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Shaping the Middle East in the Midst of the Arab Uprisings: Turkish and Saudi foreign policy strategies

CRYSTAL A ENNIS & BESSMA MOMANI

ABSTRACT *While the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are undergoing rapid change, many domestic, regional and international actors are vying for space and influence as systems and customs evolve and adopt new forms. This paper characterises and compares the evolving foreign policy strategies of two such regional actors, Turkey and Saudi Arabia. It further assesses the motivations and activities of and challenges to Turkish and Saudi involvement throughout the region since the Arab uprisings. Ultimately these cases provide intriguing insight into the foreign policy purpose and methods of emerging states under conditions of uncertainty.*

The Middle East is in a delicate period of political transition, given the momentous changes sweeping the region since the onset of the 2011 Arab uprisings. The present is a critical period in modern Middle East history, where the region is especially vulnerable to competing ideas and interests. This paper seeks to assess and compare the foreign policy strategies of two influential regional actors, Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Both states have, to various degrees over the years, held leadership roles in the region. While holding divergent preferences on the region's direction and revolutionary outcomes, the current regional climate provides a renewed impetus for each to exert influence. Neither state expects to use hard power to achieve its foreign policy objectives. Instead, both Turkey and Saudi Arabia use a mixture of public diplomacy, media, economic incentives, convening power and the mobilisation of Islam. While both countries share similar foreign policy instruments, they vary greatly in how they utilise these instruments and justify their involvement in the region.

Turkey has prided itself on being viewed as a modern role model. Its rapidly growing economy, built on modern industrialisation, along with its successful Islamist government, are offered as examples to be emulated. Where Saudi Arabia has been predominately counter-revolutionary, motivated by geopolitical security fears and driven by sectarianism, Turkey has been able to walk a

Crystal A Ennis is a PhD candidate at the University of Waterloo, 200 University Ave W, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G1. Email: cennis@uwaterloo.ca. Bessma Momani is in the Balsillie School of International Affairs, University of Waterloo. Email: bmomani@uwaterloo.ca.

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clearer line in support of democratic, albeit Islamist, transitions. In contrast, Saudi Arabia has long considered its role as custodian of the holy Islamic cities of Mecca and Medina as its *de facto* guarantee of regional significance, while promulgating its prominent role in the G20, the Organization of Islamic States and the Arab League as examples of regional leadership.

Turkish motivations are to be a role model in the region for Arab states to emulate, particularly on the question of how to be a responsible Islamist, democratic and economically successful government in the global community. Turkey relies on its role in regional and international security, its impressive economic growth and regional political clout to spread its message and its positive image. Its ambitions are not so much to gain political influence, as to gain economic access to Arab markets, consumers and materials. Hence Turkey's engagement is more limited than Saudi Arabia's and its rhetoric is louder than its actions. Moreover, Turkish support for Arab Spring countries provides a sense that the region is undergoing fundamental transformations, akin to those in Turkey, where Islamic politics, democracy and economic prosperity are seen as key desires of the populace.

In contrast, there are currently two great motivators of Saudi foreign policy towards the Arab Spring. First, Saudi Arabia views the preservation of monarchy in its neighbourhood as essential to the security and stability of its own regime. Second, it actively frames the discourse around ongoing revolutions in sectarian terms, largely viewing transformations in the region through the lens of its regional competition with Iran. Thus it views Iran and Shiite populations within or near its borders as explicit threats to continued stability.

This paper will examine the evolving foreign policies of Saudi Arabia and Turkey since the Arab uprisings and will discuss the motivations and activities for and challenges to their involvement throughout the region.

Turkey's evolving foreign policy strategy towards Arab countries

Turkey's role in the Arab Middle East has changed dramatically in recent years, accentuated by the events dubbed the Arab Spring in Western circles. From its negatively perceived Ottoman political history as a former imperial master of the Arab Middle East, Turkey is increasingly playing a proactive role in the Arab world that is gaining attention both domestically, regionally and internationally. Tellingly Turkey has signed numerous political initiatives and cultural agreements with its Arab neighbours, has enhanced its role in the Organization of Islamic Conference and has joined the Arab League as an observer. This has all occurred since the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) took power.[1] Moreover, in 2010, the Turkish prime minister created the Office of Public Diplomacy to manage this charm offensive and to 'tell Turkey's new story'.[2]

Political analysts have traced the change in Turkish–Arab relations to the former's election of the Islamist AK party led by Tayyip Erdogan in 2002 and to its foreign minister's, Ahmet Davatoglu, overarching regional strategy of 'Zero Problems with Neighbours Policy'—a form of 'Wilsonian' idealism or 'liberal-institutionalism' in Western conceptions.[3] Since the time the AKP took government, the party and its supporters have increasingly rejected the Kemalist

tendencies of the once dominant Turkish political elite, who had previously snubbed the Arab Middle East in disdain for its attachment to Islam and its associated cultural practices.[4] The Kemalist political elite, in alliance with the Turkish military, had essentially securitised its relationship with its neighbours, with detrimental consequences. In contrast, the AKP has increasingly embraced the Arab Middle East and reignited historical memories of Turkish involvement in the region in a more promising and positive light: a sort of 'Ottomonian Revivalism'[5] or 'Neo-Ottomonism'. The 'Zero Problems with Neighbours Policy' revitalised its Ottoman legacy but also attempted to both increase interdependence with Arab neighbours and minimise any negative spill-overs.[6] The Davutoglu plan for Turkey involved engaging its neighbours with more confidence and less securitisation of diplomacy.

The Arab Spring and the Arab peoples' call for democratisation, economic and social justice, and international respect were viewed in Ankara as the moment when the Arab world caught up with the Turkish experience that has culminated under the AKP. This 'Turkish model' in the Middle East is about providing a third alternative to the dominant political tendencies in the region—political authoritarianism, rentierism and radical Islamism.[7] In real, though unstated, terms this translates into providing an alternative to the Saudi rentier model and the Iranian theocratic one, which were both 'uninspiring' models for Arabs to emulate.[8] The Arab region had not had the opportunity to find a way for Islam and democracy to coexist effectively;[9] the experience of Algeria in 1991 remained a vivid example of how this could go terribly wrong and lead to a spiralling civil war and radicalisation.[10]In this respect Turkey is providing a positive demonstration effect for regional parties and actors, who can call for democracy, moderate Islamist parties and be responsible economic and political actors in the globalised international community. As Turkish President Abdullah Gul stated:

> once you succeed in raising and realizing your standards, then you start being followed very carefully by other countries; you become an inspiration for them. And once that happens, what matters is to combine your hard and soft power and translate it into virtuous power—for your immediate environment for your region, and for the whole world.[11]

The 'Turkish model'—or the third alternative in the Middle East—was also an economic success story. Unlike the Saudi and Iranian models, which depended on a combination of natural resources and rentier politics to drive economic growth, the Turkish model depended on raising the economic productivity of Turkish society through strong manufacturing.[12]In a region where the majority of the population do not reside in natural, resource rich countries, there is appeal in the idea of using manufacturing and industrial strength to further the domestic economy. Paul Salem notes that the Arab countries' strong economic trade ties with Turkey have meant that Arabs are cognisant of the increased availability of Turkish industrial and manufactured products.[13] According to a survey conducted by the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) in 2011 of Arab people, 71% of those surveyed had bought or

consumed Turkish goods.[14] Turkish cultural goods, like its dubbed soap operas, are also favourites throughout the Arab countries. This is also applicable to Turkish financial investments—especially in the construction sector—which are still lagging behind many prominent Arab Gulf investments in the region, but do play a visible role in Arab society. The 'Turkish model' is shifting Arab perceptions of Turkey as a 'military state', with all its negative imperial legacies, to that of a 'trading state', a modern regional hub of economic productivity.[15] Indeed, in the same survey Saudi Arabia was still viewed as the top regional economic power, but Turkey was ranked the top economic powerhouse of the future in the region. In addition, 78% of Arabs had a favourable view of Turkey, surpassing 64% for Saudi Arabia.[16]

The AKP has used 'economic interdependence' with the Arab Middle East to bring its political 'depth' and soft power to the region.[17] Even before the Arab Spring Turkish economic investments in the Arab Middle East were increasing steadily. Turkey has signed a free trade agreement with many countries of the Levant, including Syria. Indeed, it has a valuable geo-economic position, sitting at the crossroads between the oil rich east and the advanced European market; it also controls the vital distribution point for Central Asian oil pipelines in the Mediterranean seaport of Ceyhan. At the moment the Turkish government's self-perception is that of being a partner in Middle Eastern economic development. Truth be told, there is some economic asymmetry, where Turkey will increasingly play the role of industrial and investment hub and the Arab countries in the Turkish–Arab relationship will be a spoke or basin of consumers and natural resources. This means that the terms of trade will be weighted in favour of Turkey, which will benefit from value added production. This economic interdependency does not necessarily yield the same value-added gains for the Arab Middle East as it does for the industrious and productive Turkish economy. Turkey is also acting in its own economic interest by diversifying its market away from the fiscally strapped European Union. This has paid off, as Turkish export trade with the Middle East has increased dramatically and cushioned it against a potential hard landing from a stagnating EU economy.

Contextualising Saudi Arabia's foreign policy in the Arab uprisings

In order to understand Saudi Arabia's foreign policy over the past few years, it is important to take a long view. Saudi foreign policy, even if fragmented, has historically been depicted as cautious, pragmatic and characterised by interpersonal relations. From the outset it has been primarily concerned with regime and state survival. It is in this vein that Saudi Arabia has retooled its foreign policy since 2011. Containment of the Arab uprisings has become a defining feature.[18] Containment has proven difficult, however, resulting in much international floundering through attempts to shape outcomes in ways that maintain the regional balance of power. Indeed, the Saudi focus on containment can best be understood by recognising the conventional determinants that shape Saudi Arabia's foreign affairs.

A concern with domestic security has long structured how external security is approached, prioritising the endurance of the ruling House of Saud and the

geographic integrity of what has become the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In this regard foreign policy in Saudi Arabia is largely determined by domestic concerns.[19] This occurs through the cross-utilisation of resources, traditional legitimacy and control.

Natural resources have played a significant role in structuring Saudi Arabia's relationships both internationally and within the state. As one of the top two countries in the world with the highest proven oil reserves, Saudi Arabia's 267 billion barrels in oil reserves unsurprisingly shape its international and domestic affairs.[20] The availability of such vast financial means with which to support its foreign policy and security objectives is central to how it wields its policy tools. Not only does oil generate great wealth, it fashions relations between the ruling family, business interests and international capital, expertise and energy.[21] It also bestows on Saudi Arabia the ability to moderate international oil prices by functioning as a swing producer. This in turn serves as a significant bargaining chip and policy tool.[22] Resources and access to resources dominate much international engagement, give Saudi Arabia geo-strategic significance, propel its friendly relationship with the US and help secure its role in OPEC and the G20, along with a dominant position in the MENA region more broadly and the Arabian peninsula in particular.

One must be mindful that, first and foremost, Saudi international relations are defined by an odd alliance with the US that started with the early days of oil exploration and extends to the present. Their current relationship is best 'characterized as transactional, each side seeking specific benefits from the other through cooperation on various issues'.[23] Saudi security has been undergirded by many US military agreements since the 1940s.[24] The emphasis on the Saudi–US relationship has drawn international attention since the Arab uprisings, especially where they diverge on support for or opposition to the various revolutions. Despite this, accusations that relations are in crisis are exaggerated. All evidence points to the US–Saudi relationship weathering this test to its relationship much like it weathered arguably more serious ones like the 1973 oil embargo and 9/11.[25] Normative concerns with the US's continued implicit support for authoritarian governments in the Gulf is another debate. Pointing to human rights and political reform concerns, scholars and activists are known to decry the US complicity in torture and human rights abuses, and note its impact on local activists.[26] These same people advocate a rethinking of the US–Saudi alliance, and look to Obama's second term as a possible moment of opportunity.

Although Saudi and Western resource and security interests do not always converge, common ground can often be found, even if the rationale diverges. Saudi Arabia tends to craft its foreign policy moves based on economic, primarily oil, interests and domestic stability concerns, both of which reinforce each other. For instance, where the US portrays Iran as a significant security threat and regional rival, the Saudis tend to emphasise an assumed more insidious ideological and political challenge domestically, while pursuing competitive energy and political manoeuvring abroad.[27]

This demonstrates the nexus of domestic security and foreign policy in Saudi politics. It also points to the significance of the second tool mentioned above—

legitimacy. Saudi foreign policy must take into account concerns from various segments within society. Even in the absence of formal policy input mechanisms, the legitimacy and consequently the security of the Saudi state partially rest upon various social groups. Gerd Nonneman calls this 'omnibalancing', in that it involves a fragile multilevel balancing of resources and risks.[28]

In order to maintain its domestic legitimacy, Saudi Arabia leverages oil rent, its family leadership tradition, the 'manipulation of a cultural ideal related to leadership', its importance as the custodian of the holy sites of Mecca and Medina with a concomitant association of religious guardianship, and its championing of Islamic and Arab causes.[29] It also uses the divisive politics of sectarianism alongside the summoning of the Wahhabi religious tradition. This is especially evident in its relationship with the Arab uprisings.[30]

The utilisation of oil rent to both secure legitimacy and promote political quiescence to rule is well documented in literature on the rentier state.[31] A growing population and widening fiscal constraints on the state are limiting its ability to wield rent resources as effectively as in the past. With rising expenditure since 2011, some estimates put Saudi's breakeven oil price at US$90 per barrel in 2012—quite a leap from $35 per barrel in 2005.[32] Legitimacy resources, given a decreased capacity to manage welfare and patronage distribution as effectively, must be sought from other sources.[33] These include religion and control.

Conventional interpretations of domestic legitimacy and foreign policy see these resting on a foundation of religion in general, and the Wahhabi Sunni tradition in particular. The early alliance of Abdulaziz ibn Saud with Muhammad Al-Wahhab and his followers has extended into the present with a peculiar religo-political alliance. Whatever security this does provide, however, has also resulted in something of a catch-22 for the House of Saud. Legitimating their rule in these terms has been complicated by the transnational identity of Islam and other domestic and regional religious movements. As such, 'because of the importance of Arabist and Islamist feelings among the Saudi population, encouraged to some extent by the government itself, Riyadh risks domestic reactions if it is seen as deviating too far from the Arab-nationalist and/or Islamist consensus on issues concerning Israel and relations with the United States'.[34] The same logic applies to domestic reforms as well, which has seen conservative patriarchal elements of society protest at government legislative moves deemed 'un-Islamic'.[35] Religion provides the Saudi leadership with a sharp legitimacy tool that, like any sharp tools, has the potential to cut its handler.

Therefore control plays an important role. Like many authoritarian states, Saudi Arabia uses the promise of economic well-being and the provision of national security. This is combined with the use of a strong security apparatus, fear and control over official discourse ranging from religion to political and social issues. Oil revenues have allowed the Saudis to develop a robust security apparatus. Its military expenditure as a share of GDP was 10.1% in 2010, the highest in the world for that year.[36] In addition to this, it consolidates its control by distributing a division of royal labour across key security and foreign policy roles. The late crown prince Sultan, for example, was both minister of defence and responsible for the Special Office for Yemeni Affairs until his death in

2011.[37] The current crown prince, Salman bin Abdulaziz, is the current minister of defence. Various members of the Saudi royal family, particularly the remaining members of the so-called Sudairi Seven and more recently their sons, maintain these posts.

The House of Saud must constantly maintain this balance of internal and external security and legitimacy, appeasing various segments of society and maintaining a strong, principled image. It must balance local perceptions of danger emanating from the forces of globalisation and the presence of foreign culture through the heavy presence of expatriate workers, as well as pressure from Europe and the USA in particular. Its control and authoritarianism have long been rooted in the struggle of ordering natural resources and society. As Toby Jones argues, this struggle can be seen as constructing and entrenching authoritarianism more than early alliances between religious actors and the Al Saud.[38]

Regionally and internationally Saudi Arabia has tried to flex its diplomatic muscles through multilateral organisations for some time. Its founding role in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and the Arab League, for instance, are suggestive of its self-proclaimed interest in playing an 'effective role' in international and regional organisations and leveraging soft power toward its aims.[39] Its long-standing role in OPEC already cast it as an economic force, which it happily continued to embrace with its inclusion in the G20. Saudi Arabia is, in fact, the only Arab and the only OPEC member in the G20. Its increasing exposure to international economic vicissitudes with its expanding financialisation, given its sovereign wealth funds and transition from a debtor to a creditor country, have made it a natural peer to other emerging economies in the G20. One should not underestimate its economic considerations in its international foreign policy moves. Since the global financial crisis of 2008 the Saudis have been affected by finance, oil and food commodity markets.[40]

In the same vein Saudi Arabia has also been diversifying its international economic and political partners. After joining the World Trade Organization (WTO), following over a decade of negotiations and the accession of King Abdullah to the throne, both in 2005, Saudi Arabia appears to have jump-started its integration into the global community.[41] Visits to China and the Pope, and mushrooming relations with both India and China all indicate a 'more pragmatic, rational and economy-oriented foreign policy'.[42] Nonetheless, alongside its participation in regional and international organisations, one can also trace a history of Saudi Arabia serving in a mediating role since the early 1970s and arguably earlier. Indeed, Saudi Arabia considers 'mediation as an integral tool in its foreign policy goals of maintaining an active involvement in regional issues, enhancing and deepening its influence'.[43] Saudi foreign policy under King Abdullah may be seen as more reformist or pragmatic, but it continues to pursue its chief goals of domestic and regional security and stability. This has long included the support of regional actors aligned with Saudi and Western interests, along with countering Iranian influence in its neighbourhood, especially in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen and Bahrain. It is only since 2011 that it found itself also pursuing a new foreign policy objective, namely 'containment' of the revolutions sweeping the Arab world.[44] This new behaviour, however,

can be viewed in the same context of protecting regime security and domestic and regional stability.

Saudi Arabia is a peculiar middle power. Its foreign policy is not designed simply to balance neighbouring interests or yield to US pressure, but rather walks a fine line between managing domestic and external pressure so as to guarantee regime survival and regional authority. Understanding the determinants of Saudi foreign policy can help us understand its seemingly schizophrenic reaction to the Arab revolutions. The notion of containment fits well within this narrative. Not only does Saudi Arabia want to maintain its role as a soft power mediator and be seen as advancing and even leading Arab causes, it wants to be the dominant religio-regional figurehead, opposite Iran. Along with acceptance and complicity in consigning unfriendly Arab states to casualties of the Arab Spring, it has sought to aid its regional friends and, when that failed, tried to forge new friendships. This was particularly evident in the case of Egypt, where Saudi Arabia tried to help Hosni Mubarak stave off unrest and now finds itself in the awkward position of trying to mend relations with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Simultaneously it has tried to buttress monarchy in the region, while leveraging sectarianism to marginalise and discredit dissent in its eastern province and Bahrain.

Comparison of Turkish and Saudi foreign policy strategies since 2011

In the early days of the Arab Spring Turkish responses were varied according to particular interests in the fate of each regime. However, as the inevitability of the Arab Spring appeared to take hold, the Ankara government's responses became increasingly coherent and fortified around a principled approach in favour of the change sought by Arab Spring protestors. Saudi Arabia, in contrast, viewed the start of the revolutions with a mixture of concern and scepticism. This later evolved into what appears from a distance to be a rather schizophrenic approach to the uprisings. Not only did Saudi Arabia extend financial and military support to counter uprisings in some locations, it supported others.

Like many countries Tunisia did not capture the attention of Turkish leaders, despite some modest concerns. When the revolutions hit Egypt, the Turkish government, and Prime Minister Erdogan in person on Al Jazeera, were quick to call for the fall of the Mubarak regime. This might be explained by the often tense regional rivalry between Turkey and Egypt. The lack of Turkish investment in Egypt also made the choice easier.[45] Some have seen this as Turkish empathy for the dominant opposition, Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood.[46] Regardless, Turkey has been a vocal critic of Mubarak and active supporter of Egyptian protestors' right since the onset of the 25 January Egyptian revolution.

In much the same way Saudi Arabia sought to support its friends but disregard or counter its foes. It offered its long-time friend Ben Ali asylum when he was ousted from power in Tunisia. Likewise, in true rentier fashion, Saudi Arabia is said to have underwritten the Mubarak regime when US support dwindled.[47] In an attempt to shore up other regional monarchies, Jordan and Morocco were invited to submit applications to the GCC, although, since then,

there has not been any further development on GCC expansion.[48] In Yemen Saudi Arabia shrewdly attempted to balance both sides—government and 'revolution'. At the same time as supporting Ali Abdullah Saleh, Saudi Arabia worked quickly to cultivate alternative leadership arrangements that would have strong patronage ties to itself.

The case in Libya, however, was different. Along with the Arab League, Saudi Arabia supported the NATO-led intervention in support of the Libyan revolution.[49] This was an easy call for the Al Sauds, who had long had an antagonistic relationship with Gaddafi.[50] The Turks were less supportive of NATO intervention plans and played a hesitant role, albeit not an obstructive one, at the UN Security Council when Resolution 1973 was before the international community calling for the protection of the Libyan people against the encroaching Gaddafi armies. In addition to 25 000 Turkish workers in Libya, Salem notes that Turkey's $15billion investment in Libya was a prime motivator of Turkish hesitancy; but it needs to be noted that the Turks were also very concerned with foreign, Western boots on the ground in Libya and the region generally, after the perceived catastrophe of the US intervention in Iraq.[51] Hence Turkey did feel it was responsible, as the sole Muslim power in NATO, to be cautious about what NATO intervention might do in the region.[52]

Turkey greeted the uprising in Bahrain with attempted mediation. Not only did it attempt to diffuse tensions between Iran and the GCC, it also cautioned against GCC involvement in Bahrain. As a primarily Sunni country, Turkey's middle ground approach seemed to hold promise, and it urged Bahraini rulers to show restraint.[53] Unfortunately its attempts were ineffective. To its chagrin Turkey's mediating strategy quickly gave way to Saudi-dominated GCC plans for crushing the largely Shia protests in Bahrain.

Indeed, Saudi Arabia was hostile to the uprising in Bahrain, which began a few days after Mubarak left Egypt. Its initial response, again, was financial. A GCC meeting in early March ended with the promise of $20 billion to be shared between Bahrain and Oman, both of whom had suffered unrest since February.[54] One month after the protests began in Bahrain, on 14 March 2011, Saudi forces, along with a few Emirati troops, crossed the causeway into Bahrain and violently suppressed the protests.[55] The population of Bahrain, a small island off the Saudi coast, is predominately Shia and ruled by the Sunni Al-Khalifa family. Not only does Saudi Arabia want to secure the monarchical nature of the GCC countries and counter democratic movements so close to home, it also seeks to curb Iranian influence. Its own eastern province, also predominately Shia, has had ongoing unrest as well. Overstating religious differences, essentially fanning the flames of sectarianism, has become the Saudi umbrella approach to limiting unrest to Shia areas. The awful stench of sectarianism and divisive politics across much of the Gulf has been fuelled, in large part, by Saudi Arabia and its religious establishment.[56] There exists a broad unwillingness to acknowledge that the protests in the eastern province or Bahrain are anything other than an Iran-backed conspiracy.[57]

Viewed through this lens of sectarianism and attempts to offset Iranian influence, the protests in Syria presented an opportunity to the Al Sauds. President Bashar al-Assad had been increasingly shifting towards Iran. With a

majority Sunni population, the uprising in Syria was seen as a chance to bring Syria back into the Arab, and Sunni, sphere of influence. This would consequently increase Saudi Arabia's friends in the region and drastically improve its position in Lebanon. Along with Qatar, Saudi Arabia has been an advocate of the international community arming the Syrian rebels. In the absence of international consensus on so doing, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have found channels for funnelling arms to them.[58]

In Syria Turkey was overly optimistic that it could alter President Bashar al-Assad's political calculations. After all, Turkish investment in Syria was at an all-time high and Erdogan had believed that Turkey could use its influence to change Syrian behaviour. This proved futile and Erdogan made a principled decision to actively undermine the Syrian regime after August 2011.[59] This was not just accidental timing. The Assad regime increased its repressive crackdown in August 2011 during the fasting month of Ramadan. This, in turn, caused added negative reverberations among devout followers in the AKP. This signified an uncompromising Turkish break with the Assad government. Turkish support for the Syrian opposition was a principled one, as Turkish economic investments in Syria and its relationship with the Assad government had been strong. Moreover, Turkey's support for the opposition had closed an important land route to key markets in the Levant and the Arab Gulf.

The steady influx of thousands of Syrian refugees every month to Turkey since 2011 and the Turkish eyewitness to atrocities committed against the Syrian refugees has hardened Turkish positions against Assad and its call for his downfall. Turkey also played an active role in providing a headquarters for the Syrian National Council, until it was replaced with the Syrian National Coalition and moved to Cairo in late 2012.

As in Libya, Turkey has felt that it had great responsibility as the sole member of NATO to ensure that any military action would be justified. Where, in Libya, the Turks were more hesitant about military intervention than were their NATO allies, in Syria it is NATO allies that have been more hesitant than Turkey. Turkey has not wanted to take any unilateral military actions against the Syrian government and has instead pushed for increased military intervention under a NATO banner. That said, Turkish opinion has generally been against any unilateral military intervention. Seventy-six percent of urban Turks surveyed oppose military intervention.[60] Specifically Turkey has wanted NATO to assist in enforcing a no-fly zone over Syria. The alliance has not wanted to entertain such an option, but has agreed—albeit, some have argued, hesitantly—to provide Turkey with anti-aircraft patriot systems for defensive purposes only.[61] Quiet Saudi and Qatari arms support for the opposition has been problematic in and of itself, with violence and atrocities being reciprocated against perceived government supporters, and Alawis in particular. A NATO intervention into what has devolved into a civil war makes it an unattractive option.

Turkey has recently joined Saudi Arabia in attracting accusations of harbouring sectarian views toward the Arab Spring. Both are Sunni countries and have been upbraided for their lack of criticism over Bahrain and their support for Syrian rebels. This criticism may be exaggerated in the Turkish case. Turkey has, for a number of years, reached out to Iran to improve economic and

political relations. Indeed, Prime Minster Erdogan has tried to mediate Sunni–Shia tensions by visiting the Shia spiritual leader Ali Sistani and visiting the shrine of Imam Ali, and had in recent years commemorated the Shia Day of Ashura in Istanbul.[62] Nevertheless, the muted international reaction to Bahrain and the nearly uncritical support of the Syrian rebels points to a re-escalation in sectarianism across the region, pushed to the forefront of the Arab imagination in large part by Saudi Arabia but also by politics in the post-Saddam Iraq.

Assessing the longevity of Saudi and Turkish foreign policy strategies

Turkey

Those who have argued for a more tempered prediction of Turkish hegemony and leadership in the Arab Middle East have argued that Turkish actions look like leadership because of an absence of effective Arab leadership at the start of the Arab Spring. At the start of the Arab Spring the Middle East had a power vacuum that was filled by Turkey 'artificially inflating' the self-perception of Turkish power.[63] Specifically Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the USA were already weakened in the region.[64] As Steven Cook noted:

> It was easy to be influential when the Arab world was politically dead and devoid of authentic leadership. Like it or not, Ankara's interests are wrapped up in the old regional order. As a result, at a moment of unprecedented regional change, when people power and democracy is sweeping the Middle East, the Turks look timorous, maladroit, and diminished—not at all the regional leader to which Ankara has aspired.[65]

Like Cook, other analysts do not foresee Turkish leadership in the Arab world to be long term. Salem argues that Turkish foreign policy in the region had not translated the effective image Turkey has in the region into actual foreign policy strength or influence in the region.[66] In other words, the Turkish position is high on rhetoric and low on actions.

This idealistic or liberal turn in Turkish foreign policy may change as the hard security realities test the AKP's concept of 'Zero Problems with its Neighbours', a possibility that is being debated in the country.[67] The Arab uprisings have brought a 'sense of urgency' to the Turkish foreign ministry, which felt that its 'newfound prestige' needed to be accompanied by increased soft power.[68] Under the 2012 re-elected AKP Turkish diplomats are calling the government's new foreign policy strategy an 'active deepening'.[69] This new 'proactive approach to foreign policy is bent on making Turkey a beacon for a region in which century-old regimes are crumbling and political structures are in a profound state of flux'.[70] So it appears that the Turkish response to increased security pressures has been to intensify the soft power elements of its foreign policy strategy. This, however, might be short-lived when referring to the thorny issue of Kurdish independence.

In theory the more confident Turkish policy toward its neighbours is also meant to apply to the Kurdish question, where Turkey was less worried by Kurdish cultural demands insofar as Kurdish groups did not undermine the integrity

of Turkish state.[71] Indeed a neo-Ottoman view of Turkey is one that has come to terms with its multicultural past and present.[72] However, what will be made of the fact that there is also a 'Kurdish Spring'? In Northeast Syria there is *de facto* Kurdish autonomy as a result of the retreat of te Syrian army and this has raised Kurdish aspirations for autonomy that will probably transfer into Turkish territory.[73] This might be the most significant fault-line in Turkey's 'active deepening' approach. Moreover, by emphasising idealist notions of soft power, the new Turkish political elite have undermined the military establishment that had historically been, and some argue still is , allied to the old Kemalist political elite.[74]

The AKP tension with the military brass is an enduring legacy of the security establishment's great suspicion of Islamist movements and its ardent support of Kemalist views on secularism. The AKP has clashed with the military establishment, specifically in 2010, when the Turkish government accused a number of army generals of planning a 2003 political crisis. This served to sow chaos and then a *coup d'état*, or the 'Sledgehammer Coup', when the newly elected AKP refused to support the US invasion of Iraq. The military generals have denied planning an attempted coup, but the military has historically carried out coups against civilian governments in 1960, 1971 and 1980. The AKP's predecessor, the Islamist Welfare Party, was also nudged out of civilian politics by the military in 1997 for having an overtly Islamist agenda. The military–government tensions in Turkey remain strong. The idealism and soft power approach of the AKP may indeed clash with vested securitisation interests of the Turkish military establishment. Again, the most powerful thorn in the side of the Turkish military is the Kurdish separatist group, often labelled a terrorist organisation: the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK).

Turkey has relied on its soft power approach with the government of the Kurdish region of Iraq to mollify the PKK. In essence Turkey has been the prime investor of upwards of $5billion into the Iraqi Kurdish region in 2008 in the hope of charting an alternative, third way to militarised Turkish–Kurdish relations.[75] But just as the Turks were surprised to see the limits of soft power influence in changing hard power realities in the case of Assad and Syria, the Turkish government may find Turkey's alliance with Iraqi Kurdish region President Massoud Barzani to be short-lived. The Kurdish spring may ignite long-held aspirations for Kurdish autonomy and support for the PKK, a watershed moment that Barzani cannot or will not hold back.

In a contrast to sceptics of Turkish longevity as a regional hegemon, Aras and Akarcesme argue that, to understand Turkish leadership and hegemony in the Middle East, it needs to be seen in the context of declining US hegemony in the region and the globe. The rise of civilian governments in Turkey and Egypt has further diminished the USA's two key security triangles in the region that both involved Israel.[76] Without the close military ties to the Egyptian and Turkish brass, US influence in the region will continue to be undermined. One must point out, however, that the USA has fostered a close relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood and, given the similarity in economic orientation, this is likely to continue.

Nevertheless, as global economic power continues to shift from the 'West to the rest', Turkish leadership may continue to find opportunities in a region that is hungry for economic prowess.[77] Turkish influence in the Middle East is likely to deepen and strengthen as the 'Zero Problems with Neighbours' policy enters its second phase, when Turkey will press for stronger humanitarian and normative considerations in the Middle East.[78] Where the first version of the policy was about 'dialogue with regional leaders', the second version will involve 'support for the will of the people'.[79] Some might argue that this shift from supporting leaders like Bashar al-Assad in the first version of the policy to support for the general Arab people's collective will is essentially going to guarantee the longevity of Turkish foreign policy. It is, however, Turkey's economic involvement in the region that is arguably the most interesting and holds the most promise of amplifying its role. From involvement in the Mashreq to investment and partnership in the Arabian Peninsula, Turkey is brandishing economic influence.

Saudi Arabia

The closing pages of the so-called Arab Spring remain unturned. Indeed, it is much too soon to either interpret the impact of the uprisings that began to sweep the Arab world in 2011 or to predict their ultimate outcomes. From the outset, however, the revolutionary spirit that swept the region has unsettled Saudi Arabia. While it has not experienced widespread domestic threats, its responses both domestically and regionally indicate that it is shaken. Moreover, they have been consistent with the claim that domestic stability and security are at the crux of Saudi foreign policy ambitions. Regional uncertainty, changes in US–Iran relations and regional soft power competitors like Qatar and the newly Muslim Brotherhood-led Egypt each pose a challenge to the longevity of its prominence in the region.

In many regards one can expect that, if the Saudi state successfully manages this time of regional political transition, its role in the region is likely to remain just as prominent. The risk of domestic revolution in Saudi, some argue, is higher than it may look from the outside. It suffers from many similar socioeconomic challenges to its neighbours, including a population of young people, with equally high unemployment and virtually no genuine political representation.[80] Domestic upheaval would comprise a significant game changer, not just in terms of regional influence, but also of regional security and US–MENA relations. Although unlikely in the near future, Bruce Riedel's recent hypothetical security briefing provides one possible scenario for just such an event.[81]

As noted, however, there are regional challengers to its role. Turkey, of course, is an expected contender. Yet, since 2005, and even more so since the onset of the uprisings, this relationship has been marked more by engagement and, some suggest, strategic partnership than by competition.[82] Egypt, which especially in earlier decades played a strong role in shaping the region, seemed likely to regain some prominence. Further, a new Muslim Brotherhood-led Egypt also promised some ideological competition to Saudi Arabia. Egypt's new democratically elected president, Muhammad Morsi, had an early day in

the sun after brokering a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza strip in November 2012.[83] That victory was short lived, however, and internal turmoil has since taken prominence. So far, it seems that any impact from Egypt remains limited to revolutionary fervour. As long as the current government continues to face such domestic instability, it remains likely to be focused internally.

In fact, it is Qatar that has risen to the forefront of foreign policy competition with Saudi Arabia. Its disaffection with Saudi Arabia has extended for some time, but reached an especially low point in the mid-1990s, when Saudi Arabia was accused of orchestrating an attempted counter-coup against Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa, who had unseated his father the year before. Several other diplomatic quarrels transpired over the decade, including a row over a gas pipeline. Relations, which finally began warming in 2007, have faced revived tensions since the eruption of the uprisings across the region. Qatar played a highly visible role in the Libyan intervention and continues to play a more prominent role in Syria. Qatar was much more vocal than Saudi Arabia in its opposition to Gaddafi and even contributed military support. More crucially it was not only in Libya that Qatar championed the revolutions.[84] Its support, either via the high visibility it gave the revolutions through its channel Al Jazeera, or through monetary, diplomatic or military aid, put it at odds with the Saudi line, which favoured the status quo. Saudi was particularly aghast at Qatar's audacity when it released a short documentary, 'Shouting in the Dark', on the Bahrain crackdown. This was quickly quieted however, and Al Jazeera coverage of Bahrain remained scarce.

Qatar's support of the transitions in the region has continued to irk the Saudis. In addition, its competition as a regional mediator is pushing into traditionally Saudi diplomatic territory.[85] The highest point of contention between Saudi Arabia and Qatar currently, however, is their incongruent stands on the Muslim Brotherhood. Saudi Arabia has long had a poor relationship with the Brotherhood, one example of which was the Brotherhood's support of Saddam Hussein during the 1990 to 1991 Gulf war. Qatar, on the other hand, holds favourable views of the Brotherhood and has recently been bolstering its positions throughout the region. Some argue, in fact, that this is leading to the de-legitimisation of the Qatari role in the region. Instead of just championing transition or serving as a neutral mediator, it is supporting the political parties of the Muslim Brotherhood and appreciably interpolating itself in Egyptian, Libyan and Syrian politics.[86] There is something to this argument. If the Muslim Brotherhood fares poorly in politics, Qatar will lose much of its influence, possibly allowing Saudi Arabia to retain or regain its footing.

Perhaps unsurprisingly Saudi's hegemony (or aspiration to hegemony) in the Arabian Peninsula is met with resentment and resistance from other GCC rulers and Yemen. Even the country's attempt to push through a GCC political union was overwhelmingly opposed, with the natural exception of Bahrain. If King Abdullah expected agreement when he requested that the GCC 'move from a phase of cooperation to a phase of union within a single entity' in December 2011, he met wild disappointment.[87] Even rationalising that the GCC countries' 'security and stability are threatened' did not motivate agreement at the May

2012 GCC meeting. Instead, a decision was pushed to December 2012 and then subsequently taken off the agenda.[88] In the words of Yousef bin Alawi, Oman's minister of foreign affairs, 'There is no Gulf union'.[89]

Saudi Arabia continues to flag the Iranian threat, both in its involvements in the Gulf and wider MENA and in its relations with the USA. In fact, geostrategic positioning against Iran and its utilisation of sectarianism to divide and suppress unrest at home and nearby is largely based around a perceived Iranian, and Shia, threat. An unlikely thawing of US–Iran relations in Obama's second term has the potential to complicate these strategies.

Concern with Iran, with the political rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, and with the emergence of Qatar as a global player are all interrupting the position Saudi Arabia has fashioned for itself. Its importance to commodity markets, of course, promises continued international consequence. More significantly, perhaps, the Arab Awakening represents an ideological challenge to legitimacy in Saudi Arabia, arguably stronger than was felt previously in the rise of pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism. Its traditional responses to threats, utilising a mixture of resources, religion and force, may be the Achilles' heel of the longevity of its foreign policy strategies. Although it has long practised utilising financial resources, such as patronage internally and regionally, increasing subsidies and the expansion of government jobs, the size of past expenditure to this end 'pales in comparison' with that decreed in February and March 2011 alone.[90] Its exercises in containment, coercion and co-option threaten its long-term fiscal sustainability which, in turn, could heighten potential future instability.

Conclusion

The cases of Turkish and Saudi foreign policy strategies provide interesting insights into how emerging powers conduct foreign policy under conditions of uncertainty. Economic clout forms a strong backbone to the prominence of each. In addition, it is evident that the foreign policy behaviours of either one cannot be disaggregated from internal politics. The motivations behind the actors they support and mechanisms they use to support these actors are perhaps most telling. Where Turkish strategies may be more intrepid as Turkey tries to re-carve a space for itself in the wider MENA, Saudi Arabia seeks to consolidate its position. Using the tools of ideology and symbolism along with patronage and diplomacy, both Saudi Arabia and Turkey are doing a precarious dance to find and retain space in a rapidly changing region.

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Notes on Contributors

Crystal A Ennis is a PhD candidate, Global Governance and International Political Economy, at the University of Waterloo. With a regional focus on the Arabian peninsula, Crystal's research expertise centres on development, innovation, and entrepreneurship. Prior to beginning her doctorate, she worked in academic planning at York University, was a research associate for the Jerusalem Old City Initiative, and served as a lecturer and inaugural head of the Business Studies Program at Shinas College of Technology in Oman. As well, Crystal has worked on a CIDA-funded good governance project in Egypt with the United Group for Democratic Development.

Bessma Momani is Associate Professor at the University of Waterloo's Balsillie School of International Affairs and a Fellow at Brookings Institution and the Centre for International Governance and Innovation. She is a Fulbright Scholar and former visiting scholar at Amman Institute and Georgetown University's Mortara Center. The author and editor of 7 books and over 45 academic journal articles and book chapters, her work examines the intersection between international economics, the Middle East, and international politics. Her most recent edited volume is entitled *Targeted Transnationals: The State, the Media, and Arab Canadians* by UBC Press (2013).