to get Iran's support about a prospective Turkish military intervention into Iraq.[306] However, Iran did not stand behind Turkey's cross-border operations against the PKK bases in the Northern Iraq. Instead, the then Iranian foreign minister, Manouchehr Mottaki stated that there were other options than military action to solve the problem. [307] In this sense, despite their cooperation, Iran would not tolerate extension of Turkey's power beyond its borders, and vice versa. [308] However, their mutual interdependence in the region during this period

[304] "Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Hükümeti ile İran İslam Cumhuriyeti arasında Uyuşturucu Kaçakçılığı, Organize Suçlar ve Terörizmle Mücadelede İşbirliği Anlaşması", *Resmi Gazete*, August 14, 2008, https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2011/05/20110528M1-9-1.pdf (accessed on 29 March 2020).

[305] Ibid.

[306] Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*,20.

[307]"İran sınır ötesine soğuk", Hürriyet, October 30, 2007, https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/iran-sinir-otesine-soguk-7576884. (accessed on 25 March 2020). Following the PKK's attacks that caused high casualty among Turkish civilian in October 2007, Turkish Parliament accepted a resolution for a new cross-border operation in Northern Iraq. However, Turkish government waited for the US approval before taking an action in the Northern Iraq. See McCurdy, "Turkish-Iranian Relations When Opposites Attract", 97-98.

[308] The regional competition between two countries will be analysed in more detail in the next chapter.

restrained their competition. The regional competition between two countries will be more visible in the post-2011 period.

Moreover, even though the leaders of two countries have repeatedly expressed the necessity of the regional cooperation towards the regional problems, these discourses have not turned into a practice. For instance, during his meetings with the Iranian authorities on October 26-28, 2009, Erdoğan emphasized on the importance of the regional cooperation, for him, "*regional problems cannot be solved by external powers given their failure until now… [For this reason] Turkey and Iran play critical roles for regional solidarity*". [309] Likewise, during the same meeting, Khamenei stated that Turkey and Iran should stand shoulder to shoulder in combatting to solve the regional problems. [310] However, despite such an emphasis on regional cooperation between two countries during this meeting, no concrete steps were taken for increasing bilateral security cooperation. Instead, for the regional cooperation, they preferred to address some regional institutions such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Economic Cooperation Organization or D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation. [311]

In this sense, it can be said that the cooperation between Turkey and Iran could not deepen due to their historical regional competition. On the one hand, the Turkish government needed Iran's regional collaboration for its border security and territorial integrity. On the other hand, it was concerned about the excessive rise of Iran's soft and hard power in the region. Hence, despite the convergence

[309] "Başbakan Erdoğan'dan İran'da ekonomik mesajlar", *Son Gelişme* http://www.songelisme.com/basbakan-erdogandan-iranda-ekonomik-mesajlar/ (accessed on 28 September 2018). "Türkiye-İran ticaretini artırma sözü", *BBC News*, October 28, 2009, https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2009/10/091028_turkey_iran ( accessed on 27 September 2018).

[310] Bayram Sinkaya, "Başbakan Erdoğan'ın Tahran Ziyaretinin Sonuçları ve Türkiye-İran İlişkilerinin Sınırları", *Ortadoğu Analiz* 1, no.11 (2009): 21.

[311] Ibid.

of their interests, their regional collaboration has never turned into a long-lasting alliance during this period.

### 4.3.2. Turkey's Support for Iran's Nuclear Program and Active Diplomatic Relations

The regional convergence between two countries reflected itself in increasing their diplomatic dialogue and Turkey's support for Iran's nuclear program for peaceful purposes. In the post-2003 regional context, Iran has become a natural partner for Turkey's fight against the PKK terrorists and preserving Iraq's territorial integrity. Furthermore, for Turkey, regional cooperation with Iran would decrease Turkey's security dependence on the US. In this sense, during this period, Turkey sought to solve Iran-connected security problems by diplomacy and proposing being a mediator between Iran and the West. Any non-diplomatic tools for Iran's nuclear policy would further destabilize the region, which was already conflict-driven and challenging for Turkey's national interests.

Hence, Turkey's regional military cooperation with Iran, the nuclear issue and their active trade relations led dramatic increase of official visits between two countries during this period. The language used by the Turkish officials in these official visits has been considerably cooperative. For instance, during the meeting of Erdoğan and the first vice president of Iran, Muhammad Reza Arif at the International Transporters' Association in May 2003, Erdoğan repeatedly called Arif as a '*Dear Brother*'[312], which provided a more friendly atmosphere for them while undertaking an economic agreement. [313] Erdoğan's below statement reflects this supportive discourse toward Iran:

[312] This address form refers to closeness and affiliation in Turkish culture.

[313] "Çile değil, vuslat kapısı", *Sabah*, May 31, 2003, http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2003/05/31/p03.html (accessed on 26 September 2018).

> As Turkey, we are determined to preserve our peaceful intentions [in the region] as we have done until now…We will pay attention to maintain our bilateral relations with Iran which is our neighbor, friend, and brother…[314]

Furthermore, as one of the indicators of the importance of the regional level for the bilateral relations, the Turkish foreign policy elites expressed Turkey's regional cooperation with Iran in the international meetings they attended. For instance, during his meeting with 30 high-level leaders of US Jewish organizations in 2004, Erdoğan vocalized Turkey's close regional cooperation with Iran and stated that "Their *[Iranians] opinions about terrorism are not different from us. Their sensitivity and concerns are similar [with us]*". [315] In this regard, the main convergence point of two countries was their collaboration against terrorism in the post-2003 region. Turkey's efforts for cooperation with Iran was entitled as Turkey's "*Iran opening*" by the Turkish press during the same year.[316]

Regarding the Iran's nuclear program, the Turkish foreign policy elites continuously emphasized Iran's legal right to produce peaceful nuclear energy within the context of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT).[317] Furthermore, the Turkish government was willingly to play active role of

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[314] "Türkiye-İran ticaretini artırma sözü", *BBC*, October 28, 2009, https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2009/10/091028_turkey_iran (accessed on 26 September 2018).

[315] "Yahudilere İran'ı övdü", *Milliyet*, January 29, 2004, http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr/ (accessed on 26 September 2018)

[316] Sami Kohen, "İran açılımı", *Milliyet*, July, 27, 2004, http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr/ (accessed on 26 September 2018).

[317] Turkey signed the NPT in 1969 and approved in in 1980. It also acknowledged the NPT's Additional Protocol in 2000 and has been a part of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). See Pieper, "Turkish Foreign Policy toward the Iranian Nuclear Programme".

mediation between Iran and the P5+1 countries. [318] On the one hand, the Turkish foreign policy elites repeatedly proposed the idea of denuclearized Middle East including Israel and suggested Western countries to get rid of their nuclear weapons before condemning Tehran.[319] On the other hand, they sought not to be overtly contradictory with the international community and tried to convince Tehran to collaborate with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). For this purpose, both Erdoğan and the then FM Gül[320] have repeatedly recommended Iranian foreign policy elites to open Iran's nuclear facilities to the international inspection during their official visits since 2003. [321]

For this purpose, the Turkish foreign policy officials pursued active diplomacy in the Western capitals and repeatedly stressed the peaceful character of Iran's nuclear program. [322] After Iran's referral to the UNSC in 2006, which led to the

[318] The revelation of Iran's undeclared nuclear facilities in Natanz in 2002 has made the Western states be alarmed and impose a series of serious economic sanctions on Iran since then. Iran has started its nuclear program with the assistance of the US and some European countries during the Shah Pahlavi period in the late 1950s. However, Islamic Revolution in Iran brought to halt a nuclear program due to disapproval of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini who was the most effectual actor in the domestic and foreign policy area with changing Iranian constitution. After the destruction of nuclear facilities at Bushehr due to 1980-88 war with Iraq and death of Khomeini in 1989, nuclear program has been put on the agenda of Iranian regime again which brought domestic and international tensions with it. The Islamic Revolution of Iran has changed the perceptions of regional and international powers entirely. Since mid-1990s, there has been ongoing controversies between Iran and Western countries regarding this issue which led to successive political and economic embargo towards Iran that has been imposed by the US and EU for approximately three decades. "Iran: Nuclear", *Nuclear Threat Initiative*, January 2020, https://www.nti.org/learn/countries/iran/nuclear/ (accessed on 26 March 2020).

[319] Efe Çaman and Kenan Dağcı, "Iran's Nuclear Program and Turkey: Changing Perceptions, Interests and Need for Revision", *Alternatives* 12, No.2 (2013): 8.

[320] Abdullah Gül served as Turkey's Minister of Foreign Affairs from 2003 to 2007.

[321] "İran'la Nükleer Ayar", *Milliyet*, August 26, 2003, http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr/ (accessed on 26 September 2018).

[322] E.Fuat Keyman and Onur Sazak, "Turkey and Iran: The Two Modes of Engagement in the Middle East", *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 17, No.3 (2005): 330.

strict political and economic sanctions against Iran, the then FM Gül carried out diplomatic dialogues with Iran by visiting the Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, Ali Larijani, to propose Turkey's facilitator role between Turkey and P5+1 countries.[323] As a result of these diplomatic efforts, several negotiations and talks between Iran and P5+1 countries took place in Turkey which was regarded as a "neutral host". [324]

Turkey's active foreign policy and its mediation efforts between Iran and the P5+1 countries regarding the Iran's nuclear program came up with the result in 2010. As two non-permanent members of the UNSC for the period 2009-2011, Turkey and Brazil persuaded Iran to transport its enriched uranium to Turkey in exchange for taking 20 percent enriched nuclear fuel for the Tehran Research Reactor (TRR) and they publicly announced the conditions of the agreement which is known as "*Tehran Declaration*". [325] Regarding this agreement, Erdoğan sent official letters to the leaders of 25 countries including UNSC permanent and non-permanent members, Turkey's neighbors, and regional countries.[326]

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[323] Given Turkey's security and economic attachments to Iran in the region, the AKP government sought to cooperate with Iran regarding the latter's nuclear program and adopted a cautious policy not to be part of the sanctions against Iran. "Security Council tightens restrictions on Iran's proliferation-sensitive nuclear activities, increases vigilance over Iranian banks, has states Inspector Cargo", *United Nations Press Release*, March 3, 2008, https://www.un.org/press/en/2008/sc9268.doc.htm (accessed on 26 September 2018).
Rahman G. Bonab, "Turkey's Emerging Role as a Mediator on Iran's Nuclear Activities", *Insight Turkey* 11, No.3 (2009):170.

[324] As Gürzel and Ersoy wrote, as long as Turkey kept its promise regarding supporting Iran's interests, Iranian elites approved Turkey's facilitator role in their nuclear dispute. Aylin G. Gürzel and Eyüp Ersoy, "Turkey and Iran's Nuclear Program", *Middle East Policy* 19, No.1 (2012): 40; Pieper, "Turkish Foreign Policy toward the Iranian Nuclear Programme", 85.

[325] "Nuclear fuel declaration by Iran, Turkey and Brazil", *BBC News*, May 17, 2010, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8686728.stm (accessed on 28 September 2018)

[326] "Erdoğan'ın İran diplomasisi", *CNN Türk*, May 22, 2010, https://www.cnnturk.com/2010/turkiye/05/22/erdoganin.iran.diplomasisi/577249.0/index.html (accessed on 28 September 2018)

However, the Vienna Group consisting of the US, Russia, France, and the IAEA rejected the deal in June 2010. [327] The then Turkey's Foreign Minister (FM) Davutoğlu[328] reacted to the UNSC decision by reminding the peace efforts in Iraq, Afghanistan and entire Middle East and stated:

> It is impossible to plan out [in the region] without considering the big picture, [thus] today's sanction decision is a wrong decision that was taken without considering of its regional repercussions". [329]

Overall, Turkey's commitment to solve the Iran nuclear issue by diplomatic tools was mainly derived from Turkey's strategic interests in the region. For the Turkish government, the post-2003 region was already challenging due to the rise of Kurdish separatism, acceleration of sectarian conflict and unfriendly policies of the US and Israel. Hence, isolation of Iran in the region or any military conflict between the US and Iran would be contradictory with Turkey's strategic interests. Overall, Turkey's active diplomatic relations and support to Iran's nuclear energy program was a part of Turkey's efforts to guarantee its diplomatic, economic and security cooperation with Iran during this period. The table below demonstrates the official visits between two countries during 2002-2011:

[327] "Geçmişten günümüze Türkiye-İran ilişkileri", *Al Jazeera Turk*, January 6, 2014, http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/dosya/gecmisten-gunumuze-turkiye-iran-iliskileri (accessed on 27 September 2018).

[328] Ahmet Davutoğlu was the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey from 2009 to 2014 and served as the Prime Minister of Turkey from 2014 to 2016.

[329] Even though Turkey continued to host further negotiations and talks between Iran and P5+1 countries after the failure of the Tehran Declaration, the nuclear deal would not be realized until 2015, which will be touched on in the next chapter. "Davutoğlu, İran'a yaptırım kararını yorumladı", *CNN Türk*, June 10, 2010, https://www.cnnturk.com/2010/turkiye/06/09/davutoglu.irana.yaptirim.kararini.yorumladi/579546.0/index.html (accessed on 27 September 2018)

**Table 4.2.** The High-Level Official Visits between Iran and Turkey during 2002-2011[330]

| Turkish Officials' Visit to Iran | Date | Iranian Officials' Visits to Turkey | Date |
|---|---|---|---|
| President Ahmet Necdet Sezer-State Visit | 12 June 2002 | Vice-President Mohammed Reza Aref-State Visit | 29 Apr. 2003 |
| PM Abdullah Gül-A part of Middle East diplomatic tour against the looming Iraq war | 12 Jan. 2003 | President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad-State Visit | 14-15 Aug. 2008 |
| President Ahmet Necdet Sezer-D8 4th Summit | 18 Feb. 2004 | President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad-OIC-ISEDAK Summit | Nov. 2009 |
| PM Recep Tayyip Erdoğan-State Visit | 28-29 July 2004 | Vice-President Mohammed Reza Aref- Afghanistan's Neighbors Meeting | 5 Jan. 2010 |
| PM Recep Tayyip Erdoğan-State Visit | 2-3 Dec. 2006 | President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad-CICA/AIGK Conference | 7 June 2010 |
| President Abdullah Gül-10th Summit Meeting of ECO | 11 March 2009 | Vice-President Mohammed Reza Rahimi-State Visit | 15 Sept. 2010 |
| PM Recep Tayyip Erdoğan-State Visit | 26 Oct. 2009 | President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad-the 11th ECO Summit | 23 Dec. 2010 |
| PM Recep Tayyip Erdoğan-The Tehran Joint Declaration | 17 May 2010 | President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad-The 4th UN Conference on Least Developed Countries/LDC-IV | 8 May 2011 |
| President Abdullah Gül-State Visit | 13 Feb 2011 | | |

### 4.3.3. The Economic Dimension of Regional Cooperation

The cooperative relations between Turkey and Iran during this period became a significant impetus for increasing their economic relations. This study argues that the favorable regional dynamics and improvement of political relations

[330] This table is mainly based on the sources of Sinkaya's article named as *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, the website of Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs and several sources of newspaper archives.

between two countries allowed them to accelerate their economic ties. [331] Furthermore, given Turkey's increasing energy demands and economic interests in the region, the AKP government kept its commercial ties with Iran active during this period. Even just before the AKP's coming to power, then-President Ahmet Necdet Sezer's visit to Iran in 2002 with a significant group of Turkish industrialists and businessmen has showed that both political and economic relations between two countries were on the road to recovery. [332]

Their cooperative political relations and geographical proximity allowed Turkey to benefit from economic ties with Iran. The main advantage for Turkey's increasing its economic ties with Iran was reducing its dependence on Russian natural gas. Turkish government has sought to lessen its dependence on the Russia's Gazprom and sought to find new alternatives. Iran has been one of the most significant alternatives for meeting Turkey's natural gas needs. [333] Furthermore, economic development was a priority for the AKP government officials who did not want to experience a financial turmoil like the 2001 Turkish economic crisis. Hence, with populous Iran with is growing economy became a significant market for Turkey's exports in the region. For Iran, economic and trade relations with its neighbor, Turkey, has become more important due to the increasing international sanction on it. [334]

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[331] For further analysis, see Mustafa Aydın and Damla Aras, "Political Conditionality of Economic Relations between Paternalist States: Turkey's Interaction with Iran, Iraq and Syria", *Arab Studies Quarterly* 27, No. 1/2 (Winter/Spring 2005).

[332] For instance, the Turkish-Iranian Business Council was established in November 2001 by the decision of the Turkish Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEIK) and the Iranian Chamber for Commerce, Industries, and Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) has also contributed to the trade relations between two countries. "Turkey-Iran Business Council", *DEIK*, https://www.deik.org.tr/middle-eastern-and-gulf-business-councils-turkey-iran-business-council (accessed on 26 March 2020). the Habibi, "Turkey and Iran: Growing Economic Relations Despite Western Sanctions",1.

[333] Nilüfer Karacasulu and İrem Aşkar Kararır, "Iran-Turkey Relations in the 2000s Pragmatic: Rapprochement", *Ege Academic Review* 11, No.1 (2011): 116.

[334]Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, 28.

Despite the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) of the US, Turkey's imports from Iran rose from $1.9 billion in 2004 to $6.9 billion in 2010 given Turkey's growing domestic energy needs. [335] In July 2007, they agreed on a memorandum of understanding (MoU) that would transport 30 billion cubic meters of Iranian and Turkmen natural gas to European markets via Turkey as a part of the Nabucco pipeline project. [336] Furthermore, the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) obtained a license from Iran for developing three segments of the South Pars gas field. [337] Regarding the trade volume during this period, as it is seen from the data of the Turkish Ministry of Trade below, there was a trade imbalance in favor of Iran throughout these years. The reason of this imbalance was derived from Turkey's imports of natural gas. [338]

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Marianna Charountaki, *Iran and Turkey: International and Regional Engagement in the Middle East*, 150. Habibi, "Turkey and Iran: Growing Economic Relations Despite Western Sanctions",3. "Doğalgaza Papa Çözümü",*Milliyet*, July 29,2004, http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr/ (accessed on 26 September 2018).

[336] "Türkiye-İran arasında enerji anlaşması", *CNN Türk*, July 14, 2007, https://www.cnnturk.com/2007/ekonomi/dunya/07/14/turkiye.iran.arasinda.enerji.anlasmasi/376414.0/index.html (accessed on 28 March 2020).

[337] Habibi, Turkey and Iran: Growing Economic Relations despite Western Sanctions", 4.

[338] "Erdoğan, İran'la engelsiz ticareti 'Suya atalım yüzsün'e bağladı", *Hürriyet*, September 17, 2010, https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/ekonomi/erdogan-iran-la-engelsiz-ticareti-suya-atalim-yuzsun-e-bagladi-15801238 (accessed on 10 May 2020).

**Figure 4.1.** Turkey-Iran Trade Volume (2001-2011)[339]

Even though there were some reductions in Turkey's oil imports from Iran especially after accelerating of the US sanctions on Iran in 2010, Turkey has continued to import Iranian gas based on take-or-pay principle. [340] Given Turkey's energy needs, it is natural to observe Turkey's political determination to maintain trade relations with Iran despite the growing international sanctions on Iran. The Turkish foreign policy elites have repeatedly expressed their commitment to economic relations with Iran. To give an example, Davutoğlu wrote the necessity of Turkey's energy cooperation with Iran by stating:

> As a growing economy and surrounded by energy resources, Turkey needs Iranian energy as a natural extension of its national interests. Therefore, Turkey's energy agreements with Iran cannot be dependent upon its relationships with other countries.[341]

[339] "Ülkelere Göre Dış Ticaret", *Türkiye Ticaret Bakanlığı*, https://ticaret.gov.tr/istatistikler/dis-ticaret-istatistikleri/dis-ticaret-istatistikleri-ocak-haziran-2019/ulkelere-gore-dis-ticaret (accessed on 10 October 2019).

[340] Two countries agreed on gas trade on take-or-pay principle since Iran was not allowed to take payments in dollars or euros. Iran accepted to take their payments in Turkish lira to get over the financial restrictions for the payments for oil and gas. Afterwards, it turned its payments into gold in Turkish markets and imported that gold in pieces. However, soon, the US put additional precautions for preventing this gold-for energy trade with Iran. Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, 32.

[341] Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision", 91.

As the regional security cooperation between Turkey and Iran continued, two countries started to implement the Reciprocal Promotion and Protection of Investments in 2005 and the Prevention on Double Taxation in 2006 which aimed to create suitable conditions for the investors in both countries. [342] These agreements positively reflected on the investment figures; for instance, while there were 319 Iranian firms in Turkey in 2002, this number rose to 1,470 in 2010 and 2072 by 2011. [343] In addition, Turkish companies began to show up more often in Iran; for example, Gübretaş's purchasing of major shares (48.8 percent) of Iranian Razi petrochemicals in 2008 has been still accepted as the utmost Turkish business investment abroad. [344]

Hence, it can be said that the compelling regional dynamics and improvement of political relations allowed two countries to spread their regional cooperation to the economic realm during this period. The foreign direct investments, economic and energy agreements, and trade volume between two countries have caused an economic interdependence between them. Even though trade and energy relations between two countries have not been exempt from problems due to trade imbalance and pricing and technical problems regarding their natural gas deals, two countries have sought to keep their economic relations alive. As it will be seen in the next chapter, the economic relations between two countries made them so interdependent during this period that even they would not be affected by their diverse regional policies in the post-2011 Middle Eastern dynamics. [345]

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[342] Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, 29. Elik, *Iran-Turkey Relations, 1979-2011*, 174.

[343] Giorgio Cafiero, "Will Syria Cause a Divorce Between Iran and Turkey?" *Foreign Policy in Focus*, July 5, 2012, https://fpif.org/will_syria_cause_a_divorce_between_iran_and_turkey/ (accessed on 27 September 2018).

[344] Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, 32.

[345] For the detail analysis, see Sinkaya, "Iran and Turkey Relations after the Nuclear Deal".

Overall, regarding their cooperation in terms of different sectors, it can be said that Turkey-Iran security/military cooperation could not reach to the expected levels due to their regional and historical competition. However, both diplomatic-discursive cooperation and their economic ties experienced one of the brightest eras in Turkey-Iran relations. In this sense, it can be argued that regional powers in the Middle East can be hesitant about deepening security cooperation with other regional powers. On the other hand, issues of low politics such as economic and diplomatic relations can be easier way for Middle Eastern regional powers to enhance and demonstrate their regional cooperation.

### 4.4. The AKP's Axis Shift or Regional Shifts of Power?

Turkey's close relations with Iran and the Middle Eastern neighbors in general has initiated a discussion about axis shift in the journals and commentaries in the Western press by 2009. Accordingly, the commentators were asking whether Turkish foreign policy was experiencing 'a shift of axis', referring that Turkey was breaking its ties with the Western world and was tending toward the Middle East and Asia. [346] The most important reasons of this argument were the deterioration of Turkey-the US and Turkey-Israel relations during this period and Turkey's close cooperation with Iran and Syria and its support to Iran's nuclear program at the expense of the US' and European harsh positions toward Iran. [347] The role of Turkey's support to Iran's nuclear program and Ahmadinejad was significant for these 'shift of axis' debates. For instance, on November 25, 2009, *Foreign Policy* magazine put a picture of Erdoğan with Ahmadinejad and asked, 'How the West Lost Turkey?" [348] Likewise, *The Christian Monitor Science*

[346] Cengiz Çandar, "Turkey's" soft Power" Strategy: A New Vision for a Multi-polar World", *SETA Policy Brief*, no.38. (2009): 3.

[347] Nick Danforth, "How the West Lost Turkey?", *Foreign Policy*, November 25, 2009, https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/11/25/how-the-west-lost-turkey/ (accessed on 25 March 2020).

[348] Ibid.

emphasized on Erdoğan's calling Ahmadinejad as a 'friend' and asked whether Turkey was 'now shifting too far away from Europe and to Muslim despots specifically". [349] *The Washington Times* gave a title '*An Islamist Pivot to East'* for Turkey's close cooperation with Iran and Syria in contrast to deterioration of relations with Israel.[350] *Spiegel International* interpreted Turkey's active position toward its Middle Eastern neighbors as Turkey's disappointment with the EU accession process and the revival of 'Ottoman Nostalgia'. [351] Similarly, *the Economist* explained Turkey's active orientation toward East and South as a rise of Islamism in Turkey and disillusion about never-ending EU negotiation process. [352]

The Turkish academia has also witnessed various works on 'shift of axis' in Turkish foreign policy during the AKP period. According to Oğuzlu, we can talk about the Middle Easternization in Turkish foreign policy however it does not mean that Turkey abandoned its ties with the West but rather taking priority of the Middle East in Turkey's foreign policy approach with the West.[353] He argued

[349] "Turkey's Worrisome Approach to Iran, Israel", *The Christian Science Monitor*, October 29, 2009, https://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/the-monitors-view/2009/1029/p08s01-comv.html (accessed on 25 March 2020).

[350] "An Islamist Pivot to the East", *The Washington Times*, November 6, 2009, https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/nov/06/an-islamist-pivot-to-the-east/ (accessed on 25 March 2020).

[351] Furthermore, *Spiegel International* wrote that Turkey was looking east toward Hamas and Iran. Bernhard Zand, " The Anatolian Tiger: How the West is Losing Turkey?", *Spiegel International*, June 15, 2010 https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/the-anatolian-tiger-how-the-west-is-losing-turkey-a-700626.html (accessed on 25 March 2020). Daniel Steinvorth, "Nostalgia for the Ottomans: Disillusioned with Europe, Turkey Looks East", Spiegel International, November 12, 2009, https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/nostalgia-for-the-ottomans-disillusioned-with-europe-turkey-looks-east-a-660635.html (accessed on 25 March 2020).

[352] "Turkey and the Middle East: Looking east and south", *The Economist*, October 29, 2009, https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2009/10/29/looking-east-and-south (accessed on 25 March 2020).

[353] Oğuzlu, "Middle Easternization of Turkey's Foreign Policy", 3.

that the increasing Middle Easternization in Turkish foreign policy were derived from the national security interests of Turkey and more 'pragmatic/rational' Turkish approach toward the US and the EU. [354]

Similarly, Başer acknowledges that Turkey's foreign policy roles has changed with the AKP's coming to power. Based upon policies, speeches, and interviews of the AKP foreign policy elites, Başer argues that the change in Turkish foreign policy roles cannot explain with the shift of axis but 'a more active and ambitious foreign policy' in the international arena. [355] Oktav contributed to the shift of axis debates in Turkish foreign policy by arguing that Turkey's close relations with Iran and Syria was derived from Turkey's efforts to maintain interdependence at the regional level. [356] Babacan examined Turkey's increasing relations with the East from foreign trade perspective and concluded that the rise of Turkey's trade relations with the Middle Eastern states were to great extent derived from global economic transformations. Hence, he argues that Turkey's new foreign policy activism cannot be categorized as 'axis shift' but rather 'expansionary shift' or a new 'creative axis'. [357] Likewise, Kardaş argued that the AKP foreign policy is based on a new strategic identity fed by realpolitik and idealist elements. This new foreign policy understanding, he wrote, does not

[354] Ibid.

[355] Ekrem T. Başer, "Shift-of-axis in Turkish foreign policy: Turkish national role conceptions before and during AKP rule" *Turkish Studies* 16, no. 3 (2015): 305.

[356] Özden Zeynep Oktav, "Regionalism or Shift of Axis? Turkish-Syrian-Iran Relations" in *Turkey in the 21st Century: Quest for a New Foreign Policy* ed.Özden Zeynep Oktav (Surrey, Ashgate Publishing, 2011).

[357] Mehmet Babacan, "Whither an axis shift: A perspective from Turkey's foreign trade" *Insight Turkey* 13, no. 1 (2011): 154.

explain only with the AKP identity but keeps geocultural and geopolitical factors within it. [358]

This thesis interprets the axis shift debates from the regionalist perspective. In this understanding, a foreign policy change of Turkey toward Iran and the other Middle Eastern neighbors was mainly derived from the regional level. As a regional power, Turkey has been highly sensitive to regional power changes and shifted its foreign policies to preserve its power and status in the region. Hence, the regional developments in the post-2001 context and Turkey's position have made Turkey to focus on its immediate neighbors. The US' long-term military presence as well as its unilateral and ambiguous policies in the Middle East has led to the instability and chaos in Turkey's borders which required active coordination with its neighbors. In the post-2001 environment, most of the challenges of Turkey came from its south eastern borders and for securing its national interests, Turkey paid more attention to establish active relations with its Middle Eastern neighbors and especially Iran. In this regard, the regional shifts of power were the main reason for Turkish foreign policy behaviors toward Iran.

As one of the focal points in the axis shift debates, Turkey's active relations with Iran during this period should be analyzed through the *regionalist perspective.* As it was explained above, the main *local security externalities* that have led to Turkey's rapprochement with Iran were the US invasion of Iraq and the subsequent regional instability in the post-2003 Middle East and the rise of Kurdish separatism in the Northern Iraq. Furthermore, the US long-term military presence in the region increased Turkey's concerns and pushed it to cooperate with Iran in the region. Hence, Turkey's common interests and concerns with Iran about the Kurdish issue and the role of the US in the region prevented it

[358] Şaban Kardaş, "Türk Dış Politikasında Eksen Kayması mı?", *Akademik Orta Doğu* 5, no.2 (2011): 20.

from pursuing a 'containment strategy' against Tehran. [359] Due to convergence of threat perceptions of two countries, as Larrabee argued, Turkey was '*unlikely to support US policies aimed at isolating Iran*…" [360] Likewise, Turkey's growing energy needs and Turkey's economic interdependence with Iran have had a significant role on strengthening of the relations between two countries.

However, as the regional dynamics shifted in the post-2011 and the US decided to play more passive role in the region, the regional convergence between Turkey and Iran began to decrease. Hence, the AKP government changed its foreign policy attitude toward Iran according to the changing regional dynamics of the post-2011 Middle East. This change is the subject of the next chapter.

[359] Wehrey et al. "An Altered Strategic Landscape", 33.

[360] Ibid.

# CHAPTER 5

## THE CHANGING REGIONAL CONTEXT AND TURKEY'S ESTRANGED POLITICAL RELATIONS WITH IRAN BETWEEN 2011-2016

> *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.* [361]
>
> (Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, The President of Turkey, 2015)

In contrast to close relations between Turkey and Iran between 2002 and 2011, which was characterized by visible increase in mutual official visits, political and economic agreements as well as supportive discourses of Turkish foreign policy elites toward Iran, this new period witnessed an observable regional tension between the two countries. Even though Turkish political climate witnessed no radical change, the Turkish government's attitude toward Iran has radically changed during this period. In this regard, like the previous chapter that covered Turkey-Iran relations during 2002-2011 period, this chapter aims to show that the primary reason of Turkey's changing relations with Iran is changing regional context and *local security externalities* for both countries.

Under the changing conditions of the Middle Eastern security complex, Turkish foreign policy elites were concerned about the regional position of Iran and did not hesitate to criticize Iran's regional policies especially after the Syrian civil war broke out. Similarly, Iranian authorities expressed their criticisms toward Turkey's foreign policy responses to the regional crises including the Syrian civil

[361] Erdoğan has been 12th President of Turkey since August 28, 2014. "Turkish President Erdoğan says can't tolerate Iran bid to dominate the Middle East", *Hürriyet Daily News*, March 27, 2015, https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-president-erdogan-says-cant-tolerate-iran-bid-to-dominate-middle-east-80252 (accessed on 23 March 2020)

war, Turkey's policies towards the ISIS and the PYD (the Kurdish Democratic Union Party) in Northern Syria. Some experts on Iran-Turkey relations even argued that Turkey-Iran relations were perhaps experiencing the worst period since the AKP came to power. [362]

To understand the competitive regional positions of Turkey and Iran as well as critical Turkish foreign policy discourses and attitudes toward Iran during this period, this chapter will analyze the *local security externalities* of the Middle Eastern security complex and the role of extra-regional powers in the region for shaping the relations between two countries. In the first place, this period witnessed more permissive regional context for the regional powers to increase their regional autonomy due to the US' withdrawal decision from Iraq and its less direct military involvement in the region. Hence, as two of the regional powers, Turkey and Iran could find more opportunity to increase their influence in the region which resulted in their regional competition.

Secondly, as the most significant factors to diverge the regional positions of Turkey and Iran, the regional power shifts in the Middle Eastern security complex, the emergence of Arab Spring and the long-lasting Syrian civil war will be analyzed.[363] Within this context, the role of the extra-regional powers, the US and Russia, and their relations with the non-state armed groups substantially shaped the foreign policy strategies of Turkey and Iran. Accordingly, this period witnessed competitive regional positions of Turkey and Iran depending on their opposed national interests and their relations with the extra-regional powers and

[362] "Türkiye-İran İlişkileri: 13 yılın en kötü dönemi", *Aljazeera Turk*, September, 28, 2015, http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/al-jazeera-ozel/turkiye-iran-iliskileri-13-yilin-en-kotu-donemi (accessed on 23 March 2015)

[363] The terms 'Arab Spring' and 'Arab Uprisings' are commonly used in the academic literature. Hence, this thesis uses both terms interchangeably. For the detail discussion on the Arab Spring, please see Larbi Sadiki, *Routledge Handbook of the Arab Spring: Rethinking Democratization* (London: Routledge, 2015).

non-state armed groups. The outcome was tense Turkey-Iran relations based on conflictual foreign policy discourses and decrease in their security cooperation.

**Table 5.1.** Local Security Externalities of the Middle East and Turkey's Relations with Iran (2011-2016)

| **Time Period** | **The Role of Extra-Regional Powers and Local Security Externalities of the Middle Eastern Security Complex** | **Foreign Policy Responses of Regional Powers: Turkey's Relations with Iran** |
|---|---|---|
| 2011-2016 | The US withdrawal decision from Iraq<br>Regional Power Shifts: The Arab Uprisings and the Syrian Civil War<br>The Role of the Extra-Regional Powers and Non-State actors in the Syrian Civil War | Turkey-Iran competition to fill the power vacuum and increase their influence in the region<br>Turkey-Iran Divergent National Interests |

## 5.1. Local Security Externalities of the post-2011 Middle Eastern Security Complex: Diminishing the Role of the US and Power Vacuum in Iraq

> H.7. *During the times of diminishing roles of extra-regional powers in the region, regional powers may find a space for claiming their regional hegemony. Competition may arise between regional powers.*

The regional context of the Middle East has experienced outstanding power changes in the post-2011 period that has impacted the position of regional powers. In the first place, the 'US strategic retrenchment' under the Obama administration created significant consequences for the region. The Obama government sought to change the Bush's interventionist Middle East policy and tried to focus on the Pacific region and Asia which is called as strategic 'pivot to

Asia' or 'rebalancing' to Asia. [364] Hence, the US, which has acted as a *quasi-regional actor* for almost a decade in the post-2003 region, decided to have more passive role in the Middle Eastern politics. After almost nine years, the US government completed its military withdrawal from Iraq by December 2011.[365] Like the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the removal of the US military forces from Iraq had an impact on the regional balance of power that influenced its neighbor countries. The withdrawal of the US created a huge power vacuum in Iraq which led to ethnic and sectarian cleavages within Iraq and power competition among regional powers. The US military's fading from the scene gave an opportunity to competing regional powers such as Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia for maximizing their area of influence in Iraq.[366]

As two of the regional powers in the Middle East, Turkey and Iran further involved in the Iraqi domestic politics after the American withdrawal in 2011 and stood behind opponent political groups. They already supported rival groups in 2010 elections, within which Iran supported Nouri al-Maliki's State of Law Coalition (a bloc consisting of only Shiite political parties) and Turkey was in favor of Ayad Allawi's Iraqiya Bloc that consisted of both Sunni and Shiite

[364] Obama defined the new US doctrine as 'an American leadership that recognizes the rise of countries like China, India and Brazil. It is a U.S. leadership that recognizes our limits in terms of resources and capacity.' Fawaz A. Gerges, "The Obama approach to the Middle East: the end of America's moment?" International Affairs 89, no. 2 (2013):301. David Shambaugh, "Assessing the US "pivot" to Asia." Strategic Studies Quarterly 7, no. 2 (2013): 10. Nuri Yeşilyurt, "Explaining miscalculation and maladaptation in Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East during the Arab uprisings: A neoclassical realist perspective." All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace 6, no. 2 (2017): 68.

[365] The last US military convoy, which contained about 110 vehicles and 500 soldiers, withdrew from Iraq on 18 December 2011. Tim Arango and Michael S.Schmidt, "Last Convoy of American Troops Leaves Iraq", *The New York Times*, December 18, 2011, https://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/19/world/middleeast/last-convoy-of-american-troops-leaves-iraq.html (accessed on 10 October 2020).

[366] S. Gülden Ayman. "Turkey and Iran: Between Friendly Competition and Fierce Rivalry", *Arab Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (2014): 6-26. Sean Kane, "The Coming Turkish-Iranian Competition in Iraq", *United States Institute of Peace* (June 2011). 2011. Alshafey Haider Hamood,"Competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia in Iraq under US Army's Withdrawal [J]", Arab *World Studies* 1 (2010), 1.

political parties and emphasized on the 'Iraqi identity' over any ethnic or religious one.[367]

Even though Allawi won the elections, he could not form a government within 30 day after the elections.[368] After eight-months deadlock, the parties ultimately compromised and agreed on Nuri al-Maliki's continuing his duty as Iraqi PM. [369] Iran explicitly stood behind Maliki to govern Iraq for a second term. Regarding Iran's support to the Baghdad government, Mahmoud Shater, a member of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, argued that "*Iran has a stronger role than America here. (The Shia coalition) has no one else to support them apart from Iran*".[370] In return it has been argued that Maliki government permitted Iran to use Iraqi territory for training and equipping Iraqi Shiite militias.[371]

In contrast to deepening relations between Iran and the Baghdad government, Maliki's increasing sectarian politics in favor of Iran further escalated Turkey's concerns about Iran's rising its influence in Iraq.[372] As Gülden Ayman quoted, Erdoğan expressed Turkey's concerns to then-US President Barack Obama by

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[367] Ayman. "Turkey and Iran: Between Friendly Competition and Fierce Rivalry". Kane, "The Coming Turkish-Iranian Competition in Iraq".

[368] "Irak'ta meclis yeni hükümeti görüşecek", *BBC News*, November 11, 2010, https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2010/11/101111_iraq_govt (accessed on 10 October 2020).

[369] "Nouri Maliki starts work on forming Iraq government", *BBC News*, November 25, 2010 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-11836484 (accessed on 10 October 2020).
. "Iran backs Maliki for second term as Iraqi PM", *The Guardian*, October 18, 2010, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/oct/18/iran-iraq-maliki-ahmadinejad-sadr (accessed on 25 March 2020).

[371] Rick Brennan, "Withdrawal Symptoms: The Bungling of the Iraq Exit", *Foreign Affairs*, (November/December 2014), https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/withdrawal-symptoms (accessed on 25 March 2020).

[372] It is generally argued that Maliki had long-lasting connections with Iran and relatively tense relations with the AKP since he came to power. For more details, see Gareth H.Jenkins,*Occasional Allies, Enduring Rivals: Turkey's Relations with Iran*, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (2012), 45.

saying "*You [US] left Iraq in the hands of Iran once you withdrew*". [373] From this perspective, Iran was indirectly responsible for Maliki's authoritarian and sectarian-oriented policies in Iraq. [374] Turkey's concerns were based on Iran's support to Maliki government for creating a buffer area against the Western and Sunni Arab coalition in Iraq.[375]

However, the competition between Turkey and Iran in Iraq was not a source of tension between two countries on its own. Its intersection with their divergent positions on the Arab Uprisings and Syrian civil war made it more visible. The US administration's decision to retreat from the Middle Eastern politics overlapped with a series of striking events that have entirely changed the rules of the game in the region within which Turkey faced with a changing regional power structure. Even though the competition in Iraq did not bring Turkey and Iran openly against each other, their clashing positions during the Arab Spring and the Syrian civil war has led this issue to come to forefront. [376] To understand the growing regional disagreements between Turkey and Iran during this period, it is significant to explain their opposed regional positions toward the Arab Uprisings that started in Tunisia and spread toward Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, and Yemen. The Syrian civil war, which has been regarded as the peak point of the tension between two countries, will be specifically reviewed.

[373] Gülden S.Ayman, "Turkey and Iran: Between friendly competition and fierce rivalry", 15.

[374] After he came to power in 2006, Al-Maliki monopolized his power by controlling ministry for defense, the interior, and Iraq's National Security Council via the Office of the Commander in Chief. Al-Maliki's authoritarian tendencies were watched by Kurds and Sunnis as well as his political oppositions with deep concern. Brennan, "Withdrawal Symptoms". Ayman, "Turkey and Iran",15. Gülden S.Ayman. "Regional Aspirations and Limits of Power-Turkish-Iranian Relations in the New Middle East." *Etudes Helléniques/Hellenic Studies* 20, no. 1 (2012).

[375] Gülden S.Ayman. "Regional Aspirations and Limits of Power-Turkish-Iranian Relations in the New Middle East." *Etudes Helléniques/Hellenic Studies* 20, no. 1 (2012), 15.

[376] Bayram Sinkaya, "Amerikan Askerlerinin Çekilmesinden Sonra Irak-İran İlişkileri", *SETA Rapor*, No.9 (Mayıs, 2013): 35.

## 5.2. Local Security Externalities of the post-2011 Middle Eastern Security Complex: The Arab Uprisings and 'Competitive Interference' of Regional Powers

> *H.6. During the times of regional powers shifts, regional powers are inclined to compete with the rival regional powers to maximize their powers and influence in the region.*

The regional repercussions of the power-shift in Iraq overlapped with the uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries. These Arab Uprisings have had a critical influence on the geopolitical dynamics of the Middle Eastern security complex as well as foreign policy strategies of regional and global actors. Most particularly, the Syrian civil war, which has lasted for more than seven years, has deepened the regional bipolarity, and reinforced the fault lines among regional actors. Furthermore, the emergence and increasing influence of violent non-state actors in the Syrian conflict and the active involvement of Russia in the Syrian war have reformulated the foreign policies of regional powers, Turkey, and Iran.

The Arab uprisings in the MENA countries, which eventually created many instabilities in the region, started in Tunisia in 2010 and had a snowball effect on other Arab countries including Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria.[377] It can be said that as of August 2012, there were winds of governmental change in four

[377] Despite their regional consequences, the uprisings arose from deep-rooted domestic problems within Arab countries such as democratic deficiency, human rights violations, chronic economic hardship and several kinds of corruption, unemployment as well as severe poverty. Katerina Dalacoura, "The 2011 uprisings in the Arab Middle East: political change and geopolitical implications." *International Affairs* 88, no. 1 (2012): 64-66. "Arab uprising: Country by country-Tunisia", *BBC News*, December 16, 2013, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-12482315, (accessed on 8 October 2019). "Arab Uprising. Country by Country- Libya", *BBC News*, December 16, 2013, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-12482311 (accessed on 8 October 2019). "Arab Uprising. Country by Country-Bahrain", *BBC News*, December 16, 2013, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-12482295 (accessed on 9 October 2019)

Arab countries: Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen. [378] Under the circumstances of governmental changes in once stable Arab regimes, as Hinnebush claimed, the post-uprising competition for power emerged in the region. [379] The "*competitive interference*" of regional powers showed itself with their efforts to influence the domestic politics of Uprising states in favor of their interests. [380]

Regarding Turkey's position, like several regional and global actors, the changing regional context and the overthrown of once stable regimes in the Middle East has made Turkey reconsider its foreign policy strategies and adapt to the new regional reality. As a regional power, Turkey sought to increase its influence and status given the changing regional balance of power and power vacuum in the region. Before the Arab Spring, Turkey sought to maximize its political, cultural, and economic relations with its neighbors[381] and increase its regional autonomy given the active role of the US in the region as a "quasi-regional actor". To reach this aim, prior to the Arab Spring, the AKP government

[378] According to Emel Parlar Dal, the spillover effect of these conflicts in the region was derived from "the neighborhood effect". In this sense, in the regions where there is high likelihood of the conflict, "the conflicts are more likely to spread into the neighboring countries compared to the relatively more stable and secure neighbors". See Emel Parlar Dal, "Impact of the transnationalization of the Syrian civil war on Turkey: conflict spillover cases of ISIS and PYD-YPG/PKK." *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 29, no. 4 (2016): 1398.

[379] Raymond Hinnebush, "The Arab uprising and regional power struggle" in *Routledge Handbook of International Relations in the Middle East* ed. Shahram Akbarzadeh (Oxon: Routledge, 2019), 121.

[380] The intervention of regional powers into other states has been a regional routine since supra-state Arab and/or Islamic identity have been defining characteristic of the Middle Eastern "public sphere". Hinnebush, "The Arab uprising and regional power struggle", 121.

[381] Pınar Bilgin calls this approach as 'civilizational geopolitics.' Pınar Bilgin, "A Return to 'Civilizational Geopolitics' in the Mediterranean? Changing Geopolitical Images of the European Union and Turkey in the Post-Cold War Era." *Geopolitics* 9, no. 2 (2004).

sought to pursue '*zero problems with neighbors*' policy which has required politically stable and secure neighborhood.[382]

However, with the Arab Uprisings and subsequent violence in Libya and Syria, Turkish foreign policy vision based on 'zero problems' policy has faced a critical test and started to cope with the new regional environment. Similar to the US and Europe, Turkey faced a contradiction in terms of *ethical* or *self-interested* oriented foreign policy.[383] According to Öniş, given the delicate balance of national interests and commitment of democratic values, Turkey's foreign policy responses regarding the uprisings in different Arab countries have varied by country and changing context.[384]

Having encountered the Arab uprisings, Turkey preferred to support the democratic will of the people of the Uprising states. During the initial phases of the Arab Spring, the Turkish government welcomed the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. In this way, as a regional power, it would increase its regional influence in the post-Arab uprising period. The AKP leaders recognized the democratic demands of the people as the main reason of the Arab Spring and sought to demonstrate that as a democratic Muslim country, Turkey would be a role-model/ model country for the 'revolutionary' governments.[385] Accordingly,

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[382] This foreign policy understanding was not dependent on '*democracy promotion*' in the region but rather based on non-intervention in the internal affairs of other states and respect to their independence. Ziya Öniş, "Turkey and the Arab Spring: between ethics and self-interest." *Insight Turkey* 14, no. 3 (2012): 46.

[383] Ziya Öniş, "Turkey and the Arab Spring: between ethics and self-interest." *Insight Turkey* 14, no. 3 (2012):46.

[384] Öniş argues that Turkey's foreign policy responses to the Arab Spring includes cautious unilateralism, reluctant participation unilateral proactivism, and finally a return to a more cautious approach and reluctant multilateralism. For more details, see Öniş, 'Turkey and the Arab Spring", 51.

[385] Bayram Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, (İstanbul, Institut français d'études anatoliennes, 2019), 38.

Turkey could be a '*model country*' with "its secular and democratic population for each Muslim country". [386] As a part of this foreign policy strategy, during this period, Erdoğan visited Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt and emphasized Turkey's support to the protestors in these countries and stated:

> The Turkish state is in its core a state of freedoms and secularism…the world is changing to a system where the will of the people will rule. Why should the Europeans and Americans be the only ones that live with dignity? Aren't Egyptians and Somalians also entitled to a life of dignity? [387]

In this regard, the Arab Spring gave an opportunity to Turkey to demonstrate itself as a 'democratized Muslim-major polity' which could assist the spread of democracy to the Middle East. Given the problematical relations with the EU and suspicions of the EU members about Turkey's democratic competence, these uprisings became a chance for the Turkish government to prove Turkey's regional leadership in the region for the sake of democratization. [388]Some scholars argue that new Turkish foreign policy in the face of the regional developments was based on the 2.0 version of "*zero problems*" policy which gives priority to the democratic demand of the Arab people against the oppressions of their regimes.[389]

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[386] Zehra Funda Savaş, "Analysis of Conflicting National Role Conceptions of Iran And Turkey During the Arab Spring", paper presented at the *14th METU Conference on International Relations: Area Studies and International Relations, Intersecting Dimensions* (Ankara, 17-19 June 2015). Thomas Seibert, "Turkey is a model for every Muslim state, Recep Erdogan says", *The National*, October 1 2012, http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/middle-east/turkey-is-a-model-for-every-muslim-state-recep-erdogan-says (accessed on15 January 2020)

[387] David D. Kirkpatrick, "Premier of Turkey Takes Role in Region" *The New York Times*, September 12 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/13/world/middleeast/13egypt.html?_r=0 (accessed on 12 January 2020).

[388] Şener Aktürk, "Turkey's role in the Arab spring and the Syrian conflict", *Turkish policy quarterly* 15, no. 4 (2017).

[389] Tarik Oğuzlu, "The 'Arab Spring 'and the Rise of the 2.0 Version of Turkey's 'zero problems with neighbors' Policy", *SAM Papers*, No.1, (February 2012): 3.

In contrast to 'pro-democratic' approach of Turkey towards the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia, Iranian leaders tended to emphasize the Islamic nature of the uprisings and defined them as "Islamic awakenings" stimulated by the Iranian revolution.[390] The members of anti-Iran Arab conservative regimes (called as the 'moderation camp') were targeted by the initial uprisings and it was in favor of Iran's geopolitical interests.[391] From Iranian perspective, the forthcoming regimes in the uprising countries would be anti-American, anti-Western and preponderantly Islamic which would make them ideologically close to Iran. [392] In this way, as a regional power, Iran would increase its power and influence in the new regional context vis-à-vis the other regional powers in the region.

Iran sponsored various international workshops under the name of "World Assembly for the Islamic Awakening" to spread its model to the Arab participators and "to make intellectual and political partnership in the region".[393] During the First International Conference on Islamic Awakening, Khamenei stated that "*the ultimate goal must be a unified Islamic ummah[nation] and the establishment of a new Islamic civilization based on religion, rationalism, science, and morality*."[394] In this sense, Iranian political elites regarded Iran's role during the Arab Spring as a "*moral leader of Islamic awakening*" and

[390]"Khamenie: US must be from Islamic World", *The Matzav Network*, February 21, 2011, http://matzav.com/khamenei-us-must-be-removed-from-islamic-world (accessed on 17 January 17 2020).

[391] Bayram Sinkaya "Implications of the Arab Spring for Iran's Policy towards the Middle East." *Middle Eastern Studies/Ortadogu Etütleri* 6, no. 2 (2015): 59.

[392] Sinkaya, "Implications of the Arab Spring for Iran's Policy towards the Middle East", 61.

[393] Savaş, "Analysis of Conflicting National Role Conceptions of Iran And Turkey During the Arab Spring", 5.

[394] Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, "Speech at the International Conference of the Islamic Awakening," *The Center for Preserving and Publishing the Works of Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khameni*, September 17, 2011, http://english.khamenei.ir/ (accessed on 14 January 2020).

claimed that "it was possible to go beyond Western model of governing". [395] Hence, it can be said that Iran sought to consolidate its soft power via "giving ideational support to the Arab islamists" and increase "its regional power against those support the US objectives in the region". [396]

While Khamenei argued that Turkey's secular governing model was not conformed with Muslim Arab societies, Erdoğan called for a secularism in Egypt by explaining the advantages of having a secular constitution. [397] During those days, *Sabah*, a pro-government Turkish daily newspaper, sought to reinforce the perception that Turkey was the best "*model*" country to Arab societies by publishing Egyptian public survey that showed their envy to both Turkey and Erdoğan. [398] Similarly, then considered as a mainstream Turkish newspaper, *Hürriyet*, compared the position of Turkey and Iran in the eyes of Arab people by publishing the survey results of Arab-American Institute. Accordingly, it showed that while Iran's prestige and credibility have dramatically reduced among Arab people in the last ten years, Turkey's efficiency and leadership have evenly risen. [399]

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[395] Savaş, "Analysis of Conflicting National Role Conceptions of Iran And Turkey During the Arab Spring", 6.

[396]Savaş, "Analysis of Conflicting National Role Conceptions of Iran And Turkey During the Arab Spring", 6. Payam Mohseni, "The Islamic Awakening: Iran's Grand Narrative of the Arab Uprisings", *Middle East Brief* 71 (2013): 4.

[397] "Erdoğan calls for a secular Egypt", *Egypt Independent*, September 13, 2011, https://ww.egyptindependent.com/erdogan-calls-secular-egypt/ (accessed on 25 March 2020). Anthony Shadid, "In Riddle of Mideast Upheaval, Turkey Offers Itself as an Answer", *The New York Times*, September 26, 2011, https://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/27/world/europe/in-mideast-riddle-turkey-offers-itself-as-an-answer.html (accessed on 25 March 2020).

[398] "Arapların Lideri Türkiye ve Erdoğan", *Sabah*, November 22, 2011, https://www.sabah.com.tr/dunya/2011/11/22/araplarin-lideri-turkiye-ve-erdogan (accessed on 25 March 2020).

[399] "Türkiye, Arap Ülkelerinin Gözünde İran'ın Yerini Aldı", *Hürriyet*, July 28, 2011, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/turkiye-arap-ulkelerinin-gozunde-iran-in-yerini-aldi-18357875 (accessed on 25 March 2020).

In this sense, it can be said, following the first uprisings, there was a soft power competition between Iran and Turkey in the region which showed itself in the discursive level. In contrast to rapprochement between the two countries from 2002 to 2011, the *local security externalities* of the Arab Uprisings uncovered their divergent geopolitical interests which has been based on the aim of being influential regional power throughout the region. Hence, the debates about the '*Turkish model*' based on moderate Islam, democratization and economic integration to the world politics vs '*Iranian model*' based on Islamic, anti-Western and anti-Israel regime, demonstrated their regional competition to play active role in the reconstruction period of the Middle East. [400] However, this competition between two countries did not affect their bilateral relations as much as the Syrian war did, which became the litmus test for the relations between Turkey and Iran and paved the way for new forms of amity and enmity in the region.

### 5.3. The Local Security Externalities of the Syrian Civil War: The Divergent National Interests of Turkey and Iran

None of the uprisings mentioned above has affected the Middle Eastern security complex as well as Turkey-Iran relations as Syria conflict has done.[401] As two of

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[400] For more details, see Özüm S.Uzun, "The" Arab Spring" and Its Effect on Turkish-Iranian Relations." *Middle Eastern Studies* 4, no. 2 (2013).

[401] The uprisings that shaken the Arab countries arrived late to Syria, but its peaceful nature has expeditiously transformed into a long-lasting sectarian war that involve both regional and global powers. Like the uprisings in other Arab countries, the Syrian war was derived from political pressure, the defeat of the Arab socialist ideology, long-lasting economic problems, minority-dominated rule, state violence and corruption within the Syrian state. Protests demanding resignation of President Bashar Al-Assad began in the city of Deraa in March 2011. The Syrian Ba'athist regime's disproportional use of force against the protestors escalated the conflict and soon transformed into a nationwide civil war. Even though the civil right activists asked for a non-sectarian and democratic governance in the country, this secularist aspiration was replaced by ethno-sectarian war of the radical Islamists especially during the fourth year of the conflict. Throughout the war, Syrian government has lost a vast scale of the Syrian territory which started with the rural areas of north-West Homs and spread over the north-east due to the creation of

the regional power in the Middle East, Turkey and Iran have been highly affected by the Syrian war. On the one hand, the Assad regime has been an invaluable ally of Iran since the 1979 Iran Revolution and has been a significant tool for increasing Iran's influence on Shiite groups such as Hezbollah. On the other hand, the post-2003 era witnessed political and economic convergence of Turkey-Syria relations and Syria became an important indicator of Turkey's 'zero problems with neighbors' policy in the region.[402] However, their responses and strategies toward the Assad regime have been different from each other and caused to regional tension between two countries.

The Syrian war has created significant *negative security externalities* for the region and involved not only local and regional actors but also extra-regional powers. It has led to the several different coalitions among different state and non-state actors that has changed over time. The main regional actors involved in this war are Turkey, Iran, Israel, Qatar, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia, Hezbollah as well as Jordan and Lebanon; the local actors are the Syrian state, various moderate or radical Islamist/jihadist groups, and Kurdish groups, transnational armed groups and extra-regional powers are principally Russia, the US, Great Britain and France. [403] These actors constituted different poles in such a way that Russia-Syria-Iran-Hezbollah mainly supported the Assad's regime, and counter-regime groups were supported by different grouping sets of the US,

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autonomous areas in frontier parts of the country. Kristen Leigh Davis, "The Expanding Nature of the Syrian Civil War: From Poor Policy to Regional Conflict" (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2015), 9. Erzsébet N. Rózsa, "*The Arab Spring: Its Impact on the Region and on the Middle East Conference*", *Academic Peace Orchestra Middle East/Policy Brief*, no.9/10 (August 2012): 1. Fred H. Lawson, "Syria's mutating civil war and its impact on Turkey, Iraq and Iran", International *Affairs* 90, No. 6 (2014): 1351. Lawson, "Syria's mutating civil war", 1353.

[402] "Syria and Turkey-history of complex relationship", *Euronews*, July 28, 2015, https://www.euronews.com/2015/07/28/syria-and-turkey---a-history-of-the-relationship (accessed on 10 October 2020). For more details for Turkey-Syria Relations, Raymond Hinnebusch and Özlem Tür, *Turkey-Syria Relations: Between Enmity and Amity* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

[403] Rami G. Khouri, "The Implications of the Syrian War for New Regional Orders in the Middle East ", *Menara Working Papers*, no. 12 (2012): 4.

Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Turkey, Qatar, Israel, the United Kingdom and France. [404]

### 5.3.1. Initial Foreign Policy Responses of Turkey and Iran toward the Syrian Civil War

The Syrian war has changed the regional balance of power and deeply affected the relations among regional powers in the Middle Eastern security complex. On the one hand, Turkey envisaged the future of Syria without the Assad regime and calculated its foreign policies accordingly. In this sense, it has aimed to increase its soft power in the region with its emphasis on human rights and democratic values vis-à-vis the oppressive Assad regime. In this way, it would be a regional model-country for the new democratic Syrian government in the post-Assad period. On the other hand, Iran's regional power was highly based on the survival of the Syrian regime which has acted as a bridge between Iran and its proxy groups. In this sense, the way of increasing their regional power was highly divergent and mutually exclusive in their highly unstable neighborhood.

Given the Syrian war across its borders, Turkey's policy of "*zero problems with neighbors*" have been suspended and the Turkish government's relations with the Assad regime have rapidly deteriorated since August 2011. [405] In the beginning of the war, Turkish government demanded from once-friendly Assad regime to make domestic reforms which the Assad regime dismissed. In this regard, as a regional power, Turkey firstly tried to have a *mediator role* between the Assad government and political wing of the opposition groups during the initial months of the crisis and tried to have an active role with the rhetoric of

[404] Ibid, 5.

[405] Turkey's new foreign policy reflected a completely different approach that Turkish government pursued toward Syria from 2004 with several bilateral agreements about water resources, free trade and visa regulations. Charountaki, *Iran and Turkey*,174.

being "*a playmaker country in the Middle East*".[406] In this way, having affected the course of regional events, Turkey would prove its soft power in the region and consolidate its regional power status.

However, as violent crackdowns of Syrian regime continued and started to impact Turkey's security, and its Western allies increased the dose of their critics, Turkey has distanced itself from the Assad regime and joined the international condemnation of its violent crackdown on the opposition groups. From that time, in contrast to Iran's support of the Assad regime, Turkish political leaders have consistently called Assad regime to "*put down its weapons, meet people's demands and resign*". [407] The Assad regime's brutal crackdown of the opposition groups despite the Turkish government's calls has made Ankara to cut its ties with the Assad regime. [408] During the initial phases of the Syrian crisis, the AKP government also tried to take Iran's support against the Assad regime. For instance, to negotiate about the Syrian crisis, Davutoğlu visited Tehran in August 2011 and Erdoğan met Supreme Leader Khamenei in March 2012. However, Iran has continued to support the Assad regime. [409]

[406] Doğan Ertuğrul, "A Test for Turkey's Foreign Policy: The Syria Crisis", *Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation*, (2012):1. Cihan Tuğal, "Democratic Janissaries? Turkey's Role in the Arab Spring", *New Left Review* 76, (2012): 16.

[407] "Turkish Prime Minister tells Syria's President to step down or risk tragic end", *CNN International*, November 23, 2011, http://edition.cnn.com/2011/11/22/world/meast/syria-unrest/ (accessed on 15 January 2020)

[408] Ankara's harsh criticism towards the Assad regime has been explained by its effort to adopt ethical policy making regarding the regional politics. On the other hand, the several political crises between two countries occurred because of the shooting down of one another's warplanes due to violation of their airspaces in 2012 and 2013. Furthermore, the violent acts such as car bombs and artillery shells occurred within Turkish territory that killed more than 70 Turkish people. Ayman, "Turkey and Iran" ,17. Dal, "Impact of the transnationalization of the Syrian civil war on Turkey", 1400.

[409] Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, 39.

As the regionalist perspective argues, geographical contiguity increased the extent of the *negative security externalities* of the Syrian civil war for Turkey. There were several border tensions between two countries during this period. In addition, the Syrian regime shot down a Turkish fighter jet in June 2012 on the grounds that it violated Syrian air space.[410] Given Syria's direct threat to Turkish national security, Turkey's opposition to the Assad regime became more explicit. As the Assad regime's violent crackdown on protesters lasted, Ankara became a significant backer of the Syrian opposition; for instance, the Syrian National Council (SNC) was formed in August 2011 in Istanbul and aimed to "*represent the concerns and demands of the Syrian people*" against the Assad regime. [411] The Turkish government also assisted the Free Syrian Army (FSA) which was formed by soldiers defected from the Syrian regime army.[412] Turkish foreign policy elites perceived that the Assad regime would be toppled in a short period. Hence, it was significant for Turkey to have a voice in the post-Assad Syria to consolidate its regional power status. In this regard, as a regional power, Turkey sought to have an active and leading role for conflict resolution in Syria in favor of its national and regional interests.

Turkish foreign policy elites revealed Turkey's opposition to the Assad regime and did not avoid harsh criticism against it. For instance, Erdoğan declared the Syrian President Assad as a terrorist by stating that *"I don't regard Bashar Assad as a politician anymore. He is a terrorist carrying out state terrorism; a*

[410] "Turkey-Syria border tension", *The Guardian*, October 4, 2012, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/oct/04/turkey-syria-threat-security-live#block-506dc39bc0e3aacd18e2f6f2 (accessed on 25 March 2020).

[411] İpek Yezdani, "Syrian dissidents form national council", *The Edmond Sun*, August 24, 2011, https://archive.is/20121204175512/http://www.edmondsun.com/news_tab3/x2122765173/Syrian-dissidents-form-national-council (accessed on 25 March 2020).

[412] The FSA was established as a military wing of the opposition with the Syrian flag and became a military part of the Syrian Provisional Government that formed in March 2013. Dilara Hamit and Erdoğan Çağatay Zontur, "Free Syrian Army transforms into Syrian National Army", *Anatolian Agency*, October 9, 2019, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/free-syrian-army-transforms-into-syrian-national-army/1607384 (accessed on 25 March 2020).

*person who killed 110,000 of his people is a terrorist.*" [413] Davutoğlu summarized the policy options regarding the crisis and Turkey's position as follows:

> There are three policies to be implemented regarding Syria: the first is to stand by Assad on behalf of the status quo, the second is not to deal with what happened in Syria, and the third is to be with the people, because we are unable to maintain our relationship with Assad. [414]

In this regard, the regional context pushed Turkey to support opposition groups in Syria against the Assad regime. As a regional power, Turkey sought to consolidate its *soft power* in the region by glorifying human rights and democracy which could have an impact on the new governments in the Uprising states. Furthermore, Turkey's regional position converged Turkey and Saudi Arabia since both called for the Assad regime's resignation.[415] Turkey's position on the Assad regime and being on the same side with Saudi Arabia were contrary to the Iran's interests since Syria has been main regional ally of Iran and the latter has been its significant regional adversary. Hence, as it will be explained below, regional power and alignment shifts to a great extent diverged Turkish and Iranian interests during this period.

From Iranian perspective, the fall of the Assad regime would be unacceptable for Iran since it has been an inseparable regional member of the '*resistance front*' connecting Iran to Lebanon and Hezbollah, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic

[413] "Turkey's Erdoğan says Syria's Assad is a terrorist, not a politician", *The Jerusalem Post* , June 10, 2013, http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Turkeys-Erdogan-says-Syrias-Assad-is-a-terrorist-not-a-politician-328095 (accessed on 10 January 2020).

[414] "Davutoğlu, Esad'a ömür biçti", *NTV*, August, 24, 2012, https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/davutoglu-esada-omur-bicti,Nsez_e7zmEO7uz5O9Pv6hw (accessed on 26 March 2020).

[415] Meliha Altunışık, "Turkey's Relations with Egypt and Saudi Arabia: From Hopes of Cooperation to the Reality of Conflict" in *Aspiring Powers, Regional Rivals: Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the Middle East* eds. Gönül Tol and David Dumke (Washington, Middle East Institute, 2019), 32.

Jihad. [416] As a regional power, Iran's objective has been consolidating its power and influence in the region which has been possible with the Syrian support so far. Furthermore, Syria has been one of the most significant allies of Iran in the Middle Eastern security complex with its long-lasting strategic alliance with Iran since the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979. For instance, it was the only Arab country that stood behind Iran during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) which led to the emergence of Iran-Syria axis.[417] Hence, the removal of the Assad regime from regional balance of power would put Iran's strategic interests at risk and make it more vulnerable against its regional enemies. The Iranian regime was already domestically fragile since it dealt with the Green Movement uprisings and it witnessed economic crisis derived by the international sanctions. Hence, the fall of the Assad regime would further isolate the Iranian regime in an insecure Middle Eastern security complex.[418]

Hence, Iran's foreign policy stance toward the Syrian war from the beginning has been preserving the Assad regime against the anti-Assad groups. For this reason, the Iranian regime has consistently emphasized the foreign nature of the Syrian uprisings. Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has been active in Syria since the initial stages of the Syrian war. They have supported the Assad regime with the tasks known as TAA (Train, Advise, Assist). To increase its support to the Assad regime, Iran has deployed IRGC Ground Forces in Syria within where they have been actively involved in several military operations. [419]

[416] Ayman, "Turkey and Iran", 18. Sinkaya "Implications of the Arab Spring for Iran's Policy towards the Middle East", 65.

[417] Syria's support to Iran have been derived from regional reasons within which Syria aimed to balance against Iraq and Israel by cooperating with Syria.

[418] Furthermore, the Western and Saudi support to the Syrian opposition made Iran become more convinced of being side with the Assad regime. Sinkaya "Implications of the Arab Spring for Iran's Policy towards the Middle East", 65. Hinnebush, "The Arab uprising and regional power struggle", 124.

[419]Paul Bucala and Frederick W. Kagan, "Iran's Evolving Way of War: How the IRGC Fights in Syria", *Critical Threats* (March 2016): 13. Christin Cappelletti, "Dynamics of the Iranian Role in the Syrian Civil War", (Master's Thesis, Middle East Technical University, 2018).

Furthermore, the Iranian government also persuaded Maliki to accept the flow of goods and military equipment via Iraqi territory and to ensure Syrian trade movements via Iraqi banks.[420]

### 5.3.2. The First Discursive Indicators of Turkish-Iranian Regional Tension after the Syrian Civil War

As an indicator of their divergent positions regarding the Syrian war, Turkey hosted the second "*Friends of the Syrian People*" Summit in April 2012 and Iran was not among the guest states.[421] Similarly, in the same year, Iran hosted an alternative international conference with 29 countries, but did not make an invitation to Turkey. [422] Furthermore, during this period, the mutual accusations between two countries, which was unfamiliar during 2002-2011 period, became common part of the everyday politics. Both countries criticized each other's position concerning the massacres in Syria; for instance, while the Iran Revolutionary Guard accused Ankara of "*being responsible for shedding of blood in Syria and supporting the war efforts of the US*", Erdoğan condemned Iran by stating:

> Turkey was the only country that was side with Iran in the period when no country stood by it. It was Turkey that plumped for Iran with respect to nuclear energy issue. But I am asking to Iranians, 'Is there a place in our belief in defending a regime that kills its own citizens? If Syrians leave their country and

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[420] Özden Zeynep Oktav, "Understanding Iran's Approach to Violent Non-State Actors: the ISIS and YPG Cases" *Violent Non-state Actors and the Syrian Civil War*: the ISIS and YPG Cases, eds.Özden Zeynep Oktav, Emel Parlar Dal and Ali Murat Kurşun ( Cham, Springer, 2018), 199.

[421] In this conference, Turkey expressed its will to accept the Syrian National Council as "the legitimate representative body of the Syrian people". "Friends of Syria recognize SNC as 'legitimate representative'", *RT*, April 1, 2012, https://www.rt.com/news/friends-syria-istanbul-meeting-966/ (accessed on 26 March 2020). Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, 39.

[422] Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, 40.

> run away, isn't it of Iran's responsibility to ask account for it? Before being questioned, the Iranian government has to account for itself ". [423]

Turkey's criticism toward pro-Assad policy of Iran was also explicitly stated by Davutoğlu in August 2012, as follows:

> Iran relies on government and individuals rather than trusting people. Iran is applying the policy of 'resistance axis' for Assad which it has implemented in the past. In our opinion, the 'resistance axis' is legitimate if it is based on people. The 'resistance axis' is the will of Syrian people. Iran makes mistakes in its Syria policy.[424]

The Turkish government was determined to criticize Iran's pro-Assad foreign policy during the year of 2013. During his press conference on February 2013, Erdoğan said:

> Iran should check and review the attitude it has adopted towards Syria up till now. Because, until now, we have not found the Iran's attitude towards Syria appropriate. There is a persecution in Syria and this cruelty is a kind of cruelty that cannot be described with words. Almost 60,000 people were killed here [in Syria]. These people are those who are Syrian citizens and share the values of Iran. While these people are killed there, Iran is still quiet. [425]

On the other hand, Iranian officials criticized Turkey for being side with the US regarding the Syrian civil war. Furthermore, Turkey's cooperation with the Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States was a source of concern for Iran. The Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces, Hassan Firouzabadi hold Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey for the blood in the Syrian war and warned them about spread of al-Qaida-like terrorism. In August 2012, he declared that:

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[423] "Türkiye'den İran'a Kınama", *Deutsche Welle*, August 7, 2012, https://www.dw.com/tr/t%C3%BCrkiyeden-irana-k%C4%B1nama/a-16150396 (accessed on 26 March 2020).

[424] "Davutoğlu, Esad'a ömür biçti", *NTV*.

[425] "Başbakan'dan İran'a kritik uyarı", *Sabah*, February 3, 2012, https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2013/02/03/basbakandan-irana-kritik-uyari (accessed on 26 March 2020).

> Assisting the Great Satan's (the US) war plans are not a correct basis for neighbor countries of Syria. If they act based on this… then they should know that…. Turkey and other countries will be next.[426]

Furthermore, the top-government Iranian officials, including Iranian Foreign Minister, Javad Zarif started to warn Turkey in 2013 about its Syrian policy. By emphasizing that the military method is not a solution for Syrian civil war, Zarif stated that:

> We have common views on several issues; however, we believe that the Turkish government pursues very dangerous and wrong policy about the Syrian civil war.[427]

Their regional disagreement regarding the Syrian war had a spillover effect on other fields that two countries had cooperated between 2002-2011 period. While their geographical proximity and common concerns led their cooperation about PKK/PJAK threat in the previous decade, Turkey and Iran have significantly reduced their intelligence cooperation against the PKK since 2011.[428] In contrast to 2002-2011 period, Turkish officials claimed that Iran had stopped to give intelligence to Turkey regarding the PKK activities. This security incoordination about the PKK was also overlapped with the unambiguous claims about seizure of Murat Karayılan, a PKK leader, by Iran in August 2011. On the Turkish side, Turkish Anadolu Agency claimed that '*Iran captured Karayılan*' based on the news from Iranian sources. This news was disapproved by the Iranian and Turkish authorities. Instead, it was claimed that even though Turkish National

[426] "İran: Sıra Türkiye'ye Gelir", *Deutsche Welle*, August 6, 2012, https://www.dw.com/tr/iran-s%C4%B1ra-t%C3%BCrkiyeye-gelir/a-16148211 (accessed on 12 October 2020).

[427] "İran'dan Türkiye'ye 'tehlikeli politika' uyarısı", *Milliyet*, September 19, 2013, https://www.milliyet.com.tr/dunya/irandan-turkiyeye-tehlikeli-politika-uyarisi-1765793 (accessed on 12 October 2020).

[428] Ali Othman and Ismail Zhirwan A. , "Impacts of Syrian Crisis on Turkish-Iranian Relations:(Rojava Factor)" *Journal of University of Human Development* 3, no. 3 (2017): 570.

Intelligence Organization shared intelligence to Iran about the location of Karayılan, the Iranian authorities did not act responsibly and Karayılan escaped. [429] Some writers of the pro-government Turkish press even argued that Iran was likely to use Karayılan and PKK against Turkey. [430] These news leaks demonstrated that there was a tense diplomatic atmosphere between Turkey and Iran during this period.

Furthermore, Iran's concerns about the PJAK threat diminished during this period due to the PJAK's unilateral ceasefire against the Iranian regime. This development reinforced the perception that the Karayılan incident and the PJAK ceasefire was related to each other. [431] The then Turkish Deputy Prime Minister, Bülent Arınç expressed the government's confusion about the vagueness in the Karayılan incident and said that "*there is something in it, but we haven't yet been able to explain or see it*." [432] However, afterwards, in October 2011, he announced that his words about Karayılan were misunderstood and explained that '*we believe that the [Iranian] statements made to us are sincere and true, and our cooperation with Iran will continue. Our conviction has not been changed so far*". [433]

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[429] "Karayılan'ı İran kurtardı", *Sabah*, August 20, 2011, https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2011/08/20/karayilani-iran-kurtardi (accessed on 26 March 2020).

[430] "Karayılan'ı İran kurtardı", *Sabah*. "PJAK Karayılan'ı kurtarmak için mi ateşkes ilan etti?", *İL Gazetesi*, September 7, 2011, http://www.ilgazetesi.com.tr/pjak-karayilani-kurtarmak-icin-mi-ateskes-ilan-etti-123463h.htm (accessed on 26 March 2020).

[431] "Karayılan'ı İran kurtardı", *Sabah*. "PJAK Karayılan'ı kurtarmak için mi ateşkes ilan etti?", *İL Gazetesi*, September 7, 2011, http://www.ilgazetesi.com.tr/pjak-karayilani-kurtarmak-icin-mi-ateskes-ilan-etti-123463h.htm (accessed on 26 March 2020).

[432] "Bülent Arınç'ın Karayılan Şüphesi", *CNN Türk*, August 22, 2011, https://www.cnnturk.com/2011/turkiye/08/22/bulent.arincin.karayilan.suphesi/626927.0/index.html (accessed on 25 March 2020).
[433] "Bülent Arınç'tan Murat Karayılan Açıklaması", *TRT Haber*, October 14, 2011, https://www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/bulent-arinctan-murat-karayilan-aciklamasi-12729.html (accessed on 26 March 2020).

Even though the two countries sought to overcome the doubts and misunderstandings regarding the Karayılan incident in 2011, the next year witnessed another rumor about Iran's incoordination about the PKK activities. Some Turkish experts suspected Iran of having knowledge about the PKK attack in the Şemdinli district of Hakkari in July 2012, which led to death of 20 Turkish soldiers. [434] In this sense, it was argued that Iran preferred to wink at the PKK activities across Turkish-Iranian border in exchange for Turkey's support to Syrian opposition against the Assad regime. [435] During that year, *Sabah* newspaper argued that the PKK attacks against Turkey escalated due to the Iranian agents in Turkey that leaked information to the Iranian government regarding "*the coordination of several strategic institutions and establishments*" in Turkey. [436] Similarly, in August 2012, the then-Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç criticized Iran for its support to the PKK terrorists as follows:

> Iran used to make a fierce war against the PJAK. Afterwards, it became apparent that there was no such a war anymore. Now, it is seen that the Şemdinli attacks were realized by the terrorists not coming from Iraq but infiltrating from Iran".[437]

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[434] Ali and Zhirwan A., "Impacts of Syrian Crisis on Turkish-Iranian Relations", 570.

[435] Larrabee and Nader, *Turkish-Iranian Relations in a Changing Middle East*, 11.

[436] "İran ajanlarından PKK'ya koordinat", *Sabah*, August 31, 2012, https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2012/08/31/iran-ajanlarindan-pkkya-koordinat (accessed on 26 March 2020).

[437] Likewise, following the PKK attacks in Çukurca,Hakkari in October 2011, Erdoğan warned that Turkey would bring the supporters of the terrorists to account in any circumstances; the target of this statement was interpreted by the foreign press as Syrian and Iranian government. "İran beni hayal kırıklığına uğrattı", *Sabah*, August 11, 2012, https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2012/08/11/iran-beni-hayal-kirikligina-ugratti (accessed on 26 March 2020). "Erdoğan, İran ve Suriye'ye gönderme yaptı", *Hürriyet*, October 21, 2011, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/erdogan-iran-ve-suriyeye-gonderme-yapti-19036728 (accessed on 26 March 2020).

This regional tension between two countries regarding the Syrian war also reflected itself in the nuclear diplomacy. It has been claimed that the active support of Turkey toward the Syrian opposition led to Iranian government's rejecting Turkey's hosting of nuclear negotiations between Iran and the Western world. Accordingly, one of the significant Iranian officers, Aleaddin Burucerdi said that "*Iranian decision-makers do not want Turkey to host the negotiations*" and he added that Turkey, which has adopted "*irrational and extreme policies*", lost its legitimacy to host such a meeting. Instead, he recommended that the talks can be held either in Damascus or Baghdad.[438] Upon these criticisms, Erdoğan retorted:

> Nowadays, the circulating Damascus or Baghdad offers refers to dodging the column. It means that 'do not let it [these talks] happen'. Because they know that the other side will not come to Damascus or Baghdad. In return, they will say that 'we had already offered both Damascus and Baghdad. We need to be honest. They continue to lose their reputation in the world politics because they are not honest. This is not diplomacy language. This is another kind of language and it does not suit to me." [439]

### 5.3.3. The Regional Tension over NATO Missile Shield and Patriot Missile

As the regionalist theories argue, the geographically proximate threats are more challenging for national security of states. Hence, any security precaution of a regional member is likely to be perceived as a threat by other regional actors. Turkey's deployment of the US radar system in Malatya/Kürecik in September 2011 and as a result straining of Turkey-Iran relations should be evaluated within this context.[440] From Turkish perspective, it was difficult for Turkey to oppose a

[438] "Erdoğan'dan İran'a sert çıkış", *BBC*, April 5, 2012, https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2012/04/120405_iran_turkey_nuclear (accessed on 26 March 2020).

[439] Yahya Bostan, "Erdoğan: İran ipe un seriyor", *Sabah*, April 6, 2012, https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2012/04/06/erdogandan-irana-bu-ipe-un-sermektir (accessed on 26 March 2020).

[440] Deployment of NATO ballistic missile systems within the territories of member states was already announced at the NATO Lisbon Summit in November 2010. However, Turkey's deployment of the missiles in its territory in September 2011 overlapped with regional dynamics

defense system for NATO and the West since it could be interpreted as Turkey's abandoning the Western security system.[441] Having aimed to consolidate its regional power status, Turkey has improved its relations with the Middle Eastern countries, it also wanted to preserve its stable relations with the West. Hence, the Turkish government accepted to host NATO's "early warning radar system" in its territory. [442]

However, as the Syrian war has continued to diverge the positions of Turkey and Iran, Turkey's decision to host the US radar system further strained the relations between two countries. Having already concerned about Turkey's active support to the Syrian opposition alongside with the Western states, Iran suspected whether Turkey returned to its traditional pro-American bloc.[443] The Iranian government was highly concerned about deployment of NATO radar system close to its borders and it was highly perceived that Israel would benefit from this system. [444]

In this sense, this system alerted the Iranian leaders' threat perceptions and led them to express their concerns about potential regional tensions with Turkey.

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that diverged Tukey and Iran's national interests and in return increased Iran's threat perceptions. "Lisbon Summit-19-20 November 2010", *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_67814.htm (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[441] The Turkish government was already charged with shifting its axis to the Middle East and turning its back on the West. Kemal İnat, "Türkiye'nin İran Politikası 2011" in *Ortadoğu Yıllığı 2011*, eds. Kemal İnat, Bilal Yıldırım, Fuat Aydın, Muhittin Ataman (İstanbul, Açılım Kitap, 2012), 20.

[442] İnat, "Türkiye'nin İran Politikası 2011", 20.

[443] Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, 23.

[444] "İran'dan Ankara'ya radar tepkisi", *Al Jazeera Turk*, October 5, 2011, http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber/irandan-ankaraya-radar-tepkisi (accessed on 25 March 2020).

[445]The deputy head of the Iranian Armed Forces, Massoud Jazayeri criticized Turkey's decision by stating that "*Turkey should rethink its long-term strategic interests and draw lessons from the 'bitter historical experiences' of other countries*".[446] Similarly, Iranian Parliamentary Speaker Ali Larijani warned that "*the US radar stationed in Turkey is no good for any Muslim country*". [447] In October 2011, Ahmadinejad stated in one of the interviews that "*we told our Turkish friends that what they did was not true, and this system would not be in their own interest. We are aware that you are a NATO member, but they are not your friends*". [448]

The top political elites of the AKP, the then President Gül and Erdoğan consistently stated that NATO radar system was not against any neighbor country in the region since it was within the context of NATO defense system. [449] In the joint press conference with the Iranian FM Ali Akbar Salehi in January 2012, Davutoğlu expressed:

> This is purely a defense system and only a radar based in Turkey and this is part of a NATO security system, defense system. And during the negotiations and discussions we especially emphasized and underlined that this system cannot be

[445] Bank and Karadag interpreted the relations between two countries as "conflict-ridden" during this period. André Bank and Roy Karadag, "Before the Arab revolts and after: Turkey's transformed regional power status in the Middle East" in *Regional Powers in the Middle East: New Constellations after the Arab Revolts* , ed.Henner Fürtig, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 109. "Turkey to site NATO missile shield radar in its south-east", The Guardian, September 14, 2011, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/sep/14/turkey-nato-missile-shield-radar (accessed on 25 March 2020).

[446] "Turkey-Iran tension escalates over NATO radar system and PKK", *Dünya*, October 12, 2011, https://www.dunya.com/gundem/turkey-iran-tension-escalates-over-nato-radar-system-and-pkk-haberi-156248 (accessed on 20 March 2020).

[447] "NATO radar system in Turkey up, running", *Hürriyet Daily News*, January 14, 2012, http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/nato-radar-system-in-turkey-up-running-11474 (accessed on 15 March 2020).

[448]"İran'dan Ankara'ya radar tepkisi".

[449] İnat, "Türkiye'nin İran Politikası 2011", 15.

against any neighbor of Turkey and there cannot be any name as a target or as a threat in NATO documents because of the Turkish position.[450]

Similarly, during a two-day official visit to Tehran in March 2012, Erdoğan gave an interview to Iran's official news agency, *Fars* and assured Iran about the shield project. Accordingly, he stated that the "early warning radar system" was not threat to Iran and "*if NATO does not conform to the conditions of Turkey, we demand the closure of the system*". [451] However, it can be said that this issue blurred the waters between two countries during this period. For instance, Ahmadinejad's cancelling of his planned visit to Konya in December 2012 at the last moment rose doubts whether it was a reaction to the Turkish decision to deploy the radar. [452]

As two countries have had opposite threat perceptions in the region, their foreign policy responses to the regional developments became increasingly divergent and conflictual. Two countries experienced a more serious tension when the Turkish government called for NATO in 2012 to deploy Patriot missile defense system in Turkish territory against possible missile and aircraft threats from Syria. [453] Due to its crisis with the Syrian regime on its borders, Turkey was

[450] "Dışişleri Bakanı Sn.Ahmet Davutoğlu'nun İran Dışişleir Bakanı Ali Ekber Salihi ile Ortak Basın Toplantısı", *Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, January 5, 2012, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-davutoglu-yeni-yilda-ilk-yurtdisi-ziyaretini-irana-gerceklestirdi.tr.mfa (accessed on 20 March 2020).

[451] "Erdoğan: NATO yalan söylerse radarları kapatırız", *T24*, April 1, 2012, https://t24.com.tr/haber/erdogan-nato-yalan-soylerse-radarlari-kapatiriz,200722 (accessed on 15 March 2020).

[452] "Ahmedinejad Konya ziyaretini iptal etti", *T24*, December 17, 2012, https://t24.com.tr/haber/ahmedinejad-konya-ziyaretini-iptal-etti,219813 (accessed on 15 March 2020). "Ahmedinejad Türkiye'ye gelmiyor", *Al Jazeera Turk*, December 16, 2012, http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber/ahmedinejad-turkiyeye-gelmiyor (accessed on 15 March 2020).

[453]"NATO Deploys Patriot Missiles to Turkey", *Stratfor*, January 8, 2013, https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/nato-deploys-patriot-missiles-turkey (accessed on 20 March 2020).

concerned about its national security. Hence, in January 2013, NATO deployed six Patriot batteries upon Turkey's demand in Turkish territory. [454] Erdoğan defended their requests to deploy Patriot missiles in its southern border by stating "*We will take our precautions without any hesitation in the face of threats against us, our security and our peace. Nobody should try to make different meanings from the measures we take at our borders*". [455] Similarly, Davutoğlu stated that '*when the risk [the Syrian war] disappears and the security risk at our borders disappears, Patriots return to their country as they arrived*". [456]

However, the Turkish leaders' explanations regarding the Patriots did not relieve Iran's concerns and caused harsh criticisms from the Iranian political actors. One of the parliament members, Ismail Kevseri accused Erdoğan of being dishonest and said that "*Ankara has become a subcontractor and agent of world imperialism. Erdoğan and other Turkish decision-makers are not capable of making their own decisions and just do what others want them to do*". [457] In December 2012, The Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces, Hassan Firouzabadi warned Turkey over the potential dangers of the Patriots to "create a world war". [458] The tension spread to the upper political elites of both countries,

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[454] "Patriot missiles arrive in Turkey", *BBC*, January 21, 2013, https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-middle-east-21130238/patriot-missiles-arrive-in-turkey (accessed on 20 March 2020).

[455] "Patriottan başka anlam çıkmasın hükümet sadece barış istiyormuş", *BirGün*, November, 26, 2011, https://www.birgun.net/haber/patriottan-baska-anlam-cikmasin-hukumet-sadece-baris-istiyormus-63242 (accessed on 15 March 2020).

[456] Ibid.

[457] "İran: Erdoğan emperyalistlerin emirlerini uyguluyor", *Evrensel*, April 7, 2012, https://www.evrensel.net/haber/26637/iran-erdogan-emperyalistlerin-emirlerini-uyguluyor (accessed on 20 March 2020).

[458] "Iran: Patriot Missiles in Turkey First Step to Next World War", *Business Insider*, December 17, 2012, https://www.businessinsider.com/iran-patriot-missiles-in-turkey-first-step-to-next-world-war-2012-12 (accessed on 20 March 2020).

too. In the same month, the then Iranian Foreign Minister, Ali Akbar Salehi defined Turkey's deployment of Patriot missile system in its territory as "*a provocative action that can have unexpected results*". [459] These criticisms led Davutoğlu to adopt a critical discourse towards Iran by stating, "*our expectation from Iran is to stop the Syrian regime that persecute its own people, instead of criticizing the system that has no provocation*".[460]

These two incidents showed the role of regional context and geographical contiguity for divergent positions of Turkey and Iran during this period. Even though Turkey's ties with NATO did not create any concern for Iran during 2002 and 2011, their different national interests during the Syrian war have made Iran to suspect about Turkey's commitment to NATO defense system. On the other hand, having concerned about its own security, Turkey sought to depend upon NATO security umbrella against the possible Syrian threat, at the expense of disturbing Iran and other neighbor countries.

### 5.3.4. Violent Non-State Actors and Extra-Regional Powers in the Syrian Civil War: A New Competition Field between Turkey and Iran

The Syrian civil war and its *local security externalities* have become more challenging for the relations between Turkey and Iran, as the extra-regional powers, the US and Russia and violent non-state armed groups, became more involved in the war. During this period, Turkey and Iran had a tension over their responses to ISIS and PYD/YPG in the Syrian civil war. On the one hand, Iran accused Turkey of supporting ISIS and al-Qaeda affiliate other extremist groups

[459] "İran'dan ikinci çıkış: Türkiye'ye Patriot yerleştirilmesi kışkırtıcı", *T24*, December 17, 2012, https://t24.com.tr/haber/irandan-ikinci-cikis-turkiyeye-patriot-yerlestirilmesi-kiskirtici,219821 (accessed on 20 March 2020).

[460] "Davutoğlu İran'a böyle çıkıştı", *Milliyet*, December 18, 2012, https://www.milliyet.com.tr/siyaset/davutoglu-irana-boyle-cikisti-1643580 (accessed on 12 October 2020). "Davutoğlu'ndan İran'a 'Patriot' Yanıtı", *CNN Türk*, December 18, 2012, https://www.cnnturk.com/2012/guncel/12/18/davutoglundan.irana.patriot.yaniti/689133.0/index.html (accessed on 12 October 2020).

in Syria. On the other hand, Turkey was concerned about Iran's ambiguous position toward PKK-affiliate PYD/YPG in the Northern Syria. Furthermore, this period witnessed a likely temporal convergence of interests between the US and Iran on defeating ISIS and allegations about Turkey's support to ISIS against PYD/YPG in Kobane which reduced Turkey's credibility as a regional partner of the US against ISIS. [461] Hence, Turkey and Iran were again not on the same side in the Syrian civil war and they were in competition over the international prestige about their fight with terrorism.

#### 5.3.4.1. Turkish Position in a Triangle of ISIS, PYD and the Extra-Regional Powers

As the *negative security externalities* of the Syrian civil war have diversified, Turkey's regional concerns for its national security and suspicions about its regional partners increased. Its priorities about the Syrian civil war has started to change especially after the rise of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) and PYD/YPG and became fighting both terrorism and the Assad regime. [462] During the initial phases of the Syrian civil war, Turkey supported opposition Sunni groups against the Assad regime, however, the rise of extremist Sunni ISIS in 2013 has muddied the waters for Turkey's foreign policy strategy. Furthermore, one of the most effectual opposition group of ISIS was Kurdish PYD/YPG in the Northern Syria[463] which has led the US to maintain regional partnership with it

[461] "Turkey astonished by Iran accusations of ISIS support", *The Arab Weekly*, December 4, 2015, https://thearabweekly.com/turkey-astonished-iran-accusations-isis-support (accessed on 12 October 2020).

[462] Kılıç Kanat and Kadir Üstün, "US-Turkey Realignment on Syria", *Middle East Policy* 22, no.4 (2015): 88.

[463] As a political party, the PYD was formed in 2003 in Northern Syria following the Assad regime's assaulting and closing the PKK camps according to agreement between Turkey and Syria. The PYD can be regarded as a part of the Kurdistan Communities Union which is an umbrella organization for the PKK and PJAK. As a military wing of the PYD, the YPG emerged following the Kurdish riot in Qamishli, Syria. Turkey was strongly opposed to the empowerment of PYD/YPG in the Northern Syria which would mean the emergence of an independent Kurdish state across its borders. See Özlem Kayhan Pusane, "How to Profile PYD/YPG as an actor in the Syrian Civil War: Policy implications for the region and beyond" in *Violent Non-state Actors and*

against ISIS. Under these circumstances, Turkey's efforts to manage its foreign policies strategies toward both ISIS and the PYD/YPG were challenging and open to criticisms of both global and regional powers.

Turkey's relations with the US became already problematical regarding the Syrian civil war as there were allegations about Turkey's support to jihadist Sunni opposition groups against the Assad regime and the PYD/YPG.[464] Turkey was even depicted as '*jihadist highway*', pointing to its policy of letting foreign militias enter Syria via its borders. [465] Accordingly, Turkey, alongside with Saudi Arabia and Qatar, was claimed to support al-Qaeda-associated jihadist Sunni groups in the Syrian civil war, such as Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham (under the command of the Army of Conquest).[466] These groups were regarded as extremists and terrorist groups by the US. Hence, it was argued that '*joint approach by Turkey and Saudi Arabia graphically illustrates how the interests of the Sunni regional powers are diverging from those of the US in Syria*'. [467]

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*the Syrian Civil War*: the ISIS and YPG Cases, eds.Özden Zeynep Oktav, Emel Parlar Dal and Ali Murat Kurşun ( Cham, Springer, 2018), 75. Doruk Ergun, " External Actors and VNSAs: An analysis of the United States, Russia, ISIS, and PYD/YPG." in *Violent Non-state Actors and the Syrian Civil War: the ISIS and YPG Cases*, edited by Özden Zeynep Oktav, Emel Parlar Dal and Ali Murat Kurşun (Cham: Springer, 2018):165. Semih İdiz, "Turkey Reconsiders Support for Jabhat al-Nusra", *Al-Monitor*, August 13, 2013, https://archive.vn/20170429221027/http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/tr/originals/2013/08/turkey-considers-support-for-al-nusra.html (accessed on 12 October 2020).

[464] Ibid.

[465] Ayla Albayrak and Joe Parkinson, "Turkey Struggles to Halt Islamic State 'Jihadist Highway'*", The Wall Street Journal*, September 14, 2014, https://www.wsj.com/articles/turkey-struggles-to-halt-islamic-state-jihadist-highway-1409777884 (accessed on 12 October 2020).

[466] Semih İdiz, "Why is Jabhat al-Nusra No Longer Useful to Turkey?", *U.S. News*, June 11, 2014, https://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2014/06/11/why-is-jabhat-al-nusra-no-longer-useful-to-turkey (accessed on 12 October 2020).

[467] Kim Sengupta, "Turkey and Saudi Arabia alarm the West by backing Islamist extremists the Americans had boomed in Syria", *Independent*, May 13, 2015, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/syria-crisis-turkey-and-saudi-arabia-shock-western-countries-by-supporting-anti-assad-jihadists-10242747.html (accessed on 12 October 2020).

However, as the threat of ISIS increased, Turkey declared al-Nusra as a terrorist organization and sought to control its Syrian border more tightly. [468]

The division between the foreign policies of Turkey and the US about the violent armed groups in the Syrian civil war continued with the rise of ISIS threat. Regarding Turkey, ISIS was a significant threat for Turkey's national security. [469] However, the US' military assistance to PYD/YPG in its struggle against ISIS in Northern Syria has added another challenge for Turkey's national interests since PYD has been a Syrian branch of PKK terrorist organization and regarded as a threat for Turkey's national security. [470]

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[468] "Turkey adds Al Nusra Front to list of terror organizations", *Anatolian Agency*, June 3, 2014, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/politics/turkey-adds-al-nusra-front-to-list-of-terror-organizations/154306 8accessed on 12 October 2020).

[469] The threat of ISIS for Turkey's security has become more alerting by the late 2014 when the ISIS terror acts has become more threatening for Turkish citizens. In June 2014, while there were violent clashes between the Iraqi army and ISIS in Mosul, Iraq, the 28- 32 for some sources- Turkish truck drivers, who took fuel from Iskenderun to a power plant in Mosul, were taken hostage by the ISIS. The hostages were released by ISIS almost one month later In the same week, ISIS militants seized Turkish's consul general of Mosul and his staff- including their families-Furthermore, after capturing the most of the territories- previously under the control of the Free Syrian Army and the Nusra Front- around southern borders of Turkey, ISIS militants began to launch rocket attacks to Turkish towns, particularly Kilis town, across the borders and caused deaths among Turkish people. "IŞİD 28 Türk tır şoförünü rehin aldı", *HaberTürk*, June 10, 2014, https://www.haberturk.com/dunya/haber/956342-isid-28-turk-tir-soforunu-rehin-aldi (accessed on 27 March 2020). "Kaçırılan tır şoförleri serbest bırakıldı", *Akşam*, July 3, 2014, https://www.aksam.com.tr/dunya/kacirilan-tir-soforleri-serbest-birakildi/haber-321573 (accessed on 27 March 2020). . "Militants Storm Turkish Consulate in Iraqi City, Taking 49 People as Hostages", *The New York Times*, June 11, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/12/world/middleeast/militants-seize-turkish-consulate-staff-in-mosul.html (accessed on 27 March 2020). Selin Girit, "Syria Conflict: Kilis, the Turkish town enduring IS bombardment", *BBC*, May 9, 2016, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36245505 (accessed on 27 March 2020).

[470]See Özlem Kayhan Pusane, "How to Profile PYD/YPG as an actor in the Syrian Civil War: Policy implications for the region and beyond" in *Violent Non-state Actors and the Syrian Civil War*: the ISIS and YPG Cases, eds.Özden Zeynep Oktav, Emel Parlar Dal and Ali Murat Kurşun ( Cham, Springer, 2018), 75. Ergun, " External Actors and VNSAs", 165.

The collaboration between the US government and the PYD/YPG against the ISIS threat has been a challenging for Turkey's security interests in the region. For Turkey, the emergence of the PYD/YPG in 2012 across its borders was already an alarming development given its connections with the PKK. [471] In other words, Turkish political elites have seen the PYD/YPG as a terrorist threat for Turkish national interests since its members' ideological base has been PKK and its members have recognized the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan as their own leader. Thus, Turkish officials were worried about the emergence of the autonomous Kurdish government along the Turkish-Syrian border as in the case of KRG along the Turkish-Iraqi border. Put it differently, it can be said that Turkey's "*northern Iraq*" problem has been replaced by the "*northern Syria*" problem following the emergence of the PYD/YPG.[472]

In contrast to Turkey's serious concerns about the PYD/YPG, the US government regarded the PYD/YPG as one of the most important local allies on the ground against the ISIS in the region since it has been the most organized and secular armed group in the Syrian war and it has controlled oil rich areas which the US has aimed to secure. [473] Against this background, when there was a fight between ISIS and YPG in Kobane, largely Kurdish Syrian town across the border of Turkey, in September 2014, the US-led coalition began to assist the PYD/YPG which pushed the ISIS back in January 2015. [474] The US-led airstrikes

[471] Dal, "Impact of the transnationalization of the Syrian civil war on Turkey", 1402.

[472] Pusane, "How to Profile PYD/YPG as an actor in the Syrian Civil War", 81.

[473] Othman and Zhirwan A., "Impacts of Syrian Crisis on Turkish-Iranian Relations", 573.

[474] The Turkish foreign policy actors confronted a contradiction in terms of foreign policy decision. On the one hand, YPG's connection with the PKK created serious concerns for Turkey about spreading of the Kurdish regions to the Turkish territory. On the other hand, as ISIS marched into more villages and towns, the humanitarian situation in Kobane required a rapid international intervention. Under this challenging position, Turkey decided to allow KRG forces to use its territory to assist Kobane defense against ISIS. Furthermore, it called Free Syrian Army opposition forces to support Kobane. However, the war in Kobane ultimately resulted in the international intervention led by the United States and made YPG forces engage coalition with the United States. Eva Maria Resch, "Syria's impact on the Kurdish peace process in Turkey",

also supported the PYD/YPG's territorial gains nearby al-Hasakah and al-Haul.[475] In this sense, it can be said that the US-led coalition's airstrikes against the ISIS targets have put it into defensive position and made it lose the vast majority of its territories.[476] In addition to its airstrikes that assisted the PYD/YPG, the US also maintained its military assistance to the SDF that was mainly consisted of the YPG forces. [477]

Despite the criticisms of Turkish officials, several US government representatives visited the PYD leaders in the Northern Syria to contact them in person. [478] For instance, when the US envoy to the coalition against the ISIS visited Kurdish officials in Kobane in 2016, Erdoğan showed its reaction against the US policy and asked the US, "*who is your partner, is it me or the terrorists in Kobane*?". [479] Even though Turkey sought to prevent Kobane's fall to ISIS' control, it regarded Kobane clashes as taking place two terrorist groups, which

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*Istituto Affari Internazionali* 17 (2017): 7. "US drops weapons and ammunition to help Kurdish fighters in Kobani", The Guardian, October 20, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/20/turkey-iraqi-kurds-kobani-isis-fighters-us-air-drops-arms (accessed on 27 March 2020).

[475] The US already accelerated its military attack against the ISIS following the ISIS's genocidal attacks against Yazidis in Kurdish-controlled parts of Iraq. Ergun, "External Actors and VNSAs", 164.

[476] "What is 'Islamic State'?", *BBC News*, December 2, 2015. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29052144 (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[477] It was even argued that the US supplied advanced military equipment such as FGM-148 to the SDF. Ergun, "External Actors and VNSAs",165.

[478] Ergun, "External Actors and VNSAs", 165.
[479] "Erdogan asks Americans Who's your partner, Turkey or Kurds?" *Middle East Online*, February 7, 2016, https://middle-east-online.com/en/erdogan-asks-americans-who%E2%80%99s-your-partner-turkey-or-kurds (accessed on 27 March 2020). "1st visit by top US official to Syria during ISIS fight", *CBS News*, February 1, 2016, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/us-envoy-isis-coalition-brett-mcgurk-visits-kobani-syria-kurds/ (accessed on 27 March 2020).

were equally challenging for Turkey's national security. [480] Hence, when the US regarded the PYD as different from the PKK and provide it military equipment, it was inevitable that Turkey and the US had a 'crisis of confidence' about their political approaches to the PYD/YPG. [481]

The other regional development that further narrowed Turkey's maneuvering area was Russia's active military involvement in the Syrian war in 2015 which has shifted the balance of power for all the interested parties in the conflict since then. [482] Russia's concrete military involvement in the Syrian war began with its air strikes in 2015 targeting the Islamist groups. [483] Russia's military involvement in the war shifted the power dynamics in favor of the Assad regime, because Russia supported the Assad regime against ISIS since it regarded the Syrian army as the "*most effective and powerful ground force to fight Islamic State*". [484] Russian air strikes that targeted both ISIS and other rebel groups have strengthened the hands of both the Assad regime and, in return, Iran.

The Turkish government regarded this development as against Turkey's national interests since Turkish government position regarding the Syrian war was constructed on the assumption since 2011 that the Assad regime would be toppled down. As Russia came into play of Syria in October 2015, Turkish

[480] Kanat and Üstün, "U.S.-Turkey Realignment on Syria", 91.

[481] Ibid, 92.

[482] Its involvement in the Syrian war is likely to represent its first comprehensive military presence in the region since it was removed from Egypt in 1972 and refers to its first military intervention beyond its close neighborhood since the end of the Cold War. Ergun, "External Actors and VNSAs", 159.

[483] Its involvement in the Syrian war is likely to represent its first comprehensive military presence in the region since it was removed from Egypt in 1972 and refers to its first military intervention beyond its close neighborhood since the end of the Cold War. Ergun, "External Actors and VNSAs", 159.

[484] Ibid, 159.

government had already shifted its focus from the Assad regime to the PYD/YPG that had received the US assistance since its Kobane struggle against ISIS, however Russian involvement has made the war more complicated for Turkey. [485] It can be said that Russian airstrikes favored the Kurdish groups and weakened the Syrian opposition groups and Turkmens which reduced Turkey's political and military impact in Syria. In other words, Russian airstrikes in the Syrian airspace favored Turkey's opponents- the Assad regime and the Syrian Kurds- by increasing their territorial achievements at the expense of Turkey's allies in Syria, such as the Salafist Ahrar al-Sham and the FSA. [486]

The Russian military involvement in the Syrian war has also added one more critical issue for Turkish government since two countries did not agree upon any protocols for "*aircrafts and drone flights over Syria*". Hence, this incoordination between two countries regarding their military flights over Syrian airspace resulted in shooting down of a Russian jet by a Turkish F-16 in November 2015 and created further unfavorable environment for Turkey which created a tension with Russia.[487] As a beginning, Russia suspended the existing security mechanisms between two countries including the High-Level Cooperation Council (HLCC). Furthermore, in addition to its economic sanctions against Turkey, Russia situated S-400 air defense mechanisms in Syrian territory and virtually blocked Syrian airspace for the Turkish military airplanes. Due to this restriction, Turkey could only use its *Fırtına* howitzers in its Northern Syria

[485] Aslı Aydintasbas, "With friends like these: Turkey, Russia, and the end of an unlikely alliance" *European Council on Foreign Relations Policy Brief* (June 2016): 8.

[486] Bechev, "Russia and Turkey", 98.

[487] Russia-Turkey relations took a major blow with this affair, according to then-Deputy Prime Minister Mehmet Şimşek, due to the Russia's economic sanctions against Turkey, Turkey made a loss more than $10 billion. Dimitar Bechev, "Russia and Turkey: the promise and the limits of partnership" in *Russia's Return to the Middle East: Building Sandcastles?* Eds. Stanislav Secrieru and Nicu Popescu (Paris, EU Institute for Security Studies, 2018): 95. Hasan Selim Özertem, "Turkey and Russia: a fragile friendship" *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (2017): 124.

operation in August 2016. Turkey's inability to use its air power caused further ISIS attacks to Turkey's border cities like Kilis and Gaziantep and gave an opportunity to YPG forces to further advance to the west and its empowerment in the southern border of Turkey.[488]

As a regional power, Turkey confronted serious challenges for both its national security and regional power status during this period. For Turkey, this period witnessed *negative security externalities* of the extra-regional powers and violent non-state armed groups that have been involved in the Syrian civil war. Due to geographical security interdependencies, the threats of YPG and ISIS became increasingly more detrimental for Turkey's territorial integrity and security. Furthermore, as the extra-regional great powers created more *negative security externalities* for Turkey, Turkish foreign policy came to a nearly deadlock in the region. Under these circumstances, Iran's contradictory foreign policy behaviors and regional partnership with Russia in favor of the Assad regime as well as its support to the PYD/YPG led Turkish-Iranian tension in the short-term.

#### 5.3.4.2. Iran's Position and Escalation of Turkish-Iranian Regional Tension

In contrast to Turkey's unfavorable regional position derived from the regional developments, Iran's regional status has gradually increased. Even though ISIS was a vital threat for Iran's national security, its support to Iraqi forces for fighting ISIS in Iraqi territories increased Iran's international reputation and converged its strategies with the US even for a short period. Furthermore, Russian involvement in the Syrian civil war started to empower the Assad regime and strengthened Iran's hand at the expense of Turkey and Sunni opposition groups that Turkey supported. In this regard, as it will be explained below, the *local security externalities* of the Syrian civil war during this period led to a severe regional competition and indirect regional confrontation between Turkey and Iran.

[488] Hasan Selim Özertem, "Turkey and Russia", 125.

Like other regional actors, ISIS had an immense threat for Iran's national security. From Iranian perspective, ISIS' exclusivist sectarian language against the Shiite groups and Iran was a serious security threat. Hence, to remove ISIS threat from its borders, Iran assisted KRG's peshmerga forces with military equipment. Furthermore, Iran had already significant strategic, military, and economic ties with the Iraqi Shiite military and political group, the Badr Organization, which participated Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani's declaration to fight ISIS. They joined the Iraqi forces and started to be known as Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). They had a significant role in Fallujah, Ramadi and Baiji operations against ISIS. Iran's key role on the group has led the PMF's depiction as "mostly Iranian-backed coalition of Shia militias". [489]

Despite ISIS' significant threat, Iran was able to gain advantage of its fight with ISIS in Iraq even for a short period. After decades of bad regional and international reputation for collaborating with terrorist groups of the region, Iran was able to demonstrate that it was "*a natural partner within the community of nations in pursuing order in the region*" against ISIS threat.[490] Accordingly, IRGC Quds Force could increase it 'regional reputation' by fighting ISIS to protect regional religious minorities and supporting them for pushing ISIS back from their towns. [491] In this sense, by using public relations, Iran could turn its struggle with ISIS into an advantage in terms of its regional status.

[489] Jack Watling, "The Shia Militias of Iraq", *The Atlantic*, December 22, 2016, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/12/shia-militias-iraq-isis/510938/ (accessed on 12 October 2020).

[490] Dina Esfandiary, and Ariane Tabatabai, "Iran's ISIS policy", *International Affairs* 91, no. 1 (2015): 5.

[491] Ibid, 5.

Iran's role in fighting ISIS led to a temporary convergence of the US-Iranian regional strategies during this period. Even though there was no direct military coordination between two countries, it was argued that both the US and Iran winked at one another's operations against ISIS.[492] As the US Ambassador to Iraq, Stuart Jones expressed, the US government acknowledged that Iran had a significant role in fighting ISIS in Iraq. [493] Even it was argued that the US implicitly transferred the responsibility of ground operations against ISIS to Iran under the condition that the forces of two countries would not collide with one another on the ground. [494] It can be said that after decades of bilateral hostility, Iran, and the US for the first time converged their strategies against one common enemy in the region. [495]

As Iran's regional confidence about fighting terrorism increased, its criticism toward Turkey's policies on ISIS became more frequent. During this period, Iranian media coverage and some Iranian officials harshly accused Turkey of supporting ISIS and its sympathizers. Accordingly, some Iranian news agency and officials claimed that the Turkish government has been involved in oil trade with ISIS and other jihadists in Iraq and Syria. [496] Iranian accusations had great repercussions in global media and started to affect Turkey's regional status

[492] Ibid, 5.

[493] "Irak'ın IŞİD'e karşı en önemli müttefiki ABD mi, İran mı?", *BBC News*, January 16, 2015, https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2015/01/150115_iran_irak_etki (accessed on 12 October 2015).

[494] "IŞİD'e karşı ABD-İran İşbirliği", *Euronews*, March 6, 2015, https://tr.euronews.com/2015/03/06/iside-karsi-abd-iran-isbirligi (accessed on 12 October 2020).

[495] "IŞİD ABD ile İran'ı buluşturdu", *Cumhuriyet*, June 13, 2014, https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/isid-abd-ile-irani-bulusturdu-82713 (accessed on 12 October 2020).

[496] "Turkey astonished by Iran accusations of ISIS support".

negatively.[497] Turkish government was exceedingly uncomfortable about accusations that took place in Iranian news agencies and Turkish Foreign Ministry published a critical statement regarding Iran:

> Turkey is following principled policies in line with the international efforts for the settlement of existing problems in its region through peaceful means and has mobilized its resources far beyond the efforts of international community regarding the humanitarian dimension of the problem. Therefore, terrorism related allegations on Turkey, put forward by the countries which cause the escalation of the crisis in cooperation with Damascus regime which is conducting state terrorism against its own people and has blood on its hands, have no aspect to be taken seriously.[498]

Apart from their confrontation regarding ISIS threat, two countries were divided about Russia's active role in the Syrian civil war. As it was explained above, Turkey had a tension with Russia in terms of the latter's military operation in favor of the Assad regime and PYD/YPG and their crisis over Turkey's shooting down a Russian jet. However, during this period, Iran kept is regional cooperation with Russia at the expense of Turkey. The strategic partnership between a regional power (Iran) and extra-regional great power (Russia) was undesirable regional outcome for Turkey since they cooperated at the expense of Turkey's national interests in the region. Furthermore, due to their regional competition and zero-sum nature of Middle Eastern politics, the rise of Iran's regional power and its pro-Assad foreign policy behaviors created a significant concern for Turkish foreign policy makers. Hence, the role of Russia in the Syrian civil war had a significant factor for Turkey's regional criticisms toward Iran and their discursive tension about the regional affairs.

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[497] Ahmed Rasheed, "Iraqi PM: ISIS smuggling Most of its Oil through Turkey", *HAARETZ*, December 7, 2015, https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/iraqi-pm-turkey-main-conduit-for-isis-oil-smuggling-1.5433512 (accessed on 12 October 2020). David Butter, "Does Turkey really gets its oil from Islamic state?", *BBC News*, December 1, 2015, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34973181 (accessed on 10 October 2020).

[498]"Qa-31, 6 December 2015, Statement Of The Spokesperson Of The Ministry Of Foreign Affairs, Tanju Bilgiç In Response To A Question Regarding The Statements Of Some Iranian Officials About Turkey", *Republic of Turkey Turkish Trade Office in Taipei*, December 6, 2015, http://taipei.to.mfa.gov.tr/Mission/ShowAnnouncement/246845 (accessed on 12 October 2020).

In the first place, Iran supported Russia at the expense of Turkey regarding the Russian plane shot down by Turkey which had adverse regional consequences for Turkey. The Iranian foreign policy elites at every turn vocalized their support to Russia and criticisms toward Turkey. Deputy Chief of Staff of Iran's Armed Forces, Massoud Jazayeri defended Russia's position in Syria and stated, "*Russia will not cease its active position in Syria because its plane has been dropped*".[499] Or, Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani stated:

> Turkey's action against Russia was a big mistake. The US President Obama's support for the action was an even greater mistake…This action will escalate the conflicts in the region and efface the fight terrorism. [500]

The Turkish government's responses toward Iran's criticism reflected Turkey's disappointment about Iran's position. The then PM Davutoğlu stated:

> We did not leave Iran alone during their hardest days. But, if they leave us alone about the issue that we are right, they would have hurt long-lasting Turkey-Iran friendship. While the whole world was against Iran, we raised our hands against the embargoes alongside with Brazil in the UN.[501]

The regional tension between Turkey and Iran was not limited to their different positions on Russia's involvement in the war and the future of Assad regime. As an important divergence factor between two countries, Turkey and Iran had different approaches toward the PYD/YPG. Despite the Turkish government's serious concerns regarding the empowerment of YPG in the Northern Syria, Iran

[499] "İran'dan düşürülen Rus uçağıyla ilgili açıklama", *Yeni Şafak*, November 25, 2015, https://www.yenisafak.com/dunya/irandan-dusurulen-rus-ucagiyla-ilgili-aciklama-2346842 (accessed on 20 March 2020).

[500] "İran Meclis Başkanı Ali Laricani: Türkiye büyük bir hata yaptı", *Cumhuriyet*, November 26, 2015, http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/iran-meclis-baskani-ali-laricani-turkiye-buyuk-bir-hata-yapti-432613 (accessed on 20 March 2020).

[501] "Başbakan Davutoğlu'ndan flaş İran ve Rusya mesajları", *Milliyet*, December 8, 2015, https://www.milliyet.com.tr/siyaset/basbakan-davutoglundan-flas-iran-ve-rusya-mesajlari-2160277 (accessed on 20 March 2020).

has adopted more pragmatist attitude toward YPG which made it at odds with the Turkish government. Given ISIS' explicit enmity toward Iran, when ISIS launched an attack against the Northern Iraq in 2014, Iran became the first country to assist the Iraqi Kurds, particularly the PUK. Furthermore, during the defense of Kobane in the same year, the PUK, linked with Iran, supplied the anti-ISIS coalition's weapons to YPG forces. Furthermore, it was argued that Iran also needed a collaboration with the PKK in Sinjar and the YPG in Kobane and Qamishli against the threat of ISIS and via which it also aimed to reach to the Mediterranean and to the Syrian port of Latakia.[502]

Meanwhile, it has been argued that Iran has had an 'ambivalent' position on PYD and federalism in Syria. On the one hand, Iranian authorities has opposed to any federal solution to the Syrian crisis, on the other hand it has collaborated with PYD and has not reacted to Russia's policies that favored Kurdish autonomy in the Northern Syria. [503] In addition, when Turkey made cross-border operations to Syria targeting both the PYD/YPG and ISIS, Iran did not hesitate to express its discomfort. After Turkey's artillery strikes against ISIS positions in Syria and Kurdish militants in northern Iraq in July 2015, the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson warned that anti-terrorist campaigns should comply with the international law, particularly '*respect the national sovereignty of governments*.' [504]

Under these circumstances, Turkey sought to improve its relations with Saudi Arabia and Gulf states which were deteriorated after they had contradictory

[502] Pusane, "How to Profile PYD/YPG as an actor in the Syrian Civil War", 83.

[503] Bayram Sinkaya, " Federalism in Syria, PYD and Ambivalent Position of Iran", *ORSAM*, April 4, 2017, https://orsam.org.tr/en/federalism-in-syria-pyd-and-ambivalent-position-of-iran/ (accessed on 20 March 2020).
[504] "Respect to states' sovereignty needed in anti-terror campaign", *IRNA*, July 25, 2015, https://en.irna.ir/news/81694709/Respect-to-states-sovereignty-needed-in-anti-terror-campaign (accessed on 20 March 2020).

attitudes toward the 2013 Egyptian military coup against the Mohammed Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood government. [505] Turkey's relations with Saudi Arabia began to develop and mutual official visits became more frequent since 2015. [506] As Turkey aligned with Saudi Arabia, Iran's most significant Arab adversary, the regional positions of Turkey and Iran became further apart. The Turkish government supported Saudi Arabia's operation in Yemen and criticized Iran's intervention in favor of Shiite groups in Yemen. [507] Accordingly, Turkey accused Iran of pursuing 'sectarian' policies in the region. Regarding Iran's military support to Yemen's opposition Shiite Houthi movement against the Saudi Arabia, Erdoğan has made the one of the hardest criticisms toward the Iranian regime:

> Iran is virtually in an endeavor of dominating the region. Is it permissible? [Iran] started to disturb many countries in the region including the Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States and our country which is not possible to tolerate. Iran must see this…In Iraq, it is struggled against DEAŞ on the one hand; it is struggled against the Revolutionary Guards sent by Iran on the other. [508]

Meanwhile, Turkey's cross-border operations in the Northern Syria continued to create a tension between Turkey and Iran. As ISIS and YPG have increased their threat for Turkish national interests, on August 24,2016, Turkey launched a ground operation in Syria through directing its warplanes, tanks and special forces backed by the Free Syrian Army and called as Operation Euphrates Shield. [509] Erdoğan announced the start of the operation by stating "*our army has*

[505] Altunışık, "Turkey's Relations with Egypt and Saudi Arabia", 33.

[506] However, as it will be explained in the next chapter, the national interests of Turkey and Saudi Arabia diverged and their relations began to deteriorate in 2017. Ibid, 33.

[507] Ibid, 33.

[508] "Erdoğan Suudi Arabistan Saldırısıyla İlgili İran'ı Suçladı", *Bianet*, March 27, 2015, https://m.bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/163339-erdogan-suudi-arabistan-saldirisiyla-ilgili-iran-i-sucladi (accessed on 25 March 2020).

[509] During this period, Turkey hold series of consultations with Russia which resulted in Russia's consent about the Operation of Euphrates Shield (OES) which was made in coordination with the FSA in August 2016. "Operation Euphrates Shield", *Global Security*,

*launched an operation against terrorist organizations such as ISIS and PYD, which threated our country in the north of Syria*". [510] According to SETA report, Turkey's main purposes were "*to establish border security, to push DAESH away from the border line, and to block the YPG/PKK, a PKK offspring in Syria, from carving out a corridor by taking control of the east-west line in the north of Syria*".[511]

The operation was again an inconvenient regional development for Iranian officials. The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi stated that any struggle with the terrorist groups in Syria should be realized in coordination with the Syrian regime. [512] Interestingly, just before the operation started, the officials from Iran and Turkey had a meeting on the future of Syria. However, as the International Crisis Group (ICG) report wrote, Turkey did not inform the Iranian officials about the operation despite their meeting the day before the operation. [513] In this sense, it can be said that there was a sense of mistrust among Turkish foreign policy elites toward their Iranian counterparts about the regional issues.

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https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/syria-euphrates-shield.htm (accessed on 20 March 2020).

[510] "Erdoğan: 'Fırat Kalkanı' harekatı DAİŞ, PYD gibi terör örgütlerine yönelik başlatıldı", *T24*, August 24, 2016, https://t24.com.tr/haber/erdogan-firat-kalkani-harekati-dais-pyd-gibi-teror-orgutlerine-yonelik-baslatildi,356622

[511] Murat Yeşiltaş, Merve Seren and Necdet Özçelik, *Operation Euphrates Shield: Implementations and Lessons Learned* (Ankara, SETA Publications, 2017), 10.

[512] "Iran shows reaction to Turkey's troops deployment in Syria", *IRNA*, August 25, 2016, https://en.irna.ir/news/82203449/Iran-shows-reaction-to-Turkey-s-troops-deployment-in-Syria (accessed on 20 March 2020).
[513] "Turkey and Iran: Bitter Friends, Bosom Rivals", *Crisis Group Middle East Briefing*, no.51 (December 2016): 9.

As the regional disagreements between two countries lasted over Syria war and non-state armed groups, Iraq became another source of indirect tension between Iran and Turkey. In 2015, the Turkish military forces was deployed in the Bashiqa camp, near Mosul, to train Iraqi forces and the Kurdish peshmerga against the threat of ISIS. [514] However, when the Iraqi government decided to launch a military operation called as 'the Mosul Operation' against ISIS in October 2016, the then Iraqi PM Haider al-Abadi was opposed to the active role of the Turkish armed forces. [515] Even the tension between Baghdad and Ankara escalated when al-Abadi stated that '*We have asked Turks many times not to interfere into Iraq's internal affairs. I am afraid that the Turks' adventures will turn into a regional war*." [516] In response, Erdoğan condemned al-Abadi's explanations and stated that '*The military forces of the Republic of Turkey have not lost its quality to take instructions from you. We will continue to do whatever it is necessary, as we have done so far*". [517]

Iran's response to the tension between Turkey and Iraq about the Mosul operation was supporting the al-Abadi government against Turkey's request to be involved in the operation. On October 24, 2016, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Ghasemi stated that "*it is not acceptable at all if a country, under the pretext of combating terrorism or any other crimes, tries to violate the*

[514] In December 2014, Turkey and Baghdad government agreed on the establishment of Turkish military base in Bashiqa in order to train the Sunni combatants and the Kurdish forces against the threat of ISIS. Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, 46.

[515] Kemal İnat and Mustafa Caner, "Türkiye'nin İran Politikası 2016" in *Türk Dış Politikası Yıllığı 2016* eds.Burhanettin Duran, Kemal İnat and Mustafa Caner (İstanbul, SETA Yayınları, 2017),163.

[516] "Irak Başkanı Haydar El İbadi'den Türkiye'ye 'bölgesel savaş' uyarısı", *BBC Türkçe*, October 5, 2016, https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-37561778 (accessed on 15 March 2020).

[517] "Irak yönetimi haddini aştı!İbadi'den küstah Erdoğan cevabı", *Akşam*, October 11, 2016, https://www.aksam.com.tr/guncel/irak-yonetimi-haddini-asti-ibadiden-kustah-erdogan-cevabi/haber-556419 (accessed on 15 March 2020).

*sovereignty of another country.* [518] Moreover, Rouhani stood by Baghdad's side by stating '*We regard as very dangerous [acts of] intervention by foreign countries without any coordination with the host country*'.[519]

Meanwhile, the Turkish government was uncomfortable about the involvement of the Shiite militia forces to the operation, *Hashd al-Shaabi* (the Popular Mobilization Forces, PMF), backed by Iran.[520] Even though PMF was officially connected to the Baghdad government, its members were mostly trained by Iranian military advisers and adhered to the Iranian Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.[521] Having considered the militia's previous sectarian acts, the Turkish government was critical about PMF's involvement in the operation that aims to save Mosul against ISIS. In addition to be concerning about risk of sectarian violence in the city, the Turkish government was uncomfortable about close ties between PMF and Iran. [522] For instance, regarding the issue, FM

[518] "Iran warns Turkey: Don't violate Iraqi sovereignty", *The Times of Israel*, October 24, 2016, https://www.timesofisrael.com/iran-warns-turkey-dont-violate-iraqi-sovereignty/ (accessed on 15 March 2020).

[519] "Iran president says any foreign intervention 'very dangerous'", *Press TV*, October 24, 2016, https://www.presstv.com/detail/2016/10/24/490480/iran-middle-east-hassan-rouhani-markazi (accessed on 25 March 2020).

[520] Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, 46.

[521] Babak Dehghanpisheh, "Iran-trained militias join U.S-backed campaign on Mosul, flying Shi'ite flags", *Reuters*, October 30, 2016, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-iran/iran-trained-militias-join-u-s-backed-campaign-on-mosul-flying-shiite-flags-idUSKBN12U0UI (accessed on 25 March 2020).

[522] Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, 46. "Erdoğan: Haşdi Şabi'ye cevabımız farklı olur", *Sputnik Türkiye*, October 29, 2016, https://tr.sputniknews.com/turkiye/201610291025539786-erdogan-hasdi-sabi/ (accessed on 20 March 2020).

Mevlut Cavusoglu stated, "*involving Shia militias in the operation will not bring peace to Mosul. On the contrary, it will increase problems*".[523]

All in all, it can be said that even though the foreign policy elites of both countries prevented their regional disagreements from turning into an explicit conflict, the regional relations between Turkey and Iran witnessed serious tensions about almost all issues about the Syrian war and the related developments. Their confrontational positions and different national interests prevented them from having smooth relations during this period. As two of the regional powers, Turkey and Iran were affected by the regional dynamics more than other regional actors since they have had ambitions to be regional leaders in their neighborhood. Their regional alignments with other regional and extra-regional actors were contradictory to one another. Hence, they regarded each other as an obstacle to reach their regional objectives during this period. However, as it will be seen in the next chapter, the changing regional dynamics once again brought two regional actors together for overcoming the war environment in the region.

### 5.4. Why did Turkey-Iran Tension not Turn into a Conflict? The Regional Security Interdependences of Neighbor Countries

Even though both Turkey and Iran adopted highly critical positions toward each other, their neighborhood and security interdependencies prevented them from

[523] However, this tension regarding the involvement of PMF in the operation did not last too long due to Iraqi government's decision to forbid the PMF militias from involving in the operation between October 2016 and July 2017. Regarding the tension between Iraq and Turkey about Turkey's involvement in the Mosul operation, Iran offered to be a mediator between relevant parties. The Turkish government responded positively to the Iran's mediation offer and revealed its will to ease the tension. "Turkey warns against Shia involvement in Mosul attack", *Anadolu Agency*, October 7, 2016, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/turkey-warns-against-shia-involvement-in-mosul-attack/660392 (accessed on 27 March 2020). Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, 47. "Leader's Top Advisor: Iran is Ready to Mediate between Turkey and Iraq", *Iran Front Page News*, October 30, 2016, https://ifpnews.com/leaders-top-advisor-iran-ready-mediate-turkey-iraq (accessed on 28 March 2020). "Dışişleri Bakanı Çavuşoğlu: Başika kampı gereksiz bir genginlik yarattı", *Anadolu Agency*, November 1, 2016, https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/disisleri-bakani-cavusoglu-basika-kampi-gereksiz-bir-gerginlik-yaratti/676592 (accessed on 28 March 2020)

escalating their tension and turning it into an open conflict. As regional powers, they have been in favor of regional stability and limited regional involvement of extra-regional powers. In this way, they could have more regional autonomy and find a regional space to increase their regional power. Furthermore, they have had economic and security interdependencies derived from their geographical contiguity. Hence, even though their regional relations have been competitive by nature, they have needed each other in the conflict-driven and unstable regional security complex.

Regarding their economic interdependencies, they have a long history of privileging their economic relations over their political disagreements. This has been largely derived from the economic interdependence and domestic needs of both countries. According to Sinkaya, two countries have managed to compartmentalize their relations to distinguish the roots of conflict and cooperative areas. From this perspective, despite their regional disagreements, the bilateral economic relations between two countries have lasted during this period. [524]

However, it is significant to note that their economic relations started to be adversely affected by their tense political relations during this period. Their trade volume reduced from $21.8 billion in 2012 to $13.7 billion in 2014 and $9.7 billion in 2015. [525] Their trade relations during this period were largely derived from their long-termed natural gas contracts based on the 1996 twenty-five-year natural gas agreement. [526] However, both countries sought to increase their trade volume given their domestic needs. Accordingly, during the high political tension between Turkey and Iran due to their opposing positions in the Yemen

[524] Sinkaya, "Iran and Turkey Relations After the Nuclear Deal", 85.

[525] H. Akın Ünver,"Turkish-Iranian Energy Cooperation and Conflict: The Regional Politics" *Middle East Policy* 23, no.2 (2016):135. Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, 61.
[526] Sinkaya, "Iran and Turkey Relations After the Nuclear Deal", 14.

civil war, Erdoğan made an official visit to Iran for increasing bilateral economic ties and finding a middle ground for the conflict in the region. [527] Furthermore, even though Turkish political elites were concerned about more powerful Iran after the nuclear deal given their regional disagreements, they also sought to use the economic opportunities of increasing bilateral trade relations with post-deal Iran.[528] Despite the efforts, declining of trade relations can be seen in the following graph:

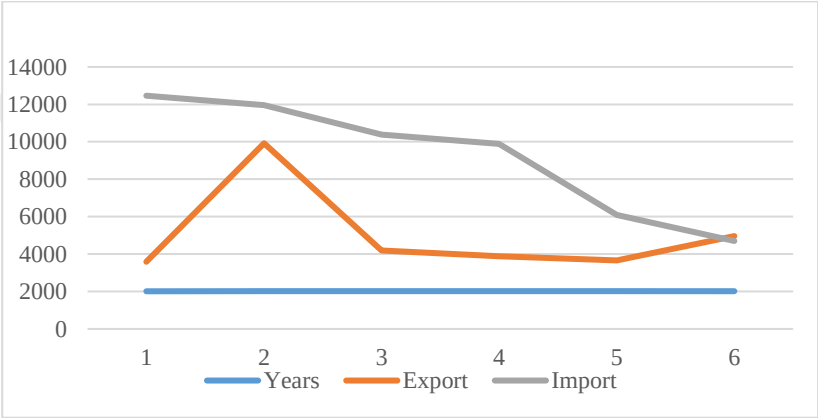


**Figure 5.1.** Turkey's Trade Volume with Iran during 2011-2016[529]

Regarding their energy relations, the Turkish government's main objective was to bring down the price of the Iranian natural gas with the sanctions removed. During his visit to Iran in April 2015, Erdoğan gave signals that bilateral trade

[527] Emre Peker, "Turkish President Seeks Closer Economic Ties on State Visit to Iran", *The Wall Street Journal*, April 7, 2015, https://www.wsj.com/articles/turkish-president-on-state-visit-to-iran-seeking-closer-economic-ties-1428411176 (accessed on 25 March 2020).

[528] The nuclear deal, called as The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was signed between Iran and the P5+1 on July 14, 2015. According to the deal, Iran accepted to restrict its nuclear enrichment activities and agreed to the IAEA's access to its all nuclear facilities under the Additional Protocol, in exchange for eliminations of all sanctions regarding to the Iranian nuclear program. "Iran: Nuclear", *Nuclear Threat Initiative*, January 2020, https://www.nti.org/learn/countries/iran/nuclear/ (accessed on 26 March 2020).

[529] In this table, numbers between 1-6 refer to 2011-2016. "Ülkelere Göre Dış Ticaret", *Türkiye Ticaret Bakanlığı*, https://ticaret.gov.tr/istatistikler/dis-ticaret-istatistikleri/dis-ticaret-istatistikleri-ocak-haziran-2019/ulkelere-gore-dis-ticaret (Accessed October 10, 2019).

with Iran would increase by stating: '*if they push the price down, we could significantly increase the natural gas we buy from Iran*". [530] Meanwhile, Turkey went to international arbitration due to the high price of Iranian gas and requested a 25% reduction. [531] The arbitration case was resulted in favor of Turkey and Iran had to pay $ 760 million to the Turkish Oil Pipelines Corporation (BOTAŞ) and decided to reduce the unit price for gas it exports to Turkey. [532] Under these circumstances, it was expected that the total trade volume, which has decreased in the recent years due to the international sanctions and high prices of Iranian gas, would increase again.

In this regard, it can be said that the foreign policy elites of both countries sought to disassociate the economic relations from their regional tension. The foreign policy makers of both countries were aware that their geographical proximity and regional realities of the Middle East will put Turkey and Iran together. Regarding their regional disagreements, Erdoğan stated:

> It is a reality that there are some opinion differences between Turkey and Iran about regional issues… it is to our countries' advantage to minimize differences of opinions and maximize commonalities by strengthening political dialogue." [533]

Likewise, Rouhani agreed with Erdoğan and stated:

[530] Mehmet Çetingüleç, "How will Turkey benefit from lifting of Iran sanctions?", *Al-Monitor*, April 10, 2015, https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/04/turkey-iran-how-will-benefit-from-lifting.html (accessed on 26 March 2020).

[531] Çetingüleç, "How will Turkey benefit from lifting of Iran sanctions?"

[532] Ünver,"Turkish-Iranian Energy Cooperation and Conflict", 135.

[533] Ibid.

> Such minor differences of opinion are also natural, and we are ready for more consultations, particularly for the fight against terrorism… The two countries are determined to bolster their relations in all fields". [534]

Furthermore, even though the early phases of the Syrian war escalated the mutual accusations and criticisms between two countries, neither Turkey nor Iran put diplomacy and negotiation aside about the Syrian crisis. As two of the regional powers in the region, both Turkey and Iran have been aware of the regional repercussions of a long-lasting war in their neighborhood. Hence, when the then Egyptian president Mohammed Morsi invited them to talk about the issue, the foreign ministers of both countries went to the meeting in Cairo in September 2012, which was called as the 'quartet committee'. [535] They also met on the sidelines of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly meeting in September 2012 where Davutoğlu noted that Turkey expected Iran to use its influence to stop the blood in Syria. The third round of these meeting was held in Islamabad in November 2012 with participation of their head of states. [536]

As another regional efforts of two countries, talk about the developments in the region, the presidents of Iran, Turkey and Egypt came together on the sidelines

[534] "Iran, Turkey influential in future Muslim world: Leader's aide", *Press TV*, July 31, 2016, http://french.presstv.com/Detail/2016/07/31/477806/Iran-Turkey-Ali-Akbar-Velayati-Riza-Hakan-Tekin (accessed on 26 March 2020).

[535] Even though Egypt invited, the foreign minister of Saudi Arabia did not attend to the meeting. This decision was regarded as a reaction to the Iran's existence in the meeting. Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, 40. Yasmine Saleh, "Egypt's Morsi says Iran is vital to ending Syria's crisis", *Reuters*, September 23, 2012, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-president-iran/egypts-mursi-says-iran-is-vital-to-ending-syrias-crisis-idUSBRE88M00L20120923 (accessed on 26 March 2020).

[536] "New York'ta sürpriz görüşme", CNN Türk, September 27, 2012, https://www.cnnturk.com/2012/dunya/09/27/new.yorkta.surpriz.gorusme/678250.0/index.html (accessed on 26 March 2020). "Islamabad Declaration", *D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation*, 2012, https://developing8.org/report/islamabad-declaration/ (accessed on 26 March 2020).

of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) summit in February 2013.[537] In addition, two countries also hold a bilateral meeting in October 2012 on the sidelines of the ECO summit within which Erdoğan proposed three different alternative regional groups by stating: '*We proposed a three-way system here. The system could be a trio of Turkey-Egypt-Iran. A second system could by Turkey-Russia-Iran. A third system could be Turkey-Egypt-Saudi Arabia'*. [538] Yet, as one of these alternative regional collaboration groups, Iran-Turkey-Russia triple negotiations did not realize until December 2016. [539]

The official visits between two countries during this period mostly aimed to reduce the tension derived from the regional crises. For instance, even though the election of Hassan Rouhani on June 14, 2013 increased the expectations about the Turkey-Iran cooperation in the regional problems due to his moderate discourses, it was not enough for itself to result in concrete steps for increasing the regional collaboration between two countries. Particularly, Rouhani's visit to Turkey in June 2014 was regarded as the "*turning point*" in the bilateral relations between Turkey and Iran, however, it did not meet the expectations raised prior to it. It was also claimed that the agreements signed during the meeting and public declarations after it, did not take the Turkey-Iran relations a step further. [540] Hence, even though two countries tried to overcome their regional

[537] "Presidents of Egypt, Iran, Turkey meet on Syria crisis", *China Daily*, February 7, 2013, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2013-02/07/content_16213353.htm (accessed on 26 March 2020).

[538] Laura Rozen, "Turkey's Erdoğan meets Iran's Ahmadinejad on Syria", *Al-Monitor*, October 16, 2012, http://backchannel.al-monitor.com/index.php/2012/10/2663/turkeys-erdogan-confers-on-syria-with-irans-ahmadinejad-in-baku/ (accessed on 26 March 2020).

[539] "Turkey and Russia 'agree terms of Syria ceasefire", *The Guardian*, December 28, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/28/turkey-russia-agree-terms-syria-ceasefire (accessed on 26 March 2020).

[540] Bayram Sinkaya, "Türkiye-İran siyasi ilişkilerinde son nokta", *Aljazeera Turk*, July 2014, http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/gorus/turkiye-iran-siyasi-iliskilerinde-son-nokta (accessed on 25 March 2020).

disagreements, it did not become possible due to coercive regional context of 2011-2016 that diverged their regional positions.

All in all, the *local security externalities* of the Middle Eastern security complex caused a tension in bilateral relations between Turkey and Iran during this period. Even though the AKP government remained in power Turkey during this period, its foreign policy attitudes toward Iran changed due to the regional context of the Middle East. Hence, the regional level and its effect on the relations among regional powers once again demonstrated its importance. As regional powers, both Turkey and Iran sought to use the opportunity of power vacuum in the region derived from the US military withdrawal from Iraq and the initial Arab Uprisings. These regional dynamics led their power competition for increasing their influence in the region. Both regional powers sought to have an impact on the new governments of the Uprising states.

The Syrian civil war and the subsequent role of the extra-regional powers, the US and Russia, and the non-state violent armed groups, ISIS and PYD/YPG further complicated Turkey's relations with Iran. Due to their divergent foreign policy strategies and national interests about the Syrian civil war, there was a tense regional atmosphere between Turkey and Iran. The national threats on their borders and their aims to influence their neighborhood made their relations more competitive and fragile during this period. As the regional dynamics have changed the regional positions of two countries, Turkey-Iran relations and Turkish foreign policy attitudes toward Iran started to change after 2016. It will be covered in the next chapter.

**Table 5.2.** The High-Level Official Visits (Presidential Level) between Iran and Turkey during 2011-2016

| **Turkish Officials' Visit to Iran** | **Date** | **Iranian Officials' Visits to Turkey** | **Date** |
|---|---|---|---|
| President Abdullah Gül-State Visit | 13 Feb 2011 | President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad-The 4th UN Conference on Least Developed Countries/LDC-IV | 8 May 2011 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| PM Recep Tayyip Erdoğan-State Visit | 28-29 Mar. 2012 | Vice-President Mohammed Reza Aref-State Visit | 5 Oct. 2012 |
| PM Recep Tayyip Erdoğan-State visit- The establishment of High-Level Cooperation Council (HCC) | 28-29 Jan.2014 | President Hassan Rouhani-State Visit- the HCC's 1st meeting | 9 June 2014 |
| President Erdoğan-State Visit-the HCC's 2nd meeting | 7-8 Apr. 2015 | President Hassan Rouhani- OIC Summit- the HCC's 3rd meeting | 15-16 Apr. 2016 |
| PM Ahmet Davutoğlu-State Visit | 4-5 Mar. 2016 | | |

# CHAPTER 6

## THE REGIONAL CONTEXT BRINGS TURKEY AND IRAN BACK TOGETHER (2016-2019)

> *It is above all in our countries' interest to strengthen our political dialogue and reduce our differences of opinion to a minimum… We should work together to tackle the problems of sectarianism and terrorism that have occurred in our region.*[541]
>
> (Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, The President of Turkey, 2016)

While there was an explicit tension in the relations between Turkey and Iran during 2011-2016, the post-2016 period has witnessed a normalization process in Turkish foreign policy orientation toward Iran. The main reason of this normalization process was the *local security externalities* of the Middle Eastern security complex which made Turkey adopt more moderate and cooperative foreign policy attitudes toward Iran. In this sense, while the 2011-2016 period witnessed a serious regional tension between two countries, Turkey-Iran relations have experienced almost no mutual criticisms and accusations in the post-2016 period. As two regional powers, Turkey and Iran had still divergent regional positions, but they were determined to manage their disagreements for regional stability and autonomy during this period. From the Turkish perspective, the changing regional context, Turkey's deteriorated relations with other regional powers (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt), as well as Turkey's deteriorated relations with the US and increasing Russia's regional role, as the most influential extra-regional power in the region during this period, had an impact on more cooperative Turkish foreign policy attitudes toward Iran.

[541] "Turkey urges cooperation with Iran to fight terrorism, sectarian strife", *Reuters*, April 16, 2016, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-iran/turkey-urges-cooperation-with-iran-to-fight-terrorism-sectarian-strife-idUSKCN0XD0OD (accessed on 11 May 2020)

To comprehend the manageable competition between Turkey and Iran as well as moderate Turkish foreign policy discourses toward Iran during this period, this chapter will examine the *local security externalities* of the Middle Eastern security complex and the changing role of extra-regional powers in the region for shaping the relations between two countries. Accordingly, the increasing power of the Assad regime with the military support of Russia and Iran; the growing threat of the YPG and ISIS against Turkish national interests; the disagreements of Turkey-US relations in the northern Syria have pushed Turkey to revise its foreign policy orientation toward the Syrian civil war. The new foreign policy orientation has obliged Turkey's regional cooperation with Iran and Russia to cease the Syrian civil war and the regional insecurity. Furthermore, an independence referendum crisis of the KRG and the convergence of their interests in the Qatar crisis and Turkey's deteriorated relations with key Arab states has assisted Turkey to further collaborate with Iran in the post-2016 Middle East.

In this regard, this chapter argues that the regional level had a catalyzer role for Turkey's recovered relations with Iran in the post-2016 period. The July 15 coup attempt in Turkey and the subsequent Iran's support to the AKP government intersected with the above-regional developments and further converged the foreign policies of the two countries during this period. It can be said that the Turkish government interpreted the Iran's support through the *regional lenses* and regarded it as an opportunity to increase its cooperation with Iran given the challenging *local security externalities* of the post-2016 Middle East.

**Table 6.1.** Local Security Externalities of the Middle East and Turkey's Relations with Iran (2016-2019)

| Time Period | The Role of Extra-Regional Powers and Local Security Externalities of the Middle Eastern Security Complex | Foreign Policy Responses of Regional Powers: Turkey's Relations with Iran |
|---|---|---|
| 2016-2019 | Empowerment of the Assad Regime<br>Russian active role in the Syrian war<br>Turkey-US Disagreement on PYD/YPG<br>Turkey's Deteriorated Relations with the core Arab states<br>The KRG Independence Referendum<br>The Qatar Crisis | Turkey-Iran manageable competition<br>Regional Cooperation<br>Badwagoning with Russia |

## 6.1. Local Security Externalities of the post-2016 Middle Eastern Security Complex: The post-2016 Syrian War Power Shifts

The post-2016 period has witnessed the shifting distribution of power in the Syrian war in favor of the Assad regime. As it will be explained below, the Russian military support to the Syrian regime has started to change the balances in the war since September 2015. Having launched systematic air strikes against the opposition groups and ISIS, Russia has allowed the Assad regime to gather strength. Particularly, after December 2016, with the Russian airstrikes and Hezbollah's land operation alongside with the Syrian army has completely regained the northeast of Aleppo, the second largest city in the country. [542] The fall of rebel-controlled Aleppo has greatly reduced the strength of the opposition groups and has changed the perspectives of regional and global actors about the fate of the Syrian war. [543]

[542] As opponents and civilians started to withdraw to the south of East Aleppo, they first squeezed over an area of 30 square kilometers and then gradually lost these areas. Ufuk Ulutaş, Can Acun and Murat Yeşiltaş, "Halep sonrası Suriye", *SETA Analiz*, no.185 (2017):10.

[543] Regarding the post-Aleppo power balances in the Syrian war that made three countries enter a dialogue, it has been argued that "everything has changed since Aleppo since it created 'a new equation'. Lyse Doucet, "Syria Peace Talks: Armed Groups come in from the cold", *BBC*, January 23, 2017, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-38712444 (accessed on 10 May 2020).

In addition to the Russian and Iranian military support to the Syrian army, the Assad regime was also benefited from the US' reluctance to be actively involved in the war and the divisions among the Sunni countries in the region. Accordingly, following the coup d'état controlled by General al-Sisi in Egypt, Turkey and Qatar experienced a tension with the Sisi government backed by the Saudi Arabia and the UAE. In contrast to Turkey and Qatar, Sisi government has expressed its support to the Assad regime against opposition groups within which Muslim Brotherhood has had an active role.[544] However, the Saudi Arabia has continued to support the rebels against the Syrian army until 2017.[545] This division among the regional countries has caused the opposition forces in Syria to further split in their struggle against the Assad regime. [546] Hence, this period witnessed the empowerment of the Assad regime against the opposition groups in the Syrian civil war which, in return changed the Turkish foreign policy regarding the war.

### 6.1.1. Turkey and Iran's Position in the post-2016 Syrian Civil War

As one of the regional powers in the region, Turkey's objective was maintaining regional stability and consolidating its power by removing the regional threats for its national security during this period. For this reason, in the post-2016 period, Turkish foreign policy toward Syria war has shifted from prioritizing the breakdown of the Assad regime to maintaining the Syrian territorial integrity. Having acknowledged the impossibility of the Assad regime's fall due to the active military role of Russia and Iran and the US' lack of interest in the war,

[544] "Egypt's Sisi expresses support for Syria's military", *Al Jazeera*, November 23, 2016, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/11/egypt-sisi-expresses-support-syria-military-161123150315176.html (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[545] Martin Cuholov, "Victory for Assad looks increasingly likely as world loses interest in Syria", *The Guardian*, August 31, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/31/victory-for-assad-looks-increasingly-likely-as-world-loses-interest-in-syria (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[546] Francesco D'Alema, "The Evolution of Turkey's Syria Policy", *IAI Working Papers* 17 (2017): 11.

Turkey has removed its strategy for '*Syria without Assad*' from its agenda. [547] As it will be explained, this new strategy contributed to improvement its relations with Iran. On 20 January 2017, this foreign policy change was verbalized by the then Deputy PM Mehmet Şimşek as follows:

> As far as our position on Assad is concerned, we think that the suffering of (the) Syrian people and the tragedies, clearly the blame is squarely on Assad. But we have to be pragmatic, realistic. The facts on the ground have change dramatically, so Turkey can no longer insist on a settlement without Assad, it is not realistic.[548]

During this period, the most immediate national threats for Turkey were again derived from its neighborhood. To deal with the *negative local security externalities* of the Syrian war, Turkish government adopted two-way foreign policy strategy. On the one hand, it sought to deal with the most critical threats for Turkish national interests: further empowerment of PYD in northern Syria and escalation of ISIS attacks on Turkish soils. [549] Given the threats to its national security, Turkey has become militarily active with its cross-border operations to the northern Syria.

Accordingly, as it was mentioned above, in August 2016, Operation Euphrates Shied was launched against ISIS militants and YPG forces that sought to maintain territorial link between Afrin and Kobane cantons. [550] As the PKK/YPG and ISIS were deployed in Afrin and continued to be a threat for Turkish territory, the Turkish army initiated another operation named '*Operation Olive*

[547] Muhittin Ataman and Çağatay Özdemir, "Turkey's Syria Policy: Constant Objectives Shifting Priorities", *Turkish Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 5, no.2 (2018): 21.

[548] "Turkey can no longer insist on Syria settlement without Assad: Turkish deputy PM", *Reuters*, January 20, 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-turkey idUSKBN1541IJ?mod=related&channelName=worldNews (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[549] D'Alema, "The Evolution of Turkey's Syria Policy", 11.

[550] Ibid, 13.

*Branch* (OOB) in the Northern Syria on January 20, 2018 with the assistance of the FSA. According to the Turkish government, Turkey reached its aim to control Afrin with less than two months. [551] Another Turkish operation named 'Operation Peace Spring (OPS) was launched on 9 October 2019 due to the lasting PKK/YPG threat and the US' fail to establish a safe zone in the Turkish-Syrian border. [552]

On the other hand, as a regional power, Turkey has sought to undertake regional responsibility for ceasing the humanitarian crisis in Syria particularly following the fall of Aleppo to the Syrian regime in December 2016. The Aleppo siege created a humanitarian emergency with thousands of civilians and opposition groups strained in the eastern part city. Hence, it brought to the issue of safe evacuation of civilians from Aleppo and locating them in the neighboring province, Idlib.[553] Accordingly, there were intensive diplomatic contacts between Turkey and Russia during this period. They ensured the announcement ceasefire between the Assad regime and opposition forces that aimed to facilitate evacuation of civilians-it failed though. [554] Accordingly, as it will be explained below, the coordination between two countries had significant repercussions for regional collaboration among Russia, Turkey and Iran.

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[551] "Relations between Turkey-Syria", *Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey%E2%80%93syria.en.mfa (accessed on 9 May 2020).

[552] Ibid.

[553] "Syria conflict: Aleppo evacuation operation nears end", *BBC*, December 22, 2016, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-38402893 (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[554] The agreement excluded ISIS, Jabhat Fateh al-Sham and all groups associated with these radical terrorist organizations. On 16 December 2016, the clashes started again between opposition groups, regime forces and Shiite militias before the evacuation completed, and each group charged one another over the clashes. Serkan Demirtaş, "Ball on Russian and Iranian side of court after Aleppo deal", *Hürriyet Daily News*, December 17, 2016 https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/opinion/serkan-demirtas/ball-on-russian-and-iranian-side-of-court-after-aleppo-deal--107395 (accessed on 10 May 2020).

From Iranian perspective, the empowerment of the Assad regime and Turkey's shifting foreign policy regarding the Syrian civil was a positive development. Iranian foreign political elites felt increasingly trapped in the region and needed a regional partner due to the Trump administration's exclusionist policies toward Iran, such as unilateral withdrawal from the nuclear agreement and statements to restrict Iran's influence in Syria. [555] Accordingly, the Trump administration made its anti-Iranian foreign policy in the region obvious with following explanations: "*We're not going to leave as long as Iranian troops are outside Iranian borders, and that includes Iranian proxies and militias*".[556] On the other hand, during this period, Iran had significant disagreements with Russia about the role of Iran backed Shiite militias, the role of Syrian Kurds and the post-war Syrian government. [557] Under these circumstances, improving relations with Turkey via the Astana process became most plausible foreign policy strategy for Iran. [558]

### 6.1.2. Turkey's Quest for a Regional Partner: Its Deteriorated Relations with the United States and Arab Countries

Apart from the Assad regime's empowerment, the challenging regional context and Turkey's deteriorated relations with the US and key Arab states pushed Turkey cooperate with Russia and Iran during this period. In the first place,

[555] Altunışık, "Iran-Turkey Relations",141.

[556] Joe Gould and Tara Copp, " Bolton: US troops staying in Syria until Iran leaves", *DefenseNews*, September 24, 2018, https://www.defensenews.com/global/the-americas/2018/09/24/bolton-us-troops-staying-in-syria-until-iran-leaves/

[557] Iran had also serious concerns about Russia's cooperation with Israel, Saudi Arabia or the UAE about the Syrian future. Maysam Behravesh and Giorgio Cafiero, " Can Russian-Iranian alignment in Syria last?", *Middle East Institute*,October 16, 2019, https://www.mei.edu/publications/can-russian-iranian-alignment-syria-last (accessed on 12 October 2020). Altunışık, "Iran-Turkey Relations", 141.

[558]Altunışık, "Iran-Turkey Relations", 141.

Turkey had a disappointment about Trump government's keeping rely on the YPG forces in the region. Due to the US' support to the PYD/YPG, two countries had several bilateral crises in the region; their military troops almost confronted with one another in Manbij.[559] Secondly, Turkey's relations with the core Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the UAE deteriorated during this period. Hence, Turkey's regional alignment shifts and changing relations with the significant extra-regional power pushed the Turkish government to find new regional collaborations for both its national interests and the solution for the Syrian catastrophe.

Firstly, the US ceased to act as a *quasi*-regional actor in the Middle Eastern security complex with its military withdrawal decision from Iraq in 2011 and not taking an active role during the Arab uprisings. Instead, both Obama and Trump administration preferred to depend on regional states and non-state actors to reduce the burden of the US regarding the region. The new US government has tried to detach itself from the Middle Eastern conflict zones which has been interpreted as a step for '*the post-American Middle East*". [560] This power shift in the region gave a message to the regional powers that they had a responsibility for the fate of the region by eliminating the turmoil on their borders.

However, there was also an unambiguity in this approach since the US has been still in the region for the sake of struggling terrorism, resisting Iran's power and its nuclear program, securing oil flows, and maintaining the security of the American partners in the region. [561] It has been argued that Trump government has sought to accomplish its objectives in the region based on the policy of

[559] Gülriz Şen, "Dynamics of estrangement and realignment in Turkey–Iran relations in the 2000s" in *Turkey's Pivot to Eurasia: Geopolitics and Foreign Policy in a Changing World Order* eds. Emre Erşen and Seçkin Köstem, (Oxon, Routledge, 2019): 157.

[560] Richard H.Haas, "The Post-American Middle East", Council on Foreign Relations, December 18, 2019, https://www.cfr.org/article/post-american-middle-east (accessed on 11 May 2020).

[561] Ibid.

'*selective cooperation*' rather than alliance system.[562] Regarding the Syrian crisis and struggle against ISIS, like the Obama government, Trump administration have sought to give more responsibility to the regional partners for the struggle against terrorism and declared that "*America does not seek an indefinite presence in Syria under no circumstances*".[563]

The main issue of concern to Turkey was whether Trump would pursue Obama's strategy about the Syrian crisis or not. As it was explained above, the relations between Turkey and the US were deteriorated due to their divergent approaches toward YPG/PYD in the Northern Syria. Even though the election of Trump created a '*cautious optimism*' in the Turkish government with the thought that he would not follow his predecessor's Syrian policy, it soon became apparent that Trump has pursued same line of foreign policy. [564] During this period, Turkey and the Trump administration have witnessed several bilateral crises due to Trump's armament to YPG forces, Turkey's acquisition of the S-400 missile system from Russia, the tension over the US' reluctance to deliver to F-35 joint

[562] In this regard, it has been argued that the new US government has sought to depend on the Sunni bloc such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Egypt against the influence of Iran and Russia in the region as well as has given a full support to Israel at the expense of Palestine. In contrast to Obama's balance of power approach in the region which tried to avoid "any one power to become too dominant", Trump administration has marginalized some regional states (particularly Iran) at the expense of others. The main source of regional instability in Trump's view has been Iran which in return led him to unilaterally withdraw from the nuclear deal and renew the sanctions against Iran Murat Yeşiltaş, " 'Trump Doktrini' ve Post-Amerikan Orta Doğu", *SETA*, December 30, 2017, https://www.setav.org/trump-doktrini-ve-post-amerikan-ortadogu/ (accessed on 10 May 2020). Steven LeBlanch, "Why Turkey is Important", *World Watch Today*,http://worldwatchtoday.org/archives/2702 (accessed on 11 May 2020). "Financial Times: Trump'ın Orta Doğu politikasında ölümcül kafa karışıklığı var", BBC, January 15, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-46875837 (accessed on 11 May 2020).

[563] "Statement by President Trump on Syria", *The White House Office of the Press Secretary*, April 13, 2018, https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/features/2018/0418_syria/img/statement-by-president-trump-on-syria.pdf (accessed on 11 May 2020).

[564] Kılıç Buğra Kanat, "Türkiye'nin ABD politikası" in *Türk Dış Politikası Yıllığı 2017* eds.Burhanettin Duran, Kemal İnat and Mustafa Caner (İstanbul:SETA Yayınları, 2018), 288.

strike fighter jets to Turkey, the tension over Gülen extradition after the 2016 failed coup and arrestment of Pastor Andrew Brunson in Turkey. [565]

Trump's failure to meet Turkey's expectations regarding the Northern Syria and insisting on working with YPG in Syria has made Turkey-US relations tense in the region. The PYD/ YPG has continued to be strategic partner of the US against ISIS threat in the northern Syrian. In addition to a US envoy's visit to PYD-held areas, the US armed forces have continued to train the SDF forces, mainly consisting of YPG militias, against advances of ISIS. For instance, the US air strikes actively assisted the SDF forces against ISIS in Raqqa which resulted in the victory of the SDF forces in October 2017 after a four-month offense. [566] The involvement of the SDF forces to the Raqqa operation was completely contrary to the condition that Turkish government put for participating the operation. [567]

During this period, the city of Manbij became one of the problematical areas between Turkey and the US in the northern Syria.[568] The city, which witnessed four different administrations during the Syrian war, became a recurrent problem between Ankara and Washington, when it was seized by the US-backed

[565] Helin Sarı Ertem and Radiye Funda Karadeniz, "Lost in Translation: A System Level Analysis of the Turkish-U.S. Analysis under the Obama and Trump Administrations", *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs* 24, No.1 (2019): 22

[566] "Raqqa: IS 'capital' falls to US-backed Syrian forces", *BBC*, October 17, 2017, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-41646802 (accessed on 11 May 2020). Mariya Petkova, "What will happen to post-ISIL Raqqa?" *Al Jazeera*, October 17, 2017, https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/10/sdf-captures-syria-raqqa-city-isil-171013110014050.html (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[567] Rengin Arslan, "Türkiye ve ABD Rakka düğümünü çözebilir mi?", *BBC*, March 3, 2017, https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-39143526 (accessed on 11 May 2020).

[568] Manbij is geostrategically significant since it is positioned close to the borders of Turkey, Euphrates River and the eastern Aleppo.

YPG/SDF forces in 2016. [569] More importantly, the US has a military presence by the side of the YPF forces in the city as a part of its struggle with ISIS. The SDF operation in Manbij violated Turkey's red line about the YPG existence on the west part of the Euphrates. [570] To prevent any Turkish operation against the YPG forces, the US has claimed that the YPG would withdrawal from the west bank of the Euphrates after the operation and sought to arrange a meeting between SDF and Turkish authorities. [571] However, the problem remained regarding Manbij since the Manbij Military Council, mainly composed of the YPG member, emerged in the city which caused Turkish shells toward YPG forces for creating '*a corridor for moderate rebels*' as a part of OES. [572] Their relations regarding the Manbij issue eased only after they decided on the Manbij agreement in June 2018. [573]

Meanwhile, as Turkey's assault on the SDF forces has started with the *Operation Peace Spring* (OPC) in north-eastern Syria on October 9, 2019, the Trump

[569] Kılıç Buğra Kanat and Jackson Hannon, "The Manbij Roadmap and the Future of U.S.-Turkey Relations", *Middle East Policy Council*, Fall 2018, https://mepc.org/journal/manbij-roadmap-and-future-us-turkish-relations (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[570] The US officials stated that the SDF forces do not only contain YPG forces but involves five or six different groups. Furthermore, the US ensured that the YPG forces will not stay in Manbij after removing ISIS from the city. Phil Stewart, "Exclusive: U.S.-backed Syria forces launch offensive for Manbij pocket-U.S. officials", *Reuters*, June 1, 2016, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-offensive-idUSKCN0YN377 (accessed on 9 May 2020).

[571]Kanat and Hannon, "The Manbij Roadmap and the Future of U.S.-Turkey Relations".

[572] The tension between two countries escalated after the Turkish government's declaration that Turkey aimed to launch an operation in Manbij after its Operation Olive Branch (OOB or the Afrin Operation). Ibid.

[573] According to the Manbij agreement of Turkey and the US, the YPG forces would leave the city. Turkish and the US' forces as well as local forces would deploy in the city in order to maintain the security of Manbij. For the mainstream Turkish media, the Manbij agreement was a triumph of Turkey since the US acknowledged the Turkish military presence in the city. " 'Münbiç, Türkiye'nin Diplomatik Kazanımı' ", *Sabah*, June 6, 2018, https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2018/06/07/munbic-turkiyenin-diplomatik-kazanimi (accessed on 10 May 2002).

administration announced the decision of the US military withdrawal from the northern Syria. [574] Even though it was argued that the US decision would decrease the tension between two countries regarding the northern Syria, Trump's official letter to Erdoğan about the OPC, that leaked into the press, proved the opposite. [575] The agreement between the US and Turkey regarding suspending the operation was only reached after high-level meetings between Erdoğan and the US administration during Erdoğan's visit to Washington in November 2019. [576]

These circumstances had significant consequences for Turkish regional alignments during this period. Accordingly, due to its regional tension with the US, Turkey sought to align with Russia- other significant extra-regional power- to ensure its national security and regional power. Turkey's decision to purchase of the S-400 missile defense system from Russia has showed that the extent Turkey has been search for an alternative military cooperation. [577] This strategic decision encountered the strong reactions of the US government which warned Turkey about excluding it from the F-35 program within the context of the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). [578] In response, even though the Turkish government did not cancel the agreement of

[574] Dorion Jones, "Trump'ın Suriye'den Çekilme Kararı Erdoğan için bir Zaferdir", *VOA News*, https://www.amerikaninsesi.com/a/trump-in-suriyeden-cekilme-karari-erdogan-icin-bir-zaferdir/5114893.html (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[575] In his controversial letter, Trump urged Erdogan not to continue the military operation in the northern Syria and warned that the US would destroy Turkish economy. However, the Turkish government continued to its military assault in the northern Syria.

[576] Mehmet Toroğlu, "2019: Türkiye- ABD İlişkilerinin Zor Yılı", *VOA News*, December 28, 2019, https://www.amerikaninsesi.com/a/t%C3%BCrk-amerikan-i%CC%87li%C5%9Fkilerinin-zor-y%C4%B1l%C4%B1/5223439.html (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[577] The Turkish government claimed that the decision was due to the US refusal to sell Patriots to Turkey. Ayşe İ.A.Özer, "Arming Countries: With or Without the United States", *SETA Analysis*, no. 55 (November 2019): 17.

[578]The US Senate passed it on August 2, 2017. Ibid, 17

S-400 purchase, it has not activated them until recently. [579] It can be said that the existence of S-400 defense system in Turkish soil has become a shadow in the bilateral relations between the US and Turkey.

Apart from deteriorating relations with the US, Turkey had problems with the significant Arab states during this period which had important consequences for Turkey's regional alignments. Turkey's relations with Egypt were already problematical especially after General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's coup d'état in July 2013 that removed the Morsi government. [580] Turkey's support to the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) members against the Sisi government has caused a tension between two countries. Furthermore, Turkey's recent involvements in Libya and Sudan increased threat perceptions of the Sisi government toward Turkey and two countries have witnessed several indirect confrontations in these countries. [581]

In addition to Egypt, Turkey had tense relations with other key Arab countries, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates during this period. Even though Turkey and Saudi Arabia cooperated against the Assad regime during the initial phases of the Syrian civil war, they soon diverged about their strategies on post-war Syria and the groups that they would cooperate. [582] Their most significant

[579] "Gözler Türkiye'de: S-400'ler active edilecek mi ?", *Deutsche Welle*, April 8, 2020, https://www.dw.com/tr/g%C3%B6zler-t%C3%BCrkiyede-s-400ler-aktive-edilecek-mi/a-53052871 (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[580] Altunışık, "Turkey's Relations with Egypt and Saudi Arabia",31.

[581] Merve Şebnem Oruç, "Who is disturbed by Turkey's presence on Sudan's Suakin island?", *Daily Sabah*, May 10, 2019, https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/merve-sebnem-oruc/2019/05/10/who-is-disturbed-by-turkeys-presence-on-sudans-suakin-island (accessed on 12 October 2020). Fehim Taştekin, "Erdogan's Ottoman dream causes storm in Red Sea", *Al-Monitor*, January 3, 2018, https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/fa/originals/2018/01/turkey-sudan-cooperation-sparks-worry-in-gulf.html (accessed on 12 October 2020). Altunışık, "Turkey's Relations with Egypt and Saudi Arabia", 31.

[582] Altunışık, "Turkey's Relations with Egypt and Saudi Arabia",32.

divergent point between Turkey and Saudi Arabia was the 2013 Egyptian military coup against the MB. While Turkey condemned the Sisi's military coup and has hosted the MB members who escaped from Egypt, Saudi Arabia became one of the significant regional partners of the Sisi government. Turkey's close relations with the MB members were a source of concern for the Saudi Arabia that felt threatened by its internal problems.[583] Furthermore, due to their different national interests, both countries have supported different groups in Libya and Sudan. [584] Their regional competition even led to Saudi Arabia's cooperation with YPG in Syria at the expense of Turkey's national interests.[585]

As Saudi Arabia's important ally, the UAE, was another key Arab country that Turkey experienced a regional tension. Two countries have been in opposing ends in most of the crises in Middle Eastern security complex, including the Syrian civil war, the coup d'état in Egypt and Libyan civil war.[586] Turkey's relations with Saudi Arabia and the UAE were even depicted as a 'cold war' since there has been a recurring regional rivalry in recent years. [587] In this sense, it can be said that Turkey has become estranged from the Arab core during this period which led to its regional rapprochement with Iran during this period.

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[583] Ibid, 34. Abdulmajeed al-Buluwi, "The Saudi-Turkey Cold war for Sunni hegemony", *Al-Monitor*, April 1, 2014, https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/fr/originals/2014/04/saudi-arabia-turkey-muslim-brotherhood-sunni-middle-east.html (accessed on 12 October 2020).

[584] Lawrence Goodman, "The coming proxy wars between Turkey and the Saudi Arabia", *Brandeis Now*, September 6, 2019, https://www.brandeis.edu/now/2019/september/turkey-saudiarabia-conflict.html (accessed on 12 October 2020).

[585] The Qatar crisis between Turkey and Saudi Arabia will be reviewed in a different section since it was a significant factor for Turkish-Iranian collaboration. Altunışık, "Turkey's Relations with Egypt and Saudi Arabia", 34.

[586] Batu Coşkun, "Looking at Abu Dhabi from Ankara: No love lost between Turkey and UAE", *Daily Sabah*, July 1, 2010, https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/op-ed/looking-at-abu-dhabi-from-ankara-no-love-lost-between-turkey-and-uae (accessed on 12 October 2020).

[587] Pınar Tremblay, "Erdogan's cold war with Saudi Arabia and UAE", *Al-Monitor*, May 5 2020, https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/05/turkey-saudi-arabia-united-arab-emirates-conflict-escalating.html (accessed on 12 October 2020).

All in all, it is significant to note that Turkey's deteriorated relations with significant Arab states and the US have pushed the Turkish government to turn the regional balance in favor of itself during this period. As a regional power, Turkey's detachment from the critical regional actors would be likely to restrict its regional sphere of influence. To balance against these regional actors, Turkey preferred to increase its collaboration with Iran and Russia in the region. Furthermore, the US policies in the northern Syria that contradicts with Turkey's regional interests and the related tensions regarding the related S-400 purchase deal has catalyzed Turkey to find alternative solutions and regional collaborations regarding the Syrian war. The consequence was Turkey's participation to the '*Astana Talks*' alongside with Russia and Iran which has contributed to normalization of Turkey-Iran relations.

### 6.2. Regional Collaboration among Russia, Turkey, and Iran: The Astana Process

In contrast to problematical relations with the US and Arab states, Turkey's relations with Iran and Russia significantly improved during this period. As it was explained above, these two countries were important for Turkey to balance against other regional actors that Turkey had a tension with. Besides, both Russia and Iran had significant political roles in the post-Aleppo Syrian war relative to diminishing diplomatic role of the US in the Syrian war as well as failure of the Geneva peace talks. For this reason, to cease the conflicts on its borders, Turkey participated to Syrian peace talks with Iran and Russia despite their support to different sides in the Syrian war from the beginning. Furthermore, due to the rise of PYD/YPG and ISIS threats to Turkey's national security, the Turkish government was willing to be involved in regional cooperation with Iran and Russia for the sustainable solution for the Syrian war. As a regional power, Turkey was willing to have a political voice in the peace mechanism for the long-lasting Syrian war.

The diplomatic dialogue among Turkey, Iran and Russia has already started with the evacuation process of civilians during the Aleppo siege which has increased their diplomatic contacts regarding the possible political solution for Syrian war. [588] To avoid a humanitarian crisis in other trouble spots in Syria, three countries met in Moscow on December 20, 2016 and agreed on a joint declaration. Accordingly, they committed to sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic; struggling against ISIS and al-Nusra; and being the guarantor countries of a 'prospective agreement, being negotiated, between the Syrian Government and the opposition'. [589] With this declaration, the Turkish government recognized the Assad regime for the first time since the beginning of the Syrian war in 2011 which has been interpreted as a "*dignified retreat strategy for Turkey*". [590]

In accordance with the Moscow declaration, three countries initiated the Astana process that has included series of high-level meetings and summits that started in Astana in January 2017 and continued in Moscow, Sochi, Ankara and Tehran, New York, and Geneva. [591] Even though the Astana talks were regarded as a

[588] Ahmet Arda Şensoy and Talha İsmail Duman, "Türkiye'nin Suriye ve Lübnan Politikası" in *Türk Dış Politikası Yıllığı 2017* eds.Burhanettin Duran, Kemal İnat and Mustafa Caner (İstanbul:SETA Yayınları, 2018), 190-191.

[589] "Joint Statement by the Foreign Ministers of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey on agreed steps to revitalize the political process to end the Syrian conflict", *Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, December 20, 2016, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/joint-statement-by-the-foreign-ministers-of-the-islamic-republic-of-iran_-the-russian-federation-and-the-republic-of-turkey-on-agreed-steps-to-revitalize-the-political-process-to-end-the-syrian-conflict_-20-december-2016_-moscow.en.mfa (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[590] "Moskova bildirisi, Türkiye açısından onurlu bir geri çekilme stratejisi", *Sputnik News*, December 22, 2016, https://tr.sputniknews.com/columnists/201612221026453575-moskova-bildirisi-turkiye-suriye-esad-geri-cekilme/ (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[591] This triple cooperation between Turkey, Iran and Russia has been interpreted as an "alliance of convenience" by Marc Pierenni (a former EU ambassador to Turkey). A Divergent 'Alliance of Convenience': Russia, Turkey, Iran Try to Plan Syria's Future", *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, April 4, 2018, https://www.rferl.org/a/putin-erdogan-rohani-ankara-meeting-syria-analysis/29144774.html (accessed on 10 May 2020).

complementary of the Geneva peace talks, it can be interpreted as a shift from the US-lead diplomacy to the Russian-controlled one given its active military role of on the battleground. Even though the United Nation's peace process, named Geneva talks have lasted since February 2012 and six rounds of talks held throughout the years until that time, there have been no concrete development regarding the political solution for the Syrian war. [592] The Astana process has proceeded in parallel with the Geneva talks and has sought to bring the representatives of militants to negotiate with the regime. [593]

Within the framework of peace talks, Turkey, Russia and Iran agreed to create 'de-escalation zones' in the predominantly opposition-controlled areas of Syria where the clashes are intensive. Accordingly, Idlib, Homs, Eastern Ghouta and parts of Deraa and Quneitra provinces would be conflict-free zones with Russia, Turkey and Iran to be guarantors.[594] Even though the de-escalation zones in Homs, Eastern Ghouta and parts of Deraa and Quneitra have been created through negotiations in the year of 2017, Idlib province has been "the most complicated point" among conflict-free zones given its almost 3,5 million civilian population and existence of tens of thousands of armed fighters; it could

[592] Katty Collin, "7 years into the Syrian war, is there a way out?", *Brookings*, March 16, 2018, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/03/16/7-years-into-the-syrian-war-is-there-a-way-out/ (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[593] In contrast to Geneva talks, the Astana guarantor countries have tried to guarantee the participation of the Assad regime by replacing the Geneva Communique's phrase 'transitional body' with 'political process'. Mohammed Cherkaoui, "From Geneva to Sochi: The Revolving-Door Diplomacy of the Syrian Crisis", *Al Jazeera Centre for Studies* (March 25, 2018): 11. Lakshmi Priya, "Astana Talks: A Prelude to Peace in Syria", *Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses*, November 28, 2017, https://idsa.in/backgrounder/astana-talks-a-prelude-to-peace-in-syria_lpriya_271117 (accessed on 11 May 2020).

[594] "Syria's 'de-escalation zones' explained", *Al Jazeera*, July 4, 2017, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/05/syria-de-escalation-zones-explained-170506050208636.html (accessed on 10 May 2020).

not been announced as a demilitarized zone until September 2018. [595] Turkey and Russia agreed on a demilitarized deal in Idlib on 17 September 2018 in Sochi and signed "*Memorandum on Stabilization of the Situation in the Idlib De-escalation Area*". Afterwards, Iran, as the third guarantor country, declared its support to the Memorandum. [596] However, the heavy clashes between the pro-Assad forces and rebels, fights among jihadist groups (Hayat Tahrir al-Sham/HTS and others) resulted in the failure of the full implementation of the agreement until today. [597]

Regarding the meaning of the Astana process for Turkey's foreign policy position about Syria, it can be said that Turkey has accepted the Assad regime for the transition formula of Syria and revealed that its main interlocutors about Syria's future has been Iran and Russia.[598]In a regional environment where the

[595] "5 soruda Suriye'deki çatışmasızlık bölgeleri", *BBC Türkçe*, August 8, 2017, https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-40860776 (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[596] "Relations between Turkey-Syria".

[597] As another attempt for the Syrian peace process, the Syrian National Dialogue Congress started on 30 January 2018 in Sochi with the representatives of the Assad regime and opposition groups that represent all ethnic and religious groups in Syria. As the guarantor countries stated, the aim of the Congress was reviving the negotiations under the UN auspices and contributing to the Geneva negotiations. However, a delegation including some opposition members refused to participate the Congress due to the posters and logos of the Syrian regime and delegated their authority to the Turkish government. In this sense, this Congress demonstrated that Turkey became one of the most influential regional actors in the Syrian peace process and has impacted on the foreign policy approaches of both Iran and Russia toward Turkey's maneuvers in the Northern Syria. The most significant consequence of the Congress was plan for creating a Constitutional Committee comprising of representatives of government, opposition Syrian civil society members, tribal chiefs and women. "Final Statement of the Congress of the Syrian national dialogue", *Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, January 30, 2018, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/final-statement-of-the-congress-of-the-syrian-national-dialogue_en.en.mfa (accessed on 10 May 2020). "Syria: Who's in control of Idlib?", *BBC*, February 18, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-45401474 (accessed on 10 May 2020). "Press Release Regarding the Results of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi*", Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, January 30, 2018, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-30_-socideki-suriye-ulusal-diyalog-kongresinin-sonuclari-hk_en.en.mfa (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[598] "'Astana Süreci Türkiye ve İran'ı birbirine Yakınlaştırmıştır'", *Hürriyet*, October 6, 2017, https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/astana-sureci-turkiye-rusya-ve-irani-birbiri-40601445 (accessed on 10 May 2020).

US has supported the PYG against ISIS threat and sought to withdraw from the Syrian quagmire, the Turkish government has preferred to cooperate with Iran and Russia that would be influential on the Assad regime for any political solution for the Syrian war. [599]

From the Turkish perspective, the end of the conflicts and controlling the influx of asylum seekers coming to Turkey is critical since it has already hosted over 3,5 million Syrian refugees.[600] Furthermore, if the clashes could be stopped in the west of the Euphrates, the Syrian regime and Russia would focus on the east of the Euphrates and prevent the US-backed PYD advance in that region. [601] Accordingly, for the Turkish government, struggling with the threats of PYD/YPG and ISIS on its borders has become more salient than removing the Assad regime and has impacted the Turkish foreign policy preferences toward Iran.[602] In this sense, the geographical proximity and the *local security externalities* once again manifested their significance for states' in/security during this period.

### 6.3. A New Regional Convergence between Turkey and Iran about the Syrian Civil War?

Even though the regional disagreements between Turkey and Iran regarding the Assad regime and the opposition groups have lasted, the Turkish government has left the regional divisions with Iran aside and has started to focus on the regional collaboration points between two countries. Particularly, following the Astana

[599] Vakkas Dogantekin, "Trump announces troop withdrawal from Syria", *Anatolian Agency*, October 7, 2019, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/americas/trump-announces-troop-withdrawal-from-syria/1604796 (accessed on 9 May 2020).

[600] "'Astana Süreci Türkiye ve İran'ı birbirine Yakınlaştırmıştır'".

[601] Ibid.

[602] D'Alema, "The Evolution of Turkey's Syria Policy", 11.

talks, the two countries have consistently emphasized the importance of their Astana collaboration for the regional security. For instance, when Erdoğan congratulated Rouhani for his re-election in the Iranian presidential elections on May 19, 2017, he pointed out the significance of regional cooperation between two countries in the Astana talks:

> Turkey is determined to develop its ties with Tehran in all fields…Iran-Turkey relations are developing, and it is imperative that these ties be further cemented in bilateral and regional fields…Regional cooperation between the two countries, especially in the Astana meeting, contributes to peace and stability in the region. [603]

The foreign policy elites of two countries have kept their political dialogue as a part of the Astana and Sochi process. For instance, during the third tripartite summit in Tehran on September 7, 2018, Turkey, Iran, and Russia addressed the controversial and challenging issue of the pro-Assad's forces' attack on Idlib. Despite its concerns, the Turkish government became committed to the Astana process for a long time and has shaped the foreign policy discourses accordingly. During this summit, Erdoğan remarked the spirit of the Astana process:

> The core of the Astana spirit is our political will to meet on a common ground. These least common denominators are maintaining Syrian political unity and territorial integrity and a finding a political solution to the conflict…If we can make a ceasefire announcement here, this will be one of the most important steps of the summit. [604]

In the meantime, the Turkish government's support to Iran following the Trump administration's announcement of withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal on May 8, 2018 has been welcomed by the Rouhani government and contributed to breaking the ice between two countries. Accordingly, during Rouhani's visit to Ankara in December 2018, Erdoğan criticized the US government's withdrawal decision from the Iran nuclear deal which he thinks "*jeopardizes*

[603] "Iran, Turkey ready to open new chapter in relations, boost economic coop./Stressing deepening regional coop.", *Official website of the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, May 24, 2017, http://www.president.ir/en/99200 (accessed on 10 May 2020).
[604] "Erdoğan'dan tarihi zirvede 'ateşkes' baskısı", *Yeni Şafak*, September 7, 2018, https://www.yenisafak.com/dunya/erdogan-irana-gitti-3394179 (accessed on 10 May 2020).

*regional security and stability*". [605] Regarding the increasing regional cooperation between Turkey and Iran, he stated:

> We are pleased that the contacts between our bilateral security institutions have increased recently. We have not tolerated any formation targeting the stability and security of our country and our region… In this regard, we are fully willing to continue our cooperation with Iran…For ending the conflict in our region and creating a peace environment, there are several steps that Turkey and Iran can take. We deepen our cooperation and consultations with Iran on regional matters. [606]

Meanwhile, Turkey has continued to launch operations in the Northern Syria for removing the threats of YPG and ISIS from its borders. As it was explained above, the Operation Euphrates Shield (OES) in 2016 constituted the first time that Turkish army' ground forces were penetrated into the Northern Syria which aimed to dismiss ISIS from Jarablus and contain the YPG advance in northern Syria. [607] As it was explained in the previous section, Turkey's cross-border operation in 2016 was not welcomed by the Iranian regime on the grounds that it violated the sovereignty of Syrian regime. However, it adopted more moderate discourse on the Turkish OOB, also known as Afrin Operation, that started on January 20, 2018. [608]

The reasons of Iran's moderate foreign policy responses to Turkey's OOB can be found in the regional context and its relations with the extra-regional power.

[605] Erdinç Çelikhan, "Erdoğan ve Ruhani'den 'birlik' mesajları: ABD yaptırımlarını desteklemiyoruz", *Hürriyet*, December 20, 2018, https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/erdogan-ve-ruhaniden-birlik-mesajlari-abd-yaptirimlarini-desteklemiyoruz-41058791 (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[606] Çelikhan, "Erdoğan ve Ruhani'den 'birlik' mesajları".

[607] "Relations between Turkey-Syria".

[608] The second Turkish military operation started with the support of the FSA in order to eliminate YPG forces in Afrin and preventing them from merging Ayn el-Arab and Afrin as well as removing ISIS terrorist elements from Turkish borders in the western part of the Euphrates. Yeşiltaş, "Turkey's Strategic Reasoning behind Operation Olive Branch", 4.

[609]As the Turkish government's foreign policy strategy has shifted from removing the Assad regime to struggling PKK/YPG and ISIS across its borders, the positions of Russia and Iran toward Turkey's cross-border operations have changed.[610] Russian position about the Turkey's Afrin operation impacted on Iran's approach toward Turkish cross-border operations.[611] Even though the Assad regime strongly condemned Turkey for its cross-border operation in Syria, the Iranian regime did not share the Assad regime's strong reaction to Turkey about the OOB operation. [612]

From Iranian perspective, even though Turkey has continued to support rebels on the ground, it has involved in the Astana peace process alongside with Iran and Russia. In this sense, the Iranian regime has sought to ensure Turkey's commitment to the Astana talks which has contributed to diminishing of clashes in Syria for a period. Furthermore, the Iranian regime has anticipated that Turkey's war with the YPG/PKK was likely to increase the Assad regime's power 'in future negotiations with the Syrian Kurds'. Given Turkey-US

[609] Mahan Abedin, "Why Iran cautiously supports Turkey's operation in Afrin?", *Middle East Eye*, January 31, 2018, https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/why-iran-cautiously-supports-turkeys-operation-afrin (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[610] In the first place, it has been argued that Russia's giving green light to Turkey's Afrin operation was influential on Turkey's military achievement given Russian military and political role in the region. Mahan Abedin, "Why Iran cautiously supports Turkey's operation in Afrin?", *Middle East Eye*, January 31, 2018, https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/why-iran-cautiously-supports-turkeys-operation-afrin (accessed on 10 May 2020).
Yeşiltaş, "Turkey's Strategic Reasoning behind Operation Olive Branch", 4.

[611] Russian support to Turkish military operation has been mainly derived from Turkey's changing policy about the Syrian regime and its contribution to the trilateral negotiations among Turkey, Iran and Russia. Furthermore, it has been also claimed that as an extra-regional power, Russia has sought to benefit from the US-Turkey division about the PKK/YPG in the northern Syria and sought to be more penetrating in Turkey's future strategic aims in the region. At the end of the day, Russia's consent to the OOB operation increased Turkey's strategic maneuver capability about the YPG/PKK presence in the east bank of the Euphrates. Yeşiltaş, "Turkey's Strategic Reasoning behind Operation Olive Branch", 4.

[612] Mahan Abedin, "Why Iran cautiously supports Turkey's operation in Afrin?", *Middle East Eye*, January 31, 2018, https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/why-iran-cautiously-supports-turkeys-operation-afrin (accessed on 10 May 2020).

disagreement about YPG and Turkey's northern Syria operations, it is also argued that "*Tehran can hardly be displeased by rising tensions between NATO allies Turkey and the United States*". [613] Tehran was aware that Turkey's tension with the US would bring Turkey closer to Russia and Iran in the region. For these reasons, Iran's position toward Turkey's military operations in the northern Syria following the Astana talks has been regarded as '*cautiously supportive*' during the OOB operation. [614] In this regard, apart from Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassimi's statements that emphasized Iran's concerns about the operation, Iran's reactions did not turn into a practical opposition to the OOB operation. [615]

In the light of these developments, the Turkish government welcomed the moderate approach of Iran and took steps for relieving Iran's possible concerns about the operation. The Turkish Armed Forces and the Iranian military officials were in contact with each other throughout the operation. For instance, one day after the operation started, the Chief of Turkish General Staff Hulusi Akar called his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Bagheri to evaluate both the OOB operation and the situation in Syria in general. In this regard, he pointed out that the sole objective of Turkey was removing the terrorist groups from Turkish borders and maintaining Syrian territorial integrity.[616]

Despite these discursive and political efforts of both Turkey and Iran for increasing the regional cooperation, their regional competition and

[613] Ibid.

[614] Ibid. See also Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, 42.

[615] Hakkı Uygur, "Afrin Operasyonu ve İran'ın Tutumu", *İRAM*, January 31, 2018, https://iramcenter.org/afrin-operasyonu-ve-iranin-tutumu/ (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[616] Kemal İnat and Mustafa Caner, "Türkiye'nin İran Politikası 2018" in *Türk Dış Politikası Yıllığı 2018* eds.Burhanettin Duran, Kemal İnat and Mustafa Caner (İstanbul: SETA Yayınları, 2019): 31.

disagreements/misunderstandings have remained intact. According to Şen, following the defeat of ISIS, Tehran attached importance to the compromise between the Syrian Kurds and the Assad regime to remove the US-PYD relations in the country. Hence, Turkey's operations against the Syrian Kurds could be an obstacle for the Iranian strategic plans. [617] In this regard, when Turkey announced a prospective joint military operation of Turkey and Iran against the PKK in March 2019, this declaration was falsified by the Iranian military officials who said that they were not the part of the Turkish operation against the PKK. [618]

Iran was also concerned about Turkey's OPS launched in the Northern Syria in October 2019. Iranian Foreign Ministry stated that Tehran acknowledged 'Turkey' security concerns', however it is concerned about that '*the military action would not only diminish that country's security concerns, but also cause financial and humanitarian damages*.' [619] In this sense, Turkey's OPS and following Tehran's criticisms once again reminded the divisions between two countries regarding the several actors in Syrian war. On the one hand, with its operations, the Turkish government has sought to prevent a formation of the uninterrupted region controlled by the YPG/PKK along Iraqi borders in the Northern Syria. On the other hand, Iran has aimed to bring the Kurdish groups in

[617] Tremblay, "Is Turkey-Iran rapprochement sustainable?".

[618] Kerem Congar, "Tahran Kabul etmişti, yeniden yalanladı: türkiye ile ortak PKK operasyonu yok", *Euronews*, March 20 2019, https://tr.euronews.com/2019/03/20/iranin-yalanladigi-ortak-pkk-operasyonuna-ankara-ve-tahran-dan-devam-karari (accessed on 10 May 2020). Pınar Tremblay, "Is Turkey-Iran rapprochement sustainable?", *Al-Monitor*, October 1, 2019, https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/09/turkey-iran-experts-ask-if-rapprochement-sustainable.html (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[619] Patrick Smith, "World leaders unite in condemnation of Turkey's Syria operation", NBC News, October 11, 2019, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/world-leaders-unite-condemnation-turkey-s-syria-operation-n1064591 (accessed on 10 May 2020).

Northern Syria to compromise with the Assad regime and ensure that all the soils in Syria would gradually become under the control of the Syrian regime. [620]

In this sense, as two regional powers in the region, Turkey and Iran have still different national interests on several regional issues. Particularly, the situation in Idlib is seen as 'stress test for Iranian-Turkish relations". [621] In this regard, Turkey's main objective is creating a safe area in Idlib under the Turkish military supervision with borders defined by Sochi agreement and which has been wiped off from radical elements. [622] On the other hand, Iran's strategy has been ensuring the Assad regime's control in Idlib and 'rely on Russian channel for deescalating the conflict between the Syrian army and Turkish-backed forces in Idlib'. [623] However, as the Turkish military attacks increased the pressure against the Assad forces, Russia has become reluctant to confront Turkish forces in Idlib, which made Iran suspicious about 'back-channel deal' between Turkey and Russia. [624]

From Turkish perspective, Damascus's taking control of Idlib via military operations would create fatal risks for Turkish national interests. One of the

[620] Rahimullah Farzam, "İran'ın Barış Pınar Harekatın'na Yaklaşımı", *İran Araştırmaları Merkezi*, October 12, 2019, https://iramcenter.org/iranin-baris-pinari-harekatina-yaklasimi/ (accessed on 10 May 2020). Giorgio Cafiero, "Iran's View on Turkey's Operation Peace Spring", *Militarist Monitor*, October 14, 2019, https://militarist-monitor.org/irans-view-on-turkeys-operation-peace-spring/ (accessed on 9 May 2020).

[621] Sina Azodi and Giorgio Cafiero, "Idlib is a stress test for Iranian-Turkish relations", *Atlantic Council*, March 17, 2020, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/iransource/idlib-is-a-stress-test-for-iranian-turkish-relations/ (accessed on 12 October 2020).

[622] Oytun Orhan, "İdlib'de Tarafların Pozisyonları ve Muhtemel Senaryolar", *ORSAM*, February 24, 2020, https://orsam.org.tr/tr/idlibde-taraflarin-pozisyonlari-ve-muhtemel-senaryolar/ (accessed on 9 May 2020).

[623] Hamidreza Azizi, "Iran risks confrontation with Turkey over Idlib", *Al-Monitor*, March 4, 2020, https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/03/iran-confrontation-turkey-idlib-syria.html (accessed on 10 October 2020).

[624] Ibid.

reasons is it would trigger a new wave of mass migration to the Turkish territory. The other reason is that it would weaken Turkey's position in the Syrian military and diplomatic field which would impact Turkey's struggle to YPG/PKK and its efforts to reach a political solution in Syria. Even, it has been argued that the loss of Idlib would undermine Turkish military deterrence which would in return weaken Turkey's struggle in areas such as Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean. [625] In this regard, Turkey's military existence in Idlib has had a vital importance for Turkey's regional position.

On the other hand, even though Iran has been determined to support the Assad regime against the rebels, the situation in Idlib has made Iran's stance more ambiguous. While Iran was more determined to confront Turkey in Idlib under Russian security umbrella, Russia's back-step, and Iran-Russia disagreements over Idlib made Iran weaker in Idlib against Turkish operations on the ground. [626] Hence, when the pro-Assad forces and Turkish army members clashed in Idlib in February 2020, Iran remained relatively neutral and emphasized the importance of dialogue and diplomacy. [627] Without Russian support, Iran has not deployed Shia militias to the northern Syria and failed to strengthen its existence in Idlib. Furthermore, both domestic hardship and external pressures, particularly the US economic sanctions, have prevented Iran to fully support the pro-Assad forces' attacks in Idlib at the expense of Turkey's interests. In other words, Iran is not expected to confront Turkey in Idlib and risk losing Turkey as a significant regional and economic partner. Instead, Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif declared

[625] Oytun Orhan, "İdlib'de Tarafların Pozisyonları ve Muhtemel Senaryolar", *ORSAM*, February 24, 2020, https://orsam.org.tr/tr/idlibde-taraflarin-pozisyonlari-ve-muhtemel-senaryolar/ (accessed on 9 May 2020).

[626]Hadi Khodabandeh Loui, "Would Iran confront Turkey in the Idlib frontier?", *Anatolian Agency*, March 5 2020, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis/would-iran-confront-turkey-in-the-idlib-frontier/1755905 (accessed on 12 October 2020).

[627] Azizi, "Iran risks confrontation with Turkey over Idlib".

that Iran has been ready to be mediator between Turkey and Syria for their peace negotiations. [628]

All in all, as the *local security externalities* requires, Turkey and Iran have sought to overcome their differences over the Syrian war by institutionalizing their regional cooperation. By bandwagoning with extra-regional power Russia, both Turkey and Iran have committed to the Astana peace process that aims to bring region peace and stability. The trilateral negotiation mechanism has been accompanied by the supportive discourses of both Turkey and Iran to one another. Yet, the regional disagreements and divisions between two countries about the critical issues in the Syrian war have remained. However, as it is explained below, other regional development continued to converge the interests of two regional powers in the region.

### 6.3.1. The Regional Cooperation against the Independence Referendum of the KRG

> *H.3. Due to their power constraints, regional powers can cooperate with each other against common threats that affect their national security.*

The regional context and *local security externalities* of the Northern Iraq continued to converge the national interests of Turkey and Iran. it was explained in the previous sections, Iraq has constituted one of the problematical fields between Turkey and Iran which has led to both regional cooperation and competition between them. Since the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, the developments in Iraq have pushed Turkey and Iran cooperate about maintaining territorial integrity of Iraq but compete for influencing the political actors in the country. During this period, as one of the main actors in Iraq, the Kurdish Regional Government's referendum on full independence, which both Turkey

[628] Loui, "Would Iran confront Turkey in the Idlib frontier?". "İran: Türkiye ve Suriye arasında arabuluculuğa hazırız", *Deutsche Welle*, February 8, 2020, https://www.dw.com/tr/iran-t%C3%BCrkiye-ve-suriye-aras%C4%B1nda-arabuluculu%C4%9Fa-haz%C4%B1r%C4%B1z/a-52306698 (accessed on 10 May 2020).

and Iran had close contacts, have increased the concerns of Turkey and Iran about the Kurdish separatism in their own country and led them to act together. The Turkish Daily Sabah interpreted this convergence as "*two sides are more willing than ever to reach deals in Syria and Iraq*". [629]

Before the crisis regarding the referendum, the Turkish government had a tension with the KRG about oil-rich Kirkuk region in March 2017. The status of Kirkuk region has been already problematical given the clashing claims of its inhabitants which are Turkomans, Arabs and Kurds. The controversy over 'who historically belonged' this region lies at the center of discussions in Kirkuk. Accordingly, both Kurds and Turkmens and to a lesser extent, Arabs claim that this place belongs to them. [630] According to Iraq's new constitution in 2005, the status of Kirkuk and other controversial regions were supposed to determine with the referendum that would be held until 31 December 2007. [631] However, this

[629] During this period, the high-level military visits were accompanied by the foreign policy elites' official meetings. On 4 October 2017, Erdoğan made an official visit to Iran to be co-chair of the 4th Meeting of the Turkey-Iran High Level Cooperation Council and talked about the developments in the KRG with both Khamenei and Rouhani. This visit was regarded as critical since it was Erdoğan's first visit to Iran since April 2015. By expressing their determination to taking all steps against the referendum, they decided to create a consultation mechanism between Iran, Turkey an Iraq to synchronize their sanctions against the KRG. In this sense, during this period both Turkey and Iran increased their diplomatic contacts with the Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar Ababi. Hence, this regional coordination among three countries against the KRG and the Iraqi forces' military operations in Kirkuk and other controversial areas between Baghdad and Erbil in October 2017 made the KRG to suspend the referendum results. Bayram Sinkaya, " Turkish-Iranian Rapprochement and President Erdogan's Visit to Iran", *ORSAM*, October 9, 2017, https://orsam.org.tr/en/turkish-iranian-rapprochement-and-president-erdogan-s-visit-to-iran/ (accessed on 11 May 2020). Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, 47.
Yunus Paksoy, "Iranian chief of staff visits Ankara as common stance sought in Idlib, Afrin", *Daily Sabah*, August 15, 2017, https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2017/08/15/iranian-chief-of-staff-visits-ankara-as-common-stance-sought-in-idlib-afrin (accessed on 10 May 2020). "President Erdoğan's visit to Iran", *Presidency of the Republic of Turkey*, October 3, 2017, https://tccb.gov.tr/en/speeches-statements/558/84758/president-erdogans-visit-to-iran (accessed on 11 May 2020). "4 soruda Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan'ın kritik İran ziyareti", *BBC Türkçe*, October 4, 2017, https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-41493827 (accessed on 11 May 2020).

[630] İrem Köker, "Kerkük: Irak'ta 'bir bölgeye bağlı olmayan vilayet'", *BBC Türkçe*, April 7, 2017, https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-39512741 (accessed on 9 May 2020).

[631] Ibid.

voting could not be done, and Kirkuk has been defined as a '*province not connected to any region'*, but the claims of Kurds and Turkomans about Kirkuk have remained. [632]

In the face of ambiguous status of Kirkuk, Turkey and Turkomans have claimed that the KRG have brought the Kurds to the region and disrupted the demographic structure of the city after the American invasion of Iraq in 2003.Turkey has claimed that Kirkuk is a Turkoman city and strongly opposes to the KRG's control of Kirkuk. [633] Against this background, when the Kirkuk Provincial Assembly decided to rise the KRG flag alongside with the Iraqi flag in all the official institutions in Kirkuk on March 28, 2017, Turkey strongly criticized the decision and regarded it as '*unilateral act*' which 'will harm reconciliation efforts and destabilize and endanger Iraq'. [634]

Regarding the issue, Iran took side with Turkey and reacted to Kirkuk Provincial Assembly's decision to display the KRG flag. Accordingly, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassimi stated that "raising a flag other than the Iraqi state flag in Kirkuk is against the Iraqi constitution" and it can escalate the

[632] The reason for this is the 'Arabization' policy of the city's local population during the period of Saddam government between 1968 and 2003. The Constitution determines the normalization of the demographic structure and voting as a prerequisite for the public vote. In order to normalize the demographic structure, the way for those who were forced to migrate from this province during Saddam Hussein's period was returned after the US invasion in 2003. Köker, "Kerkük: Irak'ta 'bir bölgeye bağlı olmayan vilayet'",

[633] Furthermore, historically, modern Turkey's founding philosophy "National Pact" regards Kirkuk within Turkey's borders.

[634] "Press Release Regarding the Decision Approved in the Kirkuk Provincial Assembly", Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 28, 2017, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-92_-28-march-2017_-press-release-regarding-the-decision-approved-in-the-kirkuk-provincial-assembly.en.mfa (accessed on 10 May 2020). See also Othman Ali, "Kirkuk, Iraq's Next War: What Options Does Turkey Have?", *Insight Turkey* 19, no.4 (2017):33.

tension in the country. [635] In this sense, given their concern about the independent Kurdish state in the northern Iraq, the flag crisis in Kirkuk led to regional cooperation between Turkey and Iran which manifested itself more explicitly during the KRG's referendum policy.

In June 2017, the KRG declared that the Kurdistan Region would hold an independence referendum on September 25, 2017. [636] The referendum was planned to hold in Erbil, Soleimani, Nineveh, Diyala, Dohuk and the controversial region, Kirkuk within which Peshmerga increased its power following the struggle against ISIS in 2014. [637] The KRG officials claimed that the Baghdad government have systematically blocked the equal distribution of oil revenues and the KRG government has not been able to obtain its 17% budget rights since January 2014. [638] On the other hand, it has been argued that

[635] "Bayrak tartışmasına İran da dahil oldu", *Hürriyet*, April 3, 2017, https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/bayrak-tartismasina-iran-da-dahil-oldu-40416028 (accessed on 10 May 2020). "İran'dan Kerkük'te IKBY Bayrağına Tepki", *Al Jazeera*, April 3, 2017, http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber/irandan-kerkukte-ikby-bayragina-tepki (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[636]Masoud Barzani, President of the KRG, has consistently emphasized the right of the Kurds to vote for independence of Kurdistan. However, Barzani and other KRG officials have been cautious about their referendum plan and sought to relieve the opposition groups to this idea by stating that a referendum would be held when the central government and the KRG were in agreement about the KRG's separation from Iraq. "Irak Kürdistan Bölgesel Yönetimi bağımsızlık referendum tarihini açıkladı: 25 Eylül", *BBC Türkçe*, June 7, 2017, https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-40191041 (accessed on 10 May 2020). "Barzani: Bağımsızlık referendumuna gideceğiz", *BBC*, July 1, 2014, https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2014/07/140701_barzani_bagimsizlik (accessed on 11 May 2020). Kadir Üstün and Lesley Dudden, "Turkey-KRG Relationship: Mutual Interests, Geopolitical Challenges", *SETA Analysis*, no.31 (2017):29.

[637] "Iraqi Kurdistan votes in independence referendum", *BBC*, September 25, 2017, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-41382494 (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[638] "6 soruda IKBY'nin tartışmalı referandumu", *Anatolian Agency*, September 18, 2017, https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/info/infografik/7101 (accessed on 10 May 2020).

Barzani has sought to use the independence referendum as a political strategy to overcome his legitimacy crisis at home. [639]

The independence aspirations of the Barzani government and containing oil-rick Kirkuk to the referendum plan have violated Turkey's red lines for Iraq in the post-2003 period. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs released its criticism for the independence referendum plan of the KRG on the ground that it would harm peace and security in the region. [640] Especially, inclusion of Kirkuk to the referendum plan was regarded as a "grave mistake" by the Turkish government. Accordingly, İbrahim Kalın, spokesperson for the Turkish presidency, expressed Turkey's concerns about the issue on June 15, 2017:

> What really concerned us was that Kurdish leaders want to include Kirkuk in the process while according to the Iraqi constitution Kirkuk is an Iraqi city and is not within Kurdish boundaries… If any attempts will be made to forcefully include Kirkuk in the referendum question, problems will be made for Kirkuk and its surrounding areas. [641]

Given the long-lasting domestic Kurdish problem in Iran, Tehran has shared Turkey's concerns about Barzani's referendum decision and harshly criticized the KRG government. Even though there has been competition between Turkey and Iran for influencing the political actors in Iraq, Iran has been in full agreement with Turkey about preserving Iraq's territorial integrity since the US

[639] Christopher M.Blanchard, "Kurds in Iraq Propose Controversial Referendum on Independence", *CRS Insight*, September 21, 2017, https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/IN10758.pdf (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[640] "Press Release Regarding the Decision to Organize Independence Referendum in the KRG on 25 September 2017", *Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, June 9, 2017, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_181_-9-june-2017_-press-release-regarding-the-decision-to-organize-independence-referendum-in-the-krg-on-25-september-2017.en.mfa (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[641] "Kirkuk should not be included in Kurdish Referendum, says Turkey", *Center for Eurasian Studies*, June 15, 2017, https://avim.org.tr/en/Bulten/KIRKUK-SHOULD-NOT-BE-INCLUDED-IN-KURDISH-REFERENDUM-SAYS-TURKEY (accessed on 10 May 2020).

invasion of Iraq. On August 30,2018, Qassimi conveyed Tehran's message and warning to the KRG:

> The referendum decision of the Kirkuk Provincial Assembly is clearly unacceptable by the Iraqi central government, the United Nations, and many countries in the region. This decision is a dangerous and provocative step. [642]

More than this, the foreign ministers of Iran, Turkey and Baghdad government came together in New York on September 20, 2017 to talks about the referendum plan of the KRG. Three countries agreed that the planned KRG referendum is 'unconstitutional' and is likely to bring new tension to the region. [643] By expressing their 'commitment to the territorial integrity of the territorial integrity and political unity of Iraq', they agreed on applying 'counter-measures in coordination' to the KRG for deterring the Erbil government from realizing its plan of the independence referendum. [644] However, the Erbil government did not cease the referendum plan and implement the referendum on September 25, 2017 which resulted in a majority Yes vote. [645]

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[642] "İran'dan Kerkük İl Meclisi'nin 'referendum' kararına tepki", *Anatolian Agency*, August 30, 2017, https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/irandan-kerkuk-il-meclisinin-referandum-kararina-tepki-/897192 (accessed on 11 May 2020). "Iran joins Turkey, Iraq in opposing KRG independence vote", *Daily Sabah*, June 10, 2017, https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2017/06/10/iran-joins-turkey-iraq-in-opposing-krg-independence-vote (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[643] "Joint Communique of the Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Republic of Iraq, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Turkey", *Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, September 20, 2017, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/joint-communique-of-the-meeting-of-foreign-ministers-of-the-iraq-iran-and-turkey_en.en.mfa (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[644] "Turkey, Iran, Iraq consider counter-measures over Kurdish referendum", *Reuters*, September 21, 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-kurds-referendum-minis/turkey-iran-iraq-consider-counter-measures-over-kurdish-referendum-idUSKCN1BW1EA (accessed on 9 May 2020).

[645] "Kuzey Irak'ta referendum ve sonrası", *Deutsche Welle*, September 25, 2017, https://www.dw.com/tr/kuzey-irakta-referandum-ve-sonras%C4%B1/a-40666969 (accessed on 10 May 2020).

After this stage, Turkey and Iran deepened their cooperation against the KRG and increased their dialogue about the issue. The military officials between two countries had already intensified their contacts about the latest developments in the region. For instance, in August 2017, as the first visit by an Iranian chief of staff to Turkey since Iran's Islamic Revolution, the Iranian General Mohammad Bagheri had visited Hulusi Akar in order to discuss about the regional developments-the KRG referendum plans in particular-.[646] Regarding the meeting, Bagheri told:

> There have been no such visits between two countries for a long time but considering regional developments and security issues-border security and fight against terrorism-there was a need for such a visit.[647]

In this regard, as two of the regional powers of the Middle Eastern security complex, the relations between Turkey and Iran again converged against a common threat during this period.[648] The threat of an independent Kurdish state accelerated their security syndrome against potential Kurdish separatism in their own country and has made them intensify their political and military collaboration against the KRG. Even though Turkey and Iran have had significant trade relations with the KRG, the territorial integrity of Iraq have constituted more significant priority for the national interests of both countries.

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[646] On 4 October 2017, Akar paid a return visit to Tehran which coincided with Iranian and Iraqi forces' joint military exercises across the KRG borders. "Turkey's top general Akar visits Iran amid Iraq crisis", *Hurriyet Daily News*, October 2, 2017, https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-top-general-visits-iran-120224 (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[647] Parisa Hafezi and Tuvan Gumrukcu, "Iran's military chief in rare visit to Turkey for Syria talks", *Reuters*, August 16, 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-iran-military/irans-military-chief-in-rare-visit-to-turkey-for-syria-talks-idUSKCN1AW1PT (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[648] The common threats made two counties to urge the KRG leaders to declare the results of independence referendum "null and void" or would face an isolation in the region. "Turkey: Erbil should declare referendum 'null and void'", *Anatolian Agency*, November 1, 2017, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/turkey-erbil-should-declare-referendum-null-and-void/953433 (accessed on 11 May 2020).

Hence, neither Turkish government nor Iran did not refrain from implying sanctions against the KRG and shifted the regional environment in favor of themselves.

The regional cooperation between Turkey and Iran against Kurdish referendum had also significant implications for Iran's policy on Syrian Kurds. After this point, Iran's perspective on YPG has started to change from '*a tactical ally*' against ISIS to a '*strategic threat*'.[649] Furthermore, the Trump administration's exclusionist policies toward Iran in the region and 'maximum pressure' policy against Iran further concerned Iranian officials about the US' long-term cooperation with PYD. Hence, Iran's foreign policy difference from Turkey over Syrian Kurds started to diminish during this period which enabled two countries act together against Kurdish separatism in Iraq. [650]

### 6.3.2. The 'Temporal' Convergence of Turkish-Iranian Regional Strategies: The Qatar Crisis

As the regional balance of power shifted in the post-Arab uprisings, the regional actors have adapted their foreign policies according to the new regional reality in the Middle East. Under the new regional context, the new alignments and estrangement among the regional actors became a normal routine of the Middle Eastern security complex. As it was explained above, Turkey had already tense relations with the Saudi Arabia and the UAE during this period which pushed it becoming closer to Iran. The Qatar Crisis was one of the regional demonstrations of these changing regional alignments of the significant regional actors. In this case, according to their national and regional interests, Turkey and Iran found themselves cooperating against the significant actors of the Arabian Peninsula.

[649] Şen, "Dynamics of estrangement and realignment in Turkey–Iran relations in the 2000s", 157.

[650] Ibid.

When Saudi Arabia alongside with the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain decided to suspend their diplomatic relations with Qatar in June 2017 due to the latter's support to 'radical terrorism', Turkey and Iran cooperated with Qatar. [651] Saudi Arabia and its partners suspended their relations with Qatar and sought to make Doha comply with their 13 demands; consisting of cutting its ties with Iran, ceasing its support to all 'terrorist organizations' including Muslim Brotherhood, ISIS and Hezbollah; cancelling Turkish military deployment in Qatar and suspending its joint military collaboration with Turkey in the Qatar borders.[652]

From Turkish perspective, Qatar has been a significant partner for increasing Turkey's regional power. Turkey had already close economic and military relations with Qatar under the AKP government. While Turkey's trade volume with Qatar was $339.5 million in 2012, it became $710 million in 2016. Furthermore, the number of Turkish companies in Qatar is more than 180 with their budget $ 17.4 billion. [653] In addition to commercial ties, as the regional positions of Turkey and Qatar following the Arab Spring have converged, their strategic cooperation has grown.[654] In April 2016, as a port of their security agreement, Turkey and Qatar agreed to construction of Turkish military base in

[651] The Trump government also participated to the Saudis about accusing Doha's support to 'radical ideology' including its funding of Muslim Brotherhood Vahid Yücesoy, "The recent rapprochement between Iran

and Turkey: is it durable or is it a relationship of convenience? *Turkish Studies* 10 (2019): 10.

[652] "13 demands on Qatar from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE and Egypt, *The National*, June 23, 2017, https://www.thenational.ae/world/the-13-demands-on-qatar-from-saudi-arabia-bahrain-the-uae-and-egypt-1.93329 (accessed on 11 May 2020).

[653] "Turkey-Qatar Economic and Trade Relations", *Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-commercial-and-economic-relations-with-qatar.en.mfa (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[654]For instance, the 'Supreme Strategic Committee' was established in 2014 to boost high-level dialogue and collaboration between two countries. "Bilateral Political Relations between Turkey and Qatar", *Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey-qatar-relations.en.mfa (accessed on 10 May 2020).

Qatar for 'security and stability'. The then Turkish PM Davutoğlu considered military base in Qatar was as boosting regional stability:

> I can tell you now that the security and stability of Qatar is like the security and stability of Turkey. We want a stable and secure Gulf. Turkey and Qatar, we have the same destiny. We face the same threats. [655]

The *local security externalities* of the post-Arab uprisings period to a great extent converged the foreign policy strategies of Turkey and Qatar. They both supported Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Syrian opposition groups against the Assad regime. [656] In contrast to improving relations with Qatar, Turkey's relations with Saudi Arabia fell into a decline following the Arab Uprisings. [657] Saudi Arabia has already differed from Turkey and Qatar due to its opposition to Muslim Brotherhood ideology and its support to Fatah rather than Hamas in Palestine and its enmity to Iran in the region. When the Arab Uprisings erupted, Saudi Arabia was more cautious than Qatar and Turkey for supporting the rebels due to its internal problems and its strategic calculations in favor of the status quo. However, it can be said that by the year of 2012, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar have coordinated their actions toward supporting opposition groups against the Assad regime. [658]

As it was explained in the previous section, Turkey and Saudi Arabia were divided over their policies toward the Sisi government and MB members. Qatar

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[655] "Seeing shared threats, Turkey sets up military base in Qatar", *Reuters*, April 28, 2016, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-qatar-turkey-military/seeing-shared-threats-turkey-sets-up-military-base-in-qatar-idUSKCN0XP2IT (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[656] Ibid.

[657] Until 2010, Turkey had active diplomatic and economic relations with Saudi Arabia. As a significant indicator of improving relations, the GCC announced Turkey as a strategic partner on 2 September 2008. Birol Başkan, "Turkey between Qatar and Saudi Arabia: Changing Regional and Bilateral Relations", *Uluslararasi Iliskiler* 16, No. 62 (2019): 88.

[658] Ibid, 88.

took side with Turkey against Saudi Arabia and both countries have hosted the MB members who escaped from Egypt. Unlike Turkey and Qatar, Saudi Arabia adopted a contrary position and supported the military coup and announced MB as a terrorist organization in 2014.[659] Even though this difference did not collapse Turkey-Saudi relations, it has reduced their diplomatic visits for a while. Conversely, the regional convergence between Turkey and Qatar led to further increase their strategic cooperation which has created a concern for Saudi Arabia and UAE.

From Iranian perspective, it can be said that there have been fluctuating relations between Iran and Qatar before the 2017 crisis. On the one hand, Qatar has pursed pro-Saudi policies on several issues such as Yemen and Syrian civil war at the expense of Iran. On the other hand, Doha has had adopted pragmatic foreign policy toward Iran and maintained a degree of cooperation with Iran given the existence of the world's biggest natural gas field (North Field and South Pars) between their borders. [660] More than this, Doha has never perceived Iran as much of a threat as the Saudi Arabia have done. [661] When it comes to Iran, the long-lasting proxy wars and soft power competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia has made Tehran supported Qatar at the expense of Saudi Arabia in the 2017 crisis. [662] Even though the scope of Qatar-Iran relations has been restricted, Iran

[659] "Saudi Arabia declares Muslim Brotherhood 'terrorist group'", *BBC*, March 7, 2014, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26487092 (accessed on 11 May 2020).

[660] "Qatar-Iran ties: Sharing the world's largest gas field", *Al Jazeera*, June 15, 2017, https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2017/06/qatar-north-dome-iran-south-pars-glance-lng-gas-field-170614131849685.html (accessed on 11 May 2020).

[661] Yücesoy, "The recent rapprochement between Iran and Turkey", 12.

[662] Ibid, 12.

did not miss the opportunity of challenging Saudi-led coalition by maintaining a '*temporary partnership of convenience*' with Qatar. [663]

This case once against demonstrated the importance of the regional level for cooperation among the regional powers. On the one hand, Turkey did not want to lose a significant economic and military partner that has assisted Turkey to increase its regional power status. On the other hand, Iran sought to use the opportunity of regional balancing against its lost-lasting regional rival, the Saudi Arabia. This regional convergence between Turkey and Iran made them pursue common foreign policy strategies in favor of Doha during the Saudi-led blockade. Both Turkey and Iran started to assist Doha through sending ships carrying foods to Qatar as well as Iran opened its airspace to Qatari flights toward Africa and Europe. [664] More importantly, in November 2017, Turkey, Iran and Qatar made a transportation agreement for improving their trade relations by enhancing sea and land transportation among them. [665] All in all, Turkey and Iran again found themselves in series of trilateral agreements regarding the regional issues during this period.

[663] Bülent Aras and Emirhan Yorulmazlar, "Turkey, Iran and the Gulf Crisis", *HSF Policy Brief* 1, no.3 (2018): 6.

[664] "Iran's airspace open to Qatari flights", *Tehran Times*, June 7, 2017, https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/414038/Iran-s-airspace-open-to-Qatari-flights (accessed on 10 May 2020).

[665]As a reaction to Turkey's support to Qatar in June 2017, Saudi Arabia authorities met the PYD leaders in the Northern Syria in the same year and gave economic support to the stabilization plans for the cities under the PYD control in 2018. Başkan, "Turkey between Qatar and Saudi Arabia", 98. "Saudi-led Qatar blockade brings Iran, Turkey together", *Al-Monitor*, July 3, 2017, https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/06/saudi-qatar-blockade-iran-turkey-convergence-crisis.ac.html (accessed on 11 May 2020).
"Turkey, Iran and Qatar sign new trade-transport agreement", *Middle East Monitor*, November 27, 2017, https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20171127-turkey-iran-and-qatar-sign-new-trade-transport-agreement/ (accessed on 10 May 2020).

### 6.3.3. The Regional Economic Interdependence between Turkey and Iran in the post-2016 Middle East: Turkey's Attitude toward Iran in the face of the US Sanctions

Like the previous periods, the economic relations between two countries have been a significant component of their regional power status. Turkey's energy needs and their intensive trade relations have made Turkey and Iran economic relations intact during this period. Especially after the Iran Nuclear Deal, or JCPOA and lifting of sanctions against Iran in January 2016, Turkey's import of Iranian natural gas and oil increased to 21 million barrels in 2016 and 52.8 million barrels in 2017. [666] From Turkish perspective, the free trade with Iran has been significant since the economic sanctions to Iran would influence Turkey's non-oil exports to Iran in the medium and long-term and unstable Iran would threaten the regional security. [667]

However, Trump administration's decision to withdrawal from the Iran Nuclear Deal in June 2018 has led to renewal economic sanctions against Iran which in return would endanger Turkey's trade relations with Iran. Despite Turkey's determination to boost trade relations with Iran, the US' sanctions do not only prevent US companies from doing business with Iran but also prohibits international companies and other countries from establishing commercial relations with Tehran. [668] When the US renewed the economic sanctions against

[666] Moreover, to increase trade relations with Iran, the Turkish Exporters Assembly established the Turkish Trade Center in Tehran with agents of fifty-nine Turkish companies on 25 February 2017.Sinkaya, *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, 32. "Ekonomik-Ticari İlişkiler", *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Tahran Büyükelçiliği*, June 18, 2017, http://tahran.be.mfa.gov.tr/Mission/ShowInfoNote/331968 (accessed on 12 May 2020).

[667]Tamer Badawi, "The Economic Turn in Turkish-Iranian Relations", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, March 12, 2010, https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/81273 (accessed on 12 May 2020).

[668] "ABD'nin yeniden yaptırım uygulamaya başlaması İran ekonomisini nasıl etkiledi?", *BBC Türkçe*,May 2, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-48131321 (accessed on 12 May 2020).

Iran on November 5, 2018, it temporarily allowed Turkey and other seven countries to continue importing oil from Iran for six months. [669]

Hence, the trade relations between Turkey and Iran did not dramatically reduce during the first part of 2018. However, as TÜPRAŞ approved, the Turkish government has ceased importing crude oil from Iran since May 2019 and has sought to meet crude oils needs from other sources, mainly Iraq and Russia.[670] However, given the increasing transportation cost of the oil coming from Russia and insufficient infrastructure in Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline, it can be said Turkey has been adversely affected by the sanctions on Iran. Even though the trade relations between two countries has continued during this period, the below table demonstrates the adverse impact of the US sanctions on Turkey-Iran trade relations:

**Table 6.2.** Turkey's Trade Volume with Iran (2016-2019)[671]

| **Turkey's Trade Relations with Iran (Billion US Dollars)** | **2016** | **2017** | **2018** | **2019** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Export | 4.96 | 3.26 | 2.40 | 2.31 |
| Import | 4.70 | 7.50 | 6.90 | 3.29 |
| Volume | 9.70 | 10.76 | 9.30 | 5.60 |

[669] Other countries were China, India, South Korea, Italy, Greece, Japan and Taiwan. Mühdan Sağlam, "İran yaptırımlarında biten muafiyetin Türkiye'ye etkisi", *Gazete Duvar*, April 23, 2019, https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/ekonomi/2019/04/23/iran-yaptirimlarinda-biten-muafiyetin-turkiyeye-etkisi/ (accessed on 11 May 2020).

[670] In addition, Turkey has imported crude oil from a lesser extent Kazakhstan and Saudi Arabia. Elif Sudagezer, "Tüpraş: Türkiye İran'dan petrol ithal etmiyor", *Sputnik Türkiye*, July 11, 2019, https://tr.sputniknews.com/columnists/201907111039638957-tupras-turkiye-irandan-petrol-ithal-etmiyor/ (accessed on 11 May 2020). Elif Erşen, "Russian, Iraqi crude replaces Iranian oil, yet supply security still an issue", *Daily Sabah*, June 4, 2019, https://www.dailysabah.com/energy/2019/06/04/russian-iraqi-crude-replaces-iranian-oil-yet-supply-security-still-an-issue (accessed on 11 May 2020).

[671] "Turkey-Iran Economic and Commercial Relations", *Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/economic-and-commercial-relations-with-iran.en.mfa (accessed on 11 May 2020).

Despite the sharp drop of Iranian exports to Turkey, Turkey's exports to Iran have not been dramatically affected over 2018 and 2019. Furthermore, many Iranian people started to make more investments in Turkey's real estate sector in 2019. In this sense, Iranians have constituted second nationality after Iraqis to buy property within the context of foreign residential sales in Turkey. The year of 2019 has also witnessed emergence of 978 Iranian companies in Turkey. [672] According to Fatih Çayabatmaz:

> Turkey has become as single route for the Iranian capital, especially after the US embargo was imposed. We expect this interest to continue to grow in the coming years as well.[673]

All in all, the neighborhood effect in Turkey-Iran relations have continued to affect not only their political and military relations but also their economic interactions. Their geographical proximity has provided low-transaction cost in their trade which has provided a significant motivation for both countries to pursue their economic relations. Even if the regional politics in the middle Eastern security complex has had a zero-sum nature, the commercial relations among regional actors have been likely to be a positive-sum game. Hence, the economic interdependence between Turkey and Iran have continued to benefit both countries and assisted them to increase their capabilities in the region.

### 6.4. The Regionalist Review of Turkey's Realignment with Iran the Post-2016 Middle East

As two of the regional powers, Turkey and Iran have been greatly affected by the regional power shifts. The power shifts in the region have been emerged in both

[672] Badawi, "The Economic Turn in Turkish-Iranian Relations". "Iranians rank second in Turkey's housing sales to foreigners", *Daily Sabah*, May 27, 2019, https://www.dailysabah.com/real-estate/2019/05/27/iranians-rank-second-in-turkeys-housing-sales-to-foreigners (accessed on 12 May 2020).

[673] Çayabatmaz is the Tehran representative of MÜSİAD "Iranians top list of foreign investors in Turkey", *Eghtesad Online*, December 15, 2019, https://www.en.eghtesadonline.com/Section-economy-4/31205-iranians-top-list-of-foreign-investors-in-turkey (accessed on 12 May 2020).

local and extra-regional power level. On the one hand, Russia's role and power in the Syrian war and the region has considerably increased at the expense of the indirect role of the US. On the other hand, it became certain with Russian support that the Assad regime would be in power in Syria and any political solution would involve it. Furthermore, regional non-state actors, ISIS and YPG have continued to challenge the regional states and pushed them to alter regional foreign policy strategies.

Under these circumstances, Turkey had to adapt the new regional context and pursued its foreign policy preferences accordingly. In the first place, the deterioration of Turkey-US relations in the region due to their contending positions toward the YPG forces in the northern Syria have made Turkish foreign policy elites to maintain alternative regional collaborations in a challenging regional atmosphere. On the other hand, the developments in the Syrian war has demonstrated that Turkey had to alter its foreign policy orientation that was based on the removal of the Assad regime since 2011. By support of Russia and Iran, the Assad regime had irreversible gains such as recapturing Aleppo and it showed that any future for Syria had to include the Assad regime.

Hence, the Turkish government started to revise its foreign policy orientation and become involved in the diplomatic dialogue with Russia and Iran, two most influential players in the Syrian war. Furthermore, due to Turkey's deteriorated relations with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the UAE, Turkey needed to increase its alternatives for regional collaboration. As the then Turkish PM Yıldırım stated, during this period, Turkey has sought to have "*more friends, fewer enemies*" in the bloody realities of its neighborhood. [674] In this way, Turkey has been willing to have a role in the Syrian peace process which would cease the regional insecurity and instability as well as it can have a regional role in the post-war

[674] "Turks seek 'more friends, fewer enemies'", *Politico*, March 7, 2016, https://www.politico.eu/article/turks-seek-more-friends-fewer-enemies-turkey-relations-russia-israel/ (accessed on 12 May 2020).

Syria. Given the power changes in the Syrian war and Russian active military role in the region, Turkey has started to enter more dialogue with Iran within the context of the Astana talks. Furthermore, the Turkish government has acknowledged that the US' primary objective has been struggling against ISIS instead of active involvement in the Syrian issue. Hence, the responsibility had to be fulfilled by three influential actors that have been willing to come to table for the future of Syria.

From Iranian perspective, it was significant to collaborate with Turkey in a regional environment that the US has increased its pressure against Iran. [675] Furthermore, Turkey's commitment to the Astana process was critical for Iran's regional interests since it indicated Turkey's acceptance of the Assad regime. Besides, like Turkey, the regional instability and spillover effect of the Syrian war have put Iran at risk in the region. Hence, when the Assad regime escalated its attacks against the rebels in Idlib, Iran has avoided direct conflict with Turkey in Idlib. On the other hand, Turkey has needed Iran for its influence on the Assad regime and possible military role it has had on the ground. [676] In April 2019, during his official meeting with Zarif in Turkey, Çavuşoğlu pointed out the importance of regional cooperation in de-escalation in Idlib and stated:

> For permanent peace in Syria and preserving the cease-fire in Idlib, we continue to work together to coordinate various issues, including the US' decision to withdraw from Syria. The whole world sees the sincere efforts to establish the constitutional committee.[677]

[675] "U.S. Maximum Pressure Meets Iranian Maximum Pressure", *International Crisis Group*, November 5, 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iran/us-maximum-pressure-meets-iranian-maximum-pressure (accessed on 12 May 2020).

[676] Yücesoy, "The recent rapprochement between Iran and Turkey", 10.

[677] Özgenur Sevinç, "Turkey, Iran continue cooperating to find way out of Syrian crisis", *Daily Sabah*, April 18, 2019, https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2019/04/18/turkey-iran-to-continue-cooperating-to-find-way-out-of-syrian-crisis (accessed on 12 May 2020).

In addition, the KRG's referendum decision for independence has led two countries to share common concerns about their national interests. As their history has shown that the Kurdish issue has been always a source of either competition or cooperation in the relations between two countries depending on the regional context. However, any plan for an independent Kurdish state has always caused common reactions from both Turkey and Iran. Like the declaration of de-facto autonomy of the Kurdish government in the Northern Iraq after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the 2017 KRG referendum for independence triggered Turkey's long-lasting syndrome about Kurdish separatism and made the Turkish government adopt serious countermeasures against the Arbil government. By having same Kurdish problem in domestic politics, Iran has given priority to Iraq's territorial integrity and made collaboration with Turkey against the KRG referendum decision.

Hence, it can be argued that this chapter demonstrates to what extent the regional environment is vital for changing foreign policy orientation of the regional actors. Besides, if these actors are regional powers, they are more susceptible of regional power shifts due to their ambitions to preserve and increase their capabilities in the region. Moreover, the limited capacities of the regional powers in the face of extra-regional powers further muddy the waters and led them either to balance or bandwagon with these *quasi-regional* actors. Regional alignments or estrangement among the regional powers need to be evaluated within this perspective. In this way, the changing foreign policy relations between Turkey and Iran in the post-2016 Middle Eastern security complex and its distinguishing features from the 2011-2016 period can be comprehended.

**Table 6.3.** The High-Level Official Visits (Presidential Level) between Iran and Turkey during 2016-2019[678]

| Turkish Officials' Visit to Iran | Date | Iranian Officials' Visits to Turkey | Date |
|---|---|---|---|
| PM Ahmet Davutoğlu-State Visit | 4-5 Mar. 2016 | President Hassan Rouhani-OIC Summit- the HCC's 3rd meeting | 15-16 Apr. 2016 |
| President Erdoğan-the HCC's 4th meeting | 4 Oct. 2017 | Ishaq Jahangiri, Vice President-State Visit and D-8 Summit | 19-20 Oct.2017 |
| President Erdoğan-3rd Astana Meeting | 7 Sept. 2018 | President Rouhani-OIC Summit | 13 Dec.2017 |
| President Erdoğan's Official Phone Call to President Rouhani | 9 Oct. 2019 | President Rouhani- 2nd Astana Meeting | 3-4 Apr.2018 |
| | | President Rouhani-OIC Summit | 19 May 2018 |
| | | President Rouhani- the HCC's 5th meeting | 19-20 Dec.2018 |
| | | President Rouhani-5th Astana Meeting | 16 Sept.2019 |

[678] This table is mainly based on the sources of Sinkaya's article named as *Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP*, the website of Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs and several sources of newspaper archives.

# CHAPTER 7

# CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters, Turkey's fluctuating relations with Iran between 2002-2019 have been analyzed from the regionalist perspective. Having applied both Buzan and Wæver's RSCT and Lake and Morgan's theory of regional orders, this thesis has showed the important role of the *local security externalities* of the Middle Eastern security complex on the Turkish-Iranian relations in the last two decades. As it was explained before, the relations between Turkey and Iran, as two regional powers, are highly sensitive to *local security externalities* of their regional security complex. Accordingly, the changing regional dynamics and the role of extra-regional powers in the Middle East have been significant independent variables for ups and downs in Turkish-Iranian relations during the period under consideration.

The main reason for using the regional level in this thesis is that it locates itself between micro-level (national) and macro-level (system) of analysis and is explanatory for the complex nature of Turkish-Iranian relations. In contrast to pure *Innenpolitik* or international systemic approaches, the regionalist approach of this thesis contains both global and unit levels and gives an inclusive understanding for Turkey's fluctuating relations with Iran between 2002-2019. Even though Turkish domestic climate has been relatively stable during this period and the role of the US has been still paramount for the region (even if it has been reduced after 2011), Turkish foreign policy toward Iran substantially changed throughout these years and its reason is found at the regional level. More importantly, even if there are changes in global and unilt levels, their impacts are filtered through the regional level. Hence, both Buzan and Wæver's RSCT and Lake and Morgan's theory of regional orders contribute to our

understanding of relations between two of the regional powers of the Middle East.

Upon applying the regionalist perspective to the case study, this work has reached following conclusions. The period between 2002-2011 shows that the significant reason behind Turkey's becoming closer to Iran was compelling regional context of the Middle East following the US invasion of Iraq. Accordingly, both Turkey and Iran shared common concerns in the post-2003 Middle East and were aware that bilateral cooperation would preserve their security. As two neighbors of Iraq, maintaining Iraq's territorial integrity and stability became a priority for both Turkey and Iran since they were highly concerned about the spillover effect of the Kurdish separatism. Furthermore, when the US sought to be act as a regional actor in the Middle East, the relations between Turkey and Iran, as two regional powers, became cooperative due to their will to increase their regional autonomy and thus their weight as regional powers. Hence, they sought to cooperate with each other due to their concerns in the face of the US active involvement in the region. Thus, this period indicates that the Turkish foreign policy makers pursued their foreign policy strategies toward Iran within the context of the Middle Eastern security complex. In this regard, the AKP's '*zero problems with neighbors*' and active engagement with Iran was to a great extent derived from the regional realities.

The post-2011 Turkish-Iranian relations proved that the cooperation between two countries are not perpetual but context-dependent. During the times of regional powers shifts, Turkey, and Iran, as two regional powers, are inclined to compete with one another to maximize their power and influence in the region. The regional distribution of power radically changed in the post-2011 Arab Uprisings and gave a room for Turkey and Iran to increase their regional power. Their historical competition for being a model country for the rest of the region recurred during this period and led to their regional rivalry. In this regard, two countries sought to use their different forms of government (secular Turkish

model vs. Islamic Iranian model) to consolidate their regional influence at the expense of another. Furthermore, their divergent foreign policies during the Syrian civil war indicate that when these two regional powers have different national interests in the region, they do not hesitate to confront each other through cooperating with each other's opponents.

In terms of the role of primary extra-regional power in the region, the post-2011 Middle East experienced the diminishing of the US active role in Iraq. In contrast to the US' being quasi-actor in the region in the post-2003 Middle East, the US government planned to adopt a more passive role in the Middle East and decided to make a military withdrawal from Iraq. Hence, with the diminishing role of the US, Turkey and Iran found a space for claim their regional hegemony and increased their competition in Iraq. In this sense, contrary to expectations of *Innenpolitik* approaches, even though the same government remained in power in Turkey, Turkish foreign policy orientation toward Iran radically changed during this period. Hence, this period proves that the main determinant of Turkey's foreign policy approaches toward Iran was not the Turkish domestic politics but regional power shifts in the Middle East. Accordingly, the *local security externalities* of the Middle East and the global-regional nexus in the region had a great impact on changing Turkish-Iranian relations.

Another conclusion drawn from the case study is that the post-2016 Middle East had serios repercussions for Turkish-Iranian relations and pushed them to come together. This period again witnessed regional power shifts which converged the interests of two regional powers. Accordingly, the increasing power of the Assad regime, the assertive role of Russia in the Syrian civil war and the growing threats of the YPG and ISIS against Turkish security were critical regional dynamics that pushed Turkey to change its foreign policy toward the Syrian civil war and cooperate with Iran and Russia. During this period, the regional alignments were also undergoing a change for Turkey since it had tensions with significant Arab actors such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and

Egypt. The inevitable consequence of these regional developments for Turkey was focusing on its commonalities with Iran and being a part of the Astana process alongside with Iran and Russia.

Furthermore, as two regional powers, even though they tend to increase their regional autonomy against extra-regional powers, both Turkey and Iran have limited capabilities in the face of the great powers in the region. Accordingly, the post-2016 Middle Eastern security complex and growing regional threats derived from the Syrian civil war made Turkey and Iran align with Russia under the Astana process. The coercive and unstable regional order in the post-2016 period did not allow Turkey and Iran to seek their regional autonomy and balance against Russia. In contrast to recovered Iran-US relations under the Obama administration, Iran's threat perceptions toward the US under the Trump government have been dramatically increased due to the latter's 'maximum pressure' campaign against Iran. Even though Turkey is a NATO member and its relations with the US has been dependent on the strategic partnership, Turkey's relations with the US in the region has been tense during this period due to the latter's support to PYD in the northern Syria. Under these circumstances, they preferred to act together with Russia to maintain their security which obliged their regional cooperation. Even though their competition remained in the region, the *local security externalities* of the Middle East, their relations with the US and Russia as well as with other regional actors made it advantageous for both countries to highlight their agreements and commonalities in the region.

What does the fluctuating Turkish-Iranian relations between 2002-2019 reveal and what does that mean for the foreign policies of states and IR theories? In the first place, this case study questions the dominance of pure international-system and unit level of analysis for explaining the changing foreign policy preferences of states. Several foreign policy changes require more comprehensive analysis for revealing their complex nature. Hence, the thesis shows that Turkey's changing relations with Iran was considerably derived from the regional level

which is an intersection point between the global and unit level of analysis. In this way, the regional level aims to "*establish a link between system/structure theory and the area studies approach by positing that we are confronted not with a single global international system, but with several in a variety of relationships*". [679]

The regionalist perspective of this thesis assists us to escape from a trap of the '*agent-structure problem*' in the IR theories. The foreign policy behaviors of states are so multifaceted that neither merely agent nor structure-oriented approaches can clarify the main determinants behind them. Hence, more flexible and encompassing perspective can give us insight into the impact of regional security complexes on the relations among its members. Regional security complexes embody both international distribution of power and national characteristics of its member states and their '*historical hatreds and friendships*'. In this way, they give rise to emerge of states' regional positions such as their changing alignments and threat perceptions toward one another.

Having acknowledged the Middle East as a regional security complex, this thesis argues that the region has its own peculiarities and path-dependencies that have impacted on its members. In this sense, it is significant to consider '*how regions socialize powerful actors on their own terms, rather than simply playing the hegemon's game*'.[680] The regional members of the Middle East have been socialized into culture of hard-politics, anarchic order and excessive use of religion and ethnicity for political ends. Furthermore, this regional security complex has been highly subjected to involvement of extra-regional powers throughout history. Under these circumstances, as Lake argues, the 'outsiders' have produced *local security externalities* for the rest of the region. Thus, the

[679] Leonard Binder, "The Middle East as a subordinate international system." *World Pol.* 10 (1957): 409.

[680] Amitav Acharya, "The emerging regional architecture of world politics." *World Pol.* 59 (2006): 651.

extra-regional powers have increasingly acted as regional members and become a reality for the foreign policy makers of the Middle Eastern security complex.

In the light of the regionalist perspective that used in this thesis, how can we interpret the recent Turkish-Iranian relations? We can observe that the Turkish-Iranian relations have continued to be affected by the *local security externalities* of the Middle East and the involvement of the extra-regional powers in the region. As two regional powers, their relations are still characterized by cooperation, competition and balancing against each other to restrict regional rise of one another.[681] Both Turkey and Iran have continued to increase their regional power and shift their regional positions accordingly. The recent developments led to change the regional balance of power in the Middle East which in turn impacted on the Turkish-Iranian relations. Regarding the Idlib front of the Syrian civil war, Turkish-Iranian competition became more manageable due to the regional interests of two countries. Turkey and Russia's ceasefire agreement in Idlib on 5 March 2020 demonstrated that the role and effectiveness of Turkey and its cooperation with Russia increased.[682] Despite Iran's concern about this alignment and Turkey's increasing regional influence, it has continued to cooperate with Turkey and Russia for the solution for Syrian civil war to be a part of 'the political deal'. Hence, both Turkey and Iran so far have continued to be part of the Astana process under the Russia's leadership. [683]

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[681] Meliha Benli Altunışık, "Regional Powers in a Transforming Middle East." *IEMeD Conferences* (2014): 1.

[682] Andrew Roth, "Russia and Turkey agree ceasefire in Syria's Idlib province", *The Guardian*, March 5, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/05/russia-and-turkey-agree-ceasefire-in-syrias-idlib-province (accessed on 7 September 2020). "Iran is absent from political agreements but present in Idlib battles", *Enab Baladi*, April 21, 2020, https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2020/04/iran-is-absent-from-political-agreements-but-present-in-idlib-battles/ (Accessed on 7 September 2020).

[683] Iran's FM Zarif summarized Iran's recent position on the Syrian civil war as follows: "Syrian issue requires special coordination. We coordinate our steps with Turkey and Russia in Syria under Astana process". Muhammet Kurşun, "Iran 'coordinates steps in Syria with Russia, Turkey", *Anatolian Agency*, September 24, 2020, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/politics/iran-coordinates-steps-in-syria-with-russia-turkey/1984237 (accessed on 7 September 2020). "Iran,

Apart from the Syrian civil war, the new *local security externalities* of the Middle Eastern security complex continued to affect the relations between Turkey and Iran since the very beginning of 2020. The Libyan civil war, which started in 2014, has increasingly become a new competition arena for regional and global powers and become a new partnership front between Turkey and Iran.[684] To secure its maritime agreement with Libya's UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA), Turkey has been militarily active in Libya since January 2020 and supported Government of National Accord (GNA) against the General Khalifa Haftar's forces. [685] Accordingly, Iran declared its support for the Turkish government in the Libyan civil war against supporters of General Haftar.[686] Accordingly, the region once again witnesses cleavages over this crisis which remind us of the regional divisions during the 2017 Qatar Crisis; Turkey, Qatar, Iran on the one side: and Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE on

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Russia, Turkey in talks to find political solution for Syria", *Al Jazeera*, July 1, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/7/1/iran-russia-turkey-in-talks-to-find-political-solution-for-syria (Accessed 7 September 2020). "Iran is absent from political agreements but present in Idlib battles".

[684] Maysam Behravesh and Hamidreza Azizi, "What is behind Iran's sudden realignment with Turkey?", Responsible Statecraft, July 1, 2020, https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2020/07/01/whats-behind-irans-sudden-realignment-with-turkey/ (accessed on 7 September 2020).

[685] "Turkey: Maritime deal with Libya 'red line' for Ankara", *SETAV*, September 2, 2020, https://www.setav.org/en/turkey-maritime-deal-with-libya-red-line-for-ankara/ (accessed on 8 September 2020).

[686] Tahir Abbas, "Iran-Turkey Partnership: A New Front in Libya", *Modern Diplomacy*, September 22, 2020, https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2020/09/22/iran-turkey-partnership-a-new-front-in-libya/ (accessed on 7 October 2020).

the other. [687] However, Russia's role in the Libyan civil war is equally significant and likely to affect the position of Turkey and Iran in the medium to long-run.[688]

While this part of this thesis was being written, the 6th Meeting of the Turkey-Iran High Level Cooperation Council was held via video conference. During the meeting, the foreign policy elites of both countries drew attention to their regional power status and the importance of their regional cooperation. Accordingly, in the light of the latest regional developments, Erdoğan stated that *"The Turkey-Iran dialogue has a determining role in the solution of many regional problems".* [689] His Iranian counterpart Rouhani pointed out the strengths of both countries in a challenging region by asserting: *"Iran and Turkey are two major powers in the region, and there have always been animosities and grudges against both countries…there is no way other than strengthening friendly relations between the two countries overcome such conspiracies".*[690] These elite discourses are manifestations of the recent regional convergence of two countries.

As the regional environment, within which Turkey and Iran locate, is highly unstable and competitive, the relationship type between two countries cannot be expected to be consistent and long termed. Accordingly, the recent rapprochement between Turkey and Iran should be interpreted as a convergence

[687] Anna Jacobs, "Gulf Rivalries and Great Power Competition in Libya", *The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington*, June 8 2020, https://agsiw.org/gulf-rivalries-and-great-power-competition-in-libya/ (accessed on 7 October 2020).

[688] Yaşar Yakış, "Turkey-Russia cooperation faces new test over Libya", *Arab News*, June 7, 2020, https://www.arabnews.com/node/1686146 (accessed on 7 October 2020).

[689] "President Erdoğan attends 6th Meeting of the Turkey-Iran High Level Cooperation Council via videoconference", *Presidency of the Republic of Turkey*, September 8, 2020, https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/122081/president-erdogan-attends-6th-meeting-of-the-turkey-iran-high-level-cooperation-council-via-videoconference- (accessed on 10 September 2020).

[690] Ibid.

of their regional interests rather than as the emergence of a new regional alliance. Due to their will to influence the regional affairs, both Turkey and Iran have been inclined to compete throughout the history and the period between 2002-2019 is not an exception of this. In the meantime, due to their limited capacity, they have needed each other in economic and political terms. The neighborhood effect and the geographical proximity has made these two regional powers enchain and shaped their foreign policy preferences toward each other. The *local security externalities* of the Middle East are likely to continue to affect the near future of Turkish-Iranian relations.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: CURRICULUM VITAE

### PERSONAL INFORMATION

Surname, Name: Yalçınkaya Savaş, Zehra Funda
Nationality: Turkish (TC)
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### EDUCATION

| Degree | Institution | Year of Graduation |
|---|---|---|
| MA | DEU International Relations | 2013 |
| BA | DEU International Relations | 2010 |
| High School | İzmir Şemikler High School, İzmir | 2005 |

### WORK EXPERIENCE

| Year | Place | Enrollment |
|---|---|---|
| 2011-2019 | Izmir University of Economics-Department of Political Science and International Relations | Research Assistant |
| 2019 July | University of Brement, Institüt für Interkulturelle und Internationale Studien | Visiting PhD Student |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 2019 May | Tehran University, Department of International Relations | Visiting PhD Student |
| 2011 August | Yaşar University European Union Research Center | Intern Student |

**FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

Advanced English, Beginner German, Beginner Persian

**PUBLICATIONS**

**Journal Article**

Z.F.Savas, "Implementation of the 'Responsibility to Protect' Doctrine in Libyan and Syrian Civil Wars", *Beykent Üniversitesi Hukuk Fakültesi Dergisi* , Vol. 1, No. 2 (2015).

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## APPENDIX B: TURKISH SUMMARY/TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Bu çalışma, 2002-2019 yılları arasında Türkiye'nin İran'a yönelik değişen dış politika tutumunu bölgeci perspektif ile ele almayı amaçlamaktadır. Buna göre, 2000'lerin başında Türkiye'nin İran ile ilişkileri önemli biçimde iyileşme gösterirken 2011'de başlayan Arap İsyanları sonrası gergin bir hal almıştır ve 2016 sonrası tekrar normalleşmeye başlamıştır. Türkiye'nin İran'a yönelik değişken ilişkilerinin bu denli kısa sürede ve aynı hükümet döneminde meydana gelmesi çok alışılagelmiş olmayıp önemli bir araştırma sorunu sunmaktadır. Bu dış politika değişikliğinin sebepleri ve bu sebepleri hangi kuramsal yaklaşımın açıklayabileceği tezin temel sorularını oluşturmaktadır.

İki bölgesel güç arasındaki değişken ilişkileri anlamak için bu tez Buzan ve Wæver'in Bölgesel Güvenlik Kompleksi Teorisi (BGKT) ile Lake ve Morgan'ın bölgesel düzenler teorisini kullanmaktadır. Buna göre, Orta Doğu güvenlik kompleksinin *yerel güvenlik dışsallıklarına* odaklanılmış olup bunların Türkiye ve İran'ın bölgesel pozisyonlarına nasıl bir etkide bulunduğu analiz edilmektedir. Bu iki devletin bölge-dışı güçler ve devlet-dışı silahlı gruplarla olan ilişkileri de göz önünde bulundurularak, bu çalışma hem yerel hem de küresel aktörlerin eylemlerinin kesiştiği bölgesel düzlemin bu dönem boyunca Türkiye-İran ilişkilerini anlamak için en uygun analiz seviyesi olduğunu savunmaktadır.

Türkiye'nin İran'a yönelik değişen dış politika tutumu konusunda, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) dönemindeki Türkiye-İran ilişkilerine odaklanan literatür genellikle Türkiye'deki iç politika dönüşümünün rolüne dikkat çekmektedir. Buna göre Kemalist elitin gücünün azalması, Siyasi İslam'ın ve Kürt probleminin güvenlik-dışılaştırılması, muhafazakâr dış politika elitlerinin aktif Orta Doğu politikaları ve Anadolu kaplanlarının bölgede ekonomik olarak aktif olması Türkiye-İran ilişkilerinin düzelmesinin nedenleri arasında gösterilmektedir. Bu tez, tüm bu faktörlerin AKP döneminde Türkiye'nin İran'a

yönelik olan dış politikasını şekillendirmede rolü olduğunu kabul etmekle birlikte iki ülkenin değişen ilişkilerinin arkasındaki asıl sebebin bölgesel dinamikler olduğunu savunmaktadır.

Bu bağlamda, bu çalışmanın ana argümanı 2002-2019 yılları arasında Türkiye'nin İran'a yönelik değişen ilişkilerinin arkasındaki temel sebebin Orta Doğu'daki değişen bölgesel dinamikler olduğudur. Bu süre içerisinde AKP'nin dış politika yönelimindeki farklılıklar dahi Türkiye'ni bölgesel politikalarında gözlemlenebilmektedir. Ayrıca, bölge dışı güçler arasındaki uluslararası rekabet de 2002-2019 yılları arasında Orta Doğu'ya yansımaya devam etmiştir. Bu bakımdan, bu tez devlet ve uluslararası sistem analiz düzeyinin Türkiye'nin İran ile olan ilişkilerine etkisini yadsımamaktadır. Aksine, bölgesel düzlemin her iki düzeyi de içerdiğini savunmaktadır, çünkü Buzan ve Wæver'in belirttiği gibi bölgesel düzlem hem ulusal hem de küresel güvenlik mekanizmalarının karşılıklı etkileşim halinde olduğu ve çoğu eylemin gerçekleştiği bir analiz düzeyidir. Bu sebeple AKP dış politika elitlerinin İran'a yönelik dış politika kararları bölgesel düzlemin fırsat ve kısıtlamaları çerçevesinde şekillenmektedir. Benzer şekilde, uluslararası sistem düzeyi büyük güçlerin bölgedeki rekabetleri ve çatışan rolleri ile analize dahil edilmektedir.

Bölgesel düzlem devletlerin güvenlikleri için büyük yer tutmaktadır, çünkü birçok tehdit kısa mesafede devletlerin askeri, güvenlik, sosyal ve ekonomik güvenlikleri için daha fazla sorun teşkil etmektedir. Ayrıca, her devlet coğrafi olarak yakın birimlerden oluşan nispeten devamlılığı olan bir bölgesel bağlamın parçasıdır. Bu anlamda, Buzan ve Wæver'in belirttiği gibi, devletlerin belirli 'sistem yapısı içindeki konumu', bölgeselliği ve coğrafi yakınlığı önemli kılmaktadır. İki komşu ülke olan Türkiye ve İran 560 km uzunluğunda ortak sınıra sahiptir ve sınır güvenlikleri büyük ölçüde birbirlerine bağlıdır. Geçmişe bakıldığında da Kürt ayrımcı hareketine ve diğer tehditlere karşı iki ülke arasında birçok güvenlik protokolü imzalandığı görülmektedir. Düğer taraftan, Orta Doğu'daki bölgesel bağlam iki ülke arasında rekabet ve gerilim sebebi

olagelmiştir. Bu nedenle, 2002-2019 yılları arasında Türkiye-İran ilişkilerindeki iş birliği ve gerilim bölgesel düzlem içinde değerlendirilmelidir.

Bu çalışmada kullanılan bölgesel düzlem bölgesel alt-sistemlere, özellikle Bölgesel Güvenlik Komplekslerine (BGK) dayanmaktadır. BGK kavramı Buzan ve Wæver'in 2003'te güncelledikleri Bölgesel Güvenlik Kompleksi Teorisine (BGKT) dayansa da bu tez, kavramın bölgesel düzen ve yapı literatüründeki daha kapsamlı versiyonunu kullanmaktadır. Buna göre, tez hem Buzan ve Wæver'in BGKT'ni hem de Lake ve Morgan'ın bölgesel düzenler teorisini kullanmaktadır. Böylelikle, Orta Doğu güvenlik kompleksinin karmaşık doğasını ve Türkiye-İran ilişkilerine olan etkisini anlamayı amaçlamaktadır. *Bölgesel güvenlik kompleksi* ve *yerel güvenlik dışsallıkları* yukarıdaki iki kuramdan alınmış olup tezin temel kavramlarını oluşturmaktadır.

Bu iki kavramın kullanılması, bölgesel güvenlik komplekslerinin dış güçlerle olan karmaşık ilişkisini anlamak için çok önemlidir. BGKT, devletlerin sadece tek bir güvenlik kompleksine üye olabileceğini savunurken Lake ve Morgan'ın bölgesel düzenler teorisine göre coğrafi yakınlık bölgesel üyelik için gerekli bir şart değildir. Eğer bölgenin *yerel güvenlik dışsallığı* aynı bölgede olmayan başka bir ülkeyi de yakından ilgilendiriyorsa o ülke de bir süreliğine o bölgenin üyesi sayılabilmektedir. Bu bakış açısı, Orta Doğu'da uzun yıllar boyunca askeri ve siyasi varlıklarını sürdüren dış güçlerin belirli süre zarfında üye-devlet gibi kabul edilebilmelerinin yolunu açmaktadır. Böylelikle, büyük güçlerin bölgedeki aktif varlığı ve bölgesel aktör gibi hareket etmelerinin bölgedeki diğer aktörlerin ilişkileri için yarattığı sonuçlar daha iyi değerlendirilebilmektedir. Bu görüşün bu tez için önemli bir sonucu ise 2002-2019 yılları arasındaki hem Amerika Birleşik Devletleri (ABD) hem de Rusya'nın Orta Doğu güvenlik kompleksinde bölgesel aktör gibi rol oynamalarının Türkiye ve İran ilişkileri açısından yarattığı *yerel güvenlik dışsallıklarını* analiz etmeye olanak sağlamasıdır.

Literatürde bu çalışma, Türkiye ile İran arasındaki değişken ilişkileri yorumlamayı amaçlayan bölgeci kuramlar arasında yer almaktadır. Ancak farklı bölgeci kavramları sentezleyerek ve bunları Türkiye-İran ilişkilerine uygulayarak bölgeci yaklaşımlara yeni bir bakış açısı getirmeyi hedeflemektedir. Hem Buzan ve Wæver'in BGKT'ni hem de Lake ve Morgan'ın bölgesel düzen kuramını kullanan bu çalışma, Orta Doğu güvenlik kompleksini ve bu bölgedeki bölge dışı güçlerin *yerel güvenlik dışsallıklarını* kavramsallaştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu bağlamda, farklı bölgeci yaklaşımları detaylandırarak ve son dönem Türkiye-İran ilişkileri için yeni hipotezler oluşturarak literatürdeki boşluğu doldurmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Türkiye'nin İran ile değişen ilişkilerini ve bu ilişkilerin bölgesel dinamiklerden ne ölçüde etkilendiğini açıklayabilmek amacıyla bu çalışma bölgesel güç yaklaşımından da yararlanmaktadır. Buna göre Türkiye ve İran Orta Doğu'da bölgesel güç olarak kabul edilmektedir. Nolte'nin bölgesel güç kavramsallaştırmasına göre hem Türkiye hem de İran bölgesel liderlik iddiasında bulundukları, yeterli ölçüde askeri, ekonomik ve demografik güç ile yumuşak güce sahip oldukları ve bölgesel olaylara etkide bulunabildikleri için Orta Doğu'daki bölgesel güç kategorisine girmektedirler. Bu sebeple, bölgedeki güç dağılımı değişikliklerinden diğer bölgesel aktörlere kıyasla daha çabuk etkilenirler. Bölgesel güçlerini devam ettirebilmek amacıyla hem birbirlerine karşı hem de dış-güçlerin bölgedeki müdahalelerine karşı denge politikası izleme eğilimdedirler. Buna göre, 2002-2019 yılları arasında Türkiye'nin İran'a yönelik olan değişen dış politika tutumu bu yaklaşım ışığında daha iyi anlaşılmaktadır.
Bu kuramsal yaklaşımlar ışığında, Türkiye-İran ilişkilerinin tarihsel arka planına bakıldığında iki ülke ilişkileri arasında bölgesel bağlamın önemli rolü gözlemlenebilmektedir. Buna göre hem Orta Doğu'daki *yerel güvenlik dışsallıkları* hem de bölgedeki dış güçlerin varlığı bu iki ülkenin ilişkilerini tarih boyunca etkilemiştir. İki ülke arasındaki yüzyıllar boyunca süren rekabet ve iş birliğine dayalı ilişki biçimi 16.yüzyılda Osmanlı ve Safavi imparatorluğu dönemine kadar uzanmaktadır. Her iki imparatorluğun da aynı sınır bölgelerine

ve ticaret yollarına hükmetme çabası, Kürt ve Azeri milliyetçileri birbirlerine karşı kullanma mücadelesi iki imparatorluk arasında birçok çatışmaya yol açmıştır. I. Dünya Savaşı sonrası bölgede yaşanan kolonileşmeye rağmen kendi özgürlüklerini koruyabilen Türkiye ve İran ortak değerler eşliğinde bölgesel yakınlaşmaya girmiştir. Buna göre, dış güçlerin müdahalesine karşı egemenliklerini ve toprak bütünlüklerini korumak amacıyla statükodan yana bir tavır almışlardır. Bu iş birliğine rağmen iki ülkedeki etnik azınlıklar ve ortak sınırdaki Azeri ve Kürt milliyetçilerinin ayaklanmaları birbirlerini suçlamalarına sebep olmuş ve iki ülkenin karşılıklı tehdit algılarını canlı tutmuştur.

Bölgesel dinamiklerin değiştiği Soğuk Savaş döneminde tüm bölgesel aktörler, ABD ve Sovyetler Birliği arasındaki rekabetin gölgesinde kalmıştır. Buna göre, ABD'nin yanında yer alan Türkiye ve İran, Sovyetler Birliği'nden gelecek olan olası bir tehdide karşı birçok bölgesel iş birliği anlaşması imzalamışlardır. Ancak, 1970'lerde Soğuk Savaş'ın yoğun rekabeti yumuşadığında iki ülke arasındaki bölgesel rekabet tekrar su yüzüne çıkmıştır. 1973 petrol krizi sebebiyle ekonomik ve askeri gücü artan İran, aynı dönemde krizden olumsuz etkilenen ve Kıbrıs müdahalesi sebebiyle ABD'nin silah ambargosuna maruz kalan Türkiye için bölgesel bir endişe kaynağı haline gelmiştir. Ayrıca, bu dönemde İran'ın Irak Kürtlerini Bağdat hükümetine karşı kullanmaya çalışması, Türkiye'nin İran'a yönelik güvenini sarsmıştır. Sonuç olarak bu dönemde, her iki ülke de Batı kampında yer almasına rağmen, bölgesel rekabetleri ve karşılıklı şüpheleri İran ve Türkiye'nin bölgesel müttefik olmasını engellemiştir.

İran İslam Devrimi ile hem İran'ın bölgesel pozisyonu hem de Orta Doğudaki bölgesel dinamikler radikal bir biçimde değişmiştir. Yeni İran İslam rejimi, laik Türkiye rejiminin antitezi olması sebebiyle iki ülke arasında bölgesel gerilimlerin yaşanacağı beklenmiştir, ancak Orta Doğudaki bölgesel bağlam (1980-88 İran-Irak savaşı ve ekonomik ihtiyaçlar) iki ülkeyi 1980'li yıllarda iş birliği yapmaya itmiştir. Ancak 1990'lı yıllara gelindiğinde Sovyet Birliği'nin dağılması ve 1991 Körfez Savaşı'ndan sonra Kuzey Irak'ta oluşan güç boşluğu,

iki ülkeyi tekrar rekabet içine sokmuştur. Türkiye ve İran, Sovyet Sonrası oluşan Kafkasya ve Orta Asya ülkelerine model ülke olma yarışına girmiş olup bu bölgelerdeki doğal gaz ulaşım güzergahı için de rekabet halinde olmuşlardır. Benzer şekilde, Kuzey Iraktaki güç boşluğu, iki ülkenin farklı Kürt gruplarını desteklemeleri sebebiyle bölgesel rekabetlerini de arttırmıştır. Ayrıca, iki ülke arasındaki bölgesel gerginlik, Türkiye'nin İran'ın PKK terör örgütüne yardım ve yataklık ettiğine dair ciddi şüpheleri ile daha da artmıştır. Özetle, 2002 öncesi Türkiye-İran ilişkilerine bakıldığında bu iki ülkenin coğrafi yakınlıklarının ve Orta Doğu güvenlik kompleksinin *yerel güvenlik dışsallıklarının* çok önemli rol oynadığı anlaşılmaktadır.

Bu çalışmanın mercek altına aldığı zaman aralıklarından ilki olan 2002-2011 yılları arasında Türkiye'nin İran'a yönelik dış politika davranışları da temel olarak Orta Doğu'nun *yerel güvenlik dışsallıkları* ve bölge-dışı aktörlerin (ABD) bölgede yol açtığı önemli değişikliklerden etkilenmiştir. Bu dönem boyunca, Türkiye'nin İran'la ilişkileri daha önce hiç olmadığı kadar iş birliğine açık ve dostane olmuştur. Buna göre iki ülke arasında karşılıklı destekleyici söylemler, resmi ziyaretler, askeri, siyasi ve ekonomik anlaşmalar ciddi şekilde artmıştır. Bu bölümün temel sorunsalı aralarındaki bölgesel rekabete karşın bu dönemde iki ülke arasındaki iş birliğinin neden arttığıdır. Türkiye'nin İran ile iyileşen ilişkileri genelde AKP'nin hükümete gelmesi ve Türk dış politikasında yarattığı dönüşümler ile açıklanmaktadır. Buna göre, AKP'nin dış politika vizyonu-Davutoğlu Doktrini- ve Orta Doğu'ya karşı hem siyasi hem de ekonomik elitlerin artan ilgisi Türkiye'nin İran'la olan ilişkilerinin iyileşmesine sebep olmuştur. Bu çalışmaya göre bu faktörler AKP'nin İran'a yönelik olan dış politika davranışlarını şekillendirse de iki ülke arasındaki düzelen ilişkilerin asıl sebebi Orta Doğu'daki bölgesel dinamiklerdir.

2002-2011 arasında Orta Doğu'daki *yerel güvenlik dışsallıkları* ve ABD'nin bu bölgesel güvenlik kompleksinin bir üyesiymiş gibi bölgedeki aktif varlığı Türkiye ve İran'ı iş birliği yapmaya itmiştir. İlk olarak ABD'nin 2003'te Irak'ı

işgal etmesi ve bölgedeki aktif askeri varlığı, iki ülke için de endişe kaynağı olmuştur. İran, Bush hükümeti için 'şer ekseni' üyelerinden biridir ve ABD'nin Irak'taki varlığı İran'ın tehdit algısını önemli ölçüde arttırmıştır. Türkiye ise ABD'nin bölgesel partnerlerinden biri olmasına rağmen iki ülke arasında 1 Mart tezkeresi ve Süleymaniye Olayı konusunda gerginlik yaşanmıştır. Ayrıca, Türk hükümeti, Kuzey Iraktaki güç boşluğundan faydalanan PKK terör örgütünün artan tehdidi ile ilgili ABD'nin Türkiye'ye yeterince destek olmamasından dolayı rahatsızlık duymuştur. Buna ek olarak iki bölgesel güç olan Türkiye ve İran, bölgede dış bir gücün varlığını kendi bölgesel özerklikleri için bir endişe sebebi olarak görmüşlerdir.

İki ülkenin yakınlaşması için daha önemli bir bölgesel sebep ise ABD'nin Irak'ı işgalinden sonra Irak'ın kuzeyinde kurulan Kürdistan Bölgesel Yönetimi'nden hem Türkiye hem de İran'ın kaygı duymasıdır. Buna göre, kendi ülkelerindeki Kürt ayrılıkçı hareketi için endişe duyan iki ülke bu konu hakkında iş birliği yoluna gitmiştir. Kuzey Iraktaki güç boşluğundan faydalanan PKK ve PJAK terör örgütleri Türkiye ve İran'daki saldırılarını arttırmışlar ve iki ülkenin bu örgütlere karşı güvenlik iş birliği yapmasına sebep olmuşlardır. Buzan ve Wæever'in belirttiği gibi kısa mesafeli tehditler devletlerin güvenliği için daha büyük önem arz etmektedir. İki sınır komşusu olan Türkiye ve İran, ortak sınırlarından gelen tehditlere karşı birbirilerini en önemli bölgesel partner olarak görmüşlerdir. Ayrıca, Türkiye'nin ABD ve İsrail ile gerilen ilişkileri, Türk hükümetini bölgedeki tehditlere karşı başka bir bölgesel partner aramaya ve komşusuyla yeni bağlar kurarak ABD ve İsrail karşısında bir anlamda 'yumuşak dengeleme' politikası gütmeye itmiştir. Tüm bu bölgesel dinamiklerin sonucu olarak bu dönemde iki ülke arasında siyasi, askeri, söylemsel ve ekonomik düzlemde önemli bir iş birliği gözlemlemek mümkündür.

Türkiye'nin bu dönemde İran ve genel olarak Orta Doğu komşularıyla olan yakın ilişkiler kurması Batı basınında 'eksen kayması' hakkında bir tartışma yaratmıştır. Buna göre, Türk dış politikasının Batı dünyası ile bağlarını koparıp

Orta Doğu ve Asya'ya yöneldiği ve böylelikle 'eksen kayması' yaşadığı savunulmuştur. Bu argümanın en önemli nedenleri, bu dönemde Türkiye-ABD ve Türkiye-İsrail ilişkilerinin kötüye gitmesi ve Türkiye'nin İran ve Suriye ile yakın iş birliğine girmesi olmuştur. Özellikle Türkiye'nin İran'ın nükleer programına ABD ve Avrupa'nın yaptırımları pahasına destek vermesi 'eksen kayması' tartışmalarının temel noktalarından birisi olmuştur. Ancak bu çalışma, eksen kayması tartışmalarını bölgeci perspektiften yorumlamaktadır. Buna göre, Türkiye'nin İran ve diğer Orta Doğu komşularına yönelik dış politika değişikliği esas olarak bölgesel düzeyden kaynaklanmıştır. Bölgesel bir güç olan Türkiye, bölgedeki güç değişikliklerine karşı oldukça duyarlı olmuş ve dış politikasını bölgedeki gücünü ve statüsünü korumak için değiştirmiştir. Dolayısıyla, 2003 sonrası bağlamdaki bölgesel gelişmeler ve Türkiye'nin konumu, Türkiye'yi yakın komşularına odaklanmaya itmiştir. Bu bağlamda, Türkiye'nin İran'a yönelik dış politika davranışlarının temel nedeni, bölgesel güç kaymaları olmuştur.

Türkiye'nin 2011-2016 yılları arasındaki İran ile ilişkileri analiz edildiğinde bir önceki dönemden farklı olarak iki ülke arasında daha gergin, karşılıklı eleştiri ve suçlamalara dayanan bir ilişki biçimi olduğu gözlemlenmektedir. Buna göre, Türk siyasi elitleri özellikle Suriye iç savaşının başlamasının ardından İran'ın bölgesel politikalarından rahatsız olduklarını açıkça dile getirmişlerdir. Benzer şekilde, İranlı yetkililer ise Türkiye'nin Suriye iç savaşı sırasında takındığı tutumu ve Türkiye'nin IŞİD ve PYD ile olan mücadelesi sırasında izlediği politikaları eleştirmişlerdir. Bu dönemde iki ülke arasında PKK'ya karşı yürüttükleri istihbarat paylaşımları azalmış ve bölgesel gerginliklerinin ekonomik ilişkilerine de olumsuz yansıdığı gözlemlenmiştir. Bir önceki dönemde olduğu gibi, bu çalışma, iki ülke arasındaki gergin ilişkilerinin en önemli sebebinin Orta Doğu güvenlik kompleksinde meydana gelen değişiklikler ve bu değişikliklerinin iki ülkenin bölgesel konumlarına olan etkileri olduğunu savunmaktadır.

İlk olarak bu dönemde Obama liderliğindeki ABD'nin Iraktan askeri olarak çekilme kararı ve ABD'nin genel olarak Orta Doğu'da daha az müdahaleci bir role soyunmak istemesi, bölgesel aktörlerin bölgedeki özerkliklerini arttırmaları için izin verici bir unsur olmuştur. Buna göre, 2002-2011 yılları arasında bölge aktörü gibi hareket eden ABD, Obama hükümeti ile bu politikasından vazgeçmiştir. Irak politikasındaki güç boşluğu, iki bölgesel güç olan Türkiye ve İran'ı Irak politikasında daha aktif bir role sahip olmaya ve muhalif iki siyasi partiyi desteklemeye itmiştir. İran'a yakın olan Maliki hükümetinin Irak'ta iktidara gelmesiyle birlikte Türkiye, İran'ın Irak politikasında artan etkisinden rahatsızlık duymuştur. Ancak iki ülkenin Irak konusundaki rekabetleri tek başına bir gerilim kaynağı olmamıştır. İki ülkenin Irak politikasındaki rekabetleri Arap Baharı ve Suriye iç savaşındaki muhalif bölgesel duruşlarıyla birleşince daha görünür hale gelmiştir.

2011 yılında Tunus'ta başlayıp Mısır, Libya, Bahreyn, Yemen ve Suriye'ye yayılan Arap Ayaklanmaları ve Suriye iç savaşı tüm bölgeyi değiştiren ve tüm bölge aktörleri için önemli sonuçlar doğuran *yerel güvenlik dışsallıkları* olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Bu koşullar altında, Suriye iç savaşı başlamadan önce muhaliflerin yanında yer almalarına rağmen Türkiye ve İran'ın ayaklanmalara bakış açısı çok farklı olmuştur. Bir taraftan Türkiye, ayaklanma sonrası hükümetler için laik 'Türkiye modelini' önerirken İran'ın siyasi elitleri ayaklanmaları 'İslami uyanışlar' olarak adlandırmışlardır. Her iki ülke de bu dönemde 'yumuşak güçlerini' kullanarak bölge üzerinde daha fazla etkiye sahip olma ve Hinnebush'un 'rekabetçi müdahale' olarak belirttiği gibi ayaklanma sonrası hükümetler için model ülke olma konusunda birbirleriyle rekabete girmişlerdir.

Ancak, Suriye iç savaşı hem Orta Doğu güvenlik kompleksi hem de Türkiye ve İran ilişkilerinin akıbeti için bu dönemin dönüm noktası olmuştur. Suriye iç savaşı tüm bölge için *negatif güvenlik dışsallıkları* yaratmış olup yerel, bölgesel ve bölge dışı aktörlerin dış politikalarında değişikliklere yol açmıştır. Savaş

ayrıca bölgesel güç dengesini değiştirmiş ve bölgesel aktörlerin ilişkilerini de derinden etkilemiştir. Türk hükümetinin Esad rejimiyle ilişkileri Ağustos 2011'den itibaren bozulmaya başlamıştır. Krizin başlarında, Türkiye Esad rejimine muhaliflerin taleplerini yerine getirmesi ve kendi halkına karşı silah kullanmayı bırakma çağrısında bulunmuştur. Ancak muhaliflere karşı şiddet eylemlerini sürdüren Esad rejimiyle yollarını ayırmış ve Esad karşıtı bir politika benimsemiştir. Coğrafi yakınlıktan ötürü Suriye'deki savaşın *negatif güvenlik dışsallıkları* Türkiye'nin güvenliğini daha fazla etkilemiştir. Türkiye ile Suriye arasında birçok sınır krizi yaşanmış olup Haziran 2012'de Suriye rejimi hava sahası ihlali gerekçesiyle Türk jetini düşürmüştür. Bu tarihten itibaren Türkiye'nin Esad karşıtlığı daha da artmış ve Türkiye Suriye rejimi muhaliflerinin önemli bir destekçisi olmuştur.

Türkiye'nin aksine, İran Suriye iç savaşının en başından itibaren Esad rejiminin en büyük müttefiki olmuştur. İran'ın bakış açısına göre, Esad rejimi, İran'ı Lübnan, Hizbullah ve Hamas gibi müttefiklerine bağlayan *direniş cephesinin* önemli bir bölgesel üyesidir. Esad rejimimin yıkılması, bölgesel bir güç olan İran'ın en önemli destekçisini kaybetmesi anlamına gelmektedir. Bu sebeple, İran Devrim Muhafızları Suriye savaşının ilk aşamalarından itibaren Esad rejiminin yanında sahada ve operasyonlarda yer almışlardır. İki bölgesel gücün bu denli karşıt kutuplarda yer alması bu dönemin söylemsel ve siyasi gerginliklere ev sahibi olmasına neden olmuştur. Her iki ülke de Suriye'deki katliamlarla ilgili olarak birbirlerinin tutumunu eleştirmiş ve iki ülke arasındaki karşılıklı suçlamalar gündelik siyasetin ortak parçası haline gelmiştir.

İki ülkenin Suriye savaşına ilişkin bölgesel anlaşmazlıkları, 2002-2011 döneminde iki ülkenin iş birliği yaptığı diğer alanlara da yayılmıştır. Coğrafi yakınlıkları ve ortak kaygıları geçtiğimiz on yılda PKK/PJAK tehdidi konusunda iş birliğine yol açarken, Türkiye ve İran'ın 2011'den bu yana PKK'ya karşı istihbarat iş birliğini önemli ölçüde azaltmıştır. Hatta bu dönemde, Türk basınının bazı yazarları, İran'ın Türkiye'ye karşı PKK lideri Murat Karayılan'ı

ve PKK'yı kullanma ihtimalinin yüksek olduğunu yazmışlardır. Ayrıca, İran'ın PJAK tehdidiyle ilgili endişeleri, PJAK'in İran rejimine karşı tek taraflı ateşkesi nedeniyle bu dönemde azalmıştır. Bu gelişme ise Karayılan'ın İran tarafından ele geçirilme iddiaları ile PJAK ateşkesinin birbiriyle bağlantılı olduğu algısını güçlendirmiştir. Bu dönemdeki PKK'nın Şemdinli saldırısı ile ilgili olarak Türkiye basınında Türkiye'nin Esad rejimine karşı Suriye muhalefetine verdiği destek karşılığında İran'ın Türkiye-İran sınırındaki PKK faaliyetlerine göz yummayı tercih ettiği ileri sürülmüştür. Tüm bu haber sızıntıları, bu dönemde Türkiye ile İran arasında gergin bir diplomatik atmosfer olduğunu ortaya koymuştur.

Bu dönemde, iki ülke bölgede farklı tehdit algılamalarına sahip olduklarından bölgesel gelişmelere olan dış politika tepkileri giderek daha farklı ve çatışmalı hale gelmiştir. Öncelikle, Türkiye'nin ABD radar sistemini Eylül 2011'de Malatya/Kürecik'te konuşlandırması İran için önemli bir endişe kaynağı olmuştur. Türkiye'nin Batılı devletlerin yanı sıra Suriye'deki rejim muhaliflerine aktif desteği konusunda endişeli olan İran, Türkiye'nin geleneksel Amerikan yanlısı bloğa dönüp dönmediğinden şüphe duymuş ve Türkiye topraklarında NATO "erken uyarı radar sistemi" İran'ın bölgesel tehdit algılamalarını arttırmıştır. Konuyla ilgili olarak İran yetkilileri Türkiye'nin kararını eleştirmiş ve bu kararın bölge için yaratacağı tehlikeleri dile getirmişlerdir. Ayrıca, Türk hükümeti 2012'de Suriye'den gelebilecek olası füze ve uçak tehditlerine karşı NATO'dan Türkiye topraklarında Patriot füze savunma sistemi konuşlandırması çağrısında bulunduğunda iki ülke daha ciddi bir gerilim yaşamıştır. Türkiye, sınırlarında Suriye rejimiyle yaşadığı kriz nedeniyle ulusal güvenliğinden endişe duyarken İran ise bu füzeleri kendi toprak bütünlüğüne karşı bir tehdit olarak algılamıştır. Sonuç olarak, bölgeci kuramların iddia ettiği gibi, coğrafi olarak yakın tehditler, devletlerin ulusal güvenliği için daha zorlayıcıdır. Bu sebeple, bir bölge üyesinin herhangi bir güvenlik önlemi, gerilim yaşadığı diğer bölgesel aktörler tarafından bir tehdit olarak algılanabilmektedir.

Suriye iç savaşı ve *yerel güvenlik dışsallıkları*, bölge dışı güçler (ABD ve Rusya) ve devlet-dışı silahlı örgütlerin savaşa dahil olmasıyla Türkiye ve İran arasındaki ilişkiler için daha zorlu hale gelmiştir. Bu dönemde Türkiye ve İran, Suriye iç savaşında IŞİD ve PYD/YPG'ye verdikleri tepkiler konusunda gerginlik yaşamıştır. Bir taraftan, İran Türkiye'yi IŞİD ve El Kaide'ye bağlı diğer aşırılık yanlısı grupları desteklemekle suçlamıştır. Diğer taraftan Türkiye, İran'ın Kuzey Suriye'de PKK'ya bağlı PYD/YPG'ye yönelik muğlak konumundan endişe duymuştur. Üstelik, bu dönem IŞİD'i mağlup etme konusunda ABD ve İran arasında olası bir geçici çıkar yakınlaşmasına ve Kobane'de Türkiye'nin PYD/YPG'ye karşı IŞİD'i desteklediği iddialarına sebep olmuştur, bu da Türkiye'nin IŞİD'e karşı ABD'nin bölgesel ortağı olarak güvenilirliğini azaltmıştır. Dolayısıyla, Türkiye ve İran'ın Suriye iç savaşında aynı safta yer almamalarına ek olarak iki ülke terörle mücadele konusunda da uluslararası prestij konusunda rekabet halinde olmuşlardır.

Bu dönemde bölgesel bir güç olarak Türkiye hem ulusal güvenliği hem de bölgesel güç statüsü açısından ciddi zorluklarla karşılaşmıştır. Coğrafi güvenlik bağımlılıkları nedeniyle, YPG ve IŞİD tehditleri Türkiye'nin toprak bütünlüğü ve güvenliği için giderek daha tehlikeli hale gelmiştir. Ayrıca, Türkiye bu dönemde ABD ile PYD/YPG konusunda ciddi gerilim yaşamıştır. ABD hükümeti, Türkiye'nin PYD/YPG ile ilgili ciddi endişelerinin aksine, PYD/YPG'yi bölgedeki en örgütlü ve laik silahlı grup olduğu için IŞİD'e karşı sahadaki en önemli yerel müttefiklerinden biri olarak görmüştür. Dolayısıyla, ABD, PYD'yi PKK'dan farklı görüp ona askeri teçhizat sağladığında, Türkiye ve ABD'nin PYD/YPG'ye siyasi yaklaşımları konusunda bir 'güven krizi' yaşamaları kaçınılmaz olmuştur.

Bu dönemde, Türkiye'nin manevra alanını daha da daraltan bir diğer bölgesel gelişme ise Rusya'nın 2015 yılından itibaren bölgeye aktif askeri müdahalesi olmuştur. Bu tarihten itibaren Rusya Orta Doğu güvenlik kompleksinde aktif rol oynamış ve çatışmanın tüm ilgili tarafları için güç dengesini değiştirmiştir.

Rusya'nın savaşa müdahil olması, güç dinamiklerini Esad rejiminin lehine kaydırmıştır, çünkü Rusya, Suriye ordusunu "İslam Devleti ile mücadelede en etkili ve güçlü kara kuvveti" olarak gördüğü için IŞİD'e karşı Esad rejimini desteklemiştir. Bu bölgesel gelişme, Türkiye'nin aksine hem Esad rejiminin hem de İran'ın elini güçlendirmiştir. Ayrıca, Rusya IŞİD'e karşı askeri müdahalesi, PYD/YPG'nin lehine olmuştur. Bu koşullar altında, Türkiye'nin bölgede Rusya ile yaşadığı gerilimlerde İran, Rusya ile iş birliğini korumuştur. Bölgesel bir güç olan İran ile bölge dışı büyük bir güç olan Rusya arasındaki strateji ortaklık, Türkiye'nin bölgedeki ulusal çıkarları pahasına iş birliği yaptıkları için Türkiye için istenmeyen bir bölgesel sonuç olmuştur. Dolayısıyla Suriye iç savaşında Rusya'nın aktif rolü, Türkiye'nin İran ile yaşadığı bölgesel gerilimler için önemli bir faktör olmuştur.

Bölgeci perspektifin argümanlarına paralel olarak 2011-2016 yılları arasında, hem Orta Doğu güvenlik kompleksindeki *yerel güvenlik dışsallıkları* ve hem de dış-güçlerin bölgeye aktif müdahalesi iki ülkenin ilişkilerini olumsuz etkilemiştir. Ancak Türkiye ve İran birbirlerine karşı son derece eleştirel konumlar alsalar da coğrafi yakınlıkları ve güvenlikle ilgili karşılıklı bağımlılıkları gerginliklerini açık bir çatışmaya dönüştürmelerini engellemiştir. İki bölgesel güç olarak hem Türkiye hem de İran her zaman bölgesel istikrar ve bölge dışı güçlerin bölgeye sınırlı müdahalesinden yana olmuşlardır, çünkü ancak bu şekilde bölgesel özerkliğe ve bölgesel güçlerini arttırmak için bölgesel bir alana sahip olabileceklerdir. Ayrıca, coğrafi yakınlıklarından kaynaklanan ekonomi ve güvenlikle ilgili karşılıklı bağımlılıkları iki ülkeyi birbirleriyle açık bir çatışmaya girmekten alıkoymuştur. Dolayısıyla, bölgesel ilişkileri doğası gereği rekabetçi olsa da çatışmaya dayalı ve istikrarsız bölgesel güvenlik kompleksinde birbirlerine ihtiyaç duymuşlardır.

2011-2016 yılları arasında Türkiye-İran ilişkilerinde belirgin bir gerginlik yaşanırken, 2016 sonrası dönemde Türkiye'nin İran ile olan ilişkilerinde normalleşme süreci başlamıştır. Bu normalleşme sürecinin temel nedeni,

Türkiye'nin İran'a karşı daha ılımlı ve iş birliğine açık dış politika tutumu benimsemesini sağlayan Ortadoğu güvenlik kompleksinin *yerel güvenlik dışsallıkları* olmuştur. Bu anlamda, 2011-2016 dönemi iki ülke arasında ciddi bir bölgesel gerilime tanık olurken, 2016 sonrası dönemde Türkiye-İran ilişkilerinde neredeyse hiçbir karşılıklı eleştiri ve suçlama yaşanmamıştır. İki bölgesel güç olarak, Türkiye ve İran hala farklı bölgesel görüşlere sahipti, ancak bu dönemde bölgesel istikrarı ve özerkliklerini korumak için anlaşmazlıklarının yönetmeye kararlı olmuşlardır. Türkiye perspektifinden, değişen bölgesel bağlam, Türkiye'nin diğer bölgesel güçlerle (Suudi Arabistan, Birleşik Arap Emirlikleri ve Mısır) kötüleşen ilişkileri, Türkiye'nin ABD ile bozulan ilişkileri ve Rusya'nın bölgesel rolünün artması, Türkiye'nin İran'a yönelik dış politikasını etkileyen en önemli faktörler olmuştur.

2016 sonrası dönemde, Türkiye ile İran arasındaki yönetilebilir rekabet ve Türkiye'nin İran'a yönelik ılımlı Türk dış politika söylemlerini anlamak için Orta Doğu güvenlik kompleksinin *yerel güvenlik dışsallıkları* ve bölgedeki bölge-dışı güçlerin değişen rolü analizde çok önemli bir yer tutmaktadır. Buna göre Esad rejiminin Rusya ve İran'ın askeri desteğiyle artan gücü; YPG ve IŞİD'in Türk ulusal çıkarlarına yönelik artan tehdidi; Kuzey Suriye'deki Türkiye-ABD anlaşmazlıkları Türkiye'yi Suriye iç savaşına yönelik dış politika tutumunu gözden geçirmeye itmiştir. Suriye savaşının ve bölgedeki istikrasızlığın sona ermesi için bu dönemde Türkiye İran ve Rusya ile bölgesel iş birliğini arttırmıştır. Dahası, Kürdistan Bölgesel Yönetimi'nin bağımsızlık referandum krizi ve Katar krizinde Türkiye ve İran'ın çıkarlarının yakınlaşması, 2016 sonrası Orta Doğu bölgesel güvenlik kompleksinde Türkiye ve İran'ı birbirine yakınlaştırmıştır.

Bu bağlamda, Türkiye'deki 15 Temmuz darbe girişimi ve ardından İran'ın AKP hükümetine desteği, yukarıdaki bölgesel gelişmelerle kesişmiş ve bu dönemde iki ülkenin dış politikalarının daha da yakınlaşmasına neden olmuştur. Türk hükümetinin İran'ın desteğini bölgesel merceklerle yorumladığı ve bunu 2016

sonrası Orta Doğu'nun zorlu *yerel güvenlik dışsallıkları* göz önüne alındığında İran ile iş birliğini arttırma fırsatı olarak gördüğü söylenebilir. Dönemin Başbakanı Yıldırım'ın da belirttiği gibi, bu dönemde Türkiye, bölgenin değişen bağlamında "daha çok dost, daha az düşman" politikasını uygulamaya başlamıştır. Böylelikle Türkiye, bölgesel güvensizliği ve istikrarsızlığı ortadan kaldıracak ve hem Suriye barış sürecinde hem de savaş sonrası Suriye'de bölgesel bir rol oynayabilecektir. Suriye savaşındaki güç değişiklikleri ve Rusya'nın bölgedeki aktif askeri rolü göz önünde bulundurarak Türkiye Astana görüşmeleri kapsamında İran ile daha fazla diyaloğa girmeye başlamıştır. Daha da önemlisi, Türk hükümeti, ABD'nin birincil hedefinin Suriye meselesine aktif olarak katılmak yerine IŞİD'e karşı mücadele etmek olduğunu kabul etmiştir. Dolayısıyla, Suriye'nin geleceği için bölgedeki sorumluluk, masaya gelmeye istekli üç etkili aktöre ait olup sorunun çözümü için Türkiye, İran ve Rusya'nın iş birliği yapması bu dönemde taraflarca kabul edilmiştir.

İran açısından ise ABD'nin İran'a yönelik baskısını arttırdığı bölgesel bir ortamda Türkiye ile iş birliği yapmak önem kazanmıştır. Dahası, Türkiye'nin Astana sürecine olan bağlılığı, Türkiye'nin Esad rejimini kabul ettiğini anlamına geldiği için İran'ın bölgesel çıkarları açısından önem arz etmektedir. Ayrıca, Türkiye'ye benzer şekilde, Suriye savaşının bölgesel istikrarsızlığı ve bölge için yarattığı tehditler İran'ın güvenliğini de riske atmaktadır. Bu sebeple, İran, İdlib'de Türkiye ile doğrudan çatışmaya girmekten kaçınmıştır. Buna ek olarak Kürdistan Bağımsız Yönetimi'nin referandum kararı, iki ülkenin kendi ulusal çıkarlarıyla ilgili ortak endişeleri paylaşmasına neden olmuştur. İki ülke ilişkilerinin tarihsel arka planı incelendiğinde, Kürt meselesinin bölgesel bağlama göre iki ülke arasında her zaman bir rekabet ya da iş birliği kaynağı olduğu gözlemlenmektedir. Ancak, bağımsız bir Kürt devleti için yapılacak herhangi bir plan hem Türkiye hem de İran'dan her zaman ortak tepkilere sebebiyet vermiştir. Bu sebeple, 2017 Kürdistan Bölgesel Yönetimi bağımsızlık referandumu İran ve Türkiye'nin bu dönemde Barzani hükümetine karşı ortak hareket etmesini sağlamıştır.

Bu çalışmada analiz edilen üç zaman aralığı (2002-2011, 2011-2016 ve 2016-2019) Türkiye ve İran'ın ilişkileri açısından bölgeci perspektifin ne ölçüde önemli olduğunu göstermiştir. Hem Buzan ve Wæever'in BGKT'si hem de Lake ve Morgan'ın bölgesel düzen teorisi son yirmi yılda Orta Doğu güvenlik kompleksinin *yerel güvenlik dışsallıklarından* etkilenen Türkiye-İran ilişkileri için son derece açıklayıcı olmuştur. Daha önce açıklandığı gibi, iki bölgesel güç olan Türkiye ve İran arasındaki ilişkiler bölgesel güvenlik kompleksindeki gelişmelerinden önemli ölçüde etkilenmektedirler. Bu sebeple, Orta Doğu'da değişen bölgesel dinamikler ve bölge dışı güçlerin rolü, söz konusu dönemde Türkiye-İran ilişkilerindeki iniş çıkışlar için önemli bir bağımsız değişken olmuştur.

Bu çalışmada bölgesel düzeyin kullanılmasının temel nedeni, bölgesel düzlemin kendisini mikro düzey (ulusal) ve makro düzey (sistem) arasında konumlandırması ve Türkiye-İran ilişkilerinin karmaşık doğası için açıklayıcı olmasıdır. İç politika veya uluslararası sistemik yaklaşımların aksine, bu çalışmanın bölgeci yaklaşımı hem küresel hem de birim seviyelerini içermekte ve Türkiye'nin İran ile 2002-2019 yılları arasındaki dalgalı ilişkileri için kapsayıcı bir anlayış sağlamaktadır. Türkiye iç siyaseti bu dönemde görece aynı kalmasına ve ABD'nin rolünün bölge için hala önem taşımasına rağmen (2011'den sonra azalmış olsa bile) İran'a yönelik Türk dış politikası bu yıllar boyunca önemli ölçüde değişmiştir ve bunun sebebi bölgesel dinamiklerde bulunmuştur. Daha da önemlisi, küresel ve birim seviyesindeki değişikliklerin etkileri dahi bölgesel düzeyde filtrelenmektedir. Dolayısıyla hem Buzan ve Wæever'in BGKT'si hem de Lake ve Morgan'ın bölgesel düzen teorisi, Orta Doğu'nun iki bölgesel gücü arasındaki ilişkileri anlamamıza katkıda bulunmuştur.

2002-2019 yılları arasında değişen Türkiye-İran ilişkileri, devletlerin dış politikaları ve Uluslararası İlişkiler kuramları için ne anlama gelmektedir? İlk olarak, bu örnek olay çalışması, sadece uluslararası sistem ya da birim analiz

seviyesini kullanan kuramların açıklayacılığını sorgulamaktadır. Devletlerin dış politika değişiklikleri çoğu zaman daha kapsamlı bir analiz gerektirmektedir. Nitekim, bu çalışma Türkiye'nin İran ile değişen ilişkilerinin küresel ve birim analiz düzeyi arasındaki kesişim noktası olan bölgesel düzeyden kaynaklandığını göstermektedir. Bu çalışmanın bölgeci perspektifi, Uluslararası İlişkiler kuramındaki 'yapan-yapı sorunu' tuzağından kaçmamıza yardımcı olmaktadır. Devletlerin dış politika davranışlarının çok yönlü olması, salt yapan- ya da yapı-odaklı yaklaşımların bu davranışların arkasında yatan ana sebepleri ortaya çıkarmasına izin vermemektedir. Bu nedenle, bölgesel güvenlik komplekslerinin üyeleri arasındaki ilişkilerine olan etkisini anlamak için daha esnek ve kapsayıcı bir bakış açısı gereklidir.

Bölgesel güvenlik kompleksleri, üye devletlerin hem uluslararası güç dağılımını ve ulusal özelliklerini hem de onların 'tarihsel nefret ve dostluklarını' bünyesinde barındırmaktadır. Bu şekilde, devletlerin değişen hizalanmaları ve birbirlerine yönelik tehdit algılamaları gibi bölgesel konumlarının ortaya çıkmasına olanak sağlamaktadır. Orta Doğu'yu bölgesel bir güvenlik kompleksi olarak kabul eden bu tez, bölgenin kendine has özelliklerinin ve üyelerini etkisi altına alan patika-bağımlılıklarının olduğunu öne sürmektedir. Buna göre, Orta Doğu'nun bölgesel üyeleri, sert siyaset kültürü ve anarşik düzenin olduğu ve siyasi amaçlar için din ve etnik kökenlerin kullanıldığı bir bölgesel ortamda varlıklarını sürdürmektedirler. Ayrıca, bu bölgesel güvenlik kompleksi, tarih boyunca bölge dışı güçlerin müdahalesine maruz kalmıştır. Bu koşullar altında, Lake 'in öne sürdüğü gibi 'yabancılar' bölgenin geri kalanı için *yerel güvenlik dışsallıkları* üretmişlerdir. Böylelikle, bölge dışı güçler giderek daha fazla bölgenin bir üyesi gibi hareket etmiş ve Orta Doğu güvenlik kompleksinin dış politika yapıcıları için önemli bir gerçeklik haline gelmişlerdir.

Bu bölgeci perspektif ışığında, son dönem Türkiye-İran ilişkilerini analiz edecek olursak bu iki ülkenin ilişkilerinin hala Orta Doğu'daki *yerel güvenlik dışsallıklarından* ve dış güçlerin bölgeye müdahil olmasından etkilendiğini

söylemek mümkündür. İki bölgesel güç olarak, Türkiye-İran ilişkileri, bölgesel olarak birbirlerinin yükselişini sınırlamak için hala iş birliği, rekabet ve birbirlerine karşı denge politikası ile nitelendirilebilir. Hem Türkiye hem de İran bölgesel güçlerini arttırmaya ve buna göre bölgesel konumlarını değiştirmeye devam etmektedir. Son gelişmeler de Orta Doğu'da bölgesel güç dengesinin değişmesine yol açmış ve Türkiye-İran ilişkilerine yansımıştır. Suriye iç savaşının İdlib cephesi ile ilgili iki ülkenin bölgesel çıkarları nedeniyle Türkiye-İran rekabeti daha yönetilebilir hale gelmiştir. Türkiye ve Rusya'nın 5 Mart 2020'de İdlib'de yaptığı ateşkes anlaşması, Türkiye'nin bölgedeki rolünün ve etkinliğinin arttırdığını göstermiştir. İran, Türkiye'nin artan bölgesel gücünden duyduğu endişelere rağmen, Suriye'de olası bir 'siyasi anlaşmanın' parçası olabilmek için Türkiye ve Rusya ile iş birliğine devam etmiştir. Nitekim şimdiye kadar hem Türkiye hem de İran, Rusya liderliğinde Astana sürecinin bir parçası olmaya devam etmektedir.

Suriye iç savaşının yanı sıra, Orta Doğu güvenlik kompleksinin yeni *yerel güvenlik dışsallıkları*, 2020'nin başından itibaren Türkiye ve İran arasındaki ilişkileri etkilemeye devam etmektedir. 2014'te başlayan Libya iç savaşı, giderek artan bir şekilde bölgesel ve küresel güçler için bir rekabet alanı ve Türkiye ile İran arasında da yeni bir ortaklık cephesi haline gelmiştir. Buna göre, Türkiye, Libya'nın BM tarafından tanınan Ulusal Mutabakat Hükümeti'ni General Khalifa Hafter'e karşı korumak için Ocak 2020 tarihinden itibaren Libya'da askeri olarak aktif bir rol oynamaktadır. İran da General Khafter'e karşı Türk hükümetine desteğini açıklamıştır. Orta Doğu güvenlik kompleksi bu krizle birlikte, 2017 Katar Krizi'ni hatırlatan bölgesel bölünmelere tanık olmaktadır; bir tarafta Türkiye, Katar, İran ve diğer tarafta Mısır, Suudi Arabistan ve Birleşik Arap Emirlikleri'nin olduğu bir bölgesel kutuplaşmayı Libya iç savaşı üzerinden gözlemlemek mümkündür. Bununla birlikte, Rusya'nın Libya iç savaşındaki rolü de aynı derecede önemlidir ve orta ve uzun vadede Türkiye ve İran'ın konumunu etkileme olasılığı yüksektir.

Sonuç olarak, Türkiye ve İran'ın içinde bulunduğu bölgesel koşullar istikrarsız ve rekabetçi olduğundan, iki ülke arasındaki ilişki türünün tutarlı ve uzun vadeli olması beklenmemektedir. Buna göre, Türkiye ile İran arasında son dönemde tanık olunan yakınlaşma, yeni bir bölgesel ittifakın ortaya çıkışı olarak değil, bölgesel çıkarların birleşmesi olarak yorumlanmalıdır. Hem Türkiye hem de İran, bölgesel meseleleri etkileme iradeleri nedeniyle tarih boyunca rekabet halinde olmuşlardır ve 2002-2019 dönemi bunun bir istisnası değildir. Ancak, sınırlı kapasiteleri nedeniyle ekonomik ve siyasi anlamda birbirlerine ihtiyaç duymaktadırlar. Komşuluk etkisi ve coğrafi yakınlıkları, bu iki bölgesel gücü birbirine bağlamakta ve dış politika tercihlerini şekillendirmektedir. Orta Doğu'nun *yerel güvenlik dışsallıkları* ve dış-güçlerin bu bölgedeki rolleri muhtemelen Türkiye-İran ilişkilerinin yakın geleceğini etkilemeye devam edecektir.

## APPENDIX C: THESIS PERMISSION FORM / TEZ İZİN FORMU

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