Turkish Foreign Policy towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings (December 2010 to July 2018): A Neoclassical Realist Account

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Turkish Foreign Policy towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings (December 2010 to July 2018): A Neoclassical Realist Account

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ABSTRACT

With the outbreak of the Arab Uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa at the end of 2010, regional and global state actors, including Turkey and Iran, sought to shape and manage these political and social phenomena in alignment with their regional interests and objectives. Although Turkey's foreign policy towards Iran was initially tense, it later became more manageable due to specific unit-level factors. In this context, the Arab Uprisings offer the historical context by which to assess how Turkish Foreign Policy (TFP) towards Iran was shaped and conducted. This thesis explores the rationale behind TFP towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings by asking two central questions:

1. *To what extent did structural forces shape the formulation of Turkish foreign policy towards Iran following the Arab Uprisings, from December 2010–July 2018?*
2. *How did unit-level (domestic) factors interact with structural imperatives in shaping Turkish foreign policy towards Iran following the Arab Uprisings, from December 2010–July 2018?*

Consequently, the thesis uses the perception and domestic security and economic considerations of the AKP elites as intervening variables to clarify the cause-effect relationship between systemic changes and the relative power position of Turkey (as independent variables) to examine the TFP towards Iran (the dependent variable) in the short to medium term. In this regard, NCR provides a useful theoretical framework for the intervening variables to explain the causal link between independent and dependent variables. Schweller's balance of interest theory also helps explain Turkey's alliance choice with Iran, considering Turkey's economic and security considerations. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of TFP and TFP towards Iran in particular by establishing a conceptual framework through the use of NCR while also providing fresh insights concerning the key variables connected to foreign relations and domestic politics in TFP towards Iran. In short, the empirical goal of this work is to provide an innovative contribution to the study of TFP from a theory-driven standpoint. As a result, this thesis provides a solid foundation for scholars to build on and use NCR in future research

that explores the actions of state actors facing seismic regional shifts and new security challenges.

DECLARATION

The work in this thesis based on research carried out at the School of Government and International Affairs, Durham University, United Kingdom. No part of this thesis has been submitted elsewhere for any other degree or qualification and it is all my own work unless referenced to the contrary in the text.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AKP	Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi)
AQI	Al-Qaeda in Iraq
ASALA	Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia
BCM	Billion Cubic Meters
BOTAS	Petroleum Pipeline Corporation
BPD	Barrels Per Day
CENTO	Central Treaty Organisation
CHP	Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi)
CR	Classical Realism
ECO	Economic Cooperation Council
EU	European Union
FETO	Fethullahist Terror Organisation (Fethullahci Teror Orgutu)
FSA	Free Syrian Army
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
HDP	People's Democratic Party (Halklarin Demokratik Partisi)
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
ISI	Islamic State in Iraq
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (Daesh, Islamic State)
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KNC	Kurdish National Council
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq (Iraqi Kurdistan)
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
MB	Muslim Brotherhood
MIT	Turkey's National Intelligence Organisation (Milli Istihbarat Teskilati)
MHP	Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetci Hareket Partisi)
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NCR	Neoclassical Realism
NPT	Non-Proliferation Treaty
NR	Neorealism

OIC	Organisation of the Islamic Conference
PJAK	Kurdistan Free Life Party (Prtiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistane)
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistane, Kurdistan Isci Partisi)
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organisation
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
PYD	Democratic Union Party (Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat)
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SNC	Syrian National Council
TFP	Turkish Foreign Policy
TIKA	Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (Turk Isbirligi ve Koordinasyon Idaresi Baskanligi)
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	United States (United States of America)
USD	United States Dollar
YPG	People's Protection Units (People's Defense Units, Yekineyen Parastina Gel)

Dedicated To my lovely sons,

Kerem Bera Akcay - Erdem Uraz Akcay

"When Turkey sneezes, Iran catches a cold."

Mohammed Reza Pahlavi-the Last Shah of Iran

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

According to Ray Hinnebusch (2002, 1), the Middle East is a chaotic regional subsystem with a high level of conflict and state rivalry. This region was hit by yet another powerful political and social phenomenon in December 2010, exacerbating tensions within the exiting regional order. The Arab Uprisings (also called the Arab Spring or Arab Awakening) broke out across the Middle East and North Africa, significantly influencing regional politics as autocratic regimes faced a wave of protests demanding political and economic change. These waves began to threaten the existence of the ruling regimes, first in Tunisia and then in other authoritarian regimes, thus altering the political landscape of the region. The Middle East became the centre of international and regional politics and attracted the attention of both regional and international state actors, once again. All these state actors, including Turkey and Iran, sought to shape and manage the developments of this political and social phenomena, in alignment with their regional interests and objectives. As two of the three pivotal non-Arab state actors in the Middle East (the other is Israel) Turkey and Iran viewed the uprisings as an opportunity to fulfil their regional interests and aims by influencing regional politics. The Arab Uprisings, therefore, offer the historical context by which to assess how Turkey conducted foreign policy towards Iran.

Turkey has historically had a roller coaster relationship with Iran. While its economic ties exert influence over its relations with Iran, Turkey has sometimes had a competitive relationship with Iran due to conflicting interests and ideas. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, for instance, Turkey competed with Iran to influence the then newly independent Central Asian states. Both countries hoped to establish close ties with these countries to develop their regional interests. Given Turkey's cautious ties with Iran, the Arab Uprisings recast Turkey's policies towards Iran by causing political and security shifts in the regional system.

Middle East politics represents a "primitive anarchic order" with a low level of institutionalization in terms of state norms and rules, with autonomous regional dynamics (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 187; Hinnebusch and Ehteshami 1997, 13). From the outset of the

Arab Uprisings, the international community experienced another systemic change following the 9/11 attacks and the US-led operations in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. In such an environment, the already anarchic regional politics accelerated and reshaped "political systems, national interests, alliances and rivalries" (Amour 2017, 1). As such, Turkey had to readjust its foreign policies towards the Middle East in general, and Iran in particular.

Following the uprisings and despite initial hesitation, Turkey sought to strengthen its power and enhance its security, economic, and political interests. First, Turkey used its soft power to achieve these goals by presenting itself as a model Islamic, democratic, and economically prosperous government. In other words, its political and economic success in international politics promoted Turkey's self-view as a role model in the post-Arab Uprisings era (Ennis and Momani 2013, 1128), and so it followed an active foreign policy in the wake of the uprisings. Likewise, Iran aimed to utilise the anarchic state of politics to increase its regional position and thus welcomed the uprisings as a movement which would transform the Arab world (Turhan and Yorulmazlar 2018, 110). Consequently, the geopolitical vacuum resulted in renewed competition between Turkey and Iran over regional hegemony and leadership in the Muslim world (Murinson 2012, 22). More precisely, the two countries attempted to influence the regional balance of power due to their similar relative power position in the regional structure following to the uprisings.

Despite their rivalry, Turkey was sometimes forced to establish practical cooperation with Iran due to the significant consequences of the Arab Uprisings, including the empowerment of non-state armed actors. With the rise of non-state armed actors, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the Democratic Union Party (PYD), Turkey chose a pragmatic and short-term collaboration with Iran over national security concerns. Economic considerations also forced Ankara to establish close ties with Tehran. While losing its authoritarian economic allies and having financial issues, Ankara hoped to establish closer economic cooperation with Iran, and so followed an interest-driven foreign policy towards it. Bearing in mind Turkey's these ambivalent foreign policies towards Iran from December 2010 to July 2018, this thesis explores and explains how Turkey's relative power position in the systemic shifts and domestic factors shaped the formation and implementation of TFP towards Iran, and how domestic factors played an intervening role between Turkey's relative power position and its foreign policy towards Iran in the short-to-medium term. Neoclassical realism (NCR) is adopted as the theoretical framework since NCR incorporates both systemic and

domestic factors in the explanation of a state's foreign policy. However, first, in this introductory chapter, the research aims, and objectives are defined, and an overview of the research methods and thesis structure is presented.

1.1 Research Objective and Significance

According to Barry Buzan (2003, 141), a region refers to a "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." Al Tamamy (2014, 206) further argues that "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." Instead of a specific regional hegemon, therefore, rival regional powers play a significant role in the Middle Eastern politics. In this regard, middle/regional state powers (Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Israel) "project influence, exert pressure and try and drive agendas which are of direct interest to them. Some work together, sometimes, but they did not have any meaningful strategic partnerships with each other" (Ehteshami 2014, 36). This demonstrates that Turkey and Iran, non-Arab regional powers and two neighbouring states, are among the units which are sensitive to regional power shifts because they want to expand their respective spheres of influence. This situation further provides a critical understanding of their amity and enmity towards each other.

With the onset of the Arab Uprisings in December 2010, the Middle East experienced significant shifts at a sub-systemic level. Many authoritarian regimes were toppled, such as in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen, and many-faced domestic revolution, such as Syria and Bahrain, while numerous non-state armed groups used the political chaos to increase their power and influence in the post-uprisings' era. Many external and regional state actors, moreover, were confronted with a decrease in their power and influence in the region. Turkey's and Iran's regional actions drew attention in such an anarchic regional arena since they influenced the uprisings' progress as two prominent regional state powers. Following the uprisings, Ankara and Tehran first followed an interest-maximisation policy, through which Turkey first viewed Iran as a competitor. As a regional middle power, Turkey aimed to increase its relative power position by exploiting the underlying power vacuum; however, taking relative power as the sole consideration fails to explain TFP towards Iran fully. Indeed, domestic factors, including the AKP elites' perception and domestic security and economic

considerations, also played an influential role in shaping TFP towards Iran from December 2010 to July 2018 because these factors hampered the acceleration of Turkey's competitive perspective on Iran. Such a rapid shift in TFP towards Iran while still being governed by the same party is unusual and led to an intriguing enigma. The period of December 2010 to July 2018 has been chosen for this study because the Arab Uprisings started in December 2010, and Turkey officially adopted new political system by switching from a parliamentary system to a Turkish type of presidential system, in which the role of parliament decreased while the role of President increased, in July 2018. In this regard, this thesis accepts the influence of both systemic and domestic levels on TFP towards Iran, and the central questions of this research are as follows:

1. *To what extent did structural forces shape the formulation of Turkish foreign policy towards Iran following the Arab Uprisings, from December 2010–July 2018?*

2. *How did unit-level (domestic) factors interact with structural imperatives in shaping Turkish foreign policy towards Iran following the Arab Uprisings, from December 2010–July 2018?*

This thesis utilises NCR and explores the causal relationship between the independent (system level) and intervening (domestic level) variables vis-à-vis the dependent variable (foreign policy behaviour). Through a careful examination and analysis of these different variables, the thesis argues that international power relations and, most importantly, Turkey's relative power played a significant role in shaping TFP towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings, from December 2010 to July 2018. The thesis also explores the intervening role of domestic variables in shaping TFP towards Iran in the same period, based on the literature on TFP and the aims of this study. The thesis first categorises the AKP elites' perception as an intervening variable because the governing AKP party has conducted Turkish foreign policy since 2002 and, therefore, its leaders and founders have political power and influence in Turkey. The next selected intervening variable concerning the analysis of TFP towards Iran is Turkey's domestic security and economic considerations; this aligns with Schweller's balance of interest theory, which argues that states may ally with other states because of their interests and potential profit. As such, domestic considerations (security and economic considerations) and the AKP elites' perceptions were the most significant variables, among other internal factors, in producing a more reliable and credible analysis of TFP towards Iran. Additionally, the Syrian conflict and

the politics of Kurdistan Region of Iraq were chosen as case studies since they mediate fluctuations in TFP towards Iran. In these cases, Turkey pursued short-term pragmatic and interest-driven collaboration with Iran, although their interests and aims conflicted for the longer term. Bearing in mind that TFP towards Iran provides a useful case study for understanding Turkey's wider foreign policy since the Arab Uprisings, this thesis also addresses the following sub-questions as part of its theoretical framework:

1. *Did Turkey cooperate with its western allies or turn away from them over its relations with Iran from December 2010 to July 2018?*
2. *Did Turkey follow a value- or interest-driven foreign policy from December 2010 to July 2018?*
3. *How did Turkey's relative power position and the analysis of the AKP elite's perceptions and domestic motivations of Turkey shape TFP towards Iran in the Syrian Conflict and the politics of Kurdistan Region of Iraq from December 2010 to July 2018?*

Overall, this thesis provides a specific and detailed analysis of TFP towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings, from December 2010 to July 2018. It does not solely attribute TFP decisions to external factors; rather, it adopts a comprehensive approach by exploring the role of different aspects or levels in shaping TFP. More precisely, this thesis is the first attempt to identify links between the independent, intervening, and dependent variables in the formation and implementation of TFP towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings using NCR as a framework. In doing so, the thesis aims to improve the disciplinary knowledge of TFP towards Iran and establish a foundation for future researchers to build on the current literature regarding TFP towards Iran, because previous studies have mainly concentrated on describing their bilateral affairs. Therefore, they have not fully investigated all the possible variables and factors that improve understanding of TFP towards Iran. By assessing and evaluating previous studies and applying a theoretical framework, the thesis aims to undertake a multidimensional research approach to the investigation of TFP towards Iran, and in so doing, develop a more comprehensive study.

1.2 Literature Review

This section broadly reviews the literature on TFP, TFP towards the Middle East, and TFP towards Iran, and aims to assess and evaluate the plausibility of the available competing

paradigms in the literature. In this regard, this section engages with the ongoing debates and extracts information that can help answer and develop the central research question. Therefore, the materials chosen in this review were selected for their relevance and potential contribution to this thesis. Overall, this literature review critiques the wider narrative on TFP towards Iran and demonstrates how the outcome of this thesis will fit into the wider academic discourse.

1.2.1 Turkish Foreign Policy

The literature on Turkish foreign policy (TFP) is vast, and researchers have approached it from diverse angles. According to Philip Robins (2007), interest in TFP increased after the 1990s when Turkey was actively involved in systemic changes, such as the collapse of the Soviet Union, the first Gulf War (1990–1991), NATO and EU enlargement. Hale (2012) coupled a detailed historical examination of TFP with a presentation of how medium-sized power has functioned in the international context. He examined Turkish foreign policy historically from the late Ottoman period (1774) to the emergence of the AKP in power (2002). Bilgin (2009) also explores the role of Turkey's security concerns on its foreign policy behaviour since 1920s. According to her (2009, 121), "Turkey's western-oriented Foreign Policy…was a crucial aspect of its search for security in the face of a European/International Society that had, in the past, refused equal treatment to the Ottoman Empire. At the time, the Foreign Policy of locating Turkey in the West allowed the founding leaders to claim the right to be treated equally and with respect." In other words, at the outset of the republic, Turkey aimed to join the Western alliance. Similarly, Tur and Han (2011, 11) pointed out Turkey's security-oriented foreign policy, stating that "it is hard to draw a clear line between TFP and security policy especially until the late 1990s." Deringil (1989), Aydin (2006) and Sayari (2000) also defines the determinants of Turkish foreign policy till the end of Cold War, from a structural perspective.

Other scholars proposed different arguments regarding TFP after the 1990s. Robins (2003, 159) focuses on the role of international system and the domestic motivations behind TFP mostly in the 1990s, arguing that "ideology is at least as important as geopolitics in the formulation and pursuit of Turkish foreign policy." Therefore, different political and/or religious identities have an influential role in shaping TFP. Bozdaglioglu (2004) further uses a constructivist approach to define TFP, suggesting that "Turkish foreign policy clearly depends on the distribution of power between Secularists and Islamists." When the Islamic-rooted AKP came to power as a single ruling party in 2001, the role of identity became

increasingly influential in the study of TFP. Robins (2007) pointed out that "a cooperative cohabitation" between the "Islamist-rooted AKP" and the "Kemalist" state apparatus was reflected in TFP across several areas, including Turkish-EU relations, the 2003 Iraqi war. Kosebalaban (2011) examined TFP from 1923 to 2011 through the prism of identity politics, highlighting that the ideological rivalry between the secular vs. Islamist and nationalist vs. liberal groups in Turkish domestic politics influenced TFP. Onis (2011, 57) further asserts that "the AKP leadership has been particularly effective in using pro-active foreign policy as a tool for projecting its 'globalist' and progressive image and thereby gaining advantage over its principal 'defensive nationalist rivals', the CHP and the MHP."

However, identity and ideology had limited influence on the first years of TFP under the AKP government because the AKP elites refrained from following identity and ideological foreign policies. Instead, emphasis was placed on Turkey's diplomacy-oriented and multi-dimensional realist foreign policy. The beginning of the AKP rule in Turkey coincided with significant structural developments, such as the 9/11 attacks, the US intervention in the Middle East, and the 2001 global financial recession. Therefore, scholars focused more on Turkey's realpolitik and multidimensional foreign policy rather than identity politics. Dikici-Bilgin (2008, 408) noted that "the domestic pro-Islamist rhetoric of political parties might not necessarily transform into policies. Once in power, they are subject to rationalist cost-benefit calculations and moderation." Oguzlu (2007) focused on external and internal factors, such as the Western dimension and desecuritisation, on the rise of Turkey's soft power. He (2010, 658) even read the Europeanization process of TFP as a matter of "realpolitik security considerations." Kanat (2010) claims that new realities of a multi-polar world and Turkey's domestic factors encourage Ankara to follow a multidimensional foreign policy. Turkey thus aimed for a more "autonomous, self-regulating, and self-confident foreign policy." Kirisci (2009) further stated that Ankara's interest in Turkey's foreign policy stemmed from the country's desire to become a trading power. Similarly, Kutlay (2011) highlighted the impact of the 2001 economic crisis on Turkish domestic and foreign policies. Since a state's foreign policy is also dependent on state leaders' perception, some scholars also argued for the role of individuals on Turkey's multidimensional foreign policy to be taken into account. Aras and Gorener (2010, 90) suggested that "AKP foreign policy-makers, led by Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, have envisioned Turkey as holding multiple roles in world politics, whereas these were previously thought of as incompatible". Accordingly, Turkey under the AKP governments sought to establish cordial affairs with a variety of countries in different regions.

In other words, Ankara actively focused on different regional politics. This perception resulted in the shift of TFP from passive stance to active involvement in international politics.

Nevertheless, the literature on TFP started to involve "axis shift" arguments when Turkey's EU process was interrupted in 2005 due to the suspension of key chapters in membership negotiations and Turkey's subsequent pivot away from the EU and towards the Middle East. The next subsection thus focuses on the literature on TFP under the AKP toward the Middle East.

1.2.2 Turkish Foreign Policy towards the Middle East

The number of studies focusing on TFP towards the Middle East has increased following the AKP shift towards an active and diplomacy-oriented foreign policy towards the Middle East. This stands in contrast to previous Turkish governments. In parallel to Turkey's EU accession process, scholars highlighted the role of Turkey's EU membership process on TFP towards the Middle East. According to Ozcan (2016), Turkey's application for EU membership influenced its Middle Eastern foreign policy and Turkey attempted to work with the EU on regional concerns. Bac and Gursoy (2010) further highlight the role of EU membership process in TFP towards Iraq and Syria by stating that the Europeanization of TFP culminated in the increase of diplomatic and economic tools in shaping TFP towards both Iraq and Syria despite their conflicts being mostly related to Turkey's Kurdish issue.

Following the suspension of key chapters in Turkey's EU membership negotiations, the impact of Turkey's ties with its Western allies on policy towards the Middle East remained significant in the literature. According to Terzi (2016, 2), "It is crucial to notice that the changes of policy towards the Middle Eastern countries are loosely linked with Turkey's relations with the West in general, and with the EU in particular." Onis and Yilmaz (2009) further analysed the loss of Turkey's enthusiasm toward the EU membership due to bilateral issues. Notably, the divergence regarding the Cyprus issue resulted in Turkey's disappointment towards the EU's decision and policies when Turkey's negotiation process was partially suspended after Turkey's refusal to open its ports to vessels from the Republic of Cyprus. As a result, the Turkish elites assumed that the EU was using the Cyprus dispute as a "tool of exclusion" to stymie Turkey's EU accession process (Onis and Yilmaz 2009, 15).

On the other hand, most analysts saw TFP's policy toward the Middle East as a means of improving and deepening relations with its Western allies. According to Öniş (2011) and Altunışık (2009), Turkey's EU accession process still maintained its importance for TFP despite a period of deadlock. Therefore, Turkey's role in the Middle East did not undermine its relationship with the EU. Rather, the AKP sought to demonstrate Turkey's future influential role in the EU as a significant regional power. In his book called *Strategic Depth: Turkey's International Position,* Davutoglu (2001) uses a bow and arrow metaphor to define TFP, representing Turkey as the arrow and foreign policy as the bow. According to him, the closer Turkey gets to the Caucasus and the Middle East, the faster it will be admitted to the EU.

Other analysts pointed out that Turkey's domestic political and economic developments based on its democratisation process led Ankara to strengthen bilateral ties with Middle Eastern countries. Kardas (2010, 116) argued that "Turkey's new geopolitical alignment is a result of a process that predates the JDP [AKP]'s rise to power and has its own unique dynamics". Aras and Toktas (2010, 2) further focused on the significance of domestic politics, suggesting that "Turkey contribut[ing] to peace and stability in the neighbouring regions with the self-confidence gained through democratization and de-securitization at home." In a similar vein, Aras (2009, 30) noted that "in this environment of pluralism in foreign policy-making, Turkey has acquired a new foreign policy identity, which led to the emergence of a self- confident, multi- dimensional and dynamic foreign policy approach." Tur (2011) argued that the strengthening of Turkey's economic ties with the area resulted from changes in the Turkish economy and the AKP's election to office. Therefore, Turkey's growing role as a mediator, according to these analysts, is related to its new foreign policy stance and domestic changes. Dagi (2008) pointed out that most Middle Eastern states had few concerns regarding Turkey's "new regional activism" due to Turkey's increasing regional soft power policies. Danforth (2008, 83) also noted that "Atatürk's disengagement from the Middle East and the AKP's re-engagement with the region were both practical responses to strategic realities."

With the beginning of the uprisings in December 2010, TFP towards Middle East increased its significance among scholars due to Turkey's active roles following the uprisings. At the beginning of the Arab Uprisings, many academics and scholars defined TFP as a value based because Ankara advocated liberal-oriented principles of democracy and human rights and acted as a strategic mediator between the various sides involved in the Arab Uprising countries, including western and Middle Eastern countries (Akgün, Perçinoğlu, and Senyücel

Gündoğar 2012, 19–24; Altunışık 2011, 3). Ahmet Davutoglu (2013, 5–6), then the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, noted that Turkey endorsed peaceful democratic change in the region by saying that "the leaders are temporary and the people are eternal [and] the flow of history is on the side of the masses that have demanded their rights in the Middle East". Similarly, Ayata (2015) highlighted that Turkey followed a value and identity-based domestic-driven foreign policy to consolidate itself as a regional power in the light of the Arab Uprisings. Ipek (2015) and Yesiltas (2013) further posited that Turkey adopted a soft power policy under an identity-based discourse and efforts centred on public diplomacy. Therefore, Ankara's initial foreign policy approach to the uprisings was considered by most observers to be liberal and humanitarian.

Although Turkey initially demonstrated a value-based humanitarian policy towards the uprisings, the primary motivation behind Turkey's regional policies remained self-interest. Murinson (2012, 17) argued that Turkey developed its foreign policy according to its "national self-interest and economic interests, not the promotion of democracy". He used Turkey's support for military intervention in Bahrain to quell Shi'ite opposition protesters as an example to support his observation. Onis (2012) added that Turkey was stuck between ethics and self-interest given its previous close relations with the authoritarian regimes across the Middle East, including Syria. Kosebalaban (2011, 93–112) similarly argued that Turkey utilised idealistic views to maximise its national interests, which means that its apparent liberal foreign policy really masked calculations of national interest rather than any idealist views. Altunisik (2014) further posited that the concept of "humanitarian diplomacy" was used by Turkey to justify its involvement in the uprisings. As such, Ankara sought to justify its relative power position following the Arab Uprisings, and notably demonstrated more interest-driven policies, although Turkish policymakers were quick to deny the centrality of national-interests as the driver of their actions. In particular, Turkey's approach towards the uprisings in Egypt and Syria highlighted the dominance of interest-driven policies on TFP when Turkey was prepared to embrace sectarian policies to increase its relative power position both during and after the uprisings.

Accordingly, Çuhadar et al. (2020), Aras and Gorener (2010, 81), Gurzel (2014, 98–99), and Sula (2018, 255–56) analysed the discourse of the Turkish policymakers, stating that Ankara played numerous roles towards the uprisings, including being a 'natural leader' in the region, a historical 'big brother', and the 'protector of Muslim minorities'. Similarly, Ozdamar

et al. (2014, 93–102) examined Ankara's foreign policy roles following the uprisings, proposing that Turkey shifted its "soft power instruments to hard roles requiring material capabilities". For this reason, TFP towards the Middle East showed numerous role conceptions, such as 'a defender of regional peace and stability', 'a regional system collaborator', 'a trading state', 'a central/pivotal country', 'an active independent country', 'a developer', 'a protector of the oppressed' and 'a model/example country'. Ozdamar (2016, 94–95) purported that following its opposition to Israel's campaigns in Gaza in 2009 and again in 2014, the AKP sought to be a "regional leader, protector of the oppressed and leader of the Muslim world" to promote its "leadership and ties with populations across the region that was religiously and culturally close to the AKP electorate". Kara and Sozen (2016, 47–62) similarly pointed out that, to evaluate Turkey's position in international politics, the AKP elites defined Turkey as "a regional protector", "a mediator-integrator", "a developer", "a facilitator", "a rising power", and "a global-subsystem collaborator". For this reason, the AKP elite's perception of Turkey's relative power position and international politics has determined TFP towards the Middle East since the Arab Uprisings.

Kesgin (2020) notably analysed the effects of President Erdogan on TFP between March, 2003 and May 2013. According to him (2020, 65–70), Erdogan's religious views influenced his perceptions and pushed him towards following a more assertive foreign policy towards the uprisings. Arkan and Kinacioglu (2016, 383) also focused on Davutoglu's influence on TFP towards the Middle East, stating that "Davutoglu seeks a leadership role in the Muslim world for Turkey, framed by a desire to transform Turkey into a legitimate alternative power centre, as the leader and ultimate representative of a distinct civilisation". Baskan (2018) similarly analysed Davutoglu's discourse, illustrating "how Davutoglu's interpretation heavily borrows from the Islamist interpretive frame of modern Turkish history". Taspinar (2011) and Wastnidge (2019a) defined all role conceptions of TFP under the label of neo-Ottomanism. According to Taspinar (2011, 2), the AKP elites' neo-Ottoman tendencies are aimed at influencing politics across territories that were once part of the Ottoman Empire by using political, economic, and cultural soft power capabilities. Thanks to its secular, modern and Islamic identity, as well as its economic prosperity, the AKP elite aimed to promote Turkey as a role model for uprising countries (Ayata 2015; Çevik 2019). Dalay and Friedman (2013) further focused on Turkey's foreign policy in the Syrian conflict over the history of the AKP's foreign policy, they stated that it "is rooted in a tradition of both continuity and change vis-à-vis the AK Party's political Islamist predecessors, the Refah and Fazilet parties". Accordingly,

the values, motivations, failures, and lessons of the AKP's political forebears may help us understand recent TFP towards the Middle East under the AKP government. However, Turkey's soft power policy was exchanged for hard power especially in the Syrian conflict due to a development in its threat perception and the search for assertive and interventionist policies by Turkish foreign policymakers; this is discussed in the following chapters.

Another internal factor shaping TFP towards the Middle East in the light of the uprisings is the 'Kurdish issue.' With the rise of various Kurdish groups representing varied strands of Kurdish nationalism and separatism, the Kurdish issue re-emerged as a burning issue in Turkish domestic politics, being "securitised domestically and exported externally into regional politics" (P. Bilgin 2007; Polat 2008). In particular, due to the re-escalation of the conflict between the AKP government and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) following the collapse of a two-year ceasefire in 2015, the rise of the Kurdish groups in the region became a domestic issue for Turkey (Robins 2014, 318). In this regard, TFP experienced "a shift from foreign commercial activity to security considerations" (Lesser 2011, 3). Haugom (2019, 215) further evaluated the role of President Erdogan in TFP following the 2016 military coup attempt, but argued that national interests were more significant than ideology in shaping TFP towards the Middle East. As such, securitisation of foreign policy was the dominant aim, notably due to the Kurdish issue and the coup attempt. This thesis examines how TFP evolved towards promoting securitisation as an intervening variable shaping Turkey's policies towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings. This occurred because the AKP elite's threat perception of domestic and non-domestic Kurdish groups elevated the need for nationalist and security-based Turkish foreign policies. Following the rise of non-state Kurdish armed groups in northern Syria post-2013, Turkey's AKP governments have followed more interventionist foreign and domestic policies than were in existence before this date.

Nevertheless, Turkey's domestic factors are insufficient to fully understand TFP towards the Middle East between 2010 and 2018. The anarchic structure of the international system influenced TFP too. In this regard, Mclean (2015) analysed the role of systemic structure in shaping TFP. According to him (2015, 12), "in Turkey, external forces are highly instrumental in shaping private foreign policy responses, and that strategic adjustments are made relatively independent of domestic debates". Oğuzlu (2020, 127–28) also claimed "[TFP] since 2002 can be partially read as Turkey's effort to adapt to external developments at international and regional levels", indicating "how Turkey's responses to the external

developments at regional and systemic levels have largely agreed with structural realist expectations". As such, TFP changed alongside shifts in the systemic structure.

Yorulmazlar and Turhan (2015, 349) argued that the changing geopolitical environment forced Turkey to alter its foreign policy aims and tools. Turkey had to change its "strategic interconnector" position, separating its ties with the West and the Middle East. Notably, the Syrian conflict influenced Turkey's power position and capabilities in the region. Robins (2013, 397) posited that "the longer the Syrian imbroglio has continued, the less plausible has Turkish leadership appeared in the Middle East, let alone further afield". Ozpek and Demirag (2014) noted that the AKP's policy towards the Arab Uprising was based on the decisions of NATO countries in terms of military intervention and the restoration of the countries affected. Indeed, so long as Turkey persuaded NATO countries to intervene, its new foreign policy is viewed as successful, especially in Syria. These authors highlight the role of relations between Turkey and its western allies, especially concerning Syria. In this thesis, it is accepted that the systemic structure and external state powers played a significant role in Turkey's foreign policy behaviour since the Arab Uprisings. However, the thesis also addresses how Turkey failed to respond to the systemic changes arising from the Arab Uprisings.

Other scholars examined TFP towards the Middle East using a more theoretical framework. Parlar Dal (2015) addressed the role of ethics and morality in TFP using a 'normative international relations' approach, especially with regard to the Syrian conflict. She concluded that TFP had normative characteristics at the beginning of the conflict, but its normative aims could not be maintained due to its inability to obtain sufficient international and domestic support. In another study, Ozdamar (2016) studied Turkey's foreign policy towards the Middle East in the post-2009 period, with a 'role theory' approach. By analysing the agent-structure relationship, he proposed that the change in Turkish foreign policymakers' perception regarding Turkey's power and regional and international states led to an ambitious TFP towards the Middle East. Based on these sources, it can be stated that individual perceptions and identities shaped TFP to a certain extent.

However, merely considering the individual level provides insufficient analysis to explain TFP towards the Middle East since the Arab Uprisings. In this regard, Guner and Koc (2018) used a 'structural balance' approach to explore TFP in the Syrian conflict, arguing that the roles of the US and Russia in the trend toward Kurdish independence, and in the Syrian

conflict, played a significant part in Turkey's alignment choices. From 'constructivist and realist' approaches, Sadik (2012), Yalvaç (2014) and Kanat (2014) proposed that individual and systemic level factors played roles in TFP towards the Middle East. Kuru (2015) added that the government's policies toward the uprisings can be viewed via three levels of analysis. First, Erdogan attempted to apply the one-person rule at the individual level and used TFP toward the Middle East to manage his own internal constituency. Second, at the state level, Turkey was unable to become the engine of the Arab Uprisings owing to its insufficient military or diplomatic capacity. To explain this further, Kuru argued that Turkish domestic politics demonstrated that Turkish democracy remained frail, and its economy based largely on crony capitalism. Last, Turkish–Western relations deteriorated due to Erdogan's populist discourse and authoritarian policies at the international level, even though Turkey required the support of its NATO allies. Therefore, Kuru highlighted multi-level dimension of Turkey's foreign policy following the uprisings. This thesis is in alignment with these sources, positing that both systemic and domestic variables determined TFP, most notably since the Arab Uprisings. As such, the NCR perspective can be used to examine these variables comprehensively, and it is for this reason that some studies have sought to explain TFP via NCR.

Sönmez (2020), Yesilyurt (2017), and Kardas (2021) respectively explored Turkey's grand strategy making, the causes of Turkey's miscalculations, and Turkey's (re)securitisation policies in the Middle East since the Arab Uprisings. Sonmez evaluated the role of the AKP elite and domestic interest groups in shaping Turkey's grand strategy between 2002–2016. Yesilyurt proposed that the ideological tendencies of the AKP and its quest for consolidation of domestic power were intervening variables which paved the way for miscalculations in TFP. In a similar vein, Kardas took the prevailing security culture and domestic power configurations as the intervening variables that explained Ankara's cross-border operations in Syria and Iraq. Ovali and Özdikmenli (2019) analysed the role of nationalism and Islamism on anti-Western sentiments in TFP under NCR, comparing the Cyprus problem of the 1970s with the Syrian Civil War. Şahin et al. (2020) further addressed Turkey's response to Syrian mass migration and used "Turkey's relative power in the anarchic system" and "Turkey's foreign policy objective [of counteracting] the security threat from armed conflict in Syria" as independent variables, while also applying ideational drivers and domestic politics as intervening variables.

Given the literature regarding TFP towards the Middle East, the next subsection sheds light on the literature concerning TFP towards Iran.

1.2.3 Turkish Foreign Policy Towards Iran

Since the thesis historically covers TFP towards Iran since the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979, this subsection covers studies focusing on TFP towards Iran since 1979. The literature concerning the relations between Turkey-Iran relations after the Islamic Revolution has involved the role of 'ideology' as a key determinant in their relations. Due to the Iran's Islamic revolution and subsequent emergence of tensions between a theocratic Iran and secular Turkey, scholars started to analyse the domestic sources of foreign policy behaviours between the two countries. In this sense, an *Innenpolitik* approach gained more importance in the literature of Turkey-Iran relations.

Sinkaya (2005), Ozcan and Ozdamar (2010) examined the ideological tensions between two countries in the 1980s and 1990s due to the alleged role of Iran in the rise of radical Islamists in Turkey. Aras (2001) analyzed Turkish foreign policy toward post-revolutionary Iran by considering the domestic dynamics and examining Turkish politicians' attitudes toward the threat posed by Iran exporting its Islamist revolution to neighbouring countries. Aras and Polat (2008) emphasized the possibility of changing perceptions of Ankara and Tehran toward each other with the desecuritisation process of Kurdish and Islamist questions in Turkish politics. Sinkaya (2012) also noted that the fractious role of ideology in Turkey-Iran relations was replaced by more pragmatic calculations of each side in the 2000s such as trade interactions and security cooperation.

Various scholars further examined different aspects of Turkish-Iranian ties, such as economic collaboration as a significant determinant in their closer ties. According to Bahgat (2015) and Aşkar Karakir and Karasulu (2011), despite the ideological and regional confrontations between Turkey and Iran, economic cooperation between the two states has been pragmatic since the Islamic Revolution. Tür (2011), Ünal and Ersoy (2014) further highlighted economic ties between Ankara and Tehran, pointing out that regional economic conditions improved economic collaboration between Turkey and Iran, and the former in particular became an important trade route for the latter due to Iran's global isolation arising from the sanctions. Similarly, Küntay (2014) noted that, although both countries were regionally competitive, the interdependence between Turkey and Iran prevented the two

countries from clashing. This is because "Turkey does not want a marginalised and isolated Iran that constitutes one of the most significant energy suppliers to Turkey, on its southern border, whereas Iran does not want to lose its significant economic partner and supporter in the international arena" (Küntay 2014, 253). Sinkaya (2012, 139) and Stein and Bleek (2012, 139) also focused on economic collaboration between the two countries. They argued that Turkish-Iranian economic and cultural interactions prevailed over their ideological differences with the onset of the AKP's zero-problems-with-neighbours foreign policy, which emerged as a foreign policy principle of the AKP designed to normalise Turkey's relations with its neighbours. These pragmatic interactions showed a "rationalisation" in their bilateral affairs and "a much more flexible and less ideological approach" in TFP towards Iran. As such, economic interests pushed both countries into closer bilateral ties.

Security considerations emerged as another study area in the literature of Turkish-Iranian affairs. Ayman (2012, 102) reviewed the Turkish-Iranian rapprochement, arguing that mutual security interests resulting from the Arab uprisings pushed Ankara and Tehran closer together as much through need as through any shared normative concerns. In his study, Olson (2004) examined the importance of the blend of external/internal threats of both Kurdish and Azeri separatism in determining Turkey-Iran relations through an omni-balancing approach, which explains the choices of Third-World state leaders facing internal and external threats in establishing alignments. In his other studies, Olson (2000, 2001) highlighted the role of Islamist fundamentalism on Turkish-Iranian affairs. Yucesoy (2020) further assessed their rapprochement following the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey using Steven David's framework of omni-balancing. According to him, regime survival is the primary motivation of the AKP, and shaped its ties with Iran. In this regard, domestic threats to Ankara forced AKP policymakers to cooperate with Iran.

In addition to the *Innenpolitik* approaches on Turkey-Iran relations, more systemic approaches, particularly derived from a neorealist logic, took hold in the literature on Turkey-Iran relations following the Iran's Revolution. One of the most frequently cited work is Elik (2012)'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 the two states from 1979 to 2011 can best be understood by the concept of MPs since they have some unique features that "distinguish them from great power and small power behaviour" and have a limited room for manoeuvre due to the intervention of superpowers and great powers.

Flanagan (2013) also dealt with the Turkey-Iran relationship within the scope of their relations with major powers such as Russia and the US, mainly from 1979 to 2013. Criss and Güner (1999) approached their study within the Turkey-Iran nexus in the region through regional issues and great powers politics. They especially focused on the possible collaborations and conflicts between Russia, Turkey, and Iran in the post-Cold War period. Efegil and Stone (2003) similarly mentioned the possibility of collaboration between Iran and Turkey in the Central Asia following the Cold War. The two sources, however, lack a theoretical framework by only defining determinants of the conflicts and collaboration between Ankara and Iran.

The Arab Uprisings certainly ushered in a new phase in Turkey's foreign policy towards Iran. As such, many scholars have studied the relationship between these two significant actors during the Arab Uprisings. Notably, their competition in this changing geopolitical environment has become a significant subject in their bilateral ties. For instance, Uzun (2013) explained Turkish-Iranian competition during the Arab Uprisings, claiming that "the main competition between Turkey and Iran has been ongoing over-exercising their soft power to attract newly emerging regimes to their models of governance". Ünver (2012, 107) predicated their historical competition on their ideological differences, saying that each state has used "their historical symbolism" to gain an opportunity to influence the Sunni-Shia status quo. Keyman (2016), Monier (2014), Dallmayr (2011) further defined their role in ideological competition in the post-2011 period, by saying that Turkey and Iran have attempted to enhance their regional influence. Wastnidge (2019b, 605) also explored each state's identity in an analysis of their foreign policy behaviour. Such studies indicate that the literature in the field has focused on ideological aspects of Turkish-Iranian affairs in the post-Arab Uprisings term.

Some academics looked at the Turkish-Iranian conflict from a different angle. Sinkaya (2019), Şen (2019) and Keyman and Sazak (2015) studied their periodic estrangement and rapprochement. Notably, Şen (2019, 148) discussed the role of the US in Turkish-Iranian relations since the Arab Uprisings, arguing that the decline of the US presence in the Middle East resulted in competition between the two countries since each tried to increase their geographical influence. However, he also noted that their periodically contentious relations with the US in the post-2016 era drove a rapprochement between Ankara and Tehran. Sinkaya (2019) also analysed the AKP elite as another determinant in their ties, alongside the geopolitical context, and structural factors. According to him, the AKP elite followed "rationalisation, institutionalisation and compartmentalisation strategies" in TFP towards Iran.

Kang and Kim (2016) noted that the cooperation between Ankara and Tehran in the Middle East is derived from Turkey's bandwagoning strategy with the US. Sinkaya (2018) analyzed the role of the 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.

Several other scholars have conceptualised Turkish-Iranian relations using a variety of conceptual frameworks. Charountaki (2018) explored the significant determinants of Turkish and Iranian foreign policies and their influence on events in the Middle East since 1979, using a multidimensional interrelations model. Although she adopted a historical review of Turkish-Iranian relations, she also conducted a political analysis of their bilateral affairs during the Arab Uprisings at three levels: the domestic, regional, and international. Charountaki, however, only explained their bilateral relations during this period by analysing the Syrian Crisis and focusing on only energy politics and the Kurdish role in their relations. Further work is therefore required to define TFP towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings by involving different determinants in shaping TFP towards Iran. In another study, MacGillivray (2019) used a historical sociological framework to examine Turkey-Iran relations between 2002 and the signing in 2015 of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) when Iran agreed to strict limits and oversight of its nuclear programme in return for sanctions relief from the United States, Russia, China, Germany, France and the United Kingdom. He concluded that historical, domestic, and regional/international developments influenced their bilateral ties, but his study fell short of covering events surrounding the Arab Uprisings and their impact on bi-lateral ties.

Kumral (2020) further examined Ankara-Tehran ties from an 'affective-normative' and 'psycho-social' perspective. According to him, bilateral emotional entanglements such as brotherly love, trust, and dyadic jealousy, as well as neighbourhood narratives like the Ozsoy legend, the cold shoulders saga, the Caldiran myth and the story of Kasr-I Sirin, shaped Ankara and Tehran's historical ties. Kirchner and Baş (2017, 172) studied Turkish and Iranian policies during the Arab Uprisings using NCR, arguing that the AKP overestimated its local partners, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Free Syrian Army in Syria, and thus failed to evaluate regional power re-distribution. The authors also pointed out that, while Turkish policymakers wished to export 'the Turkish model,' thus shifting TFP strategies from "non-interference (zero-problems) to interventionism (sectarianism)", Iran followed "a strong sense

of pragmatism and abandoned their local allies when they seemed to prove useful no longer". They thus concluded that Turkey's miscalculations failed those seeking to overthrow authoritarian rule, not least in Syria. However, this study mostly explained Turkish and Iranian perceptions towards the Uprisings individually, rather than specifically focus on TFP towards Iran in the midst of the uprisings.

1.3 Originality of the Thesis

This literature review has explored the debates concerning Turkish foreign policy. While this literature is rich in its empirical and conceptual reach, there remains key gaps that this thesis seeks to address. As shown in the previous section, the literature on Turkish-Iranian ties since the Arab uprisings is limited and most of the studies have focused upon their competition in Syria. Furthermore, few studies have analysed their relations from a theoretical approach. Despite the high number of works on the relations between two countries that incorporate some conceptual approaches, it can be observed that TFP towards Iran between 2011-2018 is still under-theorised because these studies either lack a sufficient period or focus on bilateral affairs rather than emphasising the Turkish side alone. There is support in the literature, and in this thesis, for the co-determination of intervening and independent variables in TFP. The context of the Arab Uprisings is generally not considered, specifically regarding TFP towards Iran, and neither is there an analysis of different unit-level variables in these studies' explanations of TFP.

Based on the literature survey regarding TFP towards the Middle East and TFP towards Iran following the uprisings, the thesis argues that a simple calculation of relative power or domestic factors is insufficient to explain Turkey's policy towards Iran because both are necessary in the analysis of the subject. While Turkey's relative power position determines TFP in the long term, domestic factors have an influential role in shaping TFP towards Iran in the short-to-medium term. This thesis is thus the first comprehensive attempt at exploring Turkish perspective towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings, using neoclassical realism (NCR) which includes system, state, and individual level of analysis. The contribution of this thesis is that it enhances these studies by examining TFP via the lens of NCR while also considering selected intervening variables and Iran. Notably, it employs Schweller's balance of interest theory to define Turkey's domestic considerations, a more appropriate approach for explaining Turkey's alignment choices and rapprochement with Iran since the start of the Arab Uprisings,

from December 2010 to July 2018. Therefore, this study is distinguished from other theory-driven studies on TFP towards Iran by its original application of NCR that is more responsive to Turkey's peculiarities in its relations towards Iran.

As the literature survey demonstrated, decisionmakers' responses to the international environment are significant for an understanding of a state's specific foreign policy because their world views can shape their perceptions and personality. Therefore, the AKP elite perception must be taken into consideration to understand how they viewed particular issues regarding the uprisings and Iran. Moreover, as Dueck (2009, 146) posits, a neoclassical realist model "begins by positing that state officials have some conception of the national interest in the face of potential external threats. These conceptions may be misguided, but they are nevertheless genuine." In this regard, Turkey's domestic considerations must be added in examination of TFP towards Iran from December 2010 to July 2018. As such, Schweller's balance of interest theory is useful for exploring Turkey's alignment with Iran. As a result, an explanation of TFP towards Iran must be approached on many levels if it is to capture the complex dynamics of the relationship. The thesis is also the first comprehensive study examining TFP towards Iran in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq under a theoretical framework while providing different theoretical viewpoint on Turkey's amity and enmity affairs with Iran in Syria. The study clearly conceptualises why Turkey choose an alignment with Iran despite its initial competition with Iran in these areas.

1.4 Research Methodology

Based on the research questions, this study uses a qualitative methodological approach to understanding TFP towards Iran from December 2010 to July 2018. To explain the causal chain linking independent variables (systemic changes and the relative power of Turkey) and the dependent variable (TFP towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings), process-tracing is used as the central methodology. This is considered the best tool to evaluate how intervening variables play a role in TFP towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings, because process-tracing allows analysis and evaluation of specific causal mechanisms within the formulation, development, and evolution of a specific foreign policy in a particular period, without the use of controlled comparisons (Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro 2016, 132). As Benneth and George (2005, 205–6) note, it also "attempts to identify the intervening causal process —the causal chain and causal mechanism —between an independent variable (or variables) and the outcome of the dependent

variable". Accordingly, it provides the most appropriate explanation to understand a causal link between variables.

Process-tracing involves the use of "histories, archival documents, interview transcripts, and other sources to see whether the causal process a theory hypothesises or implies in a case is in fact evident in the sequence and values of the intervening variables in that case" (George and Andrew 2005, 6). As such, this thesis utilises two data collection techniques. In terms of existing material, it draws on theoretical and non-theoretical studies, including those using NCR and other IR theories, and examinations of contemporary Turkish policies towards the Middle East in general, and Iran in particular. The survey of the literature examines a multitude of English and Turkish primary and secondary sources such as books, refereed journal articles, online newspaper and magazine articles, think tank reports, documents/notes posted on Turkish governmental websites, and documents published by research centres. To reflect the AKP elite's perception, especially, pro-AKP newspapers and state-sponsored think thank reports were used as well as unbiased secondary sources.

Interviews were used as the second research technique, to resolve the paucity of substantial secondary data on this topic; these interviews were used to substantiate findings from a wide range of sources, most of which are non-refereed. Additionally, interviews can fill potential gaps between the literature and new information provided by interviewees. They are complementary to the analytical research and used to support or challenge the insights derived from secondary data. As such, this study drew data from twelve semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions which were designed to unpack several previously unconsidered topics regarding TFP towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings, the Syrian conflict, and the politics of Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The interviewees were selected using two criteria: expert knowledge on the topic, and ease of access. Access to interviewees was gained from a combination of strategies, including personal contacts, introductions made by third parties, cold calling, and credible affiliations with previous interviewees.

Moreover, to maintain an accurate record, the interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the interviewees, who were notified that they could withdraw at any time. The interviews were conducted in English to minimise errors in communication where possible since all interviewees were proficient in English. Following the interviews, the gathered data were assessed using content analysis to identify certain words, themes, and concepts, selected

based on their relevance and contribution to this study. The extracted items were then categorised and assessed for both their quality and value to the research and applied as appropriate to chapters in the thesis.

However, it should be noted that just like any study, this thesis is not without drawbacks. There are methodological limitations concerning the limited access to AKP elite interviewees due both to the turmoil being experienced in Turkey at the time of the research, and possibly the reluctance of politicians to fully reveal their views and ideas. This resulted in a shortfall in interviews with political personalities, specifically AKP politicians. To mitigate this issue and increase reliability and objectivity, expert/specialist interviewees were identified according to their different ideological standpoints and professions regarding their support for the AKP or detailed knowledge of its members during the period of the study. These interviews are complementary to the analytical research and used to endorse or challenge the insights derived from the secondary data. All the secondary sources were corroborated by expert interviews to help explore the research questions. The identities of the interviewees remain anonymous to prevent any possible pressure on them in future. Therefore, they are identified only by their job title, such as academic, journalist, and expert. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted between July and August 2020 via Skype.

As case studies, the thesis also explores the impact and influence of the Syrian conflict and the politics of Kurdistan Region of Iraq on TFP towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings, from December 2010 to July 2018. According to Gerring (2008, 645), a "case-study analysis focuses on one or several cases that are expected to provide insight into a larger population", and as such they permit explanations of research through an in-depth analysis of a single unit. The cases of the Syrian conflict and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq were selected as the appropriate examples to represent the causal mechanism of TFP towards Iran from December 2010 to July 2018 since they can provide sufficient analysis to understand how independent variables (systemic structure following the uprisings and Turkey's relative power position) and unit-level variables (AKP elite perception and domestic security and economic considerations) influenced TFP towards Iran.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is composed of eight chapters. The aim of this introductory chapter was to present the objectives, significance, and methodology of the study. Chapter 2 introduces NCR as the theoretical framework and provides an overview of the alternative theoretical approaches by comparing them with NCR. It investigates how and where NCR positions itself within both the realist school and the broader international relations literature. It also explains how NCR can be used to understand TFP in Turkey.

Chapter 3 provides a historical review of Turkey's relations with Iran by looking at systemic and bilateral factors. In terms of systemic factors, it analyses the Iran-Iraq war, the 1991 Gulf war, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the newly independent states in the Caucasus and Central Asia, the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict, and the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. As bilateral factors, it examines ideological and sectarian divisions, minority issues, the Iranian nuclear programme, and economic relations.

Chapter 4 examines the independent variables of TFP Iran since the Arab Uprisings, analysing the uprisings on a systemic level and evaluating the systemic changes and Turkey's relative power position. This chapter mainly focuses on independent variables of the analysis and examines the role of these variables on TFP towards Iran. Chapter 5 explores the intervening (unit-level) variables in TFP towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings, highlighting the role of the AKP elites' perceptions and domestic considerations of Turkey. The two chapters help to define TFP towards Iran from December 2010 to July 2018 as the dependent variable of the thesis.

The remainder of the thesis contextualises the research by using detailed thematic case studies to shed light on TFP towards Iran since the uprisings, with the aim of demonstrating that NCR allows a greater understanding of the complexity of Turkey's affairs with Iran. In this light, the Syrian conflict and the politics in Kurdistan Region of Iraq are analysed to understand TFP towards Iran through an NCR understanding in Chapters 6–7, respectively. In the case study chapters, TFP towards Iran is explored in detail by comparing the influence of systemic and domestic level variables. Chapter 8 reviews the original questions posed in the introduction chapter and discusses the findings of the thesis.

CHAPTER 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This thesis utilises the theoretical framework of neoclassical realism (NCR) to examine Turkish foreign policy (TFP) towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings, from December 2010 to July 2018. This chapter begins by analysing NCR, which integrates system level and unit level variables to define the foreign policy behaviour of states, and then engages with the rival theories and critics of NCR in much more detail to understand the reasons for the rejection of possible alternative theories. It then explains how NCR is used to analyse TFP towards Iran in the post-Arab Uprisings era and concludes with an explanation of how the conceptual framework will be employed in subsequent chapters, and in the context of this thesis as a whole.

2.1 Neoclassical Realism

Neoclassical Realism was first outlined and developed by Gideon Rose in his 1998 article *Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy* as a new foreign policy approach, including systemic and unit-level variables of states. In this regard, NCR first seeks to find a logical answer to the following questions:

> *Under what conditions do nations expand their political interests abroad? What is the relationship between a nation's external behaviour and its domestic mobilisation? How do political elites perceive and think about world politics? How do states assess and adopt to changes in their relative power? How do states respond to threats and opportunities in their external environment, and do different kinds of states respond in different ways? What explains variation in state alliance strategies, whether they choose to balance, buck-pass, bandwagon, chain gang, or avoid alliances altogether? (Elman and Elman 2003, 317–18)*

To understand these questions, NCR notably accentuates certain significant premises, many of which are also seen in other realist approaches. To begin with, 'the primacy of the conflict group' is the premise of NCR. Like other variants of the Realist approach towards international relations theory, NCR deems that states are the essential units and assumes that competition between states shapes international politics. As Kenneth Waltz (2010, 94) argues, "[S]tates ... set the terms of the intercourse .... When the crunch comes, states remake the rules

by which other actors operate". But while Waltz sees states as unitary actors shaped by the anarchic structure of the international system, NCR therefore assumes that each state is unique due to its domestic factors. As such NCR argues that while states clearly operate within an global order defined by anarchy, domestic factors can and do influence how states define their interests and adopt particular policies in meeting wider systemic challenges (Schweller 1998, 60–61).

Second, NCR views international politics as having 'an anarchic nature' due to the lack of central authority either in implementing agreements or protecting states under threat, and this anarchic environment culminates in a continual struggle between self-interested groups to dominate conditions of general scarcity and uncertainty (Juneau 2015; Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro 2009). As a result, competition for power and security in international politics emerges as a fundamental aspect in states' external affairs, although anarchy may be mitigated through institution-building (Kitchen 2010b, 140).

While trying to control this anarchic sphere, however, states determine their policies by considering the probability of conflict. In the event of low probability, states tend to concentrate on other matters; otherwise, security may be their main priority (Juneau 2015, 30). As such, NCR perceives anarchy as a "permissive condition, rather than an independent causal force" (Taliaferro, Lobell, and Ripsman 2009, 7). Instead of assuming that states seek security, it assumes that they respond to the uncertainties of international anarchy by seeking to control and shape their external environment. In contrast, security is only one element that states value when defining their interests and, as such, they are likely to seek more external influence (Rose 1998, 152). States' foreign policy may also lead to different results even if the structural condition of anarchy forces certain directions to be taken, because a state's foreign policy is ultimately conducted by those who evaluate the power and intentions of other states (Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro 2009, 7).

'The primacy of power' is the third premise of NCR, as states require the power either to achieve international domination or, more reasonably, to secure themselves (Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro 2009, 14–15). The capabilities of states and their place in the international system shape their intentions and behaviours (Juneau 2015, 30). As such, the central empirical prediction of NCR is that an increase in the relative material power of a state will eventually lead to a corresponding expansion in the ambition and scope of its foreign

policy activity, and that a decrease in such power eventually leads to a corresponding contraction. The relative amount of material power resources possessed by countries likely shapes the magnitude and ambition of their foreign policies in the long term; that is, as the relative power of a state rises, it will seek more influence abroad, and as it falls, the actions and ambitions of the state will be scaled back accordingly (Rose 1998, 152,167).

However, NCR adopts a flexible approach to the operationalisation and measurement of power due to the unit-level variable of states (Juneau 2015, 30). Although the relative power of a state in international politics is a predominant factor shaping a state's foreign policy behaviour, systemic pressure should be translated through intervening unit-level variables, such as policymakers, perceptions, and state structure (Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro 2009, 5). Notably, foreign policymakers' perception of capabilities has a more significant role than actual and physical resources and capabilities (Rose 1998, 147). Based on unit-level variables, states may target more than one foreign policy outcome, rather than merely power maximisation or security (Juneau 2010, 6; Rose 1998, 152). NCR thus emphasises the importance of the unit-level factors of states, as well as their power and capabilities.

'Confined rationality' is another assumption of NCR. In essence, rationality is a contested feature in realist canon. For instance, Waltz (2010, 118) points out that "[The balance-of-power] theory requires no assumptions of rationality or constancy of will on the part of all of the actors" since the systemic structure shapes their policies, while Keohane (1986, 165) posits that states, as rational actors, calculate the costs and benefits of their choices. In this regard, NCR adopts confined rationality, finding a middle ground in the debate on the theme. According to NCR, systemic pressures force "states to act within a set of parameters", already creating opportunities and constraints for them. Therefore, states are not assumed to be rational, but, at the same time, states assess the advantages and disadvantages of achieving their goals (Juneau 2015, 31).

Given the above assumptions inherent in NCR, it can be stated that NCR adopts a multi-level analysis in examining the foreign policy of states. As such, as Taliaferro (2012, 79) argues, "neoclassical realism['s] comparative advantage lies in its willingness to integrate unit-level and systemic-level, as well as ideational and material, variables into a coherent explanatory framework". Foulon (2015) further summarises NCR, arguing that the theory bridges gaps in international relations literature by involving space (domestic versus

international), cognition (do ideas matter, or is there nothing more than objective facts) and time (the present versus the future).

2.1.1 Variables of Neoclassical Realism

This subsection examines the variables of NCR to understand how they define a state's foreign policy behaviour.

2.1.1.1 Independent Variable

NCR assumes that the international system is significant in the shaping of a state's foreign policy. The international system is, however, defined differently by various NCR proponents. According to Schweller (2003, 332) "[t]he inclusion of interaction in the definition of the system allows process variables (such as institutions, norms, or rules) as well as structural variables to define the nature of world politics and to have an effect on their operation and dynamics". Ripsman et all (2016, 40–56), however, emphasise certain material factors, which can be structural modifiers such as geography, rates of technological diffusion, and the offence-defence balance in military technologies, as well as the variables of systemic clarity and the nature of the strategic environment. Despite the different explanations, all neoclassical realists agree that the international system can be influenced by the foreign policies and grand strategies of great powers. That is why a state's relative power position is the independent variable. As such, "the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy are driven first and 0opforemost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities" (Rose 1998, 146).

States prioritize survival and power because there is no higher authority above them. Therefore, the international system is susceptible to conflicts and wars. NCR argues that the anarchic international system forces states to determine their foreign policy by providing them with the stimulus "to emulate the successful political, military, and technological practices of the system's leading states or to counter such practices through innovation" (Taliaferro 2006, 467). This means that each state aims to be an economic and military power in international politics since "powerful states have a wider field of action and more available options" than less powerful ones (Edwards 2013, 55). Power is thus a tool by which states can enhance their external influence. By seeking more control and impact in their external sphere, rather than security to respond to the murkiness of international anarchy, states seek to increase their

relative material power resources, and desire more external influence (Rose 1998, 146, 152). In doing so, their position in the international system becomes significant enough for them to achieve their aims and interests, and the greater the relative power in the international system, the more external influence they have. In this regard, "the relative amount of their [states] capabilities will influence and shape the ambition and size of their foreign policy" (Rose 1998, 152). However, the anarchic international system forces states to determine their behaviours in line with the system by rewarding or punishing them. In the long term, a state's foreign policy has to be within the boundaries of the limits and opportunities determined by the international environment (Rose 1998, 167).

Moreover, influential NCR supporters define 'power' as a state's ability to mobilise internal resources to respond to a threat. Since states have limited ability to extract national power and mobilise resources, they thus separate state power from national power because foreign policy is not made by the nation, but by the government (Taliaferro 2006, 296). As such, state power means "the portion of national power which the government can extract for its purposes and reflects the ease with which central decisionmakers can achieve their end" (Zakaria 1999, 9). Wohlforth (1993, 303) adds that " 'power' is determined in part by how given material distributions are interpreted. Since many interpretations are always possible, state leaderships will tend to interpret particular changes opportunistically". That is to say, foreign policymakers of states seek ambitious foreign policy goals in line with national interests when they have gained enough authority; however, they may still be constrained by other factors that influence foreign policy behaviour. Therefore, NCR proponents have doubts about the measurability of power (Lindemann 2014), indicating that intervening variables are another significant factor determining a state's foreign policy outcomes.

2.1.1.2 Intervening Variable

The concept of the intervening variable is among the most significant contributions of NCR, which asserts that the 'transmission belt' between the relative distribution of power and states' foreign policy behaviours is not perfect (Rose 1998, 157; Taliaferro 2006, 465). Owing to ambiguous and unclear signals from the anarchic international system, states need to interpret this anarchic environment "according to subjective rules of thumb" (Rose 1998, 152). However, states may not respond rationally and/or directly to the systemic pressures and outcomes of these imperatives. In this regard, a state's domestic variables can provide a clear

explanation of its foreign policy shaping (Zakaria 1999, 12). Intervening variables should thus be included in an analysis of a state's foreign policy behaviour.

Intervening variables can also indicate that a state may adopt different foreign policies from other states despite identical systemic challenges. Stated differently, "[w]hen states do not respond ideally to their structural situations, neoclassical realism tells us we should find evidence of domestic politics and ideas distorting the decision-making process" (Rathbun 2008, 206). This demonstrates that states are not unitary actors because of distinctive domestic factors, and that an objective assessment of relative power is insufficient to examine a state's foreign policy choices in the short- and medium-term (Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro 2009, 28; Taliaferro 2006, 485). These domestic factors may thus result in states deviating from systemic incentives.

Neoclassical realists classify various intervening variables in their analyses to enhance the theoretical validity of NCR, meaning that there is no specific intervening variable in determining a state's foreign policy outcome. Rather, different intervening variables can be selected based on the research questions of a study. Decisionmakers' perception is one common intervening variable because studying the attributes of individuals is the primary concern of neoclassical realists (Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro 2009). Accordingly, they believe that the way leaders perceive the world determines their states' foreign policy behaviours, since they interpret the particular systemic structure from their own perspective, and therefore their perception of the international environment and relative power of their state within the international system plays a significant role in shaping foreign policy choices.

Zakaria (1999, 42), for instance, asserts that "statesmen, not states, are the primary actors in international affairs, and their perceptions of shifts in power, rather than objective measures, are critical". Lobell et all (2009, 42) also emphasises the leaders' role in determining foreign policy, arguing that leaders operate on two levels. When responding to the external sphere, they must extract and mobilise resources from domestic society, while also collaborating with domestic institutions and preserving the support of key stakeholders. Therefore, how the way decisionmakers think about the state's capability may prevail over the state's actual power capacity at specific times, even if the international system provides clear information about the threats and constraints that states face.

Taliaferro (2012, 78) adds that foreign policymakers must fulfil several tasks: making subjective probability assessments; prioritising various threats and opportunities; and discerning future intentions and shifts in the distribution of power. When fulfilling these tasks, they may misconceive the state's real power capacity. Accordingly, they "are also exposed to misperceptions and time lags between real changes and their (mis)perception of these changes" (Jervis 2017). Since the internal and external considerations of decision-makers play a significant role in a state's response to threats and opportunities (Schweller 2004, 5), as Brawley (2009, 97) posits, "a strictly top-down approach is unable to dictate the precise foreign policy of states and/or explain variances that might occur. This is most apparent when units with similar attributes choose different paths, or when units with different attributes follow the same path".

Political domestic constraint on national power and state-society relations is another common intervening variable that influences a decisionmaker's perception. This is because foreign policymakers may face difficulty in quickly attaining and extracting a state's overall material power resources from their societies when shaping foreign policy and describing national interests (Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro 2009, 26; Rose 1998, 161). As such, state power is believed to be "the portion of national power the government can extract for its purposes and reflects the ease with which central decisionmakers can achieve their ends" (Zakaria 1999, 9). This indicates that foreign policy is not an unmediated product of the decisionmakers.

In another study, Schweller (2004) lists four other domestic variables constraining decisionmakers: elite consensus, elite cohesion, social cohesion, and regime vulnerability. According to him, elite consensus is the degree of shared intra-elite perception regarding certain global facts of a particular nature and necessary policy remedies. In contrast, elite cohesion is the degree to which constant internal divisions fragment the central leadership. Social cohesion further explains the reflection of the society's support for existing institutions by responding to whether they are legitimate and appropriate (Schweller 2004). Regime vulnerability also seeks to respond to whether the governing elite groups confront serious non-democratic challenges from the military, opposing parties, or other powerful groups in the society (Schweller 2004, 173). He (2004, 169) further discusses that "elite consensus and cohesion primarily affect the state's willingness to balance (interests), whereas government/regime vulnerability and social cohesion influence the state's ability to extract

resources for this task. The combination of these four variables determines the degree of state coherence".

When comparing the US and China's foreign policies, Schweller (2018) further unpacks nationalism as another intervening variable. He (2018, 23) proposes that "The interaction between nationalism and power trajectory produces entirely different foreign policy orientations in rising and declining powers—the former embraces an outward-looking, extroverted foreign policy of expansion, while the latter adopts an inward-looking, introverted foreign policy of restraint and retrenchment". He concludes that China seeks more global influence in contrast to the US due to nationalist factors.

Taliaferro (2006, 486) also lists state institutions, state-sponsored nationalism, and statist or anti-statist ideology as domestic variables affecting the ability of leaders or decisionmakers to extract or mobilise resources from domestic society. According to him (2006, 491), state-sponsored nationalism has a tendency to escalate social cohesion and the desire of individuals to identify with the state, thereby allowing leaders to extract and mobilise resources efficiently from society for national security aims; in contrast, ideology is able to ease or restrict leaders' attempts to extract and mobilise resources, relying on "the content of ideology and the extent to which elites and the public hold common ideas about the proper role of the state vis-à-vis society and the economy".

Lobell et all (2009, 58–79) add four intervening variables: the images and perceptions of state leaders, strategic culture, state-society relations, and domestic institutional arrangements. They conclude:

> *These variables include psychological, bureaucratic/organisational, societal, and institutional models, which reflect alternative approaches to foreign policy analysis. They reflect the various constraints on the central actors, the interactions within and between decision makers and society as a whole, and the processes and mechanism by which foreign policy is formulated, each of which can affect the manner in which states respond to? the external stimuli (2009, 59).*

Kitchen (2010a) examines the role of strategic ideas in order to demonstrate the ideational factor of intervening variables. Of the different intervening variables, Lindemann (2014) suggests that the main ones identified by neoclassical realist studies can be placed into

four groups: “the state’s structure and domestic competition (measuring the ability of a state to pursue a certain policy) as well as perception and identity (measuring the willingness of a state to pursue a certain policy)”.

Bearing in mind that intervening variables play a secondary role in shaping a state’s foreign policy, the international environment prevails over domestic factors in the long-term (Rose 1998, 151). This is because anarchy and the distribution of power result in systemic incentives and constraints on states and compel them to adopt similar strategies long-term (Rose 1998, 146–47). Therefore, in Dueck (2009, 139)’s words, “domestic politics ‘matter,’ not as a primary cause of intervention, but rather as a powerful influence on its exact form”. This indicates that NCR uses a multi-level analysis involving both the state unit and its embedded system. Moreover, a state’s foreign policy outcome is likely to be differentiated owing to various intervening domestic variables, and thus states may behave neither rationally nor coherently due to complex decision-making processes (Schweller 2004). As a result, intervening variables play a co-determinant role in the analysis of a state’s foreign policy in connection to independent variables. Notably, in the short-to-medium term, the analysis of intervening variables can facilitate a clear and proper explanation for a state’s foreign policy shaping by employing what might be termed their ‘transmission belt role’ between independent and dependent variables.

2.1.1.3 Dependent Variable

In the causal chain of NCR, the state’s foreign policy is the dependent variable. In particular, “why different states, or the same state at different historical moments, have different intentions, goals, and preferences toward the outside world” is a particular interest of neoclassical realists (Zakaria 1999, 14). In relations to systemic structures, NCR addresses that when the relative material power of a state increases, the ambition, and scope of its foreign policy behaviour will expand; conversely, the objective and scope of its foreign policy behaviour will contract (Rose 1998, 167). However, the domestic factors of states may result in different foreign policy responses in the short-to-medium term (Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro 2009). Therefore, the foreign policy of a state is affected by two different levels — the systemic and the unit —over different terms: short-to-medium, and long-term.

State behaviour is defined differently by the view that a state follows different aims when shaping its foreign policy. Mearsheimer (2001, 30–36), as a supporter of offensive

realism, assumes that, in the pursuit of survival in the international system, state behaviour demonstrates three patterns: fear, self-help, and power maximisation. However, he adds that power maximisation is a more dominant pattern of state behaviour since states, notably great powers, desire to alter international power relations on their own behalf. As such, states tend to follow revisionist policies in the international system. In contrast to Mearsheimer, Waltz (2010, 126) claims that security is the chief goal of most states as they wish to maintain their systemic position. By supporting the status quo in the international system, states thus balance against any aggressive, powerful state as a potential threat (Waltz 2010, 102,128). Based on these definitions of the systemic level, the aims of states regarding the international structure may determine whether the tendencies of a state are revisionist or status quo.

For NCR, however, there is no single assumption (security or power maximisation) shaping the strategy of either revisionism or the status quo, and this challenges Waltz's claim that "security seekers are highly war-prone", while also accepting the difficulty of recognising the aims of other states (Davidson 2016, 9). Security seekers may have a tendency to revise the status quo if there is a strategic benefit for them, yet, at the same time, power maximisers may not naturally alter the distribution of goods —involving territory, status, markets, the expansion of ideology, and the creation or change of international law and institutions —in the event that "further aggrandisement is a liability rather than an asset to their power position" (Davidson 2016, 13). On these bases, NCR proposes several ways of understanding state behaviour.

Schweller (1994, 88) marks that "Satisfied powers will join the status quo coalition, even when it is the stronger side; dissatisfied powers, motivated by profit more than security, will bandwagon with an ascending revisionist state". Schweller divides the revisionist states into two categories, "jackals and wolves" (1994, 99–100), whereby "Jackals will pay high costs to defend their possessions but even greater costs to extend their values," and are "risk-averse and opportunistic". Wolves are predatory states that "value what they covet far more than what they possess", and are thus willing to take significant risks, often becoming reckless. However, revisionist states may not exhibit aggressive policies, and can thus be classified as limited-aims revisionists and unlimited-aims revisionists. Schweller (2015, 7) points out that,

> *The key question is whether the rising power views the protection and promotion of its essential values as dependent on fundamental changes in the existing international order; or whether it is merely dissatisfied with its prestige and portions of the status quo, e.g., its sphere of influence, certain*

> *international norms. If the former, then it is a revolutionary state that cannot be satisfied without destroying essential elements of the international order. If the latter, then its grievances can be satisfied, while preserving, and in some cases actually strengthening, the established order.*

It seems that the more dangerous states are of the unlimited-aim type. As such, regional powers can be defined as limited-aim revisionist when they "seek either compensatory territorial adjustments to reflect their increased power, recognition as an equal among the great powers, or changes in the rules and decision-making procedures within, but not the basic norms and principles of, existing regimes" (Schweller 2015, 7–8). All revisionist states are prone to cooperate with more powerful ones to benefit from the cooperation (Davidson 2016, 9). In this regard, the pursuit of profit may result in revisionist state foreign policy tendencies, whereby states jump on the bandwagon for profit to ride "free on the offensive efforts of others to gain unearned spoils" (Schweller 1994, 74–75).

NCR further explains the foreign policy of status quo states. For instance, Schweller (1994) proposes that satisfied states will ally with other satisfied states to maintain their position in the system and can this be divided as "lions and lambs". He goes on to add that "lions are states that will pay high costs to protect what they possess but only a small price to increase what they value... As delighted states, they are likely to be status quo powers of the first rank", while "lambs are weak countries that will pay only low costs to defend or extend their values" (Schweller 1994, 101–2). As such, a status quo state will tend to cooperate with the most powerful status quo state in the international system because it poses no inherent danger. Schweller further explains that such "states can signal their intentions by spending on defence regardless of whether the offence or defence is dominant" (Davidson 2016, 9). In doing so, they tend to maintain the status quo and distribution of power.

Three other kinds of signals can show whether a state has revisionist or status quo tendencies. The first is "shared normative principles about the legitimacy of ruling elites, the sanctity of borders and treaties, the limits on the use of force, and respect for another state's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and traditional sphere of influence'' (Chan, Hu, and He 2019, 6). The second is "pertinent to discerning a state's foreign policy orientation", including its "record of joining international accords and conventions which communicate its predisposition to abide by the international consensus as represented by these multilateral treaties" (Chan, Hu, and He 2019, 6). The third is "a state's voting record in the UN that shows the state's

willingness to align with the rest of the global community" (Chan, Hu, and He 2019, 6). When defining states according to their aims, moreover, Cooley (2019) also proposes a "two-dimensional property space" to generate four state types. Accordingly, "status quo actors" are satisfied with the international order and distribution of power, but "revolutionary ones" seek to change both situations. "Reformist states" seek to alter only the international order while "positionalist ones" seek to shift the distribution of power.

Intervening domestic factors are another influential determinant of a state's foreign policy behaviour. In this regard, Davidson (2016) focuses on the preferences of powerful domestic groups. The dominance of "externally oriented" groups, such as nationalists, may result in revisionist policies for rising states while causing status quo strategies for declining ones. The dominance of "internally oriented" groups, such as welfare beneficiaries, is more likely to cause the opposite case: "rising states are less likely to become revisionist, and declining states are less likely to become status quo seekers" (Davidson 2016, 2).

Ripsman et all (2016, 83) further divide dependent variables into time frames. In this regard, "in the shorter term, defined in terms of days, weeks, and months, states navigate rather fixed international circumstances" because "relative power is unlikely to shift within such a short time frame". In "the short-to-medium term —defined in terms of months and years, but not decades —policymaking is more forward-looking and less responsive to fixed conditions and imperatives. Instead, policymakers engage in strategic planning, or an attempt to construct grand strategy" (2016, 85). In another time frame, "the medium-to-longer term, defined in termed of years and decades, allows the strategic choices of the different great powers to interact and to have an impact on international systemic outcomes", which means "observable political phenomena resulting from the coaction and interaction of the strategies pursued by two or more actors in the international arena" (2016, 86). Finally, in "the longer term, defined in terms of decades, international outcomes and the policies and grand strategies of the principal units themselves can help reshape international structure" (2016, 87).

To sum up, depending merely on the influence of external variables is short-sighted and unreliable in determining the foreign policies of states, since foreign policy does not inevitably follow systemic pressures. The reliance on internal variables alone, however, is a limited approach, because systemic imperatives influence the context of foreign policy. Rather, the connection between external and internal variables is necessary to capture the complexity of

foreign policy, thus making NCR more efficient and robust than purely structural theories or traditional multilevel theories for the analysis of the relationship between international affairs and foreign policy. In the light of these assumptions, Table 2.1 demonstrates the variables of neoclassical realism.

Table 2-1: Variables in Neoclassical Realism

Independent Variable	**Intervening Variable**	**Dependent Variable**
Relative power in the international system	Domestic Factors	Foreign Policy

2.1.2 The Differences between Neoclassical Realism and other International Relations Theories

This section begins by examining why NCR is different from classical realism (CR) and neorealism (NR), and then compares NCR and Innenpolitik in this theoretical debate. Accordingly, this section reveals why NCR is a suitable international relations theory in explaining TFP towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings, from December 2010 to July 2018.

2.1.2.1 Neoclassical Realism and other Realist Accounts

In essence, NCR shares some significant aspects with CR and NR as a realist account. To begin with, power is the main subject of these three realist accounts. Proponents of CR deem that power is part of human nature due to the innate human desire to dominate. As such, power in international affairs is defined as an aspiration which states seek to obtain for their own interests (Morgenthau 1947, 193). For NR, power is a security issue since states aim to have greater power to protect themselves in an anarchic environment. That is to say, self-protection is the primary motivation for states to increase their capabilities and military resources (Waltz 2002). Therefore, the CR perspective assumes that power-seeking is essential for states, while the NR perspective perceives power as a tool for self-protection.

These definitions of power establish the basis for NCR, which agrees with NR's evaluation regarding the correlation between the nature of the system and power. Both view

power relations between states as a determining factor in driving the foreign policy of those states, and argue that "the distribution of power is the only element of the international system that varies and that a country's position in the hierarchy is a major constraint on that country's behaviour" (Taliaferro 2006, 464). NR is, however, lacking an explanation of exactly how power can be understood and measured by states due to its absolute focus on anarchy and the distribution of state capabilities (Schweller 2006, 330).

In contrast, NCR emphasises how states evaluate and perceive that distribution of power. It argues that international anarchy is so ambiguous that states have difficulty determining whether security is abundant or scarce due to the absence of "immediate or perfect transmission belt linking to foreign policy behaviour". As such, states seek to control and shape their external sphere through a system of "filtering" (Rose 1998, 152). In contrast to NR, NCR further deems the system a tolerant structure rather than hostile, thus assuming power is primarily for influence not just security; ensuring its own existence is not the only goal for a state. Rather, states can use power to influence the international system since they aim to control their environment and anticipate other states' strategies due to the uncertainties produced by the anarchic-permissive international system (Carpes 2014, 33). In this regard, NCR assumes much of the tradition of CR, in that states respond to the uncertainties of international anarchy by seeking to control and shape their external environment, while noting that security is an element in defining state interests.

The nature of the international system is another common theme covered by the three realist accounts. NR defines the system as a whole and classifies political structures into three features: ordering principles (the decentralised structure of anarchy between states); the character of the units (the functions showed by differentiated states); and the distribution of capabilities (states in the anarchic system are separable in terms of their greater or lesser capacity towards similar tasks). In this regard, NR perceives the international system as an essential structure in which the characteristics of states, their behaviours, and their interactions with other states are unimportant (Waltz 2010, 79). The anarchic international political system is a more significant determinant of state behaviour since it forces states, particularly the great powers, either to follow identical policies or to risk elimination as independent entities to ensure their security (Jervis 1978, 169; Rathbun 2008, 301–4). States accordingly compete for security by perceiving other states as potential threats and try to maintain their status by increasing their power (Grieco 1990, 29). This indicates that the distribution of relative power

and material capabilities in the international system are influential in explaining international outcomes in which states are unitary actors. States track and mind their interests due to the unreliability of other states and zero-sum game security between them, either boosting their capabilities or balancing them through alliances (Waltz 2010, 118).

In this regard, Waltz (2010, 71–72)'s definition of international politics:

> *[international politics] can tell us what pressures are exerted and what possibilities are posed by systems of different structure, but it cannot tell us just how, and how effectively, the units of a system will respond to those pressures and possibilities. (...) We cannot predict how they will react to the pressures without knowledge of their internal dispositions. (...) An international-political theory does not imply or require a theory of foreign policy any more than a market theory implies or requires a theory of the firm.*

Thus, it appears that a change in the international system will lead to a change in state behaviour. If states react differently and even irrationally to systemic requirements, they are most likely punished by the international system. Therefore, the pressures of international competition are more important than ideological preferences or the internal political constraints of states, and result in similarly situated states behaving alike (Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro 2009, 20; Waltz 1986, 329).

NCR is aligned with NR in that the international system provides incentives to states on how to act, and yet it also states that the signals sent by the international system are not always clear or can be misunderstood even if they are clear. In essence, anarchy is what statesmen and women make of it, because "nations do not formulate and implement foreign policy and extract resources to those ends; governments do" (Zakaria 1999, 187). As such, NCR emphasises the role of domestic variables in analysing state responses towards the signals sent by the international system, perceiving the interactions between states as a significant part of the (Buzan, Jones, and Little 1993; Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro 2016).

NR is thus criticised both for lacking an explanation of "why and how states choose among different types of 'internal' balancing strategies, such as emulation, innovation, or the continuation of existing strategies", and for ignorance of specific domestic events, such as the human motivations of individual leaders or foreign policies (Foulon 2015, 648; Taliaferro 2006, 66). In this regard, a state's domestic factors come to prominence, since "international

pressures from the structure are indirect and translate downward through state-specific domestic intervening variables at state level" (Foulon 2015, 648). Put differently, intervening domestic variables affect a state's foreign policy manner by filtering systemic pressures; this is in contrast to the view within NR that states have absolute competency in extracting and mobilising resources from domestic society (Schweller 2006, 164; Taliaferro 2006, 478).

This significantly different viewpoint between NCR and NR is its inclusion of "domestic politics, internal extraction capacity and processes, state power and intentions, and leaders' perceptions of capabilities and relative power" in examining the foreign policy behaviours of states (Schweller 2003, 317). NCR assumes that the international system does not dictate foreign policy decisions, and instead confines them while the intervening variables of states play this role; thus, it "provides a fuller conception of the state by specifying how systemic imperatives will likely translate, through the medium of state power, into actual foreign and security policies" (Taliaferro 2006, 468). While NR focuses on international political outcomes such as the polarity, balance of power, and alliance behaviour in the international system, NCR is a foreign policy theory focusing on individual states and their policies by utilising multilevel analysis (Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro 2009, 19). As such, NCR conceptualises the international system more efficiently than NR by sharing the same idea with CR in terms of recognising the importance of domestic factors in state behaviour (Rose 1998).

While NCR shares distinct similarities with CR, Rose (1998, 153) argues that CR is not a coherent research programme for developing a generalisable theory of foreign policy because it "covers a host of authors who differ greatly from one another in assumptions, objectives, and methodologies, and thus is not helpful for current purposes". In contrast to CR, NCR is viewed as an attempt at improving a generalisable and definite foreign policy with a specific methodology which posits the role of intervening variables that requires the most examination (Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro 2009, 19).

Moreover, the two realist accounts differentiate the determinants of state behaviour even though they share mutual ideas regarding states' domestic factors. CR deals with "the sources and uses of national power in international politics and problems that leaders encounter in conducting foreign policy", and concentrates on "the relative distribution of capabilities between specific pairs of states or coalitions of states" since behaviour is shaped by power and

the interests of states (Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro 2009, 16; Schweller 2006, 331). NCR, however, argues that "a state's relative position in the international system determines its national behaviour, so nations expand their interests abroad when their relative power increases", thus aligning with the principal insight of NR, which is that the international system is the dominant factor in international politics (Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro 2009, 19; Zakaria 1999, 482).

NCR also has a different view on power vis-à-vis CR, while both share similar assumptions on state-domestic society relations. As Barkin (2003, 336) posits, CR focuses on the role of moral ideals to understand international politics, and adds that the human motivations of individual state leaders influence the foreign policy behaviour of states. In contrast to CR, NCR argues that state authority has to consider or bargain with other domestic forces which exist at the unit level in order to extract or mobilise resources to support their chosen policies (Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro 2016; Rathbun 2008; Rose 1998).

In summary, NCR specifically focuses on the foreign policies of states and argues that unit-level variables play a significant role in explaining state foreign policy, despite its realist premise being that the relative international power position of a state defines its foreign policy behaviour (Rose 1998, 150). In this way, it differs from its realist relatives despite having similarities with both CR and NR. Kitchen (2010a, 118) therefore argues that "[w]hat makes NCR 'new' is its ongoing attempt to systematise the wide and varied insights of classical realists within parsimonious theory, or to put it another way, to identify the appropriate intervening variables that can imbue realism's structural variant with a greater explanatory richness". Similarly, Lobell et al. (2009, 13) elucidate that "NCR builds upon the complex relationship between the state and society found in CR without sacrificing the central insight of NR about the constraints of the international system". NCR is, *per se*, a 'new' theory of foreign policy consisting of independent, dependent, and intervening variables by which to explain specific state behaviour. Table 2.2 thus demonstrates each theory's assumptions to illustrate their similarities and differences.

Table 2-2: Classical Realism, Neorealism and Neoclassical Realism (Lobell et al., 2009, 20)

Theory	**View of the IR System**	**View of the Units**	**Dependent Variable**	**Causal Logic**
Classical Realism	Somewhat Important	Differentiated	Foreign Policies of States	Power Distribution→Foreign Policy
Neorealism	Very Important	Undifferentiated	International Political Outcomes	Relative Power Distributions→International Outcomes
Neoclassical Realism	Important	Differentiated	Foreign Policies of States	Relative Power Distributions→Internal Factors→ Foreign Policy

2.1.2.2 Neoclassical Realism and Innenpolitik Theories

Several criticisms exist of NCR due to its analysis of states' domestic factors. According to Legro and Moravcsik (1999), NCR is problematic since it supports the assumptions which realism traditionally rejects. They term this new realist approach as minimal realism and claim that secondary factors (state preferences, beliefs, and international institutions) are often treated as more important than power in minimal realism. The realist theory thus becomes indistinguishable from liberalism. Narizny (2017) similarly notes that NCR incorporates domestic factors, such as public opinion or regime stability, into realist interpretations focusing on the structure of the international system. He adds that realism can involve key domestic factors, while liberalism explicitly includes international factors and thus, he claims that NCR becomes incoherent, unnecessary, and prone to methodological errors. The critics of NCR, therefore, emphasise that "post hoc efforts […] explain away the anomalies of neorealism, making use of whatever tools are necessary to plug the holes of a sinking ship" (Rathbun 2008, 295). As such, these scholars see NCR as theoretically weaker than other realist theories, and

similar to alternative international relations approaches such as liberalism and constructivism (Vasquez 1997). In this regard, this section will now underline the differences between *Innenpolitik* theories and NCR.

Innenpolitik, a German term, refers to a state's domestic policy, and thus examines the internal factors, including politics, economics, ideology, national character, partisan politics, or socio-economic structure. In other words, *Innenpolitik* theories focus on domestic determinants. For instance, liberalism highlights "individual", "peace", and "economics" (Dunne 2008) while constructivism highlights how perceptions remain bound by "socially constructed ideas" and "norms" (Barnett 2005). According to *Innenpolitik* approaches, the domestic dynamics of states shape their foreign policy behaviour, and so examining the choices and structures of the main domestic actors can help interpret a state's foreign policy outcomes (Rose 1998, 145). To illustrate, domestic peace theory, one such *Innenpolitik* approach, states that the foreign policy behaviours of democratic states are different from non-democratic ones (Doyle 1986). Liberalism further focuses on state-society relations in explaining state preferences and state behaviour in world politics (Moravcsik 1997). This suggests that *Innenpolitik* theories view individual and national level factors as the determinant variables shaping a state's foreign policy behaviour (Waltz 2001). For example, as agent-oriented, foreign policy analysis (FPA) highlights the role of human factors in the process of foreign policy decision-making (V. M. Hudson 2005). Therefore, *Innenpolitik* theories propose that states' internal variables are sufficient to examine their foreign policy behaviours, and leave little room for the structural impact of the international system (Hadfield-Amkhan 2010, 29). Put differently, such theories highlight internal aspects more than systemic ones.

To be sure, NCR is in alignment with *Innenpolitik* theories in arguing that domestic variables shape a state's foreign policy behaviour. Domestic factors are especially important "in the process of self-help inherent to an anarchic system", therefore, they are "fair game for realism and neoclassical realists have taken up this mantle" (Rathbun 2008, 301). As such, decisionmakers' perceptions, ideas, and desires have an influential role in foreign policy outcomes, but their policies are not completely free from other domestic factors. In contrast to FPA, for example, NCR asserts that foreign policy makers can be influenced by other internal factors as well as external pressures. Moreover, state leaders define "national interests" and direct foreign policy based on other countries' intentions and relative power shifts, but they can be inhibited by other domestic constraints (Taliaferro, Lobell, and Ripsman 2009).

Another example is the view of constructivism regarding anarchy. According to Wendt (1992), states' perceptions of other states determine the definition of anarchy. A state's perception of the other state(s) as a friend or an enemy influences the international system, either through conflict or peace. Therefore, the supremacy of structure is underrated, which is in opposition to the realist approach. According to NCR, structure is the primary constraint on states' behaviour, but there are several ways in which ideas can assist states in making decisions. It establishes a clear hierarchical relationship between main factors (anarchic system and domestic factors) influencing a state's foreign behaviour and deems state behaviour a top-down manner in contrast to *Innenpolitik* theories (Coetzee and Hudson 2012). As a result, in the shorter term, especially, in the event of unambiguous international pressures, *Innenpolitik* theories may be more explanatory than realist ones since they analyse a state only on domestic variables involving domestic political coalitions or leader preferences. They may also be more useful in explaining the behaviour of non-state actors, be they corporations, societal interest groups, national non-governmental organisations, or international non-governmental organisations, since realist theories are state-centric. This is because NCR "could help explain the conditions under which non-state actors are more likely to influence the foreign policy behaviour of states when they attempt to do so" (Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro 2016, 96–97).

Nevertheless, NCR notes that states and the international system are dependent on one another since the latter is composed of states motivated by different aims (Rose 1998, 148). Thus, the influence of domestic factors is analysed when a state's behaviour deviates from systemic structures (Rathbun 2008, 295–96), because when domestic political factors have more overwhelming influence in the decision-making process than international variables, there will be consequences such as punishment and condemnation by the international system in the long-term (Rathbun 2008, 317). Moreover, states with similar domestic variables may follow different foreign policies, but states with different domestic variables may conduct a similar foreign policy approach (Rose 1998, 148). However, *Innenpolitik* approaches are unable to explain why states or governments with similar functions behave in different ways (Zakaria, 1998). As such, explanatory power of *Innenpolitik* theories is limited in contrast to NCR since involving both systemic and domestic variables provides a richer and more complete understanding of international politics and the details of states' foreign policy behaviours (Turpin 2019, 5–6). In Wivel's (2005, 374) words:

> *Realist foreign policy analysis is not an either/or choice between rigorous theoretical parsimony and empirically rich case studies. Instead, realist foreign policy analysis should ideally proceed in stages from the parsimonious and highly general starting point in structural realism to the rich case studies allowing us to explain the specific foreign policy of individual countries.*

Therefore, NCR finds a middle way between systemic theories and *Innenpolitik* approaches to increase its explanatory power (Rose 1998, 152). While *Innenpolitik* theories, such as constructivism and liberalism, claim that foreign policy is the product of domestic factors of states, NCR perceives domestic factors as intervening. Notably, in the longer term, NCR "has greater explanatory power than structural realism or any of its *Innenpolitik* competitors" (Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro 2016, 98). Onea (2021, 277) summarises the importance of NCR, purporting that "if NCR adds value compared to its competitors, this comes from its willingness to accept that one gains more insight by combining diverse variables rather than considering them separately and exclusively".

Given the flaws and strengths of the approaches discussed above, we can see that an ideal solution would be an approach that consistently seeks a balance between, on the one hand, taking account of both the nature of the structure of the international and regional system and on the other the ideational and unit-level factors that motivate and influence foreign policy choices at the domestic and individual level. That is, NCR combines material and non-material explanations, thereby widening its explanatory scope.

2.2 Concluding Remarks

Neoclassical Realism (NCR) is one of a number of the theories that look to explain state behaviour in the international system. Its most significant feature is to analyse state foreign policy using both systemic and domestic drivers. NCR contends that focusing solely on systemic or domestic issues is insufficient to understand a country's foreign policy. As a result, it varies from both systemic and Innenpolitik theories in that it provides a balanced perspective of foreign and domestic actors.

While acknowledging the criticisms and limitations identified above, the thesis nonetheless uses NCR to analyse Turkish Foreign Policy (TFP) towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings, from December 2010 to July 2018. This is precisely because NCR incorporates the

assumptions of *Innenpolitik*, NR, and CR, and it can be argued that, as individual approaches, they have low explanatory value with regard to a state's foreign policy. Using domestic factors as an independent variable, which *Innenpolitik* approaches propose, does not explain TFP towards Iran alone because Turkey's relative power is a significant determinant in conducting foreign policy towards Iran. Equally, system-level approaches cannot accurately explain TFP towards Iran even though NCR uses it as an independent variable. This is because the AKP elites' perceptions and Turkey's domestic considerations have played a significant role in shaping TFP, through which the elites have mediated between the imperatives of the international system and TFP towards Iran. The thesis thus uses NCR since it offers an empirically detailed and theoretically informed analyses of TFP towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings. To date, no other study of Turkish Iranian relations has used NCR to fully understand and critique how this relationship has reshaped much of the contemporary Middle East. The next section explores why NCR is better for analysing TFP by evaluating significant studies on TFP towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings.

Given the theoretical background of the thesis, the next chapter examines Turkey's historical relations with Iran from 1979 to 2010 to provide a clearer insight into TFP towards Iran. In so doing, the thesis aims to demonstrate how systemic and bilateral determinants historically shaped TFP towards Iran before the Arab Uprisings term.

CHAPTER 3 TURKEY'S RELATIONS WITH IRAN FROM FEBRUARY 1979 TO DECEMBER 2010: AN OVERVIEW

This chapter examines Turkey's historical ties with Iran up to the start Arab Uprisings. Instead of a broad chronological examination, the chapter focuses on which factors determined TFP towards Iran before the uprisings. As such, bilateral determinants and systemic determinants of Turkish historical ties with Iran are analysed. Since the thesis explains recent TFP towards Iran, this chapter's primary purpose is to present Turkish affairs with Iran after the Islamic Revolution. It thus focuses on the period beginning with the Islamic Revolution in Iran in February 1979 through to December 2010.

3.1 Bilateral Determinants

Turkey has shared with Iran a 560 km long border since the 1639 Treaty of Qasr-i Shirin was signed by the Safavid and Ottoman Empires; it has also shared mutual geopolitics with Iran by virtue of being situated near significant and volatile regions, including the Middle East and Central Asian and Caucasus. As such, cultural, political, social, and economic aspects are such common ties that "in many ways, Turkey and Iran are mirror images of each other" (Barkey 2010, 163; Wang 2011, 2). These shared features naturally bring close ties between the two. Nevertheless, these similarities have at times led to competition rather than collaboration. Due to their historical heritage and similar power position, and different regime type and identities, both countries compete for power in the Middle East. As a result, Turkey's perception of cooperation and collaboration towards Iran have an influential role in determining not only how its shapes its foreign policy towards Iran, but also how it chooses its policy behaviours towards regional and international politics. In the following section, the bilateral determinants between Turkey and Iran are explained to understand TFP towards Iran.

3.1.1 Ideological and Sectarian Division

Ideology and religious sects were undeniably key in the bilateral relations between Turkey and Iran. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Sunni Ottoman and Shia Safavid empires each promoted themselves as major sects of Islam and thus entered into sectarian competition.

Following World War I (1914-1918), the newly founded Turkish Republic also endorsed western principles by defining itself as a western state and seeking to develop standards in alignment with this, while Iran established a monarchy under the Reza Shah Pahlavi rule (Keskin 2009, 46; N. A. Özcan and Özdamar 2010, 103). Prior to 1979, Turkey was thus at odds with Iran for ideological and sectarian reasons, despite their periodic collaboration.

Turkey's concern about Iranian ideological policies was reinforced when Iran, following the declaration of the 1979 Islamic revolution, embraced a theocratic Shia-based regime and cut its ties with the US and its allies. Given its secular government and status as a US ally, Turkey was concerned about the possibility of the Iranian revolutionary movement being exported to the entire Middle East (Pahlavan 1996, 73). In contrast to Iran, therefore, Turkey promoted itself as a "model of secularization and modernization in the Muslim world" (Wang 2011, 4–5). In particular, the Turkish military adopted an obdurate stance towards Iran owing to Iran's Islamic identity (Fuller 2007, 111). In the light of this, Huseyin Kivrikoglu, the former Chief of the Turkish General Staff (1998–2002), claimed that "Iran's intentions have never changed. From 1639 there has not been a war between us, but Iran never wanted a strong Turkey. It seems clear that Iran's intention is to show Turkey as an aggressive country" (Olson 2000, 877–78). Accordingly, Turkey was more concerned about the ideological differences between the two countries following the 1979 Islamic revolution, which brought an ideological conflict.

Their ideological conflict intensified with the rise of Turkic nationalism in Central Asian and Caucasus following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. While Turkey, with its secular and Turkish identity, aspired to establish closer ties with these countries, Iran sought to expand political Islam and support radical Islamic groups in its proximity. Therefore, Turkey feared becoming a target for these radical Islamic groups. It was claimed that Iranian intelligence cooperated with the jihadist groups in the assassinations of Turkish secularists, including the journalists Cetin Emec and Ugur Mumcu and the academics Muammer Aksoy and Bahriye Ucok (Ayman 2014, 9). Turkey's then Minister of the Interior even claimed that Iranian security forces assisted radical jihadist groups with their military and ideological training to conduct terrorist attacks against Turkish citizens and Iranian opposition in Turkey (Barrans 2016, 31). Various Turkish newspapers also alleged that religious organisations in Turkey resulted from movements in Iran (Pahlavan 1996, 73). As a result, ideological competition in Central Asia and the Caucasus placed Ankara and Tehran in opposition, with

Ankara continuing to blame Tehran for supporting terrorist activities in Turkey during the early years of the 1990s.

Nevertheless, in June 1996, the Turkish government changed and the Islamist-based Welfare Party (in Turkish, Refah Partisi) formed a coalition government with the centre-right True Path Party (in Turkish, Dogruyol Partisi). With the election of the Welfare Party, Turkish foreign policy started to focus more on the Middle East due to the Islamic identity of the Welfare Party. The leader of the Welfare Party, Necmettin Erbakan, espoused ideological views which paved the way for cordial bilateral ties with Iran. In 1997, Turkey and Iran established the Developing-8 (D-8) Organisation for Economic Cooperation, involving eight developing Muslim countries: Turkey, Iran, Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nigeria, and Pakistan. This policy shift from a western- to a Middle Eastern-based foreign policy caused debate among Turkish secularists and military, who claimed that the Welfare Party had Iranian ties (Larrabee and Lesser 2003, 147). On 28th of February 1997, after just one year, the Turkish army issued a military memorandum which forced the coalition government to resign by claiming that the Welfare Party was following an Islamic plan in opposition to secularism, thus interrupting Erbakan's quest for close ties with Tehran. This military memorandum was then called as a post-modern coup against the Turkish government.

In 1999, the Merve Kavakci affair, related to the headscarf issue in Turkey, further broke down the bilateral affairs between Turkey and Iran. Merve Kavakci, who was elected deputy of the Welfare Party, was dismissed from the Turkish Parliament for wearing a türban (headscarf) as deputy in the swearing-in ceremony. In this regard, many Iranian students, who may have been backed by Iranian officials, conducted demonstrations to support Turkish women wearing a headscarf and other Islamic clothing. Turkey perceived this as an intervention in its domestic issues and blamed Iran for attempting to export revolution (Keskin 2009, 49; Olson 2000, 875–76). As a result, it seems that ideological difference was a strong determinant in TFP towards Iran during the 1990s. Even though some Turkish politicians, such as Necmettin Erbakan, aspired to follow closer ties with Tehran, both the secularists and the Turkish army strongly opposed Iran's Islamic Shia identity and opted for restrictions on Turkey's affairs with Iran. Since these groups played a more dominant role in TFP during the 1990s than those who sought closer ties with Iran, Turkey's foreign policy towards Iran exhibited mostly ambivalent and limited characteristics.

Having come to power in 2002, the AKP, with its Islamic-based identity, redefined TFP towards the Middle East in general and Iran in particular by promoting the Muslim and Ottoman heritage of Turkey (Dismorr 2008, 215; Ehteshami and Elik 2011, 646). Accordingly, the Islamic-dominated government's focus on the Middle East brought warmer ties between Turkey and Iran under the principles of "zero-problems-with-neighbours" and "economic interdependence" (Fuller 2007, 109; McCurdy 2008, 88). Turkey under the AKP government opted for close ties with Tehran to a certain extent, especially following the Ergenekon trials. These trials started in 2008 and prompted the dismissal of suspected members of an alleged criminal network, including secularists, ultra-nationalists, and the Turkish military, all of whom allegedly have sought to oust the AKP. As a result of these trials, both the political pressure of these groups over the AKP government terminated and the AKP consolidated its legitimacy with consecutive electoral successes. Therefore, the AKP government started to establish closer ties with Iran than before. During its tenure as a non-permanent council member of the UN in 2010, for instance, AKP-led Turkey and Brazil sought to mediate between the UN and Iran and signed a joint declaration with Tehran on Iran's nuclear programme. In this regard, it seems that the less secular and nationalist Turkish political ideology became, the more Turkish-Iranian affairs warmed, until the Arab Uprisings.

However, the Arab Uprisings ushered in a period of ideological and sectarian competition between Turkey and Iran. The AKP started to follow Sunni sectarian policies towards the Middle East, and its Sunni-based policies resulted in a challenge to Shia-based Iran. Despite this rivalry, TFP towards Iran under the AKP governments demonstrated interest-based approaches, examined in the following chapters.

3.1.2 Minority Issues

Due to their multi-ethnicity, Turkey and Iran faced minority issues for many years before the uprisings. While dealing with this internal issue, they sometimes experienced bilateral disagreement due to this problem. Before the Iranian Islamic revolution, for instance, Iran had been concerned about Pan-Turkism movements of the Young Turks —which had aimed for the cultural and political unification of all Turkic peoples —in the early 20th century due to its the Azerbaijani population (Wang 2011, 3). On the other hand, following the revolution, the Azeris of Iran were prone to be less mindful of their 'Turkishness' by integrating into Iran both culturally and economically (Fuller 2007, 110). Therefore, the disagreement over the Iranian

Azeris had little impact on their bilateral affairs. Following to Islamic Revolution in 1979, however, their main shared minority problem became Kurdish groups. Since the revolution, the Kurdish issue has remained a mutual and ongoing minority concern for both countries due to their significant respective Kurdish populations. Since 1984, Turkey's Kurdish issue has pertained to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which has been conducting an armed struggle against the Turkish government. For this reason, Turkey has deemed the PKK to be a potential danger to the country's territorial integrity.

Prior to the Arab Uprisings, Turkey's Kurdish issue shaped TFP towards Iran because Turkey occasionally accused Iran of provoking its Kurdish minorities against Turkey. In particular, Turkey slammed Iran for its apparently close ties with the PKK. For instance, in 1991, Ankara arrested an Iranian-flagged ship on suspicion of transporting weapons to the PKK (Fuller 2007, 110). According to Wang (2011, 3), "for years, the Iranian government has had acquiescence or even support for the PKK militants launching attacks against Turkey from its territory, which became an important focus of conflict between the two countries". Similarly, Imset (1992, 168) points out that Osman Ocalan, brother of the PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, had a personal relationship with the Iranian Revolutionary Guards in the early 1990s, and the PKK was allowed to use Iranian territory to carry out attacks against Turkey. The main reasons behind Iran's arguable support for the PKK were "the regime differences between Iran and Turkey, presence of Iranian asylum seekers in Turkey, Turkish policy towards Azerbaijan, even its policy towards Iraq, and its membership in the NATO" (Ozcan 2000, 52). More precisely, Iran allegedly endorsed the PKK to prevent Turkish influence in international politics, while Ankara considered that Iran's policy was an intervention in its domestic politics. Ankara was thus concerned about any possible close ties between the PKK and Tehran. Ankara's accusations, on the other hand, were expressed verbally as public declarations rather than pushing for more serious diplomatic action, such as the recall of diplomats or the cancellation of contracts.

In essence, Iran dealt with its Kurdish minorities and suffered from the attacks of the PKK-linked Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK) in its territory. Therefore, Iran sought to establish security ties with Turkey due to their mutual concern; for instance, both opposed the creation of a semi-autonomous state in northern Iraq, assuming that it would motivate their Kurdish minorities to press for greater independence. Turkey was also concerned about the control of the oil and gas fields of Northern Iraq by the Kurds (Olson 2000, 165). As such,

Turkey aimed for collaboration with Iran. They further collaborated to prevent the PKK and PJAK launching terrorist attacks from their territories, and Iran suspended its ties with the PKK following Ocalan's expulsion from Syria and his arrest by Turkey in 1999 (Yesilyurt and Akdevelioglu 2009, 45). In a joint security meeting in October 2001, having halted its support for the PKK, Iran gave assurances that it would not let the PKK use its territory against Turkey. In return, Turkey agreed to end political support for the South Azerbaijan National Liberation Movement in Azerbaijan (Wang 2011, 13). They also signed a Memorandum of Understanding on security cooperation against PKK/PJAK terrorism, respectively, on July 24, 2004, and in April 2008, to promote this collaboration (Jenkins 2012, 33; Karacasulu and Aşkar Karakir 2014, 115).

Additionally, both countries entered active bilateral cooperation in the fight against terrorism by organising mutual attacks on these groups to protect their borders. In doing so, Turkey aimed to improve its relationship with Iran, adopting a "maximum cooperation" approach to relations with Iran regarding security. Turkey also sought to restrain the possible Iranian hostile policies towards Turkey when Iran strengthened its influence in the region after the 2003 Iraq War (Yetim and Kalayci 2011, 92). Their mutual Kurdish issue, therefore, paved the way for both cooperation and accusation between them. As long as they aimed mutual benefit, they opted to cooperate against any Kurdish rebellion movement. Otherwise, especially Ankara accused Iran of supporting the PKK in its violent operations against Turkey.

The Kurdish minority group was not only conflict area for TFP towards Iran, however, as the Armenian ethnic minorities in Turkey also emerged as another point of conflict. From the 1980s to the early 1990s, Turkey accused Iran of supporting the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA), which wanted to force Turkey to publicly acknowledge its responsibility for the Armenian Genocide in 1915, pay reparations and abandon the Eastern Anatolia region for an Armenian homeland. Apart from the Armenian and Kurdish minorities, Turkey was also very concerned about Iran's influence on its Shiite, Alevi, and Qizilibash populations (Wang 2011, 3), but these minority groups had a limited role in TFP towards Iran in contrast to the Kurdish minorities. In essence, the Kurdish issue demonstrated uneasy affairs between Turkey and Iran.

3.1.3 Economic Factors

Economic factors have always influenced on Turkish-Iranian relations. Their quest for close economic ties has brought various economic alliances either on bilateral or multinational levels, such as the Saadabad Pact of 1937 and the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) in 1985 (Elik 2012, 161). They also played leading roles in the establishment of the D-8 in 1997 for economic collaboration. Economic interests thus played an influential role in TFP towards Iran before the Arab Uprisings. Even in periods of conflict, Turkey opted to boost economic ties with Iran (Sinkaya 2004, 110).

Given its pragmatic economic ties with Tehran, Ankara refused to impose an embargo against Tehran during the 1980s when the US froze Iranian assets and imposed a trade embargo due to the hostage crisis, in which the Americans in the US Embassy in Tehran were held hostage by the Iranian protesters after the declaration of the Islamic Revolution. In return, Turkish-Iranian economic ties improved significantly in the first half of the 1980s. For instance, Turkish exports to Iran increased from USD 45 million in 1978 to USD 1.088 billion in 1983, while Turkish imports from Iran increased collaterally from USD 189 million to USD 1.548 billion in 1984 (Elik 2012, 163). Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ankara maintained economic ties with Iran despite its competition with Tehran over the newly independent countries in Central Asian and Caucasus (M. Aydin and Aras 2005, 31). Both countries signed two essential agreements promising that Iran would supply gas and a gas pipeline construction project to Turkey, and both would increase their bilateral trade in merchandise to USD 2.5 billion a year (Kibaroglu 2009).

Sinkaya (2004, 111) added that the degree of economic ties between Ankara and Tehran depended on their bilateral political relations. For instance, their economic affairs declined during the 1990s when Turkey blamed Iran for supporting terrorist activities in Turkish territory, and so their trade volume fell below that of the 1980s (Inat 2015). In contrast to their weak economic ties in the 1990s, Ankara sought to strengthen its economic relations with Tehran during the 2000s, based on its warming and political relations with Tehran (Kunu and Hopoglu 2016, 112). With the principles of "zero-problems-with-neighbours" and "economic interdependency", Ankara aspired to fortify economic ties with Tehran. In this regard, Turkish imports and exports to Iran in 2002 were USD 921 million and USD 334 million, respectively. They also grew to USD 11,965 million and USD 9,923 million in 2012 (Sariaslan 2013, 75–

76). Therefore, closer political ties culminated in closer economic ties between Ankara and Tehran while economic gains always hold its priority in TFP towards Iran. More precisely, Turkey's quest for pragmatic and interest-based political ties with Tehran brought economic collaboration between the two countries.

Despite their regional political competition, the Arab Uprisings demonstrated that Ankara preferred economic cooperation with Iran. Turkey now looked for closer economic ties with Iran, a result of its increasing regional isolation and a political confrontation with erstwhile Western allies. In this thesis, therefore, Turkey's quest for economic ties with Iran is used as the context in which to examine TFP towards Iran. Chapter 5 contains an analysis of Turkey's interest-based economic policies, to explain why Turkey opted for a rapprochement and alliance with Tehran, despite their competitiveness.

3.1.4 The Iranian Nuclear Programme

The Iranian nuclear programme became another bilateral determinant in TFP towards Iran. Since the beginning of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Iran has occasionally been accused of advancing its nuclear programme in order to produce a nuclear bomb in the future. In particular, the US, despite its initial assistance to the Shah's regime, has always been concerned about Iran's nuclear programme and assumed that Iran had a nuclear capability, as it did with Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Even though the US President Barak Obama aimed at a diplomatic solution through an "engagement policy" leading to the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action-JCPOA (and in contrast to the administration of George W. Bush), the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) approved and adopted numerous sanctions against Iran in May 2010 (N. A. Özcan and Özdamar 2010, 114).

Despite global disapproval of the Iranian nuclear programme, Turkey highlighted Iran's legitimate right to develop peaceful nuclear technology as a member of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT) signed on 1st July 1968 to limit the spread of nuclear weapons. As such, Turkey voted against UNSC Resolution 1929 relating to Iranian sanctions on June 9, 2010, as a non-permanent member of the UNSC. Ankara believed that western countries took sides while ignoring Israel's possession of nuclear weapons (Pieper 2013, 85). Mercan (2010, 18–19), then Chairman of the Foreign affairs Committee of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, defined Turkey's policy towards Iran's nuclear programme as:

> *We advocate diplomatic and economic engagement of Iran rather than isolationist policies as a more effective way to address the challenges that we are facing in the region. We will continue to encourage all our counterparts to take a conciliatory approach in order to better tackle the problems in the Middle East. [...] Any interference from the outside world will have a boomerang effect and will be counterproductive. Therefore, the international community should refrain from any attempt to interfere in Iran to the detriment of the social and political fibre of Iran.*

Given its support for Iran's nuclear programme, Turkey offered to mediate between Iran and the West and hosted various P5+1 (US, Russia, China, France, the UK and Germany) negotiations with Iran at the political directors-level in Istanbul. Additionally, Turkey, along with Brazil, signed the Tehran Declaration in May 2010, to propose a diplomatic initiative. According to this agreement, Iran was required to send 1,200 kg of low-enriched uranium to Turkey for safekeeping in exchange for receiving 120 kg of fuel rods for the Tehran Research Reactor, which produces isotopes for medical use. In this context, Pieper (2013, 86) pointed out that:

> *Turkey's motivation for the 2010 Tehran declaration arguably was a mixture of its insistence on a resolution of the nuclear conflict through dialogue and engagement, geostrategic manoeuvring in line with a newly discovered regional policy and a pragmatic attempt to engage Iran in order to reduce tensions. The latter reading is thus very much in line with the perception of Turkey's role in the Iranian nuclear dossier as being that of a 'facilitator'. A further motivation and one that is underlying Turkey's Iran policy in general was the need not to disturb regional trade relations through heightened tensions surrounding the Iran case.*

Turkey's other motivations in the 2010 Tehran declaration were regarding regional security and its economy. Turkey assumed that the existence of nuclear weapons in Iran would cause a nuclear arms race in the Middle East by prompting other countries to follow suit. Ankara thus argued that a race regarding nuclear weapons would reduce regional security and cause significant economic loss. Moreover, with the successful declaration, Iran would terminate its backing of non-state armed groups in the Middle East and be integrated into the international structure. As a result, Iran would not be a geopolitical threat for Turkish economic and political interests (Ozdamar 2015, 2–4). More precisely, Turkey prioritised its future possible gains and followed interest-based policies towards the Iranian nuclear programme.

Nevertheless, Turkey's attempt regarding the declaration failed due to the P5+1's resistance. Since Ankara did not aim uncouple from the West over the Iranian nuclear programme, it adopted a pragmatic policy which would not come at the cost of its Western orientation (McCurdy 2008, 89). As such, Kibaroglu (2009) argues:

> *Bearing in mind the rivalry between the Turks and the Iranians throughout history, despite the fact that some common concerns exist as regards their national interests, the scope and the content of Turkish-Iranian relations may not go far beyond the present levels unless Turkey makes a radical turn in its relations with the West in general, and with the United States in particular, even if they may not be at satisfactory levels either.*

Therefore, Ankara was forced to consider its ties with its Western allies for long-term interests. Turkish policymakers then realised that Iran would increase its regional significance and influence by reintegrating into the world system. Despite the economic and security advantages for Turkey in an optimistic scenario, the rise of Iranian influence in the international system would threaten Turkey's relative power position and policies in the region in the long term. In this regard, the possibility of Iran's close ties with the Western powers pushed Ankara to revise its policies towards the Iranian nuclear programme (Ozdamar 2015, 4). In essence, the Arab Uprisings emerged after nearly seven months from the 2010 Tehran declaration. Ankara entered into a competition with Tehran to influence the future of the uprisings, as explained in Chapter 4 of the thesis. Ultimately, Turkey made cost-benefit calculations in its policies towards Iran's nuclear programme; despite its initial support for the programme, the Arab Uprisings forced Ankara to reconsider the regional balance of power.

3.2 Systemic Determinants

Since Turkey and Iran are two middle powers in international politics, the systemic and sub-systemic level changes determined their bilateral affairs. During the Cold War, the pressure of the communist threat of the Soviet Union resulted in a close relationship between Turkey and Iran, which sought alliances with the US and Western Europe to counter this threat. Along with Iran, Turkey followed a pro-Western foreign policy. The US also encouraged Turkey to establish bilateral or multilateral cooperation with Iran to counter the influence of the Soviet Union in the Middle East. Under the aegis of the US, Turkey entered a regional alliance with Iran in the Bagdad Pact (later called the Central Treaty Organisation) in 1955 and Regional Cooperation for Development (later called the Economic Cooperation Organisation) in 1964.

Turkey mostly viewed Iran "as a friendly and status quo power within the Western camp, not willing to jeopardise Turkey's position in the region or its security" (Kibaroglu and Nun 2008, 158–59) despite its occasional concern about the closeness between the Soviet Union and Iran's leftist groups (Kumral 2020, 120). Hence, regional great power politics mostly drove Turkey's rapprochement policies towards Iran during this period.

Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran's political structure altered radically, and foreign policy was now shaped by a new radical interpretation of Shia Islam, most visibly seen in the breaking of diplomatic ties with the US and the taking hostage of 400 American diplomats. Iran sought to export its revolution to neighbouring states, including Iraq with its own Shiite majority and across the wider Middle East, most notably Lebanon (Sayigh and Shlaim 1997), causing tensions to re-emerge between Ankara and Tehran. Ankara was clearly concerned about Iranian willingness to export its revolution, as well the Iranian separation from the Western alliance (Kibaroglu and Nun 2008, 159). Despite its concerns regarding the Islamic regime, however, Ankara almost instantly recognised the new Iranian regime. From this perspective Kibaroglu and Nur (2008, 152) proposed that:

> *The Islamic Republic of Iran's militant Islamist statements and foreign policy fuelled tension and mutual distrust. However, both countries sought to prevent conflict or a rupture in relations. This reluctance to escalate the tensions stemmed largely from their desire to protect their economic interests, given that Turkey was an exporter of goods to Iran and Iran was a major energy supplier for Turkey.*

There were further reasons behind Turkey's recognition of the new Iranian regime: Turkey had already criticised the Shah and CENTO alliance; the country was concerned about a possible civil war in Iran on the grounds of the potential risk of a Kurdish separatist movement and Soviet control in Iran; Turkey believed that Iranian regional prestige and capabilities would diminish in favour of Turkey; and Ankara aimed to establish a trade relationship with a weakened and isolated Iran for its bankrupt economy (Cetinsaya 2002). Moreover, Turkey aimed to prevent Iran from establishing close relationships with the Soviet Union (Turel 1999, 86). For this reason, Turkey approached the Iranian Islamic Revolution on the grounds of the principles of self-determination and non-intervention in the internal affairs of a state (Bleda 2000, 107). In this regard, Turkey also warned the US and the Soviet Union against interfering in Iran's internal affairs and refused a US demand for the use of Incirlik airbases in southeast Turkey against Iran following the US embassy takeover and seizure of diplomats as hostages

in Tehran (Ayman 2014, 10). As a result, Turkey's interests and cost-benefit calculations culminated in a detente between Ankara and Tehran. Alongside the declaration of the Iranian Islamic Revolution, other regional factors also shaped Turkey's foreign policy towards Iran until the Arab Uprisings.

3.2.1 The Iran-Iraq War between 1980-1988

The outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War in September 1980 influenced Turkey's policies towards Iran at the regional level. With the Islamic revolution in Iran, the countries neighbouring Iran became concerned about the former exporting revolutionary ideas across the region. With its secular and socialist ideology, the Iraqi Ba'ath regime notably increased its criticism of the Islamic revolution following the Al-Sadr Uprising in Iraq, which had been allegedly supported by the Iranian Islamic regime (Aziz 1993, 207). Iran further aspired to establish sectarian links with Iraqi Shi'ites, support Kurdish groups against the Iraqi regime, and resolve the dispute with Iraq over the Shatt-ul Arab waterway (U. Aydin 1994, 89). In this way, the war seemed to be an indispensable gain for the Iranian regime, only a year after the Islamic Revolution.

During the war, Turkey adopted a neutral foreign policy towards Iran and Iraq, a policy dictated by its own internal politics. Following the putsch of 12 September 1980, the Turkish military took over the political system. Turkish policymakers opted to concentrate domestic policy even though they were concerned about Iran's support of Iraqi Kurdish groups. Moreover, Turkey had to deal with an economic crisis as many Western states, including many in Europe opposed the new military regime and reduced bilateral trade ties with Turkey. Ankara looked to liberalise its economy during this economic difficulty through greater privatisation and moves towards a more export-oriented economy. Therefore, Turkey deemed the Iran-Iraq war an opportunity to help its ailing economy and enhance economic ties with Iran and Iraq, its two leading energy suppliers (Olson 1998, 29). A neutral foreign policy towards the war emerged as a more appropriate choice for Turkish cost-benefit calculations, in that intervening in the war would have been more costly for Turkey's fragile economy since it would have lost its significant economic partners.

Given Turkey's aims and policies, Iran appreciated Turkish neutrality, since it hoped to consolidate the legitimacy of its regime and gain an edge over Iraq. Iran also believed that Turkey's neutral policy would diminish Iranian regional and international isolation (Olson

1998, 30). Accordingly, Iran too followed pragmatic policies and refrained from using its Islamist ideology against Turkey. It also hoped to increase economic ties with Turkey since it needed Turkish ports in the Black and Mediterranean seas to import key materials. Turkey therefore had strategic and economic leverage over Iran and remained the only viable trade and transport route during the war (Gundogan 2003, 4). Due to their mutual interest, Turkey and Iran signed barter agreements for the former to provide manufactured products and foodstuffs in exchange for oil and gas. By 1983, Turkey had become Iran's largest trading partner (Jenkins 2012, 17). Interest-driven aims thus paved the way for close Turkish-Iranian ties during the war.

In the same period, Iraq too viewed Turkey as a viable route since "its economic lifeline went through Turkey with the Kirkuk-Yumurtalik pipeline to the Mediterranean as the only secure route for its oil exports" (Hentov 2013, 125). Turkey thus benefited from an oil pipeline from Iraq, allowing Baghdad to lay a significant pipeline on its territory and providing an alternative outlet to its oil at a time when tankers were being increasingly targeted by Iran in the Gulf. As a result, Turkey's neutrality provided economic gain by obtaining valuable energy supplies and foreign income, supporting Turkish consumption, and generating transit revenues through the export of oil (Hentov 2013, 125). With its neutral and pragmatist policy, Ankara achieved economic gains from the dispute between Baghdad and Tehran.

As well as economic gains, Turkey obtained political gains. During the war, it maintained the unique position of holding both credible impartiality and handling the complexities of the war. Turkey became a crucial player in the mediation efforts of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) (Hentov 2013, 125). The Iran-Iraq war allowed Turkey to obtain regional economic and political supremacy, and Turkish policies towards Iran were dependent on economic and political interests. Given Turkey's gains, maintaining the regional power balance became Turkey's initial aim. Turkish policymakers believed that, if either Iran and Iraq saw their regional power diminished, the Soviet Union would seek to benefit from the power vacuum and a long-term war could emerge in the Middle East. Therefore, Turkey hoped the war would end quickly to prevent any Soviet threats from its north (U. Aydin 1994, 89; Gundogan 2003, 2).

Nevertheless, tensions continued to mark relations between Turkey and Iran as Ankara remained concerned by the long-term regional ambitions of Tehran. One Turkish worry

concerned impaired safety for maritime passage in the Gulf, and the security of the transportation of oil over land through Turkish territory. Great concern was expressed about the fate of "Turkish tankers plying the Gulf routes and noted with concern the Iranian's public threat to hit the Kirkuk-Dortyol pipeline, which they declared to be a legitimate strategic target" (Liel 2001, 178). Turkish diplomatic relations with Iran also became tense due to the number of Iranian refugees who had been settled in camps in eastern Turkey, and some Iranian regime opposition groups had launched attacks from Turkish territory across the border. By 1985, Turkey was hosting one million Iranian refugees (Liel 2001, 172).

In 1983, Turkey felt itself provoked when the war spread to Iraq's northern Kurdish region. This impacted on Turkish-Iraqi trade ties, which deteriorated. The oil flowing through the Kirkuk-Iskenderun pipeline was under direct threat from the war because the pipeline provided Turkey with significant energy revenue, almost 40 per cent of oil volume pumped (Hentov 2013, 32–33). Equally, Turkey became increasingly concerned that any Kurdish success in one region would promote Kurdish rebellion in other , and so Ankara opposed Iran's support for a Kurdish insurgency against Iraq believing this would radicalise its own Kurdish population (Liel 2001, 173). Ankara thought that the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) would collaborate with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey, which had moved its base of operations to northern Iraq and northern Iran in the early years of the war (Olson 1998, 30). As such, although the Iraq-Iran war created some gains for Turkey, there were also security concerns that influenced policy towards Iran. However, in total, Ankara followed an interest-driven policy towards the war and Iran because of its regional position and domestic issues. As long as Turkey gained benefits, Turkey pursued to establish cordial ties with Iran.

3.2.2 The 1991 Gulf War

By invading the oil-rich regions of Kuwait in 1990, Iraq hoped to control the world's second-largest oil reserves. The invasion led to the formation of a US-led Coalition deployed to Saudi Arabia (Kibaroglu and Nun 2008, 152; N. A. Özcan and Özdamar 2010, 108). Turkey joined the allied coalition to blockade Iraq despite their developed economic affairs. Hoping to use the war to improve its regional influence, Ankara had several aims, which included demonstrating its strategic significance to Europe and the US, reasserting its strategic position in the post-Cold War era, and assuming an essential role in any future Middle East settlement

(Mango 1994, 112; N. A. Özcan and Özdamar 2010, 108). In particular, Ankara viewed the crisis as a chance for Turkey to reiterate its interest in EU membership, and to develop a strategic relationship with the US (Larrabee and Lesser 2003, 134). Given these aims, Ankara cooperated with the US-led forces to liberate Kuwait from Iraq under the UNSC Resolution 678. Ankara also allowed the US to use its Incirlik Airbase during the crisis, and in doing so, Turkey abandoned its previous policy of neutrality and non-intervention in the regional disputes (Narli 1993, 279). Therefore, the 1991 Gulf War was a systemic variable which determined Turkey's regional policies.

In contrast to Turkey, Tehran adopted a neutral policy towards the war, believing it would lessen Iraq's relative power (N. A. Özcan and Özdamar 2010, 108). In essence, this war strengthened Iran's regional position. Having fought a bloody eight year war with Iran that it had in initiated, Iraq now had to accept Iranian territorial conditions which included the recognition of Iranian and Iraqi joint sovereignty over the contested region of Shat-al-Arab (Kibaroglu and Nun 2008, 152). As such, Tehran proved not only its regime legitimacy but also its durability against a Baghdad whose own regional influence was much diminished by the outcome of the war. While this outcome reduced Iranian concerns about Iraq's regional designs, Tehran remained wary of Ankara's increasingly pro-western policies. In response, Iran cooperated with Russia and Armenia and used religious and Kurdish political cards against Turkey (Ehteshami and Elik 2011, 652). The way in which Iran's policies undermined Turkey's security exasperated Ankara and led to hostility from Turkey towards Iran.

The main criticism levied by Turkey at Iran was the Iranian support for the PKK, which had already carried out the most prominent attacks against Turkey, by utilising the vacuum created by the US and its allies north of the 36th parallel in Iraq in April 1991. Even though Turkey called on Iran to terminate its support for the PKK, its diplomatic attempts were ineffective. Moreover, Turkey entered into a competition with Iran in the northern part of Iraq during this period. While Turkey supported Massoud Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), Iran supported Jelal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the PKK. As such, Turkey blamed Iran for assisting opposition groups and violating international law in Northern Iraq while competing with Iran (Narli 1993, 280; N. A. Özcan and Özdamar 2010, 108). In this regard, Turkish-Iranian competition spread to northern Iraq, with both countries vying to increase their position of power and endorsing different Kurdish groups in the area. Therefore, closer ties with the Kurdish groups in northern Iraq emerged as a crucial aim for both countries.

Despite this rivalry over the north of Iraq, Turkey signed an agreement with Iran regarding control of terrorist groups, fearful that Kurdish irredentism could eventually challenge the territorial cohesion as well as security of the Turkish state. According to the agreement, neither country would allow terrorist activities within their borders, accepting that collaboration was essential against political violence and separatism (Kibaroglu and Nun 2008, 163). Both also agreed on the territorial integrity of Iraq by opposing the foundation of an independent Kurdistan, which threatened their internal security (Narli 1993, 280). When facing a mutual security threat from Kurdish armed groups again, Ankara opted for bilateral cooperation with Tehran because this seemed less costly than opposing Tehran. If Tehran had not provided financial and military support to Kurdish armed groups acting against Turkey, these groups would in turn have not received support from other states, thus enabling Turkey to manage the groups more easily. Based on these cost-benefit calculations, Turkey sought an occasional détente policy towards Tehran over mutual security concerns.

Following the war, Turkey further engaged in more cooperative ties with Iran, especially on energy, owing to the economic sanctions against Iraq, which had once been a significant trading partner with Turkey (Calabrese 1998, 85). Since petroleum imports from Iraq had ceased, Turkey had lost billions of dollars in pipeline fees and trade revenue. The international isolation of Iraq also "cost the Turkish treasury an estimated $35 billion and damaged the local economy of the region bordering Iraq" (Cook and Sherwood-Randall 2006, 10; Larrabee and Lesser 2003, 135). Turkey therefore saw its access to Iranian oil as providing some amelioration for its economy (Eralp 1996, 109). Ultimately, the 1991 Gulf war culminated in both cooperation and competition areas in TFP towards Iran. Considering its interest-driven aims, Turkey opted for rapprochement with Iran but, at the same time, aiming to increase its relative power position created competition between them.

3.2.3 The Collapse of the Soviet Union and the Emergence of the Newly Independent States in the Caucasus and Central Asia

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in late 1991, the bipolar power balance which had influenced global politics ended and significant change followed on both international and regional levels. The fall of the Soviet Union caused the birth of newly independent states, including six republics (namely Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan) in the Caucasus and Central Asia. As such, various regional and global state actors sought to establish closer ties with these new states. Turkey was no different.

Not only was geographical proximity a driver but it also shared the same ethnic origins, religion, language, and culture. Suleyman Demirel, the ninth President of Turkey from 1993–2000, emphasised these affinities when he declared:

> *It is quite natural that Turkey acts by taking into account its national interests in terms of its security, its economic and social relations. However, Turkey, which considers its national interests in this issue, has some moral responsibilities. These moral responsibilities come from Turkey's history...It is impossible to isolate yourself from your history...History offers opportunities as well as responsibilities and difficulties (Bal 2000, 44).*

From the economic aspect, Ankara aimed to establish free and efficient international telecommunications and transportation connections, the creation of international banking links, and the finance through exporting consumer goods and entrepreneurial know-how (Arik 1992, 34; Eralp 1996, 104). Turkey also tried to cooperate with these states in terms of its oil and gas needs, to meet its increasing energy demands, while reducing dependency on the Middle East oil and gas, and obtain royalties (Dikkaya 1999, 197; Kramer and Cimen 2001, 156). It thus strengthened its ties through the establishment of an investment bank, the extension of Turkish TV broadcasts into Central Asia, and the promotion of the Latin alphabet (Narli 1993, 282; Winrow 1997, 174). Turkey also founded a development agency, Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA), opened Turkish cultural centres and created state-owned television TRT-Avrasya with customised broadcasting for the Turkic populations of the former Soviet Union (Sinkaya 2004, 86). Therefore, closer cultural and social ties with these newly emerged countries served Turkey's economic and political aims.

From a political perspective, moreover, Central Asia and the Caucasus intersected with Turkish interests relating to both security concerns and Turkey's standing in international politics (Bal 2000, 45). Based on its national interests, Turkey sought to export its experience of democracy and a market economy to these countries as a model state, "emphasizing ethnic Turkic ties, secularism, integration into Western economic and political institutions, and increased trade and cultural ties" (N. A. Özcan and Özdamar 2010, 107). Turkey, therefore, viewed the collapse of the Soviet Union and the birth of these countries as an opportunity to assert a dominant role in the region. In this context, Turgut Ozal, the eight President of Turkey (1989–1993), claimed that "Turkey should have not missed such an opportunity that appeared for the first time after 400 years" (Sinkaya 2004, 83). This shows that Ankara aspired to

promote its soft power in the Caucasus and Central Asia, and the newly founded states provided Ankara an opportunity to enhance its power position.

Western powers also endorsed Turkey's attempt in the region due to Turkey's western-based foreign policy. In particular, the US propped up the model of Turkey as secular and democratic state with a free market-economy, believing this to be a model for the post-Soviet states in the Caucasus and Central Asia. This is because Washington was concerned that in any power vacuum, political Islam in its varied forms, as well as the influence of Iran would spread throughout the region. As such, it was hoped that Turkey, a democratic western ally, could restrict theocratic Iranian influence in the region (Eralp 1996, 104; Kibaroglu and Nun 2008, 163). Given its concerns regarding Iran, the US also "vehemently opposed the transport of Caspian oil and gas through Iran, instead of supporting projects that would go through Turkey, and prevented countries like Georgia and Armenia from developing stronger economic and political ties with Iran" (N. A. Özcan and Özdamar 2010, 107). Accordingly, Washington's support for Turkey encouraged Ankara to pursue assertive policies in the Caucasus and Central Asia, and as a result Ankara increased its diplomatic overtures towards these new states.

As well as encouragement from the US, Turkey aimed to gain the European Community's (EC) support. Due to their complicated relations over Turkey's membership, Ankara assumed that the EC would reconsider its decision over rejection of Turkey's application to become a full member of the EC if Turkey maintained its assertive policies in the region. Clearly, Turkey was trying to forge new alliances in an effort to stakeout a new and influential position in the emerging regional order (Oran 2001, 158–60). Therefore, the emergence of these new states following the fall of the Soviet Union provided economic and political opportunities for Turkish interests. Ankara sought to use these opportunities to improve its relative power position on the international stage.

Like Turkey, Iran also aimed at establishing close ties with these new states, many of which are adjacent to its northern border. Iran mainly tried to utilise its Islamic ideology, supplemented by territorial and cultural commonalities to legitimise and enlarge its presence and influence. Based on its interests, Iran supported Islamist movements and increased some economic ties and energy trade with these states. In doing so, Iran, like Turkey, tried to fill the power vacuum created by the demise of the Soviet Union and escape regional isolation by "using these states as a corridor to open to the world political and economic markets" (Ertosun

2012, 10; Menashri 1998). As a result of Iran's interest-based policies towards the new states, Turkish-Iranian relations cooled considerably again, and an intensive rivalry emerged for economic and political influence in the Caucasus and Central Asia (Akkoyunlu 2012, 263; N. A. Özcan and Özdamar 2010, 107). For example, Turkey competed with Iran over Azerbaijan, in which both countries had close ties. While Turkey shared affinities of language, ethnicity and secular government, Iran did so in terms of religion, kinship, and history through its own Azeri population. Therefore, Turkey entered into a rivalry with Iran to establish a form of political and cultural hegemony in Azerbaijan and take advantage of power imbalances (Hentov 2012, 145). Despite its shared concern regarding the extension of ethnic conflicts following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Turkey's regional difference from Iran was most visibly demonstrated when it supported Azerbaijan, in contrast to Iran's support for Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute in 1992 (Gurkas 2011, 111). As such, enhancing the relative power position was a more dominant aim for Turkey than tackling the ethnic conflict in its proximity. The Nagorno-Karabakh dispute indicated Ankara's long-term rivalry with Tehran over regional influence.

In turn, Iran had concerns about Ankara's "Turkism" policy, which aimed to establish closer ties between Turkey and Turkic-origin countries due to its ethnic Turkish minorities, such as the Azeris. Tehran believed that Ankara's policy would trigger its Turkish minorities to attempt to establish cordial ties with Ankara. For this reason, Turkey's closer ties with the newly founded Turkic countries placed Ankara and Tehran in opposition, and Tehran hoped to limit Turkish policies in its proximity (Keskin 2009, 49). Ultimately, their competition to export their respective models and economic rivalry for the transportation routes of the Caspian hydrocarbon resources determined Turkey's perceptions towards Iran (Sinkaya 2004, 95). Turkey deemed Iran a rival in Central Asian and Caucasus. As Elik (2012, 94) reveals, "both Turkey and Iran have been trying to gain leverage against great power influence and also negating each other's hegemonic ambition in this critical geography". In this regard, Turkey followed revisionist policies towards the newly founded Turkic states and aspired to increase its relative power position, primarily using soft power policies to solidify cordial ties with these countries. Ankara's these policies brought another rivalry with Tehran.

3.2.4 The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict

With the establishment of Israel as a Jewish state in Palestine on May 14, 1948, the long-term Palestinian-Israeli conflict (or the Arab-Israeli conflict) officially engulfed international and regional states and resulted in a more turbulent regional environment. Since then, Middle Eastern politics has mainly been framed by the conflict and wars between Israel and Palestine and between Israel and Arab countries, as well as other regional issues. International state powers and other non-Arab regional state powers, such as Turkey and Iran, either directly or indirectly participated in these conflicts for different reasons. In this regard, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and more particularly Turkish-Israeli relations shaped Turkish-Iranian affairs and their policies towards each other. Since the beginning of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Turkey has sought to play an active role in the dispute; however, due to the time scope of this thesis, this subsection examines Turkish and Iranian policies towards the conflict since 1979.

Turkey has followed fluctuant policies towards the conflict due to its changing interests. In the early 1980s, Ankara first opted to maintain closer ties with Arab countries rather than Israel due to "Turkey's highly dependent [status] on oil imports from its Arab neighbours" (Gruen 1995, 48). In 1980, Ankara's diplomatic representation in Israel was reduced from the level of consulate to second secretary after Israel declared a united Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. On the other hand, Turkish policymakers then realised that Turkey required a balanced policy toward Arab countries and Israel in order to be able to increase ties with western countries and fix its fragile economy (Gruen 1995, 49). Even in 1984, the Turkish prime minister, Turgut Ozal, pointed out,

> *Turkey's relations with Israel will be maintained. They will neither improve nor deteriorate…As I told our Arab friends, we are members of NATO and have close ties with the US. The strength of the Israeli lobby in the US is well known…Furthermore, it is a good thing for the Islamic world that an Islamic country should have an open window [to the West]* (Gruen 1995, 50).

Since the late of the 1980s, Turkey sought such a close economic tie with Israel that Turkey's trade amount with Israel demonstrated a high rise from $54 million in 1987 to $100 million in 1991 (Çakmak and Ustaoğlu 2017, 308–9). While following close ties with Israel, Turkey also maintained its quest for active involvement in the dispute. Ankara recognised the

declaration of Palestinian state in November 1988. In the 1990s, Turkey enjoyed close ties with Israel, with US support, and Turkish-Israeli affairs were upgraded to the ambassadorial level in 1991. Having established an 'entente' with Israel, however, Ankara strengthened its ties with Israel rather than Arab countries. This was because Ankara had been facing problems with the latter over Cyprus, in which Turkey had no support from the Arab countries, and because of Syria's support for the PKK. With the 1991 Arab-Israeli peace process in the Madrid Peace Conference between the representatives of Israel, Syria, Jordan, and the Palestinians and the 1993 Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Movement, Ankara's ties with Israel showed a high level of diplomatic and economic ties. Although the Islamist-based Welfare Party in Turkey followed a pro-Muslim policy in the region and criticised Israel's regional policies in the late 1990s, Ankara maintained a pragmatist approach to Israel due to political pressure of the Turkish army on the Turkish government (Gökçe 2016, 59–61). As such, Turkey mostly followed interest-based policies with Israel and these interests determined its perception of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Because of Turkey's regional interests, Turkish foreign policymakers aimed to preserve a balance between Turkey's relations with Israel and Arab states at a certain level (Ayman 2012, 10; Sayari 1997, 45). More precisely, they opted for a balanced foreign policy towards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict by refraining from breaking ties with both sides in the conflict and standing with an international consensus that called for a two state solution (Ertosun 2012, 14). As such, they followed a cautious and prudent foreign policy towards the conflict. Due to economic and political concerns, notably, Ankara opted to maintain ties with both Israel and Arab countries when Turkey's relations with western countries became problematic following the military coup against the Turkish government on September 12, 1980 (Aras 1997, 61). Therefore, Ankara perceived Israel and Arab countries as alternative political and economic partners and followed pragmatist and status quo driven policies to the conflict, showing that cost-benefit calculations determined Turkey's perception of the dispute.

In contrast to Turkey, with the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Tehran followed hostile policies to Israel, believing that Israel sought to weaken Muslim states, and urged other Muslim countries to collaborate against Israel (Aras 1999, 201). Therefore, Tehran wholeheartedly adopted anti-Israel policies in the dispute and supported the Palestinian groups against Israel. Given Tehran's anti-Israel policies, Tehran welcomed the cooling ties between Israel and Ankara. According to Iran, Israel was using Turkey to achieve its long-term regional interests

and Turkey served Israeli policies in the region (Ozturk 1999, 254–55). Tehran further claimed that Israel provided intelligence about Iran across the border between Turkey and Iran, thus perceiving the Turkish-Israeli rapprochement as a threat to its national security (Aras 1996; Parsi 2007, 171). Iran pressurised Turkey to abrogate its alignment with Israel, claiming that cooperation with the "Zionist regime" would result in civil unrest across Turkey. Having blamed Turkey for serving Israeli and US interests, Iran allegedly attempted to sway Turkish society against Israel following the 1997 February 'Sincan affair'. At this event, "the mayor of Sincan, a Justice and Welfare Party member, held special activities in a big tent resembling the al-Aqsa mosque and decorated with posters of members of Hamas and the Lebanese Hezbollah"; Iranian Ambassador Muhammad Riza Bagheri delivered a speech to the people by calling on them to punish those who signed agreements with the US and Israel (Bengio 2004, 160–61). This case thus resulted in a diplomatic crisis between Turkey and Iran and the reciprocal recalling of their ambassadors. Turkey saw this as a crass example of interference in its internal affairs and vehemently criticised Iran for exporting the Islamic revolution to Turkey, and destabilising its secular regime by supporting radical Islamist groups (Akkoyunlu 2012, 264).

With the AKP's accession to power in 2002, Turkey maintained friendly ties with Israel under the foreign policy principles of 'multidimensional' and 'zero problems with neighbour'. However, these ties became increasingly tense following President Erdogan's acerbic words to Israeli President Shimon Peres on 29 January 2009 at the Davos Summit due to a series of Israeli attacks on Gaza called Operation Cast Lead between 27 December 2008 and 18 January 2009. According to Đidić and Kösebalaban (2019, 7), "Both the AKP's conservative and liberal democratic orientations clashed with Israel's treatment of Palestinians". With the deaths of nine Turkish activists during the Israeli raid on the Mavi Marmara vessel taking aid to Gaza on 30 May 2010, relations nose-dived politically and militarily. At the same time, Turkey started to follow an active pro-Palestinian policy by supporting Palestine's observer status at the UN and urging the removal of the Israeli blockade against the Gaze strip. Then Hamas leader, Khaled Mashal, and President Erdogan even met many times in Turkey to talk about recent developments on the Palestinian issue. With Turkey's more interventionist policy towards Palestine, Ankara was said to be pursuing a wider leadership role, not just in the Palestine-Israeli conflict but more broadly across the Middle East (Balci 2013, 202; Gumus 2013, 84). Therefore, the AKP used its ideology and ideas for interest-based policies towards the conflict in the pre-uprisings term.

Iran, however, maintained its hostile view of Turkey, claiming that Ankara's hostile policies towards Israel were just for show, believing that NATO's missile defence system targeting Iran and Turkey served the US and Israeli goals in the region (Gumus 2013, 91). Tehran further opposed Turkish involvement in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, assuming that Turkey's greater engagement would diminish Iranian influence (Boz 2013).

In return, Turkey hoped for a deterioration in Hamas-Iranian relations to reduce the Iranian effect on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. As such, Turkey welcomed the breakdown of Hamas-Iranian relations in 2012 when Hamas and Iran endorsed different groups in the Syrian conflict. Hamas refused to support the Assad regime as an ally of Iran in the Middle East and disagreed with the Iranian presence in the conflict. The disagreement then deepened when Hamas endorsed the legitimacy of Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi's regime, in contrast to Iranian support for the Houthis (Tuysuzoglu 2014, 595).

In conclusion, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict occasionally resulted in competition between Turkey and Iran. Turkey adopted mostly interest-based policies towards the conflict to increase its relative power position and/or forge close ties either with Arab countries or Israel. While the Palestinian-Israeli conflict had limited influence on TFP towards Iran during the 1980s and 1990s, Turkey's active involvement in the dispute since 2009 paved the way for a rivalry between Ankara and Tehran due to AKP's pragmatist and utilitarian policies in the conflict.

3.2.5 The US-led operations of Afghanistan and Iraq

The 9/11 terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Centre became a turning point generally in international politics, but particularly in Middle Eastern politics. The respective US-led operations of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 following the 9/11 attacks resulted in significant regional changes, including a shift in the power balance. In this regard, Turkey and Iran, as two regional significant state actors, were influenced by developments arising from the US-led operations. In the US-led Afghanistan war, Turkey gave the US full support by condemning the terrorist attacks as a country that had been fighting against terrorism for more than thirty years, and by sending troops to Afghanistan. After the overthrow of the Taliban regime in the late of 2001, Turkey stationed troops in the northern region of Afghanistan for military educations and intelligence aid and twice led the NATO international security

assistance force between June 2002 and February 2003 (Cook and Sherwood-Randall 2006, 8). As such, Turkey entirely supported the US-led Afghanistan operation and played a significant role in the developments of the war as a NATO country.

In the US-led operation of Iraq in 2003, however, Turkey hesitated to play an active role due to security concerns. In particular, Turkey highlighted the possible emergence of an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq, and the future of oil-rich city Kirkuk, as red lines for its national security (A. Karakoc 2009, 28). Ayman (2014, 11–12), therefore, notes that "Turkey's anxieties were much more focused on the possibility of the spill over of the Kurdish demands for independence and their potential to undermine Turkey's security and stability than on the deployment of American troops in Iraq". This statement shows that Ankara was concerned about the emergence of US-Kurdish alliance and the possibility of the empowerment of the Kurdish groups in its proximity.

In consequence, despite being a US and NATO ally, Turkey refused to participate in the US-led Iraq war when the Turkish Parliament voted against the US decision to open a second front in March 2003, causing a severe decline Turkey-US relation (Ozdamar and Taydas 2008). In this context, Ayman (2012, 10) addresses that "Sectarian violence in Iraq and growing Kurdish separatism that could spill over, urged Turkey to focus more on the Middle East in an effort to prevent the establishment of a Kurdish state and contribute to peace and stability in Turkey's neighbourhood". Uslu (2000, 200) further points out that:

> *The general Turkish view on Iraq is that Iraq's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity should be preserved, and Iraq should comply fully with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions. While the U.S. remains focused on removing Saddam from power and challenges Iraq's territorial integrity with its policies, Turkey does not want to see Iraq destroyed and divided, fearing that this would destabilise the balance of power in the region and contribute to the expansion of the Iranian influence.*

Therefore, the main reasons for Turkey's hesitation about joining the US-led Iraq operations were the twin fears of having a Kurdish state in its proximity, and the rise of Iranian influence in the region despite its active support to the US-led operations in Afghanistan. Accordingly, Ankara deemed the US-led operation in Iraq more costly and profitless for its security interests.

Iran had concerns about the US-led operations, even though its key protagonists, the Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein in Iraq, had been toppled by the end of the operations. Its primary concern was the blockade and threat from the US and its regional allies to its survival. As such, Iran sought the elimination of US military pressure over the invasion of Iraq because it had backed US-led efforts in Afghanistan. In particular, US President George Bush's State of the Union address on 29 January 2002, regarding a possible US-led attack against Iran, increased Tehran's fears since Bush labelled Iran, Iraq and North Korea as the "axis of evil". Following this statement, Iran was thought to have become a potential military target for the US after Iraq (Celikkanat 2007, 128).

Additionally, Tehran feared any increase in Turkish influence in the region, assuming that Turkey would enhance its control over Northern Iraq by cooperating with the US and controlling the area's oil fields. For Iran, this meant reducing its own influence over regional politics. Moreover, the growing military cooperation between Turkey and Israel angered Iran, and Tehran perceived this alliance as a threat to its national security (N. A. Özcan and Özdamar 2010, 110). Turkey and Iran therefore deemed one another rivals following especially the US-led operations in Iraq, and TFP towards Iran was based partly on this perception.

Nevertheless, Turkey and Iran shared a concern regarding the possible disintegration of Iraq because a divided Iraq would, they reasoned, only encourage Kurdish separatists. Therefore, the Kurdish issue re-emerged as a mutual policy following the US-led operations (Wang 2011, 9). Based on their mutual fear, Turkey changed its position towards Iran. Indeed, as Cetinsaya (2003) highlights, "following the events leading up to the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the relationship between Turkey and Iran seemingly [entered] a new phase. Similar concerns about the probable consequences of developments in Iraq [caused] the two countries' positions with respect to regional political issues to converge". Given their mutual concern, Turkey required Iran's cooperation since both faced a loss of influence in northern Iraq due to the US presence in Iraq (Olson 2004, 217). With the US now the dominant power in the region, both had little chance to influence the developments of regional politics. Turkey, along with Iran, "called for Muslim countries [to act] together to solve the Iraq crisis peacefully and [to come] together under the Turkish initiative to hold regional meetings with the participation of foreign ministers of regional countries to find a solution to Iraq crisis before and after the war" (Ayman 2012, 10). When considering cost-benefit calculations, therefore, Turkey opted to establish a short-term pragmatist collaboration with Iran following the US-led operation in Iraq.

Nevertheless, this short-term rapprochement was interrupted when Iran sought closer ties with the Shia-dominated Iraqi government in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion. Ankara was concerned about Iran's policies in Iraq, including cooperating with Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army and other insurgent groups in Iraq. Ankara believed that Tehran sought to increase its influence and power in the post-Iraq war. Iran's quest for a weakened Iraq and its sectarian policies vindicated Turkey's concerns regarding Iran (Kane 2011, 1). Given its fears regarding Iran's Iraqi policies, Turkey preferred there to be no dominant group in the Iraqi political process; rather, it aimed for a united Iraq for its security and economic interests and regional stability. Therefore, Ankara propped up the secular Iraqiya alliance of Allawi, emphasising the "Iraqi identity rather than any religious or ethnic identity" (ibid). In this regard, Turkey strongly opposed friendly ties between the Shia-dominated Maliki government and Tehran. At the same time, President Erdogan expressed his annoyance over Iran's rising influence in Iraq after the decrease of the US presence in Iraq in late December 2011, complaining that the US abandoned Iraq to the hands of Iran (Ayman 2014, 15).

Ultimately, Turkey maintained its ambivalent policies, including conflict and cooperation, towards Iran following the US-led operations of Afghanistan and Iraq. While the Kurdish issue was a mutual concern, the warming ties between Iran and the Shia-dominated Maliki government and the rise of Iran's influence on Iraqi politics increased Turkey's fears regarding Iran. While aiming to increase its regional power position, Ankara perceived Tehran as a rival and sought to hamper Iranian influence, especially in Iraq.

3.3 Concluding Remarks

From 1979 to 2011, bilateral and systemic factors shaped TFP towards Iran. Before the Arab Uprisings, Turkey and Iran occasionally became rivals due to conflicts of interest. For instance, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ankara increased its power position in the region, forging cordial economic and political ties with the newly founded Turkic states. After the US-led operations in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, Turkey occasionally became concerned about the rise of Iranian influence in its proximity, assuming that increased Iranian influence would lead to a decrease in Turkey's. Therefore, Ankara did not welcome the closer ties between Baghdad and Tehran. Notably, Iran's Shia-based regional policies evolved contrary to Turkey's regional aims and voided Ankara's calculations regarding regional developments. Ankara thus perceived Tehran's policies as a threat to its interests and benefits.

Ankara also formed a temporary alliance with Iran due to its Kurdish issue and economic interests. Despite at times slamming Iran's pro-PKK policies, Turkey required Tehran's collaboration to be able to hamper the rise of the PKK in its proximity. Given Turkey's ambivalent policies towards Iran, it can be concluded that Turkey's interest-based aims and cost-benefit calculations primarily determined its foreign policy approach towards Tehran. In cases where cooperation with Tehran was more appropriate for Turkey's interests than their competition, Ankara opted to work closely with Tehran, but otherwise Ankara deemed Tehran a rival in cases where cooperation with Tehran was costly and provided less benefit for its interests. Based on the arguments made in this chapter, TFP towards Iran exhibited a realist-based approach. This chapter further evaluated determinants of TFP towards Iran before the Arab Uprisings. While some determinants, such as minorities and economic interests, seem unchanged, other systemic determinants stemming from the Arab Uprisings influenced TFP towards Iran since the outset of the uprisings. Table 3.1 thus demonstrates the constant and changeable before the Arab Uprisings. In the following chapters, there will be a further examination of the realist paradigms in TFP towards Iran. Chapter 4 contains an examination of the role of recent systemic factors and Turkey's relative power position in shaping TFP towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings, as the independent variables explored in this thesis.

Constant Determinants	**Changeable Determinants**
Minorities	Systemic Factors
Economic factors	Ideology (from secularism to political Islam)

Table 3-1 Determinants of TFP towards Iran before the Arab Uprisings

CHAPTER 4 THE SYSTEM LEVEL — INDEPENDENT VARIABLES IN TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS IRAN SINCE THE ARAB UPRISINGS (DECEMBER 2010–JULY 2018)

According to Samuel Huntington, "the third wave of democratisation that swept the world in the 1970s and 1980s might have become a dominant feature of Middle Eastern and North African politics in the 1990s" (Abushouk 2016, 52). Before the Arab uprisings, in essence, the Middle East experienced some mass demonstrations, including the Kefaya Movement, which was against the fifth presidential term of the Mubarak regime in Egypt in 2005, and Yemen's Southern Movement, which were anti-government protests in 2008 and 2009 (Dinçer and Hecan 2020, 6). With the start of the Arab uprisings in late December 2010, the Middle East was faced with chaos, insurgency, civil war, or revolution once more.

Democratisation and social justice emerged as two significant goals among the wave of protests, as most people in these countries lacked basic services and lived in poverty. Furthermore, according to World Bank data, "in the decade preceding the uprisings, the share of income that went to the top 20 percent of the populations of Syria, Yemen, Morocco, and Egypt ranged from 41 to 48 percent, while the bottom 20 percent controlled between 7 and 9 percent" (Al-AIi 2019, 2). In this regard, the Middle East has suffered from anti-democratic regimes because of "a combination of oil wealth and conflict." Notably, a large and vibrant youth population was dissatisfied with rising inequality and declining levels of secure employment, prompting them to seek a political and social change (Elbadawi and Maksidi 2017). As a result, the protesters used 'aish, horreya, adala ijtema'eya' [bread, freedom, social justice] to express their demands during the uprisings.

With the suicide of a Tunisian hawker called Muhammed Bouazizi in December 2010, a wave of rebellion emerged first in Tunisia and then in Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, and Syria. According to Dalacoura (2012, 66), Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Yemen, and Syria were isolated "from the rest of the region which experienced comparatively minor fallout from those events," therefore not all monarchies were impacted equally by the Arab Uprisings. In this regard, the initial demonstrations in Tunisia had a domino effect and quickly affected much of the Middle East and North Africa more or less. However, the effects of the uprisings were different for each individual country. Some countries experienced regimes change; others

enacted hasty reforms. When losing their authoritarian allies, for instance, the oil-rich dynastic Gulf monarchies, such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), maintained their existing family rule and established strategies by increasing public spending. They also supported other poorer monarchies, such as Morocco, Jordan, and Oman, supplying diplomatic and financial assistance, and in one case even gave direct military support to Bahrain (Bank, Richter, and Sunik 2014, 177). As such, the above table demonstrates where the uprisings happened and what the results of the uprisings for each country were.

Tunisia	• The first protests, also known as the Jasmine Revolution, occurred in response to the self-immolation of a street vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, who was protesting his treatment by local officials. • President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, an authoritarian leader, was deposed on January 14, 2011, and a free election was held in October 2011 to select a President and Prime Minister. • A new Constitution was promulgated in January 2014.
Egypt	• Protests began on January 25, 2011, and another authoritarian leader, Hosni Mubarak, was overthrown on February 11, 2011. • Mohammed Morsi's Muslim-Brotherhood affiliated government was elected in June 2012. • The democratically elected leader Morsi was deposed by Egyptian military, and General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi took over as president in July 2013.
Libya	• Protests against Muammar al-Qaddafi erupted in mid-February 2011. • NATO launched a campaign of air strikes against Qaddafi's forces in March. • Following Qaddafi's assassination in October 2011, a Transitional National Council was formed and recognised internationally. • However, a bloody civil war erupted in 2014.The country was divided into rival eastern and western-based administrations.
Yemen	• Demonstrations erupted in late 2011, and Saleh signed an internationally mediated agreement calling for a phased transfer of power to the Vice President, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, in November 2011. • However, a civil war erupted in Yemen in 2014, when Hadi's government was confronted with armed conflict and rebellion by the Houthis.

Syria	• Protests erupted in southern Syria against Bashar al-Assad in mid-March 2011. • However, Assad retains power as a result of Russian, Chinese, and Iranian support, and a civil war is ongoing.
Bahrain	• Demonstrations took place in mid-February 2011. • Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates aided the Bahraini security forces in March 2011.
Other countries (Algeria, Jordan, Morocco, Oman)	• Minor pro-democracy protests occurred, and the rulers made a variety of concessions ranging from the dismissal of unpopular officials to constitutional changes.

Table 4-1The effects of Arab Uprising in each country from 2011 to 2018

Such circumstances affected the regional structure and caused power vacuums which pulled in other states in the Middle East. "Structure" is defined by the relative distribution of capabilities and the ordering principle of the international system-anarchy (Waltz, 1979 pp. 91–99). Accordingly, the political upheaval invariably impacted upon the regional balance of power. Turkey was too affected by this change in the regional environment and tried to adapt foreign policy in parallel with its new surroundings. Following this thesis' methodology and theoretical framework, this chapter is concerned with the role of the Arab Uprisings in Turkish foreign policy (TFP) towards Iran and Turkey's relative power position as the independent variable. In the first section, distinct but interrelated trends are presented which were transforming Middle Eastern politics since the Arab Uprisings, from December 2010 to July 2018, at the systemic level. These trends are the role of Islamic parties, the Sunni-Shia divide, the role of the global powers in the Middle East, and the empowerment of non-state armed actors. The second section sheds light on how the Arab Uprisings affected Turkey's regional power position and its bilateral ties with Iran from December 2010 to July 2018.

Overall, this chapter aims to answer the primary and overarching question: *To what extent did structural forces shape the formulation of Turkish policy towards Iran following the Arab Uprisings, from December 2010–July 2018?* In this process, other sub-questions will be answered on the role of Turkey's relative power position in its foreign policy behaviour and how Turkey recalibrated its foreign policy in the wake of a geopolitical shift.

4.1 An Analysis of the Arab Uprisings at a Systemic Level

The uprisings increased the uncertainty in the region and had the potential to shift the regional balance of power in which all regional and international states were attempting to manage, either by establishing a new Middle Eastern order or maintaining the status quo in line with their interests. Lynch (2013, 17) notes that "the Arab uprisings erupted within the context of a decade long cold war that polarised the region into a resistance axis led by Iran, which included Syria, Hezbollah, and Hamas as well as a broad swath of public opinion, and a moderate axis aligning the US with Israel and most of the other Arab states". Accordingly, new regional alliances were established following the overthrow of the authoritarian regimes, because as the Arab Uprisings continued to transform the balance of power, the former authoritarian regimes became weak and fragile.

The Arab Uprisings further paved the way to an increased role for Islamic parties and non-state armed groups in regional politics. As such, new power centres emerged to fill the power vacuum, and there were significant threats and opportunities for regional and global state powers to make gains according to their interests. In this tumultuous environment, the role of Muslim Brotherhood (MB)-affiliated Islamic parties in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, the growing sectarian divide between Sunni and Shi'a, the presence of global state powers across the region, and the empowerment of non-state armed groups were all factors in the re-casting of regional state competition, the balance of power, and the relative power position of the regional state actors in the wake of the initial uprisings.

4.1.1 The Role of Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Islamic Parties

The role of Islamic parties proved significant following the Arab Uprisings. Most Islamic parties won electoral victories in various countries, including Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia. They even played crucial roles in the developments in Syria and Yemen (Lynch 2016a). For instance, the MB-affiliated Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) won 37.5 per cent of the vote in the 2011–12 parliamentary elections in Egypt, and the MB-affiliated leader Mohamed Morsi became the first democratically elected President of Egypt in 2012. The similarly affiliated Ennahda in Tunisia won 37 per cent of the vote in the constituent assembly elections of October 2011, while the Justice and Development Party (PJD) achieved the largest parliamentary representation in November 2011. The advent of these parties to power

demonstrated that Islamic sentiment was a more dominant motivation than pan-Arabism among the public (Totten, Schenker, and Abdul-Hussain 2012). As such, following the uprisings, a dense Islamic political network re-emerged, and Islamist movements re-engaged with mainstream politics (Brown 2011).

According to Gerges (2013, 391), the reason why the Islamic parties gained power is that they were "slowly moving away from their traditional agendas of establishing an authoritarian Islamic state towards a new focus on creating civil Islam that permeates society and accepts political pluralism". In this respect, the shift in their perception and focus aroused sympathy from the public, who wanted to see an end to an authoritarian state order. Ayoob (2014, 10) posits that "the impressive electoral performance of the Islamist parties is likely to have regressive implications for Arab societies and highly negative consequences for the Arab world's relations with the West", especially with those having closer ties with authoritarian regimes and being concerned about Islamist movements. Therefore, the rise of Islamic parties had the potential to influence the regional balance of power.

The electoral victory of Islamic parties presented regional actors with an apparent dichotomy. Initially, Israel watched the transformations in regional politics with great concern because Arab-Israeli relations had been calculable and predictable since the signing of the Camp David Accords with Egypt in 1979 and the Peace Treaty with Jordan in 1994. Israel had viewed both Egypt and Jordan as largely passive strategic partners who would maintain the peace accords and the balance of power on behalf of Israeli interests (Amour 2017, 3–4). While the foreign policies of the previous authoritarian regimes were largely predictive, Israel had difficulty forecasting the trajectory of the new political dispensations' trajectory that now emerged. The fall of the Mubarak regime in Egypt, a reliable ally of Israel for over 30 years, became a worrying situation for Israel. In this regard, Israel particularly feared that its Arab allies would lose power and anti-Israel governments would rise in the region (Ayoob 2012, 86). The revival of Islamism and the empowerment of Islamic extremists would threaten Israel's security. As such, the electoral victory of MB-affiliated parties was viewed with deep suspicion in Israel, especially when the MB-affiliated government under Mohammad Morsi sought to cooperate with Turkey and Qatar and establish an "Islamist-based axis", even though "Morsi reiterated his party's commitment to uphold the peace treaty with Israel and preserve the strategic partnership with the US" (Amour 2017, 2–7; Shlaim 2014, 397). Based on a shared understanding of regional security due to the rise of MB-affiliated parties and Iranian influence

throughout the region, Israel sought to cooperate with Arab Gulf states, in particular the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia, under a relationship called a "tacit security regime" (Jones and Guzansky 2017).

Alongside Israel, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) —a regional intergovernmental political and economic union established in 1981 by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, and Bahrain—was at the centre of shaping the regional order and maintaining both internal security and the regional status quo. In this regard, the members of the GCC, except for Qatar, were concerned about challenges to their Islamic legitimacy and wished to maintain their unique Islamic model in the region (Al-Rasheed 2011; Duran and Yilmaz 2013, 148). In this era, therefore, the GCC, except for Doha, defended the regional status quo and spread the wealth and political support to conservative regimes across the region (Ryan 2009, 27). They also conducted anti-MB policies, especially in Egypt, and assisted the military government after the fall of the Morsi regime in July 2013 even though they (notably Riyadh) endorsed other Islamic opposition groups in Syria.

Their ambivalent policies towards the Islamic opposition groups pertained to their perceptions towards these groups. While supporting other Islamic groups in the region for their interests, Saudi-led Gulf countries perceived the MB-affiliated groups as a threat against their security due to their religious ideology. Notably, the regional rise of the MB, with its Sunni Islam identity, posed a threat to Riyad's Wahhabi identity; as another version of Sunni Islam, this identity was used by Saudi Arabia to legitimise its regime and counteract Iran's Shia identity (Darwich 2017, 1290). As well as an identity challenge, these states assumed that the rise of MB-affiliated parties could increase Iranian influence in the region. In essence, Iran's MB-oriented policies vindicated these countries' fears regarding Iran. Tehran envisaged that "if Islamists come to power in Egypt, Iraq, and elsewhere they may be more inclined toward good relations with Iran". Iran thus welcomed the rise of Islamist movements, especially the MB-affiliated ones, in the region (Byman and Pollack 2011, 247), and strove to establish warmer ties with the newly-emerged governments to increase its regional position. The advent of the Morsi government in Egypt, for instance, encouraged Tehran to enhance its relationship with Cairo further and, in doing so, the Saudi-led Gulf countries were opposed to the MB-affiliated government and its state allies, including Turkey, Qatar and Iran.

Given their support for the MB-affiliated groups, Doha, along with Ankara, welcomed the rise of the MB-affiliated governments following the uprisings, seeing these groups as significant in improving their geopolitical status and regional influence. As such, Ankara and Doha aimed to establish a new axis of power in the Middle East in the midst of the power vacuum created by the Arab Uprisings. Notably, Doha became a financial supporter of the MB-affiliated governments (Ozkan and Korkut 2013, 171). Following the election of the MB-affiliated government in Egypt, Doha offered Cairo loans and investments estimated at around $10 billion from the total Gulf support of $20 billion in total economic aid promised to Egypt, as well as financial and tourism agreements (Khatib 2013, 428).

Qatar further endorsed other MB offsets in the region, such as moderate Islamist Syrian MB against the Assad regime. According to Roberts (2014, 54), the reason for Qatar's backing of the MB "originated as the result of a structural necessity to staff positions without inculcating any systems that would automatically defer authority to Saudi Arabia [...] It also continued to make Qatar an important spoke of the wider Muslim Brotherhood wheel, expanding its importance regionally. These networks played the central role in Qatar seeking to augment its influence" since the Arab Uprisings. Therefore, Doha followed a pragmatist and ideological-based policies in supporting the MB (Booysen 2020). However, the pro-MB policies of Qatar soon encountered difficulties. Doha was accused of supporting a de facto movement whose ideology remained anathema to the idea of hereditary rule, an ironic position for Doha to adopt given the absolute fiat exercised by the ruling family, the Al-Thani. As a result, the 2017 Qatar crisis emerged when Saudi Arabia, along with Egypt, the UAE and Bahrain, severed diplomatic relations with Qatar, accusing it of supporting extremism and destabilising the region (Trager 2017). With this crisis, the Saudi-led these Arab countries applied an embargo against Qatar who Turkey and Iran soon assisted. Ultimately, new alliances emerged with the inclusion of Ankara, Doha and Tehran against the Riyadh-led GCC countries.

Nevertheless, the success of the MB-affiliated parties started to be questioned when the Morsi government in Egypt was unable to meet the expectations of the uprising. Al-Anani (2015, 533) highlights that three main factors caused the fall of the MB-affiliated Morsi government: "the burden of conservatism and lack of a revolutionary agenda, organisational inertia and stagnation of the MB, and the lack of governance experience among Brotherhood leaders, particularly President Morsi". As a result, the democratically elected Morsi regime was ousted by the Egyptian military on July 3, 2013. Following the Egyptian coup, the Ennahda

Party in Tunisia resigned in January 2014, while other Islamist parties demonstrated poor performance in the 2018 elections (Lynch 2016a). Again, the regional balance shifted towards anti-MB states, and, with the failure of these MB-governments, influence of pro-MB states started to decrease throughout the region (Ryan 2009, 27). By contrast, the influence of Saudi-led Gulf countries increased, notably in Egypt, and they tried to rebalance the regional forces that had so disrupted the balance of power across the region.

To sum up, the MB-affiliated Islamist parties were an essential determinant top understanding the Arab uprisings, prompting both global and regional powers to jockey for position amid a changing regional balance of power in an attempt to either protect or enhance their regional interests.

4.1.2 The Sunni-Shia Divide

The Sunni-Shia divide was another significant determinant of the regional balance of power that emerged with the Arab Uprisings. This division originated from the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 when the Sunni-dominated Ba'athist regime of Saddam Hussein was deposed, and a power vacuum emerged. In the ensuing chaos and despite the efforts of Washington to hold free and fair elections, Iran saw an opportunity to enhance its influence, playing an essential role in Iraqi politics by exercising more power over different Iraqi Shia actors, political parties whose sectarian, as opposed to the ideological character was all too easy to discern (Salloukh 2013, 34–35).

With the outbreak of the Arab Uprisings at the end of 2010, Sunni-Shia competition escalated and a range of actors, many militia-based, sought to exercise influence and power over what were, in effect, captive constituencies. This rise in the power of non-state armed groups and their affiliate parties attracted Saudi Arabian-led Sunni states and Shia Iran, with these countries offering increased support to non-state armed actors mainly along sectarian lines. As Malmvig (2014, 146) suggests, "no longer just Sunni Arab leaders have allied with the West, who advance a sectarian narrative or invoke a Shia Crescent to legitimise Iran and its allies, but also civil society groups and popular religious leaders, even some who have been actively seeking to mend Sunni-Shia relations". More precisely, compared to the pre-Arab Uprisings order, the Sunni-Shia division appeared to have both deepened and broadened in scope.

Sectarian rivalry in the region involved three power centres: Iran and the Shia militias that supported Iran in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq; Saudi Arabia and the GCC (plus Morocco and Jordan) and ISIS, the latest iteration of religious extremism in the region (Khoury 2013). However, the escalation of the sectarian divide was mainly accompanied by Iran's increasing influence in the region, which posed a threat for Saudi Arabia-led Sunni states. Iran maintained to enhance its regional power within and among Shia communities across the Middle East by supporting Shia uprisings in Bahrain and Yemen while endorsing the Alawaite regime in Syria (Khoury 2016b, 14). Tehran's pro-Assad stance put it on a collision course with the Sunni states regarding Syria. In Syria, Sunni-led pro-western states such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan supported the opposition, perceiving themselves as balancing the rise of Iranian and other Shia influences in the region. Since they viewed Iraq as a loss to Iran and the Shia camp, they thought that "they would gain an important advantage in the regional Shia-Sunni balance by turning Syria's Shia-affiliated Alawi regime into a Sunni one" (Aras and Akarçeşme 2012, 22). In this respect, Khoury (2016b, 14–15) addresses that as long as the uprisings continued to be unresolved, "the balance of power between Iran and Saudi Arabia will continue to fluctuate, along with the fortunes of the forces and factions they champion in the various proxy wars around them."

Thus, Riyadh viewed "Iran and Shia populations within or near its borders as explicit threats to continued stability" (Ennis and Momani 2013, 1128). Despite its domestic challenges, Saudi Arabia, hoped to expand its influence in the region because Riyadh was concerned that a decrease in its strategic regional influence would impact its affairs with the other Gulf countries. As such, the survival of the monarchical regimes emerged as a security interest, and so Riyadh developed an active foreign policy to maintain the regional status quo and prevent the increase of Iranian influence (Ennis and Momani 2013, 1128–30). In particular, the Saudi-Iranian rivalry extended military activism in the area. Saudi Arabia, for instance, supported NATO military interventions in Libya and Syria and Bahrain to maintain dynastic rule and impede the rise of Iranian influence across the region. Given its hostile policies against Tehran, Riyadh continued rally regional for an anti-Iranian axis, placing itself at the apex of such an alliance. In this regard, other Arab regimes, except for Doha, endorsed the recent actions of Saudi Arabia in Syria and Yemen against the rise of Iranian influence (Yorulmazlar and Turhan 2015).

These states with sectarian identities also sought to advance their regional interests by supporting non-state ideology-based armed groups, leading to a proxy war between Riyadh and Tehran. To illustrate, Riyadh propped up "proxy forces involved in armed struggle and, at least until late 2013, turned a blind eye to the recruitment of Saudis to join Al Qaeda- affiliated groups outside Saudi borders" (Norton 2015, 141); this was in addition to becoming a sponsor of Sunni armed groups in Syria. In Yemen, Iran collaborated with the Houthis, who fought against the ousted President Ali Abdullah Saleh, an ally of Saudi Arabia. Accordingly, the civil wars in Syria and Yemen aggravated the Riyadh-Tehran sectarian competition. Overall, as Gause (2014, 8) notes, sectarianism emerged as a weapon which changed the balance of power. Indeed, the Sunni-Shia competition between Riyadh and Tehran shaped the foreign policies of other regional and external actors following the uprisings.

4.1.3 The Role of Global Powers

The US and the EU established friendly relations with authoritarian regimes in the Middle East, ignoring undemocratic practises in these countries to protect Israel's security, maintain the flow of oil and energy supplies to the West, and limit the rise of Iranian influence. As a result, authoritarian regimes served the interests of Western powers in the region (Metawe 2013, 141). When the authoritarian regimes faced strong opposition in the region and began to fall, Western influence in the region began to wane. In this regard, other global powers (Russia and China) and regional powers (Turkey and Iran) attempted to fill the power gap. However, the US and the EU tried to maintain their regional influence despite their initial hesitation. By accelerating the anarchic environment in the region and upending the structure of the regional system, therefore, the Arab Uprisings carried the risk that regime shifts could transform an allied state into a neutral one or even an enemy of global state powers. Therefore, global powers hoped to manage the future of the uprisings to transform the developments of the uprisings based on their regional interests. In this regard, the US, the European Union (EU), Russia, and China were global powers who were critical of events and sought to shape the future of the uprisings. Following the 2008–2009 global economic recession and the failure of the prolonged conflicts in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, the distribution of global power experienced a significant shift in which the US dominance in the international order declined, while a more multipolar world emerged. As such, the US lost military, economic and moral prestige and was in the cross hairs, as most young Arabs questioned the US presence in the region and saw the

US-led wars as but an extensions of age old western imperialism (Held and Ulrichsen 2014; Shabbir 2013, 32).

At the outset of the Arab uprisings, the US support for most Arab autocrats was the focus of much ire of Arabs protesting across the Middle East. The public in Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinian areas, and in Turkey criticised the US policies, and identified Washington as responsible for aiding and abetting autocratic regimes (Shabbir 2013, 33). In this regard, Kitchen (2012, 55) posits that "the pro-democracy movements have not themselves improved perceptions of the US, with views remaining profoundly negative, as they have been for a decade". Among these global actors, therefore, the US presence in the region was questionable in the changing regional balance of power in the wake of the uprisings. Shabbir (2013, 32) notes that the US presence in the Middle East was especially diminished and its influence across the region reduced since it had "less familiarity with the new actors in the region and [an] even less powerful position from which to influence those actors on the ground".

On the other hand, it was believed that the US maintained its dominant position in the region due to "the strong positions of its regional partners and the stagnation or decline of its rivals" (Juneau 2014, 40). In the wake of the Arab Uprisings, the US allies, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, and Israel, preserved their US-oriented policies since they needed the US as an external power to strengthen their policies in the wake of the uprisings. In essence, Washington pursued its own regional interest after the uprisings, putting aside its values regarding "national self-determination" since its application to Middle Eastern countries would lead to the rise of anti-US governments following the uprisings (Byman and Pollack 2011, 8). In an interview with the Atlantic, then the US President Barack Hussein Obama highlighted "American credibility" in the region and believed that "a president should place American soldiers at great risk in order to prevent humanitarian disasters, unless those disasters pose a direct security threat to the US" (Goldberg 2016). As such, cost-benefit calculations determined the policies of the Obama administration following the uprisings, and so long as any intervention was beneficial to the US interests, Washington opted to conduct an operation in the region.

Washington pursued developments which would create a more conducive environment for its strategic interests, and dealt with each uprising on a "case-by-case and ad hoc basis" (Ciplak 2014, 112; Yorulmazlar and Turhan 2015, 342). The US seemed to have a common

understanding with its Sunni state allies about the rise of Iranian influence and at first opposed the Assad regime, supporting Sunni state policies. However, the empowerment of Sunni radical extremists like ISIS revived US tensions regarding the jihadist groups due to their anti-US and anti-western policies (Bazzi 2017; C. Phillips 2016, 466). Based on interest-driven policies, Washington was also concerned about the threat to energy supplies from the rise of international terrorism and jihadist groups (Lesch and Haas 2012, 7). To prevent this future aggravation to the US, Washington aimed to share the burden of, and responsibility for, any intervention during the uprisings with the EU and regional countries, as occurred with the Libyan intervention in 2011, under the 'responsibility doctrine'. Washington also then stayed passive on the Sunni-Shia division while its Sunni state allies sought a greater US role against Iran, changing its focus from Iran to the jihadist groups (Hachigian and Shorr 2013).

Despite its initial hesitation to intervening in the uprisings, Washington then withdrew their support from the oppressive regimes in Egypt and Libya, but ignored violent suppression by the authoritarian regimes in Bahrain and other Gulf States (Held and Ulrichsen 2014). Washington was also concerned for security reasons, on its own behalf and that of its allies, about the empowerment of Islamic parties. For this reason, it attempted to influence the newly elected parties in Egypt and Tunisia, hoping to encourage political reforms that would allow secular political systems, similar to Turkey's to emerge. Even so (?), Washington was accused of endorsing the military coup, despite Obama highlighting his concern over the military coup led by Sisi and the future of Egypt (J. Hudson 2013). As a result, the US role became a key determinant following the uprisings, affecting the policies of regional states and the developments of the uprisings.

The EU shared a common understanding with the US in terms of awaiting the outcomes of the uprisings. Having close economic relations with the authoritarian regimes, the EU aimed to maintain close trading ties in the region. The EU's policies towards the uprisings were further subjugated to security concerns regarding terrorism and illegal migration from the southern Mediterranean coast and the Arab world (Santini 2011, 285–86). In this regard, the EU's response to the Arab Uprisings was "limited and inspired by a conservative, rather than progressive, attitude to Euro-Mediterranean relations" (Bicchi 2014, 443). On this issue, Dias (2014, 59) unpacked the EU's policies at the beginning of the uprisings:

> *The EU's renewed approach southwards does not seem to differ significantly from the previous ones [...] When read carefully, the discourses and texts framing EU relations with the Southern Mediterranean since the Arab Uprisings, one realises that the EU is reproducing the same jargon and perpetrating the weaknesses of previous frameworks. Security concerns, including migration issues, remain at the top of the EU's agenda towards its southern neighbourhood, therefore reflecting the EU's interests and its vision on how the region should evolve.*

As such, the EU had difficulty in articulating a coherent approach towards the Arab uprisings, opting instead to ameliorate challenges to their regional interests by adopting short term measures rather than supporting wholesale normative change. Following the overthrow of the MB-affiliated party in Egypt in 2013, for instance, the EU largely played a passive role due to its concern about the success of Islamic parties in the region, even though they seemed to support democratic movements in the Middle East, as did the US (Academic 3, personal communication July 9, 2020).

Since the previous authoritarian regimes, notably the Mubarak regime in Egypt, had mostly cooperated with Washington (T. Oğuzlu 2011, 5), China and Russia deemed the Arab Uprisings to be a diminishing of western influence in the region. They thus aspired to sway regional politics in favour of their own strategic interests, with both countries adopting policies aimed at helping to diminish Western, and particularly American influence still further (Dannreuther 2015, 80–93; J. D. Pollack 2011, 300). In particular, Moscow endeavoured to increase its influence in Syria after 2015 as a non-western global state power. As such, Bagdonas (2012, 55) argues that "for Russia, [the Syrian conflict] was primarily about the world order and Russia's place in it". Similarly, Trenin (2016, 27) states that Russia's intervention in Syria indicated the significance of military force in reaching its historic idea which was to "keep Russia in one piece and return it to its rightful place among the world's powers". Since 2015, therefore, Russia managed to reassert its influence in Syria which had waned following the end of the Cold War.

Based on its long-term pragmatic and overriding interests, Moscow aspired to maintain its alliance with the Assad regime in Syria and had concerns about the possibility of fall of the Assad regime due to its considerable interests, including a military base and economic and military relations with the regime. Notably, Moscow feared that "if a pro-Saudi regime replaced the Assad regime, Saudi influence would further spread and reach Muslims in the North

Caucasus, as it happened in Chechnya" (Aras and Akarçeşme 2012, 22). In this regard, Moscow perceived Ankara and Tehran as short-term allies against the western camp, including the US. The three states temporarily cooperated to determine the future of the Syrian conflict through the Astana process in January 2017 to achieve a ceasefire between the Assad regime and Syrian opposition groups following the failure of the 2012 UN-backed Geneva talks to prevent escalation of the conflict.

Moreover, Russia started to play an active role to supersede the US, undercutting longstanding US relationships in the Middle East and restructuring the regional order on its own behalf. In this regard, Moscow attempted to establish economic and security ties with US allies such as Egypt. Russia and Egypt formed cordial relations and signed arms agreements, keeping a regular schedule of meetings throughout the process. In the wake of the 2013 military coup in Egypt, Russia also maintained ties with the new Egyptian government, while by contrast, the US compelled General Abdel Fattah al Sisi, the new Egyptian President, to make reforms and suspended aid (Goldenberg and Smith 2017).

Like Moscow, Beijing continued to adopt pragmatic policies towards political transformation, maintaining its economic and financial interests even though it had lost its long-standing relationship with many of the authoritarian governments in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya (Chang 2014, 177). "China's growing dependence on energy imports from the Middle East, its central role in the financing and development of major oil fields in the Persian Gulf, and the heightened investment of Chinese multinationals across the Middle East and North Africa" resulted in the continued reflection of China's strategic calculus toward the region (J. D. Pollack 2011, 298). In contrast to western efforts regarding human rights, democracy, and economic reform, therefore, Beijing aspired to forge close ties with undemocratic states like the Assad regime in Syria (Salman, Pieper, and Geeraerts 2015, 590). From the latter phase of the uprisings, therefore, the role of Moscow and Beijing in the region increased the questionability of the US presence in the Middle East. The US regional allies, including Ankara, looked for an alternative external power to achieve their regional interest following the uprisings. As a result, the role of global powers determined the sub-systemic policies from December 2010 to July 2018.

4.1.4 Empowerment of Non-State Armed Actors

Before the Arab Uprisings, non-state armed actors in the Middle East started to become empowered due to "the successive failures of states in the Arab-Israeli conflict, 9/11 attacks and lack of adequate participation in the decision-making process" (Shabbir 2013, 31). In fact, in some cases, they undertook more of a role than the states in the region. For instance, Hezbollah gained legendary status through its resistance to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in July 2006, and which saw widespread approbation for the movement on the Arab street, much to the chagrin of some Arab Gulf states who saw Hezbollah as merely an extension of Iran (Kamal 2009, 98). The Arab Uprisings thus increased the already upended power structure and provided non-state armed actors to strengthen their regional aims and policies.

The transformation of states from being a security provider to a source of insecurity pushed sub-national ethnic and religious groups to pursue their security mechanisms. To illustrate, the Kurds, Turkmen, and Sunnis in Iraq sought to maintain their interests due to the weakness of the Iraqi state and the government's transformation into a source of insecurity (Yeşiltaş 2014, 31). As well as these groups, non-state armed actors conducted their own political, religious and territorial aims and improved their status through pragmatic ties and alignments with states in the absence of a central authority (Elhusseini 2015). More precisely, those failed states whose structure had collapsed or weakened experienced the empowerment of non-state armed groups.

Previous regional non-state armed groups like Hamas and Hezbollah arguably lagged behind recent political transformations, and their power decreased in the region. Although Hamas enjoyed warming relations with Turkey and Qatar and was able to consolidate its regional position during the first period of the uprisings, the Saudi Arabia-led Gulf countries considered Hamas to be part of the MB and thus came out against its policies. The overthrown of the Morsi regime in Egypt further scuttled Hamas's regional aims since it lost a possible state ally. Additionally, Hezbollah's support for the Assad regime in Syria and Shia administration in Iraq decreased its prestige (Aras 2014a, 40–41). On the other hand, ISIS and Kurdish armed groups like the PYD/YPG increased their influence and, in so doing, threatened the institutions, ideologies, and economic structures of sovereign states more than the former groups. These groups directly challenged the region's modern formal borders by threatening territorial boundaries established during the first quarter of the twentieth century (Lesch and

Haas 2016, 184). More precisely, the unpredictable policies of these newly emerged non-state armed groups made external and regional states more concerned, while these groups benefited from the interstate competition, sectarian division, and political chaos (Yorulmazlar and Turhan 2015).

4.1.4.1 Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

A detrimental outcome of the Arab Uprisings was the emergence of ISIS (also called ISIL and DAESH), a jihadist group which was attempting to garner power in Syria and Iraq through the use of violence. Despite being widely known as an opponent of the Assad regime in Syria, the armed group's roots can be traced back to Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), established by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Following Zarqawi's death in 2006, AQI established the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) as an umbrella organisation. Under the leadership of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the armed group sought to increase its power and influence. Initially, the group started to carry out attacks against non-Sunni targets in Iraq and, with the advent of the uprisings in Syria, the group then supported the Al-Nusra Front, the Syrian branch of Al-Qaeda, against the Assad regime. Al-Baghdadi also unified his forces in Syria and Iraq under the name ISIS and found support among those who had left Al-Qaeda. As a result, ISIS used extreme violence as an instrument in its efforts to implement its rigid Wahhabi interpretation of Islam and became an influential non-state armed group that increased its control rapidly in the region, with its anti-western discourse and intentions (J. Karakoc 2016, 1–5). A failed central state and sectarian strife in Iraq thus led to the empowerment of ISIS. After the toppling of the largely Sunni Ba'athist regime by the US-led operation, many Sunnis were marginalised and excluded from state service by the Shia government, an occurrence which ISIS exploited as evidence of the victimisation of Sunnis at the hands of Shias and the US (Işiksal 2017b, 92–94). In other words, the deteriorating sectarian balance between Sunni-Shia in Iraq provided ISIS with the chance to gain control. As such, the empowerment of ISIS was not a coincidence; rather, various regional developments gave rise to the empowerment of the armed group.

The indirect and latent support of Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia for the Syrian opposition groups further resulted in the unintentional empowerment of ISIS. They initially provided financial and military support to opposition groups, without distinguishing between them, even though this included radical Islamist organisations like Al-Nusra and ISIS. Remarkably, Tehran blamed Riyadh for providing direct support to ISIS due to the higher participation rate of Saudi citizens in ISIS from Riyadh and the financial backing of wealthy

Saudi citizens (Işiksal 2017b, 98). This is because ISIS offered a virulently anti-Shia interpretation of Islam derived from Wahhabism. Therefore, Iran was the state most concerned about the rise of ISIS in its proximity. ISIS's military victories in Syria and Iraq threatened Iran's two closest regional allies —the Assad regime and the Shia Kurdish-dominated government in Iraq. The jihadist group also threatened the Iraqi central government, with its annexation, and caused the collapse or disintegration of Iraq. For Iran, the prospect of sectarian chaos and an armed and organised extremist Sunni entity on its western border was unacceptable (Lesch and Haas 2016, 185).

In essence, the empowerment of ISIS challenged both Sunni and western states' security and interests, as well as those of Tehran. With its radical Salafist ideology aimed at the establishment of an Islamic Sharia state under the rule of the Caliph, ISIS threatened the legitimacy of other Sunni states. For instance, an ISIS victory would have challenged the House of Saud's legitimacy, which is based on Wahhabism (Steinberg 2017, 35). Al-Baghdadi even proclaimed himself caliph, the spiritual leader of Islam, to legitimate ISIS's operations in the eyes of the Islamic world (Cockburn 2015, 28). The attacks of ISIS against the Kurdish region in northern Iraq, a reliable US ally in the region, were further perceived as a threat by the US, bringing the situation to "a point where it [was] no longer insisting on the overthrow of the Assad regime in Syria, much to the satisfaction of Iran" (Işiksal 2017b, 98; J. Karakoc 2016, 1–19). As such, ISIS emerged as a mutual security concern for regional and global state actors. Even, the rise of ISIS became another shared concern for Washington and Tehran following the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq (Lesch and Haas 2016, 185–86). Therefore, with its radical ideology and violent policies, the empowerment of ISIS posed a security threat to most countries following the uprisings.

The violent attacks of ISIS changed regional state borders. ISIS had captured a third of Iraq's territory by August 2014 and half of Syria by May 2015 following the declaration of Raqqa as a capital of the caliphate in June 2014 (Shaheen 2015). The armed group thus gained more territory than any jihadist organisation in history, and became the wealthiest and deadliest terrorist organisation in history, possessing substantial financial reserves derived from oil smuggling, bank robberies, ransom money, and taxes, all of which enabled it to hire recruits (Işiksal 2017b, 92). Taking all of this into account, ISIS posed a significant challenge to the regional status quo. Its empowerment especially posed a threat to Iraq and Syria's neighbours

because it aimed to enhance its territory and financial capability, bringing sectarian, territorial, and humanitarian issues.

To hamper the empowerment of ISIS, regional and global states have conducted international military operations against this armed group since August 2014. However, the states fighting against ISIS exhibited different geopolitical ambitions. To illustrate, in September 2015, Russia asserted that its military intervention in Syria aimed to prevent the spread of ISIS and other radical Islamist groups. By this intervention, Russia aimed to become an alternative determinant (dominant?) power in the Middle East, supporting its close allies and challenging US power in Syria (BBC News 2015; Hubbard et al. 2019). Moreover, the US endorsed its regional partners in the fighting against ISIS, both to defend its interests and to prevent a possible jihadist threat against itself and its allies (Esfandiary and Tabatabai 2017, 455). To this end, from August 2014 the US and its allies conducted thousands of military strikes to weaken ISIS. As Perra (2016, 371–72) notes, "the global fight against the ISIS has indeed opened the Pandora box providing opportunities for everyone to advance larger strategic plans aimed at either maintaining the status quo or at prompting regimes to change". Ultimately, the empowerment of ISIS affected the regional balance and states' policies in the wake of the Arab Uprisings by July 2018.

4.1.4.2 Kurdish Armed Groups

Like ISIS, Kurdish armed groups have reinforced their position since the Arab uprisings. With the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in March 2011 and the empowerment of ISIS in 2014, armed Kurds attracted unprecedented attention from international and regional state actors and gained opportunities to advance their goals. Particularly in Syria and Iraq, these groups took advantage of weakened central governments, and there were two main political effects in this regard. The first was their "determined resistance against the expansion of extremist Islamism across the region", and the second their "pro-modern outlook", which allowed them to gain sympathy from the international community in their struggle against ISIS (Sabio 2015, 332). Accordingly, the armed Kurds engaged in combat with ISIS in the Siege of Kobane (September 2014 to March 2015) and the Shingal battles (2014–2015), where the empowerment of the armed Kurds became more visible. Karakoc (2016, 18–19) argues that "Whereas the decades-old Kurdish struggle in different countries in the Middle East previously attracted little attention around the world, after ISIS attacked Kobane, the resistance and fight put up by the Kurds made them prominent actors for Western countries almost overnight".

Bearing in mind that most Kurdish armed groups looked to enhance their claims to national self-determination, they aimed to change the regional status quo (Aras 2014a, 40). In particular, the Syrian conflict created a knock-on effect in those states with large Kurdish populations. As such, the anarchic regional environment pushed these groups to seek "various degrees of independence, autonomy, or self-rule that they would not have otherwise" (Ünver 2016, 65). In this regard, Iraqi Kurdish groups sought to consolidate their semi-state status through the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) de facto independence in 2017. In the north of Syria, in 2016, the Syrian Kurds also declared an autonomous region called Rojava that emerged as a potential game-changer in the area. According to Gunter (2015, 102), "the precipitous rise of the Kurds in Syria could become a factor in changing the artificial borders of the Middle East established after World War I by the notorious Sykes-Picot Agreement".

Utilising the conflicts, these armed groups further increased their external support, with the US and Israel notably seeming to endorse them against jihadist groups. While the US backed them against ISIS, Israel liaised with these groups against the empowerment of Al Qaeda-backed Sunni extremists, and Iranian-backed Shia forces (Kavak 2017, 203). Even the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu highlighted Israel's support for the establishment of a Kurdish state, claiming that "creation of Kurdish state would aid in formation of alliance of moderate powers in Middle East" (The Guardian 2014). Due to its hostile policies against Iran and the Assad regime, Riyadh also began to establish ties with the PYD through financial backing. In May 2018, it was claimed that Saudi Arabia, along with the UAE and Jordan, were aiming to cooperate with the PYD to establish Arab military units led by Al-Sanadid forces, which are part of the PYD-dominated Syrian Democratic forces (Middle East Monitor 2018; Yeni Şafak 2018). As well as Iran and the Assad regime, this collaboration would also pose a threat for Turkey, even though in 2016 Ankara and Riyadh had previously cooperated against ISIS and the PYD (Sharma 2016; The Guardian 2016). Therefore, the regional aims of states contributed the empowerment of Kurdish armed groups.

Nevertheless, the empowerment of these groups posed a security threat to certain regional states, including Turkey and Iran, due to their long-term Kurdish minority issues. for this reason, these states sought to unite against the rise of armed Kurdish groups in the region, while also changing their choice of alliance (discussed in Chapter 5). Ultimately, the empowerment of armed Kurdish groups was an influential factor in changing the regional balance following the Arab Uprisings. In particular, the revisionist policies of the armed Kurds

generally influenced states' alliance choices as these states pursued their own interests. Given the significant factors shaping the developments following the Arab Uprisings, the next section sheds light on the role of these determinants regarding Turkey's relative power position and TFP towards Iran.

4.2 The Role of the System-Level on Turkish Foreign Policy towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings, from December 2010–July 2018

According to NCR, a state's relative power position in the international system determines its national behaviour in the long term (Zakaria 1999, 482). NCR is further concerned with the impact of the international sphere upon the state's foreign policy, arguing that "over the long run a state's foreign policy cannot transcend the limits and opportunities thrown up by the international environment" (Rose 1998, 151). In this regard, Turkey's power position determines its foreign policies. Having explained the sub-systemic changes after the Arab Uprisings, this section contains an analysis of how Turkey fitted into the international system as a regional middle power and followed a foreign policy approach following the uprisings. This section thus includes an examination of the role of the system-level in Turkish foreign policy towards Iran since the uprisings, from December 2010–July 2018.

The concept of a "middle power" is so debatable that there is no entirely satisfactory definition of it.[1] Nevertheless, the traditional definition of a middle power has included those states occupying "a middle-level position in the international power spectrum, just below superpowers or great powers", with "military capabilities, economic strength, and geostrategic position, leadership capacity, and impact and legitimacy in the international arena" (Yilmaz 2017). Although they are mainly affected by the affairs of the great powers in international politics, middle powers may declare themselves to be "the local great power", with or without

[1] See Details: Holbraad, C. (1984). *Middle powers in international politics*. Springer.; Cooper, A. F., Higgott, R. A., & Nossal, K. R. (1993). *Relocating middle powers: Australia and Canada in a changing world order* (Vol. 6). UBC Press.; Challenging Contemporary Notions of Middle Power Influence: Implications of the Proliferation Security Initiative for "Middle Power Theory"; Chapnick, A. (1999). The middle power. *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, *7*(2), 73-82.; Jordaan, E. (2003). The concept of a middle power in international relations: distinguishing between emerging and traditional middle powers. *Politikon*, *30*(1), 165-181.; Shabbir, M. (2013). Emerging Middle East: Interplay of the New Power Centers. *ISSRA PAPERS*, 25.; Patience, A. (2014). Imagining middle powers. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, *68*(2), 210-224.; Jordaan, E. (2017). The emerging middle power concept: Time to say goodbye? *South African Journal of International Affairs*, *24*(3), 395-412.; Robertson, J. (2017). Middle-power definitions: confusion reigns supreme. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, *71*(4), 355-370.

the support of great powers or small states in their proximity. In the regions where they are located, middle powers may follow different policies to the great powers, based on their own power potential and capabilities. Therefore, they can be defined as a regional power, which "has the potential to balance other forces, maintain codes of conduct, stabilise spheres of influences and police unruly states" (Müftüler and Yüksel 1997, 186–88).

Since the end of the Cold War, Turkey's power capacity, due to its population, military and economic strengths, and geostrategic position, has been conceptualised as a middle power.[2] Since coming to power in 2002, the AKP government has aimed to make Turkey a 'strategic country' by increasing Turkey's middle power capability. Between 2002 and 2011, Turkey demonstrated significant economic growth following the 2001 global financial crisis and increased its trade volume nearly fourfold in ten years (Bagdonas 2015, 315; Öniş 2014). In 2008, Turkey's status in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was also upgraded from a 'debtor' to a 'creditor' and Turkey also became an active member of Group of 20 (G20) involving the world's major economic states. As well as economic growth, Turkey enjoyed political and social development. Notably, its desire for EU membership prompted several reforms, including "improvements in its human rights regime, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, gender equality and minority rights" (Öniş and Kutlay 2017, 171–73). As such, the EU membership process accelerated democratic reforms in Turkey by the uprisings-term. In terms of military capacity, Turkey had the second-largest army in NATO at 495,000

[2] See Details: Hale, W. (1992). Turkey, the Middle East and the Gulf crisis. *International Affairs*, *68*(4), 679-692.; Müftüler, M., & Yüksel, M. (1997). Turkey: a middle power in the new order. In *Niche Diplomacy* (pp. 184-196). Palgrave Macmillan, London.; Hale, W. (2012). *Turkish foreign policy since 1774*. Routledge.; Kardaş, Ş. (2013). Turkey: A regional power facing a changing international system. *Turkish studies*, *14*(4), 637-660.; Cagaptay, S. (2013). Defining Turkish power: Turkey as a rising power embedded in the Western international system. *Turkish Studies*, *14*(4), 797-811.; Sandal, N. A. (2014). Middle powerhood as a legitimation strategy in the developing world: The cases of Brazil and Turkey. *International Politics*, *51*(6), 693-708.; Bagdonas, Ą. (2015). Turkey as a great power? Back to reality. *Turkish studies*, *16*(3), 310-331.; Ongur, H. Ö., & Zengin, H. (2016). Transforming habitus of the foreign policy: A Bourdieusian analysis of Turkey as an emerging middle power. *Rising Powers Quarterly*, *1*(2), 117-133; Parlar Dal, E. (2016). Conceptualising and testing the 'emerging regional power'of Turkey in the shifting international order. *Third World Quarterly*, *37*(8), 1425-1453.; Öniş, Z., & Kutlay, M. (2017). The dynamics of emerging middle-power influence in regional and global governance: the paradoxical case of Turkey. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, *71*(2), 164-183.; Süsler, B. (2019). Turkey: An Emerging Middle Power in a Changing World? *LSE Ideas Strategic Update, May*.

members of the Turkish Armed Forces, and significant developments were made by joining international NATO military operations (Daily Sabah 2012).

Similarly, Turkey enjoyed high-level bilateral ties with various states, including western and Middle Eastern states. Based on its geostrategic location, historical roots, and religious and cultural bonds, Turkey under the AKP government continued to seek a more proactive role to improve relations with other Middle Eastern countries by signing numerous political and cultural agreements as part of the policies of 'zero-problems-with-neighbours', and 'economic interdependency' (Ennis and Momani 2013, 1128; Işiksal 2017a, 211). As a result, Turkey's regional policies toward several states, such as Iran and Syria, entered into a period of détente, although they had been intended to resolve areas of tension in bilateral ties (Ennis and Momani 2013, 1129).

According to Sandal (2014, 694) "middle powers are seen as multilateralists that actively participate in institution building, peacekeeping operations and humanitarian mission". In this regard, Turkey further sought to mediate various disputes in the Middle East, including between Israel and Syria in 2008–09, Israel and Hamas in 2009, and Iran and the P5+1 (the US, UK, France, China, Russia, and Germany) in 2010. Ankara also hoped to play a significant role in various international and regional issues through its temporary role as a UNSC member in 2009–10, and its observer status in the Arab League in 2006. Turkey further pursued humanitarian diplomacy to "increase Turkey's assistance to developing nations and [respond] to major humanitarian crises around the world" (Susler 2019, 10). As a result of its humanitarian diplomacy, Ankara's overall amount of humanitarian assistance reached $7.5 billion from 2004 to 2012 (Haşimi 2014, 134). Accordingly, until the Arab Uprisings, Turkey was perceived as an influential regional power due to its increasing power capabilities, and Turkey's relative power position increased between 2002–2011.

Given the rise of its power capability and regional influence in the pre-uprisings period, Turkey initially hoped to maintain its power status in the region, and thus faced "a dilemma between ethics and interests" (Öniş 2012). In particular, Turkey's previous pragmatic economic and political gains with the authoritarian regimes prevented Ankara from responding immediately to the uprisings. In the case of Libya, Turkey first objected to external intervention, stating that military intervention would increase chaos by damaging politics in the region, even though it ultimately recognised the NATO intervention by offering active

support. In doing so, Turkey first attempted to maintain its previous interests in Libya, with whom Turkey had close trade relations. Before the Arab Uprisings, Libya had been a significant economic partner for Turkey due to its "source of crude oil as well as for the construction contracts of Turkish businesses, which amounted to approximately $20 billion" (Altunışık and Martin 2011, 575). In the case of Syria, Turkey also demonstrated a similar attitude during the first few months of the conflict by opposing international intervention "on behalf of the protesters" and recommending that "any reforms be initiated and controlled by the Bashar al-Assad regime" (Lesch and Haas 2012, 153). Therefore, Ankara opted to maintain the status quo in the region to a certain extent, based on its economic and political gains with the authoritarian regimes.

Because maintaining ties with the regimes started to be costly for Turkish interests, Ankara abandoned its previous ties and declared support for pro-democracy movements. If Turkey had maintained its close ties with the regimes, Ankara's prestige would have been damaged, and Turkey's regional influence might have suffered both at the time and in the future context of the uprisings. In essence, Turkey's leading role was in jeopardy since other regional and international actors had, by now, begun to interfere in the regional conflicts. While Turkey was following a wait-and-see policy, for instance, France and Britain were adopting an interventionist policy in Libya (Yeşilyurt 2017, 69). Oguzlu (2012, 5) adds that "appearing too supportive of Assad might have cost Turkey a critical role to play in a post-Assad era", and so Turkey endorsed the opposition groups. Based on interest-driven calculations, Turkey opted to promote democracy following the uprisings to protect its regional goals in its immediate environment and reinforce its status as a regional power.

Turkey thus recalibrated its policies towards the uprisings and followed revisionist policies by supporting the uprisings. These volte-face policies reflected its cost-benefit calculations and demonstrated its interest-based approach towards the uprisings. As a corollary of Turkey's volte-face policy, Ankara's zero-problems-with- neighbours policy lost its validity in Turkey's ties with its authoritarian neighbours, including Syria, Libya, and Egypt. In Dalacoura's (2012, 76) words, Turkey's zero-problems-with-neighbours policy "was thrown [up] in the air as Arab populations challenged their governments, leaving Turkey searching for a coherent response".

According to Onis and Kutlay (2013, 1412), "economic interdependence" and "pro-democracy rhetoric" became two significant pillars of TFP at the beginning of the uprisings. Aras and Yorulmazlar (2014, 114) added "humanitarian protection, security, and regional diplomacy" as three pillars determining Turkey's involvement in the Arab uprisings. However, these soft power tools served Turkey's regional interests in that Ankara sought to use liberal values to improve its relative power position. In the case of Bahrain in February 2011, for instance, Turkey remained silent and avoided criticising the repression of protests by the Gulf monarchies (led by Saudi Arabia), to avoid jeopardising its strong economic ties in particular Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE (Elik 2018, 107). Turkey further opposed the autonomy of the Syrian Kurds in the north of Syria due to its national security concerns and conducted several military operations against the PYD/YPG to prevent their empowerment in its proximity since 2013. Therefore, Turkey's policies towards Bahrain and the Kurds in the north of Syria fell contrary to its principle of promoting democracy. As a result, as Stein (2014, 36–57) describes, Turkey's changing policies towards the uprisings in each country "cannot be described as an effort to promote democracy. Instead, it has been far more nuanced, based on assumptions made about a changing regional order and how the upending of the Arab world's political status quo would benefit Turkey". This shows that Turkey conducted interest-based foreign policies based on cost-benefit calculations.

Given the positive image it held before the uprisings, Ankara pursued a leadership role and promoted itself as a model in the region. Turkey's efficacious economic success and regional political prestige allowed it to propagate a positive image during the uprisings (Ennis and Momani 2013, 1128). It mostly attempted to become a 'central country' by adopting a strong and significant position in regional systems, and also intended to become a world power in the long term (Aras 2010). As such, Turkey perceived itself as an influential model, presenting an excellent example of a democratic Muslim country in the Middle East. Although Turkey seemed to balance idealism and realism (Karacasulu 2015, 34), TFP exhibited more realist aspects based on national interests.

At the beginning of the uprisings, Ankara further sought to consolidate its power position by cooperating with global powers and bringing its foreign policy in line with those of the EU and the US. In doing so, Ankara hoped to empower its internal and external roles and eliminate potential opposition from Brussels and Washington towards its political activism in the Middle East (Ciplak 2014, 93). The Obama administration encouraged Turkey to assert

itself as an ideological model throughout the Islamic world, with a view to protecting US interests through the spread of Turkey's "liberal Islamic system" in the political realities of the era. Washington reasoned that "If Turkey [did] not provide the ideological inspiration in domestically vulnerable regimes, more radical, and more anti-American, Islamist groups might emerge" (Lesch and Haas 2012, 166). As well as the US, the EU supported the Turkish model, putting aside its concerns regarding the growing Islamisation of TFP (Tocci et al. 2011, 9). Despite its Islamic aspects, the Turkish model overlapped with EU principles, and this support encouraged Turkey to follow a more active foreign policy in the region. As a result, potential mutual benefit paved the way for cooperation between Ankara and its Western allies, the EU and the US. Turkey initially appeared to be more willing to seek a common understanding with western states and with the US in particular due to its lack of ability to affect regional developments and undertake a leadership role (Murinson 2012, 12). This is because, as Demir (2017, 3) explains, "the efficacy of Turkey's foreign policy as a middle power depends on the quality of both relationships between the great powers and Turkey's own relationships with them". After a brief hesitation, Turkey cooperated with NATO to topple the Libyan leader Qaddafi and had common aims with the West in attempting to topple the Assad regime following the uprisings.

On the other hand, Zakaria (2011, 38) argues "that rising powers should no longer be seen as having to choose between integrating into or rejecting the western order. On the contrary, rising powers today seem to be entering the western order but doing so on their own terms —thus reshaping the system itself". From the beginning of the Arab Uprisings until mid-2012, both systemic pressures and the regional environment were permissive. To respond to these pressures, Turkey adopted two policies: supporting the transformation by seeking a mediator role, and direct intervention in the uprisings when transformation seemed difficult (Expert 3, personal communication, July 21, 2020). The power vacuum, in which the regional roles of the US and the EU were lacking, Russia did not yet intervene in the uprisings, and some Arab countries were dealing with domestic issues, provided Turkey with an opportunity to enhance its power position and regional interests, by constituting a new regional order and cementing its international status (Karacasulu 2015, 34). Therefore, TFP demonstrated revisionist aspects by following assertive and active policies in the region.

Turkey viewed the Arab Uprisings as an historic opportunity to further increase economic and political cooperation with new governments in the region, especially those with

which Turkey had more limited relations (Işiksal 2017a, 213). After the removal of the Ben Ali regime, for instance, Turkey attempted to develop political and economic ties with Tunisia (Altunışık 2014, 345). Notably, pro-MB policies emerged as being of "strategic importance" for Turkey's future policies in the regional politics because MB-affiliated governments would be allies supporting Turkey's influence in the region (Süsler 2020, 166), thereby increasing Turkey's relative power position. Ankara thus started to support the opposition groups, including MB-affiliated parties/groups, by welcoming the overthrow of the Mubarak regime in Egypt and attempting to establish close economic and political ties with the new MB-affiliated government (Lesch and Haas 2012, 153). Turkey's pro-democracy policies thus served Ankara's interest in Egypt, Libya, and Syria in where Turkey supported MB-affiliated parties and groups. According to Expert 3 (personal communication, July 21, 2020), Turkey became successful and earned economic and political benefits following the uprisings. In Libya, for instance, Turkey gained economic benefits and in Egypt political ones. Egypt and Turkey put aside their competition and formed a political alliance in the region, and Turkey's economic gains doubled in contrast to pre-uprisings term.

Bearing in mind that the influence of the great powers had decreased to a certain extent, the regional middle powers were attempting to fill the resulting power gap. Turkey thus entered into competition with Iran and Saudi Arabia to promote its political tendencies in the future of the uprisings. Riyadh deemed Turkey's growing role as a threat to its position as the leader of the Sunnis because of Turkey's backing of the MB-affiliated parties (Roy 2012, 17). Tunisia's Al-Nahda leader Rachid Ghannouchi, and Saad el-Katatni, the head of the Egyptian MB's new party Freedom and Justice, viewed the Turkish AKP government as a useful Islamic model (Dalacoura 2012, 77). Similarly, Iran was concerned about the Turkish model in the region since, as Murinson (2012) notes, "Turkey's emerging regional leadership role offered the Arab Islamists a Sunni alternative to Iran". There are two main reasons why the Turkish model was more attractive to the new governments. First, compared to the religious Saudi and Iranian models, the Turkish model offered Islamic liberalism involving "a marriage of formal democracy, free-market capitalism and (a toned-down) conservative Islam" (Tugal 2016, 4). Second, while the Saudi and Iranian models combined "natural resources and rentier politics to achieve economic growth", the Turkish model raised its "economic productivity through the combination of and educated Turkish society and strong manufacturing" (Salem 2011, 8). Therefore, the Turkish model was viewed as more applicable in the public opinion of the Arab uprising countries (Ennis and Momani 2013, 1129).

Turkey and Iran vindicated neoclassical realist expectations which argue that states, as influence maximisers, aim to expand their power over their external environment and utilise this power to achieve better opportunities to better affect the regional order (Juneau 2015, 104). The two non-Arab actors attempted to play a leading role in the fate of the Arab Uprisings, and hoped to become a model country in the post-Arab Uprisings era (Legrenzi 2015). Like Turkey, Tehran followed pragmatist and interest-based policies following the Arab Uprisings and perceived the uprisings as an opportunity to enhance its regional influence to a certain extent, assuming that Iran might be a good model since its 1979 Islamic revolution had toppled the west-supported authoritarian Shah regime (Academic 3, personal communication, July 9, 2020). This competition over being the best 'model' is reflected in the two states' perceptions of the uprisings. Turkey viewed the uprisings as an internal dynamic that resulted from undemocratic and corrupt regimes. For instance, then Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu pointed out that,

> *At that time, the question of what we attempted to find out an answer was: What it the ordinary course of history? Who stands on the right side of history? Are the protesters in Tunisia or Ben Ali? Is Mubarak or Youngs in Tahrir Square? These kinds of questions came out. We decided that this is a natural order and there is no conspiracy. The Arab Spring was started by the young Arab generation which should be respected (Uzun 2013, 149).*

Under this self-perception, Besir Atalay, the former Turkish Deputy Prime Minister, further pointed out that Turkey was ready to share its experience with the affected countries, to become part of the democratic transformation in the region (Uzun 2013, 149). However, Iran saw foreign interference behind the uprisings. Iran's former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, claimed, that:

> *We are going to make greater efforts to encourage both the government of Syria and the other side, all parties to reach an understanding. But I think and we believe that there should be no interference from outside. The positions of the United States are not going to help. They have never helped. They could do things better in Libya, for example. From the beginning, we said there should be an international team to mediate in order to encourage all parties to reach an understanding. But NATO had ambitions in Libya. They wanted the oil resources in Libya. There was no need to kill so many people. This is the situation in Syria, too (Uzun 2013, 151).*

In this tumultuous environment, Iran also emerged as another regional non-Arab power by using the emerging power vacuum in Iraq, as well as its long-term support for President Bashar al-Assad, to maintain and expand its presence across what some referred to as the Shia crescent (Khoury 2016b, 14). Iran now gained more opportunity than Turkey to raise its level of influence following the decreased US presence in Iraq and the 2013 draft nuclear deal, since the balance between Sunni and Shia states changed in favour of Iran (Academic 4, personal communication, July 6, 2020). In other words, the declining of the US influence in the region fell completely in line with Tehran's wishes. Turkey and Iran thus competed to fill the regional power vacuum arising from Arab fragmentation and turbulence, while most Arab actors were dealing with domestic issues, and the roles of the great powers were limited. The two states emerged as rival ideological models for those countries which experienced the Arab Uprisings, and their ideological differences caused sectarian rivalry (Academic 2, personal communication, August 6, 2020). According to Expert 2 (personal communication, August 19, 2020), Turkey was indeed disturbed by the rise of Shia Iranian influence in Syria and Iraq. The sectarian rivalry between Ankara and Tehran thus led to collaboration between Riyadh and Ankara over Bahrain and Syria at the beginning of the uprisings. To prevent the rise of Iranian influence, Turkey supported Saudi Arabia against Iran in the proxy Sunni-Shia war between Tehran and Riyadh and agreed with the Saudi objective of restricting Iranian Shia influence in the Persian Gulf. In the Yemeni uprising of 2011, Turkey supported the Saudi campaign and sought to make economic and military agreements with pro-Saudi groups, as well as Bahrain and Syria (Elik 2018, 107).

The divergent policies of Iran and Turkey expanded to Syria, where the states supported opposite ideological sides in the war. Turkey deemed the Syrian conflict to be about the democratic demands of Syrians and was therefore more critical of the Alawaite Assad regime. Turkey was at loggerheads with Iran due to its support for the Syrian Sunni opposition groups. On this issue, Nuray Mert, a Turkish journalist and political scientist, discussed the competition between Turkey and Iran in Syria:

> *If there is going to be a regime change in Syria, the whole power balance will change. If Iran loses Syria, they will lose a significant base of power in the Middle East. So, it will be a significant defeat for Iran, and within this framework, Turkey sides with the dissidents and supports some sort of regime change. Iran will take it directly against itself (Uzun 2013, 158).*

As a result, the Arab Uprisings disrupted the balance between Ankara and Tehran, bringing their conflicting interests, visions, and projects to the fore (Lesch and Haas 2012, 8; Uzun 2013, 158). Turkey perceived the rise of Iranian influence as a threat, since it might lead to a decrease in Turkish influence (Academic 3, personal communication, July 9, 2020). As a regional middle power, Turkey thus aspired to enhance its relative power position and regional interests in the wake of the uprisings to cope with the rise of Iranian influence. TFP towards Iran demonstrated competitive and revisionist characteristics when their interests overlapped. Expert 2 (personal communication, August 19, 2020) stated that if Turkey fails to balance Iran in the region, Iran may become Turkey's greatest enemy because its relative power would increase if Iran cooperated with US and Gulf-countries. This demonstrates that systemic variables shaped TFP towards Iran, and TFP towards Iran was influenced by Turkey's relations with international actors, including the US. Given its interest-driven calculations, Ankara pursued collaboration with other state actors, such as Saudi Arabia and the US, to hamper the Iranian influence to a certain extent.

4.3 Concluding Remarks

The Arab Uprisings not only changed the domestic politics of the affected countries, but they also led to regional reassessments of political systems, national interests, alliances, and rivalries. The uprisings accelerated the already anarchic environment of inter-state competition, and the rise of non-state armed groups. The above table indicates the precise link between the AUs as a change of executive powers in several countries and spill-over effects in the shape of changes of direction in the foreign policies of other countries.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates	• Both states saw minor protests but suppressed them. • They aided Bahrain's Sunni regime in putting down demonstrations by the Shiite Muslim majority. • In Egypt, they perceived the MB-related government as a threat and supported the military coup. • Saudi-led coalition supported the Yemeni regime. • However, they supported Sunni rebellion groups against the Allawi Assad regime in Syria.

	• In Libya, they endorsed the eastern-based government.
Iran	• Supported the rebellions in Bahrain and Yemen but aided the Assad regime in Syria.
Turkey	• Supported the MB-affiliated parties, Syrian opposition, and the western-based government in Libya.
Global State Powers	• NATO conducted air strikes against the Qaddafi regime in Libya. • In Egypt, the US and the EU played a passive role during the military coup attempt. • The US and the EU supported the Syrian opposition before shifting their focus to combating the ISIS. • Russia has backed the Assad regime in Syria since 2015 and supported the eastern-based government in Libya.

Table 4-2 The Arab Uprisings and reginal and global state actors from 2011 to 2018

In such an environment, the role of Islamic parties, the Sunni-Shia division and the competition in the intra-Sunni group, the role of great powers and the empowerment of non-state armed groups determined Turkey's affairs with Iran. As two regional middle powers, Turkey and Iran followed interventionist and revisionist policies after the Arab Uprisings, hoping to utilise the political vagueness to enhance their interests; they thus welcomed the uprisings as movements that would transform the Arab world under the principles and ideologies they respectively embraced (Işiksal 2017a, 211; Yorulmazlar and Turhan 2015, 343). As such, Turkey perceived Iranian policies as a threat to its power position and was concerned about the rise of Iranian influence in the region. In this regard, Ankara collaborated with Saudi Arabia to prevent the rise of Iranian influence, notably in Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain, and further sought US support to for its regional policies. In Syria, Turkey initially opted for collaboration with NATO while supporting NATO operations in Libya.

Although the regional dynamics that stemmed from the Arab Uprisings and its ground-breaking effects in the region were influential in understanding the evolution of TFP towards Iran, however, these dynamics alone cannot provide a comprehensive understanding unless Turkey's domestic variables are examined. The argument made throughout this thesis is that external structural changes primarily induced a change in TFP towards Iran in the long term. However, the thesis maintains that unit-level dynamics determined TFP towards Iran from December 2010 to July 2018, which is a short-to-medium term.

Based on unit-level variables in short-term foreign policy, Turkey opted for pragmatist and interest-driven collaboration with Iran. Therefore, the next chapter will shed light on the AKP elite's perception and Turkey's domestic considerations, including economic and security ones, to examine TFP towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings. The next chapter contains an examination of how the AKP failed to grasp the systemic changes and conducted foreign policies above Turkey's middle power capacity, and how Schweller's balance of interest theory explains Turkey's short-term alliance choice with Iran between December 2010 and July 2018.

CHAPTER 5 THE UNIT LEVEL — INTERVENING VARIABLES ON TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS IRAN SINCE THE ARAB UPRISINGS (DECEMBER 2010-JULY 2018)

According to NCR, even though foreign policy outcomes reflect the distribution of power in the long term, they may not follow the imperatives of power distribution renders in the short to medium term. More precisely, in short to medium term, state foreign policy may not harmonise with state material capabilities since domestic unit-level factors play a determinant role in shaping state foreign policy (Rose 1998, 146; Schweller 2004, 6). These unit-level variables provide a tool to examine the domestic processes of states, which "arrive at policies and decide on actions" in response to systemic forces (Juneau 2010, 2).

In this chapter, further analysis is made of the unit-level variables which filtered the systemic pressures of the Arab Uprisings and Turkey's relative power position and shaped the outcome of TFP towards Iran. Following the period of the uprisings, Turkey specifically shaped its policy responses towards Iran on the basis of certain domestic factors and the changing regional structure and balance of power. This chapter sheds light on how the intervening variables prevented Turkey from entering a conflict with Iran and resulted in an alliance between the two neighbours. Thus, the chapter presents the response to the second research question concerning "*how unit-level factors interacted with structural imperatives in shaping TFP towards Iran from December 2010 to July 2018*".

The chapter is divided into three sections: an identification of the AKP elite's perception in TFP towards Iran; an examination of Turkish domestic security and economic considerations on TFP choices towards Iran; and conclusion remarks of the findings. In particular, the chapter highlights the role of the AKP elite's (mis)perception of the systemic changes and Turkey's middle power capabilities, and how Schweller's balance of interest approach can be used to view Turkey's choice of alliance with Iran.

5.1 The AKP Elite's Perception

In NCR, there is an emphasis on politicians as the pivotal actors in international affairs, since their perception of shifts in power influences a state's foreign policy behaviour (Wohlforth 1993, 6; Zakaria 1999, 42). Notably, a change in the perceptions of the state's leaders or other policymakers is more rapid than shifts in the state's material capabilities. As such, state foreign policy behaviour can be examined through the perceptions of its foreign policymakers (Schweller 2003, 39). This suggests that over the short to the medium term, state foreign policy is influenced by foreign policymakers' perceptions more than the state's objective material power (Rose 1998, 147).

A state's foreign policy is a process of three stages, including "strategic assessment", "strategy formulation" and "implementation of the strategy". The strategic assessment phase comprises the perception of the state's decision-makers dominant role (Tang 2009). To understand a state's foreign policy behaviour, it is essential to examine in detail foreign policymakers' understanding of a state's situation in international affairs (Rose 1998, 158). Schweller (2004, 5) argues that "states respond (or not) to threats and opportunities in ways determined by both internal and external considerations of policy elites, who must reach a consensus within an often decentralised and competitive political process".

According to Barkin (2009, 245), "the need for prescription underlines the possibility that prediction might fail. This is the case in as much as it involves having to tell decision makers to do what they have been predicted to do or having to warn them not to do what it has been predicted they will not do anyway. To the extent therefore that we expect that prescription might work, we must accept that prediction might fail". Therefore, foreign policy makers have difficulty in predicting international developments or foreign policies of other states. This also implies that a variety of factors, such as beliefs or perceptions, domestic interest groups, may influence their forecasting of international developments or foreign policies of other states (Kaarbo 2015, 16). Furthermore, decision makers' choices may be influenced by the external behaviour of other states owing to the absence of an international system mechanism to control all foreign policy choices. As a result, the logical goal of national security decisions can sometimes result in irrational outcomes (Schmidt 2008, 190).

Bearing in mind that "psychological, societal, ideational, political, institutional and material" factors influenced state decisionmakers' responses to domestic and international environment (Darwich and Kaarbo 2020, 227), identity shapes the system because states tend to collaborate when they share common ideas on principles of governance. Since political elites shape state foreign policy, they usually seek to mobilise or construct identities to promote specific interests (Haas 2014). More precisely, identity becomes an instrument for the pursuit of interest, and so the ideology of the ruling elite may inform both the perceptions of relative power and the adaptability of potential policy, and influence the mobilisation of state power (Lobell 2009, 21).

Turkey's national security executive was comprised of the head of government, ministers, and officials, and together they were responsible for state foreign policy, from December 2010 to July 2018 (until the official declaration of Presidency in Turkey). Accordingly, the significant key players in shaping Turkish foreign policy have been Recep Tayyip Erdogan (as Prime Minister between 2003 and 2014, and President between 2014 to 2018), Ahmet Davutoglu (as Prime Minister between 2014 and 2016, and Foreign Affairs Minister between 2009 and 2014), Abdullah Gul (President between 2007 and 2014), Mevlut Cavusoglu (Foreign Affairs Minister between 2015 and 2018), Binali Yildirim (Prime Minister between 2016 and 2018), as well as other AKP officials. Given the importance of the perception of state elites, this section examines the perception of the AKP elites, including the president, prime minister, key cabinet members, ministers, and advisors, and how this perception played a significant role in shaping TFP towards Iran, from December 2010 to July 2018. To a certain extent, the AKP elites' identity and perceptions defined Turkish national interest from December 2010 to July 2018; for this reason, TFP was examined using an ideological framework to a certain extent (Cornell 2012, 18; Yavuz 2009, 208).

In August 2001, a core group established the AKP, splitting from the Islamist Welfare Party (in Turkish *Refah Partisi*). Even though AKP cadre described the party as centre-right when it was founded, their religious background became increasingly dominant in shaping foreign policy. Many of its founding elites graduated from Imam Hatip High schools, which focus on the interpretation of religious-legal matters and served various Islamist background parties for years. Notably, their perception reflected a "National View" (*Milli Gorus*), based on the orthodox Naqshbandiya order (Cornell 2012, 18). In this regard, the AKP cadre followed an "ethnic-national identity over a religious and civilisational one (umma)" and viewed the

Turkish nation as a "Sunni/ Halafi/ ethnic-Turk homogeneous entity" (Yavuz 2009, 209). Their viewpoint under "a conservative Islamic identity" thus shaped their internal and external policies (Han 2016, 59).

During their first term in government, however, AKP elites often refrained from promoting avowedly Islamist policies, and focused on a multi-dimensional foreign policy emphasising the party's centre-right direction. Ahmet Davutoglu, who was then the Foreign Minister of Turkey, elaborated on this:

> *Turkey enjoys multiple regional identities and thus has the capacity as well as the responsibility to follow an integrated and multidimensional foreign policy. The unique combination of our history and geography brings with it a sense of responsibility. To contribute actively towards conflict resolution and international peace and security in all these areas is a call of duty arising from the depths of a multidimensional history for Turkey (Davutoğlu 2009, 12).*

As such, the AKP elites aspired to present Turkey not only as a "Middle Eastern actor but also as an active member of the Islamic world and a European and development-oriented Muslim country through taking the initiative in regional and international relations" (Kiani 2015, 175). This aspiration laid the foundation for multidimensional policies, including ties with both the Middle East and western Europe. Notably, Ahmet Davutoglu and Abdullah Gul, another founding member of the AKP and then President of Turkey from 2007 to 2014, emphasised the combination of Turkey's "Eastern and Islamic identity" and the AKP's determination to follow western values and join the EU (Yavuz 2009, 202). Thus, their understanding was that the more active Turkey was in the Middle East, the more important it would become to the West by connecting the West and Middle East politically and economically (Expert 3, personal communication, July 21, 2020; Journalist 1, personal communication, July 1, 2020).

In doing so, the AKP elites also aimed to protect the party from Kemalists and the Turkish military, who traditionally supported pro-western policies, a secular order and the existence of the Republic, and who suspected that the AKP would transform the country into an authoritarian, religious state (Dinc and Yetim 2012, 72). The AKP elites thus refrained from demonstrating Islamic identity-based policies to avoid experiencing the same fate as former Islamist parties, who were banned either by military intervention or constitutional court rulings

(Yavuz 2009, 3). In essence, the AKP cadre twice faced trials which could have led to its closure in October 2002 and March 2008. The 2002 trial concerned whether the AKP leader, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, could become a deputy and the official leader of the party, since he had been sentenced for inciting religious hatred in 1998 (New York Times 1998). The 2008 trial aimed to close the AKP party and ban from politics for five years seventy-one of its leading members, including then President Abdullah Gul and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, because of the AKP's anti-secular policies. Although the Constitutional Court of Turkey rejected the closure request, ten of the eleven judges declared that the party had violated secular policies and agreed on a partial withdrawal of state funding for the party (Milliyet 2008). To avoid repeating this experience, the AKP deemed that a multi-dimensional policy involving both Middle Eastern and western values would be more appropriate as a basis for TFP.

When consolidating its power in Turkish domestic politics between 2007 and 2011, with the consecutive election success and the decrease of the Turkish military and the seculars on Turkish politics, the AKP sought to form a cohesive elite political group with strong political and economic support from the Muslim bourgeoisie (Altunışık and Martin 2011; Öniş 2014). In this regard, most AKP elites increased the expression of Islamic identity in the public sphere to influence "the rise of a new middle-class stratum of pious Muslims that may lead to the formation of credible, moderate political Islam compatible with regional stability" (Rabasa and Larrabee 2008, 68,75; Roussos 2017, 99). This political transformation reverberated in TFP, in which the definition of national security and threat perceptions were re-evaluated. Unlike the Kemalists' policies which had aimed to closer ties with the Western states, the AKP's policy move was to form a deeper relationship with the Middle Eastern countries.

Issues in the Turkey's EU membership process during the post-2005 period accelerated this policy shift from western- to Middle Eastern-based policies. Although Turkish-EU affairs had entered a new phase through Turkey's accession negotiation on October 3, 2005, Turkey's desire for EU membership diminished when the European Council (EC) suspended eight of thirty-five negotiation chapters on December 11, 2006. The Council claimed that Ankara had not fulfilled its responsibility to open its ports to the Republic of Cyprus (Southern Cyprus), which had been an EU member since 2004. The French President Nicholas Sarkozy further had shown reluctance about Turkey's EU membership, claiming that "Turkey was geographically not part of Europe" and "had no place in an already overstretched union" (Bilefsky 2007); this reluctance paved the way for Turkey to search for alternative policies. As a result, the group in

the AKP cadre supporting the closer ties with the Middle Eastern countries increased their influence in foreign policy and focused more on the Middle East. This resulted in the impression that TFP was undergoing a fundamental pivot away from a western-based foreign policy into a Middle East-focused agenda (Altunışık and Martin 2011, 571,578; Yavuz 2009, 211).

Then, with the 'strategic depth doctrine', the AKP elites highlighted the importance of Turkey's Ottoman past and its historical and cultural ties to the Middle East, the Balkans, and Central Asia. They advocated that Turkey's Ottoman inheritance is a significant asset for Turkey's quest for becoming a regional power (Rabasa and Larrabee 2008, 76). Foreign Minister Davutoglu's 'zero-problems with-neighbours' policy further aimed to establish cordial economic and political ties with Middle East countries, assuming that, as well as historical and cultural relations, strong economic interdependence would increase Turkey's relative power position in the Middle East (Küntay 2014, 235). Based on these aspirations, then Prime Minister Erdogan enjoyed cordial personal ties with numerous authoritarian leaders, including the Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi and the Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad. In November 2010, Qaddafi even awarded Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan with the Qaddafi Prize for Human Rights.

On the other hand, these policies increased the discussions related to 'Neo-Ottomanism', which originated from then President Turgut Ozal's term in the 1990s; indeed, the Turkish foreign policy literature also referred to the term in regard to Turkey's close political engagement with the regions formerly under the Ottoman Empire.[3] However, the AKP

[3] See Details: Cagaptay, S. (2009). The AKP's Foreign Policy: The Misnomer of Neo-Ottomanism. *Turkey Analyst*, *2*(8), 1-3.; Rüma, İ. (2010). Turkish foreign policy towards the Balkans: New activism, neo-ottomanism or/so what. *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, *9*(4), 133-140.; Somun, H. (2011). Turkish Foreign Policy in the Balkans and" Neo-Ottomanism": A Personal Account. *Insight Turkey*, *13*(3).; Taşpınar, Ö. (2012). Turkey's strategic vision and Syria. *The Washington Quarterly*, *35*(3), 127-140.; Tüysüzoğlu, G. (2014). Strategic depth: A neo-Ottomanist interpretation of Turkish Eurasianism. *Mediterranean Quarterly*, *25*(2), 85-104.; Torbakov, I. (2017). Neo-Ottomanism versus Neo-Eurasianism?: Nationalism and Symbolic Geography in Postimperial Turkey and Russia. *Mediterranean Quarterly*, *28*(2), 125-145.; Ergin, M., & Karakaya, Y. (2017). Between neo-Ottomanism and Ottomania: navigating state-led and popular cultural representations of the past. *New perspectives on Turkey*, *56*, 33-59.; Akca, A. (2019). Neo-Ottomanism: Turkey's foreign policy approach to Africa. *New Perspectives in Foreign Policy, (17)*, 03-08.; Wastnidge, E. (2019). Imperial grandeur and selective memory: re-assessing neo-Ottomanism in Turkish foreign and domestic politics. *Middle East Critique*, *28*(1), 7-28.; Hoffmann, C. (2019). Neo-Ottomanism, Eurasianism or securing the region? A longer view on Turkey's interventionism. *Conflict, Security & Development*, *19*(3), 301-307.; Gontijo, L. C., & Barbosa, R. S. (2020).

elite, notably then Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, disputed that the discourse of Neo-Ottomanism was a malicious attack on the AKP's foreign policies. At the same time, the AKP elite highlighted that Turkey had a responsibility to maintain relations with all regions in international politics (Sabah 2009). However, with the Arab Uprisings having upended the regional power structure and politics since December 2010, the Middle East became more prominent in the AKP elite's foreign policy approach, and so it aspired to play an active role in this sphere. Thus, the following section examines the role of the AKP elites' perception in TFP towards the Arab Uprisings and how their perception shaped TFP towards Iran from December 2010 to July 2018.

5.1.1 The Role of the AKP Elite's Perception in TFP towards Iran Since the Arab Uprisings (December 2010 to July 2018)

When the AKP rose to power in 2002, Ankara followed de-securitisation policies; this contrasted with previous Turkish governments, which had been mainly under the control of the Turkish military in the 1990s. Therefore, the AKP opted to establish closer ties with Tehran, especially under the foreign principle of zero-problems-with-neighbours (Expert 1, personal communication, August 17, 2020). In this regard, then Prime Minister Erdogan called Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad a "brother" when the Iranian leader visited Turkey in 2008 and welcomed his re-election as Iranian president in 2009, in the hope of closer ties between Turkey and Iran (Williams 2019, 379). Given Turkey's desire for cordial ties with Tehran, Ankara sought to play a mediator role between Tehran and the P5+1 countries over the uranium exchange deal signed between Turkey, Iran and Brazil in May 2010. Accordingly, TFP towards Iran became more positive until Ankara, under the AKP, aimed to take a lead in regional developments that was based on its religious perception of the Arab Uprisings.

A new period of political transformation stemming from the uprisings solidified the AKP elites' pursuit of involvement in this unique political system. Accordingly, then Foreign Minister Davutoglu asserted that, in this grand transformation, Turkey would play an active role by leading regional politics and added that Turkey would "manage the wave of change in

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Erdoğan's pragmatism and the ascension of AKP in Turkey: Islam and neo-Ottomanism. *Digest of Middle East Studies*, *29*(1), 76-91.; Yavuz, M. H. (2020). *Nostalgia for the Empire: The Politics of Neo-Ottomanism*. Oxford University Press.

the Middle East. Just as the ideal we have in our minds about Turkey, we have an ideal of a new Middle East. We will be the leader and the spokesperson of a new peaceful order, no matter what they say" (Küntay 2014, 243; Tür 2015, 75). At the same time, then Prime Minister Erdogan emphasised the importance of Turkey during the uprisings and began the so-called Arab Uprisings tour to promote Turkey's standing as a potential role model for Arab Uprising countries. According to Erdogan, Turkey's duty was to help Arab countries build Islamist democracies (Rezaei 2019, 197). As such, the AKP elites believed that Turkey would become a model because of its democratic system and economic growth and assumed that a smooth transition would emerge in the aftermath of Arab Uprisings (Journalist 1, personal communication, July 1, 2020; Academic 5, personal communication, July 22, 2020). They thus promoted Turkey as the "central country", "regional leader", "leader of Islamic world", and "protector of the oppressed", and followed an assertive policy and hoped to enhance Turkey's regional influence (Özdamar and Devlen 2019, 187). This aspiration demonstrates that the elite sought interest-driven policies towards the uprisings because they hoped to increase Turkey's middle power capacity by playing an active future role in the context of the uprisings.

Notably, Turkey's participation in the 2011 NATO Libyan operation paved the way for Turkey's active intervention across the region. Lesch (2012, 169) argues that "Turkish leaders in Middle Eastern politics have become increasingly ideological as the Arab uprisings have progressed, with a growing focus on democracy promotion in the region as a central strategy for promoting Turkey's interests". Similarly, Tahiroglu and Taleblu (2015, 127) note that "the liberal West's love affair with a mildly Islamist party that upheld Turkey's modern tradition further encouraged Ankara to support Islamist parties in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Syria". From a pro-democracy position, the AKP elite particularly propped up Islamist groups across the region. This policy demonstrated the abandonment of its previous policy of neither revealing the elites' Islamic identity nor viewing the Middle East from a religious identity perspective (Journalist 1, personal communication, July 1, 2020). The main reason for this volte-face policy was that the AKP elites believed the rise of moderate Islamist movements and political parties would enhance AKP's popularity and influence due to their ideological similarities with the AKP. They lauded the fact that MB-affiliated governments were pursuing a similar ideology as the AKP following the uprisings (Ayata 2015; Cornell 2012). Their Islamist-based ideology was pragmatic, and pro-Islamic groups/parties seemed more beneficial to their interests.

Notably, Erdogan pursued cordial political and economic ties with the MB-affiliated government of Mohammed Morsi in Cairo, presenting Turkey as a prosperous democracy which was politically Islamic. The AKP elites further supported the Sunni opposition in Syria, presenting themselves as their protector from Assad's Alawite regime. In August, 2011, the AKP government hosted the anti-Assad Syrian National Council (SCN) in Istanbul and privileged the position of the Syrian MB (Kirchner and Baş 2017, 169). The Turkish policymakers defined this support as "part of expectations derived from the country's protector of the oppressed role" (Özdamar and Devlen 2019, 186). In this regard, the MB-affiliated groups and parties emerged as a close ally for the AKP cadre. When Erdogan delivered a speech at Cairo University in November 2012, for example, he underlined the ever-deepening bilateral affairs between Egypt and Turkey by using strong Islamic references. Like Erdogan, Davutoglu stressed "the emergence of a new axis between Turkey and Egypt, since Morsi's election and deemed this axis extremely important to the emergence of a new order in the Middle East" (Yeşilyurt 2017, 72). As well as Egypt, the AKP cadre maintained their religious identity policies in Tunisia, Libya, and Syria through active political engagement with MB-affiliated parties and groups; however, in Syria, the elites also followed more interventionist and militarist policies by supporting Sunni armed groups, as well as endorsing the MB-affiliated groups/parties. The AKP elites thus viewed the Middle East from an identity perspective and generally supported Sunni Muslim protest and movements.

Given the AKP elites' search for regional leadership, Turkey initially viewed Iran as a competitor, primarily due to the different viewpoints towards the uprisings. According to Journalist 1 (personal communication, July 1, 2020)**,** TFP demonstrated both Islamic and sectarian features at the same time, but Iranian foreign policy changed based on the situation. Iran used either its Islamic identity, as in its support for Palestinians or the MB in Egypt, or its Shia identity, as in its support for the Alawaite Assad regime in Syria. When Iran followed its Shia identity to increase its influence, Turkey viewed Iran as a competitor, as in the Syrian conflict. The AKP officials, therefore, blamed Iran for promoting unrest to expand its influence in the Persian Gulf. Accordingly, in a TV channel interview in 2015, President Erdogan said,

> *Iran is trying to dominate the region. Could this be allowed? This has begun annoying us, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf countries. This is really not tolerable, and Iran has to change its view. It has to withdraw any forces, whatever it has in Yemen, as well as Syria and Iraq and respect their territorial integrity (Pamuk 2015).*

As such, Turkish-Iranian ties entered a new phase of competition in the region. Ankara's unwavering and pragmatic support for Sunni groups cooled relations between the two regional middle powers. Given their ideological rivalry, Ankara and Tehran were in conflict in Syria because they starkly endorsed different sectarian groups. While Ankara and other Sunni states endorsed Sunni armed groups trying to topple the Assad regime and prevented the rise of Iranian influence, Tehran maintained its support for the Assad regime. Turkey further opposed the Iranian influence over the Shia-dominated Maliki government in Iraq and sought to ally with the KDP under the Sunni Barzanis, against the partnership between Iran and the Maliki government following the decreased US presence in Iraq after 2011.

In the case of Bahrain, the AKP elites followed a sectarian policy and confronted Iran's policies. When the members of Bahrain's Shia majority protested the repressive policies of the ruling Sunni elite under the al-Khalifa dynasty, Turkish policymakers remained silent about the ensuring repression of the protestors. As such, the AKP's passive stance towards the Shia-oriented protests led to accusations against the AKP. Since then, the accusations towards the AKP elites' policies increased, and the AKP was blamed for following Sunni-based policies and aiming for regional leadership via a Sunni Islamist identity. Although the AKP elites denied this, their policies indicated that they perceived that likeminded Islamist groups would come to power across the Middle East and establish a "powerful and promising proxy" of the AKP in the region (Yeşilyurt 2017, 70). This sectarian-based perception of the elites thus resulted in the rise of competition in TFP towards Iran at a certain extent.

While the systemic stimulus revealed clear information regarding the developments of the Arab Uprisings, however, the AKP elites failed to respond to this stimulus due to their biased understanding of the internal and systemic forces shaping the developments of the uprisings. The MB- affiliated parties were unable to meet security and economic demands, and thus lost influence in their countries (Yesilyurt 2017, 71). For instance, in 2014, the Ennahda-led government lost the ensuing parliamentary and presidential elections to its secularist rival, Nidaa Tounis. Likewise, the Egyptian MB-affiliated rule was toppled by the Egyptian military in June 2013. As such, TFP saw a deadlock in the region, indicating that the AKP elites failed to predict the future of MB-affiliated parties, assuming that they could facilitate a rise in Turkish influence in the region due to their similar religious background (Özdamar and Devlen 2019, 182–86). Moreover, as Murinson (2012, 24) highlights, the Turkish model of democracy, "based upon the AKP's embrace of moderate Islam, does not match the social and economic

trajectories which the Arab countries have followed since gaining independence after World War II [...] Westernisation, a process that began long ago during the late Ottoman period, is distinguishing Turkey's path from most other Muslim countries in the Middle East". As a result, the AKP's desire to act as a role model to the new governments failed, and the AKP cadres' Islamic sectarian-based policies resulted in Turkey's isolation in the region.

According to NR theory, Turkey should have followed a rationalist foreign policy to respond to the systemic shifts of the Arab Uprisings, because the systemic stimulus revealed clear information regarding the developments of the Arab Uprisings. It was also apparent that many regional and international state actors opposed the rise of the MB-affiliated parties in the region. The AKP should have predicted this possibility and recalculated its foreign policy approach, but instead they maintained a pro-MB regional policy. Turkey's supportive policies towards the MB worsened Turkey's relations with several countries in the region, including Saudi-led Gulf countries. Even though Turkey and the Saudi -led Gulf countries aimed to limit Iranian influence in the light of Arab Uprisings, Turkey's support for the MB in Egypt deteriorated Turkey's relations with these Gulf countries. While Turkey, along with Qatar, criticised the Egyptian military coup against the Morsi government in July 2013, the Saudi-led Gulf countries supported the Egyptian military because the empowerment of the MB threatened their regimes. Turkey also failed to understand whether the global state powers would allow possible anti-western and/or anti-Russian governments to intervene in the region. In Egypt, these powers, most notably the US, were concerned about the MB-linked Morsi regime and, ultimately, the passive roles of the great powers meant that a military coup toppled the regime. Elsewhere, there was no sufficient democratic development in other countries which experienced the Arab Uprisings, and so the uprisings transformed from "Arab Spring" to "Arab Winter" (Academic 4, personal communication, July 6, 2020).

As a result of these misperception, Turkey lost not only its greatest Sunni allies but also its regional reputation as "an honest broker and future regional powerhouse" (Kirchner and Baş 2017, 167). Academic 6 (personal communication, August 25, 2020) added that with the outset of the Arab Uprisings, the Saudi-led states were disturbed at the AKP elites' self-confidence and discourse regarding neo-Ottomanism and the legacy of the Ottoman Empire, which they eschewed and deemed a positive event. After the overthrow of the Morsi regime in Egypt in 2013, moreover, Turkey's excessive support for the MB was seen by the new Egyptian military government as an outside actor pushing a particular agenda, and no longer a neutral partner.

Similarly, Turkey's close ties with the MB-affiliated Justice and Construction Party in Libya put Ankara in a difficult position. The Libyan forces under the command of General Khalifa Haftar, who launched and led Operation Dignity in May 2014, was supported by the UAE, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, who blamed Turkey for assisting armed groups in Libya (Stein 2015b, 55). As such, Turkey's zero-problems-with- neighbours foreign policy turned into "precious loneliness" following the fall of the MB-affiliated parties in the region and the overthrow of the MB-dominated government in Egypt in 2013 (Özdamar and Devlen 2019, 187). While the Saudi-led states, which aimed regional status quo, triumphed the Arab Uprisings, Turkey lost due to their revisionist policies. In this regard, Expert 2 (personal communication, August 19, 2020) claimed that Ahmadinejad, Erdogan, and Morsi became unpopular leaders in the eyes of the US, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the EU. These three leaders thus constituted a crescent (Shia/Sunni and Arab/non-Arab) against other regional actors.

In Syria, the AKP elites also followed a more ambitious and interventionist foreign policy than the systemic shifts revealed, in that they supported Sunni-armed groups and believed that the Assad regime would be toppled. In contrast to Turkey's expectations, the Assad regime maintained its grip on power with Russian and Iranian support, and the US changed its priority from toppling the Assad regime to fighting jihadi armed groups. Ultimately, the AKP elites exaggerated Turkey's actual power distribution and position in the international system, indicating that Turkey was conducting foreign policy beyond its middle power. NCR helps to explain Turkey's isolation, in that states are generally punished when they do not follow structural forces. In this context, Turkish policymakers were expected to return to the realities of power distribution and reformulate the policy response to adapt to the new status quo, voiding Ankara's previous calculations (Yesilyurt 2017, 66). Therefore, Turkey had limited ability to counterbalance Iran's influence in the region (Kirchner and Baş 2017, 165), and needed to revise its foreign policy behaviour towards Iran.

Since 2013, moreover, the AKP elites' perception has undergone revision due to domestic issues. Following the Gezi protests (the demonstrations protesting the urban development plan for Taksim Gezi Park in Istanbul, in May 2013), Turkey, under the AKP government, started to reveal authoritarian tendencies because the Turkish government permitted the use of disproportionate force by police against the protestors. After the Gezi protests, the AKP faced another dispute with its erstwhile domestic ally. Although they shared a similar religious ideology, the AKP and the Gulen movement came into dispute in December

2013 due to a corruption scandal involving several significant AKP members. After the coup attempt against the AKP government in July 2016, the AKP declared a state of emergency and enacted a purge against thousands of alleged sympathisers of Fethullah Gulen, the cleric leader of the Gulen movement and member of a 'parallel structure (state)'. Alongside these domestic issues, ties between Turkey under the AKP and its western allies started to deteriorate due to a lack of trust. While its western allies were concerned about the rise of autocratic tendencies in Turkish politics, Turkey under the AKP government accused the US and EU of protecting "FETO members" and of sponsoring the coup attempt in July 2016 and other protests. US support for the PYD since 2014 accelerated criticism from the AKP elites against the US, since the former deemed the PYD to be a terrorist group given its affiliation with the PKK. Therefore, the AKP started to use anti-western discourse and believed that the US-led western powers had tried to topple the AKP (Göksel 2019, 21). According to Expert 2 (personal communication, August 19, 2020), following the coup attempt in Turkey, no other countries except for Qatar, Iran and Russia supported Erdogan, while other countries arguably welcomed the coup attempt. For this reason, there was a change in the ideology-based perception of the AKP elites regarding TFP towards Iran, and instead they began to pursue a pragmatic and interest-based foreign policy with Tehran, viewing it as less of a threat than the US, the EU, and the Saudi-led Sunni bloc. They even claimed that the Gulen movement "is worse than the Shiites", implying Tehran (Norton 2015, 130).

Another domestic trend in Turkish politics was that the People's Democratic Party (HDP), a PKK-affiliated party, crossed the ten per cent threshold after the national election in June 2015. While the HDP gained almost thirteen per cent of the national vote in parliament, the AKP lost its majority and required a coalition partner to form a government. In this regard, the election result was an unwelcome surprise for the AKP, and Turkey began a period of internal disorder until the next national election was held in November 2015, when the AKP regained its majority with almost forty-nine per cent of the vote. During this period of disorder, nationalist discourse in Turkish politics increased when the AKP established internal cooperation with a far-right political party, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), against the rise of the HDP. As a result, the AKP elites' perspective started to exhibit nationalist and conservative features. Following the constitutional referendum supported by the AKP and MHP in April 2017, President Erdogan highlighted the theme of "one nation, one flag, one homeland, one state" (Williams 2019, 385). These developments paved the way for the emergence of re-securitisation in Turkish politics (Kösebalaban 2020; Journalist 1, personal

communication, July 1, 2020). According to Taliaferro (Taliaferro 2006), states may use nationalism as "a viable propaganda tool" to persuade the public to increase military expenditure and power politics. In this regard, the AKP elites used nationalist discourse with the Turkish public to consolidate Turkey's domestic and external military operations against the Kurdish armed groups, especially against the PKK-affiliated PYD/YPG in the north of Syria.

Given the perception shift of the AKP elites from sectarian to nationalist and anti-western, the AKP elites sought to engage in a constructive dialogue with Tehran. In 2015, Erdogan highlighted that "I don't look at the sect. It does not concern me whether those killed are Shiite or Sunni; what concerns me is [that they are] Muslims. Iran and Turkey should mediate between the battling parties and hope to obtain a result. We have to put an end to this bloodshed, this death" (Hurriyet Daily News 2015). In 2017, Erdogan further noted that "the Turkey-Iran border was established much earlier than the [political] formation of America", implying that Turkish-Iranian affairs had been longer in its term (Kumral 2020, 286). Similarly, Davutoglu stated during his trip to Iran in March 2016 that "we may have different views, but we cannot change our history or our geography. Turkey and Iran need to develop some common perspectives to end our region's fight among brothers, to stop the ethnic and sectarian conflicts" (Yackley and Sharafedin 2016). Other AKP elites further emphasised the importance of Turkish-Iranian relations. For instance, the current Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Mevlut Cavusoglu, stressed that "despite differences between Turkey and Iran, the two countries have a brotherly relationship and the strong ties between Turkey and Iran cannot even be questioned" (Noi 2015). Such discourse from the AKP elites indicates that they aspired to strengthen the Turkish-Iranian relationship and perceived the ties with Tehran as more beneficial than those with Turkey's western allies. More precisely, Turkey followed an interest-based policy towards Iran, mainly because the AKP elites aimed for a status quo in Turkish politics.

As well as the elite's (mis)perception, domestic considerations played a role in TFP towards Iran as Turkey sought to resolve economic and security issues. In this respect, the AKP elites sought to facilitate the expansion of bilateral relations between Turkey and Iran, even though they were dissatisfied with Iran's ideological foreign policy towards the Arab uprising countries (Uygur 2012, 26). Notably, the AKP elites highlighted trade and economic ties with Tehran and refrained from intervening in Iran's domestic affairs for bilateral economic and

political benefit. For instance, Erdogan emphasised energy security, especially concerning Eurasian resources, and thus sought collaboration with Iran (Ebrahimi, Yusoff, and Seyed Jalili 2017, 76–77). In the following section, there is a focus on the role of domestic considerations in TFP towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings, from December 2010 to July 2018.

5.2 Domestic Considerations

TFP towards Iran from December 2010 to July 2018 cannot be understood primarily by only analysing the perceptions held by AKP elites because alliances are not formed in response to power alone but are instead shaped by other factors (Walt 2009, 103). Randall Schweller underlines the analysis of interests and motivations as unit-level intervening variables in the causal chain of neoclassical realist foreign policy examination. According to Schweller (1994, 79), states may cooperate with each other to gain an opportunity. Therefore, similarly situated states may respond differently to similar external constraints. Schweller proposes this assumption as an approach thus views status quo and revisionist interests as intervening variables and calculates balance of interest theory.

In essence, the implications of this theory are twofold, at the unit and systemic levels. "At the unit level, it [the theory] refers to the costs a state is willing to pay to defend its values (status quo) relative to the costs it is willing to pay to extend its values (revisionist). At the systemic level, it refers to the relative strengths of the status quo and revisionist states" (Schweller 1994, 99). The state interest at the unit level as:

$$State\ Interest\ (n) = Value\ of\ Revision - Value\ of\ Status\ Quo$$

Considering that states, powerful or weak, will cooperate with other countries sharing the same aims of protecting or changing the system, satisfied states will ally with other satisfied ones to maintain their position in the system, and vice versa dissatisfied countries will cooperate with other dissatisfied ones to change the status quo. Schweller's balance of interest theory has heuristic value in defining the 'zoology of states', whereby the "lions are states that will pay high costs to protect what they possess but only a small price to increase what they value... As delighted states, they are likely to be status quo powers of the first rank"; in contrast, "lambs are weak countries that will pay only low costs to defend or extend their values" (Schweller 1994, 101–2). The theory goes on to state that, "jackals are states that will pay high

costs to defend their possessions but even greater costs to extend their values", while wolves, as predatory states, "value what they covet far more than what they possess" (Schweller 1994, 103).

In line with Schweller's interest theory, TFP demonstrated profit-oriented behaviours in both regional and international politics. Before the uprisings, Turkey had not only experienced intense economic and security affairs with Middle East countries, but it had also been perceived as a powerful economic and political actor in the region. At the outset of the uprisings, Turkey lost several economic allies in the region and faced growing security threats in its surrounding area. These economic and security shifts challenged Turkey's regional interests. Moreover, the AKP elites' foreign policy calculations resulted in a loss of prestige in both regional and international arenas. Collaterally, the AKP's legitimacy was questioned at home. Turkey under the AKP government, therefore, sought to cooperate with those states which shared similar interests, to preserve its value both at home and internationally.

As noted by Eder (2014, 81), "changing capabilities do lead to changes in the perception of threats, interests and opportunities in the neoclassical realist system". Before the Arab Uprisings, regional developments in the Middle East, such as the US-led operation in Iraq in 2003, not only deteriorated Turkey-US affairs but also increased Turkey's anxiety about its vital regional interests. In this era, Turkey enhanced its diplomatic and economic relations with Iran (Küntay 2014, 236). Following the Arab Uprisings, moreover, Turkey chose to forge ties with Iran in terms of political, security and economic aspects even though Iran demonstrated a revisionist tendency and different approach from Turkey. Therefore, it could be argued that the AKP government followed interest-driven and profit-oriented policies towards Iran, and Turkish domestic considerations were another determinant of TFP towards Iran between December 2010 and July 2018.

5.2.1 Turkey's Domestic Considerations in Relation to Iran since the Arab Uprisings (from December 2010 to July 2018)

Turkish foreign policy faced formidable challenges, including the loss of economic and political benefits with authoritarian regimes and the rise of non-state armed actors in its proximity. Although Ankara claimed to follow pro-democratic movements, financial and political motivations regarding cost-benefit calculations and interest-driven policies mostly

shaped Turkey's policies towards the Arab Uprisings. After losing its previous authoritarian allies, Turkey's regional vision was claimed to be promoting full economic and political affairs by signing security and trade agreements with the new governments under "economic interdependence" (Davutoglu 2013). However, the AKP elites miscalculated the regional developments due to biased sectarian-based policies and, worse still, Ankara lost its significant regional and external partners, including Saudi Arabia and the US. Thus, protecting economic and political interests became the top priority for Turkey.

Since coming to power in 2002, in essence, the AKP governments have signed several agreements and memoranda of understanding, bringing closer economic, political, and security relationships with Iran under various foreign policy principles, such as 'zero-problems-with-neighbours' and 'economic dependency'. Bilateral trade between the two countries saw a ten-fold increase compared to before the AKP term. Iran became Turkey's largest supplier of crude oil and second largest supplier of natural gas, and in return became Turkey's third-largest goods export market by 2012 (Gürzel 2014, 103). Their political ties also increased, and Turkey hoped to ameliorate international sanctions against Iran through the 2010 nuclear exchange deal. Between 2004–2008, Turkey also signed various security deals with Iran to combat terrorism, drug smuggling, and organised crime (Sinkaya 2019). As such, Turkey under the AKP governments followed a policy of détente towards Iran, a contrast to the less than friendly relations that had marked bilateral ties between Ankara and Tehran before 2002. Although the Arab Uprisings and period following them became a test for TFP towards Iran and brought a competition, Turkey aimed to maintain its ties with Iran at a reasonable level, because the economic, security and political developments from the uprisings confined Turkey's ability.

Regarding security considerations, the rise of ISIS forced Turkey to seek an ally in its fight with the jihadist armed group, especially since ISIS threatened Turkey's security interest as a Wahhabist militant group. Turkey was initially not troubled by the rise of ISIS since the group seemed to oppose the Assad regime, but over time Turkey realised that ISIS was a threat to its national and regional security, as well as economic interests. Notably, ISIS occupied Iraqi territory, in which the main oil pipeline from Kirkuk runs, thus alarming Turkey by influencing its financial affairs with Iraqi Kurdistan. Turkey therefore joined the Iraqi Kurds and Iraqi central government in pushing ISIS back from northern Iraq (Hale 2015, 198). The empowerment of Syrian Kurdish armed groups, the PYD, and its military wing YPG, also became a security issue for Turkey. Being a PKK-affiliated non-state armed group, the

PYD/YPG exacerbated the security challenge of Turkey's own Kurdish problem. Since 2015, when the peace process between Turkey and the PKK terminated, the empowerment of PYD/YPG sabotaged Ankara's domestic interests. Ankara sensed that the rise of the PYD might create a Kurdish ethnic problem at home, assuming that a possible Kurdish state in its proximity would trigger Kurdish groups in Turkey to attempt to gain independence or autonomy. As such, the rise of the HDP (the political party of the PKK) in Turkish domestic politics increased the concerns of the AKP government and resulted in a perception shift among the AKP elites.

As a result, domestic considerations determined TFP after the Arab Uprisings as another intervening variable, because systemic developments, including the rise of non-state armed groups, the extension of the Syrian conflict, and the fall of MB-affiliated parties diminished Turkey's regional position. Despite its unilateral military operations, Turkey realised that it was difficult to resolve such security issues alone, and the groups it was backing could not curb the growth of these non-state armed groups (Expert 3, personal communication, July 21, 2020). In this regard, Ankara required the support of Iran via the formation of a regional axis to protect its security and financial interests in the Middle East. As a result, the AKP elites did not maintain their sectarian-based policies towards Iran. Rather, domestic interests were more dominant than the sectarian-based identity in TFP towards Iran. Ankara pursued collaboration with Iran over security and economic considerations.

As Aydin (2015, 128) argues, "Turkey is a historical partner for Iran and their relations depend on the mutual interests in regional politics; besides, their destiny in international politics is the same". However, As Interviews A (personal communication, August 4, 2020) and C (personal communication, August 6, 2020) noted, we cannot say that there has been consistent cooperation or competition between Turkey and Iran; rather, they are eternal competitors and collaborators in the region. For instance, Turkey perceived Iran to be the instigator of security threats against Turkey due to its previous partnership with the PKK, but also saw it as a potential ally to resolve these self-same challenges. Furthermore, as Yorulmazlar and Turhan (Yorulmazlar and Turhan 2015) further argue, "against growing regional instability, Turkey would preferably prioritise domestic concerns, that is, security, economic development and Kurdish reconciliation". Based on cost-benefit calculations and profit-oriented policies, as Schweller's balance of interest theory, Ankara opted to ally with Tehran for a short-to medium term even though their similar relative power position in the

international system may bring a competition to enhance their regional influence in the longer term. Therefore, the following subsections examine Turkey's security and economic considerations in seeking short-to-medium term collaboration with Iran.

5.2.1.1 Security Consideration

The Arab Uprisings not only created significant security concerns for Turkey, but they also triggered a new phase of relations with Iran. The toppling of authoritarian regimes, instability, and failed state structures gave non-state armed actors, such as ISIS and the PYD a space to exploit. Throughout the region, these non-state armed actors challenged both external and regional powers, enhancing their power and control via repressive operations. The growth of these groups' influences particularly threatened Turkey's southern periphery, leaving it concerned about the empowerment of ISIS and the PYD, which it viewed as significant threats to domestic security.

5.2.1.1.1 The Rise of ISIS

Despite the international community's concerns about the rise of ISIS as a jihadi armed group, Turkey initially remained unresponsive, perceiving it as essential to its regional interests. This is because Ankara hoped for the overthrow of the Assad regime and the prevention of Iranian influence in its proximity. When ISIS emerged as a challenge to the Assad regime as an opponent, and to Iran as a sectarian hostile, Ankara assumed that ISIS would serve Turkey's aims regarding the Assad regime and Tehran. More importantly, Ankara was pleased with the conflict between ISIS and the PYD in the siege of Kobane because it perceived the PYD to be more of a threat than ISIS to its security interests (Cağaptay 2020, 123–25; Işiksal 2017b, 96).

However, Ankara miscalculated the rise of ISIS in its proximity. A corollary of Turkey's initial reluctance to fight against the jihadi group was that Turkey was accused of supporting ISIS by allowing the armed group to receive free treatment in hospitals in south-eastern Turkey, and to cross over its border into Syria. Turkey's western allies also became suspicious of Turkey's alleged collusion with the group, and the US officials, including those in the Pentagon, perceived Ankara as collaborating with the US enemies in Syria. As such, Turkey's initial hesitation in combatting ISIS was a portent of the difficult times to come for Turkey, whose indifference was increasingly challenged by the international community. The jihadi group also posed a security threat to Turkey's external and internal security by

conducting terrorist attacks. As such, Turkey faced more security threats compared to its rivals, including Iran (Cağaptay 2020, 123–25; Işiksal 2017b, 96).

Bearing in mind that Ankara initially faced a "multifaceted dilemma" regarding whether to fight against ISIS or prevent the rise of Iran's regional influence and the possibility of Kurdish independence on its southern periphery (Aras and Yorulmazlar 2016b, 5), Ankara then opted to counter the threat of ISIS to its national security. This volte-face policy resulted from ISIS attacks in Turkey's immediate vicinity. While enhancing its territory and causing instability in Iraq and Syria, ISIS persecuted certain groups, including Iraqi Kurds, Turkmens, and Yazidis, and damaged the cultural and economic resources of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). In this region, Turkey sought to protect its economic and political affairs as well as the security of Turkmens (Aras 2014b, 12). More importantly, Turkey was forced to move the tomb of Suleyman Shah in northern Syria towards the Turkish border in March 2014, due to ISIS attacks. ISIS also abducted many Turkish citizens, including a mission head and truck drivers, during its seizure of significant cities in Iraq, such as Mosul.

As well as its proximity, ISIS started to threaten Turkey's domestic security, as ISIS' aggressive policies increased the refugee influx into Turkey. According to the Ministry of Interior, in 2018, Turkey hosted approximately 3.9 million refugees fleeing terrorism and civil war in Iraq and Syria (Hurriyet Daily News 2018). With the empowerment of ISIS, the scale of its activities and of extremist ISIS sympathisers also increased in Turkey, posing a threat to Turkey's domestic security. In 2015, ISIS organised a terrorist attack killing 34 people in Suruc, a southern Turkish town near the Syrian border, while the deadliest terror attack killed 103 civilians in the central train station bombing in Ankara. ISIS conducted several attacks and caused the death of numerous Turkish citizens in various Turkish cities, including 13 people in Istanbul in January 2016, at least 41 people at Istanbul Ataturk Airport, 54 people in a wedding ceremony in Gaziantep in August 2016, and another 39 in a club shooting on New Year's Eve, 2017. These devastating cases culminated in more Turkish operations against the armed group. On 24 July 2015, Turkey hit two ISIS headquarters near Havar, a village in Syria under an operation called Martyr Yalcin. With the military operation called Euphrates Shield, in August 2016, Ankara also aimed to purge ISIS from Jarablus, as well as the PYD from northern Syria. These military operations were followed by the arrest of numerous ISIS members and the closure of ISIS-related media and organisations in Turkey. More than 1,200 ISIS members were arrested in 2015 alone (Işiksal 2017b, 97).

Further to the fight against ISIS, in September 2014, Turkey collaborated with the US-led coalition by increasing intelligence sharing and allowed the US Air Force to use Incirlik and Diyarbakir air bases in the struggle against ISIS in July 2015. Turkey also liaised with the EU regarding irregular and illegal refugee flow, including of the jihadist group members, from Syria to Europe (Özer and Kaçar 2018, 187). However, Turkey claimed that its western allies provided insufficient support during its fighting against the two non-state armed groups, ISIS and the PYD/YPG, because while the US and EU shared Turkey's concerns regarding ISIS but had different viewpoints about the PYD. On 28 July 2015, for instance, Turkey felt that NATO's response to Turkey's call under Article 4 of the NATO Charter was insufficient, since NATO members did not see the PYD/PKK as a security issue but agreed on ISIS (Bicer 2016, 93). As such, the AKP and pro-AKP newspapers, such as Daily Sabah, blamed European countries for ignoring attacks on their ally (Daily Sabah 2016b). In this regard, the lack of a shared threat perception between Turkey and its western allies against ISIS and the PYD culminated in insufficient cooperation between them.

In February 2016, Ankara also collaborated with Saudi Arabia against ISIS, announcing that Riyadh "was sending troops and fighter jets to Turkey's Incirlik airbase and the two countries were ready to launch an operation from land if the West comes up with a comprehensive strategy to counter ISIS" (Tol 2016). However, this cooperation was short-lived due to disagreements between Turkey and the West over the PYD, and Turkey and Saudi Arabia over the 2017 Qatar crisis and Syrian opposition groups. On this issue, Erdogan's advisor, Ibrahim Kalin, warned that "in the post-ISIS Syria, a new power game is brewing. The US in eastern Syria was attempting to be a counterweight to Russia and Iran. In this case, Turkey's cooperation with Iran and Russia is essential" (Frantzman 2017). Therefore, despite their different perceptions, Turkey opted to establish closer ties with Iran against the rise of ISIS, since the empowerment of ISIS threatened both countries due to its antagonistic ideological beliefs against Shi'ism and Sunni political Islam. ISIS' sectarian policy forced Ankara to cooperate with Tehran to maintain the balance of Sunni-Shia order in their proximity (Aras and Yorulmazlar 2014, 115–20).

Given Turkish-Iranian security collaboration against ISIS, the officials of the two countries united to resolve security threats arising from ISIS. For instance, in August 2017 General Mohammad Hossein Bagheri, the chief of the Iranian Armed Forces, visited Turkey to discuss security issues, and was the first Iranian military chief to do so since the 1979 Islamic

revolution in Iran (Majidyar 2017). In essence, ISIS has targeted Iran since Iran's Shia Islam clashes with ISIS's religious beliefs. Further, Iran's Sunni communities, such as Kurds and Baluchis, were a potential target for ISIS in their mission to provoke riots against Iran. Since these communities suffered from poverty, repression, and black-market economies, for which they blamed Iran, they became a viable target for ISIS. Hence, in contrast with Sunni countries, Iran needed an ally to fight ISIS (Tabatabai and Esfandiary 2017, 132). As such, mutual security considerations over the rise of ISIS brought collaboration between Ankara and Tehran. Turkey found cooperation with Iran more beneficial than that with western powers and Riyadh in terms of calculating the cost-benefit of a short-term alliance with Tehran. The two states' mutual concern thus increased the degree of their cooperation in the fight against ISIS.

5.2.1.1.2 The Rise of Kurdish Armed Groups

The Syrian conflict culminated in the empowerment of Kurdish armed groups. They benefited from the instability and power vacuum created throughout the region. Disenfranchised and repressed by successive Syrian regimes, the Syrian armed Kurds mainly took advantage of the country's instability to claim territories in which they constituted a majority (Dalay 2017a). They also received support from numerous regional and external actors. The US, for instance, supported the YPG's fight against ISIS. When jihadi ISIS advanced on the Kurdish-held town of Kobane in October 2014, the US Air Force attacked the jihadi group, launching an extraordinary and successful relationship that proved to be the most successful effort at dislodging ISIS from the territory it occupied (Işiksal 2017b, 90). In May 2017, the US President Trump approved the overt supply of weapons to Kurdish factions within the Syrian Democratic Forces to assist the liberation of Raqqa from ISIS (BBC News 2017a). As well as the US, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt also sought to establish close ties with the YPG. In October 2017, for instance, the Saudi Minister of Gulf Affairs, Thamer al-Sabhan, and then US Special Envoy to the coalition against ISIS, Brett McGurk, went to Raqqa under YPG control, and Riyadh promised to contribute economic and military aid for the non-state armed group (Başkan and Pala 2020a, 66).

By contrast, the Kurdish issue constituted a critical security concern for Turkey due to its ongoing PKK issue since 1984, despite several ceasefires. With the failure of peace negotiations between Turkey and the PKK in July 2015, this conflict accelerated hostility between the Turkish government and the PKK. When the PKK-affiliated political party, HDP, caused the AKP to lose its majority in parliament in the 2015 national election, Turkey under

the AKP became further concerned about the empowerment of Kurdish groups in its proximity. After 2015, domestic security considerations regarding the Kurdish issue predominated in TFP (Journalist 1, personal communication, July 1, 2020). Given Turkey's concerns regarding the rise of Kurdish groups, Turkey was concerned about Washington and Riyadh's aid for the YPG/PYD, assuming that this support would cause the transfer of weapons to the PKK and the possibility of a PKK attack on Turkish soil (Ergun 2018, 165).

The growth of Kurdish influence in Rojava in north-western Syria, therefore, became a critical factor in the regional and domestic policies of Turkey. Following the victory of the YPG/PYD in Kobane in 2014, Turkey's concerns increased since the PKK's substantial participation in the international campaign against ISIS offered the armed group significant opportunities to strengthen its position vis-à-vis Turkey (Romano 2015, 53–54). During this time, the PKK enjoyed support from the Assad regime due to the legacy of often tense relations that had marked ties between Ankara and Damascus (J. Karakoc 2016, 11). Accordingly, Ankara assumed that the victory in Kobane would trigger the PKK's quest for separatism, despite the Peace Process signed in 2013 between Ankara and the armed group. In essence, the PKK had imitated the Arab Uprisings and attempted to affect a 'Kurdish Spring' among the Kurds in southern Turkey in the wake of the uprisings. On February 14, 2011, Abdullah Ocalan, the imprisoned leader of the PKK, made a statement to his followers to the effect that "the Kurds could only be free if they pour on to the streets and call for their rights in the Kurdish cities, like Diyarbakir" (Noi 2012, 23–26). For these reasons, Ankara's concerns re-emerged after the victory of the Kurdish armed groups in Kobane. At the time, Erdogan was harshly critical of the US intervention in Kobane as he and his party viewed the YPG as a "greater scourge" than ISIS. Erdogan rejected any attempt by the Syrian armed Kurds to establish an autonomous area on Turkey's southern border, similar to the existing ones in Iraq since Such a state would mean that the PKK would pose an increasing security threat under the PYD's control (Barkey 2016; Oktav 2015, 87).

Following the empowerment of the PYD/YPG, Ankara adopted offensive policies in Syria and Iraq and attempted to find an alternative entity for its national Kurdish population living on its southern borders. In this regard, Turkey encouraged the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) under the Barzanis in the KRI to lead a Kurdish entity forming in northern Syria. In doing so, Turkey hoped to prevent the rise of the PYD as a significant and powerful Kurdish group in its proximity, and to control the rise of Kurdish armed groups through its collaboration

with the KDP. However, Turkish plans backfired since the PYD was unwilling to partner with the KDP controlled by Turkey (Journalist 1, personal communication, July 1, 2020). Since 2016, Turkey, along with Turkey-aligned Syrian opposition armed groups, conducted cross-border military operations against the PYD/YPG, including operations Euphrates Shield (August 2016–March 2017) and Olive Branch (January-March 2018). Since Kurds in Rojava had military troops and gained external support, however, Turkey realised that its direct involvement in northern Syria and support for Syrian opposition groups were limited in curbing the rise of the Kurdish threat. Ankara therefore needed a state ally to thwart regional Kurdish aims.

In this regard, Tehran emerged as an alternative partner for Ankara due to their mutual Kurdish problem. Likewise, Iran has suffered from several Kurdish insurgent movements. For instance, in mid-2016, Iran faced an apparent, perhaps short-lived, revival of the mostly dormant insurgency in its Kurdish region despite a cease-fire agreement in 2011 (Dalay 2017a). In essence, Iran initially established a pragmatist partnership with the YPG to limit the rise of Turkish influence in Syria and Iraq, because Iran was concerned about Turkey's so-called ties with Jabhat Fatah al-Sham [formerly Jabhat al-Nusra] and its support for Ahrar al-Sham, another militant Salafi group. However, Iran was concerned about the success of the YPG/PYD in establishing an autonomous state through western support, since it would trigger protests among Iran's Kurdish communities and threaten Tehran's increasing role in the region(Oktav 2018, 204–6).

In March 2016, moreover, Iran's YPG/PYD policies shifted from considering the group a tactical ally to a potential strategic threat, due to the YPG/PYD's ties with the US and Russia and declaration of a federal system in the territory under its control. In this respect, an Iranian national security official expressed that, "an autonomous Kurdish region [in Syria] will trigger the fragmentation of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey, replacing major regional states with an archipelago of weak states" (International Crisis Group 2016). Lastly, in July 2016, the coup attempt in Turkey became another turning point in Iran's quest for cooperation with Turkey. Iran immediately declared support for the AKP government due to its national security concerns and assumed that if the coup had been to overthrow the AKP government, Turkish Kurds would have taken the opportunity to rebel against Turkey, influencing Iranian Kurdish communities to secede likewise (Expert 3, personal communication, July 21, 2020).

Based on interest-driven and profit-oriented policies, security collaboration with Tehran became a rational approach for Ankara as it found security ties with Tehran to be more beneficial than inter-state competition over Kurdish groups. Given their mutual security concerns, in October 2011, Ankara and Tehran first reiterated their determination to work together on the Kurdish issue. Following a meeting at the Turkish Foreign Ministry in Ankara between their respective foreign ministers, Davutoglu declared that "[the] joint determination to struggle against the PKK and the PJAK will continue in the strongest way. From now on, we will work together in a joint action plan until this terrorist threat is totally eliminated" (BBC News 2011). He also claimed that there had been an essential cooperation between the intelligence and security institutions of the two countries and significant strides had been made in this joint fight. In this regard, the two countries managed to set aside their differences to tackle the issue, and pledged to coordinate efforts (Kaya 2012, 16). Turkey further attempted to conduct joint military actions with Iran against the Kurdish separatists. On this issue during a trip to Iran in 2017, President Erdogan emphasised that "joint action against terrorist groups that became a threat is always on the agenda. This issue was discussed between the two military chiefs, and I discussed more broadly how this should be carried out" (Reuters 2017). Ultimately, Turkey's PKK issue and the support from Turkey's state allies to the PYD/YPG forced Ankara to cooperate with Iran in the short-to-medium term.

Mutual concerns also forced Ankara to cooperate with Tehran following the independence referendum held by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). When the KRG pursued independence from the Iraqi government on 25 September 2017, Turkey attempted to establish regional opposition in cooperation with Iran to prevent the KRG from reaching its aim, and thus both Turkey and Iran (along with Iraq's central government) opposed the referendum. Both countries imposed sanctions on the KRG to dissuade it from declaring an independent state. With this objection, they further aimed to consolidate their opposition towards the creation of a possible Kurdish state by the PKK and PJAK (Mohammed 2011, 74). Accordingly, the Kurdish issue in Turkey is intricately tied to its relations with Iran and international allies, such as the US. While Turkey has mutual security concerns with Iran, the two countries are likely to conduct joint policies. From the perspective of Schweller's balance of interest theory, Ankara's desire for Tehran's support against the rise of Kurdish groups reflected the former's interest-driven and profit-oriented policies towards Tehran.

5.2.1.2 Economic Consideration

States' economic interests play an influential role in shaping foreign policy since the success of foreign policies is often determined by their economic impact (Aloudah 2016, 280). Following an eight-month financial recession from March to November 2001, the AKP thus targeted becoming an economic power as an indicator of its success in government (Patton 2006, 513). 'Zero-problems-with neighbours' and 'economic interdependency' emerged as the foreign policy principles by which the AKP hoped to establish economic as well as political ties with Middle Eastern countries, regardless of their governmental form (Tür 2011). As such, TFP under the AKP government hoped to forge closer economic and trade affairs with then authoritarian regimes in the Middle East.

With the onset of the Arab Uprisings, however, Turkey's quest for greater economic ties with authoritarian governments across the Middle East was no longer viable and Turkey lost economic allies in the region even after exerting itself to build sustainable political and economic relations and cooperation after 2002. The Arab Uprisings thus resulted in more detrimental economic loss to Turkish exports than in imports from the uprisings countries. For instance, at the outset of the uprisings, the Turkish export and import demands decreased by nearly four per cent and six per cent on average, respectively (Sorhun 2012, 12). Notably, the Libyan and the Syrian conflicts became a test for Turkey's economic interests since Ankara lost its two close economic allies in the region. Due to its territorial closeness, the Syrian conflict also represented an economic burden on the Turkish economy because of the resulting refugee crisis. According to Cavusoglu (2017, 12), in 2017, Turkey provided numerous services, including health and education, to approximately 2.7 million Syrian refugees.

Moreover, Turkey's pro-MB policies in the region caused a downgrade in its political and economic relations with the Saudi-led Gulf countries following anti-MB policies. While blaming Turkey and Qatar for endorsing terrorist organisations in the region, the oil-rich Gulf countries reduced their economic ties with Turkey. For instance, the values of Ankara-Riyadh and Ankara-Abu Dhabi trade respectively fell by thirty-eight per cent and twenty-three per cent in 2016 (Kerr 2017). After the 2017 Qatar crisis, Turkey also faced significant economic loss due to its pro-Qatar policies. While Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt emerged as critical to financial resources and markets, Turkey prioritised working with Qatar due to its mutual ideological policies rather than following a neutral stance; in so doing, Turkey jeopardised its economic interests with these countries (Başkan and Pala 2020b, 67).

Turkey had further economic issues due to political disagreements with its western allies. Its ties with the US soured due to US support for the PYD/YPG, the US' reluctance to extradite Fethullah Gulen following the 2016 military coup attempt, and Turkey's detention of US pastor Andrew Brunson in October 2016. Turkey hoped to establish security ties with Russia by signing a deal on the delivery of the S-400 missile system in September 2017, but Turkey's NATO allies were concerned about this deal, assuming to be in contravention of NATO principles. In this regard, US officials, notably in the Pentagon, voiced the need for economic sanctions to be levied against Turkey (Expert 2, personal communication, August 19, 2020). As such, Turkey-US political issues reflected on their bilateral economic affairs, and the Turkish lira started to lose value against the US dollar.

There were some issues between Turkey and the European countries regarding the Syrian immigrants, as well as the increasingly authoritarian nature of Turkish politics following the coup attempt in Turkey in 2016. The issue of Syrian refugees fleeing through Turkey to reach Europe exacerbated further tensions with the EU. In this regard, Mevlut Cavusoglu, Turkey's Minister of Foreign Affairs, blamed the EU for not fulfilling its duty towards Turkey, claiming that:

> *Turkey was already dealing with millions of Syrians and others fleeing civil wars with little international assistance. When the number of migrants overflowing into the EU became unbearable, the EU reached out to Turkey [...] Furthermore, financial assistance from the EU for the Syrian refugees in Turkey has been slow in disbursement. Turkey has spent around 30 billion USD for the Syrians, whereas total contributions from the international community amounted to only 526 million USD. Moreover, once the irregular crossings were reduced, the voluntary humanitarian admission scheme should have begun, but it did not. The 18 March Agreement will maintain its success as long as both sides fulfil their pledges, and the EU has several to fulfil (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2017).*

Therefore, as Dursun-Ozkanca (2019, 83) highlights "The EU- Turkey relationship has become even more controversial due to the refugee deal brokered between the two parties on March 18, 2016".

Ultimately, Turkey's problems with the West and the other Sunni states forced Ankara to find alternative allies for its economic issues. According to Expert 2 (personal communication, August 19, 2020), economic and trade dependency prevented Turkey from

abrogating ties with Iran, and so Turkey separated its political issues with Iran from its economic relations. Since the beginning of the AKP's rule in Turkey, the government pursued better trade and commercial ties with Iran under the "maximal mutual interest-based" policy (Cheema 2015, 102). Iran's substantial potential and economic capacity has become attractive for Turkey's export-led growth policy. Moreover, with rising energy demands, Turkey has pursued better relations with Iran (Küntay 2014, 235–36). Each year, Turkey imported large amounts of oil and gas from Iran. While close cooperation with Iran over energy began in 1996 under the Erbakan government, it intensified under Erdogan's regime. In July 2007, Turkey and Iran signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to transport 30 billion cubic metres of Iranian and Turkmen natural gas to Europe. The deal envisaged the construction of two separate pipelines to ship natural gas from Iran and Turkmenistan to Europe (Rabasa and Larrabee 2008, 87). Turkish dependence on Iranian natural gas and Iranian dependence on Turkey as a transit route for energy revenues (either in the form of money or gold) helped nurture an interdependent energy relationship. Each year, almost one-fifth of Turkey's natural gas imports came from Iran. Turkey's general dependency on imported energy as a growing economy—and Iran's significance in this context—was highlighted by Davutoglu when he described Turkey's need for Iranian energy as a "natural extension of Turkey's national interests" (Grunstein 2008).

Considering Turkish trade relations with Iran, Turkey was eager to access to Iranian gas on easy terms and aimed to promote the transfer of Iranian gas to western markets. It also hoped to overcome the negative effects of international sanctions imposed by the US on Iran, because the Turkish economy in general and Turkish business groups in particular were negatively impacted by the sanctions, leading to its forfeiting of Iranian trade (Aras and Yorulmazlar 2016b; Gürzel 2014, 103). Bearing in mind that Turkey favoured a diplomatic solution to the nuclear issue and criticised sanctions and the use of military force against Iran, Ankara aimed to revive negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 over Iran's nuclear enrichment programme by hosting talks in 2012 (Kaya 2012, 10).

Given strained ties with the Western powers and the Saudi-led Gulf countries, Turkey needed Iran more than ever, and aimed for pragmatic economic collaboration to compensate for other economic losses. Despite the US-led sanctions, for example, in February 2013, Ankara declared that it would continue to purchase oil and natural gas from Tehran, and indeed the Turkish state-owned Halkbank allegedly took the financial risk of exchanging gold for

Iranian oil and natural gas from 2012 to 2016 (Kumral 2020, 270). Turkey also supported the Obama administration with the 2015 nuclear deal and opposed the US withdrawal from it, and indeed the ongoing US-Iran conflict also meant a decrease in the supply of Iranian oil for Turkey (Expert 1, personal communication, August 17, 2020). In this regard, in April 2015, President Erdogan highlighted Turkey's determination to increase annual trade with Iran to $30 billion when Iran supplied 21% of Turkey's imports of oil and 16% of its imports of gas (Milliyet 2015). Ankara further agreed on the use of national currencies in its bilateral trade with Tehran in 2017. From these developments, Iran became Turkey's first and second trading partner in the Gulf in terms of balance of trade between 2015 and 2017 (Martin 2019, 265). As a result, Ankara endeavoured to integrate Iran's economy into the international system and opposed the declaration by former US President Donal Trump of withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in May 2018. If the sanctions had been lifted, Turkey would have established greater economic cooperation with Iran. As such, Turkish policy-makers opposed the US sanctions against Tehran, and even President Erdogan said that " Iran is our neighbour and our strategic partner", and "severing ties with Tehran on America's whim goes against Turkey's sovereignty" (Dursun-Özkanca 2019, 109).

In addition, Turkey aimed to consolidate economic ties with Iran to establish a close relationship with the Iraqi central government, as an ally of Iran. The reason for this was because, if Turkey were to achieve strong economic and political ties with the Iraqi central government, it could gain further diplomatic, energy, and trade benefits in the region (Cağaptay 2016). Therefore, despite its rivalry with Tehran over Iraq, Ankara realised that better ties with Tehran would promote a closer relationship between Ankara and Baghdad.

Overall, as noted by Ehteshami and Elik (2011, 654), "in economic terms, Iran was the most important partner in terms of Turkey's 'return to the arc of crisis'". In line with the political reconciliation, the Turkish-Iranian trade volume rose for the first time since 2012, standing at $10.7 billion at the end of 2017, and representing a 1.1 billion USD increase from 2016 (Cetingules 2018). Turkey did not want a marginalised and isolated Iran, as one of its most significant energy suppliers, whereas Iran did not want to lose its significant economic partner and supporter in the international arena (Küntay 2014, 253). In the same vein, Turkey did not support the imposition of severe sanctions against Iran and supported the Iranian nuclear agreement. Turkey supported Iran's right to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes and criticised the double standards in US non-proliferation policies towards Iran and Israel. In

essence, Turkey's attempts to promote confidence between Iran and the international community, its emphasis on diplomatic solutions and rejection of military attacks against Iran, and its opposition to further economic sanctions—especially the unilateral sanctions led by the US—are significant elements of the rapprochement process (Uzun 2013, 148). Iran is a significant energy supplier, and so it was not easy to decrease Turkey's dependence on Iran for economic, technological and geographical reasons (Küntay 2014, 250). Table 5.1 illustrates that Turkey maintained close economic and trade affairs with Iran, despite the conflicting issues between them. However, Turkey had to follow the requirements of the US economic sanctions against Iran, because it did not want to be at loggerheads with the US due to their long-term partnership (Expert 4, personal communication, July 24, 2020). As such, Turkey's economic interest-driven approach towards Iran is in line with Schweller's balance of interest theory, since Ankara perceived economic ties more beneficial than competition; therefore, Ankara opted to ally with Tehran in the short-to-medium term.

Year	**Turkey-Iran Exports**	**Turkey-Iran Imports**	**Turkey-Iran Total Trade**
2011	3.590	12.460	16.050
2012	9.920	11.970	21.890
2013	4.190	10.380	14.570
2014	3.880	9.830	13.710
2015	3.670	6.100	9.770
2016	4.500	4.700	9.200
2017	3.300	7.500	10.800

Table 5-1: Turkey-Iran Trade Volume (Billion $) (www.tuik.gov.tr)

5.3 Concluding Remarks

From the beginning of the Arab Uprisings, Turkey maintained an up-and-down relationship with Iran. There were times when Turkey joined in a coalition against Iran and times when it collaborated closely with it. Although Turkey competed with Iran to influence the trajectory of the Arab Uprisings, Turkish domestic factors brought a detente which shaped TFP towards Iran. As such, NCR explains this cooperation by arguing that unit-level variables play an influential role in shaping a state's foreign policy in the short to medium term.

NCR emphasises the pivotal role of policymakers' perceptions with regard to their state's position in the international balance of power. The AKP elite's perception thus culminated in a shift in TFP. In particular, their Sunni identity played a central role in shaping TFP in the first years of the Arab Uprisings. Sunni rooted AKP elites attempted to establish close affairs with the MB affiliated-parties due to their ideological similarities, thus overtly supporting Morsi's rule in Egypt, the Ennahda-led government in Tunisia and Sunni opposition groups in Syria. Given the elites' sectarian perception, they prioritised their sectarian identity in shaping foreign policy towards Iran and were disturbed by the rise of Shia Iranian influence in the region at a certain extent.

However, irrational policies and the rise of authoritarian tendencies among the AKP elites culminated in Turkey's isolation in regional and international politics. The decrease in the AKP's domestic popularity, and the rise of the Kurdish HDP party, increased the nationalist perspective among the AKP elites, who began cooperating with the ultra-nationalist MHP party. Accordingly, Turkey put aside its Sunni-based perception of Shia Iran in favour of maintaining close ties. Iran thus emerged as an alternative ally for the AKP elites in a tumultuous period for Turkey. In parallel, Turkey re-evaluated relations with its western allies following the failed military coup in Turkey in July 2016, when Russia and Iran immediately expressed full support for Erdogan unlike the US and the EU. As such, the rise of anti-westernism in Turkish politics also pushed Turkey under the AKP to greater cooperation with Iran.

Domestic considerations emerged as another unit-level factor in TFP towards Iran. While Turkey lost its significant economic partners, such as Libya and Syria, Turkey's over-ambitious and pro-MB policies accelerated its financial losses from the outset of the uprisings.

Turkey experienced strained economic affairs with other regional states, including Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and western allies such as the US. In this regard, Iran maintained its economic importance for Turkey to compensate for the latter's financial losses. Moreover, the growing anarchic environment rapidly spreading in the region due to the advent of ISIS and the PYD/YPG, the regionally isolated Turkey saw Iran as a new ally that could cooperate regarding regional stability. Notably, the rise of the YPG/PYD in the Syrian conflict forced Turkey to change its policy on tackling Iran due to the shift in its security priority. The reason for Turkey's desire for close ties with Iran lies in Turkey's interests and gains: by assuming that warmer ties with Iran would benefit Turkish interests, Turkey opted to ally with Iran. This indicates that the balance of interest theory can account for the increased degree of cooperation in TFP towards Iran; put simply, Ankara needed Tehran.

Overall, this chapter points out that structural imperatives alone are insufficient to reach a thorough understanding of TFP towards Iran. Indeed, according to structural imperatives, Turkey would have been at odds with Iran since the uprisings because their interests clearly overlapped as the two significant middle powers in the region. Accordingly, they perceived each other as rivals based on their similar relative power position in the region. The importance of the AKP elite's perception and domestic motivations as intervening variables demonstrate that systemic structures are not the only major determinants of a state's foreign policy, especially in the short-to-medium term. Through the intervening variables of TFP towards Iran, Turkey adopted profit-oriented and interest-driven policies to manage its relationship with Iran and maintain amity rather than enmity whenever closer ties were more beneficial than rivalry. However, as Academic 4 (personal communication, July 6, 2020) noted, Turkey's collaboration with Iran was for a ceasefire, not a peace. When they have mutual concerns, they collaborate, but this is not consistent. Turkey's fluctuant accusation against Iran over Tehran's alleged support to PKK and Ankara's long-term requirement for US support due to its middle power capacity resulted in short-term rapprochement with Iran. Therefore, unit-level variables played a role in the short-to-medium term in TFP towards Iran. Otherwise, Turkey would have maintained its competition with Iran in the longer term due to both states' middle power activism in the region. This indicates that the main determinant of TFP towards Iran is systemic variables, including their relative power capacity, even though Turkey followed rapprochement with Iran in the short term.

This chapter has elaborated on the main theoretical research questions by explaining how systemic determinants and Turkey's relative power have impacted Turkey's policies towards Iran, while also considering unit-level variables (the AKP elite's perception and domestic considerations) from December 2010 to July 2018. The next two chapters shed light on two significant case studies as empirical discussions to further understand the causal chain between systemic and unit-level variables. In particular, the Syrian conflict and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) were selected as case studies for two reasons. First, they help explain the anarchic and competitive international and regional dynamics resulting from the Arab Uprisings and their effects on TFP behaviour towards Iran. Second, they facilitate an understanding of the influence of Turkey's domestic politics and society on the implementation of its revised policy choices towards Iran. In this regard, the Syrian conflict is the first case study of the thesis to corroborate the role of independent and intervening variables on TFP towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings.

CHAPTER 6 TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS IRAN SINCE THE ARAB UPRISINGS (DECEMBER 2010-JULY 2018): THE CASE OF THE SYRIAN CONFLICT

This chapter discusses Turkey's role in the Syrian conflict in the context of interactions with Iran, by asking what the motivation behind Turkey's stance towards Iran was from the outset of the Syrian conflict to July 2018. Therefore, the focus in this chapter concerns how Turkey's relative power position, the AKP elite's perceptions, and the domestic considerations of Turkey shaped TFP towards Iran in the Syrian conflict from March 2011 to July 2018. To understand TFP towards Iran, the chapter is divided into three areas: first, the role of systemic (independent) variables, including certain regional political shifts deriving from the Syrian conflict and Turkey's relative power position; second, the role of Turkish domestic factors regarding the Syrian conflict as unit-level (intervening) variables —the significance of the AKP elite's perception and domestic security and economic considerations for Turkey's relationship with Iran in the Syrian conflict; and, third, how such variables played filtering roles between systemic factors and TFP choices towards Iran. The influence of unit-level variables is important because they forced Turkey to conduct a short-term collaborative foreign policy towards Iran, even though systemic factors were pushing for the exact opposite. As such, Schweller's balance of interest theory can sufficiently explain Turkey's alliance with Iran, especially for the analysis of domestic considerations. The chapter concludes that NCR convincingly explains Turkey's changing attitudes towards Iran from the outset of the Syrian conflict to July 2018.

6.1 The Role of the System-Level on Turkish Foreign Policy towards Iran since the outset of the Syrian Conflict: March 2011 to July 2018

NCR argues that the balance of power and relative power position of a country shape a state's foreign policy as systemic determinants. Understanding Turkey's policy attitude towards Iran since the outset of the Syrian conflict in terms of the effects of systemic determinants, therefore, requires an assessment of state and non-state armed actors' respective interests and their position towards the conflict, as well as Turkey's relative power position in the conflict.

Accordingly, this section analyses the internationalisation of the Syrian conflict and Turkey's relative power position within it as systemic (independent) variables. These determinants had significant impacts on TFP towards Iran because Turkey has deemed Iran a competitor in the Syrian conflict, particularly for its long-term interests, due to the major regional systemic shifts and their similar position in the international power structure.

The Syrian conflict became an anarchic environment in which there were severe regional competition from the outbreak of the conflict to July 2018, thus accelerating the multi-polarity of the context and numerous regional aspirations (C. Phillips 2017b, 37). Numerous external and regional states sought to shape the conflict in terms of their interests and goals in the Middle East by either directly intervening or indirectly controlling the future of the conflict and by backing non-state armed groups. Their seek of enhancing their interests thus ignited inter-state competition in Syria. As well as states, non-state armed actors participated in this competition to influence their regional position by means of state support. These developments internationalised the conflict and shifted regional power relations. To understand the role of systemic (independent variables) on TFP towards Iran, this section is thus divided two subsections: inter-state competition and the rise of non-state armed groups.

6.1.1 Inter-State Competition

In the tumultuous environment of the Syrian conflict, states wondered who would gain most from the newly emerged political sphere and win a relative advantage over others. To do so, numerous international and regional states explicitly formed groups in two camps: either supporting or opposing the Assad regime. The pro-Assad group of Russia, Iran, and China aimed to keep the regime in power, while other states, such as the US, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, aimed for regime change. Since Turkey and Iran had different goals in Syria, inter-state competition determined Turkey's attitude towards Iran.

The pro-Assad powers liaised with the regime on the basis of their regional interests. Russia sought to increase its international relative power position over the US through the Syrian conflict. In Charountaki (2018, 251) words, "the Syrian crisis granted Russia a means of reviving its determinant and influential role in the Middle Eastern region and helped it make a comeback on the regional political scene". Indeed, the Assad regime has always been an indispensable Russian ally, with the Russia's -only Mediterranean naval base being located at

the Syrian port of Tartus. Moscow emphasised the protection of the Assad regime to maintain its military base, which provided Russian forces with unconditional access to the Mediterranean (Carpenter 2013, 9; Pierini 2016, 7). Moscow criticised the interventionist policies of western actors and their regional allies, who opposed the Assad regime, and was particularly concerned about a possible NATO military campaign to attack Syria under the UN Security Council Resolution 1973, that looked to replicate the Libyan intervention in March 2011. As such, in February 2012, Moscow used its veto against the UN Security Council resolution, which would have demanded an end to all violence and reprisals against the regime in Damascus for its use of chemical weapons against its own citizens. In doing so, Moscow assumed that a western-led intervention in Syria would result in a similar outcome to the Libyan intervention; this outcome would impact Russia adversely because of the potential for increasing US influence across the region at Moscow's expense (Crosston 2014, 95; C. Phillips 2017b, 41–96). Russia could therefore prevent further western-led regime changes in the Middle East by supporting the status quo and shaping the conflict in terms of its regional interests.

China was another supporter of the status quo in the Syrian conflict and aimed to maintain its Middle Eastern interests despite its limited ties with the Assad regime. At the outset of the Syrian conflict, China was one of Syria's main trading partners and a crucial participant in Syria's oil industry. Like Moscow, Beijing considered that the US and its allies would try to subvert regional order by demanding a regime change in Syria, and thus used its veto as a permanent member in the UNSC against any condemnation of the Assad regime in February 2012. In this regard, Wang Keihan, then Deputy Director at the Chinese Foreign Ministry, blamed some western countries in early August 2012, for hindering and sabotaging the diplomatic process of the Syrian conflict, and for pushing for regime change in Syria (Carpenter 2013, 9). This statement indicates that the removal of the Assad regime would be against Chinese interests in the Middle East, and Beijing maintained the support of the Assad regime as long as protecting it would increase China's regional power.

As well as Russia and China, Iran depicted the Assad regime as a valuable ally in the Middle East due to its strategic and historical ties with Damascus. Ever since the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Syria has been an Iranian ally alongside Hezbollah, the Shia Islamist political party and militant group based in Lebanon. In particularly, Syria's proximity to Israel served as a convenient conduit to Hezbollah in Iran's "proxy confrontation" with Israel

(Ospina, Gray, and Creek 2014; C. Phillips 2017b, 40). In this regard, the Iranian diplomat for Middle East Affairs, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, stated that "we don't [want] permanent collaboration with the Assad regime but there is no better option. Syria is seen as a door between Iran and Hezbollah and an only Arab ally in the region" (Academic 2, personal communication, August 6, 2020). Like Russia, Iran was also concerned about the US presence in the region, because Tehran felt US pressure and assumed that a US intervention in Syria would promote Israeli interests and threaten Iran's presence and interests. As such, Tehran initially perceived the Syrian conflict as the outcome of "a pre-planned agenda by western countries aimed at weakening and destroying Islamic resistance opposed to the Zionist regime [Israel]" (Akbarzadeh and Barry 2017, 5; Academic 2, personal communication, August 6 2020). Since Iran viewed Syria as a buffer zone between the US and Israel, Tehran immediately sent military and financial aid to Assad following Washington's declaration in late summer, 2011, of seeking to remove the Assad regime (Crosston 2014, 104; Journalist 2, personal communication, August 14, 2020). As well as the US, Sunni Wahhabi Saudi Arabia was a prominent rival for Shia Iran in a sectarian proxy war that increasingly defined the Syrian civil war, as a Sunni-based regime in Syria could undermine Iranian regional interests. Accordingly, Tehran viewed the survival of the Assad regime as vital to Iran's regional interests.

On the other hand, the anti-Assad group sought to topple the regime, and aimed to block pro-Assad policies. The US was notably concerned about the Chinese and Russian vetoes regarding the Assad regime at the UNSC. For instance, in February 2012, Susan Rice, former US ambassador to the UN, pointed out that China and Russia had taken shameful and unforgivable action by vetoing policies against the Assad regime, and the US was tired of such acts. Likewise, Hillary Clinton, then US Secretary of State, proclaimed that the use of a veto by China and Russia was degrading when people were being murdered in Syria (Carpenter 2013, 8). In addition to her criticism of Russia and China, she further claimed that Iran would be a significant lifeline for the Assad regime to maintain its "proxy" and "crony" in Syria (Crosston 2014, 102). In this regard, Washington was concerned about the policies of the pro-Assad states in the conflict.

Other actors too supported the removal of Assad. While the EU played a limited role due to policy differences among its members (Ayman 2014, 22), Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey, as the leading opposition states, shared a vision of actively and directly supporting the Syrian opposition groups. To achieve their goal, each state implemented diplomatic, military

and financial policies, such as diplomatic and economic sanctions, supplying arms to opposition groups, and pressuring member states of the UNSC—particularly the US —to intervene in Syria (C. Phillips 2017b, 36). These three states even contributed to the establishment of the Syrian National Council (SNC), and then participated in the International Contact Group known as the Friends of Syria (Hokayem 2014, 65). Importantly, sectarian policies determined their Syrian policies because each state aimed to prevent the rise of Iranian influence across the Middle East, and to change the balance of power in their favour (C. Phillips 2016, 39). In so doing, they sought US assistance, and tried to persuade the US to intervene in the Syrian conflict. As a result, the anti- and pro-Assad groups competed for regional supremacy and to alter the balance of power in their favour in the first years of the conflict.

Moreover, the sectarian competition between Saudi- and Iranian-led groups was pronounced in the Syrian civil war: Saudi Arabia supported the Sunni group including Turkey, Qatar, and anti-Assad opposition groups, such as the Free Syrian Army and the Islamic Front, whereas Iran sided openly with the Shia groups, including Hezbollah as well as the Assad regime at a certain extent (Aras and Yorulmazlar 2016a, 2268). As a result, the Syrian conflict became the battlefield for a Sunni-Shia proxy war in the Middle East allowing sectarianism to become a dominant characteristic of shifting alliances that now recast much of the regional order.

This inter-state competition led to a clear deterioration of TFP towards Iran since Ankara first competed with Tehran and supported anti-Assad groups in Syria. Turkey attempted to increase its regional influence through a reconfiguration of the balance of power, and at the same time to prevent the rise of Iranian influence; thus, Turkey initially pursued largely US-led policies in the Syrian conflict. To consolidate its regional influence, Ankara followed a Saudi-led Sunni policy against the Assad regime and indirectly against Tehran (Ayman 2014, 20–21; Crosston 2014, 104). In this regard, Iran's close ties with the Assad regime disturbed Turkey, since Iran could gain leverage over Turkey in the shifting regional balance of power (Ataman and Özdemir 2018, 23). To change this possibility, Turkey played an instrumental role in facilitating the Free Syrian Army as the main opposition to the Assad regime, by allowing Turkish territory to be used for the transfer of funds, weapons, and recruits. This exacerbated tensions with Iran. Although Ankara insisted that its Syrian policy was in favour of democracy, reforms and stability, and was not sectarian, it propped up Islamist armed opposition groups, such as Al-Nusra, against the Assad regime, and even initially ignored

ISIS's aggressive policies in Syria since the jihadist group was fighting against the Assad regime (Aras and Yorulmazlar 2014, 115–16). Therefore, an indirect Turkish-Iranian proxy war also emerged with the beginning of the Syrian conflict in 2011 and TFP towards Iran shifted from "polite competition to delicate brinkmanship" (Oktav 2013, 201). Similarly, Academic 2 (personal communication, August 6, 2020) noted that there was hard balancing and competition between Turkey and Iran. Between 2012–2016 especially, there was high tension even though they tried to mitigate their tension, and yet, in the beginning of the Syrian conflict, their attempt at detente was seen as difficult because hard balancing played a determinant role. As such, Turkey's unfriendly behaviour towards Iran demonstrated that Turkey perceived Iranian policies in Syria as a threat against its long-term regional interests.

At the outbreak of the Syrian conflict, Turkey, despite its initial hesitance, arguably adopted a more militarist and security-oriented stance against the Assad regime by propping up Syrian opposition groups. According to Expert 3 (personal communication, July 21, 2020), the Syrian conflict shifted from political armed conflict to military conflict due to the involvement of external powers. In such an environment, Turkey opted to support the opposition and followed a western-based policy which meant close ties with the US and EU, and sanctions were announced against the Assad regime akin to US and EU policies (Erdogan 2016, 116). In doing this, Ankara tried to play a significant role in shaping the balance of power and enhancing its regional power situation in the Syrian conflict.

As the conflict intensified, Turkey opted for a more interventionist policy against the Assad regime than its western allies, particularly the US, and increased military aid to the Syrian opposition, notably the Free Syrian Army (FSA), by sending arms and Arab Islamist fighters into Syria (Gupta 2016, 33). Turkey became a significant state actor by hosting the major Syrian opposition institutions of the SNC and the leadership of the FSA, and by allowing the transfer of arms, funds, and humanitarian aid to reach rebel-controlled areas in northern Syria (Lynch 2016b, 141). As well as financial and military aid, Ankara endeavoured to establish both no-fly and buffer zones for the Syrian opposition (Erdogan 2016, 116). All these factors demonstrate that Turkey utilised Syrian opposition groups to enhance its regional power and influence in Syria. In particular, the Turkmen-Sunnis inhabiting the mountains in Latakia Province and the Sunni Islamist groups, such as the MB-affiliated opposition, became pivotal allies for Turkey in its attempts to achieve its regional interests in the conflict. In return, these groups promoted Turkey as their regional ally. For instance, Mohammed Riad Shaqfa, the

leader of Syria's MB, said in November 2011, that "he would accept military intervention to stop the Assad regime's deadly crackdown on pro-democracy protesters if it was led by Turkey instead of western powers" (Oktav 2013, 199). In this way, Ankara liaised with various opposition groups to achieve its regional goals.

Nevertheless, sectarianism did indeed play a limited role in TFP towards Iran, owing to the different viewpoints between Turkey and Saudi Arabia on supporting different Sunni groups. While Riyadh preferred backing mostly moderate Sunni groups, Ankara provided military and financial aid to more radical Islamist groups and MB-affiliated groups (Ayman 2014, 20–21). In this regard, a Saudi-Turkish alliance could become ineffective against the rise of Iranian influence, and Turkey then played a balancing role between Iran and Saudi-Arabia (Ayoob 2011, 64).

Furthermore, Ankara sought to establish warming ties with Tehran owing to its complicated affairs with other certain countries, such as the US. While pursuing a US policy in the Syrian conflict, Ankara did indeed adopt different goals to the US. For instance, Turkey insisted on toppling the Assad regime in the first years of the Syrian conflict, while the US changed its priorities from deposing the regime to protecting US national security interests in the region; this clearly formed a breaking point between the two allies and put severe tension on their bilateral ties. Even though inter-state competition determined TFP towards Iran at the first years of the Syrian conflict, Turkey tried to avoid any high-level tension with Iran. It seems that other factors were also key in shaping TFP towards Iran in the Syrian conflict.

6.1.2 The rise of non-state armed groups

The rise of non-state armed groups was another determining factor in the changing regional balance of power from the outset of the Syrian conflict to July 2018. The anarchic environment stemming from the conflict emboldened numerous non-state armed actors to strengthen their position and compete in a period of rapid change in the regional system. Owing to their antagonistic and separatist policies, they aggravated the anarchic environment of the conflict, with religious or nationalist (C. Phillips 2016, 24).

Religious-based policies were arguably more visible in Shia-dominated Hezbollah and Wahhabi-based ISIS' activism in the Syrian conflict when they attempted to cement their

regional influence and position. For instance, Hezbollah sent almost 2,000 dedicated fighters to defend the Assad regime and played a significant role in capturing al-Qusayr in June 2013, on behalf of the Assad regime (Byman 2014, 92–93). As well as Hezbollah, various Iraqi Shia armed groups, such as Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, became prominent in supporting the Assad regime (Academic 1, personal communication, August 4, 2020). ISIS, with its Salafi doctrine, also emerged as a jihadist armed group in Syria, especially in the second half of 2014, and established a strict religious order in the primarily Sunni areas of Syria (Unver 2018, 40). Its small but relatively well-armed and equipped military force and its insurgent tactics made ISIS the major opposition force in Syria. Strong financial reserves derived from oil smuggling, bank robberies, ransom money, and the forceful collection of taxes also enabled ISIS to hire recruits while its military victories in 2014 emboldened other extremist jihadist movements to increase their terrorist activities in Syria (Işiksal 2018, 26).

Various international and regional states also encouraged these armed groups to implement sectarian policies in the Syrian conflict, seeking to use them for their regional interests and goals. Saudi Arabia and Iran arguably demonstrated the aforementioned solidarity with numerous fundamentalist groups to enhance their regional power position and caused a "proxy war" in the conflict. Riyadh particularly endorsed the small Sunni groups, such as the Farouq Brigade, within the SNC both to topple the Assad regime and prevent the rise of Shia influence (Baylouny and Mullins 2018, 1003). In contrast to Riyadh, Tehran sent financial and/or military aid to Shia groups in the Syrian conflict. According to Juneau (2018, 32), "Iran has backed Hezbollah's growing role in Syria. Though Hezbollah has significantly diversified its sources of support over the years, much of its advanced weaponry still comes from Iran, through Syria". Therefore, state support to the non-state armed groups increased the already anarchic environment in the conflict.

Despite cordial ties between non-state armed groups and states over sectarianism, however, individual states found themselves in a dilemma over the empowerment of jihadist groups, as their victory would encourage home-grown militant groups. To illustrate, Moscow was frightened that the victory of jihadist groups in the Syrian conflict would influence Russian jihadists, and thus it boosted its political and military aid to the Assad regime by sending an air force and up to 2,000 military personnel in September 2015 (C. Phillips 2017b, 41). This allowed Russia to launch intensive air campaigns, mostly against the rebels. The rise of Sunni groups also did not fall entirely in line with Iran's regional expectations, which were to increase

Shia influence in the Middle East and keep the Alawite Assad regime in power as Iranian ally. For Iran, in mid-2012, the conflict became worse when Sunni groups and tribes started to revolt against the regime following the receipt of financial and military support from major Sunni-dominated states (Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey), and the US and its western allies (Gupta 2016, 31). In this tumultuous environment, states used the particular non-state armed groups, which had similar ideology or aim, to enhance their interests and prevent the growing influence of other state actors.

According to Journalist 2 (personal communication, August 14, 2020), the rivalry between Ankara and Tehran in the 1990s re-emerged in the Syrian conflict despite Turkey's quest for cooperation with Iran in the 2000s. Given that Turkey sought to improve its regional power position by playing a more active role and increasing its support to the Sunni opposition groups, TFP towards Iran had the potential for intense competition with no short-term possibility of improvement at the beginning of the conflict. In this environment, Turkey directly propped up Sunni armed groups against the Alawite Assad regime but did so indirectly against Iran. For instance, Ahrar al-Sham, which has much in common with al-Nusra and adopts Salafi jihadist ideology and extreme sectarianism, became a significant partner for Turkey, Qatar, and the Gulf countries. Turkey, along with Qatar and Saudi Arabia, further pioneered the foundation of Jaysh al-Fateh, another al-Nusra affiliated jihadist group. With aid from these three states, Jaysh al-Fateh captured Idlib and advanced in Latakia and other significant regime areas (Lynch 2016b, 143, 154, 169). To achieve the overthrow of the Assad regime, moreover, Turkey overlooked the flow of fighters, money and weapons into ISIS-controlled areas, which facilitated the rise of jihadist groups (Zaman 2014). Accordingly, Turkey's Sunni-based policies increased its confrontation with Iran.

According to Academic 1 (personal communication, August 4, 2020), Turkey did not even hesitate to target pro-Iranian militias in Syria. Ankara envisaged more relative advantage against Iran, as the former believed it had the capability to shape the Syrian conflict by means of close ties with the opposition groups. In doing so, Ankara endeavoured to obtain the most benefit from the new political environment and a relative advantage over Iran; Turkey foresaw that its support for Sunni groups would strengthen its international position and allow it to establish much closer economic relations with Syria in the post-Assad period. As such, Turkey, although hoping to "play an order-instituting role in the region, with western support" (Oktav 2013, 199), implemented a more interventionist policy, and this was a sign of the discord

between Turkey and Iran. Therefore, Turkey increased competition towards Iran, claiming its position as the leading regional power.

Nevertheless, the divisions within Sunni-dominated state groups prevented the growth of indirect competition between Turkey and Iran. Whereas Riyadh propped up the Salafi rebels, Turkey, along with Qatar, supported MB-affiliated groups. Saudi and other Gulf states were thus at odds over their support for these groups and, more importantly, viewed them as a threat to domestic security (Lynch 2016b, 94,142). This caused another regional political struggle, which damaged the Ankara-Riyadh alliance against the rise of Shia influence. Turkey was also at loggerheads with the US over the latter's supply of military and financial aid to some jihadist groups. For instance, former Vice President Joseph Biden stated in October 2014,

> *Our allies in the region were our largest problem... [They] were so determined to take down (Syrian President) Assad and have a proxy Sunni-Shia war, they poured hundreds of millions of dollars and thousands of tons weapons into anyone who would fight against Assad. Except that the people who were being supplied were (Jabbat) al Nusra and al Qaida, and the extremist elements of jihadis coming from other parts of the world (Parasiliti, Reedy, and Wasser 2017, 2).*

In particular, Turkey, along with Qatar, was willing to establish close ties with the al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra, which was seen as a terrorist group by the US. As such, Washington had Ankara in its crosshairs owing to reasonable concerns regarding the extremist groups which might ultimately use the weapons to attack the US and its regional allies (Stein 2015a). As a result, Ankara's policies in the conflict started to be questioned by its Western and Sunni-dominated state allies.

As well as sectarianism, nationalist factors became visible in the policies of non-state armed actors. Notably, the PYD pursued its nationalist aims in the Syrian conflict, and thus obtained a de facto autonomy in 2012 when the Assad regime forces left control of three mainly Kurdish areas (Afrin, Jazira and Kobane) to local militias. Therefore, PYD arguably became a key player by taking over large swathes of land in northern Syria, which attracted the attention of various international and regional actors. Notably, the US established cordial ties with the PYD in the fighting against ISIS. However, the PYD posed a national security threat to some states, including Turkey. With the empowerment of the PYD, Ankara shifted its priorities from preventing the rise of Iranian influence to protecting its national security. Turkey's several

western allies occasionally criticised its military operations against the PYD (S. Aydin and Ucar 2018), and thus Turkey fuelled the need for Iran's partnership in combating the PYD for a short-term period.

From the beginning of the Syrian conflict to July 2018, Ankara aspired to influence developments in the conflict in favour of its long-term interests, including enhancing its power position. According to Expert 4 (personal communication, July 24, 2020), Turkey's affairs with Iran depended on a global state actor, including the US and EU due to its limited power capabilities. At the beginning of the Syrian conflict, Ankara thus sought US/EU collaboration to topple the Assad regime and prevent the rise of Iranian influence. However, it was disappointed with the EU's limited role and US reluctance to be drawn further into the conflict. Turkey thus sought to collaborate with Russia, as another global state power, while also increasing support for the disorganised opposition groups. What this indicates is that Ankara was maintaining its rivalry with Iran not only to gain a more advantageous position but also a higher profile than Iran across the region in the longer term. However, domestic factors compelled Ankara to ally with Tehran in the short-to-medium term. In the next section, there is a focus on how unit-level factors operated regarding Turkey's relative power position in the anarchic environment and TFP towards Iran from the beginning of the Syrian conflict to July 2018.

6.2 The Role of the Unit Level (Intervening Variables) on Turkish Foreign Policy towards Iran since the onset of the Syrian Conflict: March 2011 to July 2018

While seeing Iran as a rival for its long-term regional interests, Ankara sought a short-term alliance with Tehran for domestic reasons. Therefore, without the context of the intervening (unit-level) variables, TFP towards Iran in the Syrian conflict cannot be understood, as domestic factors greatly determined the character, type, and adjustment of Turkish attitudes towards Iran. In this section, the AKP elite's perception of the Syrian conflict is examined as a domestic factor determining TFP towards Iran, and there is also an analysis of how profit-oriented security and economic considerations prevailed over Turkey's competition with Iran. Overall, in this section it is argued that the AKP elites' perception determined TFP towards Iran, and that Turkey followed profit-oriented and interest-based policies towards Iran, in line with Schweller's balance of interest theory.

6.2.1 The AKP Elites' Perception

In the Syrian conflict, the AKP elite's perception determined Turkey's policy behaviour, since, as Hinnebusch (2015, 15) says, "Turkey's response to the Syrian conflict was a function of the way the change in Turkey's identity under the AKP reshaped the government's conceptions of Turkey's interests and of the threats to them". That is to say, the AKP elites' identity, policies and perceptions regarding the conflict played a significant role in shaping TFP towards Iran.

Before the Arab Uprisings, the AKP elites had shared a common vision with the Assad regime and Erdogan and Basher Assad had become close friends. Other remarks from the AKP elites regarding Bashar Assad and the Syrians had also been friendly, calling them "friends", "family", and "brothers". In return, after becoming the first Syrian leader to visit Ankara in 2004, Bashar al-Assad compromised on the territorial conflict over Hatay[4] in 2005 and the Euphrates water issue[5] in 2008. This cordiality culminated in a reduction in the tension of the 1990s derived from Syria's support for the PKK and Turkish construction on the Euphrates, but also the rise of economic and political interaction between the two countries. Accordingly, the AKP elites did not envisaged that similar outcomes to the Egyptian or Tunisian Uprisings would occur in Syria, and few even believed that Turkey would lead an anti-Assad group in the conflict (C. Phillips 2016, 36, 59).

Following the onset of the conflict in March 2011, Turkish policymakers expressed their support for Assad, and even Erdogan portrayed Bashar Hafez al-Assad as a good friend

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[4] After one-year independence, Hatay (the Sanjak of Alexandra), which had been previously under French occupation, unified with Turkey in 1939. Therefore, Hatay became a territorial issue between Turkey and Syria which never approved this unification by believing that this unification was illegal and Western imperial designed. See details: Sanjian, A. K. (1956). The Sanjak of Alexandretta (Hatay): Its Impact on Turkish-Syrian Relations (1939-1956). *Middle East Journal*, *10*(4), 379-394.; Altunışık, M. B., & Tür, Ö. (2006). From distant neighbors to partners? Changing Syrian-Turkish relations. *Security Dialogue*, *37*(2), 229-248.; Magued, S. (2019). Turkey's economic rapprochement towards Syria and the territorial conflict over Hatay. *Mediterranean Politics*, *24*(1), 20-39.

[5] Since the 1980s, Turkey and Syria had water conflict over the control of the water flow of the Euphrates. See details: Güner, S. (1997). The Turkish-Syrian war of attrition: The water dispute. *Studies in conflict & terrorism*, *20*(1), 105-116.; Carkoglu, A., & Eder, M. (2001). Domestic concerns and the water conflict over the Euphrates-Tigris river basin. *Middle Eastern Studies*, *37*(1), 41-71.; Scheumann, W. (2003). The euphrates issue in turkish-syrian relations. In *Security and Environment in the Mediterranean* (pp. 745-760). Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg.

loved by his people. Ankara urged al-Assad to enact democratic reform and endeavoured to play a mediating role between the Assad regime and the opposition groups. The main motivation behind Turkey's desire for a mediating role was its wish to "demonstrate its value as a regional interlocutor for the West, owing to the assumed leverage over [Assad] that would allow Ankara to steer him toward peaceful political change" (Hinnebusch 2015, 17). In this regard, Davutoglu, then Foreign Affairs Minister, and Hakan Fidan, then head of Turkey's National Intelligence Organisation (MIT), paid several visits to Damascus to convey Turkey's suggestions regarding reforms and persuade the Assad regime to accept Turkey's mediation with the opposition to find common ground in Syria. However, the Assad regime not only rejected this idea but perceived Turkey's suggestions to be an intervention in Syria's domestic issues, since the AKP elites demanded Assad's resignation (Barkey 2014, 104). Consequently, in August 2011, the AKP elites became increasingly critical of the Assad regime when it ultimately refused Turkey's call for reform and dialogue. In March 2012, Ankara even closed its embassy in Damascus and started to endorse the Syrian opposition in April 2012. The elites thus shifted their position from remaining neutral to gradually supporting the Syrian opposition. In doing so, they promoted Turkey as a defender of international law, human rights, democracy, core Islamic values and trans-religious principles, and as a moral actor in the Middle East standing with the oppressed (Güney Ateşoğlu 2013, 56). Following the downing of a Turkish jet by Syrian forces in June 2012, then Prime Minister Erdogan further declared that "every military element that approaches the Turkish border from Syria in a manner that constitutes a security risk or danger would be considered as a threat and would be treated as a military target"(The New York Times 2012). Therefore, Davutoglu frequently underlined that TFP towards the Syrian conflict was related to Turkish national and security interests, independent of external pressure or directives (Taşpınar 2012, 138–39). These remarks indicate that the AKP elites were heavily involved in the Syrian conflict and started to implement an interventionist foreign policy.

In this increasingly turbulent environment, the AKP elites aimed to present Turkey as a significant regional actor in the new era by utilising a "value-based discourse" (Demirtas-Bagdonas 2014, 147–48), but they initially perceived Iran as an obstacle to achieving this since each country was propping up different groups. The AKP elites further increased their unwavering support for the Syrian opposition by pioneering the foundation of the Friends of Syria Group, established in 2012, to exert pressure on the Syrian regime, and by allowing the nominal head of the FSA to base themselves in Turkey (C. Phillips 2017a, 39). Moreover, the

AKP government demanded that the US "set up no-fly zones or protected areas along the Turkish–Syrian border, just as it had done in northern Iraq during the 1990s" (Barkey 2014, 105). In doing so, the AKP elites sought to become a significant actor in the conflict and to gain leverage over Tehran.

While the conflict was intensifying, the AKP elites increased their critical discourse indirectly against Iran, as well as the Assad regime. For instance, in 2012, then Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc accused Tehran of ignoring the violence in Homs, where almost 200 protesters had been killed (Ünver 2012, 106). In July 2013, Ahmet Davutoglu also stated that "all foreigners fighting in Syria [were] to immediately leave the country", implying Hezbollah, Tehran's Shia ally (Hurriyet Daily News 2013b). Behind their critique, the AKP elite's Sunni-based identity emerged as a foreign policy tool towards both the Syrian conflict and Tehran. They believed that the conflict would provide the MB with an opportunity to take over the Syrian regime, and hoped that an MB-affiliated government would replace the Assad regime in the post-conflict period (Okyay 2017, 834). Even before Turkish-Syrian ties deteriorated, the AKP had demanded the release of the MB's leaders and power-sharing between the Assad regime and the MB (Gupta 2016, 33). Accordingly, they deemed the MB to be a platform upon which Sunni solidarity could be established on Turkey's border, a belief that further complicated ties between Turkey and Iran. They also turned a blind eye to the movement of Sunni fighters and arms into Syria (Barkey 2014, 105). Based on this sectarian-based perception, therefore, the AKP elites opposed Iranian policies in the conflict.

Towards the end of 2013, however, Ankara revised its foreign policy towards Tehran due to the miscalculations made by the AKP at the beginning of the conflict. First, the AKP elites overestimated Turkey's ability to influence the Syrian conflict (Barkey 2014, 104). Propping up the Syrian opposition, the AKP elites envisaged that Assad would be deposed in six months, and thus rushed to support Sunni opposition groups by organising conferences in Istanbul and assisting with the formation of the FSA. Despite having lost some territory, the Assad regime still governed significant western parts of Syria and maintained power by means of Russian and Iranian support. Therefore, Turkey failed to realise that the toppling of the Assad regime would have a systemic effect, miscalculating the roles of Russia and Iran and the US in Syria (Expert 3, personal communication, July 21, 2020). At the same time, Syrian opposition groups were disorganised and had limited capability to influence the future of the Syrian conflict (C. Phillips 2016) while Turkey's relations with Saudi-led Sunni countries were

at stake due to the AKP elite's support for the MB-affiliated opposition groups. Turkey lost numerous Sunni state allies in the region, such as Saudi Arabia —except for Qatar, which also supported these groups. As a result, the AKP elites' quest for a Sunni-dominated post-Assad regime backfired; this was despite the fact that the AKP elites had joined the Sunni group of Saudi-led Gulf countries and Qatar, in an attempt to reap an economic dividend for Turkey by securing investment and funds from rich Sunni Gulf countries (Işiksal 2018, 24). This indicates that the elites' assertive sectarian policies and (mis) perception of the policies of other Sunni states in Syria culminated in economic and political losses for Ankara.

The AKP elites further misinterpreted US policies in Syria, assuming that Washington would seek regional transformation (Expert 3 personal communication, July 21, 2020). Notably, then Prime Minister Erdogan envisaged that the US was planning to attack the Assad regime after the presidential election of November 2012, since the Obama administration declared that using chemical weapons in Syria was a "red line". Even so, Washington remained hesitant about becoming mired in the Syrian conflict, a legacy of the Iraq war, and it continued to follow a more cautious policy towards the conflict than Ankara anticipated. As such, Washington merely intervened in the conflict when there was a threat to its interests, and focused more on ISIS than the Assad regime due to the rise of jihadism being perceived as a threat to the US and its allies in the region (C. Phillips 2017a, 41). In essence, Washington considered that there was no alternative Syrian opposition which would be a US ally in the post-Assad era, and deemed the opposition groups to be anti-US and anti-Israel (Ayman 2014, 22). Wary of further military entanglements in the Middle East, the Obama administration also hoped to pivot its stance from the Middle East towards Asia, due to the shift in international politics caused by the rise of China and the general economic and political importance of Asia. In short, the refusal of the Obama administration to enforce its own 'red line' following the chemical attack by Assad's forces in East Ghouta in April 2013 demonstrated that it would not intervene in the conflict (Expert 3, personal communication, July 21, 2020). Therefore, the AKP elites failed to persuade Washington to intervene militarily to topple the Assad regime due to their different perspectives on the future of the Syrian conflict.

In contrast to the US, the AKP elites focused on the overthrow of Assad rather than the rise of jihadists, and even supported jihadist groups, such as Jabhat al-Nusra, to remove the Assad regime. As a result, Turkey's image transformed from one of a "Muslim democracy" to an "Islamic bureaucracy" in international politics (Charountaki 2018, 274). While the number

of nationalist viewpoints increased among the AKP elites, they were also concerned about the US' unwavering support for the PYD in combatting ISIS. As a result, a lack of trust emerged between Ankara and Washington over the Syrian conflict, and notably the AKP elites periodically accused Washington of playing a passive role in the conflict. In this regard, in September 2013, Erdogan declared that "the world is bigger than five", implying the inefficiency of the UNSC in the conflict, including the US (Milliyet 2013). In May 2017, at a joint news conference with President Trump, Erdogan further asserted that "Turkey will never accept US alliance with Kurdish forces [PYD/YPG] fighting in Syria" (BBC News 2017b). Accordingly, US policies in Syria not only evolved diverged from the AKP elite's expectations, but undermined Ankara's policies in Syria.

Given their miscalculations towards the developments of the conflict, the trajectory of the Syrian conflict situation gradually forced Ankara to become aware of its limitations in shaping the new greater political environment. Therefore, the AKP government fuelled the need for alternative partners in Syria, except for the US and Saudi Arabia, which led to a more conciliatory foreign policy towards Tehran. Even though the UN organised the Geneva talks in 2017 to establish peace negotiations between the Syrian government and the opposition groups, Turkey and Iran, along with Russia, simultaneously adopted a triple negotiation system to find a diplomatic solution to the Syrian conflict and to secure Syria's national border from growing international violations. The three countries also conducted numerous mutual meetings and referred to themselves as guarantor countries fighting for peace in Syria (Nechepurenko 2017).

In conclusion, the AKP elites first perceived that the Syrian conflict was an opportunity to enhance Turkey's regional position, and thus followed overambitious policies in the conflict (Kuru 2015). However, their policies led to conflict with Turkey's western allies, including the US, and regional allies, including the Saudi Arabia. Increasingly, they believed that relying only on the US did not serve Turkey's national interests in the Syrian conflict. Accordingly, despite their disagreements, Turkey's ties with Iran in the Syrian conflict were not a choice but a necessity (Academic 4, personal communication, July 6, 2020). Therefore, the AKP elites put aside their sectarian policies towards Tehran based on cost-benefit calculations in the short-to-medium term. As noted in Chapter 5, with the rise of a nationalist and anti-western perspective among the AKP elites and its domestic considerations, Iran became a prominent

ally. The next section thus elucidates how domestic considerations motivated Ankara to ally with Tehran in the short-to-medium term as another intervening (unit-level) variable.

6.2.2 Domestic Considerations

As another intervening variable, domestic considerations played a significant role in shaping Ankara's short-term alliance choice with Tehran from the outset of the Syrian conflict to July 2018. At the beginning of the conflict, Ankara became concerned about the changing security environment derived from the instability on Turkey's border and its direct effects on Turkey's domestic politics. In particular, the rise of ISIS and the YPG/PYD posed a security burden to Turkey since both could revive Turkey's internal security issues. Accordingly, Turkey under the AKP government reformulated its strategies towards both the Syrian conflict and Iran due to the ever-shifting balance of power between state and non-state armed groups (Okyay 2017, 834).

Moreover, the AKP's power in domestic politics started to be questioned owing to financial costs, the refugee influx, and terrorist attacks stemming from its military interventionist Syrian policies. To consolidate its political survival, the AKP government sought to repair its external and internal position, even though it was able to restrain the domestic tensions and political consequences of policy reversals via its overwhelming control of the Turkish media (Barkey 2014, 112; C. Phillips 2017a, 45). Notably, President Erdogan deemed the Syrian conflict an internal security issue (Güney Ateşoğlu 2013, 54) which required that domestic considerations shape TFP. As such, the AKP-led Turkey extensively exploited TFP to maintain domestic stability, changing their policies from revisionist to maintaining the status quo. This suggests that the AKP elite's perceptions were not independent from domestic considerations, and internal security and economic considerations forced Turkey under the AKP government to implement pragmatic and interest-based policies towards Iran, despite their periodic clash of interests. In this regard, Schweller's balance of interest theory provides a useful perspective on why Ankara formed a short-term alliance with Tehran in consideration of cost-benefit calculations and profits. Without examining domestic considerations as an intervening variable, therefore, it can be difficult to understand how Turkey reshaped its foreign policy behaviour towards Iran from March 2011 to July 2018.

6.2.2.1 Security Consideration

Security factors became an overwhelming domestic consideration in shaping TFP towards Iran in the Syrian conflict. Following the fragmentation of Syria, numerous non-state armed groups emerged as influential actors which posed a security threat to other regional states, notably Syria's neighbours. According to Journalist 2 (personal communication, August 14, 2020), security concerns are mutual between Turkey and Iran. However, Iran's security perception was based on its own national security, while Turkey's security perception resulted from the rise of Syrian Kurds and the possible spill-over on its domestic Kurdish problem.

At the beginning of the Syrian conflict, Turkish policymakers arguably did not see the rise of PYD as a threat in the north of Syria, because they focused more on the overthrow of the Assad regime. Instead, Ankara made three demands of the PYD: no cooperation with the Assad regime; no de facto foundation based on ethnic or religious bases; and no engagement in activities that could endanger the security of the Turkish border (Gunter 2015, 108). In return, during a visit in July 2013, Salih Muslim, the former co-chairman of the PYD, declared that "the Syrian Kurds continue to see themselves as part of Syria and pose no threat to Turkey's territorial integrity". However, he also asserted that it was necessary to "establish a temporary-serving administration until the chaos in Syria is over" (Hurriyet Daily News 2013a).

Soon afterwards, in the face of Ankara's disapproval, the PYD established three cantons, thus reviving Turkey's concern regarding possible collaboration between the PKK and PYD (Elik 2018, 109). Notably, Erdogan upbraided the PYD and signalled a possible Turkish military operation in northern Syria as a "most natural right". Here, Davutoglu added, Turkey could intervene in northern Syria if the PYD became empowered (Demirtas-Bagdonas 2014, 149). These factors indicate that the empowerment of the PYD was subjugated to Turkey's internal PKK issue, and the AKP policymakers deemed that the rise of the PYD was a purely domestic matter for their political survival.

The aforementioned US-PYD alliance against ISIS further increased the AKP policymakers' concerns since the PYD would become a significant political actor on Turkey's southern border by means of US-led anti-ISIS operations (Işiksal 2017b, 98). Even though Turkey under the AKP government granted the use of Incirlik airbase, which already had a US Air Force complement, and collaborated with the US against ISIS in 2015, the US did not

withdraw its support for the PYD. Rather, Washington set up an air facility in Rmeilan in Kurdish-controlled northern Syria and sent special forces into Syrian Kurdish territory (Pierini 2016, 6). Thanks to US support, the YPG/PYD occupied Tal Abyad in June 2015, which increased Ankara's concerns since, "long-term control of Tal Abyad would further the YPG's goal of connecting the non-contiguous zones of the territory it holds across northern Syria" (Dalay 2017c, 79). Accordingly, the PYD became a more significant US ally than Turkey in combating ISIS, which sabotaged Turkey's ties with the US. In this context, Ankara demanded the termination of US support for the PYD and an "internationally-backed safe zone in between two PYD-controlled chunks of territory" (Okyay 2017, 836). Although the US encouraged the PYD to compose an alliance with its minor Syrian partners in order to meet Ankara's objections in November 2015 (S. Aydin and Ucar 2018), Ankara was at odds with the US over the empowerment of the PYD and sought an alternative way to neutralise the rise of this non-state armed group.

Given the collaboration with pro-Turkey Sunni groups, the AKP government launched numerous military attacks against the PYD, shifting the focus of its Syrian policy from ending the Assad regime to protecting Syria's peaceful territorial integrity (Ataman and Özdemir 2018, 21). In this regard, Ankara first conducted Operation Euphrates Shield from 24 August 2016 to 29 March 2017. The operation demonstrated how Ankara recognised that the PYD posed a tactical challenge to Turkey's domestic security, since the PYD's presence in Rojava could serve as a gateway for the PKK to expand its terrorist attacks along Turkey's border (C. Phillips 2017a, 43). Following this military operation, however, the international legitimacy of the PYD grew, thanks to further US support for the PYD. The US recognised the PYD internationally in its efforts in Syria and warned Turkey regarding its cross-border military activities in northern Syria (Gunes and Lowe 2015). The result was that the US support for the PYD led to a further deterioration in Turkish-US bilateral affairs, and the PKK was able to acquire safe havens adjacent to Turkish territory and close to its affiliated groups, the PYD/YPG.

The AKP's offensive attitude towards the PYD reignited tensions with the PKK, and thus worsened Turkey's own Kurdish problem. While the PYD drew international admiration for its six-months defence of Kobane from ISIS attacks in 2014–15, for instance, Ankara's unwillingness to aid the Kurdish militia drew heavy criticism from Kurds in Turkey against the AKP government and culminated in the reactivation of PKK insurgency and the termination of the Kurdish–Turkish peace process. Turkey also had to deal with regular terrorist attacks from

the PKK, including twin attacks on civilians in Ankara, killing 28 in February and 37 in March 2016 (C. Phillips 2017a, 43). It appears that Turkey under the AKP government was squeezed between protecting its internal power and clashing with the PKK/PYD.

In such an environment, the AKP government endeavoured to ensure its political survival. Notably, President Erdogan viewed the PKK attacks as an opportunity to deploy anti-Kurdish sentiments and Turkish nationalist discourse, to decrease the legitimate authority of the PKK-affiliated political party, the HDP and its leader, Selahattin Demirtas. This led to further offensive military operations against the PKK-affiliated PYD through Operation Euphrates Shield in Aleppo from August 2016 to March 2017, followed by Operation Olive Branch in Afrin from January to March 2018. All these factors indicate that Turkey's internal Kurdish issue was interwoven with the rise of Syrian armed Kurds and constrained the AKP government's ability to respond realistically to structural determinants. In particular, the rise of cross-border Turkish military offensives highlighted how the AKP government believed its political survival was now focused on preventing the rise of PYD in Syria. At the same time, Ankara was cognisant of the cost of unilateral military intervention in Syria, because Russia and Iran's increased support for the Assad regime would complicate the Turkish military intervention in Syria, and could internationalise Turkey's Kurdish issue (Ünver 2012, 106). Put differently, it was impossible for Ankara to achieve a permanent victory against both the Assad regime and the PYD without a political alliance.

Therefore, collaboration with Iran over the rise of the PYD was crucial for Turkey, even though at times Ankara had blamed Iran for supporting the PKK. According to Academic 4 (personal communication, July 6, 2020), Iran had used the PJAK and PYD against Turkey due to Turkish involvement in Syria, an act that arguably furthered the declaration of autonomy of Syrian Kurds in north Syria to counter-balance Turkey. Similarly, Academic 3 (personal communication, July 9, 2020) added that when the Assad regime started to lose influence in northern Syria, both the regime and Iran ignored the rise of the PYD in the same area. Even Iran utilised the rise of the PYD in Syria since Turkey was concerned about the rise of PYD's influence. However, in the long-term, the rise of the PYD also became a domestic concern for Iran because, as long as the Kurdish position was rising in the Middle East, Iran would have difficulty managing the Kurdish issue both internally and externally in the increasingly turbulent region (Laoutides 2016, 105). Expert 4 (personal communication, July 24, 2020) further noted that Iran supported Turkey's Kurdish concern in northern Syria because the

control of Kurds would be beneficial to the territorial integrity of Syria. As such, Iran refrained from damaging its ties with Turkey completely.

Equally, the US presence in Syria and its support to the PYD would undermine Iran's regional expectations, as well as Turkey's. Despite the defeat of ISIS in 2017, the US continued its military presence in northern Syria, supporting the PYD/YPG, which raised suspicions and concerns in Turkey and Iran. Academic 3 (personal communication, July 9, 2020) added that Iran realised it would not win in Syria and sought to cooperate with Turkey by changing its policies. As such, the two states' shared desire to hamper the empowerment of the PYD increased the degree of cooperation between Tehran and Ankara, which further supports the notion that Turkey chose to ally with Tehran for cost-benefit reasons, profit-oriented and interest-driven policies.

As well as the rise of the PYD, the crisis in migration emerged as another purely domestic security matter which compelled the AKP government to establish ever-deepening interaction with Iran. According to a Global Appeal Report from the UN Refugee Agency, in 2018, Turkey hosted approximately 2.9 million Syrian refugees in special camps in provinces such as Gaziantep, Sanliurfa, and Kilis (adjacent to the Syrian border), and in other cities such as Istanbul and Ankara; Turkey was also becoming a transit route for refugees passing legally or illegally to European countries (The UN Refugee Agency 2019). This influx of Syrian refugees created "a difficult social situation in the south-eastern regions of the country, where sporadic episodes of violence have occurred", and thus the AKP government had to deal with the considerable economic and security burden this imposed (Alema 2017, 10; Parlar Dal 2016, 1403–4). In particular, the refugee flow from Syria resulted in illegal border crossings by gangs smuggling petrol and other goods and attacked border posts. Petty crime and the black market in the Turkish provinces adjacent to Syria increased due to the poor economic situation of refugees (Kirişci 2014, 36). The refugee flow also had a knock-on effect on Turkey's Kurdish problem in the south-east of the country, and threatened to become a back door for Kurdish terrorism (Aras and Yorulmazlar 2016a, 2262; Oktav 2013, 198). All these factors posed a political challenge for the AKP government and revived the general Turkish population's criticism of the AKP's military interventionist policies in Syria. These concerns only looked set to increase once Lebanon closed its borders to Syrian refugees in 2014, followed by Jordan in June, 2016, after a suicide car bomb near a crossing killed six Jordanians (Işiksal 2018, 27). Accordingly, the AKP-led Turkey demanded a safe zone to prevent the stream of Syrian

refugees, but this was rejected by the US. Turkey was forced to find another solution regarding the refugee crisis.

Consequently, security considerations pushed Turkey to liaise with Iran, as well as Russia. In doing so, Ankara pursued an alternative choice to determine the future of the conflict and remove itself from its geopolitical isolation, even though Ankara's ties with the US and its Sunni state partners (Qatar and Saudi Arabia) had resulted in an "ideological impediment" to enhance its collaboration with Russia, and Iran particularly (Aghaie Joobani and Mousavipour 2015, 151). The Astana and Sochi processes, controlled by Turkey, Iran, and Russia since January 2017, were designed to shape the future of the Syrian conflict. Despite the different long-term interests of the three states, for Turkey, the processes also highlighted the need for improved ties with Iran over both the rise of PYD/YPG and the impact of the refugee crisis in the post-Syrian conflict. With the Astana talks, for instance, almost 3.5 million refugees living in Turkey would be repatriated to Syria (Ataman and Özdemir 2018, 22). As revealed in Expert 1 (personal communication, August 17, 2020), these processes demonstrated that Turkey put aside a solely western-based foreign policy in favour of a more pragmatist and profit-oriented foreign policy towards Iran in the short-to-medium term. Therefore, Turkey's use of short-term interest-based policies towards Iran supports the balance of interest interpretation since pragmatic security collaboration with Tehran was more beneficial than competitiveness until July 2018.

6.2.2.2 Economic Considerations

Prior to the outbreak of the Syrian conflict, Turkey had been "Syria's largest individual source of imports, with sales of $1.8 bn, and among their largest export destinations" (Werman 2019). With the outset of the conflict, however, the deterioration of Turkish-Syrian affairs hampered any economic relations between Ankara and Damascus. In such an increasingly turbulent environment, Turkey not only lost its economic partner but also became mired in an internal economic crisis. Notably, the refugee issue created by the Syrian conflict and the AKP's unwavering support for the Syrian Sunni opposition sparked economic unrest in Turkey.

The economic problems caused by the refugee crisis surpassed Ankara's financial capabilities as Turkey could not manage the cost of aiding the refugees and maintaining camps and facilities. Until 2016, for instance, Ankara disbursed approximately $9 bn in humanitarian aid for almost 2.6 million Syrian refugees and there were 26 camps in different parts of Turkey,

amounting to 20 times more than the aid from international organisations (Parlar Dal 2016, 1403–4). Until the end of 2018, this expenditure was expected to increase to over $37 bn in national resources going to Syrian refugees, as President Erdogan stated at an international gathering on migration (Sonmez 2019). It appears that the Syrian refugees became an additional financial burden for AKP-led Turkey, which was already confronted with economic difficulties such as the decline of the Turkish lira, rising inflation and foreign-source dependency (Tan 2018).

The refugee issue also played another significant economic role regarding the increase in the unemployment rate among Turkish locals because many Syrian refugees displaced locals by informally and illegally working for lower wages and longer hours. They worked mainly in the agriculture, construction and textile sectors, and labour-intensive industries, often as seasonal workers (Isiksal, Zhakanova Isiksal, and Apeji 2020; Sonmez 2019). Moreover, the cost of living and house prices were increasing daily due to the pressure caused by the rising numbers of refugees. For instance, property prices in Gaziantep, Sanliurfa, and Kilis doubled, and rents increased threefold in 2014 (İçduygu 2015, 133). All these factors revived hostility among Turkish citizens as they believed that they could not find work due to the Syrian refugees (The Economist 2019). Numerous social and economic tensions emerged and prompted demonstrations against the refugees, some of whom were evicted from their homes and businesses.

To resolve this issue, Ankara initially sought to liaise with the EU and negotiated several times the terms of financial aid to Turkey. In March 2016, Davutoglu met with the EU leaders to create a border management deal which would offer irregular migrants who had entered Greece after 20 March 2016 the chance to go back to Turkey; in return, Ankara would send legal Syrian refugees settling in Turkey to the EU. Turkey would receive €6 bn and visa liberalisation for its citizens from the EU by the end of June 2016. However, as Pierini (2016, 10) argues, “the deal quickly became embroiled in litigation about the concessions offered by the EU and the conditions to be met by Turkey”. As such, Turkey’s quest for collaboration with the EU regarding the issue of refugees stalled.

Further revenue loss for Turkey arising from the Syrian conflict was also felt in the tourism sector, notably in the southeast of the country. The impact on tourism was severe, and seriously crippled the domestic economy. For example, between 2015 and 2016, international

tourist arrivals dropped by 30.05 percent and tourism revenue fell $9.4 bn (Bloomberg 2017; Ozgen and Reyhanogullari 2017). The isolation of Turkey in international and regional areas further culminated in economic stagnation with a $4–5 bn trade deficit until 2016 (Zelyut 2016). At the same time as it was losing revenue, AKP-led Turkey increased military spending on operations in Syria. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), "Turkey's 2018 military spending increased to $19 bn, a 24 percent rise from the previous year, which was the highest increase in military expenditure among the top 15 military spenders" (Ahval 2019). As such, the AKP government was held responsible for economic stagnation and became trapped in a quagmire of domestic and foreign issues.

To maintain political survival and increase electoral support, the AKP-led Turkey sought to improve the economy, and so it looked towards more cordial commercial ties with Iran. In this regard, the AKP government laid enormous stress on economic diplomacy and bilateral trade agreements with Iran. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute, during the era of the Syrian conflict, exports from Turkey to Iran were worth approximately $10 bn in 2012 but decreased nearly $4 bn between 2014–2015. In 2016, these exports slightly increased to almost $5 bn, but shrank again to $3.2 bn in 2017 and $2.4 bn in 2018 (Turkish Statistical Institute 2018a). Imports from Iran to Turkey also fluctuated, being worth nearly $12 bn in 2012, $10 bn in 2014–2015, and $5 bn in 2016. There was an increase to nearly $7.5 bn in 2017 but this was followed by a further decrease to $7 bn in 2018 (Turkish Statistical Institute 2018b). These figures demonstrate that Turkish-Iranian bilateral trade did not entirely collapse despite their mutual competition over the Syrian conflict, and their economic inter-dependency avoided the outbreak of an actual conflict between Turkey and Iran. However, the Turkish economy seems to have been more dependent on Iran given that imports, mainly in the energy sector exceeded exports between 2012–2018.

To further maintain its commercial ties with Iran, the AKP government set a goal of reaching $30 bn in bilateral trade, and opposed any US sanctions against Iran (Erkus 2019). As such, despite the nuclear-related sanctions imposed by the EU and US against Iran, Turkey maintained economic ties with Iran and encouraged firms to continue doing business there (Karahan 2016). Ankara, therefore, prioritised its economic relationship with Iran over its diplomatic relations with the US and EU. Since 2017, the AKP government also regarded the trilateral summits between Russia, Iran, and Turkey —which aimed to end the Syrian conflict —as an opportunity to develop Turkey's economy, since enabling stability in Syria would

decrease Turkey's expenditure on Syrian refugees and defence. Therefore, commercial ties between Turkey and Iran increased in 2017 even though both countries were engaged in joint efforts in Syria, and Turkish relations with the US had cooled. Following the collaboration over the Syrian talks, as Centingulec (2018) notes, "[Turkish] trade volume rose for the first time since 2012, standing at $10.7 bn at the end of 2017, representing a $1.1 bn increase from 2016".

Ultimately, the domestic economic issues which arose in Turkey because of the Syrian conflict affected TFP towards Iran from the outbreak of the Syrian conflict to July 2018. Owing to these economic issues, the AKP-led Turkey pushed the need for short-term collaboration with Iran despite the discord over the Syrian conflict for its long-term interests. This demonstrates that economic considerations motivated Ankara to ally with Tehran, as Ankara found that an alliance with Tehran would bring more benefits than competition in the short-to-medium term, in line with Schweller's balance of interest theory.

6.3 Concluding Remarks

This chapter illustrates the relevance of NCR for explaining a regional power's foreign policy during a period of turbulent change in the regional system, in this case shaped by the Syrian conflict. Given that NCR examines structural changes in the regional and international system and the relative power of a state as systemic variables, the changing regional system in the Syrian conflict and Turkey's relative power position determined TFP towards Iran at this time. Alongside other Arab uprisings, Turkey had the self-confidence to play a significant role in shaping a new balance of power, and thus followed interventionist and assertive policies in Syria to expand its relative power position in the long term. As such, Turkey initially implemented a competitive foreign policy attitude towards Iran at a certain extent, even though the latter was pursuing its own interests in the Syrian conflict with widely differing aims. There were tensions between Ankara and Damascus, the Iranian ally, due to Ankara's support for the Syrian opposition and its harsh criticism of the Assad regime.

However, domestic factors played an intervening role in the short-to-medium term in shaping TFP towards Iran, as NCR highlights. Accordingly, the AKP elite's perception and domestic considerations played an influential role in TFP towards Iran in the Syrian conflict. Throughout, the AKP elites misread the regional system and made numerous mistakes, such as miscalculating the power of the Assad regime, and US policies in Syria. They notably followed

sectarian identity-based foreign policy principles in Syria by propping up Sunni opposition groups in an attempt to fill the power vacuum in Syria; however, Turkey's financial and military support for the jihadist Sunni armed groups weakened the relationship between Turkey and other regional and international states, such as Saudi Arabia and the US, leading to regional and international isolation for Turkey. With its increasingly anti-Kurdish and ethno-nationalist policies, the AKP elites put aside their sectarian policies and chose a short-term pragmatic alliance with Tehran.

Moreover, the empowerment of the PYD and ISIS posed security challenges for Turkey. In consequence, the AKP government shifted its priorities from removing the Assad regime to preventing the rise of the PYD and ISIS; simultaneously, Turkey needed alternative trading partners due to the domestic economic challenges caused by the refugee influx and military expenditure. In such an environment, Ankara, though clearly in regional political competition with Tehran, pragmatically engaged with Iran by joining talks to resolve both security threats to its territorial integrity and worsening economic problems. It appears that AKP-led Turkey followed a status quo position because of domestic constraints, putting aside revisionist policies for a while. Since the onset of the Syrian conflict in March 2011, TFP towards Iran moved from an era of low intensity, controlled tension to a time of rapprochement, which indicates that the cool nature of TFP towards Iran in the first years of the Syrian conflict was in a stark contrast to the more recent efforts at rapprochement towards Iran. Despite its opposition to the Assad regime, Turkey sought collaboration with Tehran, the Syrian regime's ally, to safeguard its interests by shifting its focus from overthrowing the regime to ensuring its national security. In this regard, Schweller's balance of interest approach is a helpful position from which to understand Turkey's alliance choice with Tehran from March 2011 to July 2018 because Ankara followed an interest-based policy towards Iran and deemed that short-term bilateral collaboration with Tehran was more profitable than competition in the future of the conflict. Accordingly, Table 6.1 below shows TFP towards Iran in the Syrian conflict, enumerating the short-term behaviours.

Table 6-1 TFP towards Iran in the Syrian Conflict from March 2011 to July 2018

Systemic Variables (Independent)	**Intervening Variables (Unit-Level)**	**Dependent Variables (Foreign Policy Behaviour in the Short-to-Medium Term)**
• Inter-state competition • The Rise of Non-State Armed Groups • Turkey's Relative Power Position	• AKP Elite Perception • Domestic Considerations (Security and Economic)	• Collaboration • Status-Quo Behaviour • Balance of Interest

Given the role of systemic and intervening variables in TFP towards Iran since the outset of the Syrian conflict (March 2011 to July 2018), the next chapter considers the Kurdistan Region of Iraq as the second case study used in this thesis to provide insight into how systemic and unit-level variables determined TFP towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings.

CHAPTER 7 TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS IRAN SINCE THE ARAB UPRISINGS: DECEMBER 2010 TO JULY 2018 — THE CASE OF THE KURDISTAN REGION OF IRAQ

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) is a semi-autonomous area in Erbil in the north of Iraq and has officially been governed by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) since 2005. Since the Kurdish civil war of the mid-1990s, two political parties have controlled the KRG in a power-sharing agreement: the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), under the Barzanis and centred on Erbil, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), controlled by the Talabanis and centred on Sulaymaniyah (Handy 2018, 189). The different viewpoints of these parties in KRI politics have influenced the foreign policy of the KRG. While the KDP represents tribal, conservative Sunni groups, the PUK is seen as a representative of more progressive, left-wing, and secular Kurdish groups. Although the parties' internal competition has been reflected in KRI politics since the 1990s, there are other political parties in the KRI, such as the Goran Movement and the New Generation Movement (Thornton 2015). As such, domestic politics in the KRI are competitive, reflecting a range of political perspectives among Kurdish groups.

When the Arab Uprisings aggravated political instability and ethnic and sectarian divisions in the Middle East and North Africa, the central Iraqi government had difficulty consolidating its power, which had been already questionable. The rise of non-state armed groups and the internalisation of the Syrian conflict close to Iraq further worsened the existing power vacuum and state fragility in Iraq. Accordingly, this anarchic environment engulfed the politics of the KRI, and the KRG strove to utilise this downturn by following a more assertive and revisionist foreign policy than the central Iraqi government. Notably, the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in March 2011 and the US presence in Iraq bolstered the KRG's interest-driven regional aims (Cağaptay 2012, 8; Stansfield 2013, 278–79). For instance, Erbil hoped to expand its territory by seizing areas to which it had longstanding claims, following ISIS attacks against the KRI (Musiol 2019, 124). Erbil further declared its intention to hold an independence referendum in June 2017, and, as a result, Erbil's policies not only upended the regional power structure, but they have also led to an increase in its political importance.

As well as its political significance, the KRI is an economically important region. Since 2009, the KRG has increased its oil and gas production by establishing cooperation with international oil companies such as Exxon Mobil, Chevron, the English Gulf Keystone, Total of France, Gazprom of Russia, and the Turkish company, Genel Energy (Charountaki 2012, 193; Gunes 2019a, 22)**.** This economic wealth has attracted both international and regional powers in the wake of the Arab Uprisings, and reinvigorated competitiveness between Turkey and Iran. While Turkey sought more collaboration with the KRG against a Baghdad-Tehran partnership, in order to gain political and economic leverage, Iran hoped to establish cordial links with Erbil and Baghdad to enhance its influence in Iraq (Soguk 2015, 966). According to Interviews B (personal communication, July 1, 2020) and F (personal communication, August 17, 2020), C (personal communication, August 6, 2020) and I (personal communication, July 21, 2020), internal competition in the KRI has shaped TFP towards Iran. What is interesting is that the secular Talabani Kurds cooperated with Iran, but the conservative Barzanis worked more closely with Turkey because of the competition between the latter and the PKK. Both countries thus cooperated with different Kurdish groups in the KRI, and Ankara's and Tehran's economic and political ties with Erbil played an influential role in their bilateral ties.

Given the background of the KRI, Chapter 7 contains an analysis of the role of the KRI in TFP towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings as the second case study. In so doing, the chapter covers how Turkey's relative power position and the analysis of the AKP elite's perceptions and domestic considerations shaped TFP towards Iran in the KRI after the Arab Uprisings. The chapter is split into three sections. The first explains the role of the systemic variables on TFP towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings and Turkey's relative power position in the KRI. The second section analyses the directly intervening variables for Turkey in terms of shaping TFP towards Iran as a causal chain, explaining the role of the AKP elite's perception and the balance of interest approach in TFP towards Iran in the short-to-medium term. The final section summarises the chapter. Overall, as a case, the KRI can explain the role of NCR in shaping TFP towards Iran from December 2010 to July 2018.

7.1 The Role of the System-Level on Turkish Foreign Policy towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings (December 2010 to July 2018): The Case of the KRI

This section sheds light on the role of immediate systemic changes in TFP towards Iran in the case of the KRI. In this context, the US role in Iraq and the empowerment of ISIS and the

Kurdish groups are the primary and direct systemic variables considered in this chapter, even though other systemic variables have little effect on TFP towards Iran in the KRI.

7.1.1 US policies in Iraq

The US-led Iraqi War in 2003 changed the balance of power in Iraq, laying the foundation for the official autonomy of Iraqi Kurds. While Turkey, a US ally, refused to support the removal of Saddam Hussein, the KRG emerged as a significant US ally. For providing this assistance, Iraqi Kurds were rewarded with constitutional recognition and independent foreign relations with other states (Bengio 2017, 16–17), thus increasing the significance of Iraqi Kurds in regional politics following the 2003 US-led Iraqi War.

For Iran, Iraq is vital to its regional interests, and thus Iran is unwilling to see an anti-Iranian government both in Erbil and Baghdad. For this reason, Iran started to support Iraqi Shia actors and play a more significant role in successive Baghdad governments in the wake of the 2003 war (Khoury 2016a, 14). Given its cordial ties with Baghdad, Iran also sought to forge closer ties with the KRG, but, notably due to its anti-US policies. Tehran thus put more effort into hampering US influence on the KRG. For example, Iran maintained close ties with members of the PUK, "many of whom are Persian-speaking and have lived in Iran", compared to the KDP, a US ally (Mustafa and Aziz 2016, 161–62). In this way, Iran aimed to leverage the politics of the KRI in its favour to achieve its national interests.

Following the Iraq war, Turkey remained at odds with the US regarding the status of the Iraqi Kurds. While the US deemed the Kurds a close ally in toppling the Saddam regime, Turkey was concerned about the proximity to its borders of a possible Kurdish state, envisaging that such a state would trigger rebellion among the Kurdish minority in Turkey. Irrespective of its Kurdish groups, Turkey has always concerned itself with the Turkmen minority in Iraq, which comprised approximately 16 per cent of the 2005 Iraqi population and shared ethnic affiliation with Turkey. Indeed, Ankara believed that if Kurds emerged as the rising minority, they would disregard the Turkmen in Iraqi politics (Müftüler-Bac 2005, 68, 72). On the other hand, since 2008, Turkey has no longer viewed the Iraqi Kurds as a security threat (Kayhan-Pusane 2020) and instead sought to improve relations with Erbil under the 'strategic depth doctrine' and 'zero-problems-with-neighbours" principle; Ankara also opened a consulate in Erbil in 2010. According to Journalist 2 (personal communication, August 14, 2020), the

presence of Turkmens in Iraq was more important for Turkey, which sought to prevent the empowerment of Shia groups. Therefore, Ankara perceived the rise of Shia groups in Iraq as more threatening to the rights of the Turkmen minority than the rise of Sunni Kurdish groups.

When the US decreased its troops from Iraq in 2011, the power gap that re-emerged in Iraq permitted the rise of sectarian and ethnic-based policies. Following the withdrawal, the Shia-dominated Maliki government began excluding Sunni Arabs and Kurds from Iraqi domestic politics (Bozarslan 2018, 18–19), and consequently, bilateral Erbil-Baghdad relations became strained and much more competitive (Park 2014, 5–6). This domestic rivalry in Iraq influenced Ankara's ties with Tehran since both countries sought to shape Iraqi policies to align with their interests. The decrease in the number of US troops in 2011, notably, solidified the Iranian influence in Iraq, shifting the balance of power in favour of Tehran (Khoury 2016, 14). Iran thus opted to increase its ties with the Shia-dominated Baghdad government despite its desire for closer ties to Erbil.

In contrast to the Tehran-Baghdad partnership, the Ankara-Baghdad relationship reached a nadir when Ankara blamed the Baghdad government under Nouri al-Maliki for following a sectarian policy in Iraq. As such, Turkey promoted its relations with the KRG to depose the Shi'a-dominated Maliki government while also competing with Iran (Park 2014, 6). Expert 1 (personal communication, August 17, 2020) revealed that Turkey not only opposed Iranian influence in Iraq, but it also perceived an Iran-oriented Iraq as a security threat to its long-term national interests. Although the US presence in Iraq played a balancing role between Ankara and Tehran, as an external state power, the drawdown of US troops intensified Ankara's competitive policies towards Tehran. Consequently, Ankara highlighted the significance of the KRI, just as Iran sought to enhance control over the Baghdad government. Thus, the KDP under the Barzanis became a close Turkish ally to balance Iranian influence, while Tehran deepened its ties with the PUK under the Talabanis (Cagaptay 2012, 9; Thornton 2015a, 870). More precisely, Ankara followed a competitive policy towards Iran based on cost-benefit calculations, and collaboration with Erbil seemed more beneficial for Ankara to prevent the rise of Iranian influence on Iraq's politics in the long term.

With the empowerment of ISIS in Iraq, especially after 2011, there was a revival of US fears that jihadist groups could threaten the US and its allies in the Middle East. Therefore, Washington prioritised the fight with ISIS by endorsing the Peshmerga, the official

paramilitary forces of the KRG (Paasche and Gunter 2016, 11). In this way, the KRG re-emerged as a valuable US partner in Iraq. However, the US continued to emphasise the importance of close cooperation between Baghdad and the KRG. For instance, the US recommended that Baghdad should decide which military supplies would reach the KRG (Strategic Comments 2015, 2). In doing so, Washington aimed to hamper Iranian influence over Baghdad; as such, Washington and Turkey had shared concerns about counterbalancing Iranian long-term influence (Lindenstrauss and Aksoy 2012, 55). Although the US emphasis on the political integrity of Iraq appeared to favour Turkish interests, the Turkish-US relationship remained strained due to the US' unwavering support for the PYD; the result was that Turkey began to exhibit disquiet about the presence of the US in Iraq. Given the cordial nature of Turkish-KRG affairs, Turkey perceived the Barzanis to be a more significant ally than the US due to US support to the PYD/YPG. In this regard, as a systemic force, the US role in Iraq determined TFP towards Iran. With a decreased US presence in Iraq, Turkey perceived Tehran as a competitor and sought to establish warming ties with Erbil to prevent the rise of Iranian influence in the long-term. However, Ankara has always been on the alert for US support for Kurdish groups, and so, as will be explained in the section on unit-level variables, the close ties between the US and Kurdish groups may have paved the way for a short-term alliance between Tehran and Ankara due to profit-oriented calculations and mutual interest-driven policies.

7.1.2 The Syrian Conflict

The Syrian conflict, which started in March 2011, upended the regional power structure in Iraq in the wake of the Arab Uprisings. In particular, the anarchic environment and lack of institutional legitimacy in Iraq which stemmed from the Syrian conflict provided significant opportunities for non-state armed groups, including the ISIS and the PYD/YPG, to achieve specific aims and influence the regional agenda. These groups sparked political unrest in Iraq and the KRI, as neighbours of Syria, and indeed the rise of Syrian Kurds impacted Baghdad-Erbil ties since each party took up different positions at the beginning of the Syrian conflict. While the KRG appreciated the Syrian Kurds to a certain extent, Iraqi the Maliki government, along with Tehran, sought to promote ties with the Assad regime. As such, the Iraqi and the Syrian Kurds clashed when the Baghdad government looked to "send the Iraqi army to the territory linking Kurdistan Region of Iraq [the KRI] with the Kurdish areas of Syria", to prevent the KRG from assisting Syrian Kurds (Neriah 2012, 14). However, the empathy of the Iraqi

Kurds towards their Syrian brethren vanished when the KDP under the Barzanis realised that the PYD would diminish the regional influence of the KDP. The rise of ISIS further increased the difficulties when Iraqi Kurds started to fight with the jihadist group in their territory and tried to find external state support against its fight with the ISIS (Gunes 2019b, 35).

In such an environment, Turkey's strained affairs with both the Assad regime and Tehran led to closer ties with Erbil than ever before, since the latter was "the only corridor through which [Turkey could] reach out to the Arab world" (Mustafa and Aziz 2016, 162)**.** Accordingly, Turkey desired no Iranian influence in the KRI since Iran had already increased its power in Syria. More precisely, the competition between Ankara and Tehran in the Syrian conflict spread across the KRI, and this tumultuous environment shaped TFP towards Iran as a systemic variable.

7.1.2.1 The rise of ISIS

By utilising the tumultuous environment, ISIS, as a non-state armed actor, sought to enhance its influence in both Syria and Iraq, and thus posed a threat to both Baghdad and Erbil. This jihadist group seized sophisticated and advanced weapons provided by the US to Iraqi armed forces and took control of oil wells in the KRI. Despite being forewarned by intelligence services of the KRG regarding possible attacks on Mosul, the KRG and Baghdad failed to defend their territories against ISIS attacks in August 2014 (D. L. Phillips 2014, 352). Worse still, they were incapable of preventing the humanitarian crisis which now unfolded from the ISIS assault on the Yazidi minorities in northern Nineveh. These formidable challenges and the weakness of the Peshmerga and Iraqi forces in fighting ISIS resulted in external intervention in Iraq. Notably, the KRG demanded US support in preserving its regional position and recapture control of its lost territories (Gunes 2019b, 35–36). In doing so, the KRG paved the way for a more substantial US presence and operations in the KRI.

With the US support to the fore, Iraqi Kurds enjoyed western military and financial support against the ISIS. At the beginning of 2015, for instance, the US built a military base in Erbil to provide logistical support. More than a year later, the US signed a memorandum of understanding on military coordination with the KRG. Given the close alliance between the US and the KRG, the Rudaw, a media group in the KRI, stated that "Since the beginning of the war with ISIS, there has been steady traffic of US high-level military and civilian delegations

to the Kurdistan Region and US-KRG relations entered a new phase in their strategic and special relationship" (Bengio 2017, 40–41).

This US-KRG entente also encouraged Iraqi Kurdish policymakers to seek their long-term regional aims. The KRG deemed ISIS's capture of Mosul as an opportunity to gain territory and push for independence because it assumed that a united Iraq would be impossible. In this regard, Phillips (2014, 352) notes that "By the end of June [2014], Iraqi Kurdistan [the KRI] included lands from the border with Syria in the west to Iran in the east". The status of disputed territories —including the city of Kirkuk and its neighbourhood, which had been left by the Iraqi government following an ISIS attack —drove a wedge between the KRG and the Baghdad government (Bengio 2017, 38; Gunes 2019b, 22). Tensions increased because Erbil held resource-rich areas, including Kirkuk, and had extended "its territory by more than 40 per cent" (Bengio 2017, 39; Dalay 2017d). On 25 September 2017, Erbil further attempted to gain independence by holding a referendum "in which 93.73% of the voters cast a vote in favour of independence" (Gunes 2019b, 22). Ultimately, Erbil utilised the anarchic environment stemming from ISIS attacks, with the US support and an independence referendum.

The KRG's enthusiasm backfired, however, since it failed to evaluate other external and regional state actors' perceptions. Even though Washington appeared to support Iraqi Kurdish autonomy, its primary concern was the territorial integrity of Iraq due to the rise of ISIS (Koolaee and Hafezian 2017, 82). As such, the US sought to mediate between Baghdad and the KRG to protect its interests, with the US embassy in Baghdad stating that "We support the peaceful reassertion of federal authority, consistent with the Iraqi constitution, in all disputed areas". Similarly, the US President Donald Trump asserted that "We don't like the fact that they are clashing, but we're not taking sides" (Gunter 2018, 29). Therefore, although the KRG aimed to have US support in its quest for independence, this was to no avail.

The rise of ISIS in Iraq also influenced the role of Ankara and Tehran in the KRI, with both regional middle powers deeming ISIS a threat. Tehran's concerns were due to the ISIS' Salafist ideology and its attacks against Baghdad. Following the fall of Mosul to the ISIS in June 2014, Tehran unwaveringly propped up both Baghdad and Erbil. When trying to liberate the two Kurdish districts of Jalawla and Sa'diah, the Peshmerga received direct Iranian support against ISIS (Mustafa and Aziz, 2016, 4–5). Notably, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) cooperated with Iraqi Shiites by training and organising them (Nasr 2018, 112–13).

According to Mustafa and Aziz (2016, 4–5), "the threat to Erbil by ISIS allowed Iran to show its goodwill, as the primary aid donor in the region". By cooperating in defence of Erbil, therefore, political and economic rapprochement emerged between Tehran and Erbil. Erbil essentially viewed Tehran as an alternative trading partner when it was suffering economically due to the refugee crisis caused by ISIS attacks, substantial military costs, and increased oil prices (Bengio 2017, 39; Mustafa and Aziz 2016, 162).

In contrast to Tehran, Ankara initially ignored the rise of ISIS, mainly because of their mutual opposition to the Assad regime and the PYD/YPG. For this reason, Ankara at first ignored Erbil's request to fight against ISIS in August 2014 and Turkey's ignorance damaged Ankara-Erbil ties. Fuad Hussein, Barzani's chief of staff, stated that "the US, France and Europe came to our rescue but our neighbour [Turkey] did not do the same even though we asked for its help" (Thornton 2015, 873). According to Thornton (2015, 873), the main reason behind Turkey's inaction was Erdogan's assumption that "aiding Kurds against pious Sunni warriors in the shape of ISIS" would result in the loss of hard-line Islamist supporters. However, this reasoning had limited impact on Turkey's attitude towards ISIS, because the more prominent reason was that Turkey perceived the rise of the PYD as a more significant threat. Turkey therefore opted for a wait-and-see approach until the international community denounced Turkey's inaction, and ISIS directly threatened Turkey's national security.

When faced with security challenges, however, Ankara changed policy against ISIS in Iraq and joined the US-led international coalition in September 2014 despite its reluctance to help the PYD/YPG in the siege of Kobane in northern Syria. In collaboration with Erbil and Baghdad's efforts to purge ISIS from Iraq, in 2015, Ankara also decided to train Kurdish and Sunni Muslim forces and deployed a small military contingent to Bashiqa near Mosul in northern Iraq. Expert 2 (personal communication, August 19, 2020) argued that alongside the friendship between the Shi'a-dominated Maliki government and Iran, Turkey's concern was also increased by the establishment of the mostly Shia Hashd al-Sha'bi group sponsored by the Iraqi government to fight ISIS. Similarly, Academic 2 (personal communication, August 6, 2020) uncovered that Ankara blamed Tehran and Baghdad for following sectarian policies after the establishment of Hashd al-Sha'bi in 2014. Ankara thus viewed its cordiality with Erbil as a counterbalance against the ties between Tehran and Baghdad, and it opted for a unified Iraq with dominant groups (Sunnis, Shi'ites, Kurds and Turkmens), while Iran aspired to a weak Shia dominant Iraq (Lindenstrauss and Aksoy 2012, 54).

However, Ankara's military presence exasperated Baghdad, which was concerned about Turkey's support for Sunni tribes and politicians; Baghdad even claimed that Turkey's military base in Bashiqa impugned Iraqi sovereignty (Riva 2017). Tehran, meanwhile, seemed to share Baghdad's concerns about Turkey's military presence, and thus hoped to become a more significant actor and KRG supporter than Turkey against ISIS attacks, to hamper Turkish influence in the KRI (Sinkaya 2018). In this regard, Tehran was quicker to declare its willingness to supply military support to the Peshmerga than other state actors, including the US. In response, President Masoud Barzani stated that "We [the KRG] asked for weapons and Iran was the first country to provide us with weapons and ammunition" (Collard 2014). Turkey's competition with Iran, therefore, re-emerged in the KRI as the two regional powers attempted to forge influential and exclusive ties with Erbil.

7.1.2.2 The rise of the PYD

When the PYD declared autonomy over the region of Rojava in the north of Syria in 2012, the KRG sought to curb the rise of the PYD even though President Masoud Barzani initially endorsed the Syrian Kurds and called on the Assad regime to accept Kurds' rights. The KRG's support for Syrian Kurds was short-lived, however, as the KRG realised that empowering the PYD/YPG would void Erbil's regional influence. Indeed, the PYD's close ties with the PKK —the ideological rival of the KDP —and US support for the PYD evolved contrary to Erbil's expectations. With US help, the PYD started to increase its influence in the region, and the rise of this alternative Kurdish group prompted Erbil to be concerned that its own impact would falter. Given Erbil's fears, President Barzani remarked that "Any support to the PYD means support for the PKK. They are exactly one and the same thing", implying the growing US support to the PYD/YPG (Daily Sabah 2016a). Barzani even condemned the PYD's declaration of autonomy and refused its request to open diplomatic relations with the KRG (Wilgenburg 2014).

Having criticised the PYD, the KRG attempted to organise all those Kurdish political parties which were ideologically closer to the KDP and the PUK under the umbrella of the Kurdish National Council (KNC). In doing so, it sought to enhance its influence over Syrian Kurds and push the PYD to one side, due to its political differences with the KRG (Unver 2016). This attempt by Erbil thus made clear that the KRG started to perceive the PYD as a rival in the region. In return, the PYD opposed to joining the KNC, for other reasons. As a Syrian Kurdish group, the PYD hoped to establish "an ordering based on the idea of

autonomous assemblies" while "the KNC aimed at autonomy for the Kurds within a Syria in which the Ba'ath regime would be replaced" (Jongerden 2019, 65). As a result, the Erbil agreement on creating a Kurdish Supreme Committee and power-sharing Kurdish-controlled areas was never put into action due to these disagreements, even though both sides signed the deal in July 2012 (Soz 2016).

Another reason for the KRG's competitive actions against the PYD was the friendship between Ankara and Erbil. Turkey had encouraged the KRG to establish the KNC to restrict the rise of the PYD. With Ankara's support, in November 2013, the KRG blamed the PYD for "acting unilaterally in creating an autonomous region and [for] putting pressure on Kurdish opposition members who do not support the PYD" (Gunes and Lowe 2015, 10). By supporting the KRG, Ankara wanted Erbil to play a balancing role against the PYD (Bengio 2014, 276). In 2014, Ankara allowed Erbil to move Peshmerga forces through Turkey during the siege of Kobani, even though Turkey was reluctant to help the PYD due to its affiliation with the PKK. The reason for Ankara and Erbil's volte-face was to control the area lost by the PYD, as they hoped to fill the power vacuum in Kobani. Indeed, due to a deal signed between Erbil and the PYD in June 2012, Erbil sent Peshmerga forces to support the PYD and decide how power in Kobani would be shared (Tanir 2014). Therefore, the cordial ties between Erbil and Ankara shaped Erbil's relations with the PYD.

By contrast, the emergence of ISIS laid the foundation for a short-term rapprochement between the PYD and the KRG. In August 2014, the YPG and PKK conducted intensive operations to save Yazidis from ISIS in Iraq and defend Sinjar. In return, two months later, the Peshmerga forces assisted the YPG's defence of Kobani against ISIS and supplied military equipment (International Crisis Group 2018). In October 2014, this mutual assistance resulted in the Duhok Agreement on power-sharing between the Erbil-controlled KNC and the PYD. Nevertheless, the friendship between the KRG and Turkey always dominated the collaboration between the two Kurdish groups due to the KRG's economic and political dependence on Ankara (Gunes and Lowe 2015, 11–12). As such, the partnership between the KRG and the PYD was short lived due to the power struggle between the two Kurdish groups and the Ankara-Erbil friendship. As a result, the rise of the PYD determined Turkish policies in the KRI, culminating in warmer relations between the KRG and Turkey. Thanks to pragmatic and close ties with Erbil, Ankara had the opportunity to enhance its influence more than Iran.

In conclusion, Erbil became a more significant ally of Ankara in an anarchic environment in which Turkey's ties with both Syria and Iran were cooling (Charountaki 2012, 195–96). Following the Syrian conflict, Erbil became a more important ally for Turkey since Ankara was becoming isolated by increased collaboration between Tehran and the Assad regime. From Turkey's perspective, if the Assad regime remained in power, Iran might increase its regional influence, resulting in a corresponding decrease in Turkey's. Given Ankara's concerns, Erbil served as a conduit for Ankara's aid to opposition Sunni groups in Syria (Koolaee and Hafezian 2017, 82; Lindenstrauss and Aksoy 2012, 54). Ankara, therefore, attempted to use the KDP to prevent both the rise of the PYD and Iranian influence in the long term. In other words, closer ties with Erbil meant the rise of Ankara's relative power position in the KRI for Turkey compared to Tehran. Having explained the role of systemic variables on TFP towards Iran, the next section highlights how domestic factors emerged as a causal link in shaping TFP towards Iran in the short-to-medium term.

7.2 The Role of the Unit-Level on Turkish Foreign Policy towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings: December 2010 to July 2018 —the Case of the KRI

Without elucidating intervening (unit-level) variables, it is difficult to explain TFP towards Iran in the KRI because domestic factors explain the character, type, and adjustment of Turkey's policy attitude towards Iran in the short-to-medium term. In this context, the perception of the AKP elite and profit-oriented domestic considerations shaped TFP towards Iran in the KRI.

7.2.1 AKP Elite Perception

Before the AKP came to office in 2002, the Kemalists (secular parties, the Turkish military, and extremist nationalists) deemed the Kurdish entity on Turkey's borders to be a security threat, because of the belief that the PKK and the KRG were similar ethnic entities (Tol 2014, 69). Although the Kemalists refrained from establishing ties with Iraqi Kurds, the AKP changed Turkey's attitude towards the Middle East and de-securitised Turkey's perception of Iraqi Kurds, especially after 2008. As the governing party, the AKP attempted to solve the domestic Kurdish issue through the Peace Process in 2013, with the help of Iraqi Kurds and, accordingly, the AKP elites preferred greater collaboration with them (Kayhan-Pusane 2016, 23).

The foreign policy principles actualised by Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, such as 'zero-problems-with-neighbours', created the opportunity for an Ankara-Erbil detente, and Turkey's perception of Iraqi Kurds became more progressive (Bengio 2014, 275). For example, the friendship between Erdogan and Barzani permitted growing levels of interdependence, indicating a shift from a security-oriented policy to a "political and civilian approach", even though the majority of the Turkish public maintained a sceptical view of Kurds (Dalay 2017b, 3, 5; Mustafa and Aziz 2016). Given the personal bonds between the two leaders, in March 2011, Erdogan became the first Turkish prime minister to visit the KRI, and even used the term "Kurdistan region"[6] to refer to northern Iraq where the Iraqi Kurds lived, and said that "in Erbil, we have felt like being in our city. Now we feel Diyarbakir as your city" (Kayhan-Pusane 2020, 4). In so doing, Erdogan hoped to increase his Kurdish supporters and distinguished the PKK and the KDP (Kayhan- Pusane 2016, 23–24). Other AKP elites further mentioned their ideas regarding an independent Kurdish state. To illustrate, in 2014, the then AKP spokesperson, Huseyin Celik, noted that "in the past an independent Kurdish state was a reason for war [for Turkey], but no one has the right to say this now...If Iraq is divided and it is inevitable, they are our brothers..." (Kayhan-Pusane 2020, 4). The remarks of the AKP elites show that the AKP's policy-makers used Iraqi Kurds to shape Turkey's Iraq policy and were unconcerned about "the prospect of an independent Kurdistan in northern Iraq" (Tol 2014, 69) as long as the KRG serves the AKP's interest. More precisely, the AKP elites perceived the KRG as a means by which they could expand their own interests.

Accordingly, individual interests played a determining role in the goodwill between the AKP and the KDP. Notably, the similarity in their domestic politics culminated in cooperation because Erdogan and Barzani were both blamed for following authoritarian domestic policies, based on their interests and decisions. The secularists, the Gulenists and the liberals mostly criticised Erdogan's policies, and Barzani's legitimacy was denounced by Kurdish opposition parties, including the PUK and Gorran (Özpek 2018, 45, 53). Therefore, similar internal

[6] Previous Turkish leaders had refrained from using the word 'Kurdistan', since they believed that this would aggravate the Kurdish issue in Turkey. For details *see*: Yavuz, M. Hakan (2001). Five stages of the construction of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 7:3, 1–24; White, Paul J. (1999) Citizenship under the Ottomans and Kemalists: How the Kurds were excluded, *Citizenship Studies*, 3:1, 71–102

criticisms of the two leaders' legitimacy created greater personal closeness between Erdogan and Barzani.

The AKP elites also sought closer ties with the KRG due to Turkey's animus towards the PKK and the rise of the PKK-affiliated PYD (Park 2014, 8). During the Peace Process initiated in the first three months of 2013, the AKP elites deemed Barzani more "popular and an alternative Kurdish leader" than the PKK leaders due to their mutual distrust of "conservative Sunni Muslims with links to the Naqshbandi religious order, and a network of business ties among members of their inner circles" (Kayhan-Pusane 2016, 23; Strategic Comments 2017, 2). They thus perceived the KDP and Masoud Barzani as the only Kurdish representatives and refused to deal with other Kurdish groups. According to Özpek (2018, 55), the policies of the AKP elites "became more visible after the PKK-linked Democratic Union Party (PYD) gained control of some towns in northern Syria during the civil war", since they encouraged Barzani to lead the Kurdish formation in Syria. Therefore, ethnic differences between the AKP and the KDP played a limited role in shaping their bilateral affairs, and the interests of the former predominated in the pursuit of closer ties with the KRG. In other words, the AKP elites ignored the Kurdish ethnicity of the KDP for as long as they had mutual interests.

Given these individual interests, national interests became another reason for the friendship of the AKP elites with the KRG, because the former were undecided about the rise of Shia Iranian influence over Baghdad (Park 2014, 9). The Iraqi parliamentary elections held on 7 March 2010, notably, ushered in a period of disagreement between Ankara and Baghdad (Tocci 2013, 70). During this term, the AKP endorsed the Iraqi politician Ayad Allawi's non-sectarian movement in the elections and urged "the involvement of Sunni Arabs in Iraqi political structure" to impede the rise of sectarianism in Iraq (Bengio 2014, 271; Park 2014, 16). Since then, the AKP blamed the Shi'a-dominated Maliki government for following sectarian policies in Iraq and assumed that the Maliki government would fail to consolidate the internal balance of power (Bengio 2014, 271). Indeed, Maliki's increasing sectarian policies justified the AKP politicians' concerns. Following the decreased US presence in Iraq, Maliki attempted to arrest Tariq Al-Hashemi, the Sunni Vice President of Iraq from 2006–2012, who had close ties with Turkey (Park 2014, 16; Stephen Larrabee 2013, 142). In this regard, the AKP elites emphasised the significance of the KRG and opted for collaboration with it, in contrast to the Iran-aligned Maliki government, which denounced Ankara's protection of Al-

Hashemi and accused Ankara of intervening in Iraq's internal affairs (Gunter 2013, 446; Park 2012, 113–14).

Nevertheless, the AKP elites changed their stance towards Iraqi Kurds after the September 2017 independence referendum, and this shift coincided with the termination of the Peace Process and the rise of PKK-affiliated political party HDP in Turkish domestic politics in 2015. When the HDP gained seats in the Turkish Parliament, surpassing the steep 10% threshold in the June 2015, national election, the AKP lost its majority and required a coalition partner to form the government. This election failure surprised the AKP elites, and the party revised its domestic policies by pursuing nationalist viewpoints with a far-right political party, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). As a result, the AKP elites adopted re-securitisation policies towards the Iraqi Kurds following the referendum. They started to tread less carefully in their relationship with Iraqi Kurds and slammed the 2017 independence referendum. Notably, President Erdogan shifted his position towards the Iraqi Kurds, despite his warming ties with Barzani, saying that "We are against a Kurdish state even if it were established in Argentina" (Stansfield 2013, 277).

Bearing in mind that the rise of nationalism and re-securitisation in Turkish politics increased the AKP elites' aggressive policies towards Iraqi Kurds (Park 2019, 53), a short-term collaboration between Ankara and Tehran emerged when the KRG declared its desire to hold an independence referendum in 2017. This was because both were concerned about a potential spill-over effect from the referendum on their Kurdish minority, perceiving a "generation of internal instability in the KRG and the fact that weapons from the KRG might find their way into the hands of militant Kurds in either Turkey or Iran" (Thornton 2015). As a result, the AKP elites abandoned their de-securitisation policies towards the Iraqi Kurds following the 2017 referendum for a short period of time and formed a brief alliance with Tehran as this was more beneficial than competition due to their mutual concerns regarding Kurdish independence. This indicates that cost-benefit calculations forced Turkey to cooperate with Iran, and that these ties were profit-oriented and interest-driven. The change of perception of the AKP elites towards the Iraqi Kurds further was pertinent to Turkey's long-term security considerations, which will be examined in the following subsection.

7.2.2 Domestic Considerations

Economic and security considerations pushed Ankara to establish warming ties with the KRG. Based on Ankara's quest for close economic interests, as one report noted, "Turkey was the sole conduit for the Kurdistan Region's oil exports, which averaged around 600,000 barrels per day. The region also accounted for almost all of Turkey's exports to Iraq, which in 2016 totalled US\$7.5 billion, making the region Turkey's third-largest export market" (Strategic Comments 2017, 2). In the competitive environment of the Arab Uprisings, Ankara perceived Erbil as "an alternative source of energy, a buffer against a hostile Baghdad and Iran" (Tol 2014, 70). Until 2014, Turkish companies, with almost 50,000 Turkish employees, represented 60 per cent of all the companies in the KRI. The volume of trade between Ankara and Erbil significantly improved, and Ankara-Erbil economic cordiality was dubbed "oil diplomacy" (Bengio 2014, 274; Mustafa and Aziz 2016). However, in the case of the KRI, security considerations rather than economic considerations were more dominant in Turkey's collaborative affairs with Iran because Ankara's security-based concerns forced Turkey to ally with Tehran in the short-to-medium term, despite their rivalry in the KRI in the longer term. This subsection thus emphasises Turkey's domestic security considerations regarding the KRI under the Schweller's balance of interest theory. As mentioned earlier, Turkey's security considerations were based on the presence of the PKK both in its territory and proximity. Thus, the Ankara-Erbil collaboration mainly depended on the KRG's status quo policy against the PKK (Gunes 2019b, 35), while the Ankara-Tehran alignment primarily resulted from the situation of Kurdish groups in the region. In other words, Turkey's quest for a short-term alliance with Iran was conditional upon Ankara's need for Tehran's support when Ankara believed that Erbil's support was insufficient to tackle Turkey's concern regarding the Kurdish issue.

With the termination of the Peace Process between the PKK and the AKP government and the rise of HDP in Turkish domestic politics in 2015, Ankara became less disposed to the empowerment of Kurdish groups, despite its warming ties with Erbil. Since then, Turkey perceived any Kurdish movement as a security threat and sought collaboration against the rise of Kurdish groups. With the aforementioned increase of HDP at home, the AKP elites began to follow a more nationalist approach, and opposed any independent Kurdish state in Turkey's proximity; they highlighted the territorial integrity of Iraq by claiming that an independent Kurdish state would aggravate regional anarchy (Gunes 2019b, 35; Sinkaya 2018, 857). In this regard, Ankara denounced the 2017 independence referendum of Iraqi Kurds, voicing the

concern that any independent Kurdish state would trigger Kurds in Turkey to seek independence.

Despite Turkey's condemnation, in March 2017, the KRG flew the Kurdish flag on Kirkuk's Iraqi government buildings. In return, Ankara declared that "Kirkuk was historically a Turkmen city, regardless of whether some accept it or not", deeming the KRG as an occupant and warning Barzani about Turkey's future operations in the KRI. President Erdogan further noted that "the KRG's adventure was an act of treachery and will be over when we close the oil taps, all [their] revenues will vanish, and they will not be able to find food when our trucks stop going to northern Iraq" (Park 2019, 52). The reason for Ankara's threats and objections was its concern over the future of Kirkuk, as Ankara assumed the annexation of oil-rich Kirkuk would actualise an independent Kurdish state (Park 2014, 8). In this regard, Turkey sought to work with Iran as another opponent of a Kurdish state.

During this period , Ankara was also experiencing a cooling in its relationship with the US due to the latter's support for the PYD; Ankara assumed that the KRG referendum was a US project, as was the rise of the PYD in northern Syria (Park 2019, 54). Likewise, Iran viewed the referendum as a threat to its regime's security since a possible Kurdistan state supported by the US, Israel, and the Gulf Countries would endanger the Iranian regime. As such, Iran emerged as a viable partner for Turkey in opposing the Kurdish referendum, should the US criticise Turkish actions in the KRI. Erdogan notably opted to liaise with Iran and the Iraqi government after understanding that he could not prevent the referendum despite his friendship with Barzani (Dalay 2017b, 4–6). As a result, pragmatic and profit-oriented collaboration emerged between Ankara and Tehran towards the 2017 independence referendum of the Iraqi Kurds for a short-time period.

Before the referendum, Turkey conducted several military exercises in Silopi, a Kurdish majority settlement in Turkey's Sirnak Province, adjacent to Iraq and Syria. Ankara further worked with Tehran and Baghdad to pursue joint counter-measures against the KRG's quest for independence, and emphasised the territorial unity of Iraq (Dalay 2017b, 7; Gunter 2018, 29). After the referendum, Ankara threatened, along with Baghdad, to close its borders with the KRI and to reroute trade shipments through Iran (Sumer and Joseph 2018, 13). However, these Turkish measures were insufficient to prevent the referendum and had little effect on the result. Given its similar concerns and shared policies with Ankara, Tehran also feared that, if

the referendum had been successful, a new civil war would have emerged in the region, and Iran would have lost Iraq (Expert 1 personal communication, August 17, 2020). Tehran was also concerned that Ankara and Tel Aviv would gain an edge over Iran by collaborating with the Barzanis, even though Israeli support for the referendum was met with unease in Ankara. To hamper this probability, Tehran increased its collaboration with the PUK, as well as with Ankara, by following more active policies in the KRI than Turkey (Gunter 2018; Sinkaya 2018). In essence, Tehran and Ankara's policies towards the referendum demonstrated that Tehran had a more powerful position than Ankara due to its partnership with various actors in the KRI. In contrast to Tehran, Ankara had close ties only with the KDP under the Barzanis, and therefore required more external support than Tehran in the KRI.

The 2017 referendum further aggravated the domestic competition and political fragmentation in the KRI because the PUK, Gorran, and Kurdistan Islamist Group (Komal) assumed that Barzani would utilise the referendum to consolidate his power. These Kurdish parties further opposed Turkish attacks against the PYD/YPG in Afrin, Syria, and "visited Afrin in February, 2018 to express solidarity with the YPG's resistance" (Park 2019, 56). They thus opted to liaise with Tehran in contrast to Ankara. With these partnerships, Tehran increased support for Baghdad in regaining Kirkuk from the Iraqi Kurds on October 16, 2017. During this period, Ankara and opposition Iraqi Kurdish parties kept silent about Iranian operations in Kirkuk (Gunter 2018, 29–30). Journalist 1 (personal communication, July 1, 2020) noted that Turkey preferred Iranian control in Kirkuk rather than Kurdish groups. This shows that, except for the Barzanis, Turkey's limited relations with Kurdish groups in the KRI prompted a need for Tehran's support on the 2017 referendum. Ankara thought short-term cooperation with Tehran would be beneficial to Ankara's security interests in the KRI when Ankara was disappointed with the referendum of the Iraqi Kurds.

Moreover, trust issues emerged between Ankara-Erbil because the KDP failed to see the rise of nationalism in Turkey's domestic politics. The findings from Expert 3 (personal communication, July 21, 2020) further revealed that Turkey felt betrayed. This led to Turkish criticism of the referendum and more prudent and flexible policies towards Erbil, with the KRI losing importance for Turkey. However, regarding the 2017 referendum, it was noted in Expert 1 (personal communication, August 17, 2020) that the dependence of the KRG on Turkey increased, and that the tie between Turkey and the KRG was so close that the KRG was like a Turkish city. Although the KRG has more recently been off Turkey's external agenda, the 2017

referendum failure forced the KRG to seek closer ties with Turkey because of the latter's projection of military power in operations in northern Syria.

The rise of the PKK and PJAK close to the Qandil mountains resulted in further collaboration between Ankara and Tehran, since their attacks from the KRI posed a severe challenge to both countries. With the PKK/PJAK using the Qandil mountains as a refuge from Turkish and Iranian attacks (Unver 2016, 78), Ankara and Tehran assumed that Erbil was ignoring the PKK/PJAK because Erbil sometimes hesitated to restrain their operations from Qandil, despite the competition between Barzani and Ocalan. Ankara thus accused Erbil of not taking military measures against PKK militants in northern Iraq. In contrast to Ankara's aggressive policies towards the PKK, Barzani indeed believed that "Turkey's Kurdish problem can only be resolved by dialogue and by some degree of autonomy for Turkey's Kurdish provinces" (Park 2012, 117–19). In this regard, Park (2019, 51) notes that "Barzani was perhaps proving to be a less valuable strategic asset than Ankara had hoped, and Ankara a less accommodating neighbour than Erbil thought it had become". Barzani's periodic hesitation thus pushed Ankara to see collaboration with Tehran against the PKK-PJAK issue.

Academic 3 (personal communication, July 9, 2020) noted that Turkey's concerns regarding the PKK was greater than Iran's PJAK concern since the PKK was more effective in Turkey than the PJAK in Iran. Similarly, it was argued by Academic 4 (personal communication, July 6, 2020) that Iran thought it could control the Kurdish separatist movements because of the authoritarian nature of the regime. In comparison, therefore, Turkey was more concerned about the Kurds than Iran, and this was a concern which had arisen when Turkey established a nation state following the demise of the Ottoman Empire. With the foundation of the Turkish Republic, all ethnicities were regarded as unitary under the idea of Turkishness, but ethnicities in Iran historically lived together regardless of race and identity. Therefore, Turkey's Kurdish issue is different from Iran's; Turkey fears Kurdish separation and follows security-oriented policies, and Ankara's harsh response towards the referendum vindicated its real perception of the Kurds. In this regard, Ankara required an alliance against any Kurdish separatism more than Tehran.

7.3 Concluding Remarks

The KRI became a field both of cooperation and competition for Turkey and Iran, and there was no 'win-win policy' in Turkish-Iranian affairs there due to co-determination of systemic and unit-level factors. The case study in this chapter highlights the relevance of NCR in explaining TFP towards Iran from December 2010 to July 2018, by analysing particular systemic and unit-level variables in the KRI. NCR examines structural changes in regional and international systems and the relative power of a state as systemic variables. As such, the three factors of the US role in Iraq, the Syrian conflict, and Turkey's relative power position can be seen to have directly determined TFP towards Iran in the KRI. More precisely, these developments had determinant roles on TFP for Ankara's long-term interests. These three factors will now be examined in turn.

First, the US role in Iraq shaped Turkish behaviour in the country because Turkey hoped to fill the power vacuum left by the decreased US presence. Bearing in mind that Tehran increased its influence over the Shi-a dominated Maliki government in Baghdad and established cordial ties mostly with the PUK in the KRI, Ankara tried to establish closer ties with the KDP under the Barzanis to balance the Iranian impact throughout Iraq. As a result, Ankara's desire for friendly relations with the KRG enraged Baghdad and Tehran. Second, the Syrian conflict empowered non-state armed actors, including ISIS and the PYD/YPG, in Turkey's proximity, leading Ankara to reconsider its foreign policy behaviour regarding its security interests. Despite initially ignoring the rise of ISIS due to its aggressive policies against the Assad regime and the PYD, Ankara later opted to support Erbil in order to protect its own long-term interests in the KRI. In contrast, Tehran followed closer ties with Erbil in fighting ISIS, but Ankara had no desire to lose its long-term interests and gains in the KRI.

Moreover, the rise of the PYD held a potential risk for Ankara in terms of a loss in its regional power position, as becoming an influential actor of the PYD meant empowering the PKK and the states supporting these two parties. As such, Ankara pursued greater collaboration with Erbil to prevent the empowerment of PYD, as a mutual concern, through economic, political and security strategies. Indeed, Ankara's quest for collaboration with Erbil was based on power maximisation to improve and maintain its regional power position. Given these systemic variables, it appears that Ankara retained competitive policy behaviours towards

Tehran due to their similar power position in the international system and their conflict of interests in the longer-term.

Nevertheless, the regional balance of power evolved contrary to Turkey's expectations in the short-to-medium term. In this regard, Turkey put aside its long-term interests and policies towards Iran in favour of collaboration. NCR helps to explain Turkey's volte-face policy, since it can be argued that unit-level variables played a determinant role in the state's short-to-medium term foreign policy behaviour. As such, the main reasons behind Turkey's quest for cooperation with Iran were the twin perceptions of the AKP elite, and domestic security considerations at the unit level. These elites initially pursued a policy of de-secularisation towards Iraqi Kurds since they assumed that the latter could resolve Turkey's PKK issue and prevent the rise of the PYD in the region; however, their perception altered due to the rise of domestic nationalism. Accordingly, the AKP elites started to follow nationalist and anti-Kurdish policies in internal and external politics, reflecting a more ambivalent policy shift in Ankara's ties with Erbil. Following the Iraqi Kurdish independence referendum in 2017, significant contentious issues arose between Ankara and Erbil, as the former feared the referendum would threaten its domestic stability by having a spill-over effect among Kurds in Turkey.

In this period, Ankara also drove a wedge between itself and Washington due to the former's unwavering support for the PYD. As such, the rise of nationalist policies in Turkey further cooled its ties with the US, alongside other issues such as the US' reluctance to expel Fethullah Gulen after the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey. Ultimately, Turkish-US relations entered a period of uncertainty and disagreement, and Turkey faced significant issues with its long-term Western ally due to its domestic security concerns. Given the shift in the AKP elite's perception and Turkey's domestic security considerations —arising directly from the developments in the KRI —Ankara chose pragmatic and profit-oriented short-term cooperation with Tehran, as well as Baghdad. In this regard, Turkey's quest for cooperation with Tehran vindicated Schweller's balance of interest approach. In collaborating with Tehran, Ankara hoped to counterbalance threats, and, at the same time collaboration with Tehran provided more gains than the US in the KRI, since Tehran shared mutual concerns with Turkey. Therefore, a status quo-based foreign policy with Tehran was a better option for Turkish interests in the short-to-medium term than a revisionist one. In this regard, Schweller's balance of interest theory can provide a helpful basis upon which to understand Turkey's alliance with Tehran in

the case of the KRI. Table 7.1 summarises TFP towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings in the KRI.

Table 7-1 TFP towards Iran in the KRI: December 2010 to July 2018

Systemic Variables (Independent)	**Intervening Variables (Unit-Level)**	**Dependent Variables (Foreign Policy Behaviour in the Short-to-Medium Term)**
• US Policies • Syrian Conflict • The Rise of Non-State Armed Groups (ISIS and the PYD/YPG) • Turkey's Relative Power Position	• AKP Elite Perception • Domestic Security Consideration	• Collaboration • Status Quo Behaviour • Balance of Interest

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

This chapter summarises previous chapters, presents the main conclusions of the research, and then explores the key contributions, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

8.1 Executive Summary and Arguments

The objective of this thesis was to offer an original understanding of Turkish foreign policy (TFP) towards Iran amid the upheavals caused by the Arab uprisings, from December 2010 to July 2018, by using NCR. Turkey-Iran relations have always been volatile, involving both conflict and cooperation. With the start of the Arab uprisings, Turkey's relations with Iran reverted to a state of conflict and cooperation. Despite a lack of trust between Ankara and Tehran, Turkey cooperated with Iran in the short-to-medium term primarily due to domestic factors. As a result, the thesis explains which factors resulted in competition or cooperation in shaping TFP toward Iran from 2010 to 2018. Accordingly, Chapters 2–3 constituted the background. As a theoretical chapter, Chapter 2 explained how NCR provides a better conceptual explanation for TFP towards Iran from December 2010 to July 2018, because the theory employs both systemic and unit-level variables to analyse a state's foreign policy behaviour. Chapter 3 analysed the historic role of systemic and bilateral determinants in TFP towards Iran until the Arab Uprisings. Consequently, the thesis then asked:

1. *To what extent did structural forces shape the formulation of TFP towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings, between December 2010 and July 2018?*

Chapter 4 sheds light on the role of systemic factors and Turkey's relative power position towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings, from December 2010 to July 2018. With the outset of the revolts across the Arab world, the regional system experienced significant changes, including the role of Muslim Brotherhood (MB)-affiliated Islamic parties, the Sunni-Shia divide, the role of global powers in the Middle East, and the empowerment of non-state armed groups. As such, Turkey's relative power position and consequently, its foreign policy were influenced by these systemic changes, especially for its long-term policies. At the beginning of the Arab Uprisings, Turkey first followed a wait-and-see policy, a position shaped by its

economic and political ties with previous authoritarian regimes under the zero-problems-with-neighbours policy and economic interdependence. However, the increasingly anarchic environment pushed Turkey to reconsider its initial policy towards the uprisings, and it thus tried to fill the power vacuum as a regional middle power, following a power-maximisation policy. Bearing in mind Turkey's desire to be a regional model for political and social development, Turkey competed with Iran, as another influence-seeking regional power. While it cannot be determined with any degree of certainty, it seems that in the long-term Turkey will maintain its competitive policies towards Iran since the two countries are likely to seek to dominate the regional developments for their own interests.

2. *How did unit-level (domestic) factors interact with structural imperatives to shape TFP towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings, between December 2010 and July 2018?*

Chapter 5 defined the role of the unit-level variables on TFP towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings. The chapter points out that even though systemic shifts and Turkey's relative power position played an influential role in shaping TFP towards Iran, the AKP elite's perception and domestic considerations, as unit-level variables, forced Turkey to cooperate with Iran in the short-to-medium term. Bearing in mind that Schweller's balance of interest theory can explain the reason for the alliance choice between the two states, the chapter sheds light on how Turkey's interest-based and profit-oriented policies culminated in its cooperation with Iran in the short-to-medium term. The AKP elites first seemed to follow sectarian policies towards the uprisings due to its unwavering support for MB-affiliated parties and Sunni armed groups in the region. However, their pro-MB policies backfired and caused Turkey to become increasingly isolated in the region, notably from the Saudi-led Gulf countries and the US.

While following Sunni-based policies in the region, the AKP elite refrained from breaking its ties with Shia-dominated Iran for two reasons: Turkey's isolation pushed the AKP elite to establish closer relations with Iran; and domestic security and economic considerations prevented Ankara from maintaining competitive policies against Tehran. Following the Arab Uprisings, unit-level factors were more influential drivers of TFP towards Iran, since, instead of sectarian and identity policies, Ankara opted for interest-driven and profit-oriented policies. Ankara saw a short-term alliance with Tehran more beneficial than their competition. However, NCR highlights how unit-level variables play a significant role in a state's foreign policy in the short to medium term, while in the longer term a state's relative power position is the primary

driver of its foreign policy. As such, it appears that the impact of the AKP elite's perception and domestic considerations is, in the short term at least, more influential in shaping TFP towards Iran.

As well as the main research questions, the thesis asked:

3. *Since the Arab Uprisings, did Turkey cooperate with its western allies or turn away from them over its relations with Iran?*

At the beginning of the Arab Uprisings, Turkey followed a western-based policy and cooperated with its western allies in Libya and Syria. Later, however, Ankara conflicted with these allies over certain developments, including the toppling of the MB-affiliated Morsi regime in Egypt, the future of the Assad regime, and the rise of the PYD/YPG in Syria. More precisely, Turkey's interests determined its relations with its western allies: when its interests clashed with those of its allies, Ankara forged a different path. In the Syrian conflict, Turkey initially sought to cooperate with its western allies to topple the Assad regime, but these allies changed the priority from overthrowing the Assad regime to the prevention of ISIS. Since Turkey maintained the original aim of toppling the Assad regime, it adopted different policies from its allies until the rise of ISIS began to threaten Turkey's domestic security. Moreover, the empowerment of the PYD through US support led to a lack of trust between Turkey and the US, with Turkey criticising US support for the PYD in fighting ISIS. Finally, following the coup attempt in 2016, the lack of trust increased between Turkey under the AKP government and its western allies, since Ankara noted how they remained silent about the coup attempt. This increasing distrust of western allies brought Ankara closer to Russia and Iran, who immediately voiced their support for the AKP government. This marked a decisive shift in Ankara's relations with its erstwhile NATO allies.

4. *Did Turkey follow a value-based or interest-driven foreign policy after the Arab uprisings?*

At the outset of the Arab Uprisings, Turkey claimed to support a value-based policy towards the Arab Uprisings and democratic change in the region. In this regard, it aimed to become a role model for Islamic values and democratic principles. Despite these aspirations, Turkey's actual policies reveal that it followed an interest-driven policy in the region. While claiming to

endorse democratic change, for instance, Turkey remained quiet about the Shia-dominated uprising in Bahrain. In doing so, Turkey followed a pro-Sunni policy in Bahrain by cooperating with other Sunni states. Turkey further supported MB-affiliated parties throughout the region and opposed any movements against these groups. It also opposed a possible Kurdish state on its borders when the PYD declared autonomy in northern Syria. Even though Turkey pursued anti-Assad policies in Syria, the rise of the PYD emerged as a more significant issue for Turkey's interest in the region, because a stronger PYD could inflame the Kurdish problem in Turkey because of the close ties between the PYD and the PKK. As such, Turkey focused on its own interests after the Arab Uprisings. When these interests were at stake Turkey adopted more interventionist policies, as in Syria. Moreover, its support for MB-affiliated parties shows how Turkey followed interest-based policies, because the AKP elite assumed that the ideological affinity between the AKP and MB-affiliated parties would be in Turkey's favour in the region.

5. *How did Turkey's relative power position and the analysis of the AKP elite's perceptions and domestic considerations shape TFP towards Iran in the Syrian conflict and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq after the Arab Uprisings?*

Chapters 6–7 defined TFP towards Iran following the Arab Uprisings in the Syrian conflict and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, respectively, as case studies of the thesis. Both chapters examine systemic factors, Turkey's relative power position, the AKP elite's perception, and Turkish domestic security and economic considerations. Focusing on the Syrian conflict, Chapter 6 explained that the internalisation of the conflict (inter-state competition and the rise of non-state armed groups), Turkey's relative power, and its foreign policy in the Syrian conflict directly emerged as independent variables in determining TFP towards Iran. As two regional middle powers, Turkey viewed Iran as a rival at the outset of the Arab Uprisings, and so it competed with Iran to increase its long-term influence throughout the region, by promoting itself as a role model. As such, Turkey's competition with Iran was maintained in Syria, where Iran played a dominant role in supporting the Assad regime, while Turkey endorsed Sunni groups.

However, Turkey's domestic politics (the AKP elite's perception and domestic considerations) prevented competitive policies against Iran. Although the AKP elite followed an identity-based policy and supported Sunni groups in the Syrian conflict, its misconception

of the post-conflict term pushed Turkey to establish closer ties with Iran in the short to medium term. The AKP elite believed that its western allies would continue to want to end the Assad regime quickly, but western countries, notably the US, began to prioritise fighting with ISIS over the fall of Assad. In this regard, Turkey conflicted with its western allies and began to follow more interventionist and over-ambitious policies than its western allies. Given its aim for the post-conflict term, Turkey endorsed Sunni opposition groups, including the Free Syrian Army and Al-Qaeda-affiliated Jabhat Al-Nusra. Although Turkey initially ignored the rise of ISIS due to its opposition to Assad, Turkey's sectarian policy backfired and was criticised by its western allies. The rise of the PYD further resulted in divergent policies being pursued between Turkey and its western allies. While the US supported the PYD, Turkey viewed the Kurdish group as a security threat due to its PKK affiliation, and criticised the US for supporting a terrorist organisation. As such, Turkey was isolated due to its over-ambitious and sectarian policies in the Syrian conflict, and Turkish policymakers sought an alternative partner in Turkey's policies in Syria.

As well as the AKP elite's perception, Turkey's domestic economic and security considerations determined TFP towards Iran in the Syrian conflict. Before the Arab Uprisings, Turkey had established close economic and trade ties with Syria under the zero-problems-with-neighbours policy, but once the conflict began Turkey lost economic partners in various uprising countries, including Syria. Moreover, Turkey's interventionist and overambitious policies in Syria and the immense refugee flow from the latter increased economic costs for Turkey. At the same time as Turkey was dealing with problematic political and economic ties with other Sunni states and its western allies, Iran emerged as an alternative economic partner for Turkey. Alongside its economic considerations, security concerns arising from the rise of ISIS and the PYD pushed Turkey to cooperate with Iran. While ISIS conducted several terrorist attacks both in Turkey and in its proximity, the affiliation between the PKK and PYD posed a considerable security threat to Turkish domestic security.

Chapter 7 shed light on TFP towards Iran in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), as the second case study in the thesis. Like the Syrian conflict, systemic and unit-level variables played determinant roles in TFP towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings, from December 2010 to July 2018. As systemic variables, US policies in Iraq, the developments of the Syrian conflict, and Turkey's relative power position and its foreign policy strategies directly shaped Turkey's ties with Iran and created competition between the two regional middle powers. As

such, Turkey deemed Iran a rival in the KRI, with both countries supporting different Kurdish groups. Turkey sought to establish closer ties with the KRG, notably with the KDP under the Barzanis, to prevent the rise of Iranian influence across Iraq. This was because Iran had already improved its relative power position following the decreased US presence in Iraq via closer ties with the Shia-dominated Maliki government in Iraq and the PUK, another significant Kurdish group in the KRI.

Equally, however, the AKP elite's perception and domestic short term security considerations played a direct influential role in Ankara's alliance choice with Iran in the KRI. Following the rise of the HDP in Turkish domestic politics in 2015 and the 2016 coup attempt, the AKP elite started to adopt nationalistic discourse regarding the Kurds, reflecting a change in their ties with the KRG even though they had previously followed de-secularisation policies with Erbil. Notably, the 2017 independence referendum raised the elite's concerns regarding a possible Kurdish state in Turkey's proximity. Moreover, as in the Syrian conflict, ISIS and the PYD remained a security threat to Turkey, and so Turkey needed an ally in Iran over the KRI, despite their mutual competition in Syria.

To sum up, this thesis offers an original understanding and interpretation of TFP towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings, by establishing a causal mechanism between independent and dependent variables. As such, the thesis uses the AKP elite's perception and domestic security and economic considerations as intervening variables to clarify the cause-effect relationship between systemic shifts and Turkey's relative power position (as independent variables) and TFP towards Iran (the dependent variable) in the short to medium term. In this regard, NCR provides a robust theoretical framework for the intervening variables to explain the causal link between independent and dependent variables. Schweller's balance of interest also helps explain Turkey's alliance choice with Iran, considering Turkey's economic and security considerations. Based on this approach, Turkey opted to follow status quo and profit-oriented policies with Iran in the short to medium term. These explanations were evaluated through the literature survey and expert interviews. Thus, process-tracing methodology facilitated the understanding of the causal link between systemic shifts and Turkey's relative power position, and TFP towards Iran in the short to medium term.

8.2 Contributions of the Research

The analysis of bilateral relations between Turkey and Iran, as two regionally significant middle powers, has increasingly gained currency in the literature of Middle Eastern studies. However, few studies have explained the Turkish perspective towards Iran via a holistic approach, and majority of literature regarding Turkish-Iranian affairs since the Arab Uprisings have focused on their rivalry in Syria. Notably, TFP towards Iran between 2011-2018 is still under-theorised as most studies either lack a sufficient time frame or focus on bilateral affairs rather than focusing solely on the Turkish side. The first contribution of this thesis is therefore to add new knowledge which helps fill this gap, through the analysis of TFP towards Iran via a theoretically informed account. Based on NCR, the most important contribution of the thesis conceptually is the causal relationship identified between the independent variables (systemic shifts arising from the Arab Uprisings and Turkey's relative power position) and the dependent variable (TFP towards Iran) in explaining Turkey' ties with Iran. As unit-level variables, the AKP elite's perception and the domestic considerations of Turkey provide a fruitful explanation for the causal link between the systemic shifts arising from the Arab Uprisings and Turkey's relative power position, and TFP towards Iran. Therefore, the thesis fills a gap in the literature by providing the co-determination of intervening and independent variables in TFP towards Iran through an analysis of different unit-level variables in these studies' explanations of TFP.

The second significant achievement of this study is that Turkey's desire for cooperation with Iran can be explained through NCR and Schweller's idea of a balance of interest. Due to Turkey's domestic economic and security considerations, Turkey sought to establish closer ties with Iran, proving that interest-driven and profit-oriented aims defined TFP towards Iran in the short-to-medium term. More precisely, Turkey was motivated by both opportunities for gain and its security and economic concerns in forming an alliance with Iran, and thus opted to follow status quo behaviour towards Iran despite their competitiveness in the wake of the Arab Uprisings. The alliance provided shelter for Turkey against its regional isolation and security threats in its proximity. Although several studies have touched upon the economic and security cooperation between Turkey and Iran, this thesis is the first study to examine Turkey's alliance behaviour with Iran via a theoretical background. Accordingly, applying Schweller's balance of interest theory to define Turkey's domestic considerations is a more appropriate approach for explaining Turkey's alignment choices and rapprochement with Iran from the start of the

Arab Uprisings in December 2010 to July 2018. As a result, this study differs from other theory-driven studies on TFP toward Iran in that it makes use of a novel application of NCR that is more sensitive to Turkey's peculiarities toward Iran.

Moreover, the thesis is the first comprehensive study examining TFP towards Iran in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq within a theoretical framework, as well as providing different theoretical perspectives on Turkey's amity and enmity relations with Iran in Syria. The study clearly articulates why Turkey chose to align with Iran despite initial competition in these areas.

Finally, the thesis provides a comprehensive explanation of TFP towards Iran framed by the period both during and immediately after the Arab Uprisings. Despite the events in the Middle East changing very frequently, the thesis may be a good starting point for future studies seeking to expand this research further, by investigating the most recent developments in explaining certain TFP outcomes and Turkey's relations with Iran. Ultimately, this thesis provides a theoretical contribution and time-wise contribution to the literature on both TFP and, more broadly, the international relations of the Middle East.

8.3 Limitations of the Research

One of the main limitations or possible criticisms of this thesis is the period of December 2010 to July 2018. The frequent changes in Turkish politics and in the Middle East could have affected the research and the maintenance of up-to-date data. For this reason, the selected period was chosen to be able to analyse developments easily. After July 2018, Turkey's long-standing parliamentary system was completely transformed into a heavily centralised presidential one, and Turkish domestic politics entered a new phase, even though the new system was approved by voters in the referendum on April 16, 2017. Although new analysis of more recent events is required, this thesis provides an initial step in the analysis of the role of the presidential system on TFP.

Another limitation of this study concerns access to the AKP elite due to the turmoil being experienced in Turkey during the active research period, and the possible reluctance of politicians to expose their views and ideas. This may have resulted in the lack of interviews from political personalities, and specifically AKP politicians. Thus, the empirical aspect of the thesis would have been stronger if AKP interviewees had provided first-hand accounts of their

beliefs and their own opinions on certain policy decisions. To mitigate this issue and increase the reliability and objectivity of the research, the thesis identified expert/specialist interviewees from different ideological standpoints and professions who support the AKP or have detailed knowledge of its members relevant across the period of the study.

The final limitation of this study relates to the communication process with the interviewees. Due to the very busy schedule of many interviewees, interview scheduling was quite difficult to manage; some interviewees had to cancel appointments, even though the interviews were online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Greater value would have been added to the research if more interviews could have been conducted, thereby allowing new critical viewpoints to be accumulated and different ideas to be explored. Due to the social and political turmoil in Turkey, however, some of those contacted for interview seemed reluctant to speak on the sensitive issues under examination in this thesis.

8.4 Potential Further Research

Certain issues in this research require further investigation. Although the thesis focuses on the Turkish perspective, it would also be interesting to see if a similar NCR model could be applied to a study of bilateral relations from both Turkish and Iranian perspectives, to see if the same or similar intervening variables were at work. A deeper study integrating a theoretical framework on their bilateral affairs would doubtless be of benefit, not only for the understanding of Turkey and its foreign policy, but also for Iran and its foreign policy process towards Turkey.

As mentioned, the thesis was unable to investigate all the possible variables and factors that could provide a better understanding of TFP regarding the Middle East. Following the presidential system, the AKP elite's perception as an intervening variable revolved very much around Erdogan's personality and his ideology, and indeed President Erdogan has played an increasingly central role in shaping TFP. The role of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), a far-right political party, has also increased in Turkish domestic politics due to its alliance with the AKP since the presidential referendum. It is notable that the nationalistic perception of the MHP is more apparent in TFP in the Syrian conflict. Therefore, Erdogan's perceptions and the role of the MHP could be analysed as intervening variables under the NCR in future work. Last but not least, a deeper analysis could be undertaken regarding the role of the PKK

and/or its affiliations on TFP towards Iran, or their bilateral affairs. NCR was used to analyse the role of non-state actors in shaping foreign policy as an intervening variable. It could thus provide a theoretical framework for these topics in future work.

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APPENDIX

ETHICAL APPROVAL-SGIA

Dear Cangul,

The following project has received ethical approval:

Project Title: *Turkish foreign policy towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings: A Neoclassical Realist Account.*

Start Date: *30 June 2020*.
End Date: *31 August 2020.*
Reference: *SGIA-2020-04-07T22:36:07-jndx45*
Date of ethical approval: *10 June 2020*.

You should print this email and keep it for your records.

Please note the following restriction:

- The approval relates only to proposed research you have submitted for approval and you are required to follow all procedures outlined in the application.
- If you wish to change the proposal, for example, to widen the scope of inquiry or substantially expand the use of data collected, then you MUST reapply to the Ethics & Risk Committee for further approval.
- Should you end up traveling for research you must submit individual insurance applications through the university's VIATOR system (https://apps.dur.ac.uk/travel.forms/). Those applications should include the risk assessment form attached to this ethics application.

We wish you all the best with your research.

Please be aware that if you make any significant changes to the design, duration or delivery of your project, you should contact your department ethics representative for advice, as further consideration and approval may then be required.

If you have any queries regarding this approval or need anything further, please contact sgia.ethics@durham.ac.uk

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If you have any queries relating to the ethical review process, please contact your supervisor (where applicable) or departmental ethics representative in the first instance. If you have any queries relating to the online system, please contact research.policy@durham.ac.uk.

Consent Form

Project title: Turkish Foreign Policy towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings: A Neoclassical Realist Account
Researcher(s): Cangul Altundas-Akcay
Department: School of Government and International Affairs
Contact details: cangul.altundas-akcay@durham.ac.uk
Supervisor name: Prof Clive A. Jones
Supervisor contact details: c.a.jones@durham.ac.uk

This form is to confirm that you understand what the purposes of the project, what is involved and that you are happy to take part. Please initial each box to indicate your agreement:

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated [dd/mm/yy] and the privacy notice for the above project.	
I have had sufficient time to consider the information and ask any questions I might have, and I am satisfied with the answers I have been given.	
I understand who will access to personal data, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.	
I agree to take part in the above project.	
I consent to being audio recorded and understands how recordings will be used in research outputs.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.	
I understand that if I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview, I have the right to decline to answer any question, from start to end of the interview.	

I understand that there are two possible risks (facing heavy scrutiny by the AKP government and ethical considerations arising from Skype) regarding the participation in this study.	
I understand that I will be anonymized, so the researcher will not identify me by name in any report using information obtained from this study, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure.	

Participant's Signature_____ Date_____

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS)_____

Researcher's Signature_____ Date_____

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS)_____

Debriefing Sheet

Project title: Turkish Foreign Policy towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings: A Neoclassical Realist Account

Thank you for taking part in this study. This research project examines the influence of Turkey's relative power position, the perceptions of the AKP elite and domestic factors (economic and security considerations) in shaping Turkish foreign policy towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings.

In this regard, the thesis seeks to trace the causal relationship between the independent (Turkey's relative power position from the Arab Uprisings) variable, the intervening (the AKP elite perception and domestic considerations of Turkey) variable and the dependent variable (Turkish foreign policy outcomes towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings).

As such, you were asked to reflect upon Turkey's relative power in regional politics, AKP elite perceptions of Ankara's relative power as well as the domestic factors that have influenced and shaped Turkish Foreign policy towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings. You were also asked to reflect upon Turkey's policies towards the Syrian civil war and Iraqi Kurdistan and to consider how these policies were shaped by Ankara's perceptions of Iran's regional policies.

With your agreement, I made an audio recording of the interviews. This was solely for the purposes of research and to help me recall with accuracy what you and other people told me. The recordings will be destroyed on completion of the research. Any information you supplied me will be held in strict confidence, viewed only by the researcher (Cangul Altundas Akcay) and then anonymised.

The records of this study will be kept secure and private. All files containing any information provided by you are password protected. In any research report that may be published, no

information will be included that will make it possible to identify you individually. There will be no way to connect your name to your responses at any time during or after the study.

If you would like further information about the study or would like to know about what my findings are when all the data have been collected and analyzed then please contact me on ‘cangul.altundas-akcay@durham.ac.uk'. I cannot however provide you with your individual results.

If taking part in this study has raised any specific concerns including withdrawing your data then I would suggest you contact me as soon as possible.

Kind regards,
Cangul Altundas-Akcay

Participant Information Sheet

Project title: Turkish Foreign Policy towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings: A Neoclassical Realist Account

Researcher(s): Cangul Altundas Akcay

Department: School of Government and International Affairs

Contact details: cangul.altundas-akcay@durham.ac.uk

Supervisors name: Prof. Clive A. Jones

Supervisors contact details: c.a.jones@durham.ac.uk

You are invited to take part in a study that I am conducting as part of my PhD at Durham University. This study has received ethical approval from School of Government and International Affairs ethics committee of Durham University.

Before you decide whether to agree to take part it is important for you to understand the purpose of the research and what is involved as a participant. Please read the following information carefully. Please get in touch if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

Note: The rights and responsibilities of anyone taking part in Durham University research are set out in our 'Participants Charter':

https://www.dur.ac.uk/research.innovation/governance/ethics/considerations/people/charter/

What is the purpose of the study?

The aim of this study is to identify how academics/journalists/scholars think about the influence of Turkey's relative power position in determining its relations with Iran since the Arab uprising. In order to do this, the project looks to understand the role of the following: the elite perceptions of the ruling AKP towards Iran as well as the role of domestic factors (economic and security considerations) in shaping ties between Ankara and Tehran.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited because of your expertise in Turkish and/or Iranian affairs of TFP or/towards Iran. Your insights and thoughts can help inform and deepen the analysis of the Turkish-Iranian relations.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation is voluntary, and you do not have to agree to take part. If you do agree to take part, you can withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you agree to take part in the study, you will be asked to reflect upon Turkey's relative power position in international affairs, the role of elite decision-makers in the AKP, as well as wider economic and security considerations, that have shaped Ankara's approach towards Tehran since the Arab uprisings. This will also cover Turkey's and Iran's policies towards the Syrian conflict and Iraqi Kurdistan.

The interview will be online through Skype in English where possible (to reduce the necessity to translate and to reduce translation errors). Yet, if you are uncomfortable speaking English, the interview can be conducted in Turkish. This interview will be audio-recorded using an encrypted recorder. You will be informed when recording begins, is paused or stopped.

The interview will last approximately one hour and will be informed by semi-structured questions. I may ask other questions as part of a snow-balling process, but you have right at any time to decline to respond any questions you do not wish to answer.

Are there any potential risks involved?

There is a potential risk. You may face heavy scrutiny due to the AKP government's growing assaults on journalists, intellectuals and academics. To mitigate this, your data will be anonymized. In this way, I will not identify you by name in any report using information obtained from this study. Your TOTAL ANONYMITY will remain secure.

With a Skype video interview though, there are additional ethical considerations to take into account: the issues created by online interaction is mediated through the use of technology (which is owned by third parties); the verification of participant's identity; and issues raised by the interview environment and the nature of recording the interview. In this regard, it is important, from an ethical standpoint, to remind you that your discussions online may be accessed and stored by governments agencies or corporations. In order to mitigate this issue, I will create a specific Skype account. At the termination of the study, the Skype account will be

closed and subsequently all the participants' online details and data will be removed. To protect your privacy, you will be advised to select appropriate locations from which you will be interviewed.

Will my data be kept confidential?

All information obtained during the study will be kept confidential. To mitigate risk and maintain subject privacy/confidentiality/anonymity, the data will be viewed only by me. You will have the option to withdraw from/end the interview at any time or to retract specific statements. You will also remain anonymous. Following the interview, the data then will be transcribed by me to protect the data as well as your anonymity. I will transcribe the recording from the encrypted voice recorder and delete it from the recorder. To ensure anonymity, a list that identifies you with the recordings will be kept separately and made unidentifiable by name, with a random number code attributed to you and your recording. I will then remove identifying information from the transcripts and imported them into Nvivo, a software program that facilitates qualitative data analysis and enables users to assign a code to specific lines or segments of the text.

I will also delete/destroy data containing personal details that would lead to the identification of you (e.g. your email addresses, telephone numbers, physical addresses, etc but *not* consent forms) as soon as possible. I will retain contact details only until you have participated in the study, or until you have informed me that you do not wish to participate. If you indicate that you would like to receive a copy of my notes or the research findings at the end of the study, then I will retain your contact details until this information has been sent out. I will also adhere to the University of Durham Data Protection Principles
(https://www.dur.ac.uk/data.protection/dp_principles/).

What will happen to the results of the project?

The results will be used for the purpose of the PhD's degree dissertation in Government and International Affairs, Durham University. However, they might additionally be disseminated at conferences or published in peer-reviewed publications. In this case, your anonymity will still be ensured in any papers.

All research data and records needed to validate the research findings will be stored for [10] years after the end of the project.

Durham University is committed to sharing the results of its world-class research for public benefit. As part of this commitment the University has established an online repository for all Durham University Higher Degree theses which provides access to the full text of freely available theses. The study in which you are invited to participate will be written up as a thesis. On successful submission of the thesis, it will be deposited both in print and online in the University archives, to facilitate its use in future research. The thesis will be published open access after the expiration of restricted access of the thesis.

Who do I contact if I have any questions or concerns about this study?

If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please speak to the researcher (Cangul Altundas-Akcay). If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please submit a complaint via the University's Complaints Process.

Thank you for reading this information and considering taking part in this study.

Signature the participant:

Date:

Signature of the researcher:

Date:

Privacy Notice

PART 1 – GENERIC PRIVACY NOTICE

Durham University has a responsibility under data protection legislation to provide individuals with information about how we process their personal data. We do this in a number of ways, one of which is the publication of privacy notices. Organisations variously call them a privacy statement, a fair processing notice or a privacy policy.

To ensure that we process your personal data fairly and lawfully we are required to inform you:

- Why we collect your data
- How it will be used
- Who it will be shared with

We will also explain what rights you have to control how we use your information and how to inform us about your wishes. Durham University will make the Privacy Notice available via the website and at the point we request personal data.

Our privacy notices comprise two parts – a generic part (ie common to all of our privacy notices) and a part tailored to the specific processing activity being undertaken.

Data Controller

The Data Controller is Durham University. If you would like more information about how the University uses your personal data, please see the University's Information Governance webpages or contact Information Governance Unit:

Telephone: (0191 33) 46246 or 46103

E-mail: information.governance@durham.ac.uk

Information Governance Unit also coordinate response to individuals asserting their rights under the legislation. Please contact the Unit in the first instance.

Data Protection Officer

The Data Protection Officer is responsible for advising the University on compliance with Data Protection legislation and monitoring its performance against it. If you have any concerns regarding the way in which the University is processing your personal data, please contact the Data Protection Officer:

Jennifer Sewel
University Secretary
Telephone: (0191 33) 46144
E-mail: university.secretary@durham.ac.uk

Your rights in relation to your personal data

Privacy notices and/or consent

You have the right to be provided with information about how and why we process your personal data. Where you have the choice to determine how your personal data will be used, we will ask you for consent. Where you do not have a choice (for example, where we have a legal obligation to process the personal data), we will provide you with a privacy notice. A privacy notice is a verbal or written statement that explains how we use personal data.

Whenever you give your consent for the processing of your personal data, you receive the right to withdraw that consent at any time. Where withdrawal of consent will have an impact on the services, we are able to provide, this will be explained to you, so that you can determine whether it is the right decision for you.

Accessing your personal data

You have the right to be told whether we are processing your personal data and, if so, to be given a copy of it. This is known as the right of subject access. You can find out more about this right on the University's Subject Access Requests webpage.

Right to rectification

If you believe that personal data, we hold about you is inaccurate, please contact us and we will investigate. You can also request that we complete any incomplete data.

Once we have determined what we are going to do, we will contact you to let you know.

Right to erasure

You can ask us to erase your personal data in any of the following circumstances:

- We no longer need the personal data for the purpose it was originally collected
- You withdraw your consent and there is no other legal basis for the processing
- You object to the processing and there are no overriding legitimate grounds for the processing
- The personal data have been unlawfully processed
- The personal data have to be erased for compliance with a legal obligation
- The personal data have been collected in relation to the offer of information society services (information society services are online services such as banking or social media sites).

Once we have determined whether we will erase the personal data, we will contact you to let you know.

Right to restriction of processing

You can ask us to restrict the processing of your personal data in the following circumstances:

- You believe that the data is inaccurate, and you want us to restrict processing until we determine whether it is indeed inaccurate
- The processing is unlawful, and you want us to restrict processing rather than erase it
- We no longer need the data for the purpose we originally collected it but you need it in order to establish, exercise or defend a legal claim and
- You have objected to the processing and you want us to restrict processing until we determine whether our legitimate interests in processing the data override your objection.

Once we have determined how we propose to restrict processing of the data, we will contact you to discuss and, where possible, agree this with you.

Retention

The University keeps personal data for as long as it is needed for the purpose for which it was originally collected. Most of these time periods are set out in the University Records Retention Schedule.

Making a complaint

If you are unsatisfied with the way in which we process your personal data, we ask that you let us know so that we can try and put things right. If we are not able to resolve issues to your satisfaction, you can refer the matter to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). The ICO can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office Wycliffe House Water Lane Wilmslow Cheshire SK9 5AF

Telephone: 0303 123 1113

Website: Information Commissioner's Office

PART 2 – TAILORED PRIVACY NOTICE

This section of the Privacy Notice provides you with the privacy information that you need to know before you provide personal data to the University for the particular purpose(s) stated below.

Project Title: Turkish Foreign Policy towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings: A Neoclassical Realist Account

Type(s) of personal data collected and held by the researcher and method of collection:

Personal data will be collected through interview. This will include 'special category data' including the views of academics and journalists, researchers who have sufficient information regarding Turkish foreign policy and/or Iranian foreign policy. The interviews will be conducted via 'Skype', and audio recordings will be used to collect the data.

Lawful Basis

The legal basis for processing the participant's personal data on this occasion is Article 6(1a) consent of the data subject. In addition to the legal basis for processing his/her personal data, For 'special category data' (including: personal data revealing racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, or trade union membership, and the processing of genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a natural person, data concerning health or data concerning a natural person s sex life or sexual orientation), the basis for processing the participant sensitive personal data on this occasion is Article 9(2j) processing

is necessary for archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes.

How personal data is stored:

All personal data will be held securely and strictly confidential to the researcher. The participant will have the option to withdraw from (end) the interview at any time or to retract specific statements. The participant will also totally anonymous, Thus, he/she will be allocated an anonymous number for data collection which will not be connected to his/her name or identity. Signed consent forms will be stored separately to project data. All personal data in electronic form will be stored on a password protected computer. Data will not be available to anyone except for the researcher. The conversation will be recorded and stored on an encrypted device until it has been transcribed by the researcher. No-one else will have access to the recording, and it will be erased once the transcript has been completed.

How personal data is processed:

The researcher is collecting the data to identify how academics/journalists/scholars think about the influence of Turkey's relative power position, the perceptions of the AKP elite, as well as the influence of domestic factors, notably economic and internal security considerations in shaping Turkish foreign policy towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings. As such, information will be entered into a database for analysis. The interviews will be complementary to the analytical research and used to support or challenge the insights derived from secondary data. The data will be completely anonymized and the original records, including any information which can identify the participant personally, will be destroyed. The recorded conversation will be transcribed by the researcher, and personal information will be coded and anonymized. The original recording will then be erased.

Withdrawal of data

The participant can request withdrawal of his/her data at any time. In this case, please contact the researcher.

Who the researcher shares personal data with:

The relevant data will NOT be shared with anybody, so ONLY the researcher will conduct the interview with the voice recorder and then transcribe the data. After completing the interview via Skype, the researcher will delete the contact information and chat history. After transcribing

the data, the researcher will also delete the voice record from the recorder. The identifiable data will not be transferred outside the UK/EU.

Please be aware that if you disclose information which indicates the potential for serious and immediate harm to yourself or others, the research team may be obliged to breach confidentiality and report this to relevant authorities. This includes disclosure of child protection offences such as the physical or sexual abuse of minors, the physical abuse of vulnerable adults, money laundering, or other crimes covered by prevention of terrorism legislation. Where you disclose behavior (by yourself or others) that is potentially illegal but does not present serious and immediate danger to others, the researcher will, where appropriate, signpost you to relevant services, but the information you provide will be kept confidential (unless you explicitly request otherwise).

How long personal data is held by the researcher?

The researcher will hold personal data till the completion of transcribing the data, after which it will be anonymized if necessary. Yet a signed consent form may be hold till the completion of PhD for audit purposes.

How to object to the processing of your personal data for this project:

If you have any concerns regarding of your personal data, or you wish to withdraw your data from the project, contact Cangul Altundas-Akcay, cangul.altundas-akcay@durham.ac.uk.

Further information:

Cangul Altundas-Akcay.
Email: cangul.altundas-akcay@durham.ac.uk
Tel: +447470033477

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Can you reflect upon what factors have influenced Turkey's relative power position in the light of the Arab Uprisings?
2. To what extent has Turkey has been turning away from its traditional Western allies?
3. Do you think that there is any evidence of ideological incentives in shaping TFP?
4. Can you reflect upon the consistency in the AKP's domestic and regional policies towards the Kurds?
5. Do you think that Turkey has followed an identity or interest-based foreign policy towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings?
6. How has personnel changes across the AKP elites over 10 years impacted TFP towards Iran since the Arab Uprisings?
7. How important were domestic political considerations in determining the policy choices of AKP elites' towards Iran?
8. In what ways, if any, did Turkey's internal security dilemmas (PKK, coup attempt, ISIS) shape Turkey's relations with Iran?
9. In what ways, if any, did economic considerations impact upon Turkey's relations with Iran?
10. Can you explain the impact of the Iraqi Kurds on Turkish-Iranian bilateral ties?
11. Can you explain the impact of the Syrian conflict on Turkish-Iranian bilateral ties?

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Name	Type of Interview	Date
Academic 1	Skype	04.08.2020
Journalist 1	Skype	01.07.2020
Academic 2	Skype	06.08.2020
Academic 3	Skype	09.07.2020
Journalist 2	Skype	14.08.2020
Expert 1	Skype	17.08.2020
Expert 2	Skype	19.08.2020
Academic 4	Skype	06.07.2020
Expert 3	Skype	21.07.2020
Academic 5	Skype	22.07.2020
Expert 4	Skype	24.07. 2020
Academic 6	Skype	25.08.2020