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A COMPARISON OF TURKEY AND IRAN'S SOFT POWER IN THE GULF
COOPERATION COUNCIL (GCC) COUNTRIES

BY
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Abstract

In the recent years other forms of power have been implemented and gained significant successes in the international relations. With that regard, the term “Soft Power”, introduced by Joseph Nye, has come to forefront to understand the changing nature of power. Given the increasing importance of soft power in world politics, winning hearts and minds has become one of the indispensable policy agenda of Turkey and Iran in their relations with the Middle Eastern including Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. This study examines a comparison of Turkey’s and Iran’s soft power policies and impacts in the six Gulf Cooperation Council member states (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Oman) since the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and military coup in Turkey in 1980 through means of analytical, normative, ideological and empirical measures. Audio-recorded interviews with experts, officials, and academics from Turkey, Iran and GCC countries are conducted to garner primary source information on the topic. This thesis also searches the real reflections of soft power influence of both states in the six aforementioned countries through public opinion dimension. Due to the gap in the literature, this paper offers an analysis of the available public opinion surveys towards Iran and Turkey; and driving factors of such attitudes to draw a comprehensive and broader picture of soft power policies to two non-Arab regional states.

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Chapter One: Introduction, Literature Review, Research Questions and Research Design

Introduction

Power in world politics is one of the oldest themes in the international relations, and it is usually defined within the scope of military and economic capabilities. Hard power instruments have been widely used to by the states to coerce others forcing them to change their positions favoring former ones. Yet, in the recent years other forms of power have been implemented and gained significant successes in the international relations. With that regard, the term “Soft Power”, introduced by Joseph Nye (1990), has come to forefront to understand the changing nature of power. In simplest definition, soft power refers to “ getting others to want the outcomes that you want – co-opt people rather than coerce them” (Nye, 2004, p.5).

Given the increasing importance of soft power in world politics, winning hearts and minds has become one of the indispensable policy agenda of Turkey and Iran in their relations with the Middle Eastern countries. The year 1980 can be considered as a turning point in that regard as the both countries went through gigantic transformation domestically. While an Islamic Republic based on Shia doctrines has replaced Shah regime in Iran; post-coup regime in Turkey has embraced neo-liberal policies. This massive transformation in Iran and Turkey has also altered their foreign policy perspectives towards the neighboring Middle East and especially towards the Arabian Gulf States. Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran concentrated its efforts for winning hearts and minds of the people in the region to legitimize the new regime and

to export its revolution to other countries. It is also important to note that geopolitics of soft power through different ideological and religious groups also involves in elaborating Iran's policies towards the region. Moreover, the rise of neo-conservative powers in both countries (Islamist Justice and Development Party in Turkey and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's Presidency in Iran) and regional developments (namely so called Arab Spring) rendered Middle East an arena for their soft power competition. This competition has had its repercussions in the Gulf region as well.

This study examines a comparison of Turkey's and Iran's soft power policies and impacts in the six Gulf Cooperation Council member states (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Oman) since the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and military coup in Turkey through means of analytical, normative, ideological and empirical measures. The main concepts and theories of soft power have been applied and articulated to address the non-coercive means of Turkey and Iran towards the Gulf region.

The thesis also studies the real reflections of soft power influence of both states in the six aforementioned countries through public opinion dimension. Due to the gap in the literature, this thesis offers an analysis of the available public opinion surveys towards Iran and Turkey; and driving factors of such attitudes to draw a comprehensive and broader picture of soft power policies to two non-Arab regional states.

Literature Review

Introduction

There have been many studies conducted on states and institutions' soft power assets and policies. Although the literature covers wide variety of such countries and institutions (i.e. see Nye, 2004; Sun, 2008 and; Goldsmith and & Horiuchi, 2012 on US soft power; see Kirisci, 2005; Michalski, 2005; and Haine, 2004 on soft power of the EU and see Kurlantzick, 2007; Huang and Ding, 2006; Gill and Huang, 2006; and Sun, 2008 on China's soft power), this review focuses on the studies written on Turkey's and Iran's soft power given its relevance to this thesis.

In the first place, the results of a search on Turkey's soft power show that scholars write the most of the literature reflecting mainly (1) domestic developments and foreign policy changes facilitating Turkish soft power; (2) special reference to Turkish soft power in the Middle East and (3) challenges to Turkey's soft power. It is also important to note that most of the literature on Turkish soft power has focused the period since 2003 and there is almost no literature analyzing Turkey's soft power in the Gulf region specifically.

When the literature on Iran's soft power considered, there is even more limited number of sources written in English when compared to Turkey. Therefore, it is challenging to categorize the literature according to sub-areas. Rather, it seems more useful to go through the literature on Iran's soft power one by one to frame the issue in a more comprehensive way.

Literature on Turkey's Soft Power

There is a limited yet growing literature on Turkey's soft power in recent years. As the concept of Soft Power is a relatively new phenomenon starting in 1990s in

international relations, so the academic studies on Turkey's soft power has been developed very recently. Therefore, it is important to note that the most of the articles on the subject have been written since moderate conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002 in Turkey.

Throughout the literature there are three main dimensions coming to forefront on Turkey's soft power: a) Domestic and foreign policy developments contributing Turkey's soft Power, b) Turkish soft power in the Middle East context, and finally c) The challenges and limitations of Turkey's soft power.

Domestic and Foreign Policy Adjustments Facilitating Turkey's Soft Power

Since 2003, Turkey has gone through tremendous transformation both in terms of its domestic politics and international stance, which eventually has enhanced its soft power assets. Some literature on Turkish soft power, therefore, highlights the relation between rapid transformation in Turkey and the increase in its soft power. Tarık Oğuzlu (2007) argues that several domestic factors such as democratic reforms as a result of the revival in Turkey's European Union membership bid in 2004, the change in civilian-military relations, and desecuritisation of matters have contributed to Turkish soft power significantly. Hakan Altınay (2008) also addresses economic dimension that Turkey achieved remarkable change since 1980 departing from statist economic policies towards market economy, which has enhanced Turkish soft power as it also led the emergence of a vibrant middle class and civil society which "randomly" engages with the rest of the world (p. 59).

Apart from rapid economic development and domestic stability Istar Gozaydin (2010) elaborates on a different angle of soft power. Gozaydin (2010) elaborates on the role of religion in international relations of Turkey saying that Turkey's relations

with its immediate and extended neighborhood (Middle East, Balkans, Europe, Caucasus, and Central Asia) are to a certain extent shaped around same-faith relations, adding “religion as soft power gets used by some faith-based transnational actors affiliated with Turkey” (p.10).

On the foreign policy orientation and Turkey’s soft power, there is almost a consensus among scholars saying that revitalizing the relations with EU and pursuing an active yet all-inclusive foreign policy during the early years of AKP government have increased Turkey’s credibility and attractiveness in the eyes of other countries (Altunışık, 2008; Oğuzlu; 2007; Gözaydın, 2010). On the latter aspect, Altunışık (2008) elaborates that Turkey has actively engaged in the resolution of problems in the Middle East as a third party and Ankara’s main asset on playing this role has been “its position of having good relations with the parties to different conflicts” (p.50), which increased its legitimacy (therefore its soft power) in the eyes of many regional and international actors.

Same arguments also underlined by Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu as he explains the dynamics and factors contributing Turkey’s attractiveness in a piece written in 2007 during his term as Chief Advisor to Prime Minister. On such dynamics and factors he refers to the Turkey’s unique geographical location, historical development and cultural diversity. He adds: “Turkey’s diverse regional composition lends it the capability of maneuvering in several regions simultaneously; in this sense, it controls an area of influence in its immediate environs” (Davutoglu, 2007, p. 78). In this given combination of assets, he addresses that 1) active role in the international arena 2) multidimensional external relations based on rhythmic diplomacy, 3) “zero problems with neighbors” approach in its foreign policy together

with 4) developing relations with states in the Middle East and beyond; and 5) redress the balance between security and liberties at home have contributed Turkey's image positively in the international arena. According to him, in addition to the aforementioned achievements in the domestic and foreign relations realms, activities of civil society and business organizations also contribute Turkey's attractiveness. In the final analysis he asserts "It is important to recognize the change in Turkey's image brought about by its intense diplomatic activities from 2002 to 2007. Turkey now enjoys an image as a responsible state, which provides order and security to the region, one that prioritizes democracy and liberties, while dealing competently with security problems at home" (Davutoglu, 2007, p.83).

Turkish soft power in the Middle East context

The arena where Turkey's soft power becomes more profound is the Middle East and the most of the literature focuses on or at least mentions this aspect. The domestic and foreign policy developments in Turkey since last ten or fifteen years have significant repercussions on Turkish soft power in the Middle Eastern countries from immediate neighbors to extended geography. In her article, Altınisik (2008) analyses Turkey's significant assets of soft power in the Middle East in terms of two factors. First, the domestic reforms at home and; second increasing involvement in the regional conflicts as a trusted third party have enhanced Turkey's credibility and attractiveness in the Middle East.

On the other hand, Ibrahim Kalın (2011), Deputy Undersecretary in Turkish Prime Ministry and academics, highlights that Turkey's soft power assets in the Middle East goes beyond strong economic performance, democratic reforms and active foreign policy towards the region. In fact, he asserts, "It is grounded in some

larger concepts of cultural affinity, historical companionship, geographical proximity, social imagery and how all of these create a sense of belonging. Combine this with a Turkey that is democratic, strong and prosperous, and you have a very different picture of regional dynamics. The old Turkish images of “Arab traitors” and the Arab perception of “Ottoman imperialists” speak very little to the realities of the Arab and Turkish societies today” (p.90).

The some literature on Turkish soft power in the Middle East context also focuses on Turco-Persian rivalry in the form of soft power projection. With Turkey’s rising popularity among Arabs in the region, some parts of the so-called Iranian sphere of influence have fallen into Turkish soft power area. On the issue Turkish journalist and an expert on Middle East Cengiz Candar argued in 2009 that in was interesting to witness a rapid increase in Turkish influence in neighboring Syria and Iraq, which also have special relations with Iran. Candar proclaims:

“Turkey has the potential to dislocate the Iranian sphere of influence through a “soft power” approach, without antagonizing and polarizing its eastern neighbor. Such a huge mission cannot be accomplished by having an exclusive relationship with Israel to the detriment of the remaining regional actors. It can only be performed with a stature of a regional power filling the vacuum left by the demise of Sunni actors like Egypt and Saudi Arabia and, thus, presenting a counterweight to Iran in the region” (2009, p.9).

Despite their different tactics, both Turkey and Iran have put significant emphasis on soft power; and during the Arab Spring the two regional non-Arab countries in the Middle East have competed for winning hearts and minds of the Arab streets to enhance their position in a region in transition. A more recent article by Reza Marashi

and Trita Parsi (2011) reiterates that Turkey has emerged as a rival for Iran in terms of soft power projection in the Middle East during Arab Spring that challenged Iranian position as a soft power projector in a region where traditional Saudi-US-Israeli vertex has been in decline (p.105-106).

Throughout the literature, however, the scholars have focused on Turkish soft power in general and in the Middle East region in particular from the supply side. To be clearer, most of the articles and papers explain Turkey's soft power assets such as domestic transformation and foreign policy steps. Yet, the actual influence of Turkey's soft power on the ground has been somehow neglected. As explained in the theoretical framework chapter of this thesis, one of the most efficient methods to track soft power is analyzing public opinion surveys and there is extremely limited amount of sources on that regard. In fact, the study by Sabri Ciftci and Gunes Murat Tezcur (2015) presents the first systematic analysis of the public opinion dimension of soft power competition in the contemporary Middle East between Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iran using Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project (GAP) surveys in 2012 and including four Arab countries of Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan, and Lebanon. Based on their findings, anti-Americanism, religious identity and to some extent favorable views towards democracy are the main determinants of soft power projections in the region (Ciftci and Tezcur, 2014).

Challenges and Limitations to Turkey's soft power

Soft power is based on the images and perceptions and one state's soft power capacity is quite dynamic and changeable. It is less tangible and more difficult to control and given these characteristics of Soft power, Turkey's image in the eyes of

international public is not immune from any challenges and limitations. In fact, some literature addresses this factor on Turkey's soft power.

In that regard, it appears that Turkey's soft power is highly dependent on its ability to keep its domestic momentum in domestic reforms and economic performance; and keep its foreign policy objectives that has brought significant prestige on track. On the issue, Davutoğlu (2007) highlights that Turkey needs to deepen and enrich its democracy at home and enhance its position in the neighboring region to preserve its position as influential actor in the region. Similarly, Beng (2008) and Altunışık (2010) reiterate solid domestic reforms and stability together with keeping EU bid on track are necessary elements to keep its soft power intact.

Literature on Iran's Soft Power

The articles written on Iran's soft power are also recent ones, yet the emphasis on the role of soft power in Iran's foreign policy goes back to the Islamic Revolution in 1979. On the issue, Iranian scholars Hive Feizi and Babak Talebi (2012) argues that for Iran wielding soft power instruments in the region is an instinct and indispensable element of the current regime which supports a vision for Islamic awakening in the neighboring countries and beyond to ensure its legitimacy and survival. Therefore, they argue:

“With such strong disincentives for failure, the Iranian state's ability to influence should not be underestimated or unexpected. Though there is little doubt that the Middle East will continue to see change, unless that change includes the Nezam ruling Iran, one thing likely to stay the same – Iran's persistent and practiced effort to influence the region” (p.52).

A book titled *Saudi Arabia and Iran: soft power rivalry in the Middle East* by Simon Mabon (2013) examines the rivalry between Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shia Iran on the leadership claims over the Muslim world and in the Middle East since 1979. In his book Mabon (2013) provides insights for the geopolitical and ideological competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia from a soft power perspective based on diplomacy and support for certain identity groups in the region.

Although Iran has articulated soft power measures since the Islamic Revolution to sustain its legitimacy in the eyes of others and, neighboring Iraq after the US invasion of 2003 has become an arena where Iran has used its soft influence through various means. On Iran's soft power assets in Iraq, Kemp (2005) argues that Iran has invested in soft power tools in post-Saddam Iraq via using family networks, special historical and religious ties. Michael Eisenstadt, Michael Knights, and Ahmed Ali (2010) also highlight Iran's soft power strategies in post-Saddam Iraq such as Tehran's efforts on enhancing relations between Iran and Iraq on economy, trade, religious tourism, infrastructure, charity, health, together with attempting to consolidate solidarity among Shiites favoring the national interests of Tehran. Iran's geographical location and other proximities with Iraq can be highlighted as important factors facilitating Tehran's soft power operations. On the issue Eisenstadt (2011) notes

“Iran enjoys many natural advantages in Iraq. It has a long porous border. It has longstanding ties with key Shiite and Kurdish politicians, parties, and paramilitary groups. It has religious and cultural affinities. And it maintains extensive trade and economic relations” (p.2).

Yet, it is also important to note that although Iran has engaged actively in Iraqi politics since 2003 through soft power, Tehran has failed to win the hearts and minds

of Iraqi people. Even some Shias perceived as the activities of Iran as propaganda and attempts to undermine Iraq's national unity (Eisenstadt, Knights and Ali, 2011).

A study also highlights that especially since 2007, Iran has developed a systematic approach consisting both soft and hard power elements (smart power) in Levant, Egypt, Iraq and Afghanistan to achieve multiple objectives in various areas (Kagan et al., 2012). During the so-called Arab Spring in 2011, soft power policies have gained even more importance for Iran to extend or enhance its influence in the region during the winds of change. On the issue, Parsi and Marashi (2011) argue that Iran was quick to deploy soft power measures based on being a vocal opponent of the US, Israel and Saudi Arabia; and with providing support for various political factions in the region together with developing a narrative portraying popular uprisings in the Arab world as Iran inspired.

Yet, it is again important to note that Iran's soft power is not free from any challenges and limitations. In fact, as proclaimed by Mahjoob Zweiri (2012), Iran's favorable image in the eyes of Arab Public has been on decline since 2009 due to domestic developments in Iran and during the Arab Spring Iranian model has lost its attraction especially in the wake of Tehran's position in Syria.

Iran's soft power is limited on the other fronts including religious and ideological factors as well. In that regard, Ali Rahigh-Aghsan and Peter Viggo Jakobsen (2010) argue that although Iran has potential to exert its influence through religion and ideology and presenting itself as the role model for the Muslim world, the soft power assets of Iran are quite exaggerated due to; a) Shias constitutes on 10-15 percent of all Muslims, b) not all Shia follow the Guardianship of Islamic Jurist

(Vilayat-e Faqih), c) Iran is not alone in soft power competition in the region. They assert:

“Although Iran is popular in the Arab street due to its militant opposition to the US and support for groups that fight Israel, it is not the only game in town and there are clear limitations to its influence. Iran’s cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and religious composition stands in contrast to the majority Sunni Muslims both in the Middle East and in Southwest Asia” (Rahigh-Aghsan and Jacobsen, 2010, p.564).

Last but not least, increased sectarianism in the Middle East since 2003 also does not serve into the hands of Iran when it comes to Tehran’s attractiveness in Islamic leadership. Kagan et al. (2012), therefore underlines:

“As that sectarian conflict spreads, Iran will have more difficulty presenting itself as a pan-Islamist regional leader—and Saudi Arabia, and possibly Turkey, likely will emerge as the obvious and natural Sunni Arab resistance to the Persian Shi’a” (p. 6).

As a survey on soft power of Turkey and Iran in the literature shows each state have its own sources and objectives for wielding soft power as a part of their foreign policy. While Iran has been deploying soft power measures since 1979 Islamic Revolution to sustain its internal and external legitimacy and as a duty to become a leader in a wider region, Turkey has emerged as significant soft power actor since 2002 due to rapid economic and political developments domestically and active foreign policy in the international arena. Also some literature shows

that Turkey and Iran are in competition for articulating soft power measures, especially in the Middle East.

Despite growing and valuable literature on Turkey and Iran's soft power, there are certain shortcomings that have to be addressed through further research. In the first place, there is an asymmetry in soft power literature favoring Turkey over Iran. There are more English written articles on Turkish soft power than Iran. In the second place, most of the literature addresses the state perspective and related soft power instruments of both states. Apart from the studies of Zweiri (2012) and Ciftci and Tezcur, (2015), public opinion surveys which are the key in measuring soft power have not been addressed comprehensively.

Lastly, the soft power projections of Turkey and Iran in the Arab Gulf region have not been addressed exclusively in the literature. However, the Arab Gulf region holds a significant importance in the Middle East politics, especially since Arab Spring. Within this context, given the geopolitical characteristics of the region, the Gulf has fallen into Iran's interest to exert its soft power to maximize Tehran's position. Equally important, due to Turkey's extended neighborhood policies, Arab Gulf region possesses opportunities for Ankara to form political alliances and economic opportunities through soft power measures. Therefore, there is a gap in the literature that needs to be addressed.

Research Objectives, Research Questions and Hypothesis

Having identified a scarcity of sources on the topic of this thesis in the literature review, the first aim of this thesis is to fill the gap in the literature by analyzing

alternative primary and secondary sources (as explained in the Methodology section), and by focusing on public opinion dimension of Turkey and Iran's images and the effectiveness of soft power policies in the Gulf region, particularly following the emergence of Turkey as a soft power player in the international politics since 2002.

Thus, in order to explore the different soft power strategies of Turkey and Iran towards the Gulf, and in order to discuss public opinion dimension of soft power and the reasons behind such attitudes towards Turkey and Iran this study aims to answer the following research questions:

- What soft power sources Turkey and Iran have over the GCC?
- What are the determinants (motives and motivations) of soft power policies of Turkey and Iran towards the GCC?
- How Turkey and Iran exert their soft power on people in the GCC?
- What are the perceptions about Iran and Turkey in the Gulf? And why such attitudes have been developed?

The initial assumption of this thesis is that there is a sequence in terms of soft power influence of Iran and Turkey in the Gulf: Iran's soft power in the Gulf has increased after the Islamic revolution continuing its momentum very recently. Yet, the rise in Turkey's soft power influence coincided with a period where Iran's soft power was in decline in the region especially in the Arab Spring Era. Due to:

1. Iran's soft power measures started to reach the limited audiences in the Gulf due to perceived inconsistencies in its domestic policies and foreign policy in the region.
2. Turkey has been embracing less confrontational soft power tools based on popular culture, shared religion and customs to widen its area of influence in that particular part of the world. Political leadership and economic performance of Turkey also attracts people from the Gulf.
3. Reinforced sectarianism in the Gulf and increasing geopolitical rivalry between Iran and some GCC states has undermined Iran's influence in the GCC region.

Research Methodology

The study focuses on analyzing soft power policies of Turkey and Iran towards the GCC, its reasons, implications and results. This thesis, therefore, uses qualitative research methods.

The epistemological base of this qualitative research lies in the "Pragmatist" approach. Pragmatism is a deconstructive paradigm, which "sidesteps the contentious issues of truth and reality" (Feilzer 2010, p. 8), and "focuses instead on 'what works' as the truth regarding the research questions under investigation" (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2003, p. 713). In qualitative research, there are four basic types of data collection procedures: (1) observation; (2) interviews; (3) documents; (4) visual images (Creswell, 1994). As part of its qualitative analysis, this thesis uses secondary documents related to soft power of Turkey of Iran in the GCC region, along with personal interviews.

Firstly, this study will examine a wide range of sources, covering the foundations of Turkey-GCC and Iran- GCC relations since the beginning of 1980s, the soft power policies of both states towards the Gulf and the reflections of such policies on the public sphere. These sources will include (but not be limited to): books; academic articles; official speeches; legal texts; journal or magazine articles; local newspapers (i.e Dohanews, The Peninsula and Gulf Times); and reports and documents from think tanks on the subject.

Secondly, personal interviews were used for the collection of qualitative data. This is due to the number of aspects missing from the current literature and other sources including public opinion surveys on soft power policies of Turkey and Iran towards the Gulf especially during 1980s and 1990s.

Thirdly, this thesis analyzes public opinion surveys conducted by several institutions (i.e., Zogby Analytics, Aljazeera Research Center, Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation – TESEV) in order to understand the impact of soft power policies of Turkey and Iran towards the region over the aforementioned period of time. In that regard, public opinion polls are useful tools to measure soft power, its determinants and effectiveness.

Structure of the Study

This thesis consists of six chapters. Following the introduction, which also includes literature review, Chapter Two presents the theoretical framework of this work. After a brief discussion of state power, the concept of soft power developed by Professor Joseph Nye and other scholar has been presented.

Chapter three focuses on the evolution and overview of Turkey-GCC and Iran-GCC relations since 1980 onwards to set the background for soft power policies of this two non-Arab states towards the region. Following a brief history of relations with the region, Chapter Four explores the soft power assets of both states and the rationale (motives and motivations) behind exerting soft power towards the GCC. Personal interviews and other secondary sources are utilized in this chapter to elaborate on it.

Chapter five aims measuring the soft power from a public opinion' perspective and its impact on policymaking level through analyzing opinion polls, conducted by various research institutions. Findings of the interviews, public opinion surveys and discussion are also presented in this chapter. Chapter Six summarizes the main findings of this thesis along with limitations and the prospects for further research.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework: State Power, Soft Power and Perceptions in International Relations:

Introduction

Given the increasing importance of soft power as a distinct field of study in International Relations (IR), this chapter focuses on the notion of soft power in the international level to understand and analyze state behaviors. To frame what is soft power properly, the chapter starts with the definition of state power in IR, focusing primarily on hard power from the vantage point of School of Realism. This chapter tries to present what is soft power, what are the sources of soft power and how it can be measured based on the works of Professor Joseph Nye and other scholars that he developed the idea in the last few decades. This chapter also focuses on the concepts of images and perceptions in IR literature as mean for measuring soft power of one state over the other in international level.

State Power in International Relations (IR)

In its most general definition power may refer to “ the ability to influence the behavior of others to get the outcomes one wants “ (Nye, 2004, p.2) and the concept of power is one of the central themes in the international relations literature. With this regard, although various approaches in IR theory have certainly developed arguments on the nature of power, the realist school of thought has been predominant in studying state power.

For a considerable time period, realism has been associated with state as the unit of analysis and power as the central for state behavior. The roots of the realist

theory in IR traces back to Ancient Greece as Thucydides' work of "The Peloponnesian War" marks the first account for realism. Other great thinkers such as Machiavelli and Hobbes followed this movement of thought. In its classical terms, realism defines state behavior as a desire for power. Leading thinker of classical realism Morgenthau (1948) underlines that struggle for power or conflict is essential in international level due to two reasons: first, selfish human nature in a scarcity of resources; and the second, men's desire for dominating other men or in other words *animus dominandi*. Therefore, according to the classical realism power maximization is universal and it stems from human nature (Morgenthau, 1972).

Yet, over the years with the revision in realist approach, neo-realism (or structural realism) has moved to a systemic theory and defines international system as an anarchical environment where sovereign states operate in the absence of a higher international authority. As a direct outcome of anarchy, states resort to power to ensure their security and survival. In his grand theory Kenneth Waltz explains role of power as such;

"Neorealist, rather than viewing power as an end itself, see power as a possible useful means, with states running risks if they have either too little or too much of it. Weakness may invite attack that greater strength would dissuade an adversary from launching. Excessive strength may prompt other states to increase their arms and pool their efforts. Power is a possibly useful means and sensible statesmen try to have an appropriate amount of it. In crucial situations, the ultimate concern of states is not for power but for security. This is an important revision of realist theory" (Waltz, 2008, p. 79).

In essence, whether it is a universal phenomenon or for ensuring state security, power is *sine qua non* of international relations from realist perspective. The most associated type of power to realism encompasses the elements of national power approach that usually refers to so-called hard power-the military capabilities and economic power- to define the mechanism for self-help and state survival in this anarchical environment as the *ultimo ratio* of power is war (Carr, 1964). Similarly, Robert Gilpin (1981) defines power as “military, economic and technological capabilities of states” (p.13).

As Nye (2011) clearly states:

“In traditional realist views of international affairs, war was the ultimate game in which the cards of international politics were played. When all the cards were on the table, estimates of relative power is proven and disproven” (p.9).

It would be fallacious to claim that realists do not take other sources of power into consideration when analyzing state power. For example, Morgenthau points non-material sources of power such as nation’s diplomacy and Carr (1964) highlights the role of propaganda or shaping opinions of others as non-material sources of power. On the other hand, there are certain indications that realists favors to attribute more tangible aspects such as military capabilities, economic strength, territory and population to state power In his article ‘Realist Conceptions of Power’ Brian C. Schmidt (2007) concludes that realists tend to define power as ‘possession of material resources’ and ‘military might’. On the latter point, he says, “while not taking them to be synonymous, realists do regard war-fighting ability to be essence of state power” (Schmidt, 2007, p.61).

Realists take a lot of stick by liberals in their emphasis on hard power measures as the superior form over other forms of power (soft power in particular) to define state power in the international arena. Professor Joseph Nye (2007) however, clears “I am critical only of structural realists who succumb to the ‘concrete fallacy’ and also ignore other dimensions of international politics such as the roles of non-state actors like corporations, institutions, non-governmental organizations and transnational terrorist networks, many of which have soft power of their own” (p.171).

The Concept of Soft Power: Its Definition, Sources and Measurement

In 1990, Nye introduced the notion of ‘soft power’ as a different type of power in international relations amid declining US power in the post-Cold War era and increasing limitations on traditional concept for military balance of power. He says that “a state may achieve the outcomes it prefers in world politics because other states want to follow it or have agreed to a situation in world politics as to get others to change in particular cases” which refers “co-optive or soft power in contrast with the hard and command power of *ordering* others to do what it want” (Nye, 1990b, p.166). With that regard, Nye classifies three types of power namely military, economic and soft in the international level where state behaviors ranges from coercion to inducement for the first two types of power and attraction to agenda setting for the last one (2004, p.30). To put it differently, while hard power rests upon the ‘carrots’ and ‘sticks’ as means, soft power relies on ability to shape others preferences through co-optive (non-violence and non-coercive) measures.

The notion of soft power has come to forefront with the changing nature of power. The information revolution enabled free and cheap flow of information across

the globe and increased interdependence via enhancing the strength of non-state actors. In such an environment states are forced to resort less on material forces but to wield their soft power to be able to obtain their objective as long as they remained credible in the eyes of global public (Keoheane and Nye, 1998).

By definition soft power differs from hard power in certain ways. It operates through agenda setting, persuasion and attraction, not through coercion, use of force or paying to change others preferences. As one moves in the spectrum from coercion to co-optation, or from hard power to soft power, the currency of power also differs. Regarding the resources enabling states to exert soft power, Nye (2004) argues that there are three main areas that one should consider: culture, political values and foreign policies. One should be careful, however, that only in certain conditions and places those resources could be converted into soft power on the ground. To be more clear, culture can be a source in certain places where it is attractive to others; one state's political values generates soft power over other states if they persist domestically and internationally; and foreign policy can be a tool of soft power as long as those policies appears legitimate in the eyes of others. Therefore, contend and context extremely matters when it comes to using soft power. The last point will be elaborated in this chapter when mentioning about the limitations of soft power (or any power) in the international politics.

When compared to hard power, soft power sources appears less clear, less tangible and more difficult to control. For states it poses certain challenges as well as advantages in the global information age. For instance, states do not enjoy monopoly over controlling soft power resources and agents as increasing number of private or non-state actors such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), business groups,

civil society actors and even terrorist groups enjoys large soft power. Similarly, as oppose to hard power, states should be patient to harvest the fruits of soft power strategies. In sum, as Nye perfectly describes, “soft power may appear less risky than economic or military power, but it is often hard to use, easy to lose and costly to reestablish” (2011, p.83).

Given the characteristics of soft power above, the measurement of this power also requires attention. It is less certain and difficult to draw conclusions whether it works or not than hard power. In hard power, usually the military power can be obvious in winning or losing a war; or the effect of economic power reflects itself in numbers for sanctions and payments. In the case of soft power “public opinion polls” and “careful content analysis” appears as useful tools to make ‘first estimations’ about one state’s soft power over another (Nye, 2011, p. 94-95). Here, public opinion is framed as an important factor affecting the decision making in the top level of the states. If one take soft power as the ‘ability to attract’ and if ‘attraction often leads to acquiescence’, creating a positive public opinion via attraction is a key dimension for wielding soft power.

Challenges and Limitations of Soft Power

Soft power as an academic approach in the world politics has taken attention from various scholars in the recent years. With that regards, different opinions over the nature, definition, sources and effectiveness of soft power are raised widely in the relevant literature.

On Nye’s soft power, Ying Fan (2008) claims that the concept of soft power is ‘loose’ and ‘confusing’ with its definition, sources and limitations. Ying argues that

Nye (2004) does not offer a simple and clear definition of soft power; rather he uses different words to define it, which leads to confusion. He also claims that ‘the dark side of soft power is largely ignored’ as enormous soft power of a state can create contrary situations (Ying, 2007, p.153). On the latter point, Joseph Joffe (2006) notes in an article appeared in New York Times that the “great soft power does not bend hearts; it twists minds in resentment and rage”.

Later, Nye indirectly points out that if narratives, information and soft power tools appear to be manipulative and perceived as propaganda they lose their ‘persuasive power’ adding “information that appears to be propaganda may not only be scorned, but it may also turn out to be counterproductive if it undermines a country’s reputation for credibility” (2011, p.104).

Yet, it appears that Ying was slightly late in saying “one can envisage a value ideology emerging from the successful rise of hard power institution that proposes an alluring prospect for emulation, which forms the foundation for soft power” (2008, p.154). In his article titled “Notes on a soft power research agenda” Nye (2007) admits that hard power tools of economic and military power can also create soft power behavior. He says, “a successful economy is an important source of attraction” (p. 165) and “some people are generally attracted to strength” (p. 167).

Another critique of Nye’s soft power strikes at the heart of the assumption that soft power bases on non-coercive means. Janice Bially Mattern (2007) notes that attraction is a socially constructed ‘reality’ through ‘communicative exchange’ of verbal fight, which refers to representational force that “wields a blunt, non-negotiable threat intended to radically limit the options of the subjects at whom it is directed” (p.110) In that sense, she argues that the ‘attractiveness’ as the core of soft

power is a product of representational force, and it is coercive by nature. Therefore, she claims, “soft power is not so soft” (Mattern, 2007, p.106).

Building upon Mattern’s argument, Bilgin and Eliş (2008) argues that Nye’s soft power takes stockpile of soft power for granted and elaborates on how that sources can be utilized, and remains silent on through which processes some values of culture and policies become ‘attractive’. They say:

“Perhaps more importantly, Nye remains silent on the historical process through which particular values have come to be considered as universal and right and others have been rendered parochial and less right. An analysis of the attractiveness of U.S. culture and values that is historically and sociologically attentive to their production would inquire into soft power in terms of U.S. ‘hegemony and domination’. Failing that, stating a preference for soft power while relying on essentialist notions of culture and identity communicates a benign picture of U.S. hegemony and does not allow the capturing of ‘not-so-soft’ aspects of soft power” (Bilgin and Eliş, 2008, p.12).

Apart from the concerns over the vagueness, coerciveness and essentialist nature of soft power, Nye himself lists certain limitations and challenges. According to Nye (2007):

1. Soft power resources are diffused among different agencies and departments
2. It takes long time to bear the fruits of soft power and more patient is needed.
3. Soft power investments are not under the monopoly of governments. “While governments control policy, culture and values are embedded in civil societies” (p.171).

4. Soft power rests upon credibility and governments should avoid to be perceived as manipulative and when “information is perceived as propaganda and indoctrination, credibility is destroyed” (p.171).
5. Soft power is not a magical power to have absolute ‘leverage’ in certain cases (i.e. dispute over North Korea’s nuclear weapons)

In addition to the aforementioned limitations, wielding soft power may face cultural obstacles as well. To put it clearly, as the effectiveness of soft power depends on how it is perceived by others, same sources of soft power of a particular state can reach the audience differently through the filters of cultures. Therefore, states cannot fully control the ‘perceptions’ in different cultural settings (Nye, 2011).

In fact, Nye also introduced in 2006 the concept of smart power given the shortcomings of wielding only soft power or hard power for the US to success in global politics. According to By Richard L. Armitage and Joseph S. Nye, Jr. (2007):

“Smart power is neither hard nor soft—it is the skillful combination of both. Smart power means developing an integrated strategy, resource base, and tool kit to achieve American objectives, drawing on both hard and soft power. It is an approach that underscores the necessity of a strong military, but also invests heavily in alliances, partnerships, and institutions at all levels to expand American influence and establish the legitimacy of American action” (p.7).

Similarly, underlining the inadequacies of soft power in terms of its poor argument, institutional weaknesses and politically naïve nature; and deficiencies in analyzing foreign policy from a dichotomy of hard versus soft power approach, Ernest J. Wilson (2008) advocates the notion of smart power as a national security imperative. According to Wilson (2008) smart power is “ the capacity of an actor to combine elements of hard power and soft power in ways that are mutually reinforcing such that the actor’s purposes are advanced effectively and efficiently” (115).

The importance of smart power in international relations is undeniable and there is a growing academic interest in the study to understand its definition, role and practicability. Although, we do not disregard the importance of smart power in analyzing the foreign policies of Turkey and Iran towards the GCC region, this thesis limits its scope for the understanding of soft power policies of the two states towards the Gulf region.

Role of Perceptions in Soft Power

Soft power is about persuading others to get one state wants. Yet, these definition only addressees one side, namely the sources of soft power. On the other side, however, how publics perceive a given state lays the foundation for soft power instruments and efforts to become real power on the ground. In that Nye (2007) notes:

“The production of soft power by attraction depends upon both the qualities of the agent and how they are perceived by the target. What produces attraction for one target may produce revulsion for another” (p.92).

Given the significant importance of perceptions international relations in general, articulation of soft power in particular, this thesis tries briefly to present the

works on perceptions within the field of political psychology. Thus, in order to answer how actually soft power works, Vuving (2009) addresses three ‘generic power currencies’ of beauty, brilliance and benignity. The all three attributions of a state, therefore, very closely linked with the perception of others about the former and necessary for creating a positive outlook for soft power of the former over the latter.

Benignity is one of most crucial aspects to generate soft power over other states. According to Vuving this concept has a range of meanings from ‘no harm to others’ to ‘actively protecting and supporting others’ and it operates through producing ‘gratitude and sympathy’ (2009, p. 9). He further elaborates:

“Benignity works like a paradox: if you try to assert yourself, you will be perceived as aggressive and people will resist you. But if you put your ego in the background and try to be nice, people will be more likely to get along with you”(Vuving, 2009, p.9).

Similarly, brilliance, which associates with strength and advancement in hard and soft power sources, can articulate soft power through attraction, creating myths of invincibility and inevitability (Vuving, 2009, p.10). Beauty on the other hand in international relations refers exchange of sympathy between actors stemming from shared ideals, values, causes, or visions. To put it more clearly:

“Beauty can come from a country that acts as the agent of a value, a country that is perceived as the avatar of an ideal, a country that champions a cause, or a country that articulates a vision compellingly” (Vuving, 2009, p.11).

Another important element to understand working of soft power is perceptions of public. As it is mentioned previously in this chapter, public opinion polls are

important indicator for measuring the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of soft power. As opinion of masses within a state poses certain influence over the decision-making in both domestic and foreign policy level, literature on political psychology offers helpful mechanisms for scholars to understand the relation between soft power, perception, public opinions and decision making process. In her brief introductory article to political psychology, Erişen (2012) notes:

“Public opinion research does not only describe the state of the mass public’s attitudes, but also investigates its determinants and consequences. Public opinion research provides an overall understanding of how political attitudes are formed and changed. In line with the process-minded political psychology research, public opinion analysis aims to disentangle the complex individual influences that ultimately form one’s political attitudes and judgments.” (p.22).

In sum understanding the role of perception through public opinion research is crucial for creating preferred perceptions that mentioned above. In a successful conversion of soft power, the ultimate important step is to make target to believe in those created preferred perceptions and to respond it positively (Nye, 2011).

The Relevance of Theoretical Framework to the Thesis

Soft power has become increasingly important tool for states to shape their foreign policies vis-à-vis other states. Several numbers of factors have led states to consider investing in soft power. Advancement in telecommunication technologies, easy access to information, a decline in inter-state conflicts, increasing costs (for materially and ideologically) for using military power, rise of non-state actors and

complexity of interdependence among states in a globalized world can be considered for such factors to push states to take soft power seriously.

With the aforementioned factors, classical state-centric, hard power based approaches for analyzing state power is much more complex and difficult now when it is compared to a century ago. Yet, it should be noted that it is equally unrealistic to dismiss the importance of military and economic power (hard power) in world politics. Today, states still significantly invest their armies, weapons and defense capabilities.

Given the increasing importance of soft power as an academic area and reality in world politics, regional middle-power states also resort non-coercive means to shape their neighborhood policies. With that regard, applying soft power perspective to Turkey and Iran's policies towards the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries is insightful to understand the framework of the relations.

Firstly, the soft power approach developed by Nye and other scholars opens a discussion for the capabilities of middle powers beyond their mere economic and military competences in the multipolar international and regional politics. Although Nye's concept of soft power has been developed around the argument of the US declining influence in the world and tries to offer solutions for this fact, Nye (2004) himself notes "soft power is available to all countries, and many invest in ways to use soft-power resources to 'punch above their weight' in international politics" (p.89). Given their limited overall power resources vis-à-vis great powers, the soft power policies enable middle size states, such as Turkey and Iran, to create greater impact and may catalyze the process of achieving their national interests under certain

conditions. However, it should be noted that the implications of soft power policies are not universal and depends on states' size. As noted by Yul Sohn (2012) soft power is not useful in attaining short-term interests and middle powers should carefully explore how to utilize their resources to attract others for the sake of their long-term national interests. Also it would be fair to argue that the regional and local dynamics plays a more decisive role in assessing the soft power capabilities of middle/regional powers than super powers. As in the case of Turkish and Iranian soft power in the GCC countries depends on balance of power politics, domestic determinants of the targeted countries; and historical and geopolitical rivalries among states in the region.

Secondly, when overview of the relations considered direct military conflict between Turkey- the GCC and Iran-the GCC traces back to long time ago. The latest direct conflict between Turks and Arab Gulf states was during the World War I with the so-called Arab Revolt. Similarly, Iran has not initiated any war towards the GCC countries except dispute over three islands in the Gulf between Iran and the United Arab Emirates in 1971 and Iranian support of Sultan of Oman to suppress socialist Dhofar rebellion¹. On the contrary, since the beginning of 1980, soft power policies such as images, rhetoric, values, and economic cooperation, and in some cases goodwill of Turkey and Iran have targeted their audiences in the GCC.

Soft power approach also serves the interests of both states in their foreign policies towards the GCC. Turkey, emerging as a trading state with remarkable economic growth in the last decade, eyes on investment, tourist, and energy flow from

¹ Dhofar rebellion took place between 1962 and 1976, launched by Marxist-Leninist guerilla against the Sultan of Oman. In 1973, Iranian Special Forces arrived to Oman to aid suppressing the rebellion (Mc Keown, 1981).

the oil-rich Gulf. To this end, Turkey tries to portray itself as an attractive and appreciated country in the eyes of Gulf people. Fast growing economy, Turkish popular culture, the synthesis Sunni Islamic culture with modernity and charismatic leadership of ruling moderate Islamic Justice and Development Party (AKP) has attracted many people from the Gulf region. The complementarity of Turkish and GCC economies is a driving motivation for Turkey to pursue soft power policies rather than hard power towards the Arab Gulf region. In a different context, Iran also wields its soft power tools of persuasion, agenda setting and attraction in the immediate aftermath of Islamic Revolution. Under the charismatic leadership Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran has tried to articulate the legitimacy of the revolution and uses persuasion, attractiveness and justness of the Islamic revolution to encourage people living in the Gulf to revolt against suppressive rulers. Also, the shift in Iran's foreign policy following the death of Ayatollah Khomeini and coming reformist governments of President Rafsanjani and Khatami, soft power has become an important policy in facilitating the relations with the GCC countries to break Iran's regional isolation and boost its economic opportunities.

Last but not least, the academic works presented in this chapter of the thesis provides several theoretical tools to analyze a) soft power resources, b) soft power currencies, c) motives and motivations for wielding soft power, d) ways for wielding soft power, e) measuring soft power and f) limitations of soft power of Turkey and Iran in the GCC region.

In sum, soft power approach offers a useful insight for analyzing Turkey's and Iran's soft power toward the GCC countries since the beginning 1980s. Yet, as

proclaimed by Finnemore and Goldstein (2013) in order to understand state power one should remind in mind that the context of politics matter. They say, “the social environment not only filters of channels power exerted by (or upon) state; it also creates new sources of power that states must recon with” (p.13). It is equally important to note that states are not sole actors exerting power in the international arena: role of non-state actors and institutions are undeniable today.

CHAPTER THREE: An Overview of Turkey-GCC and Iran-GCC Relations since 1980

Introduction

Turkey and Iran, the two non-Arab regional powers, have always been important players in the Middle East, including the Gulf region. The Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 and the 1980 military coup in Turkey, however, was a turning point significantly affecting the nature of relations of Ankara and Tehran with the Gulf monarchies. In order to present the evolution of Turkey-GCC and Iran-GCC relations since the beginning of 1980 and to laid the foundation for a soft power comparison of two countries in their relations with GCC states Chapter Three of this thesis examines the dynamics in Turkey-GCC and Iran-GCC relations. As this thesis intends, Chapter Three covers the relations since the beginning of 1980 to underline more relevant aspects with the main points.

Turkey-GCC Relations 1980-2015

1980 Military Coup and Ankara's opening to the Gulf

Turkey has become more visible in its relations with GCC countries since moderate Islamist AKP came to power in 2002. Yet, there were times that Ankara had put significant efforts to reach the Arab Gulf states especially during the years of Turgut Ozal (1983-1993) in Turkish politics. In fact, Turkey-GCC relations, notably with Saudi Arabia, had been facilitated since the beginning of 1980s due to at least three reasons: first, Islamic Revolution in Iran and common threat perception towards

it; second, second oil crisis and Turkey's dependence on Gulf oil; and third, substantial economic reforms in Turkey and the need for market expansion.

Against this background, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait did not hesitate much in celebrating the coup in Turkey, which was followed by an official visit by the leader of the coup and President Kenan Evren to Kuwait in 1982 and to Saudi Arabia in 1984 (Erhan and Kurkcuoglu, 2002). In a sense, during 1980s the bilateral relations between Turkey and the Arab Gulf states had gained the most significant momentum since the establishment of Turkish Republic in 1923 with a new security dimension (Mercan, 2008). The security threats for the Gulf States stemming from Iranian Revolution and the war erupted between Iran and Iraq consolidated Turkey's role as a counterbalancing power in the eyes of Arab Gulf States and the US (Oktav, 2015, p. 30). In addition to a search for a regional balancing power against Iran, the six Arab Gulf states of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman signed a treaty in 1981 and established Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) as "a practical answer to the challenges of security and economic development in the area" (Gulf Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf Secretariat General).

From energy security angle, oil crisis following Iranian Revolution and Iran-Iraq War directed oil-dependent Turkey to count upon alternative sources other than main suppliers of Iran and Iraq. As a result, Turkey signed a contract with Texaco in November 1980 envisioning oil imports from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia although most of the amount had not been delivered as the crisis halted soon (Liel, 2001, p.111).

The economic reform process led by Ozal following the 1980 coup in Turkey was another factor pushing Ankara to seek closer economic relations with the Arab Gulf States. Subsequently, the export-oriented economic policies of Turkey enhanced

the relations with oil producing Arab Gulf States as the number of Turkish construction companies operating in the Gulf and labor flow to those states from Turkey increased substantially. By the end of the decade, the number of Turkish workers in Saudi Arabia reached 150.000 and the amounts of contracts by Turkish companies in the Arab countries had jumped from 1.6 million US Dollar in 1978 to 17 billion US Dollar (5 billion US Dollar in Saudi Arabia) in 1988 (Liel, 2001, p.118).

During 1990s, Turkey's relations with the Gulf monarchies had turned both for better and for worse. The course of the relations in the decade was shaped by two crucial developments: first Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and second growing cooperation between Turkey and Israel.

Regarding the first aspect, when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait on August 1990, Turkey had left its neutral position in Middle Eastern affairs and supported the US-led international coalition against Iraq. Ankara determined to implement the embargo on Iraq through closing Iraqi pipeline to Mediterranean (Rosenthal, 1990). Further, Turkey had allowed the deployment of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) troops to Incirlik Base in the south for the operations against Iraq (US Air Force, 2013). The economic losses for Turkish economic due to the four-year embargo were tremendous; and the costs estimated for 20 billion US dollar (Aykan, 1996). Yet, Turkey's stance in the first Gulf War against Iraq had politically motivated to enhance its prestige and Ankara attempted to clinch its strategic importance in the eyes of many Western powers at a time when the Cold War era came to an end. Indeed, during his speech in Istanbul on July 1991, US President

George Bush emphasized Turkey's strategic role as a NATO member during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (Bush, 1991).

From Turkey-GCC relations' perspective, on the other hand, Turkey's supports for liberation of Kuwait had shown goodwill towards the GCC states and economic relations between the two boosted to a certain extend. Given the huge economic losses at stake for Ankara stemming from the embargo on Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait supplied 2 billion US dollar worth of oil and Arab Gulf states provided 2.5 billion US dollar for Turkish Defense Fund (Al-Atiqi, Caliskan, Long & Sadriu, 2015). Turkish construction companies had also got an opportunity to enter Kuwait for the post-war reconstruction.

Through mid-1990s, the rapprochement between Turkey and Israel through upgrading relations to ambassadorial level and enhancing military cooperation had adversely affected Ankara's relations with Arab Middle East countries in general and the Gulf states in particular. As it is explained in detail in Chapter 4 of this thesis, the nature of Turkey-Israeli is one of the factors determining Turkey's popularity in the eyes of many Arabs and its relations with the Gulf states. With this respect, while Turkey felt a need for closer cooperation with Israel through the end of the decade and inked series of military agreements in 1996, the relations with Syria deteriorated (Eisenstadt, 1997). Coupled with Ankara's efforts to construct a dam on Euphrates River that reduced the volume of the water flow to Syria, Damascus had rallied some Arab countries including Saudi Arabia against Turkey (Oktav, 2015) Through the end of the decade Turkey was marginalized in the Arab world due to its close relations with Israel and disagreement over water resources with the neighboring Arab countries.

Turkey-GCC Relations since 2003 with the Systemic and Domestic Changes

With the turn of the century, the dynamics and the determinants of Turkey-GCC relations changed significantly in at a time that tectonic systemic shift in the Middle East and domestic changes in Turkey took place. While the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 created a balance of power problem in the region raising fears for both Turkey and Arab Gulf states, the victory of moderate Islamist AKP and the rapid economic and political reform process in Turkey had transformed Turkey-GCC relations and brought them closer.

The Gulf region was one of the most affected by Iraq war's shock waves amid constellation of worries over increasing Iranian influence in Iraq. The GCC states have started to look for multilateral cooperation to enhance their security in power vacuum in Iraq, which was likely to fall into Iranian sphere of influence (Yaffe, 2004). For Turkey, on the other hand, while post-Cold War dynamics allows Ankara to pursue more independent foreign policy, the Iraqi invasion resurged Turkish fears for an independent Kurdish state in the northern Iraq that would directly threatens its domestic security (Altunisik and Martin, 2011). The Turkish concerns and its more autonomous foreign policy objectives were materialized on March 1, 2003 when Turkish Parliament rejected the deployment of US troops in Turkish soil for a so-called Northern front for the invasion of Iraq (Bourdeaux and Zaman, 2003). Although the parliament's decision had caused setbacks in Turkey-US relations, it has increased Turkey's image in the eyes of many Arabs who were against the invasion. The converging security concerns over the scenarios in post-Saddam Iraq facilitated Turkey-GCC cooperation on economic, political and security matters. In that, King Abdullah Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud visited Turkey in 2006, marking an historical moment

in relations between two states as the last visit of a Saudi monarch to Turkey was in 1966 with King Faisal of Saudi Arabia (Qusti and Khan, 2006).

Turkey has also emerged as a significant player bridging some GCC states and the NATO, under the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI), which launched in 2004. This initiative has offered all the six GCC states bilateral security cooperation with NATO and its member states and four GCC members, except Saudi Arabia and Oman already joined the Initiative, signed in Istanbul (NATO, 2011).

However, the turning point in Turkey-GCC relations was the establishment of “High Level Strategic Cooperation Council” (HLSCC) in 2008, which laid a multilateral basis through several intergovernmental meetings (Kardas, 2012). With the council, Turkey was qualified as the first strategic partner outside the Gulf region and the nature of Turkey-GCC cooperation moved towards political and strategic dialogue (Stephen Larrabee, 2011). Most recently, “4th Joint Ministerial Meeting of the GCC-Turkey High Level Strategic Dialogue” was organized in Istanbul in 2012, upon invitation of Turkey and the parties agreed on a Joint Action Plan, to enhance the further cooperation in the regional issues (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012).

Apart from systemic changes, the momentous transformation in the Turkish domestic politics is another factor contributing Turkey-GCC relations to flourish, especially in the economic aspects. With this regard, in their analysis Altunışık and Martin (2011) highlight at least three important domestic developments as a source for further Turkish engagement in Middle East region; first, AKP government itself, which considers Middle East as important foreign policy area due to its important yet neglected historical and religious ties; second, political reform process that curbed the

role of military in Turkish politics and altered previous threat perceptions; and third, further economic liberalization, which fuelled by of religiously conservative so-called “Anatolian Tigers” who are eager to do business with the Middle Eastern region (Altunısık and Martin, 2011, p. 578-579). To sum up, the Sunni-Islamic oriented leadership, the demilitarization of Turkish foreign policy, the desecuritization of Middle East relations, and the empowerment of a vivid conservative businessmen class have played significant role in enhancement of Turkey-GCC relations. It should be noted that however, the rapprochement between Turkey and the GCC countries especially with Saudi Arabia has been very linked to Saudi concerns over the empowerment of Iran and Shia population in Iraq following the US invasion in 2003. Otherwise, Riyadh would naturally be resentful of the engagement of a non-Arab regional power with an Islamist government in the Middle East, which potentially undermines its own position (Altunısık, 2012). Indeed, AKP victory and its model of compatibility of Islam and democracy challenge the Saudi political religious theory, which considers democracy as a intrusion to the fundamentals of religion (Al-Buluwi, 2014).

On the last point, the growing economic engagement with the Middle Eastern countries and Turkey’s emergence as a “trading state” in the region has played a role in shaping its foreign policies towards the immediate and extended neighborhood (Kirisci, 2009). In this strategy, the Gulf region also has been fallen into the area of interest for Turkish policy makers and Turkey and six GCC states signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2005 to enhance economic and commercial relations including negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), which has not been realized yet (TBMM, 2005). The agreement was followed by a series of high-

level official visits, as King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and President of Turkey Abdullah Gul exchanged visits between 2006 and 2009 (Baskan, 2011).

Speaking of numbers, the share of the GCC countries as a destination for Turkish exports reached 9.1 billion US Dollar 2014, against 1.6 billion US Dollar in 2003. Similarly, while the GCC region accounted for 362 million US Dollar of Turkish purchases in 2003, the figure grew to 6.6 billion US Dollar in 2014. The FDI flow from the GCC to Turkey jumped from 209 million US dollar in 2009 to 425 million US dollars in 2014. The total number of tourists coming to Turkey from six GCC member states has also reached 418 698 in 2014, almost ten times more than 2003. In that, a recent release titled “The Muslim Travel Index” (2014) revealed that Turkey topped the holiday destination in Europe for the visitors from the UAE.

Turkey-GCC relations since Arab Spring

The so-called Arab Spring has created, first and foremost, another change in the regional balance in the Middle East. The popular uprisings in Tunisia, Libya, Morocco, Egypt, and Syria, started against the autocratic rulers, has caught the neighboring states in surprise and forced them to adopt or re-orient their positions in a very short time (Chubin, 2012). Traditionally strong states, which acted as balancing powers such as Egypt and Syria, became too weak to exercise their influence against Iran. From GCC states’ perspective the uprisings also resulted into unwanted changes, which inspired by the extremist ideologies such as “political Islamic thought”, “liberal political ideas”, and “sectarianism, which poses the threat of destabilizing the conservative sociopolitical structure underpinning the Gulf region since the pre- state era (Binhuwaidin, 2015, p.12).

Arab Spring posed challenges for Turkey and its adopted ‘zero problem’ with neighbors’ policy as well. That aims at economic interdependence and more enhanced relations with the Middle Eastern countries based on cultural affinity. Inevitably, “ethics versus self-interest dilemma” has shaped the Turkish foreign policy during the early stages of the Arab Spring (Onis, 2012, p.51). Yet, despite facing this dilemma initially, Turkey quickly turned its foreign policy towards the Middle East with more liberal democratic tones in supporting popular legitimate uprisings.

Beside the diverging interests and policies, Turkey and GCC states have found a common ground to cooperate in the wake of Arab Spring era especially in Syria and countering Iran (Ataman and Akkaya, 2015). Also, Turkey and the GCC states stayed on the same page in fighting against so-called Islamic State (IS) in Syria and Iraq. In the international coalition formed against IS, all six members of GCC have contributed the fighting through various means ranging from hosting US forces to humanitarian aid for those, who affected by IS, yet particularly Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE and Bahrain joined the airstrikes with their own forces (Drennan, 2014). Similarly, Turkey also declared its support for the coalition against IS as Turkish Parliament approved the use of military force against IS and allowed to host foreign troops in order to launch strikes (Fantz & Pearson, 2015).

In 2015, Turkey and Qatar have signed a cooperation agreement, moving one step forward through a strategic partnership. This includes military training: defense industries: joint exercises and the deployment of military forces between the two countries when necessary (Al-Haj, 2015). The special bond between Turkey and Qatar during AKP era, which is shaped around common political values, clinched

with the decision to establish a Turkish military base in Qatar (Finn, 2015). The base gives Turkey a status similar to France and US in Gulf security. An analysis from the Washington Institute asserts:

“Turkey's move in Qatar will make Ankara all the more valuable to its Arab partners, and to an American ally seemingly inclined to share the burden of Gulf security. The new base will also reinforce Qatar's autonomy vis-a-vis Saudi Arabia. In addition, it could contribute to the security effort for the 2022 FIFA World Cup, a major and persistently controversial endeavor for Qatar” (Decottignies and Cagaptay, 2016).

The Turkish- Saudi cooperation also intensified following the visit of Turkish President Erdogan to new King Salman in Saudi Arabia on March 2015. The enhancement of this cooperation became visible in the Saudi-led Operation Decisive Storm against the Iran-backed Houthi militia, who is marching to the southern city of Aden after seizing the capital Sana'a last year. In the immediate of the operation, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said, “we said previously that we can offer all forms of logistical and intelligence support to the operation” (Middle East Monitor, 2015). More strikingly, Erdogan accused Iran trying to dominate the Middle East and said its efforts have begun annoying Ankara, as well as Saudi Arabia and Gulf Arab countries (Pamuk, 2015).

This operation was perceived as the incarnation of forming a Sunni block against the expansionist attitudes of Iran. On the other hand, its timing coincided with the ongoing negotiations between Iran and P5+1 to reach an agreement over Tehran's nuclear program in Switzerland (Borger, 2015). It can be argued that Saudi Arabia's

efforts also targeted Iran's recognition as a regional power and the rapprochement with the US. In the last analysis, Turkey-GCC relations in the post-Arab spring era have evolved through a strategic alliance rather than being merely economic, as the new balance of power dynamics has brought them together in cooperating against extremism and rising Iranian influence in the region.

Iran-GCC Relations during 1980-2015

1979 Iranian Revolution and its aftermath

The Iranian Revolution in 1979 is one of the turning points in Iran-GCC relation as it did not only alter the Shah regime in Iran but also shaped the dynamics of Tehran's relations with its Arab neighbors in the Gulf. Ayatollah Khomeini's call for mass revolts against US-allied rulers posed a direct threat for many Arab Gulf states. Indeed, the new order in Iran was assertive in its claims (Pradhan, 2011).

Although the call was for all oppressed Muslims, Arab Gulf states with significant Shia population, most notably Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Kuwait, perceived a threat from Revolutionary Iran and suspected their Shia nationals as the potential audience for Iran's revolutionary rhetoric. In this sense, Iranian Revolution has left a mark of domestic politics of GCC states in their relations vis-à-vis certain social groups, as the loyalty of Shia has become a questionable issue that exists until today. The uprisings in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province in late 1979 (Wehrey, 2013) and allegedly Iranian backed coup attempt in Bahrain in 1981 (Mabon, 2012) were self-evident for Iranian attempts to overthrow the Arab Gulf regimes in the eyes of ruling elites.

When the Iran-Iraq War broke up in 1980, Saudi Arabia and its allies had found little choice but to support Saddam Hussein to curb Iranian influence in the region. As briefly mentioned in this chapter, Saudi Arabia and the five other Gulf Sheikhdoms

have also created Gulf Cooperation Council, a legal body for internal cooperation and for external assistance, to manage both domestic and foreign threats stemming from Iran (Tripp and Chubin, 1996, p.11). It is also important to note that due to the internationalization of the war, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States were able to seek US military presence in the Gulf, creating another source of tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

From Iranian perspective, the revolution added a religious dimension to the existing geopolitical determinants of Iran's foreign policy such as supremacy claims in the Gulf sub region. During 1980s Tehran had attempted a multi-dimensional strategy in its relations with the Gulf States as put by Ehteshami (2002): “ (1) defeat Iraq militarily, (2) drive a wedge between Baghdad and the Gulf Arab states, and (3) cultivate a constituency for itself among the Gulf Arab peoples (particularly the Shi'a population) at the same time as subverting the most vulnerable regimes among the traditional monarchies”. (p. 298). The third pillar of this strategy is important as it is based on soft power politics and constitutes the essence of Fourth Chapter of this thesis. Yet, through the most of the decade Iran remained isolated from the region and was treated by suspicion and aversion by Saudi Arabia and some other GCC members.

By the end of the Cold War, Iran had the opportunity to pursue even more independent foreign policy in a similar manner with Turkey. Saddam's invasion of Kuwait came against this background and Tehran opted to side with Western powers and Gulf Monarchies supporting Kuwait's territorial integrity and sovereignty of the ruling family (Ehteshami and Zweiri, 2007). Tehran soon reaped the fruits of this pragmatic approach and as Ehteshami (2002) noted:

“Neutrality in this conflict gave Tehran a large measure of flexibility in its foreign relations. It gave it scope to deal with Iraq as well as the antiwar Arab forces, while it insistence on the reversal of the aggression and an unconditional Iraqi pullout brought it closer to the anti-Iraq Gulf monarchies. Its restraint and neutrality also obtained for Iran renewed diplomatic relations with Jordan, Tunisia, and Saudi Arabia, and some constructive contacts with Egypt and Morocco” (p. 301).

For Iran, one of the setbacks of the Second Gulf War, however, was the increasing US presence in the Gulf region. In a sense, the war has changed the Gulf states’ security understanding in a way that GCC states are not reluctant in hosting American bases in their lands anymore, while they had tried to rely on the GCC or regional initiatives in their security measures prior to invasion of Kuwait (Gause. 2009). The GCC states were relied more on the US protection and “during the 1990s, the policy of ‘dual containment’ of Iraq and Iran, suited the GCC states well” (Cronin and Masalha, 2011, p. 7). Yet, still Iran’s position in the Kuwait’s invasion and foreign policy efforts of President Rafsanjani facilitated Iran-GCC relations at least in the economic realms. Afshin Molavi (2015) notes, “Rasfanjani’s position did alter GCC perceptions of Iran. Trade increased. Direct flight links were restored. And money began flowing more freely across borders. The Rafsanjani era offered Iran and the region a soft landing from the war’s ravages and the revolution’s zealotry” (parag.13).

Through the end of the decade Iran’s foreign policy came into ‘moderate’ track under President Mohammed Khatami in 1997. The new discourse in Iran’s foreign policy such as ‘détente’, ‘stability’ and ‘dialogue among civilizations’ was

one of the forefront characteristics and a charm offensive in diplomacy marked the beginning of Khatami period in Tehran's relations with Arab Gulf region (Clawson, P., Eisenstadt, M., Kanovsky, E., & Menashri, D., 1998). The presence of the then Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah in the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) summit in 1997, which held in Tehran was a clear sign in changing natural of relations (Alam, 2001). In an attempt to break Tehran's decades long isolation in the region, President Khatami visited Saudi Arabia, Qatar and some other Arab countries in 1999, which was an 'historic' moment in the relations with the GCC countries since the revolution in 1979 (Jehl, 1999). The rapprochement between Iran and GCC lived for a considerable time period. In 2004, then Iranian Defense Minister. Ali Shamkhani, received Saudi Arabia's highest honor, the Order of Abdel-Aziz Al Saud, "for his efforts in defusing tensions between Iran and the Arab states" (Kinninmont, 2015).

As the détente between Iran and Arab Gulf states under a reformist president evidently shows, the domestic landscape (reformists or hardliners) of Iranian politics is one of the factors determining Tehran's relations with the GCC states and subsequently affecting Tehran's image in the eyes of Gulf people. However, the positive outlook in Iran-GCC relations lived short after US invasion of Iraq, which paved the way for Iran to penetrate into the latter through both hard and soft power measures. Iran's increasing influence in Iraq and the victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad increased distrust among GCC countries, at least Gulf elites towards Iran.

Iran-GCC Relations since 2003: Regional and Domestic Changes

Unlike the moderate years following the victory of President Khatami, Iran-GCC relations had gone through turbulent path throughout mid-2000s due to; 1) US invasion of Iraq and a change in the balance of power in the Middle East since 2003 and 2) rise of neo-conservatives in Iran with the victory of Ahmadinejad in 2005.

Removal of Saddam from power, inherently enhanced Iran positions in Iraq and Levant vis-à-vis its Arab neighbors. Iran had developed friendly relations with Shia dominated government in Baghdad; enhanced its commercial, economic, cultural, media, education and tourism ties with Iraq (Rahimi, 2012). Iran was also successful in enhancing ties with Syria, Lebanon and Palestinian territories under Ahmadinejad presidency. The expansion of Iran's relations with Arab countries had worried Saudi Arabia and US as they claimed Iran was meddling in Arab affairs and accused Tehran for destabilizing the region. As Warnaar (2013) puts in correctly:

“Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia have a motive to cultivate the perception of regional Iranian threat, both to curb Iran's influence, with the aid of the United States, as well as to legitimize the repression of their own Shi'a minority, which they claim is supported by Iran to destabilize the Saudi monarchy. The United States also added to the perception of an Iranian threat to encourage and legitimize Arab states' security alliances with the West” (p. 116).

As discussed in the following chapter of this thesis, despite a favorable environment for Iranian soft power in the region after Iraqi invasion and under popular Ahmadinejad presidency, Saudi-Iran rivalry based on mutual threat perception and sectarianism have been some of the most undermining factors for Iran

to exert its influence in GCC states.

Regarding the bilateral relations between Iran and GCC states under Ahmadinejad presidency, a series of attempts had been made to reconcile. In 2005, Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki paid a visit to all GCC states except Saudi Arabia; and President Ahmadinejad visited Kuwait in 2007. Same year, upon Qatar's invitation Ahmadinejad attended, first and only time as an Iranian president, to the GCC summit in Doha (Alsharq al-Awsat, 2007). Moreover, in March 2007, President Ahmadinejad met with King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, yet the meeting fell short of addressing a solution for the sectarian conflict in the region (Fattah, 2007).

Apart from regional developments following US invasion of Iraq, domestic changes, to be more precisely, the assertive policies of Ahmadinejad administration had brought Iran and some GCC countries at odds. Despite the frequent visits by officials during Ahmadinejad rule, the GCC states concerned also about Tehran's ambitious nuclear program. Even more importantly than question of a nuclear Iran, the popularity of Tehran in the eyes of GCC public had constrained and concerned Gulf monarchies in forming a profound stance against it (El-Hokayem and Legrenzi, 2006).

It is also important to mention here that the territorial dispute between United Arab Emirates and Iran since 1971 over Abu Musa and two Tunbs Island flared up when UAE reclaimed the sovereignty of the islands during Ahmadinejad presidency. To garner the popular support domestically Ahmadinejad did not refrained from visiting the islands in 2012, being the first president in the history of the republic, which increased tension between Iran and Arab Gulf states (Erdbrink, 2012).

The impact of Arab Spring and Iranian Nuclear Deal on Iran-GCC Relations

The so-called Arab Spring erupted in 2011 when the Gulf region has already been struggling with the probability of Shia discord and rising Iranian influence in the region following the US invasion of Iraq. Concerned with the fact that the popular uprisings would reach its shores, some GCC states led by Saudi Arabia have ignited a counter-revolution to maintain status quo domestically and regionally through increasing repression upon population and economic largesse in domestic level; and pursuing more assertive foreign policy through “shoring up alliances and bolstering otherwise faltering states” in the regional level (Kamrava, 2012, p.97).

From Iranian perspective, on the other hand, initially the outbreak of popular protests in the Arab world was something to be welcomed than concerned. Indeed, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei praised the protests in Egypt and Tunisia and label them as "Islamic awareness" inspired by Islamic Revolution of 1979 (Al Jazeera English, 2011). Similar position of Tehran reiterated by President Ahmadinejad’s speeches and further, Iran hosted the Islamic Awakening conference in September 2011. At the conference Supreme leader Khamaneh was quoted:

“Today the important point is that the enemy is designing plots to compensate for the blows he has received in Egypt, Tunisia and other regional countries. We must pay attention to the machinations of the enemy. We must take care not to let them hijack popular revolutions from the people. We must take care not to let them derail these revolutions. Make use of the experiences of others” (Khamaneh.ir, 2012).

Iran approached the Arab Spring phenomenon as an opportunity to consolidate its position within the region through “pushing a public narrative that frames recent popular protests in the Middle East as Islam/Iran-inspired” in a regional setting where the traditional US allies such as Egypt and status quo powers of Saudi Arabia and Israel were on decline (Parsi and Marashi 2011,).

The spread of Arab Spring to Bahrain and Syria, however, have reinforced sectarian dimension the popular uprisings and brought Iran and some GCC states at odds. On March 2011, Saudi and Emirati troops entered Manama under the auspice of GCC’s Peninsula Shield Force to crack down the protests and to secure Al Khalifa family’s rule in Bahrain (Bronner and Slackman, 2011). Since then, Bahrain has become a battleground for Iran-Saudi/GCC rivalry as they mutually accused each other. Iran described the Saudi deployment of troop as ‘invasion’ and President Ahmadinejad said “today, we witness the degree of pressure imposed on the majority of people in Bahrain and [they] use rifles and cannon ... What has happened is bad, unjustifiable and irreparable” (Chulov, 2011). On the GCC side, the Secretary General Abdullatif Al-Zayani condemned Iran for meddling internal affairs of the GCC states and threatening security and stability in the region, while individual members of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait and UAE issued similar statement reflecting their distrust of Iranian intentions in the Gulf (Alarabiya, 2011).

In Syria, the losses at stake were much more higher not only for Iran and Saudi Arabia but also for Turkey, Russia, US and EU. However if we focus on Iran and GCC interests in Syria, it is fair to claim that Arab Spring and a possible Sunni resurgence in Syria mean a deal blow for Tehran’s power projection in the Levant and

an opportunity for Saudi-led block to curb Tehran's growing influence in the region (Chubin, 2012). This situation has turned Syria into a battleground between Shia Iran and Saudi-Qatar led Sunni powers since 2012, and in the absence of an international and regional consensus over the fate of Syria, the conflict tends to be prolonged.

The so-called Saudi-Iranian proxy war manifested itself in conflict in Yemen as well. In late March 2015, Saudi Arabia launched Operation Decisive Storm with the support of other GCC states, except Oman, against allegedly Iran-backed Houthi militia that is marching to the southern city of Aden after seizing the capital Sana'a the year before (AlArabiya, 25 March 2015). Saudi Arabia succeeded to gain support from a wide range of Sunni countries from Pakistan to Morocco, including Turkey.

The conflict over Yemen and international coalition led by Saudi Arabia is closely linked with the alliance blocks in the region especially over Syrian conflict. Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey have intensified their efforts against Iran and its ally Bashar al-Assad in Syria. On the issue Aron Stein (2015) notes in an article published on Foreign Policy: "for Turkey, endorsing the Saudi position on the Houthis costs little and helps further its primary policy focus: its war against the Assad government" (parag 7). Further, Ankara clarified its position beside the GCC against Iran on regional security issues when Turkish President Erdoğan openly accused Tehran for trying to dominate Middle East. Erdoğan said: "Could this be allowed? This has begun annoying us, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries. This is really not tolerable and Iran has to see this," (Pamuk, 2015).

The election of moderate Hassan Rouhani into presidency in 2013 has little contributed the reconciliation between Iran and GCC states, unlike the previous trend

of easing off tension between Tehran and some GCC states under moderate/reformist presidency. It is important to note here, however, Iran under Rouhani had signaled its intention to reduce the tension with Arab Gulf states. In an article published in Foreign Policy journal on Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif (2014) assesses on ‘What Iran Really Wants’ and inks Tehran’s some intentions to ease off the tension with the neighboring Gulf states. Zarif (2014) notes:

“The Iranian government believes that even a perception that Iran is seeking nuclear weapons is detrimental to the country’s security and to its regional role, since attempts by Iran to gain strategic superiority in the Persian Gulf would inevitably provoke responses that would diminish Iran’s conventional military advantage” (p.49).

He further adds:

“Iran will also endeavor to diffuse external threats by resolving outstanding issues with the rest of the world, in particular with its immediate neighbors. Confidence building and cooperation will be the cornerstones of Iran’s regional policy. That is why last year, Iran proposed the creation of a security and cooperation arrangement in the Persian Gulf area. As a responsible regional power, Iran will actively participate in combating and containing extremism and violence through bilateral, regional, and multilateral cooperation with countries in the region and beyond” (Zarif, 2014, p.50).

Iranian Foreign Minister had also visited Oman, Kuwait, Qatar and UAE to enhance bilateral ties (Rizvi, 2014).

The historic nuclear deal between Iran and P+1 (Five permanent members of UN Security Council of US, UK, China, Russia and France; and Germany) on July 2015 came against this backdrop of high tension between Iran and some GCC countries. Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE, has signaled since the beginning that they do not welcome the agreement and the rapprochement between the US and Iran. They tended to internationalize the conflict as Saudi-led operation in Yemen was launched while negotiations over nuclear had been preceding in Vienna between P5+1 and Iran. Concerned with an even more powerful Iran without sanctions and US opposition, the operation was an open manifestation that Saudi-led bloc in the GCC do not accept Iran as a natural neighbor and important player in the region.

The new wave of aggression came in early 2016, when Saudi Arabia executed Shia leader Ayatollah Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr. In response, several demonstrations against the executions erupted in Meshed and Tehran, some protestors also attacked Saudi Embassy (Wilkin and Macdowall, 2016). In the immediate aftermath of the attacks Saudi Arabia and Bahrain announced that they cut the diplomatic relations with Iran. Kuwait and the UAE also followed the suit and announced that they downgraded their relations (BBC News, 2016 January 4). This move from Saudi-led bloc has been interpreted as the escalation of tension between two parties due to the nuclear deal. It is also important to note that severing diplomatic relations between Riyadh and Tehran came at a time as the UN Syria mediation was preparing bringing together Syria's warring parties on January 26, 2016 (Nichols, December 2015).

Although Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and UAE has severed their relations with Iran in a protest against Tehran's increasing influence in the region and the nuclear agreement with US, it is hardly true to talk about an unified GCC states against Iran.

Rather, as the nuclear deal has surfaced Qatar and Oman pursue more pragmatic and balanced relations with Tehran and they are cautious towards Saudi Arabia. For instance, Oman hosted secret meetings between officials from Iran and the US. On the issue Marie Harf from State Department said “Oman played a key role in facilitating the back channel between the United States and Iran that helped lead to the diplomacy taking place right now on the nuclear issue,” (Solomon, June 28). The independent position of Oman from Saudi politics has also become evident in March 2014, when Iran and Oman signed a natural gas agreement, which also includes building a pipeline across the Gulf at a cost of about \$1 billion (Al Hasani, 2014). Moreover, Muscat did not announce its support to Decisive Storm and did not join the 34 Muslim-States Coalition against terrorism, which was formed by Saudi Arabia excluding Iran (Browning and Irish, 2015).

Qatar also tends to play a balance role between Tehran and Riyadh, amid concern over latter’s domination in the GCC. During Arab Spring Qatar has intensified its efforts to pursue more independent foreign policy than Saudi Arabia and the rift between Riyadh and Doha became more apparent during the disagreement over Muslim Brotherhood rule in Egypt. With respect to bilateral relations with Tehran, Qatar and Iran share South Pars gas field, the biggest in the world, bringing two countries more dependent to each other. During the recent tensions in the region, starting with the beheading of Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr in Saudi Arabia, Qatar along with Oman has not severed its diplomatic relations with Iran.

Conclusion

It is hardly evaluate a single path for Turkey and Iran’s relations with the GCC states since 1980. Rather, as explained throughout Chapter 3 of this thesis, domestic

developments such as Islamic Revolution in Iran and the military coup in Turkey and regional developments such as the end of the Cold War, US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and so-called Arab Spring have certainly impacted the direction and the tone of the relations. On the side of Turkish-GCC relations, the converging interests in the aftermath of Iraqi invasion and the new orientation of Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East under moderate Islamist AKP rule since 2003 have brought Turkey and GCC countries together for closer cooperation. To speak for Iran's relations with Arab countries in the Gulf region, it can be said that first, the Islamic Revolution and the revolutionary rhetoric of the new regime in Tehran and second the increasing sectarianism in the region caused certain setbacks in the bilateral relations especially with Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and to some extent with UAE. However, one should take into consideration the fact that Iran's bilateral relations with individual GCC countries differ to from one country to another depending on historical developments and context.

Chapter Four: Soft Power of Turkey and Iran in the GCC: Sources, Motives and Motivations

Introduction

The chapter four of this thesis examines the Turkey and Iran's relations with the GCC states since 1980s from exclusive perspective of soft power in the way that is presented in the conceptual framework and methodology chapters. Apart from the conceptual framework and the relevant secondary literature, the exclusive interviews conducted with the academics, officials and experts from Turkey, Iran and the GCC states are also utilized throughout the chapter to present insightful analysis for the sources and motives/motivations of two non-Arab regional states in exerting soft power towards the Gulf region.

Soft Power Resources of Turkey and Iran in the GCC

As briefly mentioned in the theoretical framework chapter of this thesis, the resources of a given country for wielding soft power stem from primarily three sources: its culture, political values and foreign policies (Nye, 2011). However, this classification of three sources may sometimes remain inadequate to capture a country's soft power in a complex international environment depending on the target's perception of such values. Moreover, as proclaimed by Nye, other aspects, which are usually been considered within the hard face of power such as economic and military strengths, can generate soft power.

Also, analyzing soft power of states only through resources can be misleading and contradictory. According to Vuving (2009) power is not identical with its

resources; “a typical ‘soft power resource’ such as a moral value can be used both to persuade someone, when the person privately agrees with it, and force another, when it is used to build social pressure” (p.4). In order to overcome the ambiguity of soft power as resources approach, this chapter applies the concepts of benignity, brilliance and beauty in defining the soft power assets of Turkey and Iran over the targeted audience in the GCC when necessary.

Cultural Assets

Culture as a source of soft power is an ambiguous notion in the sense that it is not static and that same cultural assets can be appealing or repellent depending on certain interactions between different actors. Still, what is agreed upon is that culture of a given country can be an important soft power resource over another country through attraction. Turkey and Iran, the two long-lasting states in the region with significant products in art, architecture and literature hold important cultural assets to articulate attraction and eventually enhance soft power.

Despite being an intangible resource, Turkey holds culture as an important soft power asset in the Gulf. According to Kalın (2011) Turkey’s soft power capacity comes from its culture, history and geography. In fact, Turkish culture is heavily influenced by its history, the Ottoman past and legacy and; its geography, the connections and interactions with Europe, Balkans, Caucasus, Iran, Central Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Therefore, arts, print and visual media, film, poetry, literature, architecture, customs, fashion and cuisine as an accumulation of history and geography are Turkey’s vivid cultural assets that generates attraction for the people in the Gulf region through various tools and policies. On Turkey’s soft power resources

in the Arab Gulf region Turkey's Ambassador to Doha H.E. Ahmet Demirok; Mr. Ali Bakeer, the Senior Political Advisor in Qatar Embassy in Ankara; and Mr. Musa Budak, the Coordinator of the Middle East Department at Prime Ministry of Turkey Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities pointed out during personal interviews that the shared religious values; and similar cultural and historical experiences between Turkey and the GCC countries are significant soft power assets in the region that creates affinity and positive views towards Turkey (Bakeer, personal interview, 18 February 2016; Budak, personal interview, 28 March 2016; and Demirok, personal interview, 19 April 2016).

Similarly, Iran also has deep historical and geographical aspects that created a unique and rich culture. The Former Deputy Foreign Minister of Iran from 1988 to 1997 Abbas Maleki highlighted in an exclusive interview that Iran's cultural presence with art, language, literature, and architecture and interaction with the Arab Gulf is one of the most important assets of Iran's potential soft power in the region. He mentioned:

“Today many logos and symbols of institutions in the GCC are *Badgirs*, the wind towers of Iranian style of ventilation from 2000 years ago. Or the word of *Bandar* is a Persian word used for port is very widely used in the region” (Maleki, personal interview, 13 March 2016).

The Iranian academic Mahdi Ahouie from University of Tehran emphasized the importance of cultural assets for Iran to establish a sustainable soft power impact in the Gulf through increasing cultural events, art ateliers and places for Iranian

cuisine. Ahouie underlined:

“Real soft power should be lasting and sustainable; and for that, I think, we should use more culture than politics. Political message may be appealing now, but it may not work tomorrow. Cultural arena provides a more lasting effect on the ground” (Ahouie, personal interview, 14 March 2016).

Religion is also considered as a source of soft power and there is a growing literature on religious soft power (Nye, 2004; Haynes, 2012; Steiner, 2011 and Gozaydin, 2011). Within the cultural aspect, Islam as a shared religion can be a source of soft power for Turkey and Iran in the Gulf where the majority is Muslim.

Apart from high culture, as Nye argues (2004) popular culture attractions such as broadcasts, popular sports, music, and brands may garner soft power and serve to the foreign policy objectives of state. At this point, when the popular culture assets of Turkey and Iran compared within the intended time period of this thesis, it is fair to argue that Turkey has encompassed Iran in reaching and attracting the mass audiences in the Gulf region, especially in the last decade.

Although Iran owns a number of TV channels², including Arabic broadcasting Al-Alam, several interviewees agreed that Iranian channels usually broadcast state-sanctioned news and programs, and they are being propaganda tools³. One of the most

² For the full list of TV channels from Tehran see <http://wwitv.com/television/100.htm>

³ For example Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh from Deakin University said in an exclusive interview that Iranian media is a “mouthpiece of the state”. Similarly, during the interview Mahdi Ahouie from Tehran University said “Iran has some TV channels but they do not use it for conveying cultural message, they only use it for conveying political message. This even complicates the situation”.

important aspects of soft power is that it is a power as long as it can persuade or attract people. Soft power rests upon credibility and governments should avoid to be perceived as manipulative and when “information is perceived as propaganda and indoctrination, credibility is destroyed” (Nye, 2007, p.171). The media soft power of Iran in the Gulf is, therefore, very limited and Iran has often been accused of meddling the internal affairs of GCC states through calling for revolts against the ruling regimes (Sedarat, 2011; Vela, 2015). However, it is also important to note that Iran’s Al Alam has relatively been successful in gaining audience among Shia Arabs in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia due to its coverage of unrests in both countries, and reportedly 90 percent of surveyed Shi’ites in the Gulf state obtained their news from Al Alam (Sedarat, 2011).

On the other hand, Turkish soap operas have conquered the Arab world, and the Gulf was not an exception. According to a poll results, 74 percent of the Saudi women watched *Gumus* (Silver), which broadcasted as *Noor* in the Arab TVs (Akyol, 2009). Following the *Noor* which first broadcasted on pan-Arab Saudi channel MBC in 2007 and reached 85 million audience in the Middle East, other Turkish serials also have reached large number of people in the Gulf.

It should be underlined here that the popularity of Turkish soap operas has created real soft power in the GCC and served significantly the interests of Turkey in the region. Therefore, the popular culture resources of Turkey has turned into a power currency of *beauty* defined by Vuving as it refers to “the neat resonance that is evoked

when you represent ideals, values, causes, or visions” and “beauty generates soft power through the production of inspiration” (p.9). Therefore, the main sources of inspiration through Turkish soap operas for the people in the Gulf are that the audience observes the combination of tradition and Westernization without necessarily alienating the former and copying the latter. Moreover, cultural proximity between Turkey, beautiful views from Turkey’s cities, and portraying Turkey positively have contributed in generating soft power through such serials (Williams, 2013). The CEO of Turkey’s Global Agency, distributor of TV serials, Izzet Pinto explained “we are showing our country to millions of viewers. We are showing the beautiful scenery, our lifestyle and traditions. So we have a great influence on people through soft power” (Williams, 2013). Also, the Turkish national broadcaster Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) launched an Arabic broadcasting TV channel in 2010 for a direct communication with the Arab countries, including the Gulf states (Sanberk, 2012).

Yet, the ability of cultural assets to produce soft power depends on the context and the perception of the targeted audience, for instance, as Nye (2004) argues “American films that make the United States attractive in China and Latin America may have the opposite effect and actually reduce American soft power in Saudi Arabia or Pakistan” (p.12). Therefore, the records of Ottoman presence in the Middle East and Persian Empire in the Gulf; or having a certain interpretation of Islam as an asset may inflate tension and discontent among the Arab Gulf audiences given its context, contend and the way they are articulated by Turkey and Iran.

Economic and Military Assets

In the initial differentiation of Nye (2004) among sources of power—military, economic and soft—the former two are considered within the scope of hard power where threats, force, payment and sanctions are the primary currencies (p.31). However, as explained in Chapter Two of this thesis within the complex nature of soft power, strong military and economy can be soft power resources. Nye (2007) puts as “a successful economy is an important source of attraction” (p. 165) and “some people are generally attracted to strength” (p. 167). An even more convincing approach for economic and military success and strength as soft power generators is found Vuving’s power currency of *brilliance*. This part of this thesis, therefore, presents military, technological and economic assets of Turkey and Iran as soft power currency of *brilliance* over the GCC region. As Vuving (2009) explains:

“In international relations, brilliance manifests itself in various forms, for example, a strong and awesome military, a wealthy and vibrant economy, a rich and radiant culture, or a peaceful and well-run society. Brilliance also comes out from a country with advanced science and technology or a country that achieves military victory or economic success” (p.10).

Brilliance turns into power though generating imitation, admiration, the adoption, and the affinity “that may act against suspicion and hostility and facilitate understanding and cooperation” (Vuving, 2009, p.11). In this sense, both Turkey and Iran hold strong assets of *brilliance* that turned or would turn into soft power in the GCC region.

On military power, according to the statistics released by Global Firepower (2016), Turkey and Iran are the eighth and twenty-first military powers respectively in

terms of military strength out of 126 countries⁴. More strikingly, according to same database Turkey tops the list in the Middle East, while Iran has the fourth strongest army in the region (Global Firepower, 2016). Apart from the size and the strength of military forces, Turkey and Iran are important actors in the international military cooperation. Turkey is a member of NATO since 1952 and has joined several NATO operations in Afghanistan, Kosovo and Libya⁵. More relatedly to Turkey's military soft power assets in the Gulf, as mentioned in the third chapter of this thesis, Turkey was one of the key players in Istanbul Cooperation Initiative to enhance the relations between NATO and the GCC countries.

Iran is an observer state of Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which was formed as an economic and military cooperation in 1996. Further, Iran's nuclear program can also be mentioned here as an asset that can produce admiration in the eyes of people in the Gulf region. According to Lawrence Rubin (2010) Iran's nuclear capability provides a "symbolic benefit" in terms of soft power asset. Rubin notes:

"First, the technological advances made communicate that Iran is an advanced and modern nation, and is on its way to joining an elite club. Second, Tehran's defiance of Western demands for more intrusive inspections demonstrates its independence in pursuit of its own interests" (2010, p.13).

In fact, as the results of a survey in 2008 shows that a plurality of Arab people (67 percent) stated that Iran has the right to its nuclear program and the international

⁴ For the full list of countries see: <http://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.asp>

⁵ For the details of Turkey's International Security Initiatives and Contributions to NATO and EU Operations see: http://www.mfa.gov.tr/iv_european-security-and-defence-identity_policy-esdi_p_en.mfa

pressure should cease; and the percentage for expecting a positive outcome in the Middle East if Iran acquires nuclear weapon was 73 percent in Saudi Arabia and 51 percent in UAE (Telhami, 2008).

On the economic resources, strong economic performance and model of Turkey in the last decade and the self-sufficiency of Iranian economy under international sanctions are the main assets of two countries in terms soft power. Since 1980s with Ozal reforms, Turkey has shifted to market economy and started to integrate with the global markets through export-led growth strategies. However, despite this remarkable development, the economic success of Turkish model started bear its fruits after AKP came to power in 2002. According to World Bank report released in 2014, Turkey's exports rose from US\$36 billion in 2002 to over US\$150 billion in 2012 over the pace of other markets of Brasil, Russia and India (World Bank, 2014). The same report also indicates that while the share of MENA region for Turkish products increased, Turkey also enhanced its market competitiveness, export sophistication and export quality significantly⁶. Moreover, according to Fitch ratings Turkey's credit rating rose from B- with negative outlook in 2003 to BB+ positive outlook in 2010⁷. As the time of writing, Turkey is the 17th largest economy in the world with 799.54 billion US dollar Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (The World Bank, 2016).

⁶ For more detailed information see: <http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/eca/turkey/tr-cem-trade-eng.pdf>

⁷ The full list of ratings available see: https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:90uGQGEDui8J:https://www.fitchratings.com/web_content/ratings/sovereign_ratings_history.xls+&cd=7&hl=tr&ct=clnk

Flourishing economic achievements and outstanding performance with international recognition has been one of the most important soft power assets of Turkey in the eyes of many Gulf people. The economic success of Turkey and the model it presents has a far-reaching influence in the Arab Gulf region. In a personal talk with a high-ranking official in Oman's State Council who is also a member of the ruling Al Bu said family mentioned that when Omani people look at Turkey, first they see how Turkey succeeded in economic terms (Interviewee 1, personal conversation, 16 December 2015).

Turkey is also member of the important international economic organizations of G20 and Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). On the economic strength as an asset of soft power, in an interview with Mr. Ali Bakeer, from Qatar Embassy in Ankara said that economic assets of Turkey since 2003 is the most influential element in enhancing its soft power in the Gulf:

“Economic model of Turkey was the most successful soft power asset in terms of not provoking any sensitive issue in the targeted audience in the Gulf. Turkish economic model did not provoke any sensitivity unlike the cultural and political assets. It is safest side” (Bakeer, personal interview, 18 February 2016).

On the other hand, Iran has 9.3 percent of total proven oil reserves and 18.2 percent of proven natural gas reserves, making it the number one country in terms of gas field (BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2014, 2014). While oil and gas industry is the main economic source of state income, Iranian economy has been

overwhelmed under international sanctions due to the concerns over Tehran's nuclear program.

Despite facing strict sanctions especially after 2010 that affecting country's economy severely, the strength of Iranian economy proved itself over the years and dared to challenge Western powers especially during the years of '*principalist*' Ahmadinejad between 2005-2013 (Borszik, 2014). In 2012, Ahmadinejad stood against the sanctions and raised Iran's strong capability of coping with the embargo. He said:

"We must say to them [Western powers] that we have that much saved that even if we didn't sell oil for two to three years, the country would manage easily" (Al Jazeera, 2012).

Although there is not concrete studies measuring the impact of economic and military assets of Turkey and Iran's soft power in the Gulf region, strong economic performance of Turkey sets as admiration for the other economies in the region and Iran's economic survival and self-sufficiency enhance its invincibility, which are important aspects of soft power currency of *brilliance*.

Ideological and political Assets

The third aspect soft power resources of Turkey and Iran towards the GCC consist of domestic values, norms, ideologies, domestic policies and foreign policy orientations. Nye (2004) puts the relation between soft power and values: "policies based on broadly inclusive and far-sighted definitions of the national interest are easier to make attractive to others than policies that take a narrow and myopic

perspective. Similarly, policies that express important values are more likely to be attractive when the values are shared.” (p.61).

Ideas, norms, values and the policies as soft power resources becomes soft power currencies as Vuving’s concept of *beauty* explains:

“Beauty in world politics is not about sexual attractiveness but about the resonance that draws actors closer to each other through shared ideals, values, causes, or visions. It gives actors a sense of warmth and security, hope and self-extension, identity and community, and vindication and praise. Actors can discover this beauty when they are jointly pursuing their shared ideals, values, causes, or visions” (Vuving, 2009, p.11).

Turkey and Iran, therefore, have considerable assets, which articulates soft power in the eyes of many people in the Gulf. The Islamic Revolution in 1979 is one of the turning points regarding the ideological aspect of soft power. During the early years of the revolution, Iran emerged as an Islamic state that stands against imperialism, communism, any foreign domination and repression. The charismatic supreme leader Ayatollah Khomeini called for exporting revolution abroad against the repressive rulers. Khomeini, in a speech in Radio Tehran in 1980 said:

“We should try hard to export our revolution to the world, and should set aside the thought that we do not export our revolution, because Islam does not regard various Islamic countries differently and is the supporter of all the oppressed people of the world. On the other hand, all the superpowers and all the powers have risen to destroy us. If we remain in an enclosed environment we shall definitely face defeat. We should clearly settle our accounts with the

powers and superpowers and should demonstrate to them that, despite all the grave difficulties that we have, we shall confront the world with our ideology”⁸

During early phase of the Islamic Republic, which Dr. Mahdi Ahouie calls ‘Isolationism with a universal message’; Iran emerged as an influential actor supporting Muslims across the globe. Although the ruling elite in the Gulf perceived the message of Iran as a deadly threat to the survival of their monarchical rules, the resistance and reaction against the oppressors were appealing for many people in the region⁹. On the issue Dr. Mahdi Ahouie notes:

“Ayatollah Khomeini encouraged people of the Arab world to uprising against the suppressive governments and free themselves from imperialism etc. It was the message of the revolution and I think it was effective and successful for some time; and this is the root of this distrust between Iran and Saudi Arabia. This kind of message was quite sensitive and upsetting for the governments of the region, but it was well received by the significant part of the populations in the Gulf, not just the Shia communities but also Sunni communities. Because the notion of Islamic Umma was not about Shiism, it was not sectarian” (Ahouie, personal interview, 14 March 2016).

It is important to note that; Iran’s universal message was perceived as

⁸ The full transcript of the speech can be found at http://www.merip.org/mer/mer88/khomeini-we-shall-confront-world-our-ideology?ip_login_no_cache=20f80d5dd081427ae31a8eafd549e97

⁹ Dr. Mahdie Ahouie and Dr. Ibrahim Freihat mentioned this factor during the interviews.

frightening and repellent for Gulf rulers and significantly constrained Iran's ability to develop normal relations with those neighboring countries. Therefore, an interviewee addressed that Iran has stopped the idea of exporting revolution to the Arab world, as Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh said during the interview:

“Following the reformist presidents like Rafsanjani, Khatami and then Rouhani have been very much aware of their limitations stemming from Iran's revolutionary image on its soft power and its reach in Arab world. And in fact you can say that the Iranian leadership has effectively given up the idea of promoting revolution in the Arab world. I think Iranian state as a whole gave up the idea of exporting revolution very early on. Perhaps in the first couple of the years of Iran-Iraq war” (Akbarzadeh, personal interview, 13 March 2016).

On the other hand, Turkey, from 1980 onwards until the early 2000s has not been very influential in terms of championing any ideology, which was appealing in the Gulf region. Although the market reforms, Presidency of Turgut Ozal and Turkey's stance against Iraq during Kuwaiti invasion were appreciated by the Gulf States, Turkey was mostly perceived as a secular state with close relations with the Western powers and Israel. As mentioned in Chapter 3 of this thesis, Turkey-Israeli rapprochement during mid-1990s deteriorated Turkey's image and marginalized it in the Arab world.

The electoral victory of conservative AKP in 2002 and the rapid economic and political development in Turkey during the following years, however, provided significant assets for Turkey to garner support from the Arab world in general and the Gulf region in particular. One important asset is that Turkey represented a model to

the region where Islam and democracy can co-exist; and pursuing an independent foreign policy in a balance with East and the West is possible. Although this ‘Turkish model’ would flare some kind of sensitivity in Gulf’s ruling elite, on the issue Altunışık (2005) argues,

“The AKP’s coming to power has also become an asset for the Turkish model as it demonstrated the reconciliation of a party with Islamist roots with democracy and secularism. Thus the Turkish experience seems to lend support to the argument that the Islamic movements can be moderated through democracy” (p.56).

With the help of the domestic assets, both Turkey and Iran have enhanced their soft power through foreign policies. During the immediate aftermath of the revolution, Iran pursued an independent foreign policy, standing against both West and East; and continued its independent foreign policy vis-à-vis great powers. Turkey, on the other hand, has pursued multi-dimensional, balanced and more independent foreign policy in that regard with the end of the Cold War. Since early 2000s, the both countries has tried to champion the support for Palestinian course and took stance against Israel, which in return increased their popularity in the eyes of Arab people who are in solidarity with the Palestinians.

Motives and Motivations for Turkey and Iran’s Soft Power in the GCC

In its more general terms, the motives and motivations of a states to wield soft power is to reach the favorable outcomes without coercive measures but rather with co-opting ones. Defining a given state’s motive and motivations for exerting soft power is closely linked with the definition of their national interests (Nye, 2004). This

part of the thesis explains the rationale behind Turkey and Iran to use soft power in the Gulf region from ideological, economical and foreign policy perspectives.

Ideological Interests

During 1980s and until the end of Cold War in 1991, the rigid international system and security concerns surrounding Turkey motivated Ankara to rely more on military arrangements when it comes to achieving its interests. Therefore, it is hard to speak about the soft power motivations of Turkey towards the Gulf region from ideological aspect. However, a new perspective during the years of Turgut Ozal (1983-1989 Prime Minister of Turkey; 1989-1993 President of Turkey) can be highlighted in understanding ideological dimension of Turkish foreign policy. On the issue Muhittin Ataman (2003) argues that one of the important dimension of *Ozalist* foreign policy was his inclusive approach to Muslim and Arab World. With that respect, Turkey pursued low-level relations with Israel until mid-1990s and became one of the first countries recognizing a Palestinian state to build trust with the Arab States (Yesilada, 1993). According to William Hale (1992), developing friendly relations with Arab countries (including the Gulf states) based on trust and cultural/religious ties was an important motivation in Turkish foreign policy under Ozal.

With the AKP government since 2002, the ideological imperatives for wielding soft power in the Gulf are became much more apparent. The main component of this new ideology of the Turkish government is the Strategic Depth Doctrine (*Stratejik Derinlik*) developed by Ahmet Davutoglu¹⁰. According to the

¹⁰ Ahmet Davutoglu served as the Chief Advisor to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan from 2003 to 2009; Minister of Foreign Affairs from 2009 to 2014 and Prime Minister of Turkey since August 2014

doctrine, the power of a given country is composed of a) Constant Parameters (CP) of history, geography, population and culture; b) Potential Parameters (PP) of economic, technical and military capabilities; c) Strategic Mentality (SM); d) Strategic Planning (SP) and e) Political Will (PW). Eventually, the formulation is “Power = (CP+PP) x (SMxSPxPW)” (Davutoglu, 2001, p. 17). In this new formulation, Davutoglu also defines the geographical spheres of influence for Turkey to strengthen global position: a) land basin consisting of the Balkans, the Middle East and the Caucasus; b) the maritime basin, comprised of the Black, Eastern Mediterranean, Caspian seas and the Gulf; c) the continental basin, including the Europe, North Africa, South Asia, Middle and East Asia. According to Davutoglu, the Gulf basin, which Turkey has historical and cultural ties, is a sphere of influence for Turkish foreign policy is crucial in “transforming Turkey’s regional influence into continental one” (Davutoglu, 2001, p. 180).

It is also important to note here that the Strategic Deep doctrine had its repercussions on AKP party programs and election campaigns with some identical approaches for Turkish foreign policy in the post Cold War era (Alpaydın, 2010). In an unpublished Master thesis, Utku Ali Rıza Alpaydın (2010) analyses the soft power in Turkish foreign policy under AKP government and assesses “indeed, it can be argued that the foreign policy sections of all these documents include the evaluation of the post-Cold War environment made by Davutoğlu as a basis for the AKP’s projection of Turkish foreign policy” (p.115). This is especially true in the AKP 2007 Election Manifesto when Davutoglu was the chief foreign policy advisor to the Prime Minister Erdoğan mentioning, “a multi-dimensional foreign policy based on a well-identified and integrated framework owing to the historical accumulation,

geographical and cultural depth, and the strategic location of the country” (AKP Election Manifesto, 2007). It also states:

“To achieve this goal, the use of our deterrent/coercive hard power and our soft power with its diplomatic, economic and cultural qualities within a well-coordinated form are an absolute necessity. That is why we embrace a proactive and dynamic foreign policy method which is principled, balanced, performed in contact with all global and regional actors, based on rational grounds and well-timing.” (AKP Election Manifesto, 2007)

Therefore, it can be concluded that since the beginning of 2000s, the new approach developed by Davutoglu and articulated in AKP agenda is the most important ideological aspect of soft power motivation of Turkey in its foreign policy towards the Gulf.

Concerning Iran, Tehran’s self-projected image based on religion, ethics, and beliefs constitutes the main ideological incentives for wielding soft power. According to Manoucher Mohammadi (2008), former Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Education, soft power of Iran stems from its national character. He further asserts that soft power of Iran “outshines and overcomes hard power in a sphere in which the power is derived from spiritual sources and mainly rooted in divine and religious faiths and beliefs” (Mohammadi, 2008, p.6).

An interviewee from Qom (Iran), who prefers to remain anonymous, also mentioned that Iran’s soft power has its roots in psychological and social structure of Iranian society that has been shaped around the norms of the Islamic revolution and

he adds, “the soft power of Iran is not about convincing others, it is rather the realization of Iranian identity” (Interviewee 2, 13 March 2016). The soft power motives taking its essence from cultural identity, therefore, has become an important and inseparable part of the exporting revolution during the early years of the Islamic republic as Khomeini attempted to develop a “universally acceptable model” to enhance Iran’s popularity in the Gulf region (Feizi and Talebi, 2012). On the issue, during a personal interview Dr. Mahdi Ahouie underlined:

“The logic of revolution was to conveying a message to Muslim masses; the Iranian slogan was the unity of Islamic Ummah and exporting revolution. In a way this export of revolution was somehow voluntary. It was not implemented by military force; it was mostly through soft power. It was exactly the meaning of soft power: Muslim nations embrace the message of Islamic revolution and follow the same model and establish government to similar with Islamic republic in their countries” (Ahouie, 2016).

Economic Interests

Turkey and Iran’s economic interests in the Gulf region can be underlined as another incentive for both countries to facilitate relations through soft power. The complementary characters of Turkey and GCC economies; and cooperation-competition based Iran-GCC economic relations are examined as economic motivations of Ankara and Tehran’s soft power policies in the Gulf.

The complementarity of Turkish-GCC economies in terms of demand-supply balances in energy, investment, tourism and export products is one of the motivating factors for Turkey. According to the Oxford Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies

Group report (2015) the complementarity is based on lower value added commodities of each side. Therefore, GCC's oil and gas resources and foreign exchange surpluses and Turkey's agricultural and arable land surpluses; and trade and investment in higher value added sectors of construction, manufacturing, transport, real estate, defense, banking and other services are complementing each other¹¹. For Turkey, the soft power instruments and policies are important to secure more investment and energy deals, to attract more tourists from the Gulf and expanding Turkish exports to GCC states.

Economic liberalization since 1980 and Turkey's emergence as a trading state under AKP rule have facilitated economic motivations of Ankara for wielding soft power over the GCC to enhance market diversification for Turkish exports, and FDI inflow from the oil rich countries. In that regard, Turkish officials, businessmen and analysts have emphasized the importance of achieving economic targets through soft power means. In an interview with Financial Times (2010) then Finance Minister Mehmet Simsek underlines the Turkey's 'concerted efforts' to enhance ties with GCC countries to increase those countries FDI percentages in Turkey adding, "we have historical and cultural links with the Middle East, and we are now rediscovering them" (Wigglesworth and Strauss, 2010). Also, Alpaslan Korkmaz, the former head of Turkey's investment agency, is quoted: "The relationship between Turkey and the Gulf is deepening. We share common values and common interests. In the future we will be a lot more closely integrated with the Arab world" (Wigglesworth and Strauss,

¹¹ The further details of the complementarity of Turkey-GCC economies can be found at http://www.oxgaps.org/files/turkey-gcc_relations_trends_and_outlook_2015.pdf

2010). The soft power resources and currencies such as historical, cultural and religious ties and shared values are usually highlighted by Ankara as a base for further economic cooperation between Turkey and GCC countries.

Iran's economic relations with the GCC countries are different than Turkey's in the sense that it is based on competition-cooperation rather complementarity. The main drivers of both Iran and GCC (especially Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar) are based on energy exports of oil and gas. On the issue Professor Mehran Kamrava, Director of the Center for International and Regional Studies at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service in Qatar, mentioned during an exclusive interview in Doha that the economic motives and motivation of Iran in the GCC region is more about competition in the energy market and cooperation especially with Qatar on the shared gas field (Kamrava, personal interview, 5 April 2016).

On the other hand, Iran's economic interests appear to go beyond mere competition with the GCC countries. The new approach in oil policy of Tehran, which was based on relaxed energy policies and increasing oil production, during 1990s under the presidency of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and then Mohammad Khatami led Iran to seek greater cooperation with Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries under the umbrella of OPEC and bilateral arrangements (Ramazani, 1992). Ramazani (1992) also notes

“This new realism in economics, as in domestic politics and foreign policy, results from the emphasis of the dual leadership on reasons of state as opposed to on a chiliastic ideological crusade. The export of the revolution by coercive

means is being largely replaced by the projection of an Irano-Islamic role model by peaceful means” (p.395).

During the interviews it is also mentioned that Iran has economic interests and motivations in the Gulf region that can be achieved through soft power policies and more reconciliatory attitudes in relations with GCC countries. Professor Akbarzadeh commented:

“The overall soft power goal of Iran is normalizing relations between Iran and its neighbors; and benefiting from economic dividends of normal relations. Iran is very much a rational state which means if there are steps, measures, processes that undermines and contradicts Iran’s national interest then Iran would be not very much following the past” (Akbarzadeh, personal interview, 13 March 2016).

Similarly during the exclusive interview, former Deputy Foreign Minister of Iran Maleki (personal interview, 13 March 2016) noted that one of the main interests of Iran in the GCC region through soft power have been the “stability and calmness of in the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz” as the most important and strategic waterway in the world; and enhancing “economic cooperation among Iran UAE, Qatar, Oman and even with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait”.

Foreign Policy Interests

Foreign policy objectives of Turkey and Iran since 1980s towards the GCC states are also important motivations for both states to articulate soft power in the region. Although elaborating on foreign policies are closely linked with the

ideological and economic motivations, some aspects can be underlined as pragmatic interests independent from the former two. It is also important to note here that the foreign policy objectives of both states are not static and have changed over time due to significant transformation in the international system (the end of Cold War in 1990) and regional developments (Iran-Iraq War, Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the US invasion of Iraq and Arab Spring).

The geopolitical location, historical records and military assets have driven Iran to claim a certain, perhaps superior, role in the Gulf region. This has dictated certain foreign policy motivation for Iran in its relations with the GCC countries. Further, since the Islamic revolution what Ehteshami (2002) calls “*geopolitics of Islam*” involved in Iran’s foreign policy towards the Gulf region adding a religious dimension in the objectives.

During the pro-longed Iran-Iraq war during 1980-88, Tehran’s main foreign policy interest towards the Gulf monarchies were two-fold: first containment of Iraq through facilitating the relations with GCC states and undermining the authorities of ruling regimes through gain over the Gulf people especially among Shi’a populations (Ehteshami, 2002). Therefore, it can be claimed that the both objectives of Iran had been possible to achieve through significant soft power policies during 1980s.

On the contrary, Turkey’s foreign policy interests in the Gulf during the same decade were shaped around the security concerns stemming from a common threat perception towards revolutionary Iran and the regional instability as a result of Iran-Iraq War (Mercan, 2008; Firat and Kurkcuoglu, 2001; Oktav, 2013). Therefore, as

mentioned in Chapter Three the relations between Turkey and the Arab Gulf states gained momentum during 1980s around shared security concerns, it is difficult to mention a specific foreign policy motivation for Ankara, which requires soft power strategies.

The end of Cold War and the Saddam invasion of Kuwait marked 1990s as a significant decade for Turkey and Iran to recalibrate their foreign policy objectives towards the GCC countries. Both Turkey and Iran assessed Kuwaiti invasion as an opportunity to extend their influence through the region in a multi-polar world, where middle powers have more room for maneuver than before.

For Iran, containing Iraq and normalizing relations with the rest of the world were the two foreign policy motivations and “since restoring of Iran’s relation with United States was very difficult and sophisticated due to their prior tensions and also Iran’s inappropriate policies in the region and world; renewing ties with the Persian Gulf states became top priority of the Hashemi Administration” (Amiri and Soltani, 2011, p.191). Further, any change in the geo-political balance of power favoring Iraq in the Gulf would undermine Iran’s national interests in the region (Baktiari, 1993). Iran under President Rafsanjani was quick to condemn Iraqi invasion and launch diplomatic campaign to repair its relations with Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Saudi Arabia (Ibrahim, 1990).

Similarly, Turkey also tried to maximize its influence in the region and Iraqi invasion of Kuwait created an opportunity for Ankara to reassert its importance.

Turkey took a stance against Iraq and by breaking its non-interference in the region showed a good will towards the Arab Gulf states. William Hale (1992) notes:

“Turkey had clearly demonstrated its strategic importance, and had rendered important services to the coalition cause, without having itself fired a shot in anger. In Ankara, brave hopes were expressed that Turkey could play an important part in helping to build a more stable, prosperous and democratic order in the Middle East” (p.687).

Iran and Turkey’s foreign policy interests in maintaining closer relations with GCC countries continued during 2000s, despite changing regional balance of power following the US invasion in 2003.

On Tehran’s foreign policy motivation towards the GCC in post-2003 period, Habibi (2010) notes “the hostile international environment and ongoing tensions with the United States have also compelled Iran to improve its economic and diplomatic ties with its wealthy Arab neighbors” (p.4). Concerning Turkey, the ‘zero problems with neighbors’ policy and precise geostrategic, economic and energy interests under AKP government, the Gulf region has fallen into the sphere of interest for Ankara’s foreign policy objectives since 2003.

Despite foreign policy incentives for more cordial relations have existed for both Turkey and Iran, the post-Saddam environment has brought the GCC states and Turkey closer and increased rivalry with Iran, especially between Tehran and Riyadh in the Levant. It can be argued that the increasing concerns of GCC states over Iran’s intentions and expansion in the region have certain impact on Iran and Turkey’s soft power capabilities in the region through limiting the former and facilitating the latter.

Conclusion

This chapter of the thesis presents the two important dimensions of soft power, namely the resources and motive/motivations of Turkey and Iran for wielding soft power in the Gulf region. In that respect, both Turkey and Iran have cultural, economic, military and political resources that can be used as power currencies to generate soft power in the Gulf. It is also important to note that as presented in this chapter Turkey and Iran have had ideological, economic and foreign policy motives and motivations in creating a soft power base among Gulf constituencies, despite varying degrees and priorities among the three motives since 1980s.

Chapter Five: Wielding and Measuring Soft Power: Turkey and Iran's Soft Power Policies and Perceptions in the GCC countries

Introduction

Wielding and measuring soft power are other crucial aspects for its analysis. The soft power resources, currencies; and also motives and motivations of Turkey and Iran towards the GCC countries which are explained throughout the Chapter 4 are not adequate to assess on the existence of such a power. In fact, equating soft power resources with behaviors or outcomes is misleading. Regarding the production of soft power Nye (2006) notes:

“Of course, the fact that a foreigner drinks Coca-Cola or wears a Michael Jordan T-shirt does not in itself mean that America has power over him. This view confuses resources with behavior. Whether power resources produce a favorable outcome depends upon the context” (parag.1).

In order to address a wider picture of soft power of two non-Arab regional states over the GCC region, Chapter 5 analyzes the soft power tools including but not limited to Nye and Vuving's explanations. The chapter also capitalizes on published public opinion surveys on GCC perceptions towards Iran and Turkey. Further, the primary data through personal interviews and other indicators such as personal speeches of the prominent figures from GCC countries are also used to shed light on the soft power of Turkey and Iran in the Arab Gulf region.

Turkey and Iran's Soft Power Policies in the GCC Region

Turkey and Iran have been wielding soft power over the GCC countries through various means, at different times, over different recipients to obtain preferable foreign policy outcomes over the time period covered in this thesis. Such soft power policies range from public diplomacy to appealing rhetoric of the key political figures in both countries. With the advancement of the communication technologies and the increasing importance of the media tools, the two states have also found new avenues for wielding effective soft power policies. The policies of Turkey and Iran in an attempt to generate soft power in the GCC region since 1980 are analyzed through three categories: the demonstrative effect, public diplomacy, and foreign policy initiatives.

Demonstrative Effect

One of the main aspects of wielding soft power is so-called leading by example. As Nye argues (2004) the values that governments champion at home and in their foreign policies strongly affect the preferences of others. One should note here, however, the credibility and the implementation of such values in one country's domestic and foreign policies is the key in soft power production; and that if one country's claims are perceived as hypocrisy or mere propaganda the soft power is substantially undermined.

Against this background, it can be claimed that while Iran set an influential example of political system in the immediate aftermath of Islamic Revolution, Turkey failed to project a domestic and foreign policy model to appeal people in the Gulf during 1980s. This claim also supports the core argument of this thesis that Iran had a

significant soft power over the GCC countries after the revolution and such soft power has been sustained at different time periods over different people until the end of 2000s, while Turkey has emerged as a strong soft power house in the region after achieving significant domestic, economic and foreign policy objectives mentioned at a time when Iran's image has been deteriorated in GCC countries. In any case, the demonstrative effect or in other words, leading by example, has been an important tool for Turkey and Iran to appeal people in the region.

Regarding Iran, the overthrow of repressive monarchy by the popular uprising and the establishment of the republic based on Islamic rules was a source of inspirations for many people in the Arab world including GCC countries. The new regime's stance against Western domination and despotic regimes in the Arab world; and its call for social and economic justice for the people resonated for many Arabs at that time where the new Islamic movements were on rise after the failure of Arab nationalism in 1967(Fraihat, personal interview, 31 March 2016). In fact, the power of revolutionary Iran rested on its ability to carry out such values domestically and internationally. On the latter point Graham Fuller (2007) notes:

“He [Ayatollah Khomeini] expelled the shah, the top U.S. ally in the region; seized U.S. hostages; and bested the U.S. government's ill-fated military rescue operation, all wildly popular events across most of the Muslim world. Iran generally presumes to speak for pan-Muslim causes, rarely invoking its own Shi'ite character except to condemn injustices committed by repressive Sunni regimes on occasion” (p.146).

During the presidency of Khatami, the dual attempt of strengthening civil society and rights domestically and initiating détente with the neighboring states can be considered as consistency and leading by example in that respect. Edward Wastnidge (2015) argues: “Such attempts fit in with Nye’s views on political values being important to a country’s soft power capabilities. While the Islamic Republic cannot be seen as having any major clout historically in this regard, Khatami’s attempts at promoting reformist, modern Islamic politics did have a positive effect on its international image” (p.369). In a similar manner, Iran’s stance against the US domination and initiatives for acquiring a nuclear fuel cycle under President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005 (Chubin, 2015) can be highlighted as a consistency between the values that Iran defends internationally and the policies it implements at home.

Turkey, on the other hand, emerged from being perceived as an ineffective democracy, marginal economic power and purely secular domestically; and a dependent pawn in the Western power’s orbit internationally during 1980s to a Muslim state with an effective democracy and flourishing economy domestically and independent, active and assertive player internationally in mid-2000s in the GCC region (Fraihat, personal interview, 31 March 2016). On the perception towards Turkey in the Arab world during 1980s and 1990s, Ofra Bengio and Gencer Ozcan (2001) notes that Arabs were ridiculing on Turkish democracy as a farce and ‘democracy of tanks’ (p.72). Further, despite trade liberalization since 1980 and substantial progress in Turkish exports, Turkey failed to sustain economic growth and

since the end of 1980s Turkish economy faced with numerous recessions (Ercel, 2006).

Turkey's demonstrative effect has gained momentum under AKP government that in power since 2002. Kemal Kirisci (2011) notes that Turkey's demonstrative effect is a function of three domestic policy developments "the rise of the "trading state", making Turkey visible through commerce, investment and trade; the diffusion of Turkey's democratization experience as a "work in progress"; and the positive image of Turkey's "new" foreign policy, including the introduction of policies encouraging freer movement of people between Turkey and the Middle East" (p.35). Although Kirisci (2011) argues Turkey's demonstrative effect within the context of the debates about Turkey as a model for the transformation of Arab Middle East, it can be closely linked to Turkey's soft power in the GCC region. Indeed, literature on Turkey's soft power addresses the same aspects as the functions in that respect (Oguzlu, 2007; Altınay, 2008; and Altunisik, 2008). It can be argued that, therefore, Turkey has taken significant and coherent policy steps in the realms of domestic politics, economy and foreign policy that rendered its public diplomacy efforts towards the region effective with solid foundations; and enhanced its soft power in the GCC region.

Public Diplomacy

Soft power and public diplomacy are two terms closely linked to each other. As Nye (2008) argues public diplomacy is an instrument for governments articulate soft power resources to communicate with and attract publics in other countries. In this regard, the communication revolution after Second World War has enabled information to large publics and "has turned public opinion into an increasing factor

in international relations” (Melissen, 2005, p.3). Therefore, public diplomacy is a key for wielding soft power. On the relation between soft power resources and public diplomacy Nye (2008) puts:

“Public diplomacy tries to attract by drawing attention to these potential resources through broadcasting, subsidizing cultural exports, arranging exchanges, and so forth. But if the content of a country’s culture, values, and policies are not attractive, public diplomacy that “broadcasts” them cannot produce soft power. It may produce just the opposite”.

Against this background, both Turkey and Iran pursues public diplomacy through broadcasts, cultural events and promotions, social media and official and non-governmental exchanges to articulate their soft power resources that mentioned in chapter four of this thesis into preferable outcomes. The main governmental bodies responsible for public diplomacy are Islamic Culture and Relations Organization in Iran and Prime Ministry Office of Public Diplomacy in Turkey with that respect.

First, as mentioned in Chapter Four, the cultural resources are important assets for Turkey and Iran to produce soft power in the region. Therefore, both Turkey and Iran focuses on promotion of their culture and language through official channels of embassies and cultural centers¹². Iran has several cultural missions and culture centers in various GCC countries, including Iranian Cultural Mission in Doha, Persian Language Center in Muscat and Iranian Club Dubai. Similarly, Turkish government initiates cultural events in the GCC region to enhance its soft power. Turkish

¹² Dr. Shahram Akbarzadeh, Dr. Mahdi Ahoie and Turkish Ambassador to Doha H.E. Ahmet Demirok mentioned during personal interviews the government sponsored cultural activities as important mechanism for producing soft power in the GCC countries.

Ambassador to Doha Ahmet Demirok, said that the Turkish embassies in the Arab Gulf region are playing a crucial role in conducting public diplomacy and cultural promotion. Speaking on the cultural activities and government initiatives in Qatar, Ambassador Demirok noted:

“In a cooperation with the our Qatari counterparts, we have organized numerous events both in Qatar and Turkey within the scope of Qatar Turkey Year of Culture 2015. Besides, we opened Yunus Emre Institute in Doha and we have initiated opening of the turcology department in Qatar University to create affinity between two societies. Cultural centers’ scope of activities are wide and they are very influential in producing soft power” (Demirok, personal interview, 19 April 2016).

Second, another important mechanism to reach to the publics is broadcasting and other media channels. When the time period covered in this thesis considered, it would be argued that Iran and Turkey had limited communication channels given the scarcity of mass communication technologies such as satellite TV and internet in the region until 1990s. However, with the rising oil income flowing to the Gulf since 1970s, printed press and recorded media became very important tool for conveying messages and news. In fact, Ayatollah Khomeini extensively used taped sermons to spread his message and such taped reached large number of audiences (Koren, 2015). During the early years of the revolution, radio was one of the main sources of spreading revolutionary ideas to the Gulf¹³. Conveying Iran’s message to the masses

¹³Dr. Luciano Zaccara and Dr. Mahjoob Zweiri commented that radio was common and influential way for Iran to communicate with the audience in the GCC countries as TVs were not that widespread at that time.

through pilgrims during Hajj is also mentioned as an interesting soft power tool of Iran in the GCC region. Dr. Mahdie Ahouie explained during the interview:

“Iran always uses hajj as a means of soft power. Iranian government has political agenda every year and ceremonies are held in Mecca and Medina chanting against Israel and US. We think that we can use Hajj to communicate all the Hajis from Islamic world to make them familiar with Islamic revolution, including the Gulf people” (personal interview, 14 March 2016).

The Turkish attempts on conveying any message in the GCC region during 1980s and 1990s were quite limited. Since the establishment of Office of Public Diplomacy in 2010, however, two main narratives have emerged one on Turkish identity, economic prosperity and adherence to democracy, and another on international credibility (Huijgh and Warlick, 2016).

The changing nature of the communication technologies since the beginning of the 1990s with the satellite TVs and the widespread use of Internet and social media, has transformed the conditions for projection soft power (Nye, 2004). It also diffused the sources of information among multiple actors including but not limited to private companies, non-governmental organizations and even individuals (Keohane and Nye, 2000). With that respect as mentioned in Chapter four, both Turkey and Iran have satellite channels broadcasting in Arabic¹⁴ to reach the audience in the GCC region on a daily communication bases. Further, social media has become one of the key tools for communicating with the targeted audiences in the region. According to Arab

¹⁴ Al Alam TV and Al-Kawthar are two Iranian broadcasts in Arabia. TRT Al Arabia is Turkey's official channel broadcasting in Arabic.

Social Media Report, GCC countries dominate the top five Arab Facebook users as percentage of their population, Saudi Arabia leads in terms of Twitter users in the Arab countries, which is followed by Kuwait and the UAE¹⁵ (Salem and Mourtada, 2012). With that respect, prominent Turkish and Iranian government officials including Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, Iran’s Supreme Leader Khamanei, President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign minister Javad Zarif have official twitter accounts in English¹⁶. They are active users of social media with a considerable number of followers across the world, including the GCC region.

Third, op-ed articles written by prominent political figures can also be highlighted as a way to convey messages in a preferable way to targeted audiences. An article by Iranian foreign minister Zarif appeared in English edition of Saudi Arabia’s Alsharq Al-Awsat in 2013. In the article titled “Our Neighbors are Our Priority” Zarif inks important messages to portray Iran’s *benignity* as a soft power currency towards its ‘southern neighbors’ at a time when the tensions between Iran and GCC countries were at high:

“We recognize that we cannot promote our interests at the expense of others.

This is particularly the case in relation to counterparts so close to us that their security and stability are intertwined with ours” (parag.2).

He adds:

¹⁵ For the full report see:
<http://www.arabsocialmediareport.com/UserManagement/PDF/ASMR%204%20final%20to%20post.pdf>

¹⁶ For the Twitter accounts see <https://twitter.com/jzarif>, https://twitter.com/khamenei_ir, <https://twitter.com/hassanrouhani>, https://twitter.com/a_davutoglu_eng, <https://twitter.com/trpresidency?lang=tr>. For the Arabic accounts of Turkish President Erdogan and Prime Minister Davutoglu see https://twitter.com/rterdogan_ar?lang=tr, <https://twitter.com/DavutogluAr>

“Iran, content with its size, geography, and human and natural resources, and enjoying common bonds of religion, history and culture with its neighbors, has not attacked anyone in nearly three centuries. We extend our hand in friendship and Islamic solidarity to our neighbors, assuring them that they can count on us as a reliable partner”(parag.17).

Fourth, the governments are not the only agents promoting positive image of a given country. The successes of Turkish series, which are produced by private companies for seeking profit, are the most prominent aspects of soft power and public diplomacy in GCC countries. The themes in soap operas such as a liberal lifestyle, a romanticized past, an idealized Turkey, love affairs and gender issues are appealing to many people in the Gulf (Huijigh and Warlick, 2016). The Turkish government also capitalizes on the popularity of the series and utilizes it as a mean for the soft power of Turkey in the region. In 2008 Turkey ambassador to Saudi Arabia was quoted "Turkish drama has succeeded in boosting the number of Saudi tourists from 30,000 last summer to 100,000 this year" (Al Tamimi, 2012). In a visit to Zayed Univeristy in the UAE, former Turkish President Abdullah Gul had a meeting with Emirati students, discussing on Turkish soap operas. Gul also stressed Turkish soap operas were the focal point of the meetings with officials of the United Arab Emirates (Hürriyet Daily News, 2012).

Foreign Policy Initiatives

Foreign policy initiatives are important soft power tools as they articulate the soft power currency of *benignity* between soft power wielder and target through

creating gratitude and sympathy (Vuving, 2009, p.9). Foreign policy acts are also important for a given countries *beauty*, as Vuving notes:

“Beauty can come from a country that acts as the agent of a value, a country that is perceived as the avatar of an ideal, a country that champions a cause, or a country that articulates a vision compellingly. When it holds fast on a cause, champions a value, devotes itself to an ideal, compellingly articulates a vision, it gains credibility as a representative, a torch, or a firm supporter and guardian of the cause, the value, the ideal, or the vision. From here comes credibility, legitimacy, and even moral authority” (2009, p.11).

In that respect, foreign policy initiatives of both Turkey and Iran have been important tools to project soft power in the GCC region. The foreign policies of both states have changed depending on the domestic and international conditions, and have garnered positive images at different times and over different segments within different GCC countries. This part of the thesis tries to show this fact through analyzing different foreign policies of both states at different times. The foreign policy initiatives of multilateralism, diplomatic support and adherence to international norms; and resistance, assertive foreign policy and rhetoric of charismatic leaders of both states have been presented as soft power tools of Turkey and Iran in the GCC countries.

To start with multilateralism, diplomatic support and adherence of international norms, the end of Cold War has enabled Turkey and Iran to engage in the region based such norms. As explained previously, foreign policy orientations of Iran under President Rafsanjani and Turkey under President Ozal aimed at enhancing relations

with the GCC states. Both states' stance against Saddam Hussein aggressiveness and support for Kuwait's territorial integrity can be highlighted as foreign policies based on aforementioned aspects of soft power tools. Condemnation of the invasion and their commitment of UN resolution and economic embargo on Iraq showed both states adherence to international norms and support for multilateralism. Therefore, both Iran and Turkey articulated *benignity* in the eyes of GCC states through their foreign policies. It is most evident in that in the aftermath of Kuwaiti invasion, Iran and Saudi Arabia discussed resuming diplomatic ties after the relation were broken off in 1987 over the killing of 400 pilgrims, most of them were Iranians during so-called Iranian inspired riots in Mecca (Los Angeles Times, 1990). Also, trade volumes increased and the direct flights were restored between Iran and GCC countries (Molavi, 2015).

Following Rafsanjani, Iranian President Khatami initiated 'Dialogue among Civilizations' as foreign policy priority for improving Iran's international standing and further restoring its relations with the neighboring states. The Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) summit in Tehran in 1997 took place within this new aura in Iran's foreign policy supporting dialogue, peace promotion and multilateralism. The outcome was positive for Iran in restoring its image; then Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, "the most senior Saudi visitor to Iran since the 1979 revolution" attended the conference (Molavi, 2015); the positive repercussions on Iran-GCC relations reported in GCC media outlets (Fas.org, 1997); and frequent ministerial visits took place between Iran and GCC states (Clawson, Eisenstadt, Kanovsky, Menashiry, 1998). On the other hand, Turkey's image was significantly deteriorated

in the Muslim world and in the GCC due to military agreement with Israel in 1996. Re-securization of Turkish foreign policy due to its fight with Kurdish separatists and rapprochement with Israel retained Turkey to project multilateral and peace promoting foreign policy tool at that time. During foreign ministers meeting in 1997 OIC summit, two resolution adopted indirectly criticizing Turkey for its military cooperation with Israel and for leading military campaigns into northern Iraq (Hurriyet Daily News, 1997).

The multilateralism, peace promotion, and mediation in the international conflicts have been milestones of Turkish foreign policy tools under AKP leadership, however. In fact, in an article published in Foreign Policy, then foreign minister Davutoğlu (2010) addresses the links between such foreign policy methods and Turkey's soft power:

“...the adoption of a new discourse and diplomatic style, which has resulted in the spread of Turkish soft power in the region. Although Turkey maintains a powerful military due to its insecure neighborhood, we do not make threats. Instead, Turkish diplomats and politicians have adopted a new language in regional and international politics that prioritizes Turkey's civil-economic power” (parag. 16).

Within this framework, Turkey not only maintained its relations with EU, NATO, the US and restored its relations with Russia as of 2009, it has engaged actively in the Middle East through this new discourse and diplomatic style, pre-emptive peace mediations and multilateralism. A number of initiatives can be highlighted here.

First, in 2003 Turkey initiated ‘Iraq’s Neighboring Countries Process’, the first meeting was held in Istanbul and it lasted until 2009 with several meetings. The main aim was to supporting territorial integrity of Iran and ensuring “the participation of those who did not take part in the previous elections, the Sunni Arabs” (Hurriyet, 30 April 2005). Turkish initiative was able to bring together many countries neighboring Iraq, including Iran, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Kuwait.

Second, Turkey has also increased its efforts as the trusted third party for the mediations in the region. In 2008 Syrian-Israeli talks started in Istanbul, Turkish Chambers and Commodity Exchange (TOBB) launched Industry for Peace Initiative between Israel and Palestine, and tried to mediate between different parties in Lebanon (Altunısık, 2008).

Third, like President Khatami’s “Dialogue among Civilizations”, Turkey supported the initiative of “Alliance of Civilizations”, which was initially offered by then Spanish Prime Minister Zapatero in 2004. Turkey become the co-sponsor of the initiative given its Muslim and democratic characters. Turkey’s participation to the initiative is significant for many aspects. First of all, it shows Turkey’s preference for multilateralism over unilateralism and conciliatory efforts over conflict-seeking ones. Second, it was important for Turkey to null Huntington’s ‘clash of civilizations’ and showing Islam and democracy can be embodied. Yet, perhaps most importantly, Turkey became the spokesperson of the Islamic world in a global initiative for the first time (Balci and Mis, 2008).

Apart from *benignity*, assertive foreign policy and rhetoric of the political leaders in

Turkey and Iran are also important in producing soft power in the region depending on the regional context. With that respect, resisting Western or any kind of domination, standing against injustices and championing Muslim causes have constituted soft power currency of *beauty* and increased popularity of Turkey and Iran in the eyes many people in the Middle East, including GCC countries.

The immediate aftermath of the Islamic Revolution was a time for Iran to project its image through its foreign policy rhetoric. Charismatic supreme leader Ayatollah Khomeini encouraged people of the Arab world to upraise against the suppressive governments. The mottos of Khomeini's foreign policy rhetoric were "free yourself from imperialism" (Ahouie, personal interview, 14 March 2016), "Islamic liberation" (Freihat, personal interview, 31 March 2016) and "export of Islamic revolution" (Kamrava, personal interview, 5 April, 2016). As explained below, Iran foreign policies and rhetoric was very effective tool for creating sympathy towards the regime, at least in the eyes of publics in the GCC countries.

The interviewees¹⁷ also mentioned, Iranian foreign policy under President Ahmadinejad was successful to create soft power. If one analyzes the first term (2005-2009) Ahmadinejad's foreign policy, a return to the revolutionary discourse, confrontational rhetoric with the West over Tehran's nuclear program and stance against Israel can be highlighted as the milestones that enhanced Iran's image in the Arab streets. In 2005, during his speech in The World Without Zionism in Tehran, Ahmadinejad was quoted "The Imam said this regime occupying Jerusalem must vanish from the page of time" (Norouzi, 2010). However, many mainstream

¹⁷ Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh, Professor Mehran Kamrava, Dr. Ibrahim Fraihat and Dr. Mahdi Ahouie referred this point during personal interviews.

international media has reported a different translation of Ahmadinejad saying: “As the Imam [Ayatollah Khomeini] said, Israel must be wiped off the map” (McGreal and McAskill, 26 October 2005). President Ahmadinejad also called Holocaust (the Nazi genocide of 6 million Jews in the second world war) as a myth during a live broadcast on Iranian television with wide publicity (Tait and Harding, 15 December 2005). Trita Parsi (2006) argues that Ahmedinejad’s anti-Israeli rhetoric is determined within geo-strategic rivalry between the two, rather than ideological collision. Parsi (2006) notes “Iran started to translate its rhetoric on Israel into actual policy in order to sabotage the peace process – deemed to be the weakest link in the US-Israeli effort to create an Israel-centric order in the region based on Iran’s prolonged isolation” (p.8). Despite the geostrategic calculations of Iran, President Ahmadinejad’s rhetoric resonated in the Arab streets (Soghom, 2008). Similarly, while Iran stopped its voluntary cooperation with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 2006, President Ahmadianejad was quoted saying “The era of coercion and domination has ended,” and “Issue as many resolutions like this as you want and make yourself happy. You can't prevent the progress of the Iranian nation” (Dareini, 6 February 2006). The assertive Iranian foreign policy and charisma of Ahmadinejad has articulated as a tool for enhancing Iran’s image in the region. In fact, Professor Hadian-Jazy commented:

"Coming from his background it was not uncommon to say that stuff. He [President Ahmadinejad] never thought that as president it would be different. But once he got the reaction, he realised it could establish him as a strong leader among Muslims. It was a calculated move" (McAskill and Tisdal, 21 June 2006).

The post-Cold war environment and the emergence of Turkey with solid democratic and economic development has enabled Ankara to pursue more independent, active and to some extent assertive foreign policy under AKP leadership and its new foreign policy agenda since mid-2000s. In that sense, Ankara's foreign policy discourse started to challenge Iran's monopoly over championing anti-Western and anti-Israeli Muslim cause. In 2007, then Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan lashed Israeli President Shimon Peres during a panel on Gaza at Davos World Economic Forum meeting. Erdogan was quoted: "When it comes to killing, you know well how to kill" (Bennhold, 29 January 2009). In 2010, Israel raided Turkish humanitarian aid flotilla 'Mavi Marmara' to Gaza and killed nine Turkish citizens and Ankara immediately severed its diplomatic relations with Israel. In this sense, Turkey's uncompromising attitudes towards Palestinian cause as a foreign policy objective have repercussions in the Middle East, increasing Erdogan's popularity in many Arab capitals (Perry, 2010; The Jerusalem Post, 2011; Migdalovitz, 2010). In 2014, Erdoğan also stood against the decision-making structure under the auspices of United Nation Security Council (UNSC) in dealing with Palestine issue, civilian killings in Iraq and Syria and coup in Egypt. Speaking during the UN General Assembly Erdoğan was quoted "the double standards by the modern world leads to serious and significant distrust", "...thousands of people dying and we are only speaking about this issue. And not acting on it", "...We have to address these issues as UN without any further delay", "...Let me also say the world is bigger than five. The fact is that five permanent members of UNSC have rendered the UN ineffective, despite the situation in the world cannot be

acceptable by global consciousness”¹⁸ The enthusiastic claps can be heard during Erdogan’s speech in the UN General Assembly meeting.

Concerning the foreign policies as soft power tools, one should note that despite foreign policies and rhetoric of political leaders in Turkey and Iran have not directly targeted the GCC countries, the repercussion of such policies reach the mass audiences in the Arab Gulf region thanks to advancement of mass communication technologies. Therefore, it would be fair to address that the foreign policies of both states whether deliberately or not are important tools for wielding soft power in the GCC region.

Perceptions and Opinions towards Turkey and Iran in the GCC region

This section of the thesis tries to present the impact of Turkey and Iran’s soft power efforts in the GCC countries. The theoretical framework of soft power addresses that public opinion survey is the most appropriate way to measure or track soft power of a given state (Nye 2004) as they “can quantify changes in a country’s attractiveness over time” (Nye 2006). Yet, given the scarcity of available public opinion polls about the perception of GCC publics towards Turkey and Iran, the academic and non-academic articles are used to explain the fact. Also, the information collected through personal interviews is articulated especially for the initial decades of 1980s and 1990s as the interviewees have both expertise and experience on the topic.

¹⁸ The full speech of President Erdogan with English translation can be found at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zghm_cFpYvY

One of the main findings of the literature survey and personal interviews is that there are two parallel trends in Iran-GCC relations in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution. First one is that Iran's image in the eyes of Gulf publics increased due to the appealing model and messages of the Islamic Revolution. Ibrahim Fraihat, the Deputy Director of Brookings Doha, noted: "In early 1980s Iran's soft power was its peak because of raising anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism or Islamic liberation. They found huge audience in the region, including the Gulf" (personal interview, 31 March 2016). Mehran Kamrava, director of the Center for International and Regional Studies at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service in Qatar, said: "For religious activists in Saudi Arabia, during 1979-80 Iran was a role model, because for the first time Islam achieved political power. ...also during 1980s Shia in Bahrain looked at Iran, Khomeini was very popular" (personal interview, 5 April 2016). Dr. Mahdi Ahoie also made similar comments.

At the same time, as analyzed in Chapter Three, GCC rulers did not welcome Iranian revolution and Iran's image in the eyes of ruling elite was significantly deteriorated during Iran-Iraq War¹⁹. On the perception of GCC rulers toward the revolutionary Iran Cronin and Masalha (2011) notes:

"The GCC states viewed the Iranian revolution as a mortal threat. Khomeini openly called for the populations of the Arab Gulf states to overthrow their monarchies, and the latter responded in kind, establishing the GCC in 1981 as a direct riposte and coordinating Arab support for Iraq in its war with the Islamic republic" (p.5).

¹⁹ Mehran Kamrava, Ibrahim Fraihat, Mahdi Ahoie and Sharam Akbarzadeh mentioned that during Iran-Iraq war, Iran's positive image in the GCC states was very low.

As mentioned earlier, there is not a reliable opinion poll or source to address Turkey's image or soft power in the GCC region, as the relations between the two was very narrow in scope. Still, the economic opening of Turkey and converging security interests between Turkey and GCC during 1980s; and Prime Minister Tugut Ozal's warmth toward Islam and Muslim world²⁰ can be interpreted as positive developments on Turkey's side.

As opposed to the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution and Iran-Iraq War, Iran's image in the eyes of GCC ruling elite improved under moderate President Rafsanjani and President Khatami during 1990s. The Middle East Contemporary Survey provides insightful analysis and information on the Iran's image and relations with the GCC countries through yearly publications. The survey notes that most of the GCC states including Bahrain were quick to seek a rapprochement with Iran in following the Kuwait's invasion and there was positive media coverage towards Iran's increasing integration in the region (Ayalon (ed.), 1990, p. 308-309). "...it [Tehran] wanted to demonstrate that it was a peace-seeking country that sought stability in the region and was sufficiently powerful to guarantee such stability. Tehran expanded its foreign relations, projecting an image of reliability and stability..." (Ayalon (ed.), 1990, p. 369). In 1991, the rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran bared its fruits, and the two reached an agreement with the help of Omani mediation on the return of Iranian pilgrims and a rally in Mecca to convey supreme leader Khamenei's message (Kramer, 1993).

²⁰ Turgut Ozal was the first Turkish Prime Minister who went to Hajj. Further, Turkish Ambassador to Doha Ahmet Demirok mentioned during interview that during Turgut Ozal's prime ministry and presidency, Turkish and Arab Gulf people started to rediscover each other thanks to open policies of Turkey towards the region.

Yet, more reliable and online public opinion polls on GCC perceptions towards Turkey and Iran dates back to early 2000s. In 2002, the poll titled “Arabs: What They Believe and What They Value Most”²¹ by Zogby International finds that Iran received very high favorability in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, 66 percent and 79 percent respectively, and 38 percent in UAE. On the contrary, Turkey’s favorability rates were significantly low in all three GCC countries compared to Iran (See Table 1).

Table 1: How GCC states viewed Turkey and Iran in 2002 (favorable/unfavorable)

	KSA		KUWAIT		UAE	
	Fav.	Unfav.	Fav.	Unfav.	Fav.	Unfav.
Iran	66	31	79	18	38	54
Turkey	28	64	42	49	11	75

Source: Zogby International (2002).

An even more comprehensive public opinion poll titled “Looking at Iran” by Zogby International released in 2013 shows that Iran’s image in the GCC (Saudi Arabia and the UAE included) countries was positive until 2009. The favorable attitudes toward Iran went through a sharp decline since then (See Table 2). While 85 percent of the Saudi and 68 percent of the Emirati respondents had favorable attitudes towards Iran in 2006, the same percentage dropped to 35 percent for Saudi Arabia and 13 percent for the UAE in 2009.

²¹ The survey conducted in eight Middle Eastern Countries (Three of them are GCC members: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE). For further details see: https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/aai/pages/9767/attachments/original/1438878620/Arab_Opinion_2002.pdf?1438878620

Table 2: Favorable/Unfavorable perception toward Iran

	KSA		UAE	
	Fav.	Unfav.	Fav.	Unfav.
2006	85	14	68	31
2008	72	25	56	41
2009	35	58	13	87
2011	6	80	22	70

Source: Zogby International, 2013.

The same survey included all six GCC countries (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, The UAE, and Oman) and other 11 Arab countries' general attitudes towards Iran and the Iranian Revolution, Iranian people and culture, and Iran's nuclear activities to present an extensive picture in 2012. They also included favorability of Turkey in the six GCC countries in the same poll. As of 2012, Iran was favorable only in Kuwait out of six GCC countries with 50 percent. In the rest of the GCC countries, the majority of respondents' attitudes towards Iran were classified as unfavorable. Unfavorable attitudes are reported as highest in Saudi Arabia (84 percent) and Qatar (79 percent). On the contrary, the attitudes towards Turkey were favorable in all six GCC countries in 2012 (see Table 3).

Table 3: GCC attitudes toward Iran and Turkey (favorable/unfavorable)

	KUWAIT		BAHRAIN		QATAR		UAE		KSA		OMAN	
	Fav	Unfav	Fav	Unfav	Fav	Unfav	Fav	Unfav	Fav	Unfav	Fav	Unfav
Iran	50	44	42	56	16	79	27	69	15	84	32	57
Turkey	63	34	48	45	49	48	58	38	71	24	66	28

Source: Zogby International 2013

On seeing Iran as a model for development and progress, the poll results shows that while the plurality of respondents in Kuwait (44 percent) and Bahrain (46 percent) sees Iran as a good model to copy, the plurality of respondents in Qatar (48 percent), the UAE (56 percent), Saudi Arabia (67 percent) and Oman (41 percent) said Iran is not a good model to follow. Considering Turkey as a model for development, the percentage of respondents stating ‘a good model’ exceeds the percentage of ‘not a good model’ in all GCC countries (Zogby, 2013, p.9).

Further, the respondents in the GCC viewed Iran’s role as negative in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Bahrain, and the Arab Gulf region: “In each case, about 50% of respondents in Kuwait and Bahrain say Iran’s role is negative, while about two-thirds of respondents in Oman and UAE see Iran as playing a negative role in each country and the region. Saudi and Qatari respondents are the most negative, with about three-quarters of these respondents saying Iran plays a negative role” (Zogby, 2013, p.15). When asked their

position of agreed/disagreed with the following statement ‘Iran is a role model for my country’ majority of the respondents in all GCC countries states that they disagree (Kuwait 53%, Bahrain 58%, Qatar 78%, UAE 62%, KSA 84% and Oman 57%).

A 2014 poll titled “Today’s Middle East: Pressures and Challenges” conducted by Zogby Research Services for Sir Bani Yas Forum, includes two GCC states of Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The results of the polls shows that the majority of respondents from Arab Gulf countries continue to perceive Iran’s role in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Bahrain and Yemen as negative (Saudi Arabia 66 percent and the UAE 52 percent).

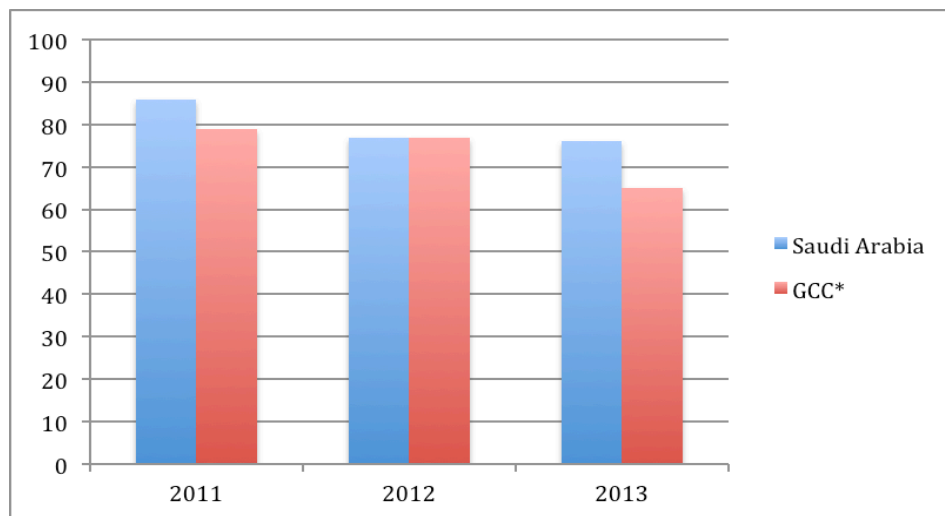
Another crucial finding of the poll (Zogby Research Services, 2014) is that the election of a moderate president in Iran has not contributed Iran’s image in the region. When the respondents were asked to state whether they agree or disagree with the following statement “During the presidency of Hassan Rouhani, Iran’s behavior in the region has moved in a more positive direction”, plurality of the respondents from GCC countries stated they disagree (Saudi Arabia 47 percent, the UAE 65 percent).

On perceptions towards Turkey in the GCC, annual surveys conducted by TESEV (in 2011, 2012, and 2013) show that the positive image of Turkey in the GCC region was prevailing. The 2011 TESEV Ortadogu’da Türkiye Algısı (Perceptions toward Turkey in the Middle East) survey reveals that the positive attitudes toward Turkey stood at 89 percent among Saudi respondents and 76 percent in respondents from five GCC countries. The survey also shows that positive attitudes toward Turkey increased in Saudi Arabia since from 72 percent in 2009 to 82 percent in 2010. The perceptions toward Turkey followed in 2012, and 2013 with a annual polls. According TESEV poll results, positive perception towards Turkey in Saudi Arabia remained high (77 %

in 2012 and 76% in 2013), and the majority of respondents in other five GCC countries still had positive perceptions towards Turkey despite a considerable decline in 2013 (see Figure 1).

Turkey's positive image as contributing peace and stability in the region also increased in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. According to Zogby Research (2014) poll, 84 percent of the respondents in Saudi Arabia and 74 percent of the respondents in UAE states that they agree Turkey contributes peace and stability in the region. It was 76 percent in 2012 and 73 percent in 2013 for Saudi Arabia, and 61 percent in 2012 and 64 percent for UAE in 2013.

Figure 1 Positive Perception Towards Turkey



*Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, the UAE and Oman
Source: TESEV polls 2011, 2012, and 2013

The survey titled “Middle East 2015 Current and Future Challenges” by Zogby Research Services (2015) covers Saudi Arabia and the UAE from GCC region. The survey results show that negative perceptions toward Iran still prevail among the

participants from the GCC region and Iran is perceived as a country creating conflict in the region. A seventy five percent of Saudi respondents and 85 percent of Emiratis think that Iranian involvement is significant in causing conflict in Iraq, and an 88 percent of Saudi participants and 84 percent of Emirati respondents stated Iranian-backed groups are causing conflict in Syria. Similar results are reported for the case of Yemen as well. Same survey also reveals that the support for the nuclear agreement between Iran and P5+1 among GCC participants is low (62 percent of Saudis and 91 percent of Emiratis stated that they are not supportive of the agreement).

More interestingly, on the question “How do you evaluate the role played by each of the following countries in combating extremist sectarian violence?” Turkey gets more “consistently positive reviews” from most countries in the survey including GCC countries (59 percent in Saudi Arabia and 63 percent in UAE). On the contrary the role of Iran in combating extremist sectarian violence is viewed most negatively in all surveyed countries (except Lebanon with 50 percent). A eighty-six percent of Saudi respondents and 89 percent of Emirati participants stated that Iran plays a negative role in that respect.

Last but not least, a poll conducted by AlJazeera Center for Studies (2015) titled “Arab Elites' Attitudes toward Arab-Iranian Relations and Iran’s Role in the Region” reveals that Arab elites overwhelmingly defined present political and security relations between Iran and the Arab world as bad or very bad. Although the data based on country breakdown is not provided, the survey is significant as it includes respondents from all six GCC countries. When asked about Iran’s attitudes toward Arab Spring revolutions, almost 80 percent of the respondents said it is extremely

negative or negative to some extent and for the reason for that most common response is noted as “Iran intervened politically and militarily on the side of oppression to quash revolutions” (Al-Smaidi, 2015, p.6). Similarly, 82 percent of the respondents said Iran’s image in the Arab world is worse than before the Arab Spring and 92 per cent of Arab elites said they do not consider the Iranian state as a model that should be followed in governance.

Analysis and Discussion

The survey results, first and foremost, show that soft power or the positive image of a given country over other countries is not static and permanent. The perceptions towards a country are highly related with the domestic and foreign policies of soft power wielder and the context of regional developments. When Turkey and Iran’s image in the GCC countries considered, the poll results also present that while positive perceptions towards Iran has declined considerably since 2009, Turkey has emerged as soft power wielder in the GCC region. There are various reasons for such a picture.

Firstly, the unbridgeable perceived contradictions of Tehran’s rhetoric and policies started in 2009. Iran gained increasing popularity among the neighboring publics, particularly in the Arab world even after the US invasion of Iraq, where Mozaffari (2013, p. 198) argues Iran has increased its soft power reach during the first term of Ahmadinejad presidency through its aims of defending the rights of Muslims worldwide. Yet, the controversial presidential victory of Ahmadinejad in his second term has changed Iran’s image in the eyes of people. The Green Movement in 2009 and Iranian regime’s repressive response against popular uprisings covered widely by

international media (Jeffrey, 2009; Al Jazeera English, 2009; Freeman and Blair, 2009; Rothberg, 2010; and Makhmalbaf, 2010) and exposed the contradictions in Iranian's championing of populations against repressive regimes since the revolution and the domestic responses to popular demands. The Zogby Research poll of 2012 shows that the majority of the respondents in all six GCC countries identified themselves with the Green Movement than Iranian government (70% in Kuwait, 53% in Bahrain, 73% in Qatar, 68% in UAE, 62% in KSA and 61% in Oman). The perceived contradictions in Iran's policies also revealed after Arab Spring.

Tehran's siding with repressive Syrian regime, albeit for a long time, against popular demands has raised the credibility and legitimacy problems of Iran during the Arab. In fact, there were two different perception among Iranian political elite towards the uprisings: first camp around supreme leader framed it Iranian inspired Islamic awakening and advocated to support uprisings; yet the second camp around president Ahmadinejad perceived the developments in the Middle East as a US-Israeli conspiracy and took a cautious stance and supported establishing diplomatic relations with those states (Haji-Yousefi, 2012). However, Iran's outspoken rhetoric praising the demands of people in other parts of the Arab world on the one hand, and Tehran's overall support for Assad regime on the other hand wiped off the image of Iran in the eyes of many people in the Arab Gulf region.

Secondly, regional development, threat perception, increased sectarianism and counter-revolution efforts of the some GCC countries after Arab Spring plays important role in torpedoing Iran's image in the GCC region. This can be evaluated under the geopolitical conditions where Iran and GCC states are operating. Increasing

sectarianism in the region mostly in the conflicts in Iraq, Syria, but also in Bahrain and Yemen has challenged Iran's ability to project soft power in the region. On the issue Professor Akbarzadeh noted:

“The sectarian war in the region has meant that Iran is now labeled as a Shia state. It is perceived as a purely sectarian state because Iran's allies in the region are Shia partners, Syria and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Once Iran is seen as a sectarian Shia state, it is very hard to break out of that box. Everything Iran says and does is interpreted from that point of view. That really undermines Iran's ability to reach out to the region” (Akbarzadeh, personal interview, 13 March, 2016).

Other interviewees have supported similar argument as Dr. Ahouie (personal interview, 14 March, 2016) noted the international developments in Iraq and Syria has led Iran's image to turn negative in the region. According to Ibrahim Fraihat, Iran's policies in the region is the main reason for Iran to fail in garnering soft power in the GCC region:

“Iran investing financially in Syria, Iran, Iraq and Lebanon, spending massive amount of money. It is estimated that Iran spends 7 billion in a year in Syria. But also it sends troops on the ground. But what is Iran getting in return is unrealized, a damage to its soft power, hatred towards Iran, raising sectarian division” (Fraihat, personal interview, 31 March 2016).

Similarly, Professor Mehran Kamrava mentioned that today people in the GCC countries are evaluating the events through sectarian lenses. Kamrava notes:

“After Iran's stance in Syria and the rise of sectarianism, the Bahraini and Saudi governments have very successfully framed popular uprisings in a

sectarian perspective and Iran's soft power declined rapidly" (Kamrava, personal interview, 5 April 2016).

Thirdly, the factions within Iranian regime and alive revolutionary voices among the Revolutionary Guard and hardliners in the media can be highlighted as a factor undermining soft power efforts of Iran in the GCC region at time sectarianism has been on rise. It also shows that Iranian government has no monopoly over the media tools and it is extremely difficulty to project one image. While Zarif expressed Iran's intentions to reach to the GCC publics and seeks rapprochement with GCC governments, Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari, commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), was quoted in 2015 "The Islamic revolution is advancing with good speed, its example being the ever-increasing export of the revolution", "Today, not only Palestine and Lebanon acknowledge the influential role of the Islamic republic but so do the people of Iraq and Syria", and "...the phase of the export of the revolution has entered a new chapter" (Alabbasi, 2015). Similarly, Tehran city representative Ali Reza Zekani was quoted saying "the Yemeni revolution will not be confined to Yemen alone" adding that it would extend Saudi Arabia as well (Nakhoul, 23 March 2015). In the information age, the different messages from Tehran can easily reach to the GCC and it would be argued that such statements from Iran reinforces negative images towards Iran and enhances GCC governments counter-revolution efforts in the region.

Within this regional environment and perceived shortcomings of Iran with respect to its domestic and foreign policies, Turkey emerges as a rising soft power in the region.

One can argue that the reasons undermining Iranian influence in the region enhanced Turkey's image in the region as a counter-balancing country. Yet, the other reasons should also be underlined for Turkish success in terms of soft power.

Firstly, Turkey has managed to project itself as a well-functioning democracy and stable state with considerable economic achievements over the last decade. As explained above, Ankara has enhanced its legitimacy through seeking multilateral cooperation, engagement with international bodies such as OIC and Arab League, and with its consistent foreign policy during Arab Spring as the foreign policy tools.

Secondly, it appears that Turkey has reinforced less controversial and more appealing soft power assets in the GCC region. Turkish President Erdogan gained popularity in the eyes of many people with his stance against Israel and the Western powers and support for Syrian opposition. The deep-rooted anti-Israeli and anti-US sentiments and the rise of Islamic movements in the region have positively contributed Turkey's image in the GCC. Ali Bakeer notes:

“Islamists goes along with Turkey, the more Turkey is conservative the more they are supporting. In the Gulf, Islamists are the most dominant section. It is an advantage for Turkey” (personal interview, 18 February 2016).

Apart from political beauty currencies of Turkey, the life style, natural and historical beauties of Turkey and open visa policies towards the Middle East are more appealing for the people in the Arab Gulf region than the images Iran projects. The impact of

Turkish soap operas should be underlined here as a significant factor facilitating positive attitudes towards Turkey. Ibrahim Fraihat noted

“Turkish model is not built on imposition; it is more reaching out to the people in the Gulf; it is collaborative rather than imposition which is in the case of Iran. Turkish model is more about making it available, reaching out to the people and people accept it, therefore it is appealing.”

Thirdly, the political rapprochement between Turkey and GCC states over Syria, Yemen and Iran should be highlighted as a factor (Fraihat, personal interview, 31 March 2016). Despite the given potential geopolitical rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Turkey over championing Muslim world, the high positive views in Saudi Arabia towards would be explained as such. Mahdi Ahouie noted:

“The rules of the game changed. I think Saudi Arabia now welcomes any state balancing Iran. At time Arab nationalism was dominant but today it is not that strong anymore. Today Islamism is on rise: Muslim Brotherhood vs. Salafis vs. Shias. So Turkish interference now is benefiting Saudi because it counter-balancing Iran” (personal interview 14 March 2016).

Turkey has become one of the closest allies of the GCC states in their foreign policies towards Syria and Iran. The regional context, therefore, plays an important role for soft power of Turkey in the GCC regions. Apart from the soft power currencies of Turkey and popularity of Turkish culture, enhancement in political relations is a factor for rising soft power impact of and positive perceptions towards Turkey in the Arab Gulf region.

Conclusion

The Chapter Five of the thesis analyzes the soft power policies and soft power impact of Turkey and Iran in the GCC region. The findings of the research shows that Turkey and Iran has utilized their soft power resources and currencies through demonstrative effect, public diplomacy and foreign policies to win the hearts and minds in the GCC region.

In fact, one should note that with the development of mass communication technologies and wide spread use of Internet; the all three soft power policies of Turkey and Iran became available for mass publics in the region. The domestic developments and foreign policy initiatives of both states are widely covered by the international media and became ready for GCC people to judge. Although the selective and prejudiced broadcasting efforts of some GCC governments would play a role in portraying the image of such states, the availability of satellite TVs and social media offers outlets for soft power wielders to project their soft power over targeted audiences.

Still, despite both Turkey and Iran tries to increase their soft power in the GCC region the public opinion polls shows that the positive image towards Iran has lost its momentum since 2009 and it is further deteriorated since 2011. The fall of Iran's image in the region can be explained within the framework of soft power perspective. First, the consistency and the authenticity of Iran's policies on responding public demands and supporting repressed people have been dealt blow with Green Movement and Tehran's support for Syrian regime in the eyes of Arab Gulf people.

Second, soft power of a given country depends on the context and the regional context following the fall of traditional powerhouses of Iraq, Egypt and Syria has led some GCC states to portray Iran negatively to curb Tehran's increasing influence in the region. And third, whether a state can produce soft power depends on its ability to use its soft power resources to produce affection. In this sense, state-controlled media and revolutionary voices within Iranian system have produced little.

On the contrary, Turkey's image in the eyes of GCC region was quite low as a 2002 poll shows. Yet, the model the Turkey presents in its domestic and foreign policies as well as with appealing culture has found strong support in the GCC region. Therefore, Turkey has succeeded in using its *brilliance*, *beauty* and *benignity* currencies to increase its soft power. The increasing sectarianism and converging interests of Turkey and GCC states can also be underlined as another factor enhancing Turkey's rising positive image. Turkey has broken its negative image during 1980s and 1990s and as the available poll results shows Turkey's image in the eyes of the Arab Gulf publics has turned into positive at a time Tehran's image was on decline.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

The overall aim of this thesis is to analyze the role soft power of Turkey and Iran, two non-Arab, regional middle-powers, in the GCC region since 1980s. In order to present the aforementioned purpose, this thesis starts with literature on soft power of Turkey and Iran to capture the academic debates on the topic and address the missing aspects. Given the increasing importance of the soft power in international relations, there is a limited yet growing literature on Turkey and Iran's soft power. Still, the comparison between the two important states and their soft power over the GCC publics are missing. Therefore, this thesis aims at filling this gap in the literature.

The conceptual framework on soft power by Professor Joseph Nye and other scholars have been revisited to provide a theoretical base for analyzing soft power of Turkey and Iran in the GCC region on various aspects. In this sense, a refined soft power approach that has evolved over decades since 1990s have been utilized to answer the research questions of this thesis. The chapter two of this thesis, therefore, capitalizes on the notion power in international relations, the definition of soft power, its resources, tools, and measurement, the role of perceptions in international relations as well as the limitations of soft power.

One of the main findings of this thesis is that soft power is not independent from the context; and the domestic and regional developments surrounding soft power wielder and targeted countries plays important role on the perceptions and soft power projection. With that respect, chapter three presents the evolution of Turkey-GCC and

Iran-GCC relations since the beginning of 1980s. The domestic and regional developments after Iranian revolution in 1979 and 1980 military coup in Turkey played important role in shaping the course of the relations. Further, the end of the Cold war and multipolar world system has enabled middle states like Turkey and Iran to operate more independently in their foreign policies towards the region. Regional and domestic developments during 1990s i.e. Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the triumph of reformist presidents in Iran and increasing security concern of Turkey and consequent rapprochement with Israel certainly determined the dynamics of the relations of both states with GCC countries. The same is true for the new millennium.

Chapter four and five of this thesis, therefore, evaluates the relations of GCC countries with Turkey and Iran from the perspective of soft power amid domestic and regional adjustments since 1980. Chapter four analyzes the potential resources, currencies as well as motives and motivations of Turkey and Iran to exert soft power in the Arab Gulf region. In this sense, the academic debates around soft power and information through personal interviews have been used. The findings show that both Turkey and Iran have considerable cultural, military, economic, ideological and political resources, which reinforce Vuving's (2009) soft power currencies of brilliance, benignity and beauty that would produce soft power in the GCC countries. Further, the thesis also argues that there are ideological, economic and political incentives (motives and motivations) for Turkey and Iran to invest in soft power policies in the GCC region.

Soft power resources and incentives are the two aspects of a multidimensional phenomenon. Therefore, chapter five focuses on the wielding and measuring soft power of Turkey and Iran in the GCC countries. In this sense, this thesis shows that the mechanisms of demonstrative effect, public diplomacy and foreign policy initiatives have been instrumentalized by Turkey and Iran to produce soft power. The survey of available public opinion polls and interviews also shows that there is a sequence in terms of favorable perceptions towards Iran and Turkey's in the Arab Gulf region since 1980s. To clarify, it is evident that Iran had long enjoyed a positive image in the GCC countries albeit over different segments of the societies at different times up until late 2000s. The positive perceptions towards Iran have started to decline since 2009 and at the time of writing this trends continues. Contrary to Iran's image, the poll results shows that Turkey's popularity among the GCC publics has increased substantially when it was compared to early 2000s. The perceived contradictions in Iran's policies, the regional developments and increased sectarianism and the inability of Iran to co-opt Gulf publics through appealing soft power tools can be highlighted for Iran's failure in sustaining its favorable image in the GCC region.

Regarding Turkey, the profound political and economic performance, the attractiveness of Turkish popular culture and efficient soft power policies since mid-2005s are important elements for its success to emerge as a soft power wielder in the region. Apart from that, increasing cooperation between Turkey and GCC on various international and regional developments subsequently plays a role in easing Turkey's penetration into the region through soft power means.

Limitations and Prospects for Future Research

The following limitations that affected this study are worth noting.

- 1) The study articulates the primary and secondary sources written in English and Turkish only. The articles, publications, reports and public opinion polls in Arabic or Farsi have not been included in the analysis. Therefore, the lack of language competency in Arabic and Farsi is one of the limitations affecting this study. Equally importantly, a more deep research on Iranian bibliography written by Iranian scholars in English and published in Iran could be conducted.
- 2) The lack of public opinion poll data is another important limitation. The most of the available public opinion surveys on Turkey and Iran in the GCC region do not encapsulate all six GCC countries. Rather such polls focus on the Middle East in general and mostly samples from two GCC countries (Saudi Arabia, UAE and/or Kuwait) are included. Therefore, it limits the generalizability of the inferences and analysis for all GCC countries.
- 3) The limited number of interviews and the lack of extensive fieldwork also are highlighted as limitations. While an intended goal of this study was to conduct interviews with a larger number of people, many of the targeted participants declined or did not return for the interview requests. Further, the interviews conducted in Turkey and Qatar (and personal conversation in Oman) due to the limited financial resources and time restrictions. A more comprehensive fieldwork (through conducting public opinion surveys and interviews in all

GCC countries, as well as in Turkey and Iran) would enhance the generalizability of the results.

It is also important to note that further research can be conducted on the topic focusing on:

- 1) The so-called fifth aspect of soft power, namely the relations between public opinion and actual foreign policy outcomes in non-democratic settings like GCC countries. To what extent the positive and/or negative perceptions towards Turkey and Iran in Arab Gulf public is effective in shaping foreign policies of GCC states can be analyzed. Additionally, the interplay between regime resilience efforts and shaping public opinion in the GCC would be interesting to assess on other states soft power capabilities in the Arab Gulf region.
- 2) The sustainability and the limitations of Turkey's soft power. Given the volatility or fragile nature of soft power, further research can be conducted on the limitations on newly emerging soft power of Turkey in the region. The impact of changing domestic and foreign policy developments in Turkey on its soft power or image in the region can be studied.
- 3) Theoretically more refined soft power approaches in the Middle Eastern geopolitical context. As the nature of soft power is quite dependent on the context, a soft power approach considering specific dynamics and sensitivities of the Middle East can be further analyzed.

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