Turkey and Saudi Arabia Relations in the Twenty-First Century: Power, State Identity and Religion

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Abstract

During the first two decades of the Twenty-First century, we have begun — and will continue to — experience a new dimension in the political roles of power, state identity and religion in different ways. One can read this situation as the concentration of these notions at the core of global politics implemented by political leaders who have been transforming their countries appearances and perceptions worldwide. Furthermore, we will also be experiencing an increase in the intersectionality between domestic and foreign policy that are covered by power, state identity and religion. Within this framework, Muslim majority countries in the Middle East, which are underdeveloped in terms of liberal democracy, have been engaging in a global struggle over state identity and power that stretches from different part of the world, and this has been affecting both the regional dynamics and beyond via global Muslim diasporas. Among many different examples two of these countries have become quite visible: Turkey, under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and Saudi Arabia with its crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman. The two countries have long been in a problematic relation and this has been intensified after Saudi agents murdered journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the kingdom's Istanbul consulate in 2018. But, how did their relations come to this point and how do power, state identity and religion play different roles? To answer this question, this article argues that not directly religion, but also international power struggles and differences between state identities could play different roles into the relations between states, but the positions of the states could not be stable and can be changeable according to their interests.
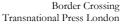
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Introduction

In September 14, 2021, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu declared that "We (Turkey) believe that our relations with Saudi Arabia can get back on track… Now the point is to normalize the relations and take joints steps on some problematic issues".[2] Likewise, in September 2021 Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farha noted that "we need to talk with Turkey to establish bilateral relations and ways to strength them". These two consecutive statements are the evidences of the rapprochement processes of these tow Muslim majority countries whose understanding of religion, state identities and their power position in the global system are quite different. In this regard, one should ask that question how did Turkey and Saudi Arabia relations worsen and how can it be rebuilt. In this regard, this article suggests that countries have multifaceted and multi-layered identities, some of which have a direct and/or an indirect relation with religion and their power positions and they might change in time. But to understand this change it is important to understand their relations and transformation capacities. The domestic and international political power struggle being waged over religion and faith is not a new reality in human history. For instance, Sheikh (2002)

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[2] Please see the details of the declaration; https://www.ntv.com.tr/dunya/son-dakika-haberidisisleri-bakani-cavusoglundan-afganistan-aciklamasi,pfcmdWpUIkuP0nBm3ztYyA

underlines the evolving theory of pan-Islamism from classical to post-caliphal times and the foreign policy practices of contemporary states which have Muslim majority societies. For countries, religion is one of the oldest identity and power codes of humankind, having influenced, changed and transformed individuals, societies, countries and international relations throughout history. (Ben-Porat 2013; Fox and Sandler 2005; Cesari 2019; Haynes 2011). However, although this reality has never disappeared, in the third quarter of the 20th century thinkers and policymakers claimed that religion and other power resources have begun to lose its influence over individuals, societies, countries and international relations compared to the past. (Berger 1967; Hadden 1987). However, the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the emergence of parties containing religious doctrine in their ideology in the Western world and religious conflict and the emergence of religion-based political alliances in the Middle East demonstrated that, in fact, the influence of religion in domestic and international politics had not disappeared. (Thomas 1995; Sandal and Fox 2013; Haynes 2016). In this context, the multi-dimensional role of religion in domestic politics in different regions, (Henne 2013; Wuthnow 1991), religion and multi-dimensional conflict, (Gurses and Ozturk 2020; Turkmen 2021), religion and diplomacy and the relation of religion to modern populist movements (Yılmaz and Morieson 2021; Ben-Porat et all 2021) have begun to top the list of subjects addressed by the literature.

Most of the Muslim majority countries utilize religion and their state identity in international relations in a more visible way compared to other countries (Hurd 2007; Mandaville 2010). In this context, for instance studies of Muslims in their own societies based on how the United States utilizes Islam in its foreign policy (Messari 2001) how Iran and Saudi Arabia use their own understandings of Islam in foreign policy (Mabon 2019), the example of Malaysia (Nair 2013) and in recent years the increasing number of studies of Turkey (Öztürk 2021; Hintz 2018) have begun to guide the literature. However, a comparison of these differences will in fact be important as regards understanding the effects of Islam, state identity and power politics on global relations with their relatively indirect and varied dimensions.

In this sense, this study will examine the relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia[3], which in particular from 2010 onwards have embarked on tensions and colloborations with each other in various regions of the world. This study aims to understand the complicated roles of religion, state identity and power politics. It will also help to provide an understanding as to what roles Islam-state identity and power politics play in foreign policy preferences and in relations between countries.

In this context this article will consist of four main chapters. The first chapter will look at points raised in the literature regarding the triangle of Islam, state identity, power politics, foreign policy and international relations. The second section will deal with the county cases transformations regarding to state identity via scrutinizing the roles of religion and their power politics in domestic and global politics. This will be followed by a discussion of the reasons for the covert struggles and cooperations embarked upon by Turkey and Saudi Arabia on the global stage, in a manner consistent with the general literature dealt with in the first part. In the final chapter the article will endeavor to establish what this relation explains as regards the roles of religion, state identity and power politics in international relations.

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[3] One study is very important to understand this complicated relation; *Turkish-Saudi Relations: Cooperation and Competition in the Middle East* written by Sinem Cengiz.

Islam, state identity and power politics in the contemporary world

The Islamic world, comprising around a third of the global population, not only draws attention to itself and affects the world through internal developments, but is also, by interacting with various groups and structures, a main determining factor or one of the main determining factors almost everywhere in the world. (Esposito 1998). While on the one hand this goes beyond the boundaries of the relationship between religion and politics (Mandaville 2003), on the other, it has a connection to those who feel themselves close, or define themselves as close, to the Islamic world, and have left their native countries and joined the diaspora (Gaborieau 2009; Mandaville 2001). In this sense, particularly following the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Islam, first and foremost in conflict in world politics (Fox 2000) or in conflict resolution (Gurses 2015), democracy (Potrafke 2012), growing authoritarianism (Fish 2002), economy (Choudury 2005), and political culture (Hefner and Zaman 2010) has become a factor in many different issues.

However, the dawn of a new century made it necessary to address Islam and the role it plays in global politics in different ways, just like many other issues. The fundamental reason for this is the fact that world politics embarked on a collective change from the beginning of the 2000s. There are various examples, such as while the debate over Turkey's Justice and Development Party being able to sustain Islam in conjunction with democracy continued in the early years of the century (Tepe 2005), the Arab uprisings led to the question being asked as to whether democratic movements led by Moslem politicians beginning in Turkey might spread throughout the Islamic world (Volpi 2013). These are all related with the role of religion in countries' state identities and their power politics. Nevertheless, while on the one hand there were hopes in the Islamic world, due to developments in the rest of the world this current starting to retreat from the middle of the 2010s onwards. The election of Trump in the United States, the rise of the right and populism in Europe and the preference of countries such as Turkey with Muslim majorities for populist authoritarian politics (Yavuz and Ozturk 2019) recalled Huntington's theory of a clash of civilisations, but resulted in a very different world order.

Without doubt this situation or conflicts beginning to emerge openly or in a relatively covert or 'soft' way confronts us with the question as to how religion will be used indirectly rather than directly in power politics. Within this confusion, while thinkers focus on how and in which forms religion plays different roles in international relations and power games in global politics (Fox and Sandler 2004; Mavelli and Petito 2014), those influenced first and foremost by schools of theory such as the liberal, neo-liberal and English school of international relations theory have begun to debate whether religion can be used alongside the concept of Soft Power expressed by Joseph Nye in the late 1980s. The concept of Soft Power in combination with religion first began to be used seriously by Jeffrey Haynes (2008; 2010; 2014; 2016). Haynes suggests that both religion and religious actors can be influential in foreign policy and that this effect should be defined as religious soft power. However, as Philpott (2007) explained, since the effect of religion in the political sphere is 'ambivalent' we can say that it demonstrates itself in many different ways, both positively and negatively. Although how religion, religious institutions and actors may be used as an element of soft power has been frequently debated in the last 10 years, (Steiner 2011; Ciftci and Tezcür 2016), there are very few who have approached the issue by reading domestic policy in conjunction with

foreign policy. Moreover, it is rare to find a study that focuses on how and in what way states may utilise or not utilise religion as soft power.

Nevertheless, as 2020 approached and religion found a new path, becoming entwined particularly with populist politics, the necessity for a new study of how religion is being used in foreign policy emerged. In this context, developing the work of Haynes, Mandaville and Hamid (2018) emphasise the reliance of the transnational use of religion on numerous, divergent facets despite the variant usage of the concept of soft power. They identified three aspects that states possess regarding transnational religious soft power. First is the institutional and normative capacity of states and their civilizational affinity, second is the socio-political circumstances of states and the aims of those seeking to wield religious soft power and third is the double-edged sword structure of religious soft power. Finally, as a contribution to the literature, Bettiza (2020) proposes the necessity to find new definitions of the concept of soft power, broadening its classic boundaries, given that certain states may possess significant religious resources that can be used symbolically and culturally. It is also undoubtedly true that it is possible to use all these definitions by synthesizing them in various ways. In this regard, I argue that as an intrinsic part of the state identity, religion has the capacity to shape politics and power relations as well as state identities. Religion and different norms-oriented power struggles, to the extent that it forms part of state identity, therefore it can shape domestic and foreign policy even if actors and decision-makers are themselves secular. In this regard, I claim that the establishment and transformation processes of state identity start from the domestic level via both leadership and the effects of critical junctures after domestic struggles among different ideological camps. In this regard, I argue that countries have multifaceted and multi-layered identities, some of which have a direct and/or an indirect relation with religion. These different relations with religion could be seen as among the identity determinants of many states. This synthesising is valid for today's world and the struggle-cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Turkey in the 21st century can provide an insight into this.

Politics, religion and power politics in Turkey

Fundamentally, Turkey established itself by demolishing the Ottoman state that was the caliphate of Sunni Islam and replacing it with a secular state. Of course, the top-down nature of this and the fact that society has not become accustomed to it has brought with it a century of social conflict (Yavuz 2003). The modernization of the Ottoman empire, Turkish society or Turkey goes back to the sixteenth century and has a history that can be read in tandem with the global history of modernization. In fact, after the first quarter of the eighteenth century, plans began to be drafted for reforms in education, administration and social relations, but due to both internal and external factors these plans were unable to evolve into fundamental change. This entire legacy, which in the main consisted of continuity, but included vital ruptures, was realized by the founding elite of the Republic of Turkey, or by a cadre we may call Mustafa Kemal and his companions. The place we may best observe this continuity and rupture is the relationship between religion, politics and society, which has a very important place in the state identity of Turkey. The founding elite of the Republic claimed it had introduced a brand-new system by hiding its methodological continuity on the subject of religion behind a major upheaval. To put it more explicitly, the founding cadres who abolished the caliphate when establishing the republic, founded the Diyanet, a body that closely resembles the semi-bureaucratic, semi-political institutions that controlled religion in

Byzantine and Ottoman times. Moreover, the fact that the Islamic world was left without a caliph led to other Muslim countries, first and foremost Egypt, keeping Turkey at arm's length during the first half of the 20th century. In domestic politics, Sunni Muslim matters were handed over to the while Islamic communities linked to the state continued to function in a de facto way (Ozturk 2016; Lord 2018). However, by the late 1960s the Muslim population in Europe had risen due to migration and this once again brought Turkey onto the agenda on account of the need for religious ministrations. A major reason for this was that some European countries considered the Diyanet as more appropriate for the provision of services to their Muslim population than Wahabi or Salafi currents (Citak 2010). Another reason for this was the presence in Germany and other countries of a majority of Turkish migrants. Hence, from the early 1970s the Diyanet began to operate legally in Europe in parallel to its role in Turkey. This international expansion continued until the early 2000s, firstly in the Balkans following changing power shifts and then to Turkic republics in Central Asia and places such as Australia, regions culturally and historically far away from Turkey (Ozturk 2018).

Of course, Turkey's Diyanet was not the only actor involved in this expansion (Ozturk and Baser 2022). The National Outlook Movement, which comprises the ideological and historical back story of the AKP, Süleymancı and Nakshibendi orders also began to establish contact with Turkish and other Muslim immigrants. But it was the controversial Gülen Movement which was the first organisation from Turkey that went beyond these limited relations. This controversial political and religious movement under the leadership of Fethullah Gülen began to establish links with the elites of countries all over the world by opening educational institutions from the 1990s until the mid 2010s (Watmough and Ozturk 2018; Turam 2007).

At this juncture it is necessary to note that this influence was wielded outside Western countries. However, in Western states, too, Turkey and its religious apparatus not only reached its own Sunni Muslim diaspora, but also extended its influence to other sections of society, to a certain extent interacting with other Muslim groupings. However, it is difficult to say it exerted an influence on very different segments of society, as it is not at all easy for Turkey to reach them. The fundamental reason for this is that Western states do not allow Turkey to promote itself beyond the provision of religious services. Hence, Turkey was only able until the early 2010s to use its religious soft power in countries relatively weaker than itself, whereas in stronger Western countries it only succeeded in being cited as a good example of a country able to combine both Islam and democracy.

Until the Arab uprisings were well underway the AKP's Turkey used religion and religious institutions in unison with the Gülen Movement in foreign policy, both as an instrument of influence and serving as a good example of public diplomacy using religion as a tool of soft power. However, with the Muslim Brotherhood, with whom the AKP had close ties, abandoning the power it had won a short time before, and with the period beginning with the Gezi protests resulting in economic downturn, which was partly responsible for Erdoğan's increasing authoritarianism, a transformation that involved his opting for both nationalism and religion as new tools engendered a serious change in the situation (Gurpinar 2015). Furthermore, with the failed coup attempt of 15 July 2016, an affair which is thought to have involved members of the Gülen Movement, Turkey began to change its identity, becoming more authoritarian and synthesising religion with nationalism (Yavuz and Ozturk 2020). This is the secuiritisation of Turkish politics under the AKP rule and it has a direct effect on

country's identity and power notion. Likewise, hile Erdoğan's AKP was becoming more authoritarian, the role if Islam and Turkey's state identity has started to change.

Within Turkey's changing and transforming identity exists loyalty to the leader and giving prominence to the leader (Karaveli 2016). In this sense, Erdoğan did not merely carry out a referendum on changing the constitution after 2016 and position himself as an omnipotent president responsible for everything. In this context he embarked on a relatively covert struggle with leaders of other countries with symbolically important leaders. This struggle with, first and foremost, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Iran, has two separate dimensions. By means of this struggle Erdoğan is presenting himself to his domestic audience as a leader who defends the rights of Muslims all over the world, in doing so consolidating his power. Furthermore, by claiming his understanding of Islam is different and superior to others, he is aiming to be the symbolic protector and leader of the world's Muslims decade. This is a big change for country's state identity and power role.

Religion-state identity and power politics of Saudi Arabia

It is impossible to think about Saudi Arabia without considering religion and its impact on state identity and power. In most of the Arabian Peninsula, in which Saudi Arabia is situated, a nomadic tribal life style has persisted for thousands of years and this is one of the key determining factors in the political, social and economic life of Saudi Arabia (Maisel 2014). Although the fact the Islamic prophet Mohammad was born in Mecca and Islam began to spread from the Arabian Peninsula has a historic and symbolic importance, this importance was taken away from it at crucial times in history. The Umayyads moving the capital of the Islamic world to Damascus, and then in the 16th century the Caliphate coming under the domination of the Ottomans obstructed the real political and economic power of the Arabian Peninsula (Hathaway 2019). In this sense one may argue that the religious dimension, and in fact the historical, political and economic conflict and cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Turkey in the present day, have continued since that time.

At this juncture, in order to understand the political moves and state identity of Saudi Arabia it is necessary to know about the Wahhabi movement. Wahhabism is a conservative movement and doctrine of the Sunni branch of Islam (Ayoob and Kosebalaban 2009). It is also the backbone of the state identity. Its name comes from its founder, Muhammad İbn Abd al-Wahhab, who was born in Arabia in the 18th century. Wahhabism advocates a pure form of Islam, focusing on the origins of the faith and the supremacy of God (Choksy and Choksy 2015). The Wahhabi movement emerged in the 1730s and was adopted by the House of Saud in 1745. From that time on Wahhabism has had an important role in the country and been influential on political relations within it (Aburish 2012). In this context, although the region lived under Ottoman sovereignty in a not wholly contented manner, in WWI it was freed from Ottoman rule and came under British rule. However, this did not last long, with the Saudi Monarchy being inaugurated under British protection in 1932.

Although the significance of oil was not to be fully understood until after WWII, for Saudi Arabia it is one of the greatest importance and this is the source of the state power and its position into the world system. Saudi Arabia, which possesses around 25% of global oil reserves, opened its oil wells in 1939 while still a poor country whose inhabitants lived under a tribal system (Raphaeli 2003; Ansari 2017; Quandt 2010). This was of the utmost importance for the balance of power in the Middle East and the wider world as Saudi Arabia built a strong

economic structure. Its oil reserves are situated in the east of the country close to the Persian Gulf and it is the leading exporter of oil in OPEC (Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries), producing approximately 13% of total global production. Thanks to this power, it has significant relations with the most powerful nations. Saudi Arabia participated in the Israeli-Arab conflicts of 1948, 1967 and 1973. It has bought billions of dollars' worth of weapons, warplanes and guided missiles from the UK, France and the USA. When Kuwait was invaded by Iraq in 1991, Saudi Arabia discharged its duty as a base for the "multi-national force" that was established to remove Iraq from Kuwait (Blanchard 2010).

It is important to note that Saudi Arabia is a monarchy in which Sharia Law is acknowledged as the constitution. This is also very much related with state identity and it has a combine structure with religion. The King, who holds both executive and legislative powers, has the right of veto over decisions of the Council of Ministers, the members of which he appoints. Almost all-important decisions are taken by members of the House of Saud. Although there are no political parties or legislature, all subjects have the right to attend the regular audiences and forward their complaints directly to the King, or request his assistance. Electoral reform is underway in Saudi Arabia so that the King will no longer be able to select his successor. A special council consisting of members of the royal family called the *Biat* will select the new king by secret ballot. 3 candidates will be put forward by the King, but the council will have the power to remove the powers of a king it sees as incapable (Bligh 1985; Vogel 2000).

As can be seen from the above, for Saudi Arabia three things are very important: religion, oil and its place in the international system. Of these three points we may state that the place of oil is the easiest to predict. Oil leads both to the administrative class that holds power increasing its prestige at home and maintaining its relations with the wider world. In this context, although oil does not directly constitute Saudi Arabia's hard power, it indirectly both supports its hard power and provides the material for its soft power. In other words, while the income and profits from oil secure Saudi Arabia a place at the same table as the great powers such as the US, it also assures its presence in one way or the other all over the world. However, at this juncture it is necessary to point out that Saudi Arabia's soft power is indistinguishable from its most significant value, and perhaps its determining element, religion. This situation, in fact, reminds us of the way religion and politics have become intertwined in Turkey. The oil reserves dramatically changed the social structure of Saudi society from the 1950s onwards, and this was accompanied by enforced secularisation of state functions that took place despite the opposition of the Wahhabi *ulama* (Nehme 1994). However, in the Saudi tradition, the administration of the state is an obligatory secular duty to be fulfilled for the salvation of religion and the benefit of believers. A political authority that works for the benefit of Sharia Law and the religious community, in whatever way it takes power, has the identity of a state to which obedience is obligatory. In this way, religious scholars are obliged to obey state officials. They act as guides and assist in the regulation of life according to Sharia Law. Nevertheless, the political power, particularly in domestic politics, uses religion as a means of legitimisation, in this way resembling the example of Turkey given above. For instance, Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, who was declared heir apparent in 2017, demonstrated the allegiance of ministers and top officials by having his photograph taken between the two most senior religious scholars in Saudi Arabia's religious hierarchy at a ceremony, firstly to the public of Saudi Arabia, and then to the wider world.

For Saudi Arabia religion is on the one hand one of the fundamental conditions for its existence, while on the other it is a means of legitimacy that is utilised in foreign policy in addition to domestic politics. It is also a tool it uses in international relations as a way of establishing its existence and of being effective in global politics. In this context it uses religion directly, if not as hard power, but on occasions exceeding the boundaries of soft power. However, we cannot claim it implements this excessively, particularly when dealing with Western countries, the underlying reason for that being that Saudi Arabia's understanding of religion is seen by them as severe or radical. At the same time, Saudi Arabia prioritises cooperation within the Islamic world. However, due to issues of religion, power and interests this is not generally the case with Turkey and as we shall see below, the more Turkey uses religion, the more complex the situation becomes and explains how the use of religion in international politics can vary.

The Complex Relations between Saudi Arabia and Turkey

Religion, power and state identity lies at the root of the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Turkey. In order to understand this, it is necessary to look at the Ottoman period, which is when the religion-based struggle began. As we have mentioned above, one of the fundamental cornerstones of the Saudi state is Wahhabism. As the House of Saud, which represented the Wahhabi understanding, consolidated its power, the Ottoman state that ruled the Arabian Peninsula was forced to take certain measures against this new and radical political and religious movement. For this movement was aiming to establish a state based on its own beliefs and ideas independent of the Ottomans. Although these ambitions were not to be realised in the Ottoman period, for around 150 years the movement endeavoured to break away from Ottoman control and, in this context, in fact had problems with the Caliphate, which was under Ottoman authority. Hence, although with the founding of the Republic of Turkey this problem might appear to have been overcome, now a different problem emerged. In its early years the Republic of Turkey saw Saudi Arabia as conflicting with its world view and ideals on account of its extreme religious outlook. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia denounced Turkey for its secular measures and its abolishing of the Caliphate. Consequently, relations have never been good. After it had been established, the Republic of Turkey recognised the political independence of states that were subsequently founded on Ottoman territory (Ataman 2012). The Kingdom of Hejaz and Nejd was founded by the Saud family and recognised by Turkey on 3 August 1929 with the signing of a Treaty of Peace and Friendship which recognised the new state's political independence and territorial integrity. However, until the 1980s there was no development worthy of note in relations between the two countries. The two states, with differing political regimes, did not make efforts to develop relations until the 1980s, apart from a brief period in the 1960s. King Faisal paid a short visit to Turkey in 1966 within the framework of a conference intended to promote Islamic unity. This was the only visit made by a Saudi monarch to Turkey during that long period.

Despite the fact that there was not a subsequent visit and that there were no developments until the late 1970s, a decade that was one of great confusion in Turkey's domestic politics, in the 1980s, with Turgut Özal at the helm there began to be a change in relations. However, this change was neither religious nor cultural, but economic in nature. Özal launched a process of restructuring Turkey politically and economically. Within this framework there were significant developments in relations with Muslim countries, first and foremost those in the Middle East. Özal adopted a positive approach to Saudi Arabia in order to achieve success in

Turkey's model of economic development based on exports and to ensure the country's oil requirements. However, the sudden death of Özal and the tumultuous state of Turkish politics in the 1990s meant relations were put on ice once again. But with the coming to power of the AKP relations suddenly began to improve once more in a totally unexpected way.

The AKP government launched a serious restructuring of relations with Muslim countries. In its first years in power, it focused on taking "confidence-building measures" in its relations with Arab countries. This was followed by efforts to broaden the scope of areas of cooperation, which had two dimensions. Firstly, religion and, secondly, the economy. The AKP on the one hand wished to have harmonious relations with Muslim countries in line with its identity, and on the other wished to have good economic relations in the wider world. Of course, the rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Turkey was part of the two countries' search for alternative foreign policies in the first decade of this century. While Saudi Arabia had been a traditional ally of the USA, following 9/11 it began to endeavour to break from its dependence on the USA. The Saudi government, concerned at the direction of US Israeli-centric regional policy, had no option but to develop relations with Turkey, one of the most important and influential regional powers that shared the same concerns (Dalacoura 2017). Particularly after Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu became Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference [now the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation], based in Jeddah, in 2005, relations between the two countries began to improve. Relations between the two countries continued to develop in 2008 and 2009. The multilateral active foreign policy pursued by the governments of both countries during that period propelled them towards cooperation on bilateral and regional issues. Visits by senior officials were the most significant indicator of these improving relations.

There were three fundamental dynamics underlying the relative improvement of relations between Saudi Arabia and Turkey during this period of AKP rule. The first of these was the possibility of cooperation between the two countries on the global stage. Secondly, the opportunity for economic cooperation to the benefit of both countries, and, lastly, the fact that culturally, or, in other words, as regards religion, they were able to operate in harmony, if not as partners. However, these three fundamental dynamics were not to survive developments after 2011. On the one hand there was the Arab Spring and on the other changes in the balance of forces in global politics and developments in domestic politics in both countries which led to a breakdown in relations. Now, in 2021, although there are efforts to revive relations, this does not appear feasible in the short term.

At this juncture, one of the main reasons for the breakdown of relations after the Arab Spring, and even for the two countries turning against each other during ongoing developments, which was fundamentally due to a clash of national interests, was Turkey adopting a position alongside the Muslim Brotherhood. In fact, this is important as regards Erdoğan repositioning himself within the international system and in terms of religion being the determining factor. As a result, Turkey scaled down its relations with Saudi Arabia, which opposes the Muslim Brotherhood. Consequently, Turkey moved closer to Qatar and began to adopt a position in regional and global politics opposing Saudi Arabia. At the same time, the deterioration of the Turkish domestic economy and the increasing authoritarianism of Erdoğan led to religion being used more in both domestic and foreign policy. Such a utilisation has brought Erdoğan into confrontation with Saudi Arabia, which wishes to influence Muslims in different regions. In regions such as the Balkans and continental Europe where there is a large Muslim

population these two countries are engaged in a struggle using religious apparatus. One dimension of this struggle involves religion, whereas the other is a contest between Erdogan and Bin Salman to see whose charismatic leadership will be the more influential on a global scale. In short, in this network of relations, religion has revealed itself as playing different roles in periods of reconciliation and periods of conflict.

Conclusion

While on the one hand this article illustrates the historical struggle of Turkey and Saudi Arabia, two countries that have significant roles in the Islamic world, on the other it demonstrates three separate things. The first of these is that in international relations, and bilateral relations between countries, religion may not always play as important a role as it is expected to. While this role is more pronounced than expected on some occasions, on others it may be less so. Nevertheless, religion, state identity and power can facilitate both conflict and reconciliation between countries and for the same actors at different times. This is fundamentally linked to the ambiguous and multi-dimensional nature of these normative concepts. However, this is also undoubtedly connected to the period in question, developments in domestic policy and the political character of the actors ruling these states. Of course, no struggle or agreement is limitless. In this context, although the existing struggle between Turkey and Saudi Arabia may appear to be one involving establishing sovereignty, both regionally and globally, by way of Islam, this does not appear feasible for these two countries. But beyond that they are also open for cooperation and this shows that the compliacted phenomenons known as religion, state identity and power cannot remain soft and one to the extent necessary, or are intended to be presented when states enter the purview of the issue, because state configuration employs economic and other sanctions in the name of power through instruments that utilise religion. This complicated and multi-dimensional situation suggests that, first of all, states cannot use religion as a one-dimensional power. Second, religion or the extremist instrumentalization of religion as a means of oppression at the hands of a political regime can prompt changes in the state identity and foreign policy approaches of the states. Therefore, these changes can spread rapidly and alter the behaviour formation of states due to their consideration for foreign policy. This is inarguably influential on topics such as the leader, state system, institutional capacity, and areas of influence.

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