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NATIONAL ROLE CONCEPTIONS AND ORIENTATIONS OF TURKEY, IRAN, AND SAUDI ARABIA AS COMPETING REGIONAL POWERS IN THE MIDDLE EAST: 1979-2020

DOCTORAL THESIS

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ABSTRACT

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NATIONAL ROLE CONCEPTIONS AND ORIENTATIONS OF TURKEY, IRAN, AND SAUDI ARABIA AS COMPETING REGIONAL POWERS IN THE MIDDLE EAST: 1979-2020

This study utilizes role theory to examine the role conceptions and behavior of the three competing regional powers in the Middle East, Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia since 1979. Theoretically, the research aims at developing a contest-based regional role approach by highlighting four role behavior dimensions to study Middle Eastern regional powerhood and competition. Such role behavior applied to the Middle East revolves around four role behavioral dimensions that shape competing regional powers as a causal dimension (role sources), orientational (role orientations), expectational (role expectations), and contestational (role challenges). Being the Middle East a conflictive region, this thesis argues that regional powers seek regional power status by playing leading regional roles that vary between *cooperative*, *competitive*, and *status quo*. These cooperative roles are expected to contribute to regionalism, competitive roles are expected to bid hegemony, and status quo roles are expected to either maintain or challenge the regional power status quo. Analytically, the primary purpose of the study is to contribute to the Middle East IR scholarship by debating and understanding the regional role competition for regional power status by Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia since 1979. By reflecting on the structural and ideational sources of roles, the study aims to explain how the shift and consistency of national role conceptions—those regional-oriented roles—shape foreign policy orientations and expectations and thus influence the dynamics of regional cooperation and competition. The study also explores how the Islamic Revolution of Iran shaped Iran's revisionist regional roles that affected the regional security order and triggered counter-regional roles of other regional powers, especially Saudi Arabia. Finally, it seeks to clarify that, while Turkey and Saudi Arabia are two Sunni status quo regional powers, they have acted differently since the Arab Spring uprisings and played competing roles; the former plays revolutionary liberal roles, and the latter plays counter-revolutionary conservative roles. Thus, such regional dynamics have transformed the regional status quo and these three regional powers' roles.

Keywords: Role Theory, Middle East, Regional Powers, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia

ÖZET

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ORTA DOĞU'DA REKABET EDEN BÖLGESEL GÜÇLER OLARAK TÜRKİYE, İRAN VE SUUDİ ARABİSTAN'IN ULUSAL ROL KAVRAMLARI VE YÖNELİMLERİ: 1979-2020

Bu çalışmada, rol teorisinden yararlanılarak 1979 yılından günümüze Orta Doğu'da bölgesel rekabet içerisindeki Türkiye, İran ve Suudi Arabistan'ın rol tanımlamaları ve davranışları analiz edilecektir. Teorik olarak çalışma, Orta Doğu'daki bölgesel rekabeti analiz etmeye yönelik dört rol davranış boyutunu ortaya koyarak, rekabet merkezli bölgesel bir rol yaklaşımı geliştirmeyi hedeflemektedir. Orta Doğu'ya uygulanan böyle bir rol davranışı, bölgesel güçleri nedensellik (rol kaynakları), yönelim (rol yönelimleri), beklenti (role beklentileri) ve rekabet (rol meydan okumaları) boyutları açısından şekillendiren dört davranışsal boyut çerçevesinde ele alınacaktır. Bu tez, çatışmanın yoğun olduğu bir bölge olan Ortadoğu'da, bölgesel güçlerin, *işbirliği*, *rekabet* ya da *statükoculuk* arasında farklılaşan bölgesel roller üstlenerek bölgesel güç elde etme arayışında olduğunu ileri sürmektedir. Bunlar içerisinde işbirliği yönelimli rollerin bölgeselciliğe katkı yapması beklenmektedir. Rekabet yönelimli olanlar ise hegemonya arayışına yöneliktir. Statükocu yönelimli roller ise ya mevcut bölgesel güç düzenini devam ettirmeye ya da meydan okumaya yöneliktir. Analitik olarak tezin temel amacı 1979 yılından günümüze Türkiye, İran ve Suudi Arabistan'ın bölgesel güç statüsü elde etmeye yönelik bölgesel rekabetini anlayarak ve tartışarak Orta Doğu'ya yönelik literatüre katkı yapmaktır. Düşünsel ve yapısal rol kaynaklarına odaklanarak ilgili tez, ulusal rol kavramlarındaki değişimlerin ve devamlılıkların, dış politika yönelimleri ve böylece bölgedeki işbirliği-rekabet süreçleri üzerindeki yansımasını ortaya koymaya çalışmaktadır. Ayrıca çalışma, İran İslam Devrimi'nin, bölgesel güvenlik düzenini etkileyen ve özellikle Suudi Arabistan gibi diğer bölgesel güçlerin karşı-devrimci rollerini harekete geçiren İran'ın revizyonist rolü üzerindeki etkisini incelemektedir. Son olarak ilgili tez, her ne kadar ikisi de Sünni ve statükocu bir güç olsa da Türkiye ve Suudi Arabistan'ın Arap Baharı sonrasında farklı politikalar izlediğini ve rekabetçi bir rol benimsediğini ortaya koymaktadır. Birincisi liberal devrimci bir rol benimserken ikincisi devrim karşıtı tutucu bir rol benimsemiştir. Bu bakımdan söz konusu bölgesel dinamikler bölgedeki statükoyu ve bu üç bölgesel gücün rollerini dönüştürmüştür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Role Teorisi, Orta Doğu, Bölgesel Güçler, Türkiye, İran, Suudi Arabistan

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Omar Munassar

Bursa 2021

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF FIGURES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Bibliographic Information
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
BSEC	Black Sea Economic Cooperation
EU	European Union
FP	Foreign Policy
FPA	Foreign Policy Analysis
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GFP	Global Firepower
GIGA	German Institute for Global and Area Studies
GNA	Government of the National Accord
IR	International Relations
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
IRGC-QF	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps- Quds Force
IRI	Islamic Republic of Iran
IRT	International Relations Theory
ISF:	Islamic Salvation Front
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
IUM:	Islamic University of Medina
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
JDP	Justice and Development Party
KAICID	King Abdullah Inter. Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
LNA	Libyan National Army
MB	Muslim Brotherhood
MBS	Mohammed bin Salman
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MESA:	Middle East Strategic Alliance
MNWFZ	Middle East Nuclear Free Zone
MUSİAD	Müstakil Sanayici ve İş Adamları Derneği—*English*: Independent Industrialists and Businessmen Association
MWL	Muslim World League
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NMP	Nationalist Movement Party (NMP)—in Turkish (MHP).
NPT	Non-Proliferation Treaty

NRC	National Role Conception	
OEEC	Organization of European Economic Cooperation	
OIC	Organization of Islamic Cooperation	
OSCE	Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe	
OECD-DAC	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee	
PIJ	Palestinian Islamic Jihad	
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party	
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization	
PMF	Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces	
PPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries	
PRAC	Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare	
PYD/YPG	Democratic Union Party /People's Protection Units	
RPP	Republican People's Party (RPP)—in Turkish (CHP)—	
RPSF	Regional Powers and Security Framework	
RSC	Regional Security Complex Theory	
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces	
SNDF	Syrian National Defense Forces	
TAF	Turkish Armed Forces	
TFP	Turkish Foreign Policy	
TIKA	Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency	
TOBB	Türkiye Odalar ve Borsalar Birliği/Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey	
TRT	Turkish Radio and Television Corporation	
RT	Role Theory	
TUSİAD	Türk Sanayicileri ve İş İnsanları Derneği/ Turkish Industry and Business Association	
UAE	United Arab Emirates	
US/A	United States of America	
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics	
WAMY	World Assembly of Muslim Youth	
YTB	Turks Abroad and Related Communities	

INTRODUCTION

The definition of regional power has taken precedence in IR research in recent years on regionalism and theorization of regional powerhood. This recent wave of studies has illuminated the behavior of regional powers, which contribute to the stability of regional order and distribution of goods. In general, these studies have made three main contributions. First, they give emerging non-Western powers an agential space and role. Second, they conceive power as a liberal normative status, a little far apart from the typically realistic vocabulary focused on self-interest and material supremacy. Third, they define three forms of power, existing middle powers acting globally, such as Canada, emerging middle powers such as South Korea, and regional powers such as Indonesia. Therefore, for regionalist and multilateralist accounts, such powers are 'emergency phenomena' that take on identity, role, and status. Although regionalist theorization remains a Western-centered and middle power-oriented approach, this study attempts to reduce this negligence. This neglect stems from a fixed set of conditions, which strictly require any country aspiring to be a regional power to have material and normative qualifications with the condition of recognition by others. This study would also clarify the behavior of regional powers, as in the cases of Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, from a reversed regionalism—a competition that affects regional order.

In general, this study's importance derives from the need to address the scarcity of a behaviorist approach to regional powerhood and behavior of Middle East regional powers that have steadily been developing since the Islamic Revolution of Iran. Since the shift in power following the three Gulf Wars and the post-Arab Spring, new regional power dynamics have persisted. Theoretically, as an endeavor, this study provided the use of role theory and its three analytical values: descriptive, which offers rich sociological language and terminology, organizational, which provides a three-level analysis, and explanatory, which offers eclectic flexibility to incorporate many concepts and theories.

First, the thesis adds an invaluable contribution to the literature on regional powerhood in the Middle East in a two-way attempt to interlink the causal interaction

between role conceptualization (agency) and behavior (structure). Second, role theory investigates regional power behavior through an interactionist approach and thus defines regional power as a 'role' different from the positional perspectives that define it as a 'position.' This provides the advantage of how a state seeks a master role, namely, a (regional power status) by conceptualizing cognitive conceptions and interacting with other states. In the interactive process, a state operates based on ideational and material sources, establishes new role identities —— or what constructivists call state identities —— and expects to preserve or challenge the existing ideational and material status quo.

Using role theory, this thesis explains the evolution and shift of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey's role conceptions and orientations, and how these roles have shaped their regional power aspirations and rivalries. Respectively, Iran's new regime identity and philosophy of Shia revolutionary Islam and anti-imperialism have become the key sources of its regional roles in both thinking and behaving. Saudi Arabia, as a conservative religious power, pro-status quo, wealthy oil power, defender of the Arab Gulf region, the birthplace of two holy cities, and US ally, fought communism and competed with Iran over the regional roles of Muslim leadership and a defender of Sunni faith and status quo. With the rise of the Turkish Justice and Development Party (JDP) and the Arab Spring's eruption, Turkey has extensively engaged in the Middle East, seeking a regional role and status. Since then, the JDP has re-articulated Turkey's national roles based on multidimensional and Middle Eastern approaches. Turkey has converted these two foreign policy approaches into various collaborative roles, including a regional bridge between civilizations, a trading state, a role model, etc. Such roles have attracted regional regimes and masses and consolidated the status of Turkey's regional powerhood. After the Arab Spring, domestic and regional complexities led Turkey to reshape its regional roles to have revolutionary liberal roles, e.g., the oppressed people protector, regional leader, regional stability defender, active independent, and anti-terrorism roles.

The interaction between these three regional powers has been competitive and unilateral since they play roles that reflect differences in regime identities. Third, role theory assesses how regional powers tend to deviate some degree from their foreign policy orientations in such a way as to express new role concepts and instruments aimed at modifying the regional status quo. The evaluation of the Arab Spring shows that

Turkey and Saudi Arabia have engaged in regional role competition, leaving Iran unbalanced. Fourth, the study discusses how regional role competition has intensified regional multipolarity, sectarian fragmentation, and alliance polarization. Every regional power has begun to build its regional polar, support its religious communities, and align itself with the relevant regional actors. As a result, for example, Saudi Arabia has been determined to balance Iran's regional roles— a revolutionary bastion, anti-imperialist, and leader of Shia faith— by building up its counter-roles to thwart revolutions, ally with the West, defend the Sunni faith, and preserve the regional status quo. Following the Arab Spring upheavals, Saudi Arabia erected a counter-revolutionary Arab axis, involving the UAE and Egypt, to counter the liberal revolutionary axis led by Turkey and Qatar. On the third side, Iran had also acted paradoxically as it seemed to have played its traditional roles including the liberator and bastion of revolutions by supporting upheavals in Bahrain and elsewhere in the region while intervening in Syria and Iraq to protect its ally regimes in the name of playing a counter-terrorism role.

1.   Research Questions

This dissertation underscores two major questions, such as the following:

1-How does the foreign policy role theory apply to the IR scholarship on regionalism and competition in the Middle East?

2-How, since 1979, have the national role conceptions and orientations of Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia influenced the regional security order and determined their regional power status?

2.   Hypotheses

H1: In the Middle East, rivalry occurs as regional powers seek regional power positions through the conceptualization and enactment of multiple regional roles.
H2: The evolution and shift of state identity and threat perceptions (*role sources*) shape national role conceptions and orientations of states in the Middle East.
H3: In a conflict-ridden region like the Middle East, each regional power has competitive and counter-roles.

H4: States with the same regional order orientation, e.g., the pro-status quo, may compete for various regional roles, such as the regional leadership and the protector of the oppressed. In the region, Turkey and Saudi Arabia are two post-Cold War status quo powers, Sunni powers, and US allies vying for a regional leadership role because of diverging historical, ideological, and geopolitical perspectives.

3.   Methods

Role theory is one of the behavioral approaches to IR and FP studies that vary in methodology. IR scholars use two empirical approaches to study international relations, namely formal methods such as binary role theory and interpretive symbolic interactionist approach; and traditional methods such as content analysis, case study, and interpretive constructivism. This thesis will develop an analytical framework for every case-study to analyze regional competition and behavior of regional powers in the Middle East. Thus, to analyze the research variables (dependent variable— regional competition) and (independent variable— regional role behavior), two approaches will be used: ***content analysis and case studies.***

First, I will use the ***content analysis approach*** to dissect domestic, regional, and international factors and events that influence states' roles and foreign policy behavior. It also leads to a better decoding of leaders and elites' declarations and speeches representing their role identities, orientations, and expectations for both their nations and the region.

Second, the ***interpretive case study approach*** would help demonstrate that the Middle Eastern competition did not begin and intensify until Iran had changed its NRCs after 1979, and Saudi Arabia had taken on counter roles against global communism and Islamic revolutionism. In addition to Saudi Arabia and Iran, Turkey has also re-articulated its historical roles to return to the Middle East. In sum, this method also helps to track the interactional relationship between state identity, foreign policy behavior, and role change.

4. **Study Plan**

The thesis introduces the significance of the research and how role theory could be a new successful approach to the study of regionalism and competition in the Middle East. Also, it sets up a number of research questions, assumptions, and methodologies. *In the first chapter*, the research goes through the conceptual and theoretical framework attempting to integrate role theory with regional powerhood theories to fit studying regional powers' behavior in the Middle East. *In the second chapter*, the thesis underscores Turkey's national role conceptions and behavior since the 1980s regarding changes and continuity of its regional roles over different ruling regimes. Most of this chapter discusses Turkey's regional roles during the JDP era that divide into phases that of the successful and appreciated roles played before the Arab Spring and the contested and controversial ones in the post-Arab Spring era. *The third chapter* analyzes Iran's NRCs and behavior since the Islamic Revolution in 1979 and how the Islamic and revolutionary regime has re-articulated the regional ideas and power relations. This chapter would discuss how Imam Khomeini's ideas became the main sources of Iran's regional discourse and roles, reoriented Iran towards global revisionism and anti-regional status quo, and how Iran aspired to a high expectation of regional hegemony, and incited regional counter-role conceptions and behavior. *In the fourth chapter*, the research focuses on analyzing Saudi Arabia's NRCs and behavior vis-à-vis the Middle East. Throughout this chapter, the study scrutinizes the national role conceptions and behavior of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia since the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979 as a turning point in the Saudi-Iranian relationship. This study gradually sheds light on the sources and ideological factors that have given rise to new NRCs of Saudi Arabia amid two main regional issues: confronting regional and international communism and Iran's revolutionary Islamic ideology. It then proceeds to the most critical orientations of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy roles, which are categorized as of three role orientations: the cooperative, competitive, and regional status quo. The third part of this chapter deals with the expectations of Saudi Arabia's roles (lower and higher). The fourth part deals with the challenges and counter-roles facing Saudi Arabia's regional aspirations and roles, especially those exposed by competing regional powers.

FIRST CHAPTER

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Role theory was borrowed from psych-sociology. For the first time in 1970, with his seminal paper "*National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy*,"[1] Holsti introduced role theory to analyze the bipolar system and behavior of major powers during the Cold War. Holsti drew on the psycho-sociological framework of the ego-alter relationship during this early phase to research inter-state interactions in terms of roles and shared expectations.

Role theory deals with the conceptual and behavioral variables in international relations and foreign policy. It serves as a social theory and as a middle-ground approach to foreign policy change and continuity. Generations of role theory have developed from the structural to the 'behavioral turn' known as the 'Second Generation,' which focuses more on actor-specific since the 1980s. This generation of role theory scholarship shifts to the symbolic interactionist role theory, which concentrates on the international system and states in terms of interactive roles, expectations, and contested roles. Moreover, it demystifies the puzzling relationship between cognitive belief systems and role conceptions of states' decision-makers and behavioral role performance regardless of ideational norms and material capacity.[2]

Despite the noticeable neglect of role theory use, yet since Holsti's early endeavors, several scholars have amply contributed to FP and IR disciplines by developing role theory in different theoretical, conceptual, and technical sides. So far, role theory has evolved into two epistemological generations: the behaviorist and structuralist. The former is known as the 'behavioral turn,' or American school that emerged in the 1980s and focuses on the agent-specific approach to role sources,

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[1] K. J. Holsti, "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy," *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 14, no. 3 (1970), pp. 233–309, doi:10.2307/3013584.

[2] Marijke Breuning, "Role Theory in Politics and International Relations," *The Oxford Handbook of Behavioral Political Science*, ed. Alex Mintz and Lesley Terris, Oxford University Press, 2019, pp. 1–23, doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190634131.013.29; Marijke Breuning, "Role Theory in Foreign Policy," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 1–23, doi:10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.334.

including personal traits, historical experience, and self-images.[3] The latter is known as the European school, which focuses on structures, including norm entrepreneurship, expectations, and contestation. It also stresses the signals and demands of roles and *other* expectations.[4]

1. ROLE THEORIZATION IN FP AND IR

1.1. Key Concepts

In this part alone, the chapter will ponder the core conceptual elements of role theory that the reader would encounter in the forthcoming section. By a chronicle tracing, Holsti identified 17 various national roles in his content analysis of different leaders' speeches in 71 states for the period from1965 to 1967. In his definition, Holsti defines a national role conception that is:

> *"The policymakers' own definitions of the general kind of decisions, commitments, rules and actions suitable to their state, and of the functions, if any, their state should perform on a continuing basis in the international system or in subordinate regional systems. It is their "image" of the appropriate orientations or functions of their state toward, or in, the external environment."*[5]

Such a definition has three assumptions. First, states individually or nationally pursue appropriate roles that reflect their ideational and material sources. Second, states make roles that are either regional or global oriented. Third, states expect from others and work on the expectations of others. This definition misses two other assumptions. First, states' roles differ according to foreign policy orientations, either cooperative or competitive. Second, states' roles might conflict among themselves or between the roles of two states or more.

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[3] Holsti, "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy," 1970, pp. 233–309; Philippe G. Le Prestre, *Role Quests in the Post-Cold War Era: Foreign Policies in Transition*, McGill-Queen's Press - MQUP, 1997; Ulrich Krotz, "National Role Conceptions and Foreign Policies: France and Germany Compared," *CES Germany & Europe Working Papers, No. 02.4*, 2002.

[4] Sebastian Harnisch, "Conceptualizing in the Minefield: Role Theory and Foreign Policy Learning," vol. 8 Foreign Policy Analysis § (2012), https://www.jstor.org/stable/24909853; Ole Elgström, *The European Union's Roles in International Politics*, *The European Union's Roles in International Politics*, 2014; David M. McCourt, "Role-Playing and Identity Affirmation in International Politics: Britain's Reinvasion of the Falklands, 1982," *Review of International Studies*, vol. 37, no. 4 (2011), pp. 1599–1621, doi:10.1017/s026021051000104x.

[5] Holsti, "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy," 1970, p. 5.

Here are some key conceptual elements of role theory as the following:

Role conceptions: are what leaders and elites of states imagine their countries' roles, images, responsibilities towards 'others' in the international community. In the statements of the leaders that Holsti recorded, states delegated different role conceptions, including a regional leader, revolutionary bastion, faithful ally, and regional protector of the oppressed.[6] Since the advent of role theory in FP and IR, some scholars and theorists have taken on Holsti's role typology to implement several other role typologies based on different IRT leanings, methodological subscriptions, and ideological orientations. *Civilian power roles*, such as those of the European Community, Japan, and Germany, are identical but not limited to those roles.

Role taking and making: role-taking is the passive process of imagining the self-position of the occupied role and others' status and roles in a competitive social arena. Role-taking is thus a pre-conditioned mechanism that rests on self-other expectations and clues of others before shifting to role-making. On the other hand, role-making is the active process and a third stage after role conceptualization and taking.

Role location: refers to the process of how and where a state plays an appropriate role in a specific regional system.[7] From a symbolic interactionist role theory's point of view, Thies considers the role location to be a process of socialization and interaction that "*occurs when an actor attempts to achieve a role for itself in the system*"[8] where '*self*' and '*other*' bargain on expectations and suitability of such a role.[9]

Role learning: is a causal factor for a foreign policy role change. So, it is the hidden persistent force behind role continuity, change, and adaptation. Any change of role requires a set of changes and developments in beliefs, instruments, and goals.

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[6] K. J. Holsti, "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy," *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 14, no. 3 (1970), pp. 233–309, doi:10.2307/3013584.

[7] Cameron G. Thies, "International Socialization Processes vs. Israeli National Role Conceptions: Can Role Theory Integrate IR Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis?," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2012), p. 29, doi:10.1111/j.1743-8594.2011.00170.x.

[8] Cameron G Thies, *The United States, Israel, and the Search for International Order: Socializing States*, Routledge, 2013, p. 3.

[9] ibid.

Harnisch draws on Mead's symbolic interactionist theory to analyze the self's communication between its *'I'* and *'me'* in the role-taking process, in which both learn about fortunes and risks of 'I' identity and 'me' roles. They interact to modify or change the old routines of roles for new promising ones.[10]

Ego-Alter [self-other] relationship and expectations: the relationship between 'self' and 'other' is thus explained by Nabers as "*role conceptions constitute the ego [self] part of the role equation, while role expectations denote the alter [other]part and role performance the actual foreign policy behavior.*"[11] Moreover, Harnisch illustrates the difference between 'self' and 'other' expectations as:

> "*Regularly comprise ego[self] expectations – that is, domestic and/or individual expectations as to what the appropriate role is and what it implies – and alter [other]expectations – that is, implicit or explicit demands by others (counter- roles or complementary roles, audience cues). On the other hand, role expectations differ with regard to their scope, specificity, communality and thus their obligation.*"[12]

Therefore, there is no role conception without considering agency and structures that both 'self' and 'other' share in a particular society and time.

*Symbolic interactionism***:** is borrowed from Mead's 1934 seminal book, 'Mind, Self, and Society,' rooted in the psychological and sociological self-identification of individuals and groups vis-à-vis *significant other*. The symbolic interactionist theory implies social interaction and communication among individuals in society through symbols and mental interpretations to shape society's order and meaning. Since roles are "*repertoires of behavior, inferred from others' expectations,*"[13] role theory has yet approached foreign policy behavior of states through symbolic interaction via language, socialization, and roles.

However, symbolic interactionist ego-alter relationships depend on the 'I-me' dialogue. The 'I' has a passive agency of cognitive repertoire of identity and expectations

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[10] Harnisch et al, *Role Theory in International Relations Approaches and Analyses*, *Role Theory in International Relations: Approaches and Analyses*, New York, NY 10017: Routledge, 2011, p. 11.
[11] Dirk Nabers, "Identity and Role Change in International Politics," *In Role Theory in International Relations*, Routledge, 2011, p. 78.
[12] Harnisch, *Role Theory in International Relations Approaches and Analyses*, p. 8.
[13] Stephen G. Walker, *Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis*, Duke University Press, 1987, p. 23.

about alter/other, and the 'me' represents the 'I' part in the world by playing roles. On this point, role theory provides IR and FPA with a range of social concepts, such as 'significant, general, organized, historical, and current other.'[14]

Role socialization: in social behavior, individuals search and navigate in society to define themselves by general and significant identities and roles according to a set of norms and demanding interests. In the process of role taking, Hudson posits, "*perception of national role is also influenced by societal character, a product of the nation's socialization process.*"[15] To Elgström and Smith, roles are constructed as "*in part an effect of learning and socialization in interactive negotiation processes.*"[16] In foreign policy, there are different interpretations of socialization. In the core-periphery relationship, socialization has a hegemonic attribute in how powerful states and organizations as outsiders set rules and norms that insiders are persuaded, rewarded, or enforced to follow.

Hegemons use material and ideational supremacy to assert norms and roles where, on the other hand, the less powerful states must internalize. International socialization and socialization vary in strategies. However, in international politics, competition and socialization overlay as both produce social hierarchies that the former works through punishment or material reward and the latter through persuasion and communication.[17]

Role alter-casting: Harnisch defines it as "*the conscious manipulation of one's own role-taking behavior to (re)shape the role of another actor, presumably a counter- or commensurate role*."[18] In the symbolic interactionist role theory, role alter-casting is a rational interaction between the 'self' and 'other' in the international social structure where the 'self' (be a major power) tends creatively to change the roles of 'significant

[14] Stephen G. Walker, "Symbolic Interactionism and International Politics: Role Theory's Contribution to International Organization," *Contending Dramas: A Cognitive Approach to Post-War International Organizational Processes*, Praeger New York, 1992, p. 23.
[15] Valerie M. Hudson, "Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2010), p. 11, doi:10.1111/j.1743-8594.2005.00001.x.
[16] Elgström and Smith, *The European Union's Roles in International Politics: Concepts and Analysis*, 2006, p. 6.
[17] Cameron G. Thies, "State Socialization and Structural Realism," *Security Studies*, vol. 19, no. 4 (2010), pp. 689–717, doi:10.1080/09636412.2010.524084.
[18] Harnisch, *Role Theory in International Relations Approaches and Analyses*, p. 13.

other' or at least dye them with its self's identity to correspond to the preferences of it. Also, alter-casting might happen from a down-top level that when the 'self' (be a small or regional power) re-realizes the risks of defiance and the advantages of compliance to the regional role and structures favored by the 'significant other' (be the US or any major power).

Role change: refers to any change in "*the shared conception and execution of typical role performance and role boundaries,*"[19] or when any part of the role process does not correspond to the role player's identity. To Hudson, "*NRCs are utilized to explain the persistence, not the change, of state behavior over time.*"[20] This interprets that the foreign policy conduct of any state might change for internal and external reasons. Internal reasons vary in nature and effect and from ideational to structural. Ideational sources include a leader's worldviews and state identity, and structural sources include revolutions, population, and military capabilities. Similarly, external reasons include significant transformations in alignment, power transition, and international institutions' expectations. Therefore, in the role-making process, changes occur in different modes that role-makers desire or are obliged to rearrange in whole or part.

There are two ontological mechanisms of role change: casual and constitutive, in addition to three main degrees of role change: *role adaptation, role learning, and role transformation*. In effect, the role changes have scope/dimensions of change in foreign policy goals, interests, and identities. There are also mechanisms or modes via which role conceptions are about to get modified, learned, or changed completely. However, these modes are crisis learning, socialization, altercasting and identity re-formation. First, change through ***role adaptation*** is a casual process defined as a dimensional change of strategies and instruments designed for role performance but without any profound change in the foreign policy goals. Second, through ***role learning,*** changing the structure and content of any certain role conception due to new information or experience learned. Learning implies changes in beliefs, new beliefs, and skills experienced during the crisis. In this type of learning, a role holder can infer the intention, expectations, and relative

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[19] Ralph H. Turner, "Role Change," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 1990, p. 88.
[20] Valerie M. Hudson, "Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, vol. 1 (2005), p. 16, doi:10.1016/j.physa.2011.03.036.

power of other role holders. Thirdly, ***role transformation*** happens where the role beholder attempts to induce a change or re-formation of the identity and interests of the target role-counter causally by driving them to re-internalize conciliatory norms and rules.[21] In this venue, a role-maker or "*ego [self]tries to induce alter [other] to take on a new identity (and thereby enlist alter in ego's effort to change itself by treating alter as if it already had that identity*."[22] This mode entails persuasion, bilateral cooperation, communication (ascription), and messages.

Role contestation: Roles are always contested domestically and internationally. Potential strains, changes, and competition occur due to domestic and external factors. Role contestation happens as a dependent variable because there is a set of national role conceptions that might conflict with one another according to incompatible identities and self-perceptions. It has different patterns and mainly divided into spectrums, domestic and international. Domestically, Cantir and Kaarbo have distinguishably developed two dimensions of domestic role contestation: *vertical and horizontal.* The vertical role contestation is a bottom-up debate that refers to a societal disagreement between the public and government over unsatisfactory expectations of a certain national role conception towards a certain issue or crisis. The horizontal role contestation refers to the non-consensus between different governmental mainstreams over the choices and priority of NRCs and their potential expectations.[23]

Internationally, there are four patterns of role contestation(conflict). First, intra-role conflict occurs between self-national and other-international expectations "*between domestically defined national role conceptions and externally defined role expectations…a disagreement between ego conceptions and alter expectations.*"[24]The 'other'— could be regional and international that shape or expect from the role-taker— 'self.' Second, inter-role conflict occurs between roles that the state may not be able to

[21] Hanns W. Maull. Harnisch, Sebastian, Cornelia Frank, "Role Theory, Role Change, and the International Social Order," *Role Theory in International Relations*, Routledge, 2011, pp. 252–61.
[22] Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Theory*, Palgrave Macmillan, 1992, p. 421.
[23] Cantir, C. and Kaarbo, J. Contested Roles and Domestic Politics: Reflections on Role Theory in Foreign Policy Analysis and IR Theory, 2012; Cantir, C. and Kaarbo, J. Domestic Role Contestation, Foreign Policy, and International Relations.2016.
[24] Cristian Cantir, *Domestic Role Contestation, Foreign Policy, and International Relations*, *Domestic Role Contestation, Foreign Policy, and International Relations*, 2016, p. 5.

harmonize. Third, counter-role differs from intra-role conflict since differences between self and other are mainly about expectations but rather than identities and orientations. Counter-roles are asymmetric roles of both self and other(s) such as a 'status quo vs. revisionist,' a 'rogue state vs. civilian nation.' Fourth, role competition takes shape when two or more states compete for/ over one or multiple roles in a certain role location and type, e.g., 'regional leader' and 'regional protector.'

There are several consequences from role conflict, 1) states (small states particularly) have no compatibility, sufficient material resources, and institutional roles— their infant foreign policy roles contradict with each other and with other one's roles— and thus culminate into regional competition such as the case of Arab states during the 1960s; 2) foreign policy dysfunctions as a result of contradictory norms and self-preferences; 3) regional and international crises and conflicts when states enact offensive and hegemonic roles.

1.2.   Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis

In this research, I would argue that the most underdeveloped part of the foreign policy role theory lies in the negligence and inadequate mechanisms of incorporating various methods to find pathways towards contextual levels of analysis. As to RT's contribution to IR and FP, Walker claims that role theory offers three methodological attributes for foreign policy researchers. Descriptively, role theory offers a rich language of individuals, state identities, and self-images of themselves and others in social interaction. Such descriptive concepts include role conceptions, expectations, and role conflict that add to other IR and FP concepts. Organizationally, role theory provides flexibility to foreign policy scholars to study foreign policy behavior at three analysis levels. At the individual level, decision-makers perceive roles; at the state level, ideational and material factors motivate role-play; and at the system level, agents and structures intersect— expectations and reactions. Explanatorily, role theory provides researchers with eclectic power to integrate concepts with various social, psychological, and political theories, including middle power theory, status theories, ontological security, and positioning theory.[25]

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[25] Walker, *Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis*.

This approach has come across Wendt's constructivist approach that deals with the 'agency-structure problem.'[26] Attempting to unite FP and IR scholars would contribute to FPA in two ways. First, it would analyze the interaction between agents and structural constraints enforced by the domestic and international systems. That is to bridge the agency-structure gap and FP and IR in one-point, i.e., identity— being foreign policy-ized— and foreign policy behavior. Second, it would enable scholars to embrace eclectic methods like structural, symbolic interactionist, and binary role theory.[27]

American role theorists are more structuralist than Europeans. For example, Stephen Walker claimed that role theory is an extension of structural realism of international relations.[28] In this version of role theory, roles are structural positions rather than cognitive conceptions. Similar to this point, in the structuralist way of understanding the foreign policy behavior of emerging regional powers, Karim integrated role theory with the status-seeking approach to highlight the relationship between the cognitive and material structures of middle powers shaping their emerging roles and statuses.[29] At most, the academic failure to solve the agency-structure gap has merely been due to the dominant structural interpretation of role conceptions and the misuse of role theory to holistically study foreign policy (agential choices and structural outcomes), i.e., role conceptions vis-à-vis role reactions.

1.2.1. Individual Level of Analysis

Following Holsti's typology and methodology of role theory, a nation's roles originate from the cognitive mapping and reasoning about expectations and preferences perceived by the national actors about their interests versus others' identities and expectations in the international system. In his definition of national role conceptions, it is evident that he takes off from the individual level as he ascribes role conceptions to

[26]Alexander Wendt, "The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations," *International Organization*, vol. 41, no. 2 (1987), pp. 335–70.
[27] Breuning, "Role Theory in Foreign Policy," p. 5.
[28] Walker, *Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis*.
[29] Moch Faisal Karim, "Middle Power, Status-Seeking and Role Conceptions: The Cases of Indonesia and South Korea," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 72, no. 4 (2018), pp. 343–63, doi:10.1080/10357718.2018.1443428.

foreign policy decision-makers despite the term 'national' precedes the compound word 'role conceptions.'

Individual role-makers are the basic unit-level of analysis in world politics. For Hudson, "*all that occurs between nations and across nations is grounded in human decision-makers acting singly or in groups*,"[30] which means the world politics starts from the situated actors as if they intend and perform national roles on behalf of their nations. Unlike policies, roles are constructed in actors' cognitive maps and motivated by domestic and external dynamics. They are also more persistent, positional, and bound with both the public and external expectations.[31]

At the core of foreign policy analysis, there is always a need to understand foreign policymaking and its functioning in two constitutive environments: the operational and psychological. There are two external and internal factors in the first environment. The external factors are certain structural opportunities and challenges faced by decision-makers in the regional and global systems (structural dimension). The internal factors consist of those material and conceptual features, such as national pride, identity, political culture, economy, etc., that inspire leaders to construct regional identities and roles. In contrast, the psychological environment comprises 'the attitudinal prism' and 'self-images' of leaders and elites and their belief systems, generating the cognitive and psychological inputs of foreign policymaking. [32] George divided the belief systems of decision-makers into two clusters: the philosophical and instrumental beliefs. Within the first cluster, the individual leaders' cognitive beliefs consist of five philosophical beliefs that influence their worldviews of '*other*(s)*,*' either friendly or enemy. In the instrumental

[30] Hudson, "Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations," 2005, p. 1.
[31] Ole Elgström Bengtsson, Rikard, "Reconsidering the European Union's Roles in International Relations: Self-Conceptions, Expectations, and Performance.," *Role Theory in International Relations*, Routledge, 2011, p. 114; Lisbeth Aggestam, "Role Identity and the Europeanisation of Foreign Policy," *Rethinking European Union Foreign Policy*, Manchester University Press, 2018, doi:10.7765/9781526137647.00011.
[32] Michael Brecher, *The Foreign Policy System of Israel: Setting, Images, Process*, Oxford University Press, 1972. Margaret Sprout Sprout, Harold, "Environmental Factors in the Study of International Politics," *Conflict Resolution*, vol. 1, no. 4 (1957).

beliefs cluster, leaders concern with rational choices, norms, strategies, and role conceptions that represent *'self'* in the international system.[33]

To emphasize the importance of the attitudinal dimension of individuals engaged in foreign policy, Wish used Deutsch's concept of 'motivational orientation' to study the three motivational orientations of those individuals: individualistic, cooperative, and competitive.[34] She subscribes to the cognitive and structural role theories when she deals with individual motivations as the first image of FPA with no neglect of structural motivations "*the first image reversed*"[35] that both reflect on role formulation. Compared to the importance of those cognitive factors such as (self-images) and psychological factors such as (belief systems and motives) and ideological factors such as (national identity), it is worth reflecting on rational factors in foreign policy. Almost all these personal considerations are the subject of the individual level of FPA, which go together through the test phase of rationality or irrationality defined by leadership style. At this stage, the leader's traits and styles are manifested during role-making and foreign policymaking and in dealing with associated events. Among the most important of these measurable styles of leadership are, for example, the degree of responsiveness to constraints, openness to information, and the type of motivation for either "problem focus" or "relationship building."[36]

However, the decision-makers' cognitive and psychological idiosyncrasies significantly impact the motivational orientations of role-making, which is evident in the Middle East, in which individualistic and competitive motivations shape states' roles. Iran and Saudi Arabia's roles are such vivid manifestations of these types of orientations.[37]

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[33] Alexander L George, "The Causal Nexus between Cognitive Beliefs and Decision-Making Behavior," *Psychological Models in International Politics*, Westview Press Boulder, 1979, pp. 95–124.

[34] Naomi Bailin Wish, "Foreign Policy Makers and Their National Role Conceptions," *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 4 (1980), p. 538, doi:10.2307/2600291.

[35] Cameron G. Thies, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy," *International Studies Encyclopedia*, 2009, p. 15, doi:10.1111/b.9781444336597.2010.x.

[36] Margaret G. Hermann et al., "Who Leads Matters: The Effects of Powerful Individuals," *International Studies Review*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2003), pp. 83–131, doi:10.1111/1521-9488.00235.

[37] Naomi Bailin Wish, "Policy Makers and Foreign National Role Conceptions Their," *International Studies Quarterly*, 1980.

As the literature shows, the Middle East has not yet received enough attention from foreign policy role theorists. Unlike anywhere else in the world, analysis at the individual level says a lot about the phenomenon of one-person decision-making, in which certain foreign policy decisions and roles emerge with the rise of particular leaders. In such conflicting regions, leaders are direct determinants in the study of foreign policy. Among a few breakthrough research efforts, Özdamar has conducted an operational code analysis to study some Middle East Islamist leaders. It reflects these leaders' belief systems and their impact on foreign policy roles, including anti-imperialism and pan-Islamism, which are "*not always genuine*" but rather used for mass mobilization and regime securitization. [38]

Likewise, role theory at the individual-level of analysis is promising to measure foreign policy change and continuity. This means that role orientations and conceptions are susceptible to change, particularly in novice and developing countries, if international structural dynamics override or benefit the decision makers' interests. [39] Decision-makers are also likely to consider flexibility and rationality to redirect and reconstruct their roles.[40] However, the change in any role conception requires a necessary change in the state's political structure, such as removing a rogue regime or a substantive change in the existing state identity elements like the belief systems and worldviews.

The behaviorist revolution in IR provided rigorous psychological approaches to FPA in general and role theory in particular. For foreign policy analysis, it decodes how individuals are involved operationally in foreign decision-making as a process and outcome. Walker insists that "*who leads matters* [and] *beliefs matter.*"[41] For Hudson's hypothesis, "*the operational code approach puts individual decision-makers front and center in the explanation of foreign policy…*[assumes that] *the beliefs of individual*

[38] Özgür Özdamar, "Leadership Analysis at a 'Great Distance': Using the Operational Code Construct to Analyse Islamist Leaders," *Global Society*, 2017, doi:10.1080/13600826.2016.1269056.

[39] Marijke Breuning, "Role Theory Research in International Relations: State of the Art and Blind Spots," *Role Theory in International Relations*, ed. by Hanns W Maull Sebastian Harnisch, Cornelia Frank, Routledge, 2011, p. 31.

[40] Jakob Gustavsson, "How Should We Study Foreign Policy Change?," *Cooperation and Conflict*, vol. 1, no. 34 (1999), p. 84.

[41] SG. Walker, "Operational Code Analysis as a Scientific Research Programme: A Cautionary Tale," *Progress in International Relations Theory: Appraising the Field*, 2003, pp. 245–76.

decision-makers are conceived as the key explanatory variable.''[42] Two other assumptions of cognitive role conceptions of decision-makers are self-images of '*what the nation naturally stands for and how high it naturally stands, in comparison to others in the international arena.''*[43] Therefore, they "*seek to maintain consistency and avoid the dissonance that arises when different beliefs conflict with one another*.''[44] In the same fashion, the founder of role theory within foreign policy, Holsti, puts himself ontologically at the vanguard of behavioral and structural role theory approaching decision makers' cognitive role conceptions and systematic functions, including commitments toward the international system.[45]

1.2.2. State-Level of Analysis

At this level, role theory connects idiosyncratic variables, namely individual role conceptions, belief systems, national identity, self-images, and culture, to material variables, including economic and military capabilities. It also discusses role sources, role orientations, expectations, and constraints and how they affect the patterns of role change and continuity. First, it suggests that role sources vary in type ideationally and materially at the national and international levels. Here, external sources like alliance, sanctions, and power polarity shape foreign policy orientations and roles. A state creates a role that reflects the self-image of "*what the nation naturally stands for and how high it naturally stands, in comparison to others in the international arena.*"[46] The political culture and historical experience motivate states as well. Second, the structuralist approach to role behavior presumes that role expectations are integral parts of role enactment that justify and shape role conceptualization and behavior but do not always determine them. Third, role orientation differs from that of foreign policy orientation since the former is far more

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[42] Klaus Brummer, Valerie M. Hudson, "The Boundedness of Foreign Policy Analysis Theory?," *Global Society*, vol. 31, no. 2 (2017), pp. 157–66, doi:10.1080/13600826.2016.1266996.

[43] Jacques E.C. Hymans, *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation: Identity, Emotions and Foreign Policy*, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 18.

[44] Aaron Rapport, "Cognitive Approaches to Foreign Policy Analysis," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 3, doi:10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.397.

[45] K. J. Holsti, 'National role conceptions in the study of foreign policy', International Studies Quarterly, 14(3), 1970, pp. 245–246.

[46] Jacques E. C. Hymans, The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, p. 18.

situational, issue-specific, and a measurable determinant of foreign policy change and continuity.

In some cases, the change in the orientation of a single role does not necessarily mean a shift in the entire range of foreign policy orientation; for example, a country may be cooperative on a particular issue and, at the same time, be competitive when it comes to the pursuit of higher regional power status. Beneš and Harnisch conclude that foreign policy change and consistency in a given context and concern feature in calculating the national interest and the corresponding roles. They assert that:

> *"roles provide reasons for action in a justificatory sense. In terms of purpose, through arguments in discourse, roles provide goals for action, i.e., to save a 'nation' from dominance, etc. In terms of justification, roles include reasoning as to which policy action can be rationalized."*[47]

Fourth, role expectations are cognitively contingent on mutual perceptions of self-other being such "*repertoires of behavior, inferred from others' expectations and one's own conceptions, selected at least partly in response to cues and demands.*"[48] States have two significant types of expectations: *low and high*. At a low level of expectations, states aspire to a higher position in the social hierarchy, motivated by liberal tendencies to contribute to global governance in exchange for regional and international rewards and recognition. While at a high level of expectations, states tend to impose hegemonic roles and statuses on significant and generalized 'others' in the social hierarchy. On the other hand, the foreign policy role theory tailors three types of role orientations: *cooperative, competitive, and status quo*. Cooperative-oriented roles meet low expectations, whereas competitive and status quo roles match high expectations. Fifth, role theory also debates how actors and structures dispute and cause domestic role conflicts expressed in the international context. Domestic role conflicts occur due to various conflicting roles and expectations among policymakers (horizontal role conflict) and between decision-makers and the public (vertical role conflict). [49] Under other conditions, countries adjust their

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[47] Vít and Beneš, Sebastian Harnisch, "Role Theory in Symbolic Interactionism: Czech Republic, Germany and the EU," *Cooperation and Conflict*, vol. 50, no. 1 (2015), p. 148, doi:10.1177/0010836714525768.

[48] Walker, "Symbolic Interactionism and International Politics: Role Theory's Contribution to International Organization," p. 23.

[49] Cristian Cantir, Juliet Kaarbo, "Contested Roles and Domestic Politics: Reflections on Role Theory in Foreign Policy Analysis and IR Theory1," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2012), pp. 5–24, doi:10.1111/j.1743-8594.2011.00156.x; Cantir, *Domest. Role Contestation, Foreign Policy, Int. Relations*.

foreign policy roles while seeking to maintain the same course. Breuning describes this form of role asymmetry as "*inconsistency between an auxiliary and master role, where the former undermines the latter.*"[50] Externally, a state's role(s) may inflict conflict between national and external expectations (intra-role conflict) and between two incompatible national roles (inter-role conflict).

At this level, role change and continuity are two critical indicators for understanding the production and reproduction of international hierarchies and conflicts. Also, they are vulnerable to independent and dependent agential and structural variables. Such independent variables are the type of political regime (democratic or authoritarian), the orientation of foreign policy (pro-status quo or revisionist), and the structure of the international system (bipolar or unipolar); and the dependent variables are the role conceptions, expectations, and orientations. Throughout role conceptualization and enactment, causal anomalies lead to technical role strains, political role change, and regional counter-role measurements by other states and the international community.[51]

1.2.3. System-Level of Analysis

The system-level analysis identifies the top-down systemic factors that shape role conceptualization and behavior in inter-state relations.[52] In general, states seek international status through three stages: cognitively shaped role conceptions, nationally endowed attributes (identity, status, strategic culture, etc.), and internationally made opportunities and constraints. At the international system level, states' roles are subject to various direct and indirect structural challenges. First, the *ego-state* with complex national and external expectations directly seeks hegemonic status and roles over the *alter-state*(s).[53] In response, it faces external role manipulation with three strategies, namely socialization, role alter-casting, and counter-role taking. At the regional level,

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[50] Marijke Breuning, Anna Pechenina, "Role Dissonance in Foreign Policy: Russia, Power, and Intercountry Adoption," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, vol. 16, no. 1 (2020), p. 22, doi:10.1093/fpa/orz004.

[51] For further information on this level of analysis, see Tayyar Arı, Uluslararası İlişkiler Teorileri, Bursa: Aktüel, 2018, pp. 95–108.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Bruce Cronin, "The Paradox of Hegemony: America's Ambiguous Relationship with the United Nations," *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2001), pp. 103–30. He draws on the contradictory role interests of the U.S and the UN to argue that role strain happens when a great power plays hegemonic roles over lesser states resulting in reversal expectations and misrecognition by them. See Cronin, ibid.

whenever there is a contradiction between nationally defined expectations and those externally defined roles, role contestation likely occurs. Second, it indirectly experiences difficulties in adapting its roles to the regional and international constraints, including polarity, power balancing, and alignments. Therefore, these two external structural forces determine the transition, continuity, and motivation of the state's role orientations and conceptions.

At any multilateral cooperation-oriented regional system, states gain opportunities and incentives to play cooperative and normative roles that contribute to regional and global governance. Whereas at the unilateral competition-oriented regional system, hegemonic tendencies prevail in states' regional role concepts and behavior, which hinder their expectations and recognition by others. This kind of role behavior may also lead to the emergence of rogue states intending to disrupt the regional status quo by playing revolutionary roles against domination and imperialism, as in the case of Iran.

At this foreign policy analysis level, role theory helps analyze the multi-layered interaction between the role player and the role recipient based on acceptance and rejection. Role orientations determine these two role dynamics: cooperative, competitive, status quo,— status quo, or revisionist. In the quest for regional power status, role theory suggests that an aspiring state should play cooperative roles and avoid competitive and revisionist roles that otherwise induce regional and international rejection. In most cases, major powers or regional peers may resort to role alter-casting of any defiant state into a corresponding role or play counter-roles against its unexpected role behavior.

Roles are often contested for two technical discrepancies. First, miscommunication over the code of conduct between the domestic agents and international structures leads to role conflict and alter-casting.[54] Second, the disconnection between identity and role causes ontological insecurity owing to the deficit of predictive intelligence in role-playing and role alter-casting by others.[55] This concerns

[54] Marijke Breuning, "Culture, History, Role: Belgian and Dutch Axioms and Foreign Assistance Policy," *Culture and Foreign Policy*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1995, p. 237.
[55] Stephan Klose, "Interactionist Role Theory Meets Ontological Security Studies: An Exploration of Synergies between Socio-Psychological Approaches to the Study of International Relations," *European Journal of International Relations*, 2019, doi:10.1177/1354066119889401.

the violation of moral and institutional imperatives that regulate relations between states in their regional and international surroundings. In other words, this occurs when there is a paradox between the identity-based potentials and the role outputs of the role beholder, for example, Iran's Islamist identity, which promised emancipatory roles, and the USSR communist identity, which promised equality roles had not vigorously met the relevant expectations. Thus, there is a directly proportional correlation between role conception and threat perception, that the more competitive roles the state plays, the more threats the other state perceives.

Role theorists have turned their backs on the external dimension (actors and structures) and have embraced the domestic dimension to examine the state's role conceptions and behavior. Instead, particularly concerning the Middle East, we should stress the importance of a holistic approach to the field. In doing so, the agent-structure problem that role theory attempts to solve may flourish by analyzing the underlying causal relationship between 'self' action (agents and structures) and 'other' reaction (agents and structures). Finally, this model will invite the role theory practitioners to revisit the reducible equation of 'I-me' interaction that gives primacy to 'I' in terms of agency and identity; and 'me' in terms of actions and roles.

1.3. Role Theory and IR Theory

Role theory contributes to IR theory in three ways: it advances human agency, explains how 'structure' influences inter-state interaction, and acknowledges legitimacy as a conditioning force for role performance and recognition. Even though role theory shares the significance of structural elements of role sources such as identity with the constructivist IR theory, it refutes, in one way or another, its prevailing assumptions that values and identity precede human agency. In this assertion, role is the active notion of agency, which interposes the passive normative and material structures. It, therefore, questions determinism in IR theory, which emphasizes the socio-structural variables.

Unlike constructivists, including Hopf and Wendt, who describe identity as an

intrinsic socially constructed and embedded before agency-structure interaction, [56] role theory views that identity develops interactively with others. In other words, role theory suggests that identity is not static but produced and reproduced through socialization and interaction between 'self' and 'other.' In this way, it distinguishes the interaction from construction. Interaction implies social communication between the self-parts: *'I' identity and 'me' roles* and the other-parts: *'I' identity and 'me' roles*. Both 'self,' which represents the state, and 'other' representing the international system, interact through their binary *'me(s)'*-foreign policy roles. In the international system, both states of 'self' and 'other' are subject to role socialization and competition to convince or enforce their distinctiveness.[57] Thus, states do not identify themselves and their identities until they manipulate hegemonic *othering* roles in some form of interaction, such as patron-client, core-periphery, leader-follower, civilized-uncivilized, and colonizer-colonized. In the same fashion, counter-*othering* roles respond to hegemonic *othering*-roles to produce resistant identities such as liberal, independent, anti-imperialist, neutral etc. Finally, role theory clarifies how interactions shape states' foreign policy and role identities that subsequently reflect on their regional statuses and national identities. This confirms that the foreign policy process is merely a matter of supplementary interaction between identity—state or national— as motivation and role as representation.

With its structural and symbolic interactionist strands, role theory allows IR and FPA scholars to explain three conceptual elements in international relations: agency, structure, and interaction. The structural role theory explains the social hierarchies and claims that social entities, i.e., states, enjoy specific social positions. Simultaneously, the symbolic interactionist role theory traces the interactive signals and expectations between actors on the role continuum.

States build on three concepts: position, behavior, and identity. Role is the composite product of all that expresses: what you are, how you do, and who you are. In other words, there is no role without identity as "*roles provide individuals with a stable*

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[56] Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Pol- Icies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999*, Cornell University Press, 2002; Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge Univer- sity Press., 1999.

[57] Thies, "International Socialization Processes vs. Israeli National Role Conceptions: Can Role Theory Integrate IR Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis?," pp. 25–46.

sense of identity,"[58] and that identity offers meaning and inter-subjective representation of roles.[59] Identity, in comparison, is more stable than role and could counter ego alteration in the social system. Unlike the former, roles are time-adjusted and changeable, such as what Turner terms "*as a change in the shared conception and execution of typical role performance and role boundaries,*"[60] or what Nabers refers to "*the change in role can occur when the performance of a role does not correspond to an identity.*"[61]

Identities thus exist within the self, and roles take place beyond the self. As a result of this social relationship, role theorists have rigorously sought to address some of the puzzling problems in international relations and foreign policy disciplines by merging role and identity.[62] Identity is one of the domestic sources of a state's roles, belongs to the "*social cognitive structure.*"[63] It seems to be a mere abstraction without action because "*behavioral manifestation and implementation of one or more of an individual's identities, presenting the observer a picture of the identity in action.*"[64] That activation of identity needs functional roles that show its validity to the outside world.[65]

From a constructivist point of view, Wendt reduces the state to a corporate actor with— self, identity, interests, and intentionality— states are often like people, which implies that national roles are simply an aggregate representation of the social and political identities of the community.[66]Moreover, identity constitutes two segments: "*those held by the Self and those held by the Other,*"[67] and the difference between them that role is objectively attained and identity is inter-subjectively constructed.

[58] Chafetz et al, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy : Belarussian and Ukrainian Compliance with the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime," *International Society of Political Psychology*, vol. 17, no. 4 (1996), p. 733.
[59] Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*.
[60] Turner, "Role Change," p. 88.
[61] Nabers, "Identity and Role Change in International Politics," p. 84.
[62] McCourt, "Role-Playing and Identity Affirmation in International Politics: Britain's Reinvasion of the Falklands, 1982," pp. 1599–1621; David M. McCourt, "The Roles States Play: A Meadian Interactionist Approach," *Journal of International Relations and Development*, vol. 15, no. 3 (2012), pp. 370–92, doi:10.1057/jird.2011.26; Nabers, "Identity and Role Change in International Politics," pp. 90–108.
[63] Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Pol- Icies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999*, p. 1.
[64] Horrocks and Jackson., *A Theory of Self-Process and Role Behavior*, Houghton Mifflin, 1972, p. 115.
[65] McCourt, "Role-Playing and Identity Affirmation in International Politics: Britain's Reinvasion of the Falklands, 1982," pp. 1605, 1608.
[66] Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, pp. 215–24.
[67] cited, p. 224.

Role theory also correlates, in part, with the *English School* of IRT in the realm of legitimacy and mutual recognition across the relationship between the role-taking state and role-receiving state(s), particularly in social orders where asymmetrical hierarchies predominate. Technically, role theory theorists utilize empirical explanatory and interpretive approaches to evaluate legitimacy and recognition of the state's role determined by the extent to which the role is accepted or rejected by other nations. Confirming this, Le Prestre underlines the importance of the role that the state conceptualizes and plays in ensuring "*a claim on the international system, recognition by international actors and a conception of national identity.*"[68]

Role theory and *Realist IR theories* can meet in some structural points of rationalism and materialism. Role theory serves as an analytical toolkit in FPA in the way it helps the understanding of structural factors in decision making in world politics. According to Walker's structural-functionalist view, role theory is a promising explanatory tool and, to some degree, an extension of Waltz's neo-realism,[69] which explains politics through some sort of systems theory. Role theory pays attention to how states deviate from the world of norm entrepreneurship when replacing cooperative with competitive and revisionist roles against the regional status quo.

Power theories could contribute to explaining the relation between power and role as "*power provides the means to act, but role explains the goals of action.*"[70] As such, theories of power are systemic in the power cycle and dyadic in the power transition. They account for the "what" cyclical patterns of capabilities a state has relative to other peers in the international system. The power disparity between the dyadic powers in a particular region causes dissatisfaction with the distribution of power and triggers a tide of political revisionism, and hence roles of this type. For Doran, the relationship between power and role is a single dynamic that "*like power, role is necessarily systemic*"[71] where "*power cycle theory asserts that the ability of a state to influence international politics*

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[68] Philippe G. Le Prestre, *Role Quests in the Post-Cold War Era: Foreign Policies in Transition*, 1997, pp. 5–6.

[69] Walker, *Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis*, p. 256.

[70] Thies, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy," p. 21.

[71] Charles F. Doran, "Economies, Philosophy of History, and the 'Single Dynamic' of Power Cycle Theory: Expectations, Competition, and Statecraft," *International Political Science Review*, vol. 24, no. 1 (2003), p. 30, doi:10.1177/0192512103024001002.

and play a principal foreign policy role is determined in large part by its stage of evolution."[72] Doran defines role as the following:

> "*Role amounts to more than power position, or place, within the international system, although role encompasses these considerations. Role suggests informally legitimated responsibilities and perquisites associated with position and place[...] Role involves the extent of leadership or followership, the capacity to extend security to others or the dependence upon external security; whether a state is an aid-giver or recipient, a lender or a net debtor; whether the state is sought after for counsel or is disregarded; and whether the state is an overachiever or a comparative nonparticipant in the affairs of the system.*"[73]

2.   ROLE THEORY AND THE MIDDLE EAST

This section will illustrate the recent literature on regional powerhood and regional actors' aspirations for regional power status in the context of Middle Eastern regionalism. Since the late 1980s, scholars of the so-called 'new regionalists' have dedicated studies to the understanding of nature and the emergence of new regions, orders, and regional powers at the demise of the Cold War bipolar international system. The new multipolar system and the 'world of regions' heralded a new international society where cooperation, institutions, and legitimacy would prevail.[74]

Theoretically, the Middle East IR scholarship has an academic problem of non-consensus on the conceptualization and delineation of regions and regional powers. By the 'regional turn of the IR'[75]—the post-Western / Global IR after the Cold War — a new constellation of emerging regional powers appeared in the South-Global regions to help shape the new regional orders. This section also argues critically with two conventional assumptions, one that does not recognize the Middle East as a particular regional security complex. The other one is that it understates the rise of regional power centers to influence

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[72] Lui Hebron, Patrick James, Michael Rudy, "Testing Dynamic Theories of Conflict: Power Cycles, Power Transitions, Foreign Policy Crises and Militarized Interstate Disputes," *International Interactions*, vol. 33, no. 1 (2007), p. 3, doi:10.1080/03050620601155680.

[73] Charles Doran, *Systems in Crisis: New Imperatives of High Politics at Century's End*, Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 30–31.

[74] Björn Hettne, "Beyond the 'new' Regionalism," *New Political Economy*, 2005, doi:10.1080/13563460500344484; Fredrik Söderbaum, *Rethinking Regionalism*, *Rethinking Regionalism*, 2016; Fredrik Söderbaum, Timothy M Shaw, "Theories of New Regionalism A Palgrave Reader," n.d.

[75] Godehardt, N. Nabers, D.: Introduction. In: Regional Powers and Regional Orders. London, New York: Routledge, 2011. Pp. 1–18.

and shape the regional order.

In 1984, the scholar and diplomat Carl Brown wrote, "*the Middle East is the most penetrated international relations sub-system in today's world.*"[76] Given this claim, regionalist studies have oddly neglected to carry out an in-depth study of the potentiality of regional power influence in the Middle East. Even though some studies had attempted to address this issue, they fell into the *domestic-international dilemma* of whether domestic or international patterns significantly impact regional power aspirations. Among these efforts, although he has listed four potential regional powers in the Middle East, Ehteshami admits that the regional power "*status shifts in this region more frequently than perhaps anywhere else in the world*"[77] as a result of contested identities, competing political regimes, colonial influence, and regional rivalry.[78] Other scholars also argue that the external influence hindered regional players from creating political and security coalitions against foreign incursions.[79]

Acharya argues that major powers shape the regional social order and behavior of the regional states,[80] while Hinnebusch points out that the Middle East is structurally already locked into the world's core-peripheral system.[81] Besides, Ayoob argues that the transition from a regional system to a regional society depends primarily on the legitimacy (status recognition) bestowed on regional powers by other regional states to

[76] Leon Carl Brown, *On Regions, Powers, and Regional Security Complexes, or What Does Regions And*, Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 4.

[77] Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Middle East Middle Powers: Regional Role, International Impact," *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, vol. 11, no. 42 (2014), pp. 29–49.

[78] Martina Ponížilová, "Delimitation of Regional Powers in The Middle East in The 21th and 21st Century," no. January 2016 (2017), p. 159.

[79] Ian S Lustick, "The Absence of Middle Eastern Great Powers : Political " Backwardness " in Historical Perspective," vol. 51, no. 4 (1997), pp. 653–83; Louise Fawcett, Helene Gandois, "Regionalism in Africa and the Middle East: Implications for EU Studies," *Journal of European Integration*, vol. 32, no. 6 (2010), pp. 617–36, doi:10.1080/07036337.2010.518719; Raymond Hinnebusch, "Failed Regional Hegemons: The Case of the Middle East's Regional Powers," *Seton Hall Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2013), pp. 75–88; Martin Beck, "The Concept of Regional Power as Applied to the Middle East," *Regional Powers in the Middle East*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2014, pp. 1–20, doi:10.1057/9781137484758_1.

[80] Amitav Acharya, 'The Emerging Regional Architecture of World Politics,' ed. Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Peter J. Katzenstein, World Politics 59, no. 4 (2007): 648.

[81] Raymond Hinnebusch, "The Middle East in the World Hierarchy: Imperialism and Resistance," *Journal of International Relations and Development*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2011), pp. 213–46, doi:10.1057/jird.2010.3.

play regional roles. [82]

In the literature on the regional organization of the Middle East, there are three major perspectives feature in the context of regionalism and regional powerhood. First, the post-Cold War debate on the "*interplay between global and regional dynamics*" [83] led some research centers to concentrate on regional powers, including the German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA). Second, the traditional Western-centric approach looks at the region from a conflict-based rather than a regionalist-oriented standpoint. Third, the 'Turkish IR school' emerged in the early 2000s to redefine Turkey's regional power and status. Regardless of its contribution, it did not avoid two pitfalls associated with exclusiveness and disowning of Middle East IR theories, drawing more attention to Turkey instead of including other potential regional powers such as Iran and Saudi Arabia. Hence, this is clear in the repetitive expression, 'Turkey's return to the Middle East.'

To exemplify, Buzan and Waver claim that Turkey is just an 'insulator' in a "*location occupied by one or more units where larger regional security dynamics stand back-to-back*." [84] According to them, Turkey has no exclusive status and roles in the region. On the other hand, for some classical Middle East scholars, including Lustick and Beck, there is no regional power in the Middle East. [85] Logically, Lustick wrote his article in 1997 when Turkey appeared reluctant during the Cold-War era to play a regional power role in the conflict-ridden region when it had a lower status recognition as a regional power. [86] For Beck, for instance, a hurdle to the emergence of a single regional power in the region emanated from two reasons:

[82] Mohammed Ayoob, "From Regional System to Regional Society: Exploring Key Variables in the Construction of Regional Order," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 53, no. 3 (1999), pp. 247–60, doi:10.1080/00049919993845.

[83] For further information about the debate see M. Valbjørn, 'The 'New Middle East' and the encounter with the Global Condition: Exploring the global/regional interplay from the perspective of the New English School,' in S. Stetter (ed.) The Middle East and Globalization: Encounters and Horizons (NY: Palgrave, 2012), pp. 171-190 and Valbjørn, Global/Regional IR and changes in global/regional structures of Middle East international relations, 'in POMEPS (ed.) Shifting Global Politics and the Middle East

[84] Barry. Buzan, Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers : The Structure of International Security*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 41.

[85] Lustick, "The Absence of Middle Eastern Great Powers : Political " Backwardness " in Historical Perspective," pp. 653–83; Beck, "The Concept of Regional Power as Applied to the Middle East," pp. 1–20.

[86] See Meliha Altunışık, Turkey's "Return" to the Middle East in Regional Powers in Henner Fürtig, eds, the Middle East.p.123

"The power capabilities of these potential regional powers are significantly weaker than those of the US in the Middle East. [....] The United States...directly controls the most advanced military capabilities deployable to and even deployed in the Middle East."[87]

In his argument, Beck contradicts himself by stating that Turkey seems to demonstrate, among other potential regional powers, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Egypt, *"the pretension (self-conception) of a leading position"*[88] in the region. On the contrary, he underestimates their potential for regional influence, developing a regional identity, and improving regional governance. Such reductionist accounts of historical and ideological concepts such as Ottoman-Arab relations, Israel-Arab rivalry, Iran-Saudi Arabia sectarian rivalry, Islam fundamentalism[89] have unwisely ignored other IR contextual accounts to clarify the proliferation of the Middle East regionalism.

Against this context, I would like to illustrate the convenience of applying role theory to the IR theories of regional powers regarding status-seeking and role-taking. First, it should be admitted that the Middle East is a regional security complex and a *"contracert of power"*[90] with no single dominant regional power to stabilize it. Second, this argument does not mean that the Middle East is not a multi-polar system. As regional power and roles are highly contested, this led Aarts to describe the Middle East as a region *"without regionalism."*[91] The re-emergence of regional powers studies following the Cold War has primarily been based on the middle-ness phenomenon in terms of causality and consequentiality in the context of regional dynamics. As an intervening variable, this helps to study regional behavior at the regional level and contribution to global governance.[92] In his 2010 article, Philip Nel refers to aspiring regional powers as *'agents*

[87] Beck, "The Concept of Regional Power as Applied to the Middle East," pp. 7,18.

[88] cited, pp. 1–20.

[89] Fawaz A Gerges, "The Study of Middle East International Relations : A Critique," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2 (1991), pp. 208–20.

[90] Beck, Martin. "The Concept of Regional Power as Applied to the Middle East." In *Regional Powers in the Middle East*, et al. Henner Furtig, 2014. pp.18.

[91] Paul Aarts, "The Middle East: A Region without Regionalism or the End of Exceptionalism?," *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 5 (1999), pp. 911–25, doi:10.1080/01436599913406.

[92] Carsten Holbraad, "The Role of Middle Powers," *Cooperation and Conflict*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1971), pp. 77–90, doi:10.1177/001083677100600108; Ed Neumann, Iver B., *Regional Great Powers in International Politics*, Macmillan Press Lld 1992, 1992; P J Ed The, New York, "Katzenstein (1996) – The Culture of National Security," 1996; Barry Buzan, Ole Waver, *Regions and Powers*, *Regions and Powers*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010; Amitav Acharya, Alastair Iain Johnston, "Comparing Regional Institutions: An Introduction," *Crafting Cooperation: Regional International Institutions in Comparative*

of change' addressing the nature of those powers' needs, choices, and reforms. For him, what is most needed for them is to gain 'recognition' of their new regional status by others through "*the communicative process in the international society of states through which states mutually acknowledge the status and social esteem of other states.*"[93]

In comparison, both established regional powers and middle regional powers[94] have similarities and differences in material and normative values. However, the core difference between them is only "*in terms of their role-model and governance capabilities within the international system.*"[95] Turkish scholars Öniş and Kutlay have substantially tailored an analytical framework to identify the capacity of emerging regional powers with Turkey as a critical example. For them, a state of potential attributes would be identified as an emerging regional power only if it has such *"ability to serve as a role model''; 'coalition-building capacity'; 'governance capacity and capabilities– expectations balance'; and 'identifying niche areas in global governance.*"[96] Likewise, Jordaan typically underpins the ontological constitutive features and behavioral dynamics of traditional middle powers and emerging middle powers. He argues that traditional middle powers are more socially democratic, whereas emerging middle powers are still in the socializing process by the most democratic powers. The latter category of powers has emerged after the Cold War era in the Global South and is still classified in the semi-

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Perspective, 2007, doi:10.1017/CBO9780511491436.001; David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations*, *Hierarchy in International Relations*, 2017; Andrew Hurrell, "One World? Many Worlds? The Place of Regions in the Study of International Society," *International Affairs*, 2007, doi:10.1111/j.1468-2346.2007.00606.x; Douglas Lemke, *Regions of War and Peace*, Cambridge University Press, 2004; Philip Nel, Dirk Nabers, Melanie Hanif, "Introduction: Regional Powers and Global Redistribution," *Global Society*, 2012, doi:10.1080/13600826.2012.682278.

[93] Nel, Philip, "Redistribution and Recognition: What Emerging Regional Powers Want." Review of International Studies, no. 4, 2010, p.p. 951, 963, see also Stryker and Statham 1985: 323; Thies 2010b: 6338

[94] See Andrew Carr, "Is Australia a Middle Power? A Systemic Impact Approach," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 68, no. 1 (2014), pp. 70–84, doi:10.1080/10357718.2013.840264; Miriam Prys, *Redefining Regional Power in International Relations*, *Redefining Regional Power in International Relations: Indian and South African Perspectives*, Routledge, 2012; Andrew F. Cooper, Daniel Flemes, "Foreign Policy Strategies of Emerging Powers in a Multipolar World: An Introductory Review," *Third World Quarterly*, 2013, doi:10.1080/01436597.2013.802501; Thomas J. Volgy, Kelly Marie Gordell, "Rising Powers, Status Competition, and Global Governance: A Closer Look at Three Contested Concepts for Analyzing Status Dynamics in International Politics," *Contemporary Politics*, vol. 0, no. 0 (2019), pp. 1–20, doi:10.1080/13569775.2019.1621719;Ziya Öniş, Mustafa Kutlay, "Rising Powers in a Changing Global Order: The Political Bric," *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 8 (2013), pp. 1409–26, doi:10.1080/01436597.2013.831541..

[95] Öniş, Ziya and Kutlay, Mustafa, the dynamics of emerging middle-power influence in regional and global governance: the paradoxical case of Turkey, Australian Journal of International Affairs, 2017 71:2, 164-183

[96] Ibid.

core-periphery paradigm. Also, they enjoy some regional dominance and relative power over other states of the same region and show intention toward regional integration and cooperation.[97]

In most recent studies, scholars applied role theory to traditional middle powers with noticeably neglecting two-dimensional concepts. The first is '*emerging*,' which seems to stand for the overused term '*rising*' used for those powers thriving economically, for instance, BRICS. Tanka refers to the difference in her re-conceptualization of regional order; the concept of emergence has two meanings 'synchronic' and 'diachronic' as the following:

> *"The concept of synchronic emergence refers to the part-whole relation that prevails in a particular social system in a certain instant of time. "Diachronic emergence," on the other hand, refers to the historical sequence of systems, when the "old" system gives rise to the "new" system. Put differently, through the process of diachronic emergence, new systems with emergent properties are historically formed."*[98]

Several other scholars of mainstream IR theories and regional studies studied the behavior of regional powers by using role theory separately or associatively with other FP and security approaches.[99]

As far as role theory is thoroughly concerned, then, the regional structure is a determining factor shaping the patterns of state's national roles and orientations.[100] For

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[97]Jordaan, Eduard. "The Concept of a Middle Power in International Relations: Distinguishing Between Emerging and Traditional Middle Powers." Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies 30 (1): 165–181. 2003.

[98] Maria Tanaka, Reconceptualizing regional order: a critical/scientific realist (CR/SR) intervention, Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies, 6:1, 79-105. 2017

[99] Cameron G Thies, Mark David Nieman, "Power, Status and Conflict Behavior: Brazil as an Emerging Power in the International System," 2014; Cameron G. Thies, Angguntari C. Sari, "A Role Theory Approach to Middle Powers: Making Sense of Indonesia's Place in the International System," *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International & Strategic Affairs*, vol. 40, no. 3 (2018), pp. 397–421, doi:10.1355/cs40-3c; Karim, "Middle Power, Status-Seeking and Role Conceptions: The Cases of Indonesia and South Korea," pp. 343–63; Emel Parlar Dal, "Conceptualising and Testing the 'Emerging Regional Power' of Turkey in the Shifting International Order," *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 8 (2016), pp. 1425–53, doi:10.1080/01436597.2016.1142367.

[100] Frazier, D and R Stewart-Ingersoll. "Regional Powers and Security: A Framework for Understanding Order within Regional Security Complexes." European Journal of International Relations, vol. 16, no. 4, n.d., pp. 731-753.2010, see also Sandal, "Middle Powerhood as a Legitimation Strategy in the Developing World: The Cases of Brazil and Turkey." 2014; Buzan B, Wæver O '*Regions and Powers': The Structure of International Security*.2003; Hurrell, (eds) *Regionalism in World Politics.1995;* Lake and Morgan eds. *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World.1997*; Lemke 2002, *Regions of War and Peace*.2002.

example, Frazier and Stewart-Ingersoll use role theory to discuss regional security. Their Regional Powers and Security Framework (RPSF) work drew up a top-down regional security framework to explain the behavioral and systemic dynamics of two vertical global and regional hierarchies and horizontal regional power mechanisms.[101]

Traditionally, Holsti did not dedicate themself to the study of small and middle powers. In regional systems, status, roles, and size matter like material and ideational values and attributions. States act according to the axiom '*the capability to act*' means as East posits, "*there are profound and significant differences in the behavior patterns of large and small states*"[102] Therefore, states with a vast number of capabilities relative to their peers exert considerable influence into their RSC's security dynamics.

It was hoped that the new Middle East would emerge immediately after the fall of the bipolar Cold War system, but only the term remained while the system split into (sub-security complexes), and the external influence intensified. In the contracert system, regional powers attempt to capitalize on the post-Cold War distribution of power in a zero-sum game that, with time, risked the regional order stability. Thus, Beck refers to a set of structural and normative factors which cubed regionalism in the Middle East as the following:

> "*High power dispersion; preponderance of competitive rather than cooperative behavior and hard-power rather than soft-power use; the command of only low global-power capabilities and the lack of usage of resources for regional development by regional actors; and the distinct role of the United States as a quasi-regional power.*"[103]

At the international level, the US has become the leading power in the Middle East to socialize small and regional powers and influence the regional order. However, due to the number of other potential regional powers joining the system, the process of state socialization for potential regional powers can vary. Specific regional powers may internalize the norms of the major external powers, such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and

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[101] Robert Stewart-Ingersoll, Derrick Frazier, "India as a Regional Power: Identifying the Impact of Roles and Foreign Policy Orientation on the South Asian Security Order," *Asian Security*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2010), pp. 51–73, doi:10.1080/14799850903472003.

[102] Maurice A. East, "Size and Foreign Policy Behavior: A Test of Two Models," *World Politics*, 1973, p. 576, doi:10.2307/2009952.

[103] Beck, "The Concept of Regional Power as Applied to the Middle East," p. 5.

Israel. Others may oppose such external socialization; for example, Iran has rejected the socializing norms and the status quo that the US formed in the post-1979 era.

2.1.   Regional Powerhood Criteria: Two Approaches

Regional power is a comprehensive concept in the regionalist strand of IR studies that denotes the power and status of aspiring states at the regional level. A regional state aspires to a regional power status when it possesses adequate material resources, its leaders think they can be regional powers, and play foreign policy roles that serve certain expectations of its 'self' and 'others' in the region. Also, regional power refers to the social status and role—master role—which both depend on self-conception, other-expectations, and acceptance. The regional power 'master role' has auxiliary roles to represent and convey national 'self' and international 'other' aspirations. [104]

The motives of the regional actors reflect the residual criteria of regional power, i.e., the ideational/cognitive approach and the positional approach. Integrating role theory with regionalist, realistic, and constructivist theories helps solve the puzzling world of ideas and behaviors that determine regional powers' aspirations. Nolte confirms this as "*it is necessary to combine different approaches in IR theory. A narrow realist, liberal, or constructivist approach is not sufficient to capture the complexity of this subject matter.*"[105]Role theory redefines the roles of regional powers by three independent variables. First, it illustrates the categories of states in position (great, regional, small) defined by their national attributes and political systems, such as pacific democracies. Second, it focuses on the self-identification and affirmation dynamics of the status and roles vis-à-vis the demands of other actors on the regional and global scales. Third, in terms of behavior, it explains the three orientations of regional powers, such as good international citizens, international compromisers, and status quo revisionists.[106]

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[104]Leslie E. Wehner, "Role Expectations As Foreign Policy: South American Secondary Powers' Expectations of Brazil As A Regional Power," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, vol. 11, no. 4 (2015), pp. 435–55, doi:10.1111/fpa.12048.

[105] Detlef Nolte, "How to Compare Regional Powers: Analytical Concepts and Research Topics," *Review of International Studies*, vol. 36, no. 04 (2010), p. 883, doi:10.1017/s026021051000135x.

[106] Carr, "Is Australia a Middle Power? A Systemic Impact Approach," pp. 70–84.

Role theory contributes a two-way to the *ideational approach* to regional power role criteria. First, it focuses on the cognitive sources of national roles defined by decision-makers. Also, it analyzes the individual influence in foreign policy-making by looking at the self-definitions, worldviews, values, and self-images of leaders. For this approach's significance, it demystifies how ideational sources cause misperceptions and drive states to punch over their weight as playing incompatible roles. Second, it looks at the ideational sources of regional peers' reactions at the receiving side of the role process system. For example, because of external permeability in the Middle East, regional roles of regional powers have split the regional system into subsystems. Iran has re-articulated the anti-Western norm and pan-Islamic roles. Others, such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey, have maintained the US-led regional order norms. Individually, Saudi Arabia relies on Western security alignments, anti-pan-Arabism, and religious convictions rather than oil influence. At the same time, Turkey's return to the region grounds on ideational and historical legacies, such as Ottoman heritage and Islamic orientation, and to balance the Kemalist-Western inclination.

At the most assumption of this approach, regional actors pursue their roles per their '*power through ideas*' which means in Carstensen and Schmidt's thesis "*the capacity of actors to persuade other actors to accept and adopt their views of what to think and do through the use of ideational elements*."[107] In some cases, the ideational sources may motivate a regional power to be a 'constructed identity,' i.e., self-assertion without recognition by others.[108] For Joseph Nye, ideational power refers to soft power,[109] and for Grant and Keohane, it is a sort of public reputation conditioned by accountability.[110] In adopting such power status, the state should attract and define the aspirations of 'others' in exchange for legitimacy and recognition of its position. Despite the importance of this approach, it does not let us know of the ideative agency behind the decision-makers' aspirations that vary according to three attitudinal goals: to reach a regional power status, to serve the national interest, or state identity.

[107] Martin B Carstensen, Vivien A Schmidt, "Power through, over and in Ideas: Conceptualizing Ideational Power in Discursive Institutionalism," *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 23, no. 3 (2016), p. 320,321, doi:10.1080/13501763.2015.1115534.
[108] L Neack, *The New Foreign Policy: US and Comparative Foreign Policy in the 21st Century*, 2003.
[109] Nye, Joseph S. Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics. New york: Public Affairs, 2004.p.5
[110] Ruth W Grant, Robert O Keohane, "Accountability and Abuses of Power in World Politics," *Source: The American Political Science Review*, 2005, p. 29-43

Second, the behavioral approach defines regional power as a self-proclaimed regional power status, which requires recognition by other players in the respective regional social order. This assumption should not underestimate the positional and ideational concepts of regional power. Also, under the behavioral approach of regional power parameters, scholars suggest that any state of any size (small or medium size) can qualify for a regional power status if it promotes 'regional influentials.'[111]

Within this dimension, a regional power is both status and role once it functions in Cooper's 'niche diplomacy' fashion, referring to participation in the regional and global governance and distribution of goods.[112] In this regard, Flemes has developed an integrated framework for assessing the functionality and productivity of potential regional powers. What is most relevant in this regard is the third criterion, namely that the instrumental/behavioral approach regards the employment of foreign policy instruments by regional powers, primarily material, structural, and discursive. It suggests that a potential regional power should use the following material power instruments: military and economic capabilities in regional and international organizations; institutional instruments both formal and informal institutions to form and shape regional regimes and issue areas; and discursive instruments in the foreign policy conduct to speak with their neighbors and represent them.[113]According to this approach, "*good international citizens, coalition builders, bridge builders, peacekeepers and third-party conflict mediators*"[114] are necessary conditions of regional powerhood.

Given these regional powerhood criteria, the regional role orientations and types make the behavioral criteria of regional powerhood in world politics. Thus, role theory contributes to IR and FPA by explaining the orientational and expectational dimensions of interstate interactions. These two constitutive dimensions are repertoires of regional power behavior and have implications for state recognition and rejection.

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[111] A. Hurrell, Regional powers and the global system from a historical perspective, p. 20,21 in D. Flemes (ed), Regional Leadership in the Global System Ideas, Interests and Strategies of Regional Powers, Ashgate Publishing, 2010

[112] Andrew F. Cooper, *Niche Diplomacy: Middle Powers after the Cold War*, 1997.

[113] Daniel Flemes, "Conceptualising Regional Power in International Relations: Lessons from the South African Case," *SSRN*, 2007, p. 14,17, doi:10.2139/ssrn.1000123.

[114] Thies, Sari, "A Role Theory Approach to Middle Powers : Making Sense of Indonesia's Place in the International System," pp. 397–421.

2.2. Role Operationalization of Regional Powers

This section draws attention to the intersecting explanatory variables of role behavior in terms of change and continuity, which I call overlapping *dimensions: causal, orientational, and expectational*. The first refers to the three causal sources: domestic, regional, and international, on which states conceptualize their national role conceptions and orient their foreign policy roles. However, they could be ideational or rational-driven. This dimension answers-why do states behave in such a way? The second refers to states' role orientations: cooperative, competitive, and status quo. This dimension answers how do states behave in response to domestic, regional, and international dynamics? The third refers to states' low and high expectations in the regional and international hierarchy. Expectations occur at the end of role making continuum. At the low level of expectations, the regional power seeks acceptance in the regional social order, while at the high level of expectations, it seeks to change the status quo. Finally, this is to answer the question, "what do the nations want from these foreign policy roles and orientations?"

In the case of the Middle East, three independent factors determine the nature and conduct of the regional powers: (1) extra-regional role permeability, (2) regional role competition, and (3) domestic role dissonance. The first relates to the external permeability/penetration by major powers during colonial times. After the Cold War, constructive socialization and passive international infiltration by the US have affected the security structures of the Middle East.[115]External permeability is a twofold layered factor that positively and negatively affects Middle Eastern powers' role orientations. These explanatory factors will be addressed in the sense of three intersecting factors at the national, regional, and global levels. The other two factors will be explained in the next sections.

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[115] Buzan, Wæver, *Regions and Powers : The Structure of International Security*; K Peter, "A World of Regions: Asia and Europe in the American Imperium," 2005; Stephan Klose, "The Emergence and Evolution of an External Actor's Regional Role: An Interactionist Role Theory Perspective," *Cooperation and Conflict*, vol. 54, no. 3 (2019), pp. 426–41, doi:10.1177/0010836718774584.

Table 1:**Role Behavior of Regional Powers in the Middle East**

Orientational Dimension

Pro-status quo Orientation

	Cooperative	Competitive	Order-oriented	
Recognition by others	-Model role -Mediator -System collaborator	-Regional leader -Defender of the faith -Protector of oppressed	*Defender of status quo*	Hegemony and order maintenance
Hegemony over others	Cooperative -Mediator -Terrorism counter	Competitive *-Regional leader* -Defender of the faith -Protector of oppressed	Order-oriented *Challenger of status quo* -Liberator -Bastion of revolutions -Anti-imperialist	Regional Order change

Anti-status quo Orientation

Expectational Dimension — Low Expectations (national role status) ... High Expectations (regional order status)

Table: Role Behavior of Regional Powers in the Middle East

2.2.1. Role Behavior: Orientational Dimension

This section focuses on the foreign policy behavior of regional powers in the regional system in relevance to various domestic, regional, and international determinants. Regional power is considered as a role itself 'master role' that plays a set of auxiliary roles that make the "*repertoires of behavior, inferred from others' expectations and one's conceptions, selected at least partly in response to cues and demands.*"[116] Role theory is useful to study the influence of agency (decision-makers' perceptions and orientations) and structures (regional order), where both interact to shape states' foreign policy behavior (status quo or revisionism). For instance, during the Cold War, foreign policy analysis was concerned with structural dynamics, including alliances, polarity, and regional orientations of status quo and revisionist states.

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[116] Walker, "Symbolic Interactionism and International Politics: Role Theory's Contribution to International Organization," p. 23.

It provides a comprehensive analysis of the ideational and systemic sources that shape decision-makers' worldviews about regional and international affairs. Role theory further refutes the presumption that all pro-status quo powers behave similarly and consistently in any region and at any time, and the anti-status quo powers. Thus, it argues that foreign policy orientation should be reduced to 'role orientation,' since pro-status quo states are concretely defined by how they behave in terms of types of roles, not by what they conceive.

Some analytical dimensions of the role-taking system should be considered: spatial dimension, e.g., the Middle East, positional dimension, e.g., superpower, middle power, small power, timing dimension, e.g., Cold War era, post-Cold War era, orientational dimension, e.g., status quo, anti-status quo, neutral, functional dimension, e.g., ascribed, declaratory and achieved, and agent-structural dimension, e.g., decision-makers and regional order.

Holsti sketched ideal types of bipolar role orientations: aligned and non-aligned. The former comprises six significant role conceptions: anti-imperialist agent, faithful ally, defender of the faith, bastion of the revolutions, regional protector, and protectee. He also touched on regionalism and regional powers and how certain states are regional-oriented, representing a range of regional roles, including liberation supporters, regional subsystem collaborators, developers, and examples.[117] Concerning regional order, Hinnebusch argues that "*role implies identity and defines orientations toward neighbors (friend or enemy), great powers (threat or patron), and the state system (revisionist or status quo)*."[118]

Foreign policy roles typically revolve around two categories of orientations, and both categories fall into three modes and a range of roles. In retrospect, Holsti defined FP's orientations as "*general attitudes and commitments toward the external environment, its fundamental strategy for accomplishing its domestic and external objectives and aspirations and for coping with persisting threats*."[119] These orientations

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[117] Holsti, "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy," 1970, pp. 233–309.

[118] Raymond Hinnebusch, Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002, pp. 15–16.

[119] Kal Holsti, *International Politics: A Framework for Analysis*, 3d ed., Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice–Hall, 1983, p. 98.

reflect the decision-makers' ideological and strategic settings and shape the role identities of aspiring regional powers. Referring to the Middle East, from a structuralist perspective, Hinnebusch and Ehteshami define role as the following:

> "*A durable formula or tradition that incorporates experience by state elites in balancing and reconciling such elements as economic needs, geopolitical imperatives, domestic opinion, and state capabilities. Role implies an identity and defines orientations toward neighbors (friend or enemy), great powers (threat or patron), and the state system (revisionist or status quo).*"[120]

Such role orientations, along with regional structures and state identities, affect the regional order.[121] First, individual states with cooperative role orientations aim to contribute to the regional order, allocate norms, and collaborate with civilized and democratic actors. Second, states with competitive roles tend to play hegemonic roles, counter the roles of other aspiring actors, and act unilaterally. Included in this category, Wish claims that "*roles associated with leadership or dominance involve a great degree of status or influence.*"[122] Third, status quo roles vary; some countries are satisfied with the regional and international order and therefore play status quo roles, and some others are unsatisfied and therefore play revisionist roles, while some others are skeptical about this and thus advocate for changes.

The study of pro and anti-status quo dynamics at the regional level contributes to the regionalist IR studies in general and the Middle East studies. Power satisfaction and dissatisfaction may easily be measured in regional role behavior. In his regional power transition theory, Lemke posits that in a 'multiple hierarchy model,' emerging regional powers behave in different orientations toward the existing regional order and thus tend to challenge, balance, or defend the status quo.[123] In his hypothesis, regional powers are "*local dominant state[s] supervising local relations, by establishing and striving to preserve a local status quo.*"[124] In comparison, the constructivist theory claims that domestic determinants, including state, national, and supra-state identities, play a

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[120] Hinnebusch, Ehteshami, *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States*, pp. 15–16.
[121] Dierrick Frazer, Robert Stewart-Ingersoll, "Regional Powers and Security: A Framework for Understanding Order within Regional Security ComplexesRegional," *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 16, no. 4 (2010), pp. 731–53, doi:10.1177/1354066109359847.
[122] Wish, "Policy Makers and Foreign National Role Conceptions Their," p. 537.
[123] Lemke D (2002) *Regions of War and Peace*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 48,
[124] Ibid.

predominant role in constructing and shaping role orientations toward either status quo or revisionism.[125]

Conventional IR theorists of regional politics define status quoness and revisionism from different contrast dimensions: ideal types and inter-subjective perspectives.[126] These two definitions suggest that status quoness and revisionism are not deterministic, supporting the thesis under study. Initially, they argue that every 'pivotal state' seeking a regional power status has, to some degree, revisionist ambitions.[127]

First, status quo roles are often declaratorily expressed in official statements by leaders and governments. Foreign policymakers also share their threat perceptions raised by those dissatisfied with the distribution of power. Second, they have oppositional orientations as the status quo, and revisionist powers often ascribe pro-and anti-regional status quo roles to each other. Third, both the status quo and the revisionist roles are longer-term than others since they reflect a state of identity stability and the dominant political impression of the ruling regimes. Fourth, they cause role conflict internally and role rivalry regionally. Fifth, revisionist roles are always opportunistic hegemon-seeking actions, motivated either by internal political dysfunction or ideological attitudes, as in the former case of Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany in the latter case, and recently Iran in the Middle East.[128] Sixth, there is often regional and international cooperation in constructing these two orientations and their respective roles and expectations. Such trans-regional role partnership has both positive and negative repercussions. For example, during the Cold War era, the US and the Soviet Union played counter-regional

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[125] and Michael N. Barnett Telhami, Shibley, *Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East.*, Cornell University Press, 2002.

[126] Oliver Turner, Nicola Nymalm, "Morality and Progress: IR Narratives on International Revisionism and the Status Quo," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, vol. 32, no. 4 (2019), pp. 407–28, doi:10.1080/09557571.2019.1623173.

[127] Stacie E. Goddard, "Embedded Revisionism: Networks, Institutions, and Challenges to World Order," *International Organization*, 2018, doi:10.1017/S0020818318000206; Maysam Behravesh, "State Revisionism and Ontological (in)Security in International Politics: The Complicated Case of Iran and Its Nuclear Behavior," *Journal of International Relations and Development*, vol. 21, no. 4 (2018), pp. 836–57, doi:10.1057/s41268-018-0149-x; Alexander Cooley, Daniel Nexon, Steven Ward, "Revising Order or Challenging the Balance of Military Power? An Alternative Typology of Revisionist and Status-Quo States," *Review of International Studies*, vol. 45, no. 4 (2019), pp. 689–708, doi:10.1017/S0260210519000019; Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, "Neoclassical Realism and the Study of Regional Order," *International Relations Theory and Regional Transformation*, 2012, doi:10.1017/CBO9781139096836.006.

[128] Steven Ward, *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers*, *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers*, 2017, p. 67.

roles in stabilizing their regional status quos. In particular, the former has played the role of guardian of the regional order, which was not immune to reactions from revisionist states such as Iraq and Iran.

In the Middle East, the type of political systems, regime survival, religion, and history play a prominent role in constructing foreign policy roles and orientations. The roles and orientations of the regional status quo and revisionist states are profoundly influenced by the state ideologies of Al Saud, Nasser, Khomeini, and Erdogan. The evolution of regional status quo roles is defined by the intersection of domestic, regional, and international factors as follows:

2.2.1.1. Domestic Factors

Within this, the set of domestic constituencies and factors, Breuning argues that "*Decision-makers form their conceptions of their state's role on the basis of both their understanding of the state's identity and cultural heritage and their perception of their state's place and possibilities within the international system.*"[129] This refers mostly to the ideational sources that have a range of various constitutive, cognitive, societal, and governmental structures like the following:

National self-images: "*consist, at least in part, of idealized stereotypes of the 'in-nation' which are culturally shared and perpetuated.*"[130] They are symbolic sources of national pride, inherited from historical narratives and experiences as references for foreign policy conduct. However, these self-images in leaders' minds guide and inspire them to be decisive in their decisions and determine what they believe is appropriate and rational. The self-image of Saudi Arabia, for example, is that it is the wealthiest Arab and dominant Sunni power. By comparison, Turkey's self-image is the ancestral center of the Ottoman Empire, the civilizational bridge between the West and East, and the current modern Muslim state, and Iran's self-image is the ancient Persian empire and cradle of Shi'ism.

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[129] Breuning, "Role Theory Research in International Relations: State of the Art and Blind Spots," p. 26.
[130] Laura Neack, *Studying Foreign Policy Comparatively: Cases and Analysis*, 2019, p. 83.

National culture and identity: define foreign policy culture in terms of common reflections and perceptions about others in international society. National identities are reflected in nationalism in the Middle East, as in Turkey and Iran before the Islamic Revolution, while tribalism and Islamism are manifested in Saudi Arabia.

Religion: is a central source of national role conceptions shaping national identity, decision-makers' belief systems, transnational identities, and self-other identification. In the Middle East, religion has two defining characteristics: the 'apolitical' concept (Islam-Judaism-Christianity) and the 'political' concept of Islam (Islamization/Islamism) as a political discourse, ideology, and legitimacy for foreign policymaking. Applied to the Middle East, theological patterns of foreign policymaking demonstrate a considerable amount about, for example, Iran's fundamental divine doctrine of '*Vilayat-el Faqih*,' the conservative discipline of Saudi Wahabism, and the Ottoman approach of Turkey.

Faith-based foreign policy in the Middle East, in general, takes three forms: Fatwa (religious legal guidelines) on foreign relations by clerics (ulema); doctrines such as Shi'ism, Sunniism, and Salafism; and discursive framing. The first and second forms are manipulated and state-*ized* by ruling regimes, and the masses and state media platforms handle the last. In Saudi Arabia and Iran, for instance, regime legitimacy is obtained by "*the principle of Baya'a (oath of allegiance to a leader), whereby the ruler is bound to the ruled according to Sharia (Islamic law).*"[131] However, religion is explicitly reflected in the role conceptions of Middle Eastern regional powers, including Iran's roles such as protector of the oppressed, defender of the faith, Saudi Arabian defender of the faith, custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, and Muslim leader. All such role conceptions are just a few examples of ideational sources of Saudi Iranian enmity in the Middle East.[132] Thus, the "Westphalian presumption"[133]– the use of religion in politics and foreign policy – is now being debated in Middle East studies.

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[131] Magdalena Charlotte Delgado, *A Constructivist Analysis of Religion's Role in Foreign Policy:The Cases of Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia under the Leaderships of Menachem Begin, Ayatollah Khomeini and Fahd Bin Abdulaziz*, The London School of Economics and Political Science, 2015, p. 183.
[132] Yasemin Akbaba, Özgür Özdamar, *Role Theory in the Middle East and North Africa*, *Role Theory in the Middle East and North Africa*, New York, NY : Routledge, 2019.
[133] Scott M. Thomas, "Taking Religious and Cultural Pluralism Seriously," *Religion in International Relations*, Palgrave Macmillan US, 2003, pp. 21–53, doi:10.1057/9781403982360_2.

History: is one of the ideational sources of states' role conceptions. Historical differences and experiences influence foreign policy-making and role-taking. Along with belief systems, historical experiences and narratives influence self-images, identity, and roles of states in the Middle East by which they portray themselves vs. others.[134] In this respect, aspiring regional powers seek to exploit their historical heritage, pride, and experience to differentiate themselves from those in the social hierarchy. Historical images about 'significant others' are (re)-formulated in national memory and foreign policy-making at particular occurrences and crises. The cases of Turkey and Iran demonstrate how Ottoman and Persian legacies amplify the self-proclaimed sense of exceptionalism in their foreign policies and regional roles.

Regime type, leadership style, identity, belief systems, worldviews:

These state-related features revolve around political regime types, cognitive perceptions, psychological milieu, ideological features, and foreign policy-making mechanisms. First, it concerns political systems such as conservative monarchical regimes (Arab Gulf States), authoritarian republican regimes (e.g., Iran, Egypt), and political ideologies such as socialism, and Baathism, and democracy. These competitive features in the Middle East have caused a wide range of ideological alliances and conflicts, e.g., Nasserist republican ideology vs. conservative monarchic regimes in the 1960s and recently revolutionary republican Iran vs. conservative monarchical Saudi Arabia. Second, it concerns the cognitive features that include self-images, worldviews, threat perceptions, and role conceptions. Third, it concerns the psychological milieu, which is the style and attributes of decision-makers. Fourth, it considers the ideological characteristics of decision-makers which include state identity and belief systems.

States are abstract entities, and individual leaders act on behalf of them.[135] Leaders' foreign policy orientations and role conceptions derive mostly from domestic and external threats to their survival and legitimacy. In this vein, decision-makers' self-images matter in studying foreign policy-making to understand how leaders see their 'self' through the lenses of 'other' by which the former describes the latter as (friend,

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[134] Breuning, "Culture, History, Role: Belgian and Dutch Axioms and Foreign Assistance Policy."
[135] Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Pol- Icies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999.*

opponent, ally, leader, imperialist, hegemon). Leaders react by conceptualizing relevant roles such as (leader, ally, friend, defender) upon such othering images. As for the leadership style, Dessouki argues that the 'leader-staff group' or 'presidential center' of Egyptian foreign policy-making has been used to personalize Egyptian diplomacy.[136] Generally, individualism has hijacked the foreign policy process in the Middle East. State identity and regime survival dynamics also have motivated leaders to personalize role conceptions and threat perceptions. In the Middle East, the securitization of state identities and regime survival has given rise to alliance polarization. Curtis Ryan underpins the causal relation between regime stability and alliances as follows:

> *"Regimes in the Middle East in particular use alliances not just in the traditional sense, as external defense pacts, but also and perhaps even more often for domestic regime security. Alliances are in this respect transnational coalitions of ruling elites, propping each other up not only against traditional threats but also against threats from within their own societies."[137]*

Without Erdogan's self-images and belief systems, there would not have been such recent Turkish role conceptions and expectations. Likewise, without Ayatollah Khomeini, would Iran have had Shia-revolutionary-centered role conceptions? Will it be possible for Saudi Arabia to compete for regional power status and roles without the House of Saud and its influence over foreign policymaking?

- *Material Capabilities:*

Material sources matter as much as ideational sources and factors in the Middle East, especially when the Arab Gulf subsystem is considered. In the very typical Middle East IR theory, the main material conditions for foreign policy are the following:

Military capability: is one of the national power indicators that determine foreign policy capacity and agenda, especially in terms of playing regional security roles such as counterterrorism agents, protectors of the oppressed, and faithful allies. In the Middle

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[136] Ali E. Hillal. Dessouki, "Regional Leadership: Balancing off Costs and Dividends in the Foreign Policy of Egypt," *The Foreign Policies of Arab States: The Challenge of Globalization*, he American University in Cairo Press, 2008, pp. 167–94.
[137] Curtis R Ryan, "Alliances and the Balance of Power in the Middle East," *In The Routledge Handbook to the Middle East and North African State and States System*, ed. by Raymond Hinnebusch and Jasmine K. Gani, Routledge , 2019, p. 344.

East, where hard power is prevailing, and military-civilian relationship is high, states like Egypt, Iran, Algeria, and Turkey could play more significant regional roles than others.

Economic capacity: varies among countries in the region, including the rentier economy (e.g., Gulf states), the trade-industrial economy (e.g., Turkey), and the traditional economy (e.g., Egypt). In the Gulf region, the Arab Gulf States and Iran are expanding their economies on rentier hydrocarbon revenues to boost military capacities, alliances, and hegemonic aspirations. For example, Saudi Arabia plays the 'swing producer' role by managing international energy supply and prices for its vast oil production and reserves.

Strategic location: figures out the opportunities and threats of states in the respective zones of influence. States aim to leverage geostrategic positions to accomplish hegemonic, economic, and civilizational expectations. For example, geography often influences Turkish foreign policy as strategically located between the West and the East. On the other hand, as far as Iran and the Arab Gulf countries are concerned, geography has always been a rivalry source over spheres of influence that Iran and Saudi Arabia have relentlessly struggled to play the Gulf region's security guardian role.

2.2.1.2.   Regional Factors

- *Material and Ideational Variables*

Several regional dynamics, including post-Cold War polarity, ideology, patterns of enmity and amity, alliances, and global influences, all have a cumulative effect on states' foreign policy conduct and role orientations in the region. During the Cold War era, the Middle Eastern states engaged in the bipolar international system aligned themselves with the pro-Western and Communist blocs. Since that time, the regional system has, according to RSC theory, been divided into three sub-regional security complexes: the Maghreb, Levant, and Gulf, along with Turkey.[138]

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[138] Buzan, Wæver, *Regions and Powers : The Structure of International Security*, p. 41.

This complex multipolarity has given rise to three regional cultures— Wenditian roles— as friends, enemies, and rivals. Since 2003, this regional architecture has evolved and propelled successive heterogeneous power hubs, cold wars, and regional powers, including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, and Israel, all of which have substantial capabilities.

Realist regional theories, including hegemonic stability theory, power transition, power and threat balance, and alliance theory, have across-red answers to this matter. In contrast to the assumptions of the hegemonic stability theory, the regional penetration of external powers, including the US, has proved only to generate instability and otherwise incite regional resistance. Such regional resistance politics has given rise to doctrinal ideologies and revisionist roles, including pan-Arabism, Shia Islamism, Nasserism, and Baathism, all aimed at challenging the regional status quo.[139]

The power transition theory has frequently manifested itself in the Middle East. For example, under Nasser, assisted by the Soviet Union, Egypt sought regional power status in the Middle East in the 1950s-60s. Egypt became a focal point for regional reforming demands, and Nasser's pan-Arabist roles, including anti-Zionist and Western imperialism, and the bastion of Arab revolutions, attracted some and frustrated others. Likewise, Iran has begun to seek regional power status and revolutionary roles after the Islamic revolution in 1979. Iraq, under Saddam, aspired to regional power status and hegemony in the 1980-90s. As materially rich and closely allied with the US, Saudi Arabia has also built a bid for regional leadership and played an assertive pro-status quo role. Since 2002, Turkey has acquired relative and material power to make multilateral and region-oriented roles.

The balance of power theory informs us about the interaction between regional rogue/revisionist and status quo states. It implies that the status quo powers seek power parity to prevent potential regional challengers from emerging. K. J. Holsti's typology of national role conceptions points to status quo roles: aggressor, defender, and balancer. [140] During the Cold War era, the Middle East became the battleground for major powers'

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[139] Hinnebusch, "Failed Regional Hegemons: The Case of the Middle East's Regional Powers," pp. 75–88.
[140] Holsti, "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy," 1970, pp. 260–70.

competition between the Western bloc (status quo) and the Communist bloc (revisionist). At the time, regional status quo powers, including Turkey and Saudi Arabia, played defending roles of the regional status quo against the Communist spillover. After the Iranian Islamic revolution, Saudi Arabia became a durable balancer against Iran's Khomeinist and Hussein's Baathist revisionism. On the other hand, the balance of threat theory demystifies the puzzling patterns of regime survival dynamics and how many regional rivalry roles in the Middle East are far more dedicated to preserving the political regimes than the regional status quo, such as Saudi Arabia versus Iran.

While the IR alliance theory contributes to understanding the roles and orientations of regional powers. It proves how alliances in the Middle East are 'liquid' and 'single-issue-oriented.'[141] Such a shift in alliances depends on ideational, political, and security calculations. Regional alliances with ideological bases mark the era of Communist containment, which brought Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran to the Western-oriented roles till 1979, including Saudi Arabia's faithful ally and anti-Communist. Together with Iran, Saudi Arabia became the twin pillar of the US-led regional Communist containment.[142] Turkey was also involved in the containment strategy with significant roles, including faithful ally, buffer state, and NATO member.

The evolution and shift of state identity reconstruct threat perceptions and shape national role conceptions and orientations of states in the Middle East. Likewise, such dynamics in role articulation and orientation depend on states' ontological and geopolitical threat perceptions. Rubin claims that, in the Middle East, an 'ideational security dilemma' is endemic when a state or group of states projects a 'transnational ideology' bears various threatening strategies, including regional roles, and thus prompts other states to respond by similar means.[143]

Regional powers in the region are often obsessed with the perceptions of threats and loaded with role conceptions that arise from ideological sources and cleavages,

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[141] Raffaella A. Del Sarto, et al, "Interregnum: The Regional Order in the Middle East and North Africa after 2011," *MENARA Final Reports*, 2019, doi:10.2139/ssrn.3367815.
[142] Tayyar Arı, Irak, İran ve ABD, Alfa Yayınları: Istanbul, 2007, ss.227-230
[143] Lawrence Rubin, *Islam in the Balance: Ideational Threats in Arab Politics*, Stanford University Press, 2014.

including revolutions, regime change, and transnational identities. Role theory implies that identity-based approaches alone do not best explain foreign policy behavior unless social roles are conducted in the social hierarchy of states to represent what is therein. In the Middle East, regional powers perform foreign policy identities, which over time and space, transform into several roles corresponding to rising regional issues. This does not deny the individual perceptions of threat and role conceptions that arise by leaders against the ideologies of significant others. These two perceptions constitute the cognitive map roadmap of leaders, but role conceptions and orientations occur as either causes or consequences of threat perceptions. In the Middle East, the regime's 'I' (identities)and 'me'(roles) communicate to defend each other against the ontological insecurity posed by a regional other (rival regional role). Darwich argues that state ontological security policies lie in the leaders' cognitive perceptions and begin and end with the ontological security interests of regimes. Thus, her approach bridges some of the missing aspects of constructivism by considering the independent conditions under which, at a given time and space, ideational threats predominately shape the foreign policy orientations and roles. She points out that in the Middle East:

> "*Leaders' perceptions in the Middle East are often at the origin of foreign policy decisions, and perceptions of threat are decisive in shaping states' conflictual and cooperative relationships with others [...] regimes seek to affirm their self-identity and pursue foreign policies that highlight their distinctiveness from others.*"[144]

Normative heterarchies have been embodied at the national-regional level as a source of conflict over the roles of sovereignty and supranational identities. The contested identities, leadership, and roles shaped both the status quo and revisionist foreign policies. Regionally, these identities, in their diversity of national, supra-state, and sectarian, have been forged and justified to protect regimes and allies in the name of opposing regional and foreign 'others.'[145] The key examples of supra-state ideologies are pan-Arabism, Zionism, Islamism, and rival systems of government like republic vs. monarchy and liberal vs. Islamist; sectarian cleavages Sunni vs. Shia; and regional blocs such as the 'Sunni revolutionary axis' led by Turkey and Qatar— since the Arab Spring— vs. the 'Arab Sunni counter-revolutionary axis' headed by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the UAE.

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[144] May Darwich, *Threats and Alliances in the Middle East*, Cambridge University Press, 2019, p. 8,12.
[145] Hinnebusch, Ehteshami, *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States*, p. 18.

Middle Eastern rivalries are attributable to two forms of transnational ideology: nationalism and Islamism. They both have three sorts of tendencies: ethnicism, revolutionism, and sectarianism. Nasser's Egypt inclined to nationalism with revolutionary and pan-Arab roles, Iran inclined to Islamism with revolutionary and pan-Shia roles, and Saudi Arabia inclined to Islamism with pan-Sunni roles. Alone in the Arab state system, Nasser's pan-Arab identity was a source of regime legitimacy within Egypt and the Arab world. His regional roles of anti-Zionism and revolutionary bastion triggered the 'First Arab Cold War' and led to a conflict of roles as Egypt's co-opted raison de la nation (Pan-Arabism) and raison d'état (Sovereignty).

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia competed with Egyptian pan-Arabism by using pan-Islamic discourse, identity, and roles. While the Arab Cold War was a matter of inter-Arab rivalry between the traditional monarchical axis and the progressive republican axis, there was also an intra-competition between Nasserism and Ba'thism. Finally, Nasser's 1967 defeat and death drove Egypt to status quo orientation and foreign policy roles of raison d'état, i.e., Egyptian sovereignty or 'Egypt First.' Since then, Saudi Arabia has aspired beyond its solely defensive roles of the status quo toward more leadership roles in the Arab world and the Arab Gulf sub-system.

Saudi Arabia has been a reluctant regional hegemon against Iran's regional aspirations since the 1980s and the emergence of the current regional order.[146] Both regional powers have institutionalized patterns of export of religious identities: Sunni Salafism versus Shia revolutionary idealism. Moreover, Saudi Arabia shifted its foreign-policy orientation and roles from the Arab world-oriented to the regional-oriented, and even more to the Arab Gulf in balancing Iraq's Saddam Hussein and Iran's Khomeini. While in the 1990s, however, Iran became a status quo power supposedly and was increasingly perceived as such, even though territorial and regional issues remained concerned. Instead, a common threat from Iraq brought Iran and GCC states to some matter of rapprochement.[147]

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[146] Mehran Kamrava, "Multipolarity and Instability in the Middle East," *Orbis*, vol. 62, no. 4 (2018), pp. 598–616, doi:10.1016/j.orbis.2018.08.003.
[147] Gerd Nonneman, *Analyzing Middle East Foreign Policies and the Relationship with Europe*, *Analyzing Middle East Foreign Policies and the Relationship with Europe*, 2005, p. 25.

Recently, since the Arab Spring 2011, the Middle East regional order has changed in several ways. Among the domestic, regional, and international factors that have affected such transition are the declining influence of the US in the region; the rise of non-Arab powers, the upsurge of transnational identities like sectarianism, nationalism, and revolutionism; the rising influence of non-state actors; the increase of extra-regional role permeability; and the shift of role-based alliances. These dynamics have been dramatically translated into revolutionary and counter-revolutionary roles. Such a new regional scenario exacerbated the cleavages between the two regional camps: the pro-Western camp, consisting of the GCC, Egypt, Israel; and the Axis of Resistance, consisting of Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, and Hamas. By the middle of the Arab Spring uprisings, Turkey was drawn into the regional game to head the third regional camp.

The currency of sectarian geopolitics is not new to the Middle East as it has evolved over major phases: post-1979, 2003, 2011. From a holistic IR viewpoint, the 'New Middle East' is marked by *transnational identity wars and competitive interference.*[148] These rivalries are defined by a complex interplay between national and regional theaters linked to trans-state identities and proxy roles carried by third parties. All this ideological competition between inter-groups and inter-states and external intervention provoked a chain of regional cold wars.[149]

States may meet with another country or group of states to build a role partnership despite their different ideologies, and the reverse may happen as role rivalry becomes inevitable. In the first case, states align themselves with other states that differ in their ideologies to establish a collective regional identity and role partnership—ideological co-dependency[150]— to serve at least one collective expectation, such as deterring a

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[148] Morten Valbjørn, "Studying Identity Politics in Middle East International Relations before and after the Arab Uprisings.," *Routledge Handbook To the Middle East and North African State and States System*, ed. by Raymond Hinnebusch, Jasmine K Gani, Routledge, 2020, p. 261.

[149] Madawi Al-Rasheed, "Sectarianism as Counter-Revolution: Saudi Responses to the Arab Spring," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, vol. 11, no. 3 (2011), pp. 513–26, doi:10.1111/j.1754-9469.2011.01129.x; F. Gregory Gause, "Beyond Sectarianism: New Middle East Cold War," *Foreign Policy at Brooking*, 2014; Nader Hashemi, Danny Postel, "Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs ISSN:*, vol. 15, no. 3 (2017), pp. 1–13, doi:10.1080/15570274.2017.1354462; Fanar Haddad, "Sectarian Identity and National Identity in the Middle East," *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 26, no. 1 (2020), pp. 123–37, doi:10.1111/nana.12578.

[150] Ewan Stein, "Ideological Codependency and Regional Order: Iran, Syria, and the Axis of Refusal," *PS - Political Science and Politics*, 2017, pp. 676–80, doi:10.1017/S1049096517000385.

temporary common enemy. Indeed, this explains that, despite asymmetrical ideological alliances, states may instead have symmetrical regional roles. Regionally, the partnership between Iran (Islamic-Persian) and Syria (secular Arab) and Saudi Arabia-Egypt-UAE in the post-Arab Spring are good examples. On the contrary, in the second case, as the ontological security approach suggests, states with identical ideologies, religiously, politically, and regionally, may be relatively wary of each other's distinctiveness. Unlike this approach that is dedicated to understanding ontological perceptions of threats, role theory explains what leaders think to do in the face of threats. As such, the Iranian-Saudi rivalry emanates partly from competition over co-role distinctiveness. For instance, both Iran and Saudi Arabia compete over the same regional roles, including Muslim world leadership, defender of the faith, and protector of the oppressed.

Several scenarios of ideological multipolarity have emerged in the region from the 1950s until the Arab Spring. First, the Egyptian revolution transformed the region's ideological and power polarity. Nasser's regional progressive roles (pan-Arabism, anti-imperialism, anti-monarchism) challenged the Saudi regime and put Saudi Arabia's pan-Al Saud and pan-Islamic identities at the mercy of Nasser's pan-Arab nationalism. In response to the Egyptian threat, Saudi Arabia consolidated its self-identification through two types of regional role identities, including pan-Islamic roles such as (liberator of Palestine, defender of the faith) and pro-status quo roles such as (defender of regional status quo, US. faithful ally, and anti-Communist agent).

Second, since the advent of the Islamic revolution of Iran, Saudi Arabia and Iran have tried to preserve their regional statuses by maintaining competing sectarian identities and roles centered on Sunni-Shia distinctions. The explanatory rationale of Sunni-Shia identification is traditionally rooted in the past and Shia's philosophy and ideals of revolution, resistance, and justice. Pointing out ontological security and how sectarian roles have intensified regional schisms, Darwich argues that:

> "Sectarianism provides stability and continuity in identity narratives for some actors in an uncertain environment, and actors become attached to this sort of stability and distinctiveness. This dynamic is best captured by ontological security. Whereas the instrumentalist argument of regime

security approaches treats sectarianism as a rationalist strategy consciously employed by elites for survival, ontological security."[151]

Third, after the Arab Spring, regional powers began to co-opt, building new liquid role partnerships and transnational identities. Gregory Gause argues that Iran has been under-balanced by the status quo regional powers in the Middle East[152] due to the rise of new threat perceptions and alliances aimed at balancing the new soft 'other,' i.e., Turkey, instead of the traditional hard 'other'– Iran. This realistic understanding of these new alignments challenges the traditional sectarian thesis. The Arab Spring has added a new Islamic revolutionary movement (the Muslim Brotherhood) and a Sunni non-Arab power-Turkey. The rise of Turkey's pro-Islamic JDP led to an "*a de-emphasis of the 'othering' and 'Islamic threat' in Turkey's view of the region*"[153] under the regional zero-problem strategy. Therefore, this Turkish political Islamic orientation, coupled with the Ottoman legacy, has led Turkey to obtain regional ideal status and allies.

Moreover, the Arab Spring has turned the region into a new polarization of alliances between three regional blocs. First, the Saudi-led bloc is made up of Egypt, the UAE, and Israel. It is based on three political ideologies: pan-Arabism, Salafism, and secularism, designed to play counter-revolutionary roles. Also, it works on three objectives: first, to counter Turkish aspirations in the region by acting as an 'Arab bloc.' Second, to dismantle the Muslim brothers by playing the regional role of 'anti-terrorism.' Third, it plays a deterrent role against Iran's influence in the region by direct military interventions in Yemen and indirectly Syria. They have moved beyond the realms of pan-Arabism and Sunniism to normalize relations with Israel with strategic justifications that Israel is no longer a direct threat to them than Turkey and Iran. Second, the Turkish-led bloc includes Turkey, Qatar, and other regional regimes (e.g., former Egyptian regime of President Morsi) and Islamic groups like Hamas. It rests on two categories of objectives: the ideological objective of articulating three regional ideals, namely Islamic democracy, reformism, and revolutionism tailored to play Sunni-liberal revolutionary roles, and the political objective of balancing the Saudi-led bloc. Generally, this bloc claims to have

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[151] Darwich, *Threats and Alliances in the Middle East*, p. 23.
[152] F. Gregory Gause, "Ideologies, Alignments, and Underbalancing in the New Middle East Cold War," *PS - Political Science and Politics*, vol. 50, no. 3 (2017), pp. 672–75, doi:10.1017/S1049096517000373.
[153] Joshua W Walker, "Turkey's Global Strategy: Introduction: The Sources of Turkish Grand Strategy - 'Strategic Depth' and 'Zero-Problems' in Context," 2011, http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/43495/.

such regional roles as conservative-liberal Muslim bloc, protector of the oppressed, role model, and independent. Third, the Iranian-led bloc contains those involved in the Axis of Resistance: Islamic-non-Arab Iran, secular-Arab Syria, Sunni Hamas, Shia Arab Hezbollah, Iraq, Yemen Houthis. Despite these discrepancies, at least some regional role identities unite them, including anti-imperialism, anti-Zionism, and anti-reactionary Arab powers, including Saudi Arabia. In comparison, Syria is a geopolitical bridge between Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas.

The Middle East is marked by a dynamic alteration in the distribution of regional power. Traditionally, as Stein wrote, "*what differentiates the Middle East is the serious dissatisfaction with the status quo by some in the region.*" [154] The Middle East countries are either inclined to the status quo or revisionism but may have a fine line between revisionism and anti-revisionism. Role theory thus seeks to demystify the puzzling layers of the foreign policy intentions and regional roles of the member countries. As it implies, states vary in their orientations towards regional order, those that maintain the status quo by playing cooperating roles, those that challenge it by playing competing and revising roles, and those that move between both. Those states that are satisfied with the regional distribution of norms and institutions and seek to revise the regional balance of power are *positionalist* like Turkey, and those that are not satisfied with the existing distribution of norms and institutions are *ideationalist* like Iran.[155]

Notably, the Arab Spring's transformations have prompted the regional states to protect the new de facto regional status quo(s) following the adjustments in their influence zones. Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran took different orientations towards the shifting regional status quo. The traditional status quo camp headed by Saudi Arabia and Turkey has become a rather odd mix of status quo and revisionist orientations. Turkey and Saudi Arabia aligned once to end the Syrian regime and the Yemeni Houthi militias and departed another time due to Turkey's pro-Islamic opposition stance. In the name of preserving the status quo, Saudi Arabia has intervened militarily in Yemen to defend Yemen's sovereignty and political legitimacy. It seemed to fail to do so as it has changed

[154] Janice Gross Stein, "Taboos and Regional Security Regimes," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 26, no. 3 (2010), p. 13, doi:10.1080/01402390412331303035.
[155] Cooley, Nexon, Ward, "Revising Order or Challenging the Balance of Military Power? An Alternative Typology of Revisionist and Status-Quo States," p. 10.

its political agenda for a dual containment of the Houthis and the Muslim Brotherhood, both viewed as a twin threat to Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Saudi Arabia's assertive approach towards Qatar, Turkey, and Libya indicates shifting foreign policy orientations and roles from conventional reactive to proactive alternatives.

Since the Arab Spring and the coup attempt in 2016, and the Syrian quagmire, the Turkish JDP has stepped away from the cooperative status quo mode. It began with a doctrinal shift from moral idealism rooted in Davutoglu's doctrine to rational idealism outlined by Erdogan's doctrine, which called for Eurasianism to balance the pro-Western status quo.

In contrast, Iran sought to maintain the status quo in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen after the Houthi takeover by playing conservative status quo roles, including territorial integrator, protector of state sovereignty, and anti-terrorism actor. The first role played in Iraq was Iran's refusal to respond to Iraq's Kurdish demands. The second and third roles in Iraq and Syria were mostly in forms of military and intelligent support for both countries against foreign interventions, territorial partition, and militant groups such as ISIS.

2.2.1.3. International Factors

The Middle East is a penetrated system that lacks a regional hegemon to counter the external regional roles. These two factors have welcomed external powers to play quasi-regional roles, socialize regional allies, alter-cast anti-hegemonic interests, and prevent the rise of a regional hegemon. The Cold War dynamics allowed foreign powers to take status quo roles directly or through regional powers.

The structuralist approaches to the Middle East studies use the state-system nexus to show that the region is still undergoing Galtung's core-periphery paradigm that influences the regional order differently. First, it has split the region into a bipolar structure as some status quo vs. anti-status quo. Second, it has provoked regional resistance to Western imperialism. Third, it has undermined state formation with such a high degree of economic and security dependency. Fourth, it has influenced regional

security alliances, especially those affiliated with regime survival-based alliances such as Saudi Arabia and other GCC regimes.[156]

However, as role theory concerns, the Middle East's penetration dynamics reflect the quasi-regional roles of the US and other major powers in the region, which take place in three variable political ways. First, they shape the regional security structures through alignments and security roles such as the guardian of regional security order. Second, they alter the regional power dynamics through 'state socialization' of regional roles, which Ikenberry and Kupchan argue *"elites in secondary states buy into and internalize norms that are articulated by the hegemon and therefore pursue policies consistent with the hegemon's notion of international order."*[157] Such occurs as members of the international system (great powers) negotiate with novices (small or regional powers) to meet their expectations. However, the mechanism of state socialization for a potential regional power may vary due to the number of other potential regional powers joining the system. Certain regional powers, such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Israel, internalize major external powers' norms and expectations. Others may oppose such external socialization; Iran, for example, has rejected the socializing norms and the status quo that the US formed in the post-1979 era. Third, they prescribe corresponding roles that aim to indoctrinate the hegemonic 'self' within the regional social system. Here, the role alter-casting exerted by major powers discourages regional powers from becoming regional leaders. The Western alter-casting of Iran's revolutionary roles is the most prominent case in the Middle East. Walker and Malici define alter-casting as *"a deroguizing mechanism may be a possible strategy to unmake rogue states."*[158]

2.2.2. Role Expectations: Expectational Dimension

In the *expectational dimension* of role behavior, the pursuit of low and high expectations is the final phase in the role-making system of the self-state/ regional power. In the low continuum of expectations, a regional power seeks to be recognized in the

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[156] Hinnebusch, Ehteshami, *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States*, pp. 3–7.
[157] G. John Ikenberry, Charles A. Kupchan, "Socialization and Hegemonic Power," *International Organization*, vol. 44, no. 3 (1990), p. 283.
[158] Stephen G. Walker. Malici, Akan, "Role Theory and 'Rogue States," *Deviance in International Relations*, ed. by Wolfgang et al, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 134, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9781137357274_7.

regional social hierarchy. According to Nell, "*recognition refers to the inter-subjective process through which agents are constituted as respected and esteemed members of a society.*"[159] Thus, some states play roles in enhancing their regional status, while others challenge or defend the regional order.

Regional audiences evaluate other nations' expectations (role makers) based on the capacity to behave as norm entrepreneurs or rogue actors. The significance of regional and external expectations is at the forefront of role theory.[160] It illustrates the inconsistency between the conceptualization of roles and consideration of regional expectations in foreign policy-making results in inadequate roles and role resistance. Such a problem occurs when role conceptions are mostly shaped by domestic sources that ignore regional expectations and demands. Low role expectations revolve around: (1) acceptance of regional power status and (2) competitive leadership roles, while high role expectations account for the challenge and maintenance of the regional status quo.

2.**2.2.1. Regional Power Status (Recognition)vs. Regional Expectations**

The concept of regional power status applied in regionalist IR refers to the liberal normative status, which is farther from the traditionally realistic terminology grounded on self-interest and material supremacy. Accordingly, this suggests an analytical relationship between them. The concept of aspiring regional power is interchangeably analogous to a 'role-maker' and a 'status-seeker.' However, role identity and behavior determine the state's longed-for status in the social hierarchy. In world politics, when an aspiring regional power plays a role as part of its responsibilities, the other states might recognize or reject it. Thus, roles are the self-proclaimed responsibilities of status-seeker, whereas recognition lies in the eyes of status-conferrer (other states).

First, status refers to traits and is relatively position-based. Wolf defines both concepts as '*trait-status*,' which refers to a position in the prestige hierarchies, while '*role status*' refers to an achieved higher position in the deference hierarchies.[161] In the second

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[159] Philip Nel, "Redistribution and Recognition: What Emerging Regional Powers Want," *Review of International Studies*, vol. 36, no. 4 (2010), p. 953, doi:10.1017/S0260210510001385.
[160] Elgström, "The European Union's Roles in International Politics: Concepts and Analysis," pp. 11–30.
[161] Reinhard Wolf, "Taking Interaction Seriously: Asymmetrical Roles and the Behavioral Foundations of Status," *European Journal of International Relations,* Vol.25,No.4, 2019,p.7.

category, status refers to deference, standing, rank, and identity, such as regional or middle power.[162] Historical legacy motivates regional powers to regain their past role status, which may signal to 'others' as a return of imperial domination and colonization.

Second, roles are interactive structures ranging from role-making to status recognition. The concept of regional power status refers to legitimacy and recognition conferred on an aspiring regional power by 'others' in the social hierarchy.[163] Two preconditions of attaining a regional power status lie in Kavalski's positive correlation "*the recognition by others rests on recognition of others*."[164]The former accounts for status-seeker roles accepted by others, and simultaneously, the latter accounts for fulfilled roles expected by others 'status-conferring parts.' Accordingly, the regional power status is distinct from that of regional power as it builds on material and ideational sources, while status "*is based on a role and a set of special rights and duties that are tied to this social position*."[165]

Third, each state has its own 'status concerns' about facilitating its future status improvement. This flexibility opens the door for states to articulate their national roles to socialize, help, or even reduce their peers' expected roles and status in the same social hierarchy.[166]Regional powers aspire to either historical status or power status that requires recognition and acceptance by others in the relevant social hierarchy. The outcome of such roles has raised regional expectations. Multilateral diplomacy and normative distribution of public goods are two attributives associated with regional power status.

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[162] Karim, "Middle Power, Status-Seeking and Role Conceptions: The Cases of Indonesia and South Korea"; Deborah Welch Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, "Status Concerns and Multilateral Cooperation," in International Cooperation: The Extents and Limits of Multilateralism, ed. I. William Zartman and Saadia Touval ,Cambridge University Press, 2010,pp.182–207; T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William C. Wohlforth, Status in World Politics, ed. T.V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William C. Wohlforth, Status in World Politics ,Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014; Thies and Sari, "A Role Theory Approach to Middle Powers : Making Sense of Indonesia's Place in the International System."
[163] Christina Stolte, Brazil's Africa Strategy Role Conception and the Drive for International Status /New York: Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2015; Karim, "Middle Power, Status-Seeking and Role Conceptions: The Cases of Indonesia and South Korea"; Emel Parlar Dal, "Status-Seeking Policies of Middle Powers in Status Clubs: The Case of Turkey in the G20," Contemporary Politics,Vol.25, No. 5 ,2019,pp. 1–17; Thies and Sari, "A Role Theory Approach to Middle Powers : Making Sense of Indonesia's Place in the International System."
[164] Emilian Kavalski, "The Struggle for Recognition of Normative Powers: Normative Power Europe and Normative Power China in Context," Cooperation and Conflict,Vol. 48, No. 2, 2013,p. 229.
[165] Christina Stolte, Brazil's Africa Strategy Role Conception and the Drive for International Status, p.28.
[166] Jonathan Renshon, "Status Deficits and War," International Organization,Vol. 70, No. 3 ,2016,pp. 513–550; Jonathan Renshon, Fighting for Status: Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics ,Princeton University Press, 2017.

Among the most significant cooperative roles of regional power status "*has therefore linked with a vocation for taking a leadership role in dispute mediation and conflict resolution and with norm-driven foreign policy initiatives.*"[167]

With some instances in the Middle East, Turkey's pursuit of regional power status has not been straightforward. In the first phase, from 2002 to 2011, Turkey could meet regional aspirations and obtain appreciation due to both regional stability and its cooperative roles. In comparison, the first phase shows that regional and international audiences expected a 'new Turkey' to contribute to regional stability and modernization. However, in the second phase, Turkey seems to decline to fulfill its expectations.

Likewise, Saudi Arabia, with substantial material petrodollars and Islamic and Arab credentials, has gained regional prominence as a result of achieving a range of regional expectations, such as: fighting the godless Communism, supported the fight against Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, championed peace initiatives vis a vis regional conflicts including the Saudi-initiated Arab Peace pact of 1982-2002 between Algeria and Morocco over the West Sahara dispute, the 1989 Taif Agreement that ended the Lebanese civil, Iraq and Syria during the Iran-Iraq War, and Iran and Iraq, the 2007 Mecca Accord between Palestinian Hamas and Fattah, and recently the 2020 Riyadh Agreement between Yemeni conflict parties. Other regional powers like Egypt and Algeria have also played significant mediatory roles in the region, the former in promoting non-nuclear proliferation regime-Middle East Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (NWFZ) and the latter in the famous Iran Hostage Crisis-1979-81.[168]

2.2.2.2. Regional Hegemony vs. Regional Expectations

Regional hegemony usually occurs in a bargaining relationship between— a role-holder and a role-expecter,— leader and follower, which determines how the former asserts authority to lead and willingness to represent the latter's demands and expectations. Internal factors such as national prestige, historical roles, material superiority, and regional and international prospects and constraints such as extra-regional hegemony

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[167] Marco Pinfari, "Middle Eastern Middle Powers the Roles of Norms in Mediation and Conflict," *Unfulfilled Aspirations: Middle Power Politics in the Middle East*, 2020, p. 51.
[168] Marco Pinfari, "Middle Eastern Middle Powers the Roles of Norms in Mediation and Conflict," pp. 49–67.

motivate states to play hegemonic roles. In the behavioral sense of hegemony, the hegemonic 'self' imposes its leadership role and identity over 'significant others' by socializing or coercive actions. At the same time, the latter (followers) may not accept it for various reasons. Justifying acceptance or rejection of hegemonic roles and identities depends on how the role audiences view such roles because "*the meaning of hegemony is often in the eyes of the beholder.*"[169]

The use of the term "hegemony" in the Middle East context refers mainly to the relational prism of power rather than the residual sphere of power and, on the other hand, to the two patterns of hegemony: external and regional. As one hypothesis of this research suggests, regional powers of the regional status quo should negotiate the distribution of regional roles and offset other revisionist roles. Conversely, the findings indicate that the competitive nature of such powers gives rise to regional role contestation. Compared to the rising power hypothesis of the 'Global South,' the Middle East is unique where regional roles are usually contested, regional expectations are marginally reached, and recognition/followership is awarded on the grounds of ideological affinity rather than consensual and shared representation.

In the Middle East, the quest for consensual leadership is challenging, and hegemonic leadership became an alternative for these internal, regional, international factors: First, internal motives create a sense of natural authority and distinctiveness for the claim to regional leadership. On the contrary, the other contenders feel ontologically insecure due to the fear of imposed subordination. Nabers refers to this dilemma as "*leadership is always contested by challenges from those who are left out of what we will call a 'hegemonic project,' and sometimes from those who find themselves in a subordinate position to the leader.*"[170]

Second, regional multipolarity and power contestation make the leading roles more hegemonic. Multifaceted divisions in ideologies, spheres of influence, alliances, and power disparity give rise to asymmetric patterns of representation and expectations

[169] Jesse, Neal G., et al. "The Leader Can't Lead When the Followers Won't Follow: The Limitations of Hegemony," *Beyond Great Powers and Hegemons: Why Secondary States Support, Follow or Challenge*, Stanford University Press, 2012, p. 7.
[170] Dirk Nabers, "Power, Leadership, and Hegemony in International Politics: The Case of East Asia," *Review of International Studies*, 2010, p. 939, doi:10.1017/s0260210510001373.

in the leader-follower relationship. These dynamics make regional powers take on regional roles, acting "as if" to take care of others. [171] Such dynamics have, for example, turned Iran from a liberator to a hegemon and a rogue state.

The problem of interactive partial representation and under-expectation is indeed the essence of the role competition between Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. Two Sunni status quo powers, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, competing over Muslim and regional leadership roles, divide the region into two Sunni Arab followers' camps, varying expectations, and shaky acceptance of their regional power candidacy. As followership matters, Saudi Arabia's aspirations to play a leadership role in the Muslim world have been contested by the Shia community. They see such a leadership role as a Sunni-Arab-oriented role that would serve only the Sunni world. Likewise, Saudi Arabia and Sunni Muslims have disputed Iran's claim to leadership roles for the same sectarian reasons.

Saudi Arabia and Turkey have started to compete on regional leadership roles against each other's interests and ideologies. The Turkey-led bloc has given ideological and historical signals to Saudi Arabia about Turkey as a non-Arab and historical empire, paving a bid for regional Sunni leadership. This new structural divergence explains the rising and declining of anti-West and Israel and the shift of US security role expectations. This indicates that, since the Arab Spring, the Middle East has entered a cold war and two opposing blocs in the status quo camp: the 'Islamic pro-democratic bloc' composed of Turkey, Qatar, and Islamic opposition groups and the other 'pan-Arabist counterrevolutionary bloc' composed of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the UAE.[172]

Third, external penetration has always been justified by regional powers to combat hegemony through hegemony. On the other hand, the international system may also offer regional powers specific opportunities to play leadership. Among such opportunities are security alignments that shape offshore balancing strategy against the anti-status quo states. Another opportunity emanated from the bipolar system's decline that allowed the US to delegate some regional powers to play regional roles to fill the regional power gap.

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[171] Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, p. 346.

[172] Nuri Yeşilyurt, Mustafa Yetim, "Emergence of the Turkish/Qatari Alliance in the Middle East: Making of the Moderate Resistance Bloc," *The Regional Order in the Gulf Region and the Middle East*, Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020, pp. 131–64, doi:10.1007/978-3-030-45465-4_5.

2.2.2.3. Order Transition or Preservation

External influence and penetration have given rise to resistance and cooperation in the Middle East. Ideas and priorities of regional states vary in generating attitudes towards the foreign hegemon that some see as at least an ally expected to act as a security guarantor, while others see it as an enemy that intervenes in their affairs and changes their roles. The evolution of hegemony and regional resistance has reverberated the production and reproduction of agencies and structures at the regional level. In the Middle East, the agency of both external hegemon and regional states is challenged by the roles and expectations of both sides. This ensures that external and regional actors share the regional agency and roles to establish and preserve one expected regional order against other peers.

Penetrating roles take on two manifestations in the Middle East, one from outside of 'imperialism' and the other from within 'revolutionism.' like Nasser Egypt's pan-Arabism and Khomeini Iran's pan-Islamism, have mostly been inspired by ideals of resistance and have functioned by revolutionary roles and discourses such as anti-imperialism, anti-Zionism, and the bastion of revolutions. [173] This study does not aim to explore the causal mechanisms of structural domination and external hegemon roles but instead explains how regional roles of resistance and preservation influence the evolution and alteration of regional hierarchies and conflicts. Such a study argues that both the dominant and the dominated have relative agency and legitimacy, no matter how rationally or morally legitimized they might be.

Hinnebusch, among other Middle East IR academics, argues that the systemic dialectics between imperialism and resistance in the Middle East have produced dependent and revisionist states that vary in claiming autonomy and survival or managing both.[174] Domestic conditions, including the regime type, state weakness, and regime survival, have significantly influenced the regional status quo role expectations. Populist republican regimes such as Syria, Iraq, and Iran tend to alleviate internal demands by

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[173] F Halliday, "Revolution and World Politics: The Rise and Fall of the Sixth Great Power," 1999; Raymond Hinnebusch, "The Middle East in the World Hierarchy: Imperialism and Resistance," *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 2011, doi:10.1057/jird.2010.3.
[174] Hinnebusch, "The Middle East in the World Hierarchy: Imperialism and Resistance," pp. 213–46.

manipulating regional issues (e.g., Palestine issue) and addressing external constraints that obstruct their regional demands (e.g., regional status and leadership roles). On the contrary, the GCC's traditional monarchical regimes expect the regional status quo to contribute to the stability of their regimes against internal revolutionary ideas and foreign revolutionary powers—(Omni-balancing).

2.2.3. Role Acceptance and Contestation: *Contestational Dimension*

Notably, most of the role theory-based analytical studies have only considered role conflict from a domestic point of view within the decision-making process, i.e., intra-role conflict and another which occurs due to role incompatibility, transition, and strain, i.e., inter-role conflict. The above happens when a state encounters a role dissonance between its master role (regional power) and its auxiliary roles (regional roles).[175] Role behavioral changes may arise when there is a shift in the international context, such as rising threats and changes in the status quo, or internally, when a political leader decides to adjust roles to become compatible with a new innovative policy.

These role conflict dynamics occur under variable circumstances at three systematic levels: first, internally, where decision-makers intentionally – *intentionality* – decide to continue playing the same role without reconsidering necessary evaluation and adjustments. Second, *functionality* means that a regional power declines to respond to regional and international expectations. Hence, such regional powers are 'reluctant' to decide and overcome competition between their own and other expectations.[176] Third, *counterability* happens when regional or external power(s) tend to counterbalance a particular regional role.

This study tends to analyze four forms of role behavior that better contribute to the Middle East IR and FPA literature as follows:

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[175] Breuning, Pechenina, "Role Dissonance in Foreign Policy: Russia, Power, and Intercountry Adoption," pp. 21–40.
[176] Sandra Destradi, "Reluctant Powers? Rising Powers' Contributions to Regional Crisis Management," *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 39, no. 12 (2018), pp. 2222–39, doi:10.1080/01436597.2018.1549942.

2.2.3.1. Intra-Regional Role Conflict

Intra-regional role conflict occurs when there is a conflict between state and regional expectations. For ideological reasons, for example, the expectations of the Syrian pan-Arab Ba'athist role collide with the expectations of some other regional states. The Saudi new role as a normalizer with Israel (Arab Israel détente) conflicts with the regional expectations of such a role. This role is justified by Iran's existential threat, especially after President Obama's nuclear deal and the Sunni extremism that became a burden on Saudi Arabia, particularly with the Western accusations of Saudi Arabia about involvement in the September 11 attacks. Such pressure on Saudi Arabia has propelled Riyadh into foreign policy shifts such as having Israel, a regional friend that consequently cause Saudi Arabia to have irreconcilable role partners and "*torn between orthodox ulama domestically and the privileged ally, the US, externally.*" Also, by the rise of the moderate and pan-Arabist King Abdullah, Saudi Arabia was alter-casted into the role of 'counterterrorism partner.' On the contrary, with the Arab Spring uprisings and Mohammed bin Salman's doctrine, Saudi Arabia has solidified internal reforms while challenged the regional US expected role once Saudi Arabia took on a counter-revolutionary role.

In the Middle East, the struggle for independent foreign policy-making gives rise to contradictory role expectations between regional and external powers. What makes these powers contend with each other is the disparity in threat perceptions and role conceptions toward regional issues. For example, Turkey's regional role may contradict the expectations of the US and Saudi Arabia if such a role seeks to be autonomous or to soften ties with regional opponents of the latter states, such as Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood.

The change from a Turkish role model to a proactive regional leader suggests intra-role conflict as Turkey shifts its foreign policy axis from a Western-oriented to an Eastern-oriented one. After the Arab Spring, the 2016 failed coup, and Russia's interference in Syria led to a shift from Davutoğlu-based soft power doctrine to Erdogan-based smart power. Such a sort of role conflict manifests in the US-Turkey relationship deterioration due to the conflict in Turkey-US's expectations about the Turkish role as a US ally. Regional issues such as Iran's nuclear ambition, terrorism, arguments over

liberal values have further divided the two allies. For national considerations and regional aspirations, Turkey has begun to tailor an independent foreign policy that seems to the US and West as a shift of Turkey's commitment to its roles as a NATO member state, US ally, and liberal model.

2.2.3.2. Inter-Role Conflict

In the role theory literature on the Middle East, the most critical examples of inter-role conflict in the foreign policy of regional states lie in the study of Michael Barnett that attributes the failure of Egyptian regional roles of President Nasser to the institutional incompatibility between sovereign state role and pan-Arab roles.[177] It refers to the institutional incompatibility the state encounters in the pursuit of two or more roles. For example, Saudi Arabia's roles as a normalizer with Israel and a faithful ally of the US contradict its ideological roles as the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and the Arab world leader in principle and expectations. Moreover, the Iranian role shift from a neutral role, 'neither East nor West,' to a Russian ally contradicts and stands incompatible in the Islamic revolution's founding institutions and standards. One more example is Syria's two conflicting roles: pan-Arab Ba'athist and ally of Iran. In Turkey's case, the US declining expectations of Turkey's regional roles have become a source of alienation and realignment of Turkey's foreign policy. Also, they have problematic implications for the Turkish inter-role conflict, such as the US ally role and the regional power role, witnessed on several occasions.[178] In the post-Arab Spring era, Turkey's autonomous regional roles in dealing with various regional issues seem to be relatively in conflicts with one another, such as the ideal role (liberal role model), the religious role (defender of the faith), and the economic role (trade state). Moreover, Turkey's regional roles are also in conflict with its international roles, such as the NATO member and the US ally, and middle-power roles, such as the G20 member. Almost all these Turkish inter-role conflicts at the three levels have been caused by varying regional stances on the post-Arab Spring concerns.[179]

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[177] Michael Barnett, "Institutions, Roles, and Disorder: The Case of the Arab States System," *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 3 (1993), p. 271, doi:10.2307/2600809.

[178] Gülriz Şen, "Dynamics of Estrangement and Realignment in Turkey–Iran Relations in the 2000s," *Turkey's Pivot to Eurasia*, no. July (2019), pp. 147–65, doi:10.4324/9780429023064-10.

[179] ibid.

2.2.3.3. Regional Role Competition

Role competition refers to the regional competition for regional leadership and order-forming roles in and between the regional status quo powers and revisionist powers. The Saudi and Iranian competition is partly about such roles as Saudi Arabia wants to maintain the status quo while Iran wants the change. In other words, it happens between regional rivals on a single or multiple regional role such as Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia competing on a leadership role, defender of the faith, protector of the oppressed (*contested leadership*). Such roles are also contested between regional and secondary powers regarding what each of them expects from the regional role in a play. Role contestation of this kind prevails due to a lack of regional consensus, reluctance to address regional issues, and fragmented representation, which undermine the role expectations of multiple audiences of diverse ideologies and political regimes.

Some other factors affect this kind of regional role competition — first, the polarization of role sources such as state identity, alliances, and threat perceptions affect regional role competition. Such dynamics cause a gap in the relationship between what the state expects (regional power role) and how it behaves (complementary roles). [180] For example, this suggests that Iran's Khomeini, Saudi Arabia's Al Saud, and Turkey's Erdogan state identities and associated roles have become sources of role competition between these three regional powers and undermined their regional leadership claims and expectations. While extra-regional alignment dynamics explain a part of the regional role competition by, for example, looking at the US's roles in the region and how they result in two reactive roles as the following: (1) resistance roles as they clash with regional internally shaped roles, such as Turkey's roles following the rise of the JDP, which has taken on more independent regionally oriented roles. (2) partnership roles as regional powers align themselves with foreign powers and secondary regional powers to achieve a regional expectation such as confronting a shared enemy. Role theory demonstrates that secondary regional powers may exploit the optimal partnership with major and regional powers to establish a more desirable regional order.[181] In this aspect, Qatar and UAE are

[180] Breuning, Pechenina, "Role Dissonance in Foreign Policy: Russia, Power, and Intercountry Adoption," p. 22.
[181] Feliciano de Sá Guimarães, "A Theory of Master Role Transition," *A Theory of Master Role Transition*, 2020, doi:10.4324/9781003021063.

two secondary regional powers that play complementary counter-roles for and against regional powers.[182] Respectively, Qatar seeks regional status by its active diplomacy and media and plays a complementary regional role to the Turkish-led bloc while the UAE plays Saudi Arabian complementary roles. Therefore, these two small powers counter one another's regional allies.

The second is the differentiation of role expectations, both low and high expectations. States with high expectations have competitive orientations that may compete for hegemony, leadership, and order-forming. In this regard, states with high expectations do not care enough about other regional states' demands and expectations. For example, Saudi Arabia and Iran are competing for hegemonic positions in the region with ideological and geopolitical backgrounds.

The third is that the variations in role orientations generate competing roles. Such competition is between two opposing regional blocs (status quo vs. revisionist) or within the same bloc as the competition between Saudi Arabia and Turkey. In retrospect, during the Cold War, Saudi Arabia adopted three regional status quo roles: a faithful ally of the West, a defender of the status quo, and an anti-communist agent. Later, after the Islamic revolution in Iran, Saudi Arabia and Iran began to play opposing roles versus the regional order. Moreover, with the rise of President Trump, the increasing influence of Iran and the Turkey-Qatar bloc, Israel, some Arab Gulf states, and Egypt have recently called for the US-expected' Arab NATO,' namely the Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA), to play a "*bulwark against Iranian aggression*"[183] and the Muslim Brotherhood. Such disputed roles in the region have given rise to regional criticism since Saudi Arabia realigned itself with the West against Islamic countries like Turkey, Iran, and Qatar. For Muslims and Arabs, Saudi Arabia is supposed to balance its regime legitimacy and regional expectations. To protest Saudi Arabian alignment with the West, Iran is always critical of Saudi Arabia, accusing it of being a Western client that executes the US agenda

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[182] ibid.
[183] "Trump Seeks to Revive 'Arab NATO' to Confront Iran - Reuters," (07/17/2020), https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-gulf-alliance/trump-seeks-to-revive-arab-nato-to-confront-iran-idUSKBN1KH2IK.

in the region at the expense of Muslim issues, including the "*sell-out of Muslim interests in Palestine.*"[184]

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[184] S Chubin, C Tripp, *Iran-Saudi Arabia Relations and Regional Order*, Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 4.

SECOND CHAPTER

TURKEY'S NATIONAL ROLE CONCEPTIONS AND BEHAVIOR IN THE MIDDLE EAST SINCE THE 1980s

"From the Adriatic to the Chinese Wall"- Turgut Özal

Turkey has a potential status to be a new regional great power in the Middle East, with a wholly new political geography in the old 'Mitteleuropa' and the Balkans.[185] This potential status is determined by domestic identification, self-images, new leadership, normative roles played, and accepted by other regional powers and populations and regionally by power relations and multipolarity. However, this is not enough for a state of being a regional power. The Turkish scholar, Kardaş summarizes this claim as:

> *"Turkey is not treated as one of the regional powers. This neglect is difficult to square with the empirical reality, as given its material capacity, influence, and the perceptions of self and other, Turkey is an essential part of the regional order in the Middle East. Turkey has been central to the patterns of amity and enmity in Middle Eastern security issues, especially those that take place in its immediate environment."*[186]

Turkey's regional power projection in the Middle East is understood relatively within the Westernization factors of value emulation and identity exclusion and the Easternization factors of value stimulation and identity inclusion. The Kemalist vision (Westernization) perceives the West as a source of Turkey's Western identity amalgamation, modernization, and securitization of Turkey's modern culture and borders. On the other hand, Turkey's multilateral vision and Easternization approach see the East as an alternative identity at times of Western identity exclusion, geostrategic depth, and a field of regional power projection.

The remarkable beginning of Turkey's Middle Eastern regionalization surfaced during the 1980s. As the Cold War was about to close its last chapter, Turkey had gradually adopted a cautious multi-dimensional foreign policy. The Turkish quest for

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[185] Neumann, Iver B., *Regional Great Powers in International Politics*, London: MACMILLAN PRESS LTD, 1992, p. 8.
[186] Şaban Kardaş, "Turkey: A Regional Power Facing a Changing International System," *Turkish Studies*, vol. 14, no. 4 (2013), pp. 637–60, doi:10.1080/14683849.2013.861111.

middle power status and role aggregated to reassess Turkey's commitment to the West in Turkey's bulwark role against the Communist influence and Turkey's nostalgic return to the East. Under the charismatic Leader Turgut Özal, Turkey revived the initial seeds of multilateralism and challenged the traditional Turkish non-involvement paradigm in the Middle East. His personal influence, regional dynamics such as the Iranian revolution, Iraq-Iran War, Cyprus issue were the most triggers of this policy orientation. He had articulated a Middle Eastern vision with two orientations, 'political neutrality and economic opening,' of which Turkey was then identified as a 'trading sate' and 'civilizational bridge.'

During the 1990s, Turkey was considered an assertive regional power in the Middle East for domestic and regional reasons.[187] Practically, this period was a paradoxical shift from the 1980s-economic opening policy to a security-based strategy in the region. As Turkey had focused on Central Asia and the Caucasus, reasserted its Western identity, and pursued an assertive foreign policy during that period, it lacked the normative credentials, and consequently, the Middle East considered it a 'coercive regional power.'[188] Turkey's uncertain future in NATO after the Cold War, domestic tension, and regional troubles such as the second Gulf War, water disputes, and PKK's escalation led Turkey to assert competitive roles colored with securitization and Westernization discourses.

The Turkish return to the Middle East started in the late 1990s under the PM Ecevit and Foreign Minister İsmail Cem amid rapprochement with Syria and successful containment of the PKK. By the coming of the JDP to power, Turkey sought regional power status claims through a proactive foreign policy and good relations with the neighbors. With an ambitious claim to a regional power status, the Turkish foreign policy of the JDP has paved the way for the Middle East by replacing Kemalist geopolitics with multilateral perspectives. With emerging nostalgic geopolitics, the end of the Cold War,

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[187] Hasan Kösebalaban, *Turkish Foreign Policy Islam, Nationalism, and Globalization*, Cambridge: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 122.
[188] Ziya Öniş, "Turkey and the Middle East after September 11: The Importance of the EU Dimension," *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, vol. 2, no. 4 (2003), pp. 84–85. Dietrich Jung, "Turkey and the Arab World: Historical Narratives and New Political Realities," *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2005), p. 9, doi:10.1080/1362939042000338818.

and Turkey's EU exclusion, Turkey has decided to reshape its foreign policy outlook and regional roles.

After the rise of the JDP until the Arab Spring, Turkish foreign policy formulated a collaborative Middle East strategy focused on multicultural diplomacy, historical legacy, and liberal experience. Turkey has outlined several six cooperative role conceptions, including the role model, the civilization bridge, the mediator, the regional sub-system collaborator, the trading state, and the peace and stability defender. During this time, Turkey was able to diversify its alliances and roles rather than deviate from the regional status quo. In other terms, it offered to build a balance of foreign policy orientation between emulating the West (Europeanization) and stimulating the East (Middle Easternization).

1. ROLE SOURCES

Compared to other aspirant regional powers in the Middle East, Turkey has ample material resources, ideational and foreign policy instruments. It has been booming in the economy since the beginning of the 2000s. With its vast population, military, significant geography, historical heritage, liberal experience, alliances, and involvement in international organizations, they have motivated Turkey to play substantive roles and seek higher international status.

1.1. Domestic Sources

The domestic sources of Turkish regional role conceptualization vary from ideational to material and structural. Each role source composition has its own distinct sub-sources with differing degrees of influence in roles' configuration. Major sourcing of Turkish foreign policy roles relies on historical vs. current self-identification of Ottoman Turkey vs. current significant others, including Saudi Arabia. Turkey's geostrategic position, liberal and democratic experience, growing economy, and the Middle Eastern approach of the JDP also inspire and qualify Turkey's regional roles.

1.1.1. Ideational Sources

Regarding Turkey since the opening of the 1980s, Turkish foreign policy orientations have diverged with the East and West. Therefore, its national role concepts

have been based on ideational considerations. Of course, that is reasonable due to the internal changes that occurred after the rise of Islamic political wings, internationally the fall of the Soviet Union, and regionally the new regional order that emerged after the rise of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, Gulf Wars, invasion of Iraq and lately the Arab uprisings. By decoding the Turkish Ottoman identity, it is merely understood in the way Easley describes "*converging and diverging identities*."[189] Historical roles often emanate from communal feelings of historical and cultural legacies used to guide aspirant regional powers.

Historically, the Kemalist state identity, or what is well known as Kemalism, emerged after the First World War, and promoted by the national leader Mustafa Kemal Ataturk who ended the Sultanate (1922), created the Turkish Republic (1923), and dissolved the caliphate (1924). This new ideology came to bring Turkey from backwardness to modern Turkey. The two constitutive nationalists and secularists Turkicized, secularized, and Westernized Turks. Throughout the Republican period, in what is known as the Kemalist era, Turkey started to develop a state ideology in such a way as to distance it from the Ottoman, Eastern, and Islamic sides. The Kemalist state identity is grounded on two dimensions: Europeanization and post-Ottomanism. As an ideology and state identity, "*Kemalism is concerned with maintaining national unity on secular and Western grounds*"[190] and a nationalist sentiment that attempted to avoid the Arab element of Ottomanism.[191] In a simple term, it was an attempt to cultivate a 'Turkified Islam' to fit the new emerging Turkish national identity.[192]

Kemalism grounds on inclusion and exclusion. The re-presentation of Turkic identity 'pan-Turkism' was formulated to make a native unity of all Turkic subjects and Turkish speaking people while it Turkicized other non-Turkic subjects in Turkey, such as Kurds, to build a singular national identity and speak the Turkish language. On the other hand, the Kemalist identity politics articulated domestic and foreign policy that aimed to exclude Ottoman and Islamic identities in Turkey and anything related to Middle

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[189] Leif Eric Easley, "Middle Power National Identity? South Korea and Vietnam in US-China Geopolitics," *Pacific Focus*, 2012, doi:10.1111/j.1976-5118.2012.01090.x.
[190] Yücel Bozdaglioglu, *Turkish Foreign Policy and Turkish Identity: A Constructivist Approach*, New York & London: Routledge, 2004, p. 137.
[191] cited, p. 44.
[192] Dav Waxman, "Islam and Turkish National Identity: A Reappraisal," *Mediterranean Quarterly*, vol. 30 (1997), p. 9, doi:10.1501/Intrel_0000000013.

Eastern influence. The Kemalist state identity tended by the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) to modernize the new republic by balancing the Turkic identity and culture against Western-oriented identity and culture. In this context, the nationalist ideas of Ziya Gökalp sum up the ideo-societal elements of Turkish national identity 'Turkish-Islamist-Westernist Modernism.'[193]

Since the 1980s, a clash of Turkish identity politics has been debated internally and internationally. As one might follow the sources and factors of this, six transformations would illustrate the remerging Turkish identity known as Ottoman, which is also presented by other metaphors and used according to different perspectives within and outside Turkey.

First, Ottomanism and Islamism as specific ideational sources have shaped Turkey's regional identity and approach— a regional power identity construction. Davutoglu's thesis of strategic depth is grounded on Turkey's role identity and status versus its regional and international 'others' to pursue national roles. This identity is further described as Turkey's regional power identity, which required a specific geography and role status to be maintained.

This conservative identity has created a civilizational identity which led to a religious solidarity discourse and normative claims for a new regional order. The rise of Ottoman identity was maintained to serve the new geopolitical perspectives of Islamic-oriented TFP in the Middle East.

Since the ascendancy of JDP, Turkey's foreign policy has chosen to articulate the Middle East a bid for its new regional power geography, identity, and roles. First, geographically, this needed a return to the region based on Ottoman legacy. Second, ideationally, for constructing a new regional power identity, Turkey has been assigned to consolidate a synthesis of domestic and foreign interests and orientations to fit the new Islamic/Middle East identity in the region. Third, Turkey started to reconceptualize and enact regional role conceptions for the region. Indeed, the JDP has attempted to create a

set of physical and cultural symbols and roles for Turkey, such as the potential 'bridge' between Asia and Europe.

The JDP's regional identity to help the Middle East return and consolidate the Islamic Ottoman identity has been highly dedicated since the 2000s, with political seeds of the 1980s. Comparatively, the JDP could make the Ankara Moment that both Bank and Karadag argue emerged as domestic and regional dynamics had helped Turkey play pro-active roles in the Middle East.[194] For domestic reasons, the authors mentioned above argue that the Ankara Moment was attributed to that:

> *"The JDP has been able utilize new regional policies as tools of domestic legitimation, while its domestic successes against the Kemalist Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) have been regionally validated as clear proof that Muslim identity, and economic and political liberalization can co-evolve ('out- side-in' and 'inside-out')."*[195]

For constructing a new Islamic democratic identity, the JDP has customized a 'branding strategy':

> *"By using foreign policy as a tool in the construction of identity. Consequently, the construction of Turkey's identity as Western and secular emerges from the interplay between internal (national) and external (international) perceptions."*[196]

Second, it tends to balance a purified Turkic identity against a collective Islamic identity. In this aspect, the new identity construction is based on national multicultural culture and identification, which attempted to reduce Kurdish ethnonationalism and non-Muslims to one collective identity (Turkish citizen). Second, it targeted the Turkish international and regional identity to balance against the domestic one by romanticizing Ottoman heritage and images in the foreign policy discourse and role conceptions. In general, the Islamic identity is instead "*viewed as being a primordial, essentially political, all-encompassing, and determining force.*"[197] which, according to Islamic-oriented elites, may balance Turkey's Ottoman identity against secular lifestyle and the Western outlook.

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[194] André Bank, Roy Karadag, "The 'Ankara Moment': The Politics of Turkey's Regional Power in the Middle East, 2007-11," *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 2 (2013), pp. 287–304, doi:10.1080/01436597.2013.775786.
[195] cited, p. 289.
[196] Tank, "Dressing for the Occasion: Reconstructing Turkey's Identity?," p. 463.
[197] M. Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 16.

Third, the rise of Islamic-oriented elites since the 1980s as Prime Minister (1983-1991) and President (1991-1993), Turgut Özal, represented the modern Islamic-oriented establishment that emerged in the 1980s. He formulated several political, economic, and cultural reforms. At the policymaking level, this identity discourse was intensified and reiterated by the emergence of a new political class linked to the democratization processes and the subsequent progress of Turgut Özal's Motherland Party, the True Path Movement of Tansu Çiller, and Najmuddin Erbakan's Welfare Party.[198]

Fourth, it responds to international and regional transformations such as the breakdown of the Soviet Union, the Cyprus crisis, the European Union's rejection of Turkey, and Kurdish nationalism. The rise of newly independent states in the Balkans and the Islamic Republic of Iran has been an additional catalyst for Turkey to compete on regional leadership and Islamic credentials.[199]

Fifth, this newly constructed identity reflects Turkey's economic interests to become a trade state and build economic and trade relations with the Middle East. In contrast, the Kemalist identity construction was somewhat justified as a security measure to avoid threats and instability from sources surrounding Turkey in the region.

Yavuz justifies the rise of Ottomanism in Turkey's foreign policy and identity politics as a 'search for an Economic and cultural space.'[200] The liberal and economic elite, inspired by the Ozalian approach, envisioned that the Turkish territorial identity would consolidate Turkey's national interest through economic and cultural relations with the Muslim world.[201]

Sixth, it helps to qualify Turkey's role identities to redeemTurkey's historical role status in the Middle East. Compared to the Kemalist rejection of Ottoman culture, the JDP elite regards the Muslim and Ottoman aspects as constructive reasons for the normalization of relations with the Middle East.[202] Three explicit depictions of the

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[198] M. Hakan Yavuz, "Turkish Identity and Foreign Policy in Flux: The Rise of Neo-Ottomanism," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 7, no. 12 (1998), p. 19,20, doi:10.1080/10669929808720119.
[199] cited, p. 22.
[200] cited, p. 23.
[201] cited, p. 22.
[202] Cengiz Dinc, Mustafa Yetim, "Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy Toward the Middle East: From Non-Involvement to a Leading Role," *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, vol.

Ottoman Empire are characterized by the self-representation of Turkish foreign and domestic policy under the JDP: (1) the Ottoman Empire as a cradle of civilization; (2) the Ottoman Empire as an Islamic state; and (3) the Ottoman Empire as a liberal democratic state.[203]

The Islamic-oriented elites in Turkey since the 1980s have claimed that Turkey should redeem its role status in the region. The Islamic identity resurgence needed a return to the Middle East, solidarity discourse, and role identity and expectations. This interprets Davutoglu's geopolitical depth thesis, where Turkey's geography and culture do not allow its identity to be "*reduced to one unified character,*" and thus, it should be "*defined as a central country with multiple regional identities.*" [204]

The Ottoman/Islamic identity has been desired and pursued since the 1980s to fit Turkey's imperial interests in the historical Ottoman-influenced countries that the Turkish scholar Kardaş calls it 'strategic identity.'[205] Thus, it is a geo-cultural identity aimed at redrawing Turkish geopolitical nostalgia, expanding the Turkish memorial world-map, and portraying Turkey's historical uniqueness to re-articulate Turkey's image as a '*self*' after it was for decades a *significant other* during the Kemalist era.

Turkish foreign policy orientations and role conceptions, and identity justify and serve each other. The Islamic-oriented foreign policy of Turkey plays an outside-in and in-outside strategy. Internally, since the 1980s, the Islamic-oriented elites have Islamized whatever possible domestically to reflect this on foreign policy. Internationally, they reconstruct foreign policy activities based on identity, religion, and geography. During the JDP era, foreign policy discourse has mainly been articulated to represent Turkey to the Muslim world as a non-other identity with 'geographical exceptionalism,' which

11, no. 1 (2012), p. 74, http://www.redi-bw.de/db/ebsco.php/search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx%3Fdirect%3Dtrue%26db%3Daph%26AN%3D90037626%26site%3Dehost-live. Murat Yeşiltaş ve Ali Balcı "AK Parti Dönemi Türk Dış Politikası Sözlüğü: Kavramsal Bir Harita", Bilgi, No:23, (2011), p. 9-10

[203] Edward Wastnidge, "Imperial Grandeur and Selective Memory: Re-Assessing Neo-Ottomanism in Turkish Foreign and Domestic Politics," *Middle East Critique*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2019), p. 9, doi:10.1080/19436149.2018.1549232.

[204] Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007," *Insight Turkey*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2008), p. 78, http://file.insightturkey.com/Files/Pdf/insight_turkey_vol_10_no_1_2008_davutoglu.pdf.

[205] Şaban Kardaş, "Turkey: Redrawing the Middle East Map Or Building Sandcastles?," *Middle East Policy*, vol. 17, no. 1 (2010), pp. 115–36, doi:10.1111/j.1475-4967.2010.00430.x.

tended to reconstruct traditional Turkish roles of the Ottoman Empire such as 'civilizational bridge.' However, the Ottoman identity is a matter of liminal identity that Turkish elites envisage to portray Turkey as a role (a bridge connecting civilizations) and geography (positioned between West and East).[206] Due to Turkey's geographical location and cultural heritage, Yanik argues that:

> *"One can talk about two different and contradictory sets of identities prevalent in present-day Turkey, one at the domestic level and the other at the international level. One of these identities is the exceptionalist identity based on the hybridization of geography and history that attempts to portray Turkey as an emerging power as well as a mediator/peacemaker, thus positioning it liminally at the international level."*[207]

Ideationally, the JDP elites have reformulated Turkey's foreign policy toward the Middle East through two successive foreign policy doctrines. The first emerged in 2002, and the other followed the Arab Spring and the attempted coup in 2016. The first one is the Davutoglu doctrine architected by the former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu that was pillared prominently on the geopolitical approach of strategic depth of Turkey. Moreover, this geopolitical doctrine was designed to revive the Ottoman legacy by soft power means, namely good neighborliness, multi-dimensional, and Islam. The term refers critically to the restoration of Turkey's geo-cultural identity by foreign policy discourse and roles and the consolidation of cultural and economic ties with states within the old Ottoman sphere.[208] This doctrine was sustained until the Arab Spring to justify Turkey's status-seeking of regional power in the region that required Turkey to reconstruct a 'Muslim and Middle Eastern self-identity.'[209]

Second, the transformations in Turkey and abroad in the region since 2015 have altered the Davutoglu doctrine by Erdogan doctrine. This doctrine has emerged immediately following the Arab Spring, which caused Turkey national security troubles

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[206] Lerna K. Yanık, "The Metamorphosis of Metaphors of Vision: 'Bridging' Turkey's Location, Role and Identity After the End of the Cold War," *Geopolitics*, 2009, doi:10.1080/14650040802693515.

[207] Lerna K. Yanik, "Constructing Turkish 'Exceptionalism' Discourses of Liminality and Hybridity in Post-Cold War Turkish Foreign Policy," *Political Geography*, vol. 30, no. 2 (2011), p. 81, doi:10.1016/j.polgeo.2011.01.003.

[208] M Hakan Yavuz, "Social and Intellectual Origins of Neo-Ottomanism: Searching for a Post-National Vision," *Welt Des Islams*, vol. 56, no. 3–4 (2016), p. 443, doi:10.1163/15700607-05634p08.

[209] Ali Balcı, Türkiye Dış Politikası: İlkeler, Aktörler, Uygulamalar, Etkileşim Yayınları, İstanbul,2013, 258-259.

and regional challenges. To cope with these troubles, President Erdogan initiated his doctrine to consolidate Kemalist security wisdom and Ottomanist identity. At the outset of national and regional transformations, President Erdogan has adopted two foreign policy styles: maximum autonomy and reciprocity diplomacy. As it is much observed, Turkish foreign policy roles since 2015 have changed dramatically to more security-oriented to respond to threats at the national and regional levels.

Turkey has also engineered an ambitious foreign policy by institutional, structural, and discursive instruments. The charismatic conservative leader Erdogan has driven Turkish foreign policy endeavors on three principles: active engagement in the Ottoman-influenced geography, discursive advocacy for Muslim interests, and the institutionalization of soft Turkish power. Institutionally, Turkey has reaped local, regional, and international incentives and benefits. Turkey has strengthened its ideational power in the Middle East through institutional bodies and active participation in the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation and observer status in the Arab League. In 2010, Turkey launched the Office of Public Diplomacy under the Prime Minister's decision to channel regional public communication through diplomacy and 'tell the new story of Turkey.' [210] Besides, other innovative bodies promote Turkish foreign policy roles such as Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), Yunus Emre Institutes (Cultural and Linguistic Body), Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) with Arabic version, and Turkish Government Scholarships maintained by the Presidency for the Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB).

Discursively, the JDP's Islamic profile, coupled with geopolitical ambition in the Middle East, has prompted Turkey to cultivate the opportunity to reduce the 'other image' of Turkey and create common denominators. Upon this, the JDP institutionalized crafted exceptionalism discourses of Turkish self-identity, soft power, and role model to express Turkey's regional and cultural belonging and paradigm change of Turkish foreign policy, which was perceived coercive and hard during the Cold Wartime. In an explicit reference to this, Turkish Chief Advisor to Turkish Prime Minister Kalin claimed that Turkey "*is grounded in some larger concepts of cultural affinity, historical companionship,*

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[210] Crystal A Ennis and Bessma Momani, "Shaping the Middle East in the Midst of the Arab Uprisings: Turkish and Saudi Foreign Policy Strategies," *Third World Quarterly,* Vol. 34, No. 6 (2013),p.1128.

geographical proximity, social imagery and how all of these create a sense of belonging."[211]

1.1.2. Material Power Sources

Compared to other potential regional powers in the Middle East, Turkey has ample material, ideational and foreign-policy resources. Its economy has been booming since the early 2000s. Its large population, military, significant geography, historical heritage, liberal experience, alliances, and participation in international organizations all made it possible to play large roles and achieve higher international status. Materially, Turkey is the third-largest population in the Middle East after Egypt and Iran (82,319,724) in 2018 and ranked second highest among regional powers in the Middle East in terms of GDP ($771.35 billion) in 2018 and second highest in terms of military spending after Saudi Arabia ($20796 billion) in 2019.[212]

1.2.   Regional and International Sources

The changes in the regional and international systems cause reconsiderations of the role location, orientation, and preference. The new systemic shifts created role alter-casting where Turkey had to manage its aspired roles according to the role ascriptions of its allies within time limit and scope. In the Middle East, especially as a 'penetrated system,' intra-role conflict occurs during status-seeking above the domestic weight and institutions and beyond the power limit given by major powers and globalism.[213]

From the Lausanne Treaty in 1923 to the Arab Spring, Turkey has faced a flurry of political and security challenges and opportunities reflected on its foreign policy behavior and orientations. For instance, in the Arab world, Turkey has entered a regional

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[211] Ibrahim Kalin, "Debating Turkey in the Middle East: The Dawn of a New Geopolitical Imagination?," *Insight Turkey,* Vol. 11, No. 1 (2009),p. 90.

[212] World Bank-database, https://data.worldbank.org and SIPRI Military expenditure database, https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex

[213] Cantir, Kaarbo, "Contested Roles and Domestic Politics: Reflections on Role Theory in Foreign Policy Analysis and IR Theory1," pp. 5–24. See also Cantir, *Domest. Role Contestation, Foreign Policy, Int. Relations*. See also Marijke Breuning, "Roles and Realities: When and Why Gatekeepers Fail to Change Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 2013, doi:10.1111/j.1743-8594.2012.00178.x; Cameron G. Thies, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis in Latin America," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 2017, doi:10.1111/fpa.12072.

power and role transition several times in the Arab-Israel wars in 1956, 1967,1973, the Iraqi-Iran War 1980s, the Gulf War 1990s, Iraq Invasion 2003, and the Arab Spring.

The post-Cold War era had emerged with a set of uncertainties and opportunities for Turkey. Firstly, Turkish people feared that the demise of the bipolar international system would bring Turkey into 'a leading casualty of strategic neglect' for the West and thus would further face turbulent the Middle East and unstable Balkan region. Turks translated this new shift of strategic importance as a decrease of economic and military assistance to Turkey.

Secondly, another Turkish perspective favored the new world order, where Turkey could construct more independent foreign policy behavior. Despite such vigilant attitudes to that era by Turkish people, especially Kemalists, leader Özal had already benefited two domestic and international variables: his popularity after winning the election and his decision to join the US's military campaign against Saddam Hussein. Besides his public support, he decided to go beyond the classical Turkish foreign policy principles of neutrality and non-involvement. etc., Instead, Turkey's involvement in the military coalition on Iraq was significant for the West of how indispensable Turkey is always during and after the Cold War. Observers analyzed Özal's foreign political activism as his attempt to construct a regional role for Turkey to bridge the time 'pre-and post-Cold War Turkey' and place 'the West and East-Turkey.' His speech suggests this claim:

> "Many things have changed in Turkey ... My conviction is that Turkey should leave its former passive and hesitant policies and engage in active foreign policy ... The reason I made this call is because we are a powerful country in the region."[214]

Similarly, Aras and Gorener argue that:

> "The end of the cold war and the dissolution of the Soviet Union created new predicaments, thus allowing more room for leadership qualities in interpreting and responding to the new strategic environment. Thus, the activism in Turkish foreign policy in the early 1990s has often been attributed to new systemic requirements."[215]

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[214] Quoted in Aras, Gorener, "National Role Conceptions and Foreign Policy Orientation: The Ideational Bases of the Justice and Development Party's Foreign Policy Activism in the Middle East," p. 80.
[215] ibid.

The regional dynamics have also attributed to the JDP's power sources to pursue active roles in the Middle East. Such dynamics are 'self-reinforcing mechanism' and 'outside-in effects,' which found Turkey a room of regional actorness. Bank and Karadag argue that the emergence of the Iraq War, the increasing influence of Iran, the Afghanistan War, the Lebanon War of 2006, the Gaza Wars, and Hamas's rise all attracted and enforced the JDP to articulate a proactive foreign policy in the Middle East. The second factor of JDP's proactive foreign policy is "*the dominant pattern of alliance-building and ideological polarization in the Middle East,*" where Turkey seized it as an opportunity to play a set of norm-based roles such as a mediator, inspirer, and solver of the troubles and instability caused by both Iran and Saudi Arabia.[216]

In Bernard Lewis's quote from Field Marshall Slim, he says, "*Turkey is the only European country in the Middle East,*"[217] and that is why Turkey in the post-Cold War era became, according to Marc Grossman, the US ambassador to Turkey, 'Turkey's place has changed from being a 'wing' state to a 'front' state for Europe and the USA. Therefore, Turkey became a Eurasian ally to maintain every US issue in the Eurasian continent and buffer state to contain the Communist and Islamist influence in the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Balkans.

As suggested by Jordaan, Turkey has attempted to "*establish a certain distance from some of its Islamic neighbors, countering Western orientalism so as to enable greater association with the EU.*"[218] This Western orientation has featured since the 1950s when joint the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe, and the Organization of European Economic Cooperation. These international institutions have enhanced Turkish's regional status and roles.

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[216] André Bank, Roy Karadag, "Before the Arab Revolts and After: Turkey's Transformed Regional Power Status in the Middle East," *Regional Powers in the Middle East*, Palgrave Macmillan US, 2014, pp. 112–13, doi:10.1057/9781137484758_6.

[217] Bernard Lewis's quoted in Meltem Muftuler-Bac, "Turkey 's Predicament Post-Cold War Era," *Futures*, vol. 28, no. 3 (1996), p. 258, http://repository.bilkent.edu.tr/bitstream/handle/11693/25750/bilkent-research-paper.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

[218] Eduard Jordaan, "The Concept of a Middle Power in International Relations: Distinguishing between Emerging and Traditional Middle Powers," *Politikon*, vol. 30, no. 1 (2004), pp. 165–81, doi:10.1080/0258934032000147282.

2.   ROLE ORIENTATIONS AND CONCEPTIONS

Since the decline of the Ottoman Empire, Turkish foreign policy toward the Middle East has passed through different transformations. Unless we investigate the variety of domestic and international dimensions and factors that historically determined Turkish foreign policy orientations and roles toward the region, understanding the JDP's NRCs for the region would not be understood.

Throughout the Kemalist era, Turkey pursued a foreign policy based on active isolation, which has been dominated by neutrality towards the region's issues. At the same time, Turkey acted within the international dimension as an ally in NATO and the European dimension as a candidate for the European Union). These two dimensions influenced Turkey's roles as a '*faithful ally*' to the West and a '*buffer state*' between the Soviet Union and the West. On the other hand, they also shaped the Kemalist vision 'peace at home, peace at the World', which was then practically translated into three objectives: consolidation of Turkey's Western identity, modernization, and securitization of Turkey's modern culture and borders.

During the 1980s, Turkey's foreign policy continued in the Western-oriented paradigm to play the bulwark role against the Communist influence in the region and to maintain the status quo. Under the charismatic leader Turgut Özal, Turkey revived the initial seeds of Ottomanism as he challenged the traditional non-involvement paradigm in the Middle East. In his speeches, he repeatedly declared that "*the 21st century will be the century of the Turks*."[219]

His personal influence, regional dynamics such as the Iranian revolution, Iraq-Iran War, Cyprus issue were the most triggers of this policy orientation. He had articulated a Middle Eastern vision with two orientations, 'political neutrality and economic opening,' of which Turkey was then identified as a 'trading sate' and a 'civilizational bridge.' For its civilizational bridge's role, Turkey wanted to restore the second half of its self-identity in the East, politically to (1) win the Middle Eastern opinion against Western-backed Cyprus and (2) create a backup position and role in the region if Turkey's Cyprus policy would have affected its NATO status.

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[219] Quoted in Muftuler-Bac, "Turkey 's Predicament Post-Cold War Era," p. 256.

During the 1990s, Turkey, for its geographical exceptionalism, dual-identity, EU candidate status, and NATO membership, sought to emphasize Turkey as a strong regional power in the Middle East.[220] Practically, this period was a paradoxical shift from the 1980s-economic opening policy to a security-based strategy in the region. Turkey's uncertain future in NATO after the Cold War, domestic tension, and regional troubles such as the second Gulf War, water crisis, and PKK's escalation led Turkey to assert competitive roles colored with securitization and Westernization discourses. Such assertive roles were mostly President Özal regional leader and bridge and the other defender of peace, and mediator. These roles were a discursive strategy and multi-role identity of Turkish foreign policy to present it as a post-Cold war regional power.[221] First, the bridge role was expected to show the West and the Middle East that Turkey is a multi-identity and regional power bridging both culturally and geopolitically. Second, the regional leader and defender of peace were frequently used to show Turkey is still an essential ally for the West in the post-Cold War, and Turkish national security is a priority. In doing so, Turkey joined the US-led military coalition against Iraq in 1991, launched intensive military operations against the PKK in northern Iraq, closed the war with Syria, and substantiated a strategic relationship with Israel. Third, Turkey played the role of 'facilitator' to solve the Israel-Palestine conflict and Iraq-US.[222] All in all, the inconsistency and conflict of Turkish foreign policy orientation and roles throughout the 1990s perplexed and crippled Turkey's regional power projection and regional recognition.

The Turkish return to the Middle East started in 1998 under the PM Ecevit and Foreign Minister İsmail Cem, and the threat of the PKK was contained in coordination with the Syrian regime. By the coming of the JDP to power, Turkey sought regional power status claims through a proactive foreign policy and good relations with the neighbors in the region. With an ambitious claim to a regional power status, the Turkish foreign policy of the JDP has paved the way for the Middle East by replacing Kemalist geopolitics with that of a multidimensional perspective with an Islamic identity. With

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[220] Hasan Kösebalaban, *Turkish Foreign Policy Islam, Nationalism, and Globalization*, p. 122.
[221] Yanık, "The Metamorphosis of Metaphors of Vision: 'Bridging' Turkey's Location, Role and Identity After the End of the Cold War."
[222] Özgür Özdamar, "Domestic Sources of Changing Turkish Foreign Policy Toward the MENA During the 2010s: A Role Theoretic Approach." .," *Domestic Role Contestation, Foreign Policy, and International Relations.*, Routledge, 2016, pp. 105–20.

nostalgic geopolitics, the post-Cold War era, and Turkey's EU exclusion, Turkey has been motivated to reshape its foreign policy outlook and regional roles. Turkey, during the reign of the JDP, those roles became active and concentrated on the Middle East as the *"real theatre of Turkey's rising regional power."* [223]

From 2002 to 2011, Turkey proposed a benevolent regional leadership and exceptional 'other' rather than the hard 'other' that dominated regional views throughout the Kemalist period. In doing so, the JDP started reconstructing Turkish exceptionalism as having a central location, moderate Islam, and international standing. Moreover, the JDP decided to represent Turkey as a big brother and a good neighbor by conceptualizing and introducing specific assertive roles, including the role model as Turkey would be a regional example of political, economic, and democratic experience. Second, the bridge role or central power is a unique complement to the regional leader role. This role was presumed to differentiate Turkey from other competing regional powers like Iran and Saudi Arabia. The role bears different references politically 'bridging West and East,' economically 'energy hub' and ideationally 'bridging Western and Muslim civilizations.' For example, the Turkish Minister for EU Affairs Egemen Bagis said: *"Turkey is the most Western country in the Orient and the most oriental country in the West."* [224] Third, other institutional roles, such as the regional mediator, regional sub-system collaborator, peace and stability defender, and trading state, were prevalent during this period. All these roles served to articulate Turkey's contribution to maintaining regional stability, peacebuilding, and crisis prevention. For example, Turkey mediated between Syria and Israel in 2008 and, along with Brazil, mediated talks with Iran on nuclear ambitions following the collapse of the Iran-P5 + 1 agreement in October 2009. All these were among the most significant initiatives of these roles. [225]

The second stage of Turkey's regional power projection in the Middle East started shortly after the Arab uprisings. By this transition, Turkey acquired the 'Ankara

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[223] Emel Parlar Dal, "Conceptualising and Testing the 'Emerging Regional Power' of Turkey in the Shifting International Order," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.37, No. 8 (2016),p.1429.
[224] Gülden Ayman, "Regional Aspirations and Limits of Power-Turkish-Iranian Relations in the New Middle East," *Etudes Helléniques/Hellenic Studies*, vol. 20, no. 1 (2012), p. 99.
[225] Meliha B. Altunişik, Lenore G. Martin, "Making Sense of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East under AKP," *Turkish Studies*, vol. 12, no. 4 (2011), pp. 569–87, doi:10.1080/14683849.2011.622513.

Moment.'[226] It capitalized on it by promoting popular revolutions. However, with the advent of regional multi-power rivalry and change of Turkey's foreign policy roles, Turkey was forced to contend for hegemonic leadership, protect refugees and oppressed people, and maintain the new regional status quo. Together, these latest domestic and regional imperatives have culminated in two scenarios in Turkey's regional power pursuit.

Table 2: **Turkey's Role Behavior in the Middle East**

Role Orientations	Role conceptions	Role sources	Role expectations
Cooperative	1. Role model 2. Civilizational bridge 3. Good neighbor 4. Mediator 5.Regionalsub-system collaborator 6. Trading state 7. Energy hub	1.liberal and democratic experience 2. strategic geography 3.Ottoman legacy (Ozalian and Erdoganian approaches) 4. international weight and status in international organizations incl (NATO, G20) 5. multi-dimensionality of the JDP 6. Industrial growth and institutionalism, both state and private, e.g., TÜSİAD and MÜSİAD	**Low Expects** *Turkish expects:* 1. attracting hearts and minds 2.improving Turkish international image 3. gaining Islamic, Sunni, and Arab's recognition 4.communicating East and West 5. regional stability 6. regionalism 7. bringingTurkey back to the region after long isolation 8.energy pipeline politics 7. opening regional market for Turkish products *Regional expects:* 1.emulating Turkish liberal and democratic experience 2.welcoming Turkey back to the region. 3.solving Arab-Turk problems incl (water issue, Syria-Turkey issue)

[226] Bank, Karadag, "The 'Ankara Moment': The Politics of Turkey's Regional Power in the Middle East, 2007-11," pp. 287–304.

			4.economic and cultural interdependence
Competitive	1. Regional leader 2. Active independent 3. Anti-terrorism agent 4. Regional protector 5. Faithful ally	1. Turk nationalism 2. new Islam 3.material, ideational, and institutional sources incl (military, population, active foreign policy engagement and discourse) 4. ally commitments, e.g. (Turkish engagement in the NATO campaign against Saddam Hussein amid Kuwaiti invasion 5. modern Sunni power competing with conservative Sunni and Shia powers Saudi Arabia and Iran. 6. the rise of the Islamic regime (JDP) 7. EU (European Union) membership disapproval 8.post-Arab Spring security dynamics (Syria crisis, 2016 coup d'état attempt, Eastern Mediterranean crisis) 9. Erdogan's doctrine (realistic idealism, assertive security approach, synthesis of the relationship between Russia and the US)	**High Expects** *Turkish expects:* 1.regional leadership and hegemony 2. independence 3.diversification of ideology, security, and energy alliances 4.representation and protection of Muslims 5.engagement in international and the war on terror (PKK and its affiliations-top priority) *Regional expects:* * contested 1. regional leader 2. high Sunni expects to offset Shia Iran 3.Muslim brothers take Turkey as a model
Status quo	1. Voice of Ummah 2. Buffer state	1. anti-Communism during the Cold War 2. Eurasianism vs. Westernism (since 2015) 2. Erdogan's philosophy of global justice (the equal allocation of veto by the UNSC) dictates that the Islamic world should have a veto.	**Low Expects** *Turkish expects:* 1.preserving the status quo during the Cold War 2. security independence playing bi-buffer state role against the US (especially in Syria) and Russian influence 3. Islamic and Third world's recognition- (*Third world veto*)

			Regional expects: 1. Turkey's advocacy for Muslim and oppressed people 2. Turkey's anti-Westernism

2.1. Regional Cooperative Roles

These roles are rather attributed to Turkey by its geography, governance, history, and culture, where the *other* audience has high expectations of learning, socializing, and accommodating such significant norms and roles. These roles are merely reflections of Turkey's soft power orientation and application. Turkish secularism, democratization, and modern Islamist polity are three key factors of Turkey's exceptional Middle East roles. Role theory provides a set of roles related to this category, such as model/example, regional subsystem collaborator, mediator, integrator, democratizer, etc.

Even though Turkey is aspirant for power and status in the region, there was a continuous pursuit for normative power in FP's agenda motivated by material capabilities and ideational tendencies. This ambition has been evident in the rhetoric of leaders and the discursive foreign policy instruments. The normative power or actor has been frequently reinstated by the Turkish leaders' national role conceptions such as the one of former President Abdullah Gul, wherein his speech dubbed Turkey as a 'virtuous power' referring to normative or soft power[227]as:

> *"A virtuous power is a power that is not ambitious or expansionist in any sense. On the contrary, it is a power where the priority lies with safeguarding human rights and interests of all human beings [....] That is what I mean by a virtuous power: a power that knows what is wrong and what is right and that is also powerful enough to stand behind what is right".*[228]

2.1.1. Regional Role Model

This type of role is referred to in Holsti's typology as "example" and is where "*the importance of promoting prestige and gaining influence in the international system*

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[227] Emel Parlar Dal, "Assessing Turkey's 'Normative' Power in the Middle East and North Africa Region: New Dynamics and Their Limitations," *Turkish Studies*, vol. 14, no. 4 (2013), pp. 709–34, doi:10.1080/14683849.2013.861113.
[228] Gul, "Turkey's Moment," 7. Interview with Gul, "Turkey's Moment," 7, quoted in cited, p. 726.

by pursuing certain domestic policies."[229] The emergence of Turkey as a Middle East model deemed to contribute to the democratization of the Muslim world in general and the Middle East has come in the aftermath of September 11**.** The US also ascribed the role model to Turkey that is expressed in different presidential statements. In the 2004 Istanbul NATO Summit, President George W. Bush appreciated "*the example that your country has set on how to be a Muslim country which embraces democracy, the rule of law and freedom,*"[230] and similarly, President Obama is referred to such a potential role "*critically important model for other Muslim countries of the region.*"[231] Altunışık claims that Turkey possesses three unique ideational assets that have gradually been developing inside Turkey since the establishment of the new republic. These assets, including democracy, secularism, and political Islam, all came together in one package after the rise of JDP, which could then export it to the region as a model/ example. Also, she refers to the foreign factors that Turkey emulated from the West or those relations and alliances of which Turkey has enjoyed as unique international statuses such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe, and the Organization of European Economic Cooperation (OEEC).[232]

The JDP conceptualized this role to show Turkey's commitment to the European Union that Turkey is actively internalizing the European norms and values and socializing them into the region. In this role, Turkey seems to be in an ego-alter game to show the ego-status to the Middle East and 'alter' to the West. Indirectly, Turkish leaders referred to this role conception in their speeches by using other norms to make Turkey an idealistic country the Middle East countries could follow, and this is clear in former president Gül's speech that described Turkey as 'a source of inspiration.'[233]

This role fell short following the Arab Spring as Turkey was likely to reverse the soft foreign policy embedded in the *Zero-problem* doctrine with the neighbors. The

[229] Holsti, "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy," 1970, pp. 233–309.
[230] Meliha Benli Altunisik, "The Turkish Model and Democratization in the Middle East," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, vol. 27 (2004), p. 46.
[231]Paolo Valentino, "Obama Says Turkey Should Be Full Member of Europe," 2010, https://www.corriere.it/International/english/articoli/2010/07/08/Barack-Obama-exclusive-interview-Corriere-della-Sera.shtml.
[232] Altunisik, "The Turkish Model and Democratization in the Middle East," pp. 45–64.
[233] Parlar Dal, "Conceptualising and Testing the 'Emerging Regional Power' of Turkey in the Shifting International Order," 2016, pp. 1425–53.

Turkish involvement was partially approved by regional dissidents who have always opposed the Assad regime and its regional allies, Russia and Iran.

Başer argues that the JDP's leadership era had witnessed a shift of axis in foreign policy orientations that impacted Turkey's foreign policy role conceptions. He demonstrates this shift by claiming that majority of the JDP's regional roles are repeated and copied from previous governments since the 1980s. Such roles are mostly cooperative-oriented, including bridge, example, and mediator that dominated and were frequently spoken about by the Turkish decision-makers, especially during the 1990s and continuing until 2011.[234]

2.1.2. Bridge and Central Power

In definition, bridge NRC means "*a communication function, that is, acting as a "translator" or conveyor of messages and information between peoples of different cultures.*"[235] In Turkey's case, the bridging role conception expressed by Turkish leaders and officials has always been the justification used to refute the debatable concept of 'shift of axis,' which recently emanated from the critics of the JDP's ideational orientation to the East. The bridging role is a unique complementary norm to the regional leader role Turkey seeks in the Middle East. Having this role, Turkey believes it is geopolitically more qualified for it than other competing regional powers like Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Turkish leaders have usually translated this role that Turkey should be an energy and trade hub linking the West and East and vice versa. Also, by this role, Turkish leaders and intellectuals claim that Turkey belongs to different regional security complexes, and thus, is not an 'interlocutor country' as scholars of international relations frequently describe. The assumption of this role is repeatedly witnessed in several official speeches and statements, including those, for instance, the words of Turkish Minister for EU Affairs Egemen Bagis:

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[234] Ekrem T. Başer, "Shift-of-Axis in Turkish Foreign Policy: Turkish National Role Conceptions Before and During AKP Rule," *Turkish Studies*, vol. 16, no. 3 (2015), p. 299, doi:10.1080/14683849.2015.1050958.

[235] Holsti, "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy," 1970, pp. 266–67.

"Turkey is the most Western country in the Orient and the most oriental country in the West... We were the bridge between the West and the Orient for centuries, but we attached more importance to the West. However, in order to have a strong bridge which really provides the connection between civilizations through communication, transportation, and dialogue, it should have strong piers on both sides. In nowhere in the world a bridge, the piers on one side which are weak can be called a sound."[236]

This 'bridge' "*between East and West, which carried geographic, civilizational, and religious undertones.*"[237] In the post-Cold War, Turkey found an opportunity to erect a powerhouse in the intersection of continents East and West and regionally between Central Asia, Caucasus, and the Middle East. The prime goal of this role was economic, while politically, Turkey wanted to fill out the regional power vacuum after acting as a buffer state during the Cold War between the US and USSR. The bridge role motivated Turkey to use its post-Cold War leverages to mediate and solve the ethnonational disputes in the Balkan region and bring the Middle East to the West through the Turkish liberal experience.

Yanık analyzes the expectations and goals of the bridge role of Turkey, arguing that since the end of the Cold War, the Turkish foreign policy has used the role conception as a discursive strategy '*metaphor of vision*' to rediscover Turkey's exceptional location and reconstruct its bridging identity and role. She makes two brands of the role conception, especially during the JDP's rule, Turkey's role as bridging continents and civilizations, meaning East and West, and Islam and Christianity as referred to in Erdogan's initiative 'Alliance of Civilizations' launched after the 9/11 attacks.[238]

The discursive reference to the bridge role is highly recorded in official statements and speeches. In the 1980s, Özal's motto of 'from the Adriatic to the Chinese Wall' directly refers to Turkey's multidimensional foreign policy, identity, and location as a

[236] Gülden Ayman, "Regional Aspirations and Limits of Power-Turkish-Iranian Relations in the New Middle East," p. 99.

[237] Özdamar, "Domestic Sources of Changing Turkish Foreign Policy Toward the MENA During the 2010s: A Role Theoretic Approach." .," p. 91.

[238] Lerna K. Yanik, "The Metamorphosis of Metaphors of Vision: 'Bridging' Turkey's Location, Role and Identity after the End of the Cold War," *Geopolitics*, vol. 14, no. 3 (2009), pp. 531–49, doi:10.1080/14650040802693515.

civilizational bridge.[239] From the 1990s to the rise of JDP, the bridge role was frequently used. For instance, Süleyman Demirel said:

> *"Turkey, with its 60 million population, money and other possibilities, is a bridge to West Asia, to the Middle East. It is a model for Muslim countries[.]. Here's the model: an independent, democratic, secular country, employing a free market economy. Turkey is the only model."*[240]

Since 2011, the use of bridge role has received a rejection, and alternatively, Davutoğlu and Erdoğan instead favored the role conception of 'central state or power.' The bridge metaphor as a role and identity has a theoretical paradox and an official rejection among the Turkish foreign policy elites since its use refers to Turkey as liminal geography, identity, and role. In other words, the role conception sounds to marginalize Turkey's identity to the level of 'mid-Other' as a bridge state linguistically refers to Turkey as only a geographical connector between other entities rather than part of any.

Nevertheless, the central power role's conception refers to the ideational and strategic centrality that Turkish policymakers have frequently used to suggest the future role that Turkey might assume in various regions, cultures, and issues. Although there is a correlation between the central power and bridge role conceptions, Davutoglu's strategic depth argues that the conception of the bridge role carries a passive relation to Turkey as identity and role. Consequently, the JDP elites tend to escape the bridge role concept that portrays Turkey as a liminal fixed identity, and instead, they prefer the term central power role, which refers to Turkey's multiple regional identities. As such, former Prime Minister Davutoglu once stated:

> *"[f]or many decades that was my main critique towards Turkish policy when I wrote my book. Turkey was neutral, was a bridge. I don't like the term bridge. A bridge is a passive entity between two sides. There are two sides, and you are [sic] bridge. No, we are part of both of the sides. We are part of all the events."*[241]

On another occasion, he explains why a central country or power is much more suitable for Turkey, as:

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[239] Aras, Gorener, "National Role Conceptions and Foreign Policy Orientation: The Ideational Bases of the Justice and Development Party's Foreign Policy Activism in the Middle East," p. 80.
[240] Yanık, "The Metamorphosis of Metaphors of Vision: 'Bridging' Turkey's Location, Role and Identity After the End of the Cold War," p. 538.
[241] Zeynep Arkan, Müge Kınacıoğlu, "Enabling 'Ambitious Activism': Davutoğlu's Vision of a New Foreign Policy Identity for Turkey," *Turkish Studies*, 2016, p. 394, doi:10.1080/14683849.2016.1185943.

"A central country with such an optimal geographic location cannot define itself in a defensive manner. It should be seen neither as a bridge country which only connects two points, nor a frontier country, nor indeed as an ordinary country, which sits at the edge of the Muslim world or the West."[242]

This role conception was recorded high in the pre-JDP era and low in the JDP era. Instead, the central state role has highly featured during the JDP period.

2.1.3. Good Neighbor

The 'good neighbor' NRC is one of the prominent role conceptions that have been featured since the JDP's advent and often used in the speeches and statements by the party's leaders. It represents the multidimensional foreign policy and soft power orientation of Turkey as a whole and refers to the Turkish goodwill and inspiration to seek brotherly and peaceful neighborly relations. The main expectation of this role is to address existing problems with neighbors through diplomatic principles. Nonetheless, under the Davutoglu approach of zero-problem with neighbors, this role concept was officially proposed.

2.2.4. Mediator

The role conception of a mediator is defined as the leaders' "perceptions of a continuing task to help adversaries reconcile their differences."[243] This role among the other six cooperative NRCs is ranked higher by the JDP administration than previous governments.[244] The Turkish claim to a regional mediator role grounds itself on the 'cultural–civilizational background' coupled with Turkey's international status and leverages in international organizations, including NATO, OSCE, the Council of Europe, G20, and the OIC. Furthermore, the former Turkish Foreign Minister and then Prime Minister claimed that Turkey fits the potential regional mediator due to "*a shared history and common future.*" [245]

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[242] Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007," p. 78.
[243] Holsti, "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy," 1970, p. 265.
[244] Özgür Özdamar, B. Toygar Halistoprak, Erkam Sula, "From Good Neighbor to Model: Turkey's Changing Roles in the Middle East in the Aftermath of the Arab Spring," *International Relations*, vol. 11, no. 42 (2014), pp. 93–113.
[245] Cited in Zeynep Arkan, Müge Kınacıoğlu, "Enabling 'Ambitious Activism': Davutoğlu's Vision of a New Foreign Policy Identity for Turkey," *Turkish Studies*, vol. 17, no. 3 (2016), p. 395, doi:10.1080/14683849.2016.1185943.

The role also has cultural connotations of mediating between civilizations situating Turkey qualified for mediating between the Muslim world and other civilizations.[246] Turkey aimed at playing a mediator role as a foreign policy instrument to ensure peace and stability and as a part of its bid for regional power in the region.

As for regional initiatives, immediately after justice and development came to power, Turkey began to contribute to mediation, conflict resolution, economic interdependence, and advocacy for regional claims. As for mediation, Turkey served as a mediator between Syria and Israel, between Palestinian factions Hamas and Fattah, and co-mediated Iran's nuclear program in 2009 after the P5 + 1 deal collapse.

During the Arab Spring era, Turkey began to engage in regional politics and conflicts as a potential and accepted third-party mediator.[247] In response to the regional conflicts followed by the popular uprisings, Turkey initiated mediating offers in various countries, including Bahrain, Libya, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. First, in 2011, Turkey managed to end the Bahrain crisis by communicating with concerned parties, including Iran and Saudi Arabia. Second, Turkey engaged in several mediation initiatives in Libya regarding the release of Western journalists in 2011 and later between the Gaddafi government and the Transitional National Council. Third, in Syria, Turkey attempted to mediate between the Assad regime and opposition amid the uprisings and made several visits and meetings with President Assad to persuade him to negotiate with the opposition. Fourth, in Yemen, Turkey's role featured in supporting the initiative of the Friends of Yemen Group and encouraging the transitional process. Fifth, in Iraq, Turkey could contribute generously to the dispute between the Shia and Sunni parties. Sixth, Turkey played an influential mediating role in the peace talks between Somalia and Somaliland.

Turkey pursues its mediating activities in the region as a third-party actor communicating with concerned regional actors, and at the organizational level, Turkey coordinates with regional and international organizations, including UN, OSCE, and the

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[246] Yanik, "The Metamorphosis of Metaphors of Vision: 'Bridging' Turkey's Location, Role and Identity after the End of the Cold War," p. 543.

[247] İsmail Akdoğan,, "Orta Doğu'da Suudi Arabistan İran Rekabeti: Yemen Operasyonu", *Orta Doğu Analiz*, vol. 7, no. 68(2015), s.11

OIC. Through the former two organizations, Turkey and Finland contributed to establishing the 'Mediation for Peace' initiative and the 'Friends of Mediation Group.'[248]

Although Turkey contributed well to the mediation process in the pre-Arab Spring era, a role that surpassed the Egyptian and Saudi roles, this role diminished dramatically in the post-Arab Spring period due to the exacerbation of the crises, and Turkey also was engaged in positions that were deemed not unbiased.

2.1.5. Regional sub-System Collaborator

In definition, Holsti refers to this role conception in the way that states allocate "*far-reaching commitments to cooperative efforts with other states to build wider communities, or to cross-cutting subsystems*."[249] In the case of Turkey, any official reference to Turkey's proactive commitments to regional cooperation, organizational initiatives, and capacity building is a sort of this role instruments such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC).[250]

This role was frequently featured during the 1980s and early 1990s. Notably, with the coalition government under Necmettin Erbakan, this role was repeated several times about the Turkish incentive to collaborate with the Muslim world and foster relations with the region's neighbors. However, this role did not last long due to the domestic changes following the advent of the ANAP-DSP-DTP coalition and the dispute with Syria over the Assad support for the PKK.

The 'regional-subsystem collaborator' role has fashioned significantly during the JDP rule since 2002. It has been proliferated by the full-spectrum approach of Turkish proactive foreign policy towards the Middle East and the paradigm of multidimensional orientation. Further, as the role implies, Turkey committed itself to contribute generously to the regional order and stability through establishing regional security institutions and regimes.

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[248] Bülent Aras, "Turkey's Mediation and Friends of Mediation Initiative," *Tepav*, no. 4 (2012), pp. 1–7.
[249] Holsti, "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy," 1970, p. 265.
[250] Özdamar, Halistoprak, Sula, "From Good Neighbor to Model: Turkey's Changing Roles in the Middle East in the Aftermath of the Arab Spring," p. 103.

In reference to official statements indicating the 'regional-subsystem collaborator,' for example, Prime Minister Erdoğan stated, *"We are ready to do everything in our power to ensure peace and stability in the region."*[251] Furthermore, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu stated:

> *"At the regional level, our vision is a regional order that is built on representative political systems reflecting the legitimate demands of the people where regional states are fully integrated to each other around the core values of democracy and true economic interdependence."* [252]

Institutionally, to meet the qualification for this role, Turkey initiated a variety of diplomatic, economic, and trade initiatives, including *"abolishing visas, creating free trade zones, high-level cooperation councils, joint cabinet meetings, and with extensive political, economic, and social openings to the region."*[253]

2.1.6. Trading State

This role conception emerged initially during the 1980s by the influence and leadership of Turgut Özal. He was the first in Turkish foreign policy decision-making to articulate the 'export-oriented and liberal market policies. [254] Not alone, at the end of the 1990s, Foreign Minister İsmail Cem followed the Özalian economic approach.

During the 1980s, the trade state role aimed to fulfill a set of objectives: (1) to convert the Middle East into a vast market for the Turkish products; (2) to use trade as a peace-building instrument to solve regional conflicts and neutralize the Turkish stance on the Iraq-Iran War for not spoiling trade relations of both states.[255] The 'water pipeline' project of 1986 was such an example.[256]

[251] "Recep Tayyip Erdogan," *Turkish Daily News*, (2009).
[252] Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Principles of Turkish Foreign Policy and Regional Poltiical Structuring," *Center for Strategic Research*, 2012, p. 7.
[253] Mustafa Aydin, "Foreign Policy, 1923–2018," *The Routledge Handbook of Turkish Politics*, Routledge, 2019, p. 374, doi:10.4324/9781315143842-29.
[254] Kemal Kirişci, "The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy: The Rise of the Trading State," *New Perspectives on Turkey*, vol. 40, no. March 2009 (2009), p. 43, doi:10.1017/s0896634600005203.
[255] Katerina Dalacoura, "Turkey and the Middle Eastinthe1980s," *Millennium*, vol. 19, no. 2 (1990), p. 211.
[256] Kemal Kirisci, *Turkey's Foreing Policy in Turbulent Times*, European Union Institute for Security Studies, Chaillot Paper No. 92, 2006, p. 11.

Since the coming of JDP, Turkey has invested in different economic and trade sectors, including banking, energy, construction, food industry, tourism, and private capital. For instance, Turkish private business companies, including TUSİAD, MUSİAD, and TOBB, have played a pivotal role in establishing trade infrastructures, mechanisms, and collaboration with the region's countries and facilitated by the JDP government and elites.[257] In 2012, trade between Turkey and the Middle East reached $ 42 billion in exports in the region, compared to $ 21 billion in imports that greatly exceeded the exchange volume in the 1990s.[258]

2.1.7. Energy Hub

Thanks to its strategic position between oil and gas-rich countries, like the Gulf States and the countries bordering the Caspian Sea, Turkey has tried to play an energy hub connecting the countries of production and import by pipelines and refining facilities. Moreover, Bilgin puts that:

> *"Turkey, in the meantime, presents itself as an emerging energy hub which is situated between the supply (Russian Federation, Caspian and the Middle East) and the demand (the European Union countries and world markets via Mediterranean).7 Turkey's geographic location is advantageous as 72 percent of world hydrocarbons are reported to be located in its neighborhood. Energy transit projects and investment opportunities in Turkey can create a strategic synergy."*[259]

Turkey has so far invested in oil-gas pipeline projects such as the pipeline project Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan linking Caspian gas between Turkey and Europe. On the other hand, Turkey and Iraq have bilateral energy deals like the Kirkuk Yumurtalık pipeline and a recent planned crude oil pipeline known as the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline.[260] Proposals also took place for Turkey-Qatar pipeline projects to transport Qatari LNG to Europe through the Turkish Nabucco pipeline.[261]

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[257] Kirişci, "The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy: The Rise of the Trading State," pp. 29–56.
[258] Bank, Karadag, "Before the Arab Revolts and After: Turkey's Transformed Regional Power Status in the Middle East," p. 105.
[259] Mert Bilgin, "Energy and Turkey's Foreign Policy: State Strategy, Regional Cooperation and Private Sector Involvement," *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, vol. 9, no. 2 (2010), p. 84.
[260] "Proposed Iraq-Turkey Pipeline to Expand Oil Trade," *Daily Sabah*, (09/05/2019), https://www.dailysabah.com/energy/2019/09/05/proposed-iraq-turkey-pipeline-to-expand-oil-trade.
[261] Tamsin Carlisle, "Qatar Seeks Gas Pipeline to Turkey," *The National*, (08/2009), https://www.thenational.ae/business/qatar-seeks-gas-pipeline-to-turkey-1.520795.

2.2.   Regional Competitive Roles

After the Arab Spring, Turkey entered foreign policy transformations and countered two regional scenarios. The first scenario portrayed Turkey as an influential leader committed to promoting pro-democratic uprisings, encouraging conservative-liberal Islamic opposition, managing transitional governments, and preserving the existing regional status quo.[262] Amid the Arab Spring, the JDP began rearticulating two competitive roles, 'regional leader' and 'regional protector.'[263] The first role slowly evolved after the Arab Spring as a third-way leadership policy to combat Iran's influence and counter-revolutionary Arab regimes. Turkey intended to serve as a leading Sunni bloc against Iran-led Shia domination, Israeli aggression, and post-Arab Spring status quo leader against the pre-Arab Spring status quo (Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and UAE). On the other hand, the regional protector role featured mainly in two obligations—first, Turkey provided strong advocacy for the protesters in the media and the international community. Second, it offered humanitarian protection for refugees and asylums.

The second Turkish regional power status scenario arose after 2016 because of consecutive dilemmas both domestically and regionally. Nevertheless, domestic political concerns, coupled with growing regional dynamics, including Russia's influence in Syria and the US reluctance, affected Turkish foreign policy's current contours. Accordingly, the JDP has undoubtedly rebuilt the foreign-policy framework in three ways: (1) the shift in foreign-policy doctrine from the moral idealism of the Davutoglu doctrine to what Tayyar Arı refers to as an "*idealist realism and smart power*"[264]known as the Erdogan doctrine; (2) the smooth shift of the axis from the West to Russia; and (3) the shift in foreign-policy role orientations towards the region from cooperative roles to competitive ones. All these new political imperatives invoke Turkish Cold War foreign policy, described by Donelli as "*a more securitized foreign policy in which the hard power*

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[262] Meliha Benli Altunışık, "Turkey's 'Return' to the Middle East," in *Regional Powers in the Middle East* ,Palgrave Macmillan US, 2014, p.134–36.

[263]   Yasemin Akbaba, Özgür Özdamar, *Role Theory in the Middle East and North Africa*, *Role Theory in the Middle East and North Africa*, New York, NY : Routledge, 2019, p. 99.

[264]   Tayyar Arı, "Türk Dış Politikasının Kavramsal ve Kuramsal Temellerini Yeniden Tartışmak," in *11. Uluslararası Uludağ Uluslararası İlişkiler Kongresi* ,Bursa: Bursa Uludağ Üniversitesi, 2019,p. 5.

regained supremacy on soft power."[265]Turkish military involvement in Syria and Libya is a robust indication of these Turkish foreign security policy changes.

At the regional level, Turkey plunged into the Syrian quagmire, failed to maintain the status quo in Egypt, Syria, Libya, and Yemen, and faced the Qatari crisis and the Mediterranean dispute. Subsequently, Turkey conceptualized three new assertive competitive roles 'active independent,' 'anti-terrorism,' and 'regional protector.' It is worth noting that these three conceptual roles are politically interrelated. As the active independent role arises from Turkey's political isolation, anti-terrorism is a self-justification for Turkey's pre-emptive foreign policy. Simultaneously, the regional protector role is also a moral self-justification for continuing Turkey's foreign policy. These three role conceptions are clarified as follows:

2.2.1. Regional Leader Role

This role conception does not necessarily have to be proclaimed like other role conceptions, but it is referred to by Turkish leaders and officials on several occasions and speeches. Consequently, this role has been dominated from the liberal viewpoint of cooperative hegemony in the Turkish foreign policy debate and competitive hegemony, as the transformations following the Arab Spring may indicate.

In Turkey, the leadership role has sometimes been dubbed as a neo-Ottoman strategy, and its theorist Davutoğlu was described as a neo-Ottomanist whom himself and other JDP elites deny because the term implies imperial claims. Proactive foreign policy is a central imperative for regional power leaders to seek more regional power status in the region. Turkey had to challenge the reactive Kemalism, which dominated Turkish foreign policy during the Cold War period.[266] This role conception has unprecedently featured during the JDP era as Parlar Dal claims that "*since the 2000s Turkey has*

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[265] Federico Donelli, "Back to the Hardest: The U-Turn of Turkish Foreign Policy," *Political Reflection Magazine*, No. 19, 2019, pp.11-15, p.13.

[266] Ömer Taşpınar, "Turkey's Middle East Policies: Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism," *Carnegie Papers*, 2008.

articulated its willingness to play a regional leadership role more openly in the Middle East than in the Balkans and the Black Sea and Caucasus regions."[267]

Historical narratives influence the decision-makers articulation of national role conceptions for specific past zones of influence, as in the Middle East. The famous Strategic Depth thesis of Ahmet Davutoglu is a revelation of how Turkey, under the JDP, applies the Ottoman legacy for its assertive regional leadership, as pointed in Davutoglu's 2001 interview:

> *"Countries like Turkey, China and Japan have deep historical roots in their regions ... During the transit from the 19th to the 20th century; there were eight multinational empires across Eurasia: Britain, Russia, Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, China, Japan, and Turkey. Now, these countries are experiencing very similar problems with their prospective regions. As these countries possess historical depth, they form spheres of influence; if they fail to do this, they then experience various problems."*[268]

It seems that JDP has assertively continued its national roles in the Middle East, regardless of role contestation and disapproval of the two key political parties, the Republican People's Party (RPP)—in Turkish (CHP)—and the Nationalist Movement Party (NMP)—in Turkish (MHP). For instance, the CHP has often criticized the JDP's role conceptualization and foreign policy orientation in general, vis-à-vis the Middle East from a security perspective. For this secular-Kemalist party, they disprove the ideational tendency and discursive acts the JDP has been using to depict Turkey as a 'central country' and 'regional leader' or sub-roles of "protector of the oppressed" and "leader of the Muslim world." Out of their political logic, firstly, structurally Turkey 'punches over its weight' or lacks 'the capacity to act' in terms of material power, secondly, ideationally it deviates Turkey from the modern-Western values Kemalist doctrine was based on, and thirdly, these roles are constructed by the JDP to buy Erdogan regional clout. For the NMP's leader Devlet Bahçeli, the JDP's constructed roles for the Middle East amount to acts of treason to the Turkish nationalistic principles and, therefore, such roles and

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[267] Parlar Dal, "Conceptualising and Testing the 'Emerging Regional Power' of Turkey in the Shifting International Order," 2016, pp. 1425–53.

[268] The strategic depth that Turkey needs, an interview with Ahmet Davutoglu', Turkish Daily News, 15 September 2001

engagement in the Arab Spring the JDP has implicated Turkey in wars that are not "ours."[269]

The regional leader role is not limited to its definition and scope; instead, it has a distinct approach to foreign policy under which other minor and complementary roles are enhancing the functionality of the leader in various contexts and times. A regional leader role has higher status and helping secondary roles such as a mediator, collaborator, etc. According to Arı and Pirinçci, in the post-Cold War and since the rise of JDP, Turkey has increasingly become involved in the Middle East with foreign policy activism to assert itself as a 'regional superpower' status and play leading roles based on multilateral norms. They refer to 'other' expectations of Turkish roles enacted in the region, especially in Syria and Lebanon, and how Turkey could redeem its image after decades the imperial-others "*created to construct self-consciousness depended heavily on anti-Turkish sentiments.*"[270]

Ehteshami outlines three diplomatic tracks of Turkey to meet the expectations of the regional leadership role. First, at least adopted the diplomatic distancing strategy with Israel and discursively negating Israeli aggression against Palestinians. Second, it incriminates Iran's regional meddling and mediates between Iran and the West regarding the nuclear program question. Third, it adopted a good neighbor role to consolidate relations and zero-problem with the Arab neighbors.[271]

Turkey's commitment to play a regional leader has been to pursue three proactive elements of foreign policy, security, economy, and culture. Firstly, as concerning the commitment to regional stability, Turkey has proactively engaged as a matter of growing understanding of regional security uncertainties and challenges such as:

  1)   Restoration and reconstruction of Iraq in the post-invasion period.

  2)   US interventions in the region.

  3)   Proactive engagement in the post-Arab Spring regional order through a smart power strategy grounded on four tracks (a) multilateral

[269] Özgür Özdamar, "Domestic Sources of Changing Turkish Foreign Policy Toward the MENA During the 2010s: A Role Theoretic Approach." eds" *Domestic Role Contestation, Foreign Policy, and International Relations.*, Routledge, 2016, pp. 105–120.
[270] Tayyar Ari, Ferhat Pirinççi, "Turkey ' s New Foreign Policy Towards The Middle East And The Perceptions In Syria And," *Akademik Bakis*, vol. 4, no. 7 (2010), p. 2.
[271] Ehteshami, "Middle East Middle Powers: Regional Role, International Impact," p. 38.

instruments such as mediation in collaboration and coordination with the UN, the EU, US, and Russia in conflict states such as in Syria (b) unilateral military operations like in Syria and Libya, (c) humanitarian protection by the refugee policy Turkey adopted to host around four million Syrian refugees, and (d) alliance engagement in Syria and Iraq to counter the terrorist groups including ISIS.

4)   Kurdish ethnonationalism in Turkey, Iraq, and Syria.

5)   Iran's influence networks in the region.

6)   The Israel-Palestinian issue

7)   The regional balance of power to be shared with other regional powers, including Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Second, regarding the economy, Turkey has been enhancing its economic engagements and roles in the Middle East through:

1)   Building energy networks making Turkey a global energy transit and hub to link the Middle East's energy market with Europe.

2)   Exporting the Turkish economic and trade culture 'economic Islam model' that is based on business unions and communities such as the famous Independent Industrialists and Businessmen Association (MUSIAD) that links "*Islamic identity and free-market ideology.*"[272]

3)   Enhancing economic relations with regional states.

Third, culturally, Turkey has been acting as a big brother and modern Muslim leader on historical and cultural grounds. The Turkish aspiration to play a regional leader role called for a reform of the Kemalist approach and modified it to be compatible with the conservative Islamic approach. The JDP was then expected to follow Islamic rhetoric and regional initiatives that earned Islamic and regional sympathy. At least, Turkey has embraced symbolic Islamic issues such as the disagreements with Israel and, most notably, the reopening of Hagia Sophia as a mosque since it became a museum after establishing the Turkish Republic.

After the Arab Spring, the regional leadership role concept has eventually

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[272] Fuat Keyman and Sebnem Gumuscu, *Democracy, Identity, and Foreign Policy in Turkey: Hegemony through Transformation*, Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014, p. 134.

developed as the third way to counter Iran's dominance and the Arab counter-revolutionary axis. This also applies to bloc politics where the JDP wanted to build Turkey: first, a Sunni Muslim bloc member versus Iran's influence and Israeli bullying, and, second, a post-Arab Spring status quo leader versus the Arab axis (Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the UAE).

After the attempted coup in 2016 and Russian involvement in Syria, Turkey pursued the Erdogan doctrine and associated regional roles as the following:

2.2.2. Active Independent Role

This role conception has intensified in line with the Erdogan doctrine, which aims to consolidate Turkey's regional power status by (1) balancing regional hegemonic aspirations of Iran in Syria and Iraq and Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the UAE in Libya, Yemen, and Sudan. (2) having a tactical balance between a political distancing from Western allies because they denied Turkey's regional requests and collaborating with Russia on the Syrian and economic agenda. The clear manifestations of this role surface in Turkish official and public discourse and antagonism with the West. Other signals of this role are the departure from the traditional faithful ally of NATO and the US. They have both disappointed Turkey's attempts to advance its political and security interests in Syria as its southern backyard, where Turkey has become subject to Russian blackmail, Iranian competition, and terrorist Kurdish groups. Most reference to this role conception and its justifiable discourse and application is featured in President Erdogan's 2018 statement:

> "The United States has repeatedly and consistently failed to understand and respect the Turkish people's concerns. And in recent years, our partnership has been tested by disagreements. Unfortunately, our efforts to reverse this dangerous trend proved futile. Unless the United States starts respecting Turkey's sovereignty and proves that it understands the dangers that our nation faces, our partnership could be in jeopardy."[273]

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[273] Recep Tayyip Erdogan, "How Turkey Sees the Crisis With the U.S.," *The New York Times*, (2018), https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/10/opinion/turkey-erdogan-trump-crisis-sanctions.html?module=inline.

2.2.3. Anti-Terrorism Agent

This role conception emerged because Turkey's southern border was subjected mainly to security threats of ethnoreligious terrorism. Having this role, it seems that the JDP has revisited Ataturk's slogan 'peace at home, peace in the world.' This role has frequently appeared in the Turkish elite's discussions regarding threats to national security from Syrian-based terrorist organizations, including ISIS, PKK, and its extension PYD/YPG. Turkey considers all these threats to be a 'terrorist corridor' and is keen to replace it with a 'peace corridor.' For instance, President Erdogan stated, "*Turkey will not allow a terror corridor along its borders with Syria.*"[274] Earlier, he expressed Turkey's position on Syria as:

> "*There is no difference between Assad regime and DAESH. Similarly, there is no difference between Assad regime and terrorist groups such as PYD, YPG, El-Nusra. They are all partners of the crimes against the Syrian people. Those who are supporting Assad, DAESH, PYD, YPG and PKK directly or indirectly are also collaborators of the same crime against humanity.*"[275]

Indeed, this role concept has been transformed into four military operations in Syria, 'Euphrates Shield 2016,' 'Olive Branch 2018', Peace Spring 2019, and 'Spring Shield 2020.'

2.2.4. Regional Protector

By definition, this role conception relates to the leader role in how it "*places emphasis on the function of providing protection for adjacent regions.*"[276] In general, the regional protector refers mainly to the following responsibilities: (1) defender of oppressed Muslims when it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts; (2) protector of the oppressed (this regards regime repression against protestors during the Arab Spring Uprisings as in the case of Syria); (3) defender of the faith; (4) humanitarian intervention and responsibility to protect; (5) humanitarian discourse.

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[274] Presidency Of The Republic Of Turkey, "'The Biggest Threat to Syria's Future Is the PKK and Its Extension PYD/YPG,'" 2019, https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/109649/-the-biggest-threat-to-syria-s-future-is-the-pkk-and-its-extension-pyd-ypg-.

[275] Quoted in Birsen Erdogan, *Humanitarian Intervention and the Responsibility to Protect: Turkish Foreign Policy Discourse*, Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017, p. 110.

[276] Holsti, "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy," 1970, p. 262.

Such an active role grounds itself on discursive, institutional, and military instruments in conflict and unstable countries to defend peace and protect civilians and the oppressed people as in the self-proclaimed engagements in the Arab countries during and after the Arab Spring Uprisings. Turkey's proactive engagement in Syria and Libya is a noticeable indicator of such an assertive role. By contrast, this competitive and proactive role articulated by the JDP, especially in the post-Arab Spring Uprisings, is one of the JDP's conceptualized roles that reflect the TFP's orientation in this era and differs from the Ozalian economic-based approach.

This conception has mainly been featured since the advent of the JDP to reflect the ideology of the party and function Turkey's ambition and responsibilities for protecting regional oppressed people and nations. A resonant example of such a role lies in the words of JDP Vice President Ömer Çelik:

> *"Turkey is not as constrained as it was in the past, when a national cause was defined within territorial limits. . . Today, Turkey has the capacity to identify issues beyond its borders as a national cause. Compared to the static behavior of previous governments, even on the most well-known national causes, such an understanding and transformation of foreign policy is a revolution. Thus, our prime minister has declared Gaza as a national cause."*[277]

During the JDP era, Turkey has put itself a '*Sunni Muslim world protector*' as this functioning are proved in different occasions, for example, involved in the activities of the Arab League and OIC championing the issues of Sunnis and bringing them with the American perspectives in Iraq and recently in the Syrian crisis. Turkey engaged heavily in empowering and backing Sunni Iraqis to have full and robust participation in the 2005 election, hosted the prominent Sunni leader, Tariq-al Hashimi, and trained 350 Iraqi politicians.[278]

Being critical of the Western policies toward the Islamic world, Prime Minister and recent President Recep Tayyip Erdogan pointed to his country's role conception as a

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[277] Aksoy quoted in Çevket Ovali, "Decoding Turkey's Lust for Regional Clout in the Middle East: A Role Theory Perspective," *Source: Journal of International and Area Studies*, 2013, vol. 20, pp. 7–8.
[278] Bulent Aras, Rabia Karakyapolat, "Turkey and the Middle East: Frontiers of the New Geographic Imagination," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 61, no. 4 (2007), pp. 471–88, doi:10.1080/10357710701684930.

defender of the Islamic world as his words imply:

"The communities that perceive themselves as the crushed, worn, propelled, victimized and downtrodden, and the communities that have no belief in justice and sincerity, make it impossible to establish peace and stability on a global scale. This is what we have emphasized in our foreign policy. We defend justice, peace, law, and democracy in every area. We, as a conservative and democratic party, are struggling to hold both real and normative policy together."[279]

The JDP leadership stressed that Turkey should play an influential regional role that could represent Turkey as an 'order-instituting country' responsible for protecting the three neighboring regions the Middle East, the Balkans, and the Caucasus. This is the remarkable difference between the post-JDP governments, which emphasized the Turkish role of the trading state and the JDP's leadership, which reshaped Turkey as a regional protector against authoritarian regimes and Western hegemony.[280]

The Arab Spring was a demonstrative field for Turkey to implement its foreign policy Islamic discourse regarding supporting oppressed people exposed to Arab authoritarian Arab regimes, Iranian-Shia aggression, and Israeli repression against Palestinians. During the Arab Spring revolutions, Turkey appeared to be siding with the Sunni political Islamist movements. As a result, this was seen in the region as a Turkish engagement into the regional sectarian game.[281]

Nevertheless, after the regional transformations, Turkey was found to activate this role. It evolved to deal with the new foreign policy doctrine and justify Turkish military existence in Syria and Libya. It affirms Turkey's moral responsibility towards its allies and brothers. In Syria's case, President Erdogan stated that "*Turkey is not fighting against*

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[279] Erdogan, "The Changing Balances and the Rising Importance of Turkey.", quoted in Parlar Dal, "Assessing Turkey's 'Normative' Power in the Middle East and North Africa Region: New Dynamics and Their Limitations," p. 717.

[280] Dinc, Yetim, "Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy Toward the Middle East : From Non-Involvement to a Leading Role," p. 67; Aras, Gorener, "National Role Conceptions and Foreign Policy Orientation: The Ideational Bases of the Justice and Development Party's Foreign Policy Activism in the Middle East," p. 83.

[281] Ziya Öniş, "Turkey and the Arab Revolutions: Boundaries of Regional Power Influence in a Turbulent Middle East," *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2014), pp. 203–19, doi:10.1080/13629395.2013.868392.

Syrians; it is fighting with Syrians against oppressors."[282] While in Libya, Turkey has been supporting the Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA)from the start to prevent what President Erdogan described as "*conspiracy against the Libyan people.*"[283] Likewise, President Erdogan's persistent criticism of Western policies in the Islamic world reaffirms the JDP's role conception of 'regional protector' as a moral duty to defend what he considers the marginalized Muslim world. His slogan, 'The world is greater than five,' is a culmination and presentation of his nationalist rhetoric and Islamist worldview representing his desire to change what he terms the 'crooked international system' and the UN system.[284]

The regional protector is a paradox compared to other active cooperative roles of Turkey. This role marks Turkey's stance on the Syrian crisis when the TFP plausibly deviated from the mediation role and discourse to a competitive role, namely the regional protector. The proclaimed regional protector has institutionalized a humanitarian discourse to justify the role shift from mediation to protection. In comparison, the Turkish 'protector role' was inconsistent regarding the cases of Syria and Libya. Turkey has activated a humanitarian—Responsibility to Protect (R2P)— discourse to justify its involvement in Syria. This role concept revolved around four claims of interference: refugees, regional security, terrorism, and the Assad regime's war crimes.[285]

2.2.5. Faithful Ally

This role conception refers to Turkey's cooperation and alliance with the West after the Second World War and the Cold War on defense, modernization, and economic interdependence. The main formal and functioning foundations of this alliance are Turkish NATO and OSCE membership. While this role conception is officially related to

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[282] Daily Sabah, "Turkey Fighting against Oppressors, Not Syrians, Erdoğan Says," *Daily Sabah*, (10/16/2019), https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2019/10/16/turkey-not-fighting-against-syrians-its-fighting-against-oppressors-erdogan-says.

[283] Arab Center Washington, "Turkey's Growing Role in Libya: Motives, Background, and Responses," 2020, http://arabcenterdc.org/policy_analyses/turkeys-growing-role-in-libya-motives-background-and-responses/#_edn3.

[284] Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, "'Our Motto "the World Is Bigger than Five" Is the Biggest-Ever Rise against Global Injustice,'" 2018, accessed November 20, 2019, https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/89052/our-motto-the-world-is-bigger-than-five-is-the-biggest-ever-rise-against-global-injustice.

[285] Birsen Erdogan, *Humanitarian Intervention and the Responsibility to Protect: Turkish Foreign Policy Discourse*.

Turkey's Global North roles, there is no doubt that it impacts Turkey's relations with the Middle East. For instance, this role featured primarily when President Türgüt Özal decided that Turkey would participate with the United States during the 1991 Desert Storm operation to show Turkey's allegiance to the West. This was also a necessary response to the fear of the deterioration of Turkey's NATO status following the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The faithful ally role has slowly deteriorated due to Ankara and the West's divergent ideological and political expectations. The Turkish deteriorated faithful ally role may reflect two transformations in Turkey. Ideologically, Turkey's new role identity is formulated to operate in the Middle East theater with no total retreat from certain conventional roles, such as the faithful ally. Although Turkey considers this role to be an international prestige, a security umbrella, and a Western source of identity, it also gives Turkey a sense of security dependency on the West, as well as political and moral pressure on Turkey from the peoples of the region during the United States and NATO-led interventions in the region. In 2011, for example, Turkey initially rejected the NATO military operation in Libya against the Qaddafi regime for such a moral reason and commitment to Turkey's soft power and good neighbor-based regional roles. On that point, Turkey expressed its stance in the words of Prime Minister Erdogan:

> *"We have seen in the past that such operations are of no use and that on the contrary, they increase the loss of life, transform into occupation and seriously harm the countries' unity.*"[286]

Politically, the faithful ally role has been declining due to: first, becoming a NATO member defines favorably or negatively Turkey-Western ties. Turkey's roles of anti-terrorism, regional protector, and active independent, though, have influenced its 'faithful role' as demonstrated in previous cases such as the 1974 military operation in Cyprus that NATO rejected and, likewise, in North-East Syria and recently in Libya. In the case of Syria, Turkey has strongly accused the West of being an 'unfaithful partner; since Western countries have been supporting the Gülenist Terror Group (FETÖ), the PKK, and the People's Protection Units (YPG), all of which are

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[286] "Turkey Reluctantly Joins NATO Operations against Libya," *France24*, (04/03/2011), https://www.france24.com/en/20110324-turkey-allows-nato-command-libya-military-operations-vote.

deemed terrorist entities by Turkey.[287]

Second, Turkey has shown that it is seeking greater strategic autonomy in its foreign policy, based on the diversification of security partners and flexible alignment tactics. This strategy has grown significantly as a result of Turkey's gambling in Syria. Consequently, Turkey has opted for a 'strategic partner role' as indicated in its ties with Russia. However, this helps Turkey to diversify its defense, technology, and energy partners. Turkey's decision to purchase the Russian S-400 system is the most significant indication of this strategy.

The faithful ally is now in contrast to the active independent role that has been performed since the inception of the JDP, which promised to adopt a more self-confident foreign and security policy. This role has frequently met with mutual mistrust between the two sides, Turkey, and the West, on several issues, including Turkey's refusal to use its territories during the Iraq invasion and its criticism of NATO's intervention in Libya in 2011. On the other hand, NATO and the United States also consistently rejected Turkey's requests for military actions or the implementation of safe zones serving Turkish security as in Syria. The role conception has also retreated amid the escalation in Syria when Turkey felt the need to use the NATO privileges to counter the increasing Russian and Iranian influence in Syria.

2.3.   Regional Status quo Roles

These types of roles might be prescribed, ascribed, or proscribed. Turkey's foreign policy orientations since the 1980s have witnessed several roles vis-à-vis the regional security order. Turkey has always opted for balancing in the Middle East multipolar system; thereby, the change and continuity dynamics in foreign policy have also impacted orientations and preferences. This will discuss Turkey's regional status quo-oriented roles since the Iranian revolution at the beginning of the 1980s up to now in three types of roles: regional order balancer, defender, challenger, and anti-imperialist, etc.

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[287]Muhittin   Ataman,   "Muhittin   Ataman,"   *Daily   Sabah*,   (2019), https://www.dailysabah.com/columns/ataman-muhittin/2019/12/05/turkeys-relations-with-the-west-a-quest-for-autonomy.

2.3.1. Voice of Ummah

In a multipolar regional system, Turkey has been able to balance rather than defend or challenge the regional order. Toward the turbulent Arab-Israel relations, "*Turkey has to maintain a balance between her relations with Israel and the Arab countries. Naturally, these thoughts hardly included a 'leadership' role*".[288]

Nowadays, during the JDP's rule, Turkey began claiming to change the international system with a frequent emphasis on UN-system modification so that the world would enjoy more justice, equality, in which developing societies would have their voice. If such a demand were to be achieved, Turkey sees it would become a permanent UN member, and that status would boost its power and influence in the Middle East by having a Muslim veto and representation in the international community. Nevertheless, this demand has been converted into the words and role conceptions of Turkish officials; for example, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu stated:

> "*We think that in the UN there should be a much more participatory political order, a much more justice-oriented and economic order and a much more inclusive cultural order (….). Turkey wants to play a much bigger role in the United Nations (…). Now we have again applied for 2015–2016. Why? Because if you take the agenda of the United Nations, if you have ten agendas of the United Nations Security Council at least eight or nine of them are directly related to Turkey.*"[289]

2.3.2. Buffer State

This role conception has recently emerged after the post-Arab Spring ramifications due to foreign policy miscalculations and regional power dynamics. However, Turkish foreign policymakers have already turned to hard politics based on threat perception than the previous strategy of value and identity-based perceptions. Turkey's new role conception as a buffer state revokes the Kemalist principle of 'Middle East distance.' After the Arab Spring and threatening conflict in Syria, the troubled regional situations have alerted Turkey to redraw a role shift from a 'central country' to

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[288] Gülden Ayman, "Regional Aspirations and Limits of Power-Turkish-Iranian Relations in the New Middle East," p. 96.
[289] Davutoglu, Ahmet. "Vision 2023: Turkey's Foreign Policy Objectives." November 22, 2011, quoted in Parlar Dal, "Assessing Turkey's 'Normative' Power in the Middle East and North Africa Region: New Dynamics and Their Limitations," p. 718.

Turkey as a 'buffer state' that echoes the Cold War period.[290] Turkish elites prominently pronounced this role during the Cold War era as a geopolitical responsibility of NATO Southern flank members. However, this role importance was capitalized by Turkey "*on its geographical "exceptionalism" by presenting itself as a "bastion" or a "bulwark," on the southern flank of NATO, Turkey had to play the protector role in the first line of defense against communism.*"[291]

However, to understand this role, here are five dynamics that explain why the Syrian crisis has motivated Turkey to reassess its FP. This role has been conceptualized and articulated as a realpolitik paradigm emanated from security-based foreign policy versus soft power politics. Turkish scholar Aydin outlines the motivations behind this new role being:

> "*The combined effects of the emergence of a semi-permanent war zone alongside its southern border, together with regionalization and internationalization of the Kurdish issue, a now permanent Russian presence in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Levant in addition to its overwhelming position in the Black Sea, and indications regarding the emergence of a new anti- Turkey axis between Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the UAE in the Middle East are felt on Turkey's regional policy-making and are increasingly forcing Turkey towards difficult policy choices.*"[292]

The transition from pro-activism to buffer politics, multidimensional to one-dimensional, normative to defense strategy, aims to secure Turkey's national borders and integrity. Specifically, the idea of this role is triggered by the crises in Syria and Iraq. As the Turkish scholar Keyman indicates:

> "*The current Turkey's buffer identity has three subtexts: (1) to contain refugees in Turkey; (2) to contain the ISIL problem in the MENA region, mainly in Syria and Iraq; and (3) to balance Iran's regional hegemonic aspirations.*"[293]

However, this role concept has a twofold expectation as Turkey's post-Arab

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[290] Donelli, "Back to the Hardest: The U-Turn of Turkish Foreign Policy," p. 12.

[291] Yanık, "The Metamorphosis of Metaphors of Vision: 'Bridging' Turkey's Location, Role and Identity After the End of the Cold War," p. 536.

[292] Aydin, "Foreign Policy, 1923–2018," p. 375.

[293] E. Fuat Keyman, "Turkish Foreign Policy in the Post-Arab Spring Era: From Proactive to Buffer State," *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 12 (2016), p. 2280, doi:10.1080/01436597.2016.1199260.

Spring orientation acts as a bi-buffer state against the US (especially in Syria) and Russian influence in the region. First, having Turkey as a buffer state should act alone or collectively against regional risks with whatever measures to protect its national security. Second, Turkey seemed to be trying to contain multiple rivals and preserve Turkey's desired status quo. As a buffer state, Turkey is prescribed by the West as a NATO member to act against the Russian-Iranian revisionism in the Levant sub-region; and then as a Russian partner, Turkey moves against the US-Kurdish alliance and the Egypt-KSA-UAE axis in the region. The shift to this role is also a consequence of domestic contestation between opposition parties, including the CHP and MHP, and the ruling party, both of which accuse the latter of ideal regional roles such as the regional protector and central power based on misperception, overestimation, and deviance from Turkic and Western identities.[294]

Turkey has mostly used institutional initiatives (diplomatic initiatives such as cooperation and coordination with Russia on Syria) and material measures (military operations in Syria, including 2018's Operation Olive Branch and 2019's Operation Peace Spring). Last, the Turkish foreign policy role of buffer state is determined by Turkish-US relations and Turkish-Russian competition in regional affairs, including Syria and Libya.

3.   ROLE EXPECTATIONS

The emergence of the JDP's regional role model strategy has profoundly astounded the regional masses as a 'third way' capable of reconciling political doctrines such as right-left, liberalism-Islamism, and conservative democracy-totalitarian secularism. For Arabs, the Turkish role model has been translated variably according to two opposing groups and their viewpoints. The first group, which comprises the 'Islamic camp' led by the Muslim Brothers (*Ikhwan*), has materialized on the Turkish role model as a step towards developing their own. Accordingly, this Arab group credited the Turkish model solely to the JDP's ideological tutelage and its leader Erdogan. The second group, including the military-secular group, regarded the Turkish role model as a top-down type

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[294] Özdamar, "Domestic Sources of Changing Turkish Foreign Policy Toward the MENA During the 2010s: A Role Theoretic Approach." .," pp. 105–20.

of conservative democratization that could only inspire Arab regimes to expand on its constitutive roots, namely the Kemalist style of "*state-imposed and military-controlled.*"[295] This group is likely to assume that the Turkish role model's potential is a kind of motivation that might encourage but could not be fully emulated unless specific structural and ideational requirements are met.[296]

Both Arabs and Iranians were relatively impressed by a set of expectations about the Turkish regional roles, including:

1) Turkish distancing policy towards Israel has indicated a positive stance on the Palestine-Israeli issue.
2) Turkish would pursue a zero-problem strategy with a conciliatory role in resolving the water dispute between Turkey and Iraq.
3) Turkey would normalize ties with Syria following years of hostile relations.
4) Turkey would play a regional mediator.
5) Turkey would reduce the geopolitical repercussions of the 2003 invasion of Iraq and its consequences for the regional order that produced a fragile Iraqi state.
6) Sunni Arabs saw Turkey would counter Iran's regional hegemony by heading a Sunni bloc capable of offsetting the Shia crescent.
7) Turkey would represent and promote regional issues through Turkey's influence in the international community, the G-20, NATO, and the European Union.

Internationally, against the context of events on 9/11, the West saw Turkey as a potential role model to bridge the gap between the Muslim world and Western civilization. On several occasions, Western leaders expressed their trust in Turkey to play such a pivotal role. For example, during his visit to Ankara in 1999, President Bill Clinton praised Turkey's future role in stabilizing the region and assured that "*the future can be shaped for the better if Turkey can become a part of Europe fully, as a stable, democratic, secular, Islamic nation.*"[297] Additionally, in the 2004-Istanbul NATO Summit, President

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[295] Oğuzhan Göksel, "Assessing the Turkish Model as a Guide to the Emerging Democracies in the Middle East," *Ortadoğu Etütleri,* Vol. 4, No. 1 (2012),p. 104.
[296] Hassan Nafaa, *The 'Turkish Model'in the Mirror of the Arab Spring.Turkey and the Arab Spring: Implications for Turkish Foreign Policy from a Transatlantic Perspective.*, Mediterranean Paper Series, 2011.
[297] Dal and Erşen, "Reassessing the 'Turkish Model' in the Post-Cold War Era: A Role Theory Perspective,"p. 267.

George W. Bush pointed out that *"the example that your country has set on how to be a Muslim country which embraces democracy, the rule of law and freedom"*[298] and President Obama even alluded to such a potential role as *"critically important model for other Muslim countries of the region."*[299]

On the one hand, Turkey's new leadership conceptualized a role model as part of its commitment to the European Union to demonstrate that Turkey would actively socialize European standards and principles. The West, on the other hand, wanted Turkey to meet the following specific expectations:

1) To counter Russia and Iran's increasing influence in regional.

2) To contribute to the international combat against terrorism.

3) To empower and encourage regional actors and populations to pursue serious policies and economic reforms like Turkey's.[300]

4.   ROLE CONTESTATION

The 1990s period witnessed extraordinary role conflicts in Turkey's foreign policy that arose because of the political coalitions' paradoxical claims. For instance, as an Islamic party, the Welfare Party preferred to create national roles to present Turkey as a Muslim world leader, while the True Path Party as a center-right party retained the traditional foreign-policy orientation and roles.[301]

Since it started to participate in the region to improve its regional status actively, Turkey's regional policy has not moved straight against the backdrop of radical changes in the regional security order caused by the Arab Uprisings. Turkey's regional status-seeking strategy has fluctuated over the pre-and post-Arab Spring eras. It could yield considerable regional status recognition during the first phase while stumbled over the second phase. The first phase shows that regional and international audiences expected

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[298] Meliha Benli Altunisik, "The Turkish Model and Democratization in the Middle East," *Arab Studies Quarterly,*Vol.27,No. 1 &2,(2004),pp.45-64,p.46.
[299] Paolo Valentino, "Obama Says Turkey Should Be Full Member of Europe."
[300] See Kemal Kirisci, Gareth M. Winrow, and Gareth M. Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey* (Routledge, 2013).
[301] Cantir, Kaarbo, "Contested Roles and Domestic Politics: Reflections on Role Theory in Foreign Policy Analysis and IR Theory1," pp. 5–24.

'new Turkey' to better contribute to regional stability and modernization under the Islamic JDP, while in the second phase, Turkey has declined to live up to its promises.

The rapprochement between Turkey and the Middle East has drawn local and foreign attention.[302] Academically, Turkish and international IR scholars sought to clarify Turkey's aspiration to return to the second home of Ottoman Turkey. They also identified such attitudes as the so-called neo-Ottomanism,[303] the shift from Europeanization to Middle Easternization,[304] the geopolitical depth, the champion of Sunni Islam,[305] and the shift in the axis.

In the process of role enactment during both the pre and post-Arab Spring, major political opposition parties, the CHP (Republican People's Party, the MHP (Nationalist Action Party), and the BDP (Peace and Democracy Party), criticized the JDP's roles and policies for basing on ideological grounds and for bringing the war to Turkey that is not "ours" in the words of Mr. Devlet Bahçeli, the leader of MHP.[306] Also, they criticized the JDP for asserting provocative roles: 'the leader of the Muslim World,' 'protector of the oppressed,' and 'bastion of revolutions' being beyond Turkey's capabilities and interests.

Another challenge to the Turkish role enactment as a regional model and democracy prompter has been challenged by the *inter-role conflicts* emanating from

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[302] Kirisci, *Turkey's Foreing Policy in Turbulent Times*; Sabri Sayari, "Turkish Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era," *Journal of International Affairs*, 2000; W. Robert Pearson et al., "Turkey's Emerging Role in the Middle East," *Middle East Policy*, vol. 25, no. 2 (2018), pp. 5–26, doi:10.1111/mepo.12339; Matthew T Gullo, *Turkish Foreign Policy: Neo-Ottomanism 2.0 and the Future of Turkey's Relations with the West*, *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, 2012; Parlar Dal, "Assessing Turkey's 'Normative' Power in the Middle East and North Africa Region: New Dynamics and Their Limitations," pp. 709–34; Kieran E Uchehara, "Continuity and Change in Turkish Foreign Policy Toward Africa.," *Afrika'ya Yönelik Türk Dış Politikasında Süreklilik ve Değişim.*, 2008; Parlar Dal, "Conceptualising and Testing the 'Emerging Regional Power' of Turkey in the Shifting International Order," 2016, pp. 1425–53; Bank, Karadag, "The 'Ankara Moment': The Politics of Turkey's Regional Power in the Middle East, 2007-11," pp. 287–304; M. Aydin, "Determinants of Turkish Foreign Policy: Historical Framework and Traditional Inputs," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 1999, doi:10.1080/00263209908701290; Meltem Müftüler-Baç, Yaprak Gürsoy, "Is There a Europeanization of Turkish Foreign Policy? An Addendum to the Literature on EU Candidates," *Turkish Studies*, 2010, doi:10.1080/14683849.2010.506734.
[303] Ömer Taşpınar, "Turkey's Middle East Policies: Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism," Carnegie Papers, 2008
[304] Aydın Çakır, Arıkan Akdağ, "An Empirical Analysis of the Change in Turkish Foreign Policy under the AKP Government."
[305] Ziya Onis, Turkey and the Arab Revolutions: Boundaries of Regional Power Influence in a Turbulent Middle East.
[306] Özdamar, "Domestic Sources of Changing Turkish Foreign Policy Toward the MENA During the 2010s: A Role Theoretic Approach." .," p. 100,101.

shifting from one set of roles to another, such as from model and democratizer to regional leader, protector or by playing multiple roles at the same time to deal with new uncertainties. At the outset of the Arab Spring, Turkey shifted noticeably from 'zero-problem, soft power-based roles' to harder ones like instigating a self-identification converging with Islamic groups with, for example, ousted Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi.

In a dynamic region, the security environment and power relations have alarmed Turkey's optimism. In the meantime, Turkey has dramatically faced a complex network of alliances and fronts, including the Russian-Iranian alliance, the Arab axis (Saudi-Egyptian-UAE), and the US-European posture. Amid those events, Turkish foreign policy was at stake and had to either utilize soft tools and roles or cast around for more realistic policy alternatives to deal with the new structural constraints.

At the core of the Arab Spring uprisings, regional concerns about Turkey's active involvement in the events erupted. Here are two contentious debates to explain those concerns. The idealistic debate holds that Turkey's role during the uprisings was ethically justifiable in supporting political revolutions against regional tyrants through institutional means. On the other hand, the realistic debate involves two other sub-debates; the first acknowledges Turkey's response to the counter-revolutionary powers that have sought to overturn the recently formed Islamist regimes in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, while the second disputes Turkey's Syrian policy. Therefore, the paradoxical trend of the Turkish foreign policy role vis-à-vis Syria originated from three juxtaposed justifications:

1) To present Turkey as a positive and responsible player to defend Syrian citizens from the Syrian regime's persecution.

2) To depict Turkey as a loyal ally to the West, working together as NATO members to tackle the Syrian crisis.

3) To react to the wider public discourse on the sovereignty, security, and image of Turkey.[307]

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[307] Özlem Demirtas-Bagdonas, "Reading Turkey's Foreign Policy on Syria: The AKP's Construction of a Great Power Identity and the Politics of Grandeur," *Turkish Studies,*Vol. 15, No. 1 (2014),pp. 139–155.

At the regional and international levels, Erdogan notes that, although Turkey desired to enact cooperative roles, its foreign policy discourse "*about the Arab Spring and empowerment of the people was yet another hegemonic project: against the old world order but constructing itself as the new model or leader*."[308] This regional understanding of Turkey's recent hegemonic roles in the region was unlikely during the Arab Spring uprisings but eventually spurred regional skepticism and triggered counter-roles as follows:

4.1. Russian-Iranian Bloc

Historically, geopolitics has made Russia and Turkey adversaries, while economic interests and Eurasian identity make them friends.[309] being the '*axis of the excluded*'[310] or at least the '*liminal Others of European identity.*'[311] They are "*friends in times of weakness, while foes in times of strength.*"[312]This diagnosis interprets the ebbs and flows of their current relationship.

Despite their excellent economic relations, the Syrian crisis has propelled Moscow and Ankara in different directions. These contending postures on Syria arose from the following calculations:

1) Turkey's position on Syria seems to Russia as a sign of Turkey's strategic allegiance to the West.

2) Russia has actively supported Assad's regime to keep its strategic foothold in Syria as the only doorway to the Mediterranean Sea.

3) Russia's worst-case scenario in Syria is Turkey's Islamic tendency to fuel a Syrian sectarian war and the fear of transforming Syria into a new Afghanistan.

4) Russia has seized the opportunity of the Syrian game to fill the regional power vacuum.

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[308] Birsen Erdogan, *Humanitarian Intervention and the Responsibility to Protect: Turkish Foreign Policy Discourse*, p. 142.
[309] Şener Aktürk, "The Fourth Style of Politics: Eurasianism as a Pro-Russian Rethinking of Turkey's Geopolitical Identity," *Turkish Studies,* (2015); Şener Aktürk, "Turkey's Role in the Arab Spring and the Syrian Conflict," *Turkish policy quarterly*,Vol. 15, No. 4 (2017),p. 89.
[310] Fiona Hill and Omer Taspinar, "Turkey and Russia: Axis of the Excluded?," *Survival,*Vol. 48, No. 1 (2006),p.81.
[311] Viatcheslav Morozov and Bahar Rumelili, "The External Constitution of European Identity: Russia and Turkey as Europe-Makers," *Cooperation and Conflict,*Vol. 47, No. 1 (2012),pp. 28–48.
[312] Şener Aktürk, "Toward a Turkish-Russian Axis? Conflicts in Georgia, Syria, and Ukraine, and Cooperation over Nuclear Energy," *Insight Turkey,*Vol. 16, No. 4 (2014),p.21.

Turkey and Iran also compete for influence and status in the region while maintaining good economic relations. Despite historical differences, the revolutions in the Arab world ruined each other's roles and ideals. Iran represents an expulsive revolutionary role in expanding its influence in the region through Shia's resistance order.

The Syrian conflict caused a deterioration in Turkish-Iranian relations. Since 2011, Turkey has mostly criticized Iran on four geopolitical grounds. First, the influential Iranian support to the Syrian regime both before and during the Arab Spring. Second, Second, Iran's rising influence in Iraq since the US withdrawal and in Yemen has driven Turkey to take countermeasures to balance it. Third, Iran's discursive position in the Palestinian question and its future nuclear power status, in turn, give Iran more leverage over regional issues than Turkey. Fourth, Turkey believes that Russia's support for Iran's regional policy is a challenge to its NATO status; for example, Iran rejected Turkey's deployment of anti-ballistic missile defense systems along its borders during the Syrian crisis.[313]

4.2. Arab Bloc

Turkey emerged as the '*winner of the Arab Spring*'[314] and, consequently, incited the Arab regimes.[315] Since then, Turkey's role and status became the subject of debates from the two groups' perspectives. The first group expressed its disapproval of the Turkish roles during the revolutions. The group includes Gulf monarchies, except for Qatar and Kuwait. The second group includes the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated movements that still hope to see Turkey as a regional leader.

Saudi-Turkish relations gained momentum until the crisis of Qatar. In addition to their economic ties, both converged on regional concerns, such as creating a strategic Sunni bloc to offset Iran's regional influence. Nevertheless, their ideological and political

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[313] Mansoureh Ebrahimi, Kamaruzaman Yusoff, and Mir Mohamadali Seyed Jalili, "Economic, Political, and Strategic Issues in Iran–Turkey Relations, 2002–2015," *Contemporary Review of the Middle East,* Vol. 4, No. 1 (2017),p.80.

[314] Bilgin Ayata, "Turkish Foreign Policy in a Changing Arab World : Rise and Fall of a Regional Actor ? Turkish Foreign Policy in a Changing Arab World : Rise and Fall of a Regional Actor ?," *Journal of European Integration,* Vol. 37, No. 1 (2015),pp.95–112; Shibley Telhami et al., "2011 Annual Arab Public Opinion Survey," *University of Maryland*, 2011.

[315] Peter Seeberg, "Analysing Security Subcomplexes in a Changing Middle East—the Role of Non-Arab State Actors and Non-State Actors," *Palgrave Communications*, 2016, doi:10.1057/palcomms.2016.87.

calculations amid the uprisings have gradually led to further rifts over hostile Saudi attitudes towards Ikhwan and Qatar.[316]

With the advent of the Arab nationalist alliance of Egyptian President Sisi, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, and UAE Sheik Mohammed bin Zayed, the divide between Arabs and Turkey deepened. This pan-Arab axis has been critical of Turkey on a set of ideological and geopolitical arguments, including the following:
1) Turkey's championing of Muslim Brothers.
2) Turkey's growing regional influence and status in the Arab world meant Turkey intends to challenge the regional order supported by this axis and the US.
3) Turkey's political and military expansionist behavior in the region.

The axis's concern has risen sharply due to Turkey's military engagement in the region, as Turkey built a military base in Qatar and, at the same time, initiated the Red Sea Belt project. Geo-strategically, the planned project divides the Red Sea into two zones. The idea of the first zone is to rent the former Ottoman Suakin island of Sudan on the upper northern flank of the Red Sea for military and economic purposes. The island is located opposite the Saudi city of Jeddah. Moreover, the second zone is the lease of two military and economic bases in Somalia and Djibouti on the lower southern flank of the Red Sea.[317]

4.3.   US-Europe-Israel Bloc

Since 2011, the US and Europe have been cautious about ensuring that the Turkish roles and status do not surpass their expectations and influence sphere. They have frequently criticized Turkey for three factors:
1) Undermining Western and Kemalist values.
2) Growing anti-Western rhetoric and decline of human rights and freedoms.

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[316] Bülent Aras and Emirhan Yorulmazlar, "State , Region and Order : Geopolitics of the Arab," *Third World Quarterly,* Vol.37,No.12,(2016),pp. 2259-2273
[317] Mustafa Gurbuz, "Turkey's Challenge to Arab Interests in the Horn of Africa | ACW," *Arab Center Washington DC*, 2018, accessed August 25, 2019, http://arabcenterdc.org/policy_analyses/turkeys-challenge-to-arab-interests-in-the-horn-of-africa/; Giorgio Cafiero and Theodore Karasik, "Turkey's Move into the Red Sea Unsettles Egypt, Middle East Institute," *Middle East Institute*, 2018, accessed August 26, 2019, https://www.mei.edu/publications/turkeys-move-red-sea-unsettles-egypt.

3) Championing of religious groups.[318]

The divide between them has deepened because of showdowns regarding Turkey's Syria policy and tilting to Russia. First, Washington refused Turkey's repeated requests to impose a no-fly zone in northern Syria and instead switched to assist the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Second, just because Syria became split between the pro-Russian regime and the pro-US Kurdish groups, Syria has become the "*magnet that Russia used to lure in Turkey*"[319] and the testing ground for Turkey-US relations. Indeed, the US-Turkey relationship deteriorated following Turkey's acquisition of the Russian S-400 air defense system and its bid to purchase Su-57 fighter jets at the detriment of the US F-35 warplane deal.

Turkish activism in the region worsened the cordial ties between Turkey and Israel due to some factors such as the following: first, the resurgence of Islamic nationalism in Ankara foreshadowed a whole new page of precarious relations. Secondly, other developments have impacted these relations, including Turkey's regional role enactment of three roles *'protector of the oppressed Muslims'*, *'regional leader,'* and *'defender of the faith.'* Functionally, these roles have made Turkey committed to protecting Palestinians, particularly in Gaza, and criticizing Israel for occupation and aggression using two political instruments:

1) A discursive campaign, a 'war of words' against Israel, depicting it as a defective state, occupying Palestinian land and inhumane aggressor of Gaza.[320] This campaign escalated amid two diplomatic crises of the Mavi Marmara incident[321] and the 'low chair' humiliation of the Turkish ambassador to Israel. Such two incidents caused a 'war of

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[318] *Nihat Celik. Dilek, Oguz, Emre Iseri, "Turkey ' s Regional Powerhood Within Regional (In)Security Complex : Transformation From a Conflict-Ridden Environment Into a Security Community," Journal of Regional Security,* Vol.10, No. 2 (2015),pp. 155–176.

[319] Galip Dalay, "Why Is Turkey Betting on Russia?," *Brookings*, 2019, accessed September 3, 2019, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/07/15/why-is-turkey-betting-on-russia/.

[320] Tayyar Arı, Eman Sultan, "Role of Representations and Visual Images in Foreign Policy Decision Making and Constituting of Identities: Turkish Foreign Policy Towards the Palestinian Issue as a Case," International Affairs and Global Strategy, vol. 81 (2020), pp. 29–34. See also Hasan Köni, H, Kaos Batı Hâkimiyetinin Çöküşü, WizartEdutaintment, İstanbul, (2016), s.184

[321] Muzaffer Ercan Yılmaz, "Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Dönemde Türkiye-Orta Asya Türk Cumhuriyetleri İlişkileri", *Orta Asya ve Kafkasya Rekabetten İşbirliğine*, (Der. Tayyar Arı), MKM Yayıncılık, Bursa., (2010), 19.

national honor' between the two countries, where the Turkish elites and the public, in turn, unanimously decided to defend Turkish dignity against Israel.[322]

2) Diplomatic distancing measures, including reduction of Israeli diplomats to Second Secretary, cessation of formal economic and military ties, and denormalization of all relations until Israel apologizes, compensates for the casualties, and wounded of Mavi Marmara and terminates the Gaza blockade.[323]

In reaction to Turkey's active roles, the Israeli Government has often taken similar rhetorical and diplomatic measures, such as:

1) Discursively, Israeli officials frequently use a historical comparison between Turkey and Israel, portraying Turkey as a society with lesser morality. They argue that Turkey is not in the right position to protect the Palestinians since, according to Israeli General Avi Mizrahi, Turkey massacred Armenians during the First World War and oppresses Kurds.[324]Likewise, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu labeled Turkey's northeast Syrian

2) Since 2008, Israel has been interacting with Turkey through a tit-for-tat diplomatic style and political pressure from the US's powerful Israeli lobby.

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[322] Özlem Demirtaş-Bagdonas, "Politics of National Honor in Turkish-Israeli Relations: An Alternative Account of the Recent Tensions," *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi,*Vol. 10, No. 38 (2013),pp.100–125.
[323] Shira Efron, *The Future of Israeli- Turkish Relations* (RAND Corporation, 2018), p.11.
[324] Demirtaş-Bagdonas, "Politics of National Honor in Turkish-Israeli Relations: An Alternative Account of the Recent Tensions," p.116.

THIRD CHAPTER

IRAN'S NATIONAL ROLE CONCEPTIONS AND BEHAVIOR IN THE MIDDLE EAST SINCE THE 1980s

"Rely on the culture of Islam, resist Western imitation, and stand on your own feet"[325] (Khomeini 1981a: 304)

Since the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Iran has been seeking a regional power role and status in the region. For achieving this, Iran has utilized various means, including ideational and material incentives and capabilities. The Islamic revolution brought a new Iranian state identity to the front reversing that of the Pahlavi, who was based on the pan-Persian historical and cultural attributes and legacies. In those periods, the ideational sources of Iranian foreign policy were mainly the discursive emphasis on Iran as the Aryan civilization superior to the '*others*,' namely Arabs, Jews, and Turks. Iranian leaders have a self-proclaimed assumption that Iran is potential regional power and leader in the Middle East ipso facto for its unique history of civilization, geographical, and economic attributes. To confirm this, Supreme Leader Khamenei also stated:

> *"During the last decades, arrogant powers, led by the United States, had reduced regional states to a state of subjugation through their political and security ploys [...] But now, they are the primary target of disgust and hatred of the region's nations.*"[326]

Along with other regional actors in the Middle East, Iran has been articulating "*the pretension (self-conception) of a leading position*" since 1979.[327] The master role of Iran is a regional power status that needs regional recognition, roles, and strategies for fulfilling it. This claim to regional role and status has always been motivated by natural attributes such as its pivotal geography, historical legacies of ancient Persia, and civilizational experience. Recently, Iran has diversified its status-oriented roles regionally

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[325] Quoted in Daniel Flemes, *Regional Leadership in the Global System*, *Regional Leadership in the Global System*, 2016, p. 170.

[326] Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, "Ayatollah Khamenei's Message To Hajj Pilgrims," *The Office of the Supreme Leader*, 2011, https://www.leader.ir/en/content/8862/AYATOLLAH-KHAMENEI'S-MESSAGE-TO-HAJJ-PILGRIMS-2011.

[327] Detlef Nolte, "How to Compare Regional Powers: Analytical Concepts and Research Topics," *Review of International Studies*, vol. 36, no. 04 (2010), p. 893, doi:10.1017/s026021051000135x.

and globally, which according to Chafetz refers to two roles of anti-status quo as a "*regional leader with a tendency to a nuclear status as well as anti-imperialist to resist international threats.*"[328]

For achieving the regional power status in the Middle East, Iranian foreign policy behavior underwent different transformations along with various role conceptions translated discursively and practically. In general, Rakel presents two key foreign policy orientations of Iran: The *conservative elite*, who insists on the power of identity, and the Islamic revolution's norms to protect the Muslim nations and resist the imperialist West. The second elite emphasizes *pragmatist* and reformist policies and cooperative roles.[329] For more elaboration, Soltani and Amiri classify four different foreign policy orientations of Iran (ideological, realist, pragmatist, and reformist) from 1979 until now. Under Ayatollah Khomeini's guidance, the first orientation began with the revolution and concluded in the early 1990s. Throughout this time, Iran's foreign policy idealists underscored the principles of exporting revolution and protecting oppressed Muslims. The second orientation was the pragmatist foreign policy experienced under President Hashemi Rafsanjani's presidency under Khamenei's leadership from 1989 to 1997. This period opened the doors to normalization and collaboration with regional actors. The third orientation started with the advent of Khatami in 1997 and concluded in 2005. During this period, Iranian foreign policy witnessed domestic reforms, foreign relations developments with regional neighbors and gained an international reputation.[330] The fourth (realistic) orientation was observed during the presidency of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who conducted an offensive regional foreign policy and accommodationist pragmatic foreign policy strategy on the global level.[331] Moreover, Milani argues that "*the collapse of Saddam Hussein has accelerated Iran's transformation from a revolutionary to a regional status quo power in search of creating "spheres of*

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[328] Suzette Grillot Chafetz, Glenn, Hillel Abramson, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy : Belarussian and Ukrainian Compliance with the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime," *International Society of Political Psychology*, vol. 17, no. 4 (1996), p. 734.

[329] Eva Patricia Rakel, "Iranian Foreign Policy since the Iranian Islamic Revolution: 1979-2006," *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology*, vol. 6, no. 1–3 (2007), p. 166, doi:10.1163/156914907X207711.

[330] Fakhreddin Soltani, Reza Ekhtiari Amiri, "Foreign Policy of Iran after Islamic Revolution Foreign Policy of Iran after Islamic Revolution," *Journal of Politics and Law*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2010), p. 199,200.

[331] Farideh Farhi and Saideh Lotfian, "Iran's Post-Revolution Foreign Policy Puzzle,", in Henry R. Nau , and Deepa M. Ollapally, *Worldviews of Aspiring Powers : Domestic Foreign Policy Debates in China, India, Iran, Japan, and Russia*, Oxford University Press USA - OSO, 2012, p. 123.

influence."[332] It was also increasingly perceived as such, regardless of pending ideological paranoia between the two sides and unsolved territorial claims, particularly with the UAE.[333]

1. ROLE SOURCES

The Iranian regional role agential and structural sources mainly originate from various domestic and international opportunities and constraints. Domestically, the theological and cognitive sources and motives create the self-identification and self-images of Iranian decision-makers in the post-Islamic revolution era. Externally, both Iranian aspiration to regional leadership and regional challenges shape Iran's role sources.

1.1. Domestic Sources

The Iranian domestic role sources vary from ideational, including national identity, political Shi'ism, and Khomeinism. The latter source includes other sub-normative, geopolitical, and behavioral sources. Materially, Iran enjoys a massive petroleum wealth, huge population, ample military capabilities that qualify for regional power status.

1.1.1. Ideational Sources

In this regard, three ideational elements are revealed to mostly determine the evolution and revolution of Iranian foreign policy, which may otherwise be called political cultures of nationalism, socialism, and Islamism.

1.1.1.1. National Identity

The confluence of Iranian self-identification has been pillared on three bases 'Iranism, Islam, and Shi'ism.' These three components are bound and constitutively construct the new Iranian state identity. These three ideational elements develop a domestic discursive identity and a social identity representing the Iranian self-

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[332] Mohsen M Milani, "Iran's Transformation from Revolutionary to Status Quo Power in the Persian Gulf," 2003.

[333] Nonneman, *Anal. Middle East Foreign Policies Relatsh. with Eur.*, p. 25.

comparison against '*others*' in the international hierarchy.[334] Akbarzadeh and Barry argue that 'Iranism' is still useful and cannot be reduced to Islamism in understanding Iranian identity in the post-Revolution. They view Iran's roles for the region as being conceptualized on more geopolitical ambition than ideational motivation.[335] Referring to Iranism-based identity, Ehteshami notes that "*historically, fears and perceptions of foreign interference have formed the basis of Iranian nationalism,*"[336] and Akbarzadeh and Barry posit that "*Iranism does not exist as a separate competing identity to Islam, but rather sits at one end of the Iranian identity continuum.*"[337]

By referring to Persian nationalism, Iranian leaders attempt to converge with the nationalist movements domestically and manipulating the anti-Shia discourse regionally. It also covers a broader national pride as Iranism includes the Persian language, Shia doctrine, oriental belonging and mysticism, and historical heritage. Unlike general misperceptions about domestic sources of Iran's regional roles, Iranism is an indispensable driver for Iran's foreign policy vision and orientation towards the region. Akbarzadeh and Barry argue that Iranism has a connotation with Iran's geopolitical 'strategic depth' as quoted in the speech of Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to refer to a geopolitical identity as:

> "*We also have important capacities outside our country. We have supporters; we have (strategic depth) in the region and the country because of Islam, [Persian] language, and the Shi'a sect. These are the strategic depth of the country.*"[338]

1.1.1.2. Political Shi'ism

Pan-Islamism has become more significant in use since the ascendancy of the Islamic revolution. It brought about politicized Shi'ism that is built upon revolutionary Shi'ism. Furthermore, although the internal dispute on the politicization of Shi'ism over Persian identity, there was a plausible sympathy for religious nationalism at the early

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[334] Mahdi Mohammad Nia, "Understanding Iran's Foreign Policy: An Application of Holistic Constructivism Mahdi Mohammad Nia *," vol. 9, no. 1 (2010), p. 153.
[335] Shahram Akbarzadeh, James Barry, "State Identity in Iranian Foreign Policy," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 43, no. 4 (2016), pp. 613–29, doi:10.1080/13530194.2016.1159541.
[336] Anoushiravan Ehteshami, A, "The Foreign Policy of Iran," 2002, p. 284.
[337] Akbarzadeh, Barry, "State Identity in Iranian Foreign Policy," p. 612.
[338] cited, p. 613.

stage of revolution against the monarchical system for its subservience to Western powers.

Shia Islamism became the theological and ideological dynamic of Iran's messianic and political arenas from the 16th Safavid empire until the current Islamist government of the Islamic Republic of Iran.[339] Shi'ism revived to bring opportunities and risks to Iran and the region. It reconciles political Shi'ism in terms of revolutionary culture with judicial Shi'ism in Shia's interpretation of Islamic clerical governance. Historically, in the seventh century, political Shi'ism started to reflect the first Islamic progressive move against Yazid I's autocratic and corrupt Umayyad leadership. This systemic interpretation of the Karbala tragedy is nothing more than a symbolic and strategic effort to bypass the Arab identity and 'selves' of which Hussein and the Prophet House (Ahl al-Bayt) belong. Another aim is to attach them to the Shia and Persian 'selves' as messianic attributes restricted to Shia's identity fighting and struggling for justice and goodness. In the mid-1960s and 1970s, and after the advent of the Islamic revolution in Iran, this anecdote has returned drastically and resoundingly to become one of the most significant foundations and ideals of Imam Khomeini and Iran's state identity to this day.[340]

The Safavid state arose as the second stage of political Shi'ism in the region. It followed the Shia doctrine and became an essential part of the state's culture and official state religion, starting in 1501. On the other side, the ideological-political goal of the Safavids was to form an identity that distinguishes them from other competing identities in the geopolitical context, especially the Sunni Ottomans and the Uzbeks.[341] Indeed, this first Iranianized Shia revival was initiated during the Safavid state to counter the 'Other' of the Ottoman empire. According to Vali Nasr:

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[339] Imad Salamey, Zanoubia Othman, "Shia Revival and *Welayat Al-Faqih* in the Making of Iranian Foreign Policy," *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, vol. 12, no. 2 (2011), p. 200, doi:10.1080/21567689.2011.591983.
[340] Manochehr Dorraj, "Symbolic and Utilitarian Political Value of a Tradition: Martyrdom in the Iranian Political Culture," *Review of Politics*, vol. 59, no. 3 (1997), pp. 489–521, doi:10.1017/S0034670500027698; Kamran Aghaie, "The Karbala Narrative: Shii Political Discourse in Modern Iran in the 1960s and 1970s," *Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2 (2001), pp. 151–76.
[341] Shabnam J. Holliday, *Defining Iran:Politics of Resistance*, ashgate Publishing limited, 2011, p. 58.

"The Safavids were the champions of Shia aspirations to regional hegemony. The Safavid model was not ruled by the imams but power to the shahs. The Safavid dynasty was a new kind of vehicle for Shia ambitions."[342]

There is a prevailing belief in Iran that Shia Islam was Iranianized during the Safavid state era at the beginning of the Sixteenth century to credit the Iranians a kind of exceptionalism that they later used to establish a sense of distinction and independence. Indeed, Iranian narratives and legends tell that the Twelfth Imam is likely analogous to ancient legendary protagonists who liberated Persia from hegemonic and humiliating powers. Hence the historical and ideological relationship between Shia culture and Persian nationalism has grown and developed together. Then, without a doubt, the Shia political discourse of both the Safavid state and Khomeinist Iran are relatively similar. Functionally, both constructed an Iranianized Shi'ism as a dual pillar to promote the historic-victim discourse and justify their ethnoreligious demands for avenging the humiliating politics for Persia and the marginalization of Shia minorities.[343]

Without a doubt, the cross-fertilization between different Iranian intellectual trends all formulated the Iranian foreign policy object and orientation in the world. However, regardless of these intellectual tendencies, they imbibed Shia's revolutionary philosophy of resistance and anti-Western domination. Namely, Iranian thinkers such as Jalal Al-e-Ahmad in his famous idea 'gharbzadagī' (Westoxication) along with the idea of Ali Shariati's return to the 'Self,' which both interpret the communal consensus on anti-imperialism and revolutionism within and beyond Iran.[344] Surprisingly, the Iranian scholar Vali Nasr refers to the ideas of the Marxist and liberal Iranian intellectual Ali Shariati as some of 'modernist tendencies' to Shia politics of revolution since he:

"Saw Shi'ism as a creed of revolution. Its history told the tale of a grand quest for justice. Its saints were revolutionary heroes. He saw Imam Husayn as a seventh-century Che Guevara and Karbala as a revolutionary drama. Shia history was none other than the famous dialectic of class war, culminating in a revolution. It had all begun in Karbala and would end with an Iranian revolution."[345]

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[342] Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, New York • London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006, p. 49.
[343] Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism*, Syracuse University Press, 1996.
[344] For further details about the influence of the Shia ideology in the Iranian philosophy of revolution, see Holliday, *Defining Iran:Politics of Resistance*.
[345] Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, p. 96.

As for the third approach, it was represented by Imam Khomeini in two main principles: Islamic governance through thefaqihof the Islamic Jurist on the one hand and confronting the '*binary other*' of the internal Shah regime dubbed as (Iranian Yazid) and the external Western domination on the other hand. The Iranian foreign policy has articulated regional role conceptions based on a religious culture-discourse and populist Shia doctrinal actions. Thus, Stein posits that:

> *"Ideology pervades public spheres to shape conceptions of national identity, legitimizing some political narratives while delegitimizing others. Populist ideological claims, however, must be validated through action."*[346]

Hence the influence of the new leadership is reflected in the orientations of Iran's foreign and security policy. Furthermore, despite the transformations of foreign policy decision-makers, domestic demands, and the regional and international system, Iran's regional status-seeking behavior has been mainly based on its competitive strategy towards the region as the guardian of Islam and the protector of oppressed people. In the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War 1980-1988, Imam Khomeini introduced the rule of Jurist, known as the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist (*Vilayat-el Faqih*) as an Islamic governance law. As a result of this modification, Fürtig and Gratius confirm that "*the Vilayat-el Faqih concept fulfilled every precondition of ideology; it was henceforth not (Shia) Islam but a specific form of Islamism; an ideology that was to be exported.*"[347]

As state identity and associated role conceptions are constitutively shaped by each other, Khomeini-made Iran is historically viewed by its people and leaders as a political victim and regional grandeur. Both historical ideals motivate Iranians to seek regional and international power status.[348] The *Islamic Revolutionary Model*: the Iranian regional policies and strategies in the post-Iranian revolution have been articulated based on exporting the Islamic revolution and its norms to the whole Muslim world Umma. According to Saleh and Worrall, this model is contingent on "*Islamic revolutionary identity,' which three constitutive elements Third Worldism, Ummah, Shi'ism.*"[349]

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[346] Stein, "Ideological Codependency and Regional Order: Iran, Syria, and the Axis of Refusal," p. 677.

[347] Fürtig and Gratius, "Iran and Venezuela: ideology-driven Foreign policies in Comparison", In Flemes, *Reg. Leadersh. Glob. Syst.*, p. 171.

[348] Gülden Ayman, "Regional Aspirations and Limits of Power-Turkish-Iranian Relations in the New Middle East," p. 88.

[349] Alam Saleh, James Worrall, "Between Darius and Khomeini: Exploring Iran's National Identity Problematique," *National Identities*, vol. 17, no. 1 (2015), p. 87, doi:10.1080/14608944.2014.930426.

This ideational source has three objectives: to unify the Muslim world as a significant *self* against *others* (Westerners), to mobilize the oppressed people either Muslims or no-Muslims against the imperialists, and to offset the regional status quo. However, the 'Islamic revolutionary model' became part and parcel of Iran's discursive and soft power. Therefore, Iranian leaders and elites do not shy away to mention this ideological policy. For example, in the post-Arab Spring revolutions, Qassim Soleimani, Iran's Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) Commander announced, "*we are witnessing the export of the Islamic revolution throughout the region.*"[350]

1.1.1.3. Khomeinism: Khomeini's Legacy

The other form of Iranian religious identity, known as the State Identity in the IR, has evolved and flourished during the Islamic Republic period. The accumulation of revolutionary philosophy, Shia revival, and international dynamics that had preceded the Islamic revolution all together inspired and enriched the ideas of Imam Khomeini to develop and turn into geopolitical and operational formulae in terms of ideational source for the identity of Iran's regional role. Iran would not have been in its geopolitical position and its current role if the role of the Shia identity and space had no awareness, understanding, and employment in Iran's foreign policymaking. This made Khomeini's Islamic thoughts and revolutionary ideas justified, accepted, and supported by nationalist and leftist currents in general.

By examining Khomeini's revolutionary legacy, Iranian composite identity was not the primary source and motive behind the Islamic revolution but two other geopolitical and economic sources. As for the first source, the Iranian Shia thought in its three classical forms: the historical (Karbala narrative and the concept of the people of the house), the politician (the Safavid era) and (the Islamic Republic of Iran), and the ideological (Twelver and the jurisdiction of the Faqih) all crossed with the Khomeinist revolutionary cross-border dimension. All these elements intertwined with the revolutionary nationalist element to produce the fourth form of Iranian identity, which is today called 'Shi revival,' a purely geopolitical term that explains Iran's current trends and roles in the region. The economic source of Khomeini's ideology is based on

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[350] Karim Sadjadpour, Behnam Ben Taleblu, "Iran in the Middle East: Leveraging Chaos," 2015, p. 6.

allegations and narratives, stating that Iran's abundant oil wealth has made it the locus of global imperialism. He deems this as Iran constitutes close to a quarter of the world's oil and gas reserves in both the Gulf region and the Caspian Sea and its outlook and control of the Strait of Hormuz as one of the most important international shipping routes.

Moreover, geopolitics is another structural source in Iranian strategic thinking. Iran's central geographical location stretches between three cultural and ethnic areas, Asian, Turkmen, and Arab, competing for Sunni doctrines that made these regions threatening environments for its ontological and ideological existence. Imam Khomeini and mollahs frequently remind Iranians of these threats, as the wars fought between the Ottomans and the Safavids and the eight-year war with Iraq.

As far as the Khomeinist legacy is a gist of the ethnoreligious identity of Iran, this collective identity has ideal goals and expectations— in the geopolitics of Shias. Although Khomeini's norms and roles aim at building an imagined Shia crescent, another set of national values back this Shia geopolitics. The Islamic revolution has initially injected the normative approach in Iranian foreign policymaking, which later went to the behavioral approach stage— national role conceptions. According to the latter approach, Iran has tirelessly continued to translate the external dimension of the Shia revolutionary concepts in its vital ideological spheres, whether religious (Shia societies or movements) or non-Shia revolutionary groups, for example, Hamas and the Taliban. The following three approaches are discussed as the following:

1.1.1.3.1. Normative-Revolutionary Approaches

This normative approach is based on three concepts: justice, injustice, and independence. These concepts from Khomeini's perspective are based on four ethical rules:

1) The Islamic rule that Imam Khomeini believes in his highness and efficacy in invigorating the Islamic nation.

2) The mandate of the Islamic jurist and its necessity from Khomeini's perspective lies in assuming a just Imam that would spread justice and unite the Muslim nation until the

emergence and return of the twelfth imam from his crypt to fill the world with justice and safety.

3) The Islamic principles of solidarity and interdependence would bring Muslims together in economic, intellectual, and security matters. These principles are ideologically presented in the Iranian Islamic theory of 'the global Islamic community' or 'Ummah.'

4) The principle of 'revolutionary Shi'ism,' which is a political ideology that distinguishes Shia thought from the Sunni in the idea of resistance to the imperialist tyranny and martyrdom to achieve universal justice and independence and resist dependency in the mantle of the capitalist West.[351]

1.1.1.3.2. Geopolitical Approaches

Geopolitical approaches of Iran stand for the 'spatial identity' and known *Shia geopolitics*. This Shia theorization model is based on the principle of expansion in Iran's strategic depths, beginning in countries with the Shia majority, the Shia minority, then the periphery— a group without Shias but with a revolutionary inclination. In theory, at least, the Shia geopolitics revolves around four expansionist goals in the Islamic world, and they are as follows:

- Islamic-Persian Iran

This was put forward in the cradle of the Islamic Republic of Iran after the revolution by the first president of Iran, Mahdi Bazargan, who aimed to find two vital areas in the Islamic and Persian worlds so that Iran's influence is not limited to the Persian geographical field.

- Global Islamic Governance

These theories are divided into two parts: (1) The state of 'Umm al-Qura,' proposed by Mohammed Javad Larijani, in his book 'Quotes in the Iranian National Strategy,' and the content of this thesis is centered on the Iranian capacity gives it the right to lead in the Islamic world. (2) The theory of the 'global Mahdi state' proposed and formulated by former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad that the Iranian regime

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[351] Kasra Aarabi, "The Fundamentals of Iran's Islamic Revolution," *Tony Blair Institute for Global Change*, 2019, https://institute.global/insight/co-existence/fundamentals-irans-islamic-revolution.

based on the principle of the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist is only an interim government through which the world crosses into the era of the global Mahdi state.

- The Iranian Middle East Project

This project is a revised version of the American version and aims, according to the perspective of former Iranian President Mohammad Khatami, to build a Middle East project based on the Islamic project that Iran will adopt to replace Western hegemony and its regional agents.

- Exporting Islamic Revolution

This approach is about exporting the Islamic revolution to all the world peoples, reeling under the weight of arrogance and domination. This thesis is the spirit of Khomeini's thought related to the universality of the Iranian Islamic revolution. According to this perspective, Iran should retain two main goals, the liberation of the oppressed and the promotion and consolidation of the principle of Islamic jurisprudence.[352]

In sum, these plausible theories explore the Iranian 'from home to the world ambition,' which may be referred to as 'Iranian grandeur.' According to Sultan Al-Nuaimi, the Islamic revolutionary regime of Iran is only one step towards the fifth end where:

> *"The Iranian revolution…goes through five stages: the Islamic revolution, then the Islamic regime, then the Islamic government, then the Islamic state, and finally the global Islamic civilization ... and it is now in the third phase."*[353]

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[352] Firas Elias, "Al-Jiubulitik Al-Shi'ayei Wal-Mukhila Al-Jyustratijia Al'Iranyah: Majalat Al-Taathir Wa-Bina' Al-Nufudh [Shia Geopolitics and Iran's Geo-Strategic Imagination: Areas of Influence and Influence Building," 2019.
[353] Sultan Al-Nuaimi, "Alsyasa Alkharjya Al'iirania Bayn Almrtkz Wal Mutaghayar[Iranian Foreign Policy between the Centered and the Variable]," *Abayan*, (2018), https://www.albayan.ae/one-world/arabs/2018-11-20-1.3413960.

1.1.1.3.3. Behavioral Approaches

As for the behavioral and functional level of Iran's foreign policy, it is that which falls between the two places, meaning that they are the national roles that have been translated and transformed by the Iranian political elite into the responsibilities and duties towards the region that were mentioned in their normative and geopolitical map. In an ideal way, Iran has monitored a list of national roles that act as functional intermediaries between the normative and geopolitical agendas. Of course, Iran's foreign policy's behavior since the Islamic revolution has been characterized by revisionism and dissatisfaction with the international status quo.

For example, the operational dimension—regional roles—was added to Iran's ideas. For example, the idea of resistance has rendered Iran the leader of the resistance axis; the idea of revolutionary Shi'ism has converted Iran into a bastion of revolution; the idea of independence has transformed Iran into an anti-imperialist-Zionist agent; the idea of justice has justified Iran's role as protector of the oppressed peoples. Thus, the Khomeinian elite believes that Iran can become a great moral power and a leader of the Islamic nation after the diffusion of those revolutionary principles.

1.1.2. Material Sources

Material sources of Iranian roles are those national capacities and capabilities in terms of geographic location, economic resources, military, cultural and population homogeneity, level of modernization, size of the state [large or small], while the second raises the level of development of the state [developed or backward]. This chart represents Iran's population size, GDP, military expenditure updated for the year 2017.

Table 3: **Material Sources of Iran**

Country	Population	GDP 2017	Mil. Expends. (Mil. USD) SIPRI	Mil. Expends. as % of GDP World Bank
Turkey	80.7M	851,549	17.824	2.2
Iran	81,162	454,012	13.931	3.1
S. Arabia	32,938	686,738	70.400	10.3
Egypt	97,553	235,369	2.766 SIPRI	1.3
Israel	8,713	353,268	15.582	4.7

https://data.worldbank.org and https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex.

Geopolitically, Iran is situated in a geostrategic location in the South-West of Asia, north of the Gulf sub-region, the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Caspian Sea, making it a bridge between the East and West. In this pivotal geography, Iran is adjacent to the Strait of Hormuz's strategic oil shipping route, through which around 100 oil ships across per month. Additionally, it intersects two oil-rich sub-regions, the Gulf, and the Caspian Sea, which contain two of the World's largest oil and gas reserves. Militarily, Iran's manpower is around an active number of 220,000 out of its general amount of 545,000. Its active personnel is made up of 18-month conscripts that receive only three months of military training. Iran's military supremacy is based on the Navy's capabilities to launch offensive attacks on foreign military threats in the Gulf region and the Strait of Hormuz. Its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' (IRGC), with its manpower of 125,000 manpower, is another powerful army corps specialized in asymmetric warfare. In addition to conventional weaponry capacity, Iran has developed a more significant number of missile stockpiles and inventories, which might exceed those of the Middle East's regional powers.[354] Beyond the Islamist regime worldviews, Barzegar argues that:

> *"Today, the nuclear program is perceived as a matter of technological advancement, national pride, and solidarity that bolsters Iranian identity and status regionally and internationally."*[355]

1.1.3. Instrumental Sources (Employment of Foreign Policy Instruments)

Iran's instrumental power has three constitutive tools of foreign policy activism: discursive, material, and institutional.

1.1.3.1. Foreign Policy Discourse

The Iranian foreign policy discourse vis-à-vis the Middle East is commonly ideology-driven. The Iranian discursive power has usually been utilized to critique every 'other' identity and policy that resists Imam Khomeini's worldviews except for those who go in line with the Iranian-led axis of the resistance. The binary basis of Iranian discourse hinges on *justice* and *injustice*; thus, Iran's revolutionary logic dictates that the world is

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[354] Ali Rahigh-Aghsan, Peter Viggo Jakobsen, "The Rise of Iran: How Durable, How Dangerous?," *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 64, no. 4 (2010), pp. 559–73, doi:10.3751/64.4.13.
[355] Kayhan Barzegar, "Iran's Foreign Policy Strategy after Saddam," *Washington Quarterly*, vol. 33, no. 1 (2010), p. 184, doi:10.1080/01636600903430665.

fragmented in just and unjust forces.[356] In general, Iranian discursive power has been determined by structural factors such as national interests and geopolitical dynamics and ideational factors such as nationalism and Islamism. In this regard, the Iranian discourse of identity and role revolves around a set of concepts and signifiers as the following:

1. The discourse of pan-Islamism as solidarity and governance theology.
2. Revolutionary Islamic discourse is reflected in two pillars, Shi'ism in terms of resistance against oppression and hegemony and global Islamic governance that is expected to be performed by the rise of Mahdi's Ghaybah (occultation).
3. The discourse of the 'Iranian role model' versus other models has always been grounded on the binary signifier of the Orient versus the West and independence versus puppetism to Western powers.

In order to internationalize its role agenda, Iran has sought ceaselessly to make a comparative political discourse. The Iranian foreign policy discourse has a two-level discourse that consists of the self-dominated discourse and other-dominated discourse. Moreover, to construct a collective role identity discourse, Iran has been actively projecting its discursive power on moral content 'Iranian role model representation' and political content 'Iranian role model internationalization.' Indeed, this dual political discourse abounds with a rich set of linguistic signifiers; the first expresses the Iranian role model 'revolutionary model' and the other (other-oriented) to the region to address the arrogant and oppressed, respectively.

Firstly, in the case of the discourse and presentation of role model, the Iranian elite aims to polarize and magnify the role of the Iranian Islamic revolution and its associated normative concepts and norms. In this internal context, the political elite seeks first to consolidate the regime's survival by making them rhetorically convinced and proud of the Islamic revolution as a source of self-identification. About the revolutionary

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[356] Homeira Moshirzadeh, "Discursive Foundations of Iran's Nuclear Policy," vol. 38, no. 4 (2007), pp. 521–43, doi:10.1177/0967010607084999; Mahdi Mohammad Nia, "Discourse and Identity in Iran's Foreign Policy," *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs*, vol. 3, no. 3 (2012), pp. 29–64; Reza Abedi Gonabad, Ebrahim Fayaz, Ahmad Naderi, "Review of Discourse Components of Islamic Republic of Iran in the Middle East," *Journal of Politics and Law*, vol. 10, no. 5 (2017), pp. 105–15, doi:10.5539/jpl.v10n5p105; Siavash Saffari, "Two Pro-Mostazafin Discourses in the 1979 Iranian Revolution," *Contemporary Islam*, vol. 11, no. 3 (2017), pp. 287–301, doi:10.1007/s11562-017-0396-4; Mansoor Moaddel, "Ideology as Episodic Discourse : The Case of the Iranian Revolution," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 57, no. 3 (1992), pp. 353–79.

role model, the discourse of 'we-ness' dominated the public sentiment and fueled a flora of signifiers and frames such as 'we did,' 'we could,' 'Iran could,' 'Iran changed,' etc. As the Islamic revolutionary train endures and international criticism of such revisionism lingers, the Iranian foreign policy discourse still gives a breath to the public and turns the challenges into a matter of constructive antagonism.

The discourse of role model representation mainly addresses the core concept of the Islamic revolution, namely, Westoxification, that has ever justified Iranian discursive claims over independence and resistance.[357] In the aftermath of the Islamic revolution, the first reference to independence was Imam Khomeini's motto 'Neither East nor West,' and on this basis, Iran established its foreign policy approach and constructed its role identity as an independent state. According to Moshirzadeh, in her reference to the assertive Iranian role of an independent state, she puts three background narratives of independence discourse are "*Iran's glorious past; historical victimization by invaders; and (semi)-colonial/imperial encounters*."[358]

Secondly, in the 'role model discourse' as a foreign policy internationalizing tool, the Iranian role identity manifests consistency and sustainability with subtle fluctuation according to the ruling faction and orientation. On three key pillars, Iran's regional-oriented discourse has concentrated on regional independence, resistance, and justice.[359] However, these pillars shaped the Iranian role identity and determined it as a 'mission-oriented state.'

As a source of semantic power, the Iranian political discourse attempts to address the two faces of *other,* the *significant other* as the arrogant, oppressor, colonial etc., and the significant *other* as the victim, oppressed and colonized. Such othering discourse is only to justify Iran's role-making that would meet the expectations of the imagined oppressed others. As for each one of these targets, the objectives of political discourse commit to (1) criticizing/negating the mandatory acts of Western domination and imperialism 'Nafy-e Sabil'; (2) convincing them to alter-cast their anti-Iran roles and its regional agenda; (3) indoctrinating Iranian-identified oppressed peoples and governments

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[357] Kasra Aarabi, "The Fundamentals of Iran's Islamic Revolution," p. 45.
[358] Moshirzadeh, "Discursive Foundations of Iran's Nuclear Policy," p. 529.
[359] Moshirzadeh, "Discursive Foundations of Iran's Nuclear Policy," pp. 521–43. See also Holliday, *Defining Iran:Politics of Resistance*.

in the Iranian revolutionary role model. To achieve this, Iran found two ways: raising their concerns in the international community and persuading them to join the Iranian-led axis of resistance. To this end, the purpose of this is to construct a collective role identity (one Ummah, one role) able to deconstruct the imperialist *other*.

As is evident in most manifestations of Imam Khomeini and the Supreme Leader's speeches, there are clear symbolic connotations that reflect the concepts of the Iranian role in the region. The lexical metaphors, frames, and signifiers sit under thematic adjectives such as oppressed and oppressive, just and unjust world, friend and enemy; obligatory models such as *we/Iran should* export (revolution); defend (the faith); resist (imperialism); protect (the oppressed) and ensure (Islamic solidarity); and frames such as Great Satan (US).

In reference to the political discourse on anti-imperialism and Zionism, Iranian leaders consider them two sides of one West coin that dominate 66 percent of their discourse as drivers behind Iran's revolutionary identity.[360] To the Iranian scholar Mohammad Nia:

> *"Anti-western revolutionary identity' is considered as the nodal point of Iran's foreign policy discourse in relation to which signs and moment are organized in a chain of equivalence that gives meaning to the country's foreign policy behavior."*[361]

From the very beginning, Iran, under its first Constitution following the Islamic revolution, has been committed to Article 152 that says, *"we have to support all oppressed people around the world...because Islam....is supporter of all oppressed people."*[362] While in reference to imperial hegemony and oppression, Supreme leader Imam Khamenei said:

> *"We would never tolerate hegemonic behavior...and countering global hegemonic system and to overrule the oppressed-oppressors equation is an inseparable indicative of our diplomacy."*[363]

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[360] Moshirzadeh, "Discursive Foundations of Iran's Nuclear Policy," pp. 521–43; Shadi Gholizadeh, Derek W. Hook, "The Discursive Construction of the 1978-1979 Iranian Revolution in the Speeches of Ayatollah Khomeini," *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2012), pp. 174–86, doi:10.1002/casp.1095; Mahdi Mohammad Nia, "Understanding Iran's Foreign Policy: An Application of Holistic Constructivism," *Alternatives :Turkish Journal Of International Relations*, vol. 9, no. 1 (2010), pp. 148–80, doi:10.21599/atjir.20134; Kasra Aarabi, "The Fundamentals of Iran's Islamic Revolution."
[361] Mahdi Mohammad Nia, "Discourse and Identity in Iran's Foreign Policy," p. 37.
[362] Mahdi Mohammad Nia, "Understanding Iran's Foreign Policy: An Application of Holistic Constructivism," p. 155.
[363] cited, p. 158.

In reference to anti-Zionist discourse, about 40 percent of Imam Khomeini was about Israel who framed it as "*a cancerous tumor that must be eradicated*"[364] among other anti-Zionism frames are like 'Zionist regime,' 'wolf-like,' 'savages,' 'creatures who have no human qualities,' 'a parasite in the heart of the Muslim world,' 'apartheid,' 'wild and outlaw,' 'illegitimate regime,' and 'criminal Zionist regime.' A resonant statement of Zarif in 2018 said, "*what makes the Zionist enemy more courageous is our [Muslim] lack of unity.*"[365]

In reference to the role of protection of oppressed people, supreme leader Khamenei in 2015 confirmed that:

> "*We will not abandon our regional friends: the oppressed people of Palestine, the oppressed people of Yemen, the people and government of Syria, the people and government of Iraq, the oppressed people of Bahrain and the sincere mujahids of the Resistance in Lebanon [Hezbollah] and Palestine [Hamas and Islamic Jihad]. These people will always enjoy our support.*"[366]

In reference to Iran as a bastion of revolution, Iran's foreign policy discourse has pointed out the important role of Shia Islamist ideology to be exported to the region. The paragon of the Islamic revolution, Imam Khomeini, 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.*"[367]

In reference to the 'resistance axis leader,' the Iranian foreign policy discourse aims to present Iran as a magnet of regional revisionism and counter-domination.[368] Beyond this institutionalized discourse, Iran labels itself as a symbol of the imperial victim. In other words, this discourse of resistance is inspired by revolutionary Shia ideology, which over

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[364] Kasra Aarabi, "The Fundamentals of Iran's Islamic Revolution," p. 6.
[365] cited, p. 28.
[366] Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, "Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, Second Sermon Speech at Eid Ul-Fitr Prayers," (07/18/2015), http://english.khamenei.ir/news/2102/ Leader-s-sermons-at-Eid-ul-Fitr-prayers.
[367] Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, "Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Speech on Eve of the Iranian New Year,Tehran, Iran," (03/21/1980), https://bit.ly/2t9fM0l.
[368] Shabnam J. Holliday, *Defining Iran: Politics of Resistance*, *Defining Iran*, Routledge, 2016. See also

history "*dictated political change through revolutionary action and glorified martyrdom and self-sacrifice.*"[369]

To justify the role of resistance axis geopolitics, Iran draws its regional discourse by ideological, sectarian, and normative content in addition to a set of rhetorical frames and signifiers. Such content encompasses pan-Islamism, revolutionary Shia concepts, and independence, symbolized in several signifiers being "*collectively constructed myths and symbols*"[370] such as the 'Battle of Karbala as a symbol of rival good versus evil'; 'foreign conspiracy'; 'martyrdom of Imam Hussein.'[371] In contrast, frames of Iranian discourse are plausible in leaders' speech acts, including Imam Khomeini's 'Great Satan' referring to the US and "*decadent and out of touch with its own people*"[372] about the House of Saud. About this role, amongst uncountable speeches of this sort, Iranian President Rouhani stressed:

> *"We are all united and coherent in seeking to flourish the flag of tawhid [monotheism in Islam], Islam, independence and resistance throughout the Islamic world and against the oppressors, and we have no doubt that if we continue to stand, the ultimate victory will be ours."*[373]

Noticeably, the dossier of the Iranian nuclear program recently became another source of resistance culture. The international allegations and suspicion about the intention of Iran's nuclear program have culminated into a new source of threat perception for the West. In response to this growing Western threat perception, President Trump imposed a package of maximum pressure on Iran, which the latter has reciprocated with maximum resistance.

Since the rise of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the earlier perspective of the leader Ayatollah Khomeini claimed the Shia based symbols of resistance by referring historically to the Battle of Karbala as the symbol of 'rival good versus evil' and

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[369] Mansoor Moaddel, "Ideology as Episodic Discourse : The Case of the Iranian Revolution," p. 370.

[370] Gholizadeh, Hook, "The Discursive Construction of the 1978-1979 Iranian Revolution in the Speeches of Ayatollah Khomeini," p. 176.

[371] Gholizadeh, Hook, "The Discursive Construction of the 1978-1979 Iranian Revolution in the Speeches of Ayatollah Khomeini," pp. 174–86.

[372] Kelkitli Fatma Aslı, "Saudi-Iranian Entanglements in the Persian Gulf: Is Rapprochement Possible," *Milletleraras*, vol. 47, no. 0 (2016), p. 27, doi:10.1501/intrel_0000000306.

[373] Kasra Aarabi, "The Fundamentals of Iran's Islamic Revolution," p. 32.

resistance against the tremendous Satan-the US and the conspiracy of foreign *others*.[374] Although the Iranian nuclear program has origins of pragmatic and rational objectives, it also has a discursive power for Iran's foreign policy behavior, national pride, and national identity. Thus, Iran's nuclear ambition can be explained as a result of the discourses of independence, resistance, and international justice and, as a discursive power, tended to enhance the status of Iran as an aspiring regional power.

1.1.3.2. Foreign Policy Institutions

As a regional power, Iran has also sought a regional power role and status by foreign policy-making institutions. This section presents some of these institutional instruments that shape directly or indirectly foreign policymaking. Five key institutions categorize the complex apparatus of Iran's foreign policymaking:

1. The leadership or the *Vilayat-el Faqih* (Ruler-Jurisconsult). This is the highest authority in the foreign policy complex, which operated through other sub-institutions, including (a) foreign affairs reflections in Friday prayers. (b) the IRGC and the Supreme National Security Council. (c) the Supreme leader's representatives abroad. (d) Islamic Revolutionary organizations committed to disseminating ideological values of the Islamic Revolution, including Islamic Propagation Organization, Organization of Islamic Culture and Communications, and the Centre for Promoting Proximity Between the Islamic Religions.
2. The Supreme National Security Council.
3. The Islamic Consultative Assembly is also concerned with three main tasks: (a) supervising international agreements, (b) legal monitoring of foreign policy issues, (c) evaluating foreign decision-making by a foreign policy commission.
4. The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps leads five tasks related to foreign affairs: (a) representing military issues in Iran embassies in ally states and security concerned, (b) coordinating with and backing proxy groups in the axis of resistance locations, (c) reporting to the Supreme National Security Council, (d) lobbying the

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[374] Gholizadeh, Hook, "The Discursive Construction of the 1978-1979 Iranian Revolution in the Speeches of Ayatollah Khomeini," pp. 174–86.

supreme leader for regional issues, (e) shaping propaganda in foreign policymaking through think tanks such as the Centre for Strategic Studies.

5. The State Expediency Discernment Council (*Majmae Tashkheeseh Maslahate Nezam*).

6. Bureau of Liberation Movements was established to provide ideological and material support to regional Islamic revolutionary movements.[375]

1.2. External Motivations and Constraints

International and regional opportunities and constraints always impact Iranian foreign policy contours and regional role construction. The nature and dynamics of regional and international systems and alignments have both impaired and benefited Iran's regional ambition in varying ways.

1.2.1. International and Regional Systems

The multipolar system and the new regional order have motivated Iran to consolidate its regional roles and status. At the end of the 1980s, domestic and international transformations occurred and opened a new page of Iran's regional policy. Internally, the death of Khomeini along with the international events such as the end of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988, the decline of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the US military presence in the region during the Kuwaiti crisis all impacted the Iranian foreign policy's orientations, roles, and status-seeking strategies.[376] Barzegar argues that the decline of the Baathist regime in Iraq has brought challenges and opportunities to Iran's roles and status in the region. As the arch-enemy, Saddam Hussein was ousted, and Iraq began redefining its internal politics in terms of the sectarian and ethnic disputes and approaching and embracing foreign relations with Iran.[377] Also, Zaccara resembles Barzegar by arguing that 'systemic factors' have contributed to enhancing Iran's role and status as a regional power directly or indirectly. He attributes Iran's gradual influence and role to the 9/11 events as Iran showed its sympathy and readiness to fight global terrorism,

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[375] Mahan Abedin, "The Domestic Determinants of Iranian Foreign Policy: Challenges to Consensus," *Strategic Analysis*, vol. 35, no. 4 (2011), pp. 620–21, doi:10.1080/09700161.2011.576097.

[376] Rakel, "Iranian Foreign Policy since the Iranian Islamic Revolution: 1979-2006," pp. 159–87.

[377] Kayhan Barzegar, "Balance of Power in the Persian Gulf: An Iranian View," *Middle East Policy*, vol. 17, no. 3 (2010), pp. 74–87, doi:10.1111/j.1475-4967.2010.00452.x.

which to Iran's conservative thinking, Saudi-backed Salafist movements were behind the events. Three other indirect advantageous events for Iran's favor were driven by the USA's policies, including the fall of the Taliban, Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, and Arab regimes in the post-Arab Spring.[378]

1.2.2. Alignments

Iran has formed crucial alliances with influential powers, such as Russia, China, and India, to conduct its regional activism and alleviate external pressures, particularly regarding nuclear issues. It also gives Iran more options for diversification of energy and security partners. The rationale of such an alliance framework is described in official circles; for instance, Mohsen Aminezadeh, the former deputy foreign minister during the rule of Ahmadinejad, stated that "*whereby an Iranian alliance with Russia, India, and China, along with a number of other ideologically inclined states, would present a formidable front against American global aspirations.*"[379] So, in general, Russia has contributed directly to the forming and shaping of Iran's regional policies and globally in general. These contributions vary according to the Russian regional policies also. Firstly, Russia has contributed significantly to the advancement of the Iranian nuclear project, military development, and supplying; energy cooperation such as the Iran–Pakistan–India pipeline and coordination of the Russian Gazprom to be leveraged to export Ian's gas.[380] Secondly, Russia has facilitated Iran's foreign policy activism in the Middle East for the periods before and after the Arab Spring, especially in Syria.

2. ROLE ORIENTATIONS AND CONCEPTIONS

To explain Iran's role conceptions and orientations over the last decades since the Islamic revolution, this section would underpin the domestic and international determinants that have impacted the continuity and change of Iran's foreign policy roles and strategies towards the region as well. Thus, I will track the development and change

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[378] Luciano Zaccara, "Iran's Permanent Quest for Regional Power Status," *Diplomatic Strategies of Nations in the Global South*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2016, pp. 181–211, doi:10.1057/978-1-137-45226-9_7.
[379] Michael Dodson, Manochehr Dorraj, "Populism and Foreign Policy in Venezuela and Iran," vol. 9 Whitehead Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations § (2008), vol. 9, p. 80, https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/whith9&id=71&div=&collection=.
[380] ibid.

of Iran's role conceptions chronically according to the ideational and pragmatic bases of six successive periods and leaders since 1979. As the table above figures out, Iran's foreign policy has undergone six transformations like each other in projecting the ambition of Iran's regional powerhood and roles that vary in foreign policy behavior strategies.

Over these phases, the Iranian foreign policymakers should be understood in two factions: The conservative faction, which articulates their worldviews and foreign policy roles according to the ideational bases of Iran's Islamic norms and Persian identity. For this group, the protector of oppressed and anti-Imperialist-USA Iran is supposed to play in the region. The second faction emphasizes pragmatist and reformist approaches to Iran's foreign policy's roles and regional status, putting soft power in trading and good civilizational practices in front.[381]

During the first phase (1979-1981), Iran had invented a new foreign policy and shaped the new Middle East and consequently created an ambivalent regional audience, those who admired it and those who suspected it. During the earlier stage of revolution and with his religious discourse and worldview Imam, Khomeini saw Iran's position and roles as an *independent state*, which Iran should go 'neither East nor West, but the Islamic Republic,' referring to an independent and non-aligned position with the communist or imperial blocks. Therefore, Iranians should "*become isolated in order to become independent.*"[382] In this so-called 'consolidation phase,' Khomeini foreign policy orientation was 'anti-status quo based' that called for consolidating Iran's role and status in the new Iran's worldview. This new foreign policy behavior was also established on export of revolution to the region and world wherein Khomeini's role conception, Iran should be the bastion of revolutions.

In the second phase of post-revolution, which began with Khamenei's rule (1981-1989), Iran's foreign policy continued in the same rejectionist approach to the regional and international system. During this 'rejectionist phase,' Imam Khamenei saw Iran fighting the U.S. as a bullying and arrogant force—, the '*estekbar jahani*' where Iran was

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[381] Rakel, "Iranian Foreign Policy since the Iranian Islamic Revolution: 1979-2006," p. 166.
[382] Magdalena Charlotte Delgado, *A Constructivist Analysis of Religion's Role in Foreign Policy:The Cases of Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia under the Leaderships of Menachem Begin, Ayatollah Khomeini and Fahd Bin Abdulaziz*, p. 154.

supposed to play the role of regional leader of the resistance bloc.383 To identify why this period was the most radical in the post-revolution, Kazemzadeh argues that "*unlike Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Ali Khamenei has always been a fundamentalist.*"[384]To Soltani and Amiri, that phase was based on the 'ideological approach' or 'interventionist approach,' which was reflected in the regional rivalry between Iran and Iraq and its suspected relations with outlawed rebellions in the region at that time.[385]

Throughout the third phase, during the Rafsanjani era (1989-1997) and in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq war, Tehran preferred cordial foreign policy towards states including Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.[386] This was a matter of status quo orientation regardless of yet unsolved territorial issues between Iran and the UAE.

What is noticeable during Rafsanjani's rule is the similarity of foreign policy behavior to that sort of the Shah's foreign policy during the 1960s and 1970s, where the emphasis was on projecting Iran's regional role and status employing multidimensional strategies. Rafsanjani's confident foreign policy laid the groundwork for "critical dialogue" with the regional neighbors with proactive engagement with the Gulf region states. In his normalization with the region, in 1991, Rafsanjani called for a common regional market between GCC countries and Iran and attempted to join the regional security debate known as the Damascus Declaration-1991. However, some Arab states rejected the engagement of Iran, especially Egypt.[387] Despite the cooperative roles of Iran towards the Middle East at that period, Iran converged with regional revolutionary Sunni groups such as the Islamic Salvation Front (ISF) in Algeria, the National Islamic Movement in Sudan, Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Palestine, the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, the al-Nahda Party in Tunisia and the Jihad Group in Egypt.[388]

By the rise of President Khatami (1997-2005), Iran turned into a '*conciliation phase.*' At the backdrop of Saddam Hussein's fall, Milani argues that this event "*has accelerated Iran's transformation from a revolutionary to a regional status quo power in*

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383 Masoud Kazemzadeh, "Ayatollah Khamenei's Foreign Policy Orientation," *Comparative Strategy*, vol. 32, no. 5 (2013), p. 452, doi:10.1080/01495933.2013.840208.

384 cited, p. 446.

385 Soltani, Amiri, "Foreign Policy of Iran after Islamic Revolution Foreign Policy of Iran after Islamic Revolution."

386 Barzegar, "Iran's Foreign Policy Strategy after Saddam," p. 181.

387 Rakel, "Iranian Foreign Policy since the Iranian Islamic Revolution: 1979-2006," pp. 159–87.

388 cited, p. 167.

search of creating spheres of influence."[389] Opting for détente foreign policy, Khatami called for the principles of 'dialogue of civilizations' instead of 'clash of civilizations' and 'dialogue in place of conflict.'[390] The period was devoid of traditional discourse of either 'exporting the revolution' or 'protecting the oppressed,' which resulted in noticeable improvement of Iran-Arab relations bringing the two sides to a confidence-building stage witnessed in the eighth summit the OIC held in Tehran in 1997. Also, Khatami's shuttle diplomacy peaked in 1999 when he paid visits to some Arab states, including Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Qatar, considered the first visits by an Iranian leader in those last decades.[391] From a principal perspective of Iran's foreign policy, Khatami continued, like former leaders, to conceptualize the anti-Zionist role as done in his novel speeches describing Israel as 'hegemonic, racist, aggressive, and violent.'[392]

Throughout the Ahmadinejad reign (2005-2013)- *fifth phase*, President Ahmadinejad's foreign policy consisted of two complementary elements: first, 'alliance building' and second, an 'accommodating' approach to foreign policy.[393] With the rise of Ahmadinejad, Iran's foreign policy returned to revolutionary principles. According to the Iranian scholar Amir Yousefi, the new faction under Ahmadinejad's presidency, Iran's foreign policy was described as both 'confrontational-assertive and accommodationist-active' influenced by his offensive realism and populist idealism. He conceptualized an assertive nuclear foreign policy and confrontational-accommodational regional policy.[394] In his first years in office, he believed that Iran "*has an Islamic nature, function and responsibility*"[395] for the region that motivated him to visit Saudi Arabia four times, UAE in 2007, and re-articulated relations with Egypt. From his principalist approach to foreign policymaking, Fathi cites Ahmadinejad's confirmation that Iran's regional power:

> *"Does not come from military weapons or an economic capability. Our power comes from our capability to influence the hearts and souls of people,*

[389] Milani, "Iran's Transformation from Revolutionary to Status Quo Power in the Persian Gulf."

[390] Shah Alam, "The Changing Paradigm of Iranian Foreign Policy under Khatami," *Strategic Analysis*, vol. 24, no. 9 (2000), pp. 1629–53, doi:10.1080/09700160008455310.

[391] ibid.

[392] cited, p. 1644.

[393] Barzegar, "Iran's Foreign Policy Strategy after Saddam," p. 181.

[394] Amir M. Haji-Yousefi, "Iran's Foreign Policy during Ahmadinejad: From Confrontation to Accommodation Amir M. Haji-Yousefi *," *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, vol. 9, no. 2 (2010), pp. 1–23.

[395] cited, p. 10.

and this scares them (the West). That's why they are using psychological warfare and impose sanctions (against us)."[396]

In his earlier days in office, he declared that Iran is "rapidly becoming a superpower." Moreover, on another occasion, he referred to Iran as a major power:

> *"I declare the Iranian nation officially to be a true and real superpower. The Iranian nation is a prudent and justice-seeking power and a friend of all nations; it has never had an eye to the territories and resources of other nations, and it has always been the helper of nations. Today the Islamic Revolution, in its 30th year, is like a 15-year-old kid, full of energy, joy and values, and like a 60-year-old, full of experience, prudence and determination."*[397]

The radical and confrontational stage of Ahmadinejad's era began with the rise of the Arab Spring in 2011 up to his last year in 2013. Throughout that period, he conceptualized a foreign policy role that resembled the roles enacted during the revolutionary and rejectionist periods of Khomeini and Khamenei in the 1980s. His conservative mindset and ideational agency reacted with the structural transformations in the region and consequently led to the re-conceptualization and enactment of 'bastion of revolutions,' 'protector of oppressed,' and 'defender of the Shia faith.' The turbulent Arab Spring has shown Iran in 'a dual position' to play an 'anti-status quo role' in some Arab states while playing 'a status quo defender' in other states like Syria and Iraq.

In the recent era of Iran's foreign policy under Rouhani since 2013 as the *sixth phase*, the Iranian foreign policy witnessed two intersections: the end of confrontational President Ahmadinejad in 2013 and regional turmoil during the Arab Spring. His second term has coincided with Trump's strict Iran policy and withdrawal from the JCPOA, a package of sanctions, the Syrian crisis, hard negotiations, and tensions in the Strait of Hormuz over allegedly Iran's oil tanks attacks. During this phase, the supreme leader initiated a strategy of 'heroic flexibility.'

Against the above background, Iran's regional roles as well as related foreign policy strategies at large, have been articulated according to three foreign policy orientations and different role conceptions: first, anti-regional status quo (status quo' oriented roles; second, the revolution export and liberation of Western dependence

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[396] Nazila Fathi, "Iran Leader Calls Nuclear Sanctions Ineffective - The New York Times," 2012, https://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/02/world/middleeast/02iran.html.
[397] Ehteshami, "Middle East Middle Powers: Regional Role, International Impact," p. 40.

(competitive roles); third, cooperating with and protecting the Shia regimes and masses along over the region (cooperative roles). The following table presents the three orientations of Iran's foreign policy roles for the region in the first column. The second column identifies three categories of auxiliary roles situated against each orientation to explain the sort of role and its orientation.

Table 4**: Iran's Role Behavior in the Middle East**

Role Orientations	National Role Conceptions	Role sources	Role expectations
Cooperative	1. Role Model 2. Antiterrorism Agent 3. Regional Collaborator	1. Persian civilization 2. Islamic solidarity 3.post-Arab Spring Sunni radicalization in Levant and Iraq. 4. soft power	**Low Expects** *Iranian expects:* 1. Iran's international image 2. regional stability *Regional expects:* 1. Iran to be an Islamic governance model 2. Gulf-Islamic world-international community's recognition
Competitive	1. Regional leader 2. Defender of the faith 3. Protector of the Oppressed	1. energy wealth 2-pan-Iranism-Islamism 2. military capability 3. political Shi'ism 4. geopolitical significance 5. Persian civilization 6. Shia world status (Shia faith and people protection) 7. regional competition	**High Expects** *Iranian expects:* 1.regional leadership and hegemony 2. leverage in the regional Shia and revolutionary zones 3. self-distinctiveness vs. other Sunni and regional powers, e.g., Saudi Arabia and Turkey *Regional expects:* 1.Shia communities expect Iran to be an Islamic leader 2. Shias expect protection from Iran.
Status quo	1. Anti-Imperialist 2. Independent state 3. Anti-Zionist 4. Leader of resistance bloc 5. Bastion of Islamic Revolutions	1. Islamic revolution 2.Shia revolutionism principle 3.imperialism (Westoxification) 3.Imam Khomeini's principles of (justice, anti-imperialism, and Zionism, and independence) 4. nuclear power ambition 5. export revolution doctrine	**High Expects** *Iranian expects:* 1. independence. 2. change the status quo for its favor. 3.Islamic governance and order. 4. removal of Gulf regimes 5. nuclear weapons. *Regional expects: *contested* 1. pro-Iran Shia regimes (Assad, Hezbollah, Houthis,

			Hamas, Iraq) expect Iran to erect a Shia crescent, support them, remove Israel, defeat Saudi Arabia and its allies, and counter US presence in the region.

2.1. Cooperative Roles

Cooperative roles refer to the Iranian regional role set that contributes to regional stability and institutions. Such roles are interpretively recorded on a temporal and factional basis that reflect which and why a particular Iranian government tended to articulate a certain role. This role typology is in the following:

2.1.1. Regional Collaborator

Discursively at least, Iran assigned itself for uniting and coordinating within the Muslim world. According to Iranian scholars, Dehshiri and Majidi:

> *"Iran rejected alignment with both the East and the West. Instead, the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in Article 11, exhorts the government to achieve unity with other Islamic countries to establish an Islamic world order founded on solidarity rather than the current world order."*[398]

This role took significant place during the presidential terms of Rafsanjani and Khatami. At least rhetorically, President Hassan Rouhani asserted during his speech to the General Assembly in 2013 that:

> *"Iran, as a regional power, will act responsibly with regard to regional and international security, and is willing and prepared to cooperate in these fields, bilaterally as well as multilaterally, with other responsible actors."*[399]

While President Khatami's term is considered the best period for Saudi-Iranian relations that changed Iran's foreign policy and its regional policy based on 'good neighborliness.' However, this policy did not change until the neo-conservatives took power to return to politics and rhetoric that confirm Iran's revolutionary identity.[400]

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[398] M R Dehshiri, M R Majidi, "Iran's Foreign Policy in Post-Revolution Era: A Holistic Approach," *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 21, no. 1–2 (2008), p. 103.
[399] General Assembly of the United Nations, "Iran (Islamic Republic of) | General Assembly of the United Nations," 2013, https://gadebate.un.org/en/73/iran-islamic-republic.
[400] See Adel Altoraifi, *Understanding the Role of State Identity in Foreign Policy Decision-Making*, LSE, 2012.

2.1.2. Role Model

The model role of Iran has been mainly repeated over two stages during the Islamic revolution in the 1980s and Arab Spring since 2011. For Tehran, the Arab Spring was a matter of emulation of the great Islamic awakening heralded by the first revolutionary leader Ayatollah Khomeini three decades ago.

Even though the Iranian revolution differs from the Arab revolutions in objectives and means argued by the Iranian Scholar Dabashi, it was "*a multifaceted revolution.*"[401] At the peak of Arab Spring, Imam Khamenei described such uprisings as:

> *"Today's events in North of Africa, Egypt, Tunisia, and certain other countries have another sense for the Iranian nation. They have special meaning for the Iranian nation. This is the same as `Islamic Awakening', which is the result of the victory of the big revolution of the Iranian nation."*[402]

In modeling the Iranian polity and governance, Khomeini introduced his 'Hukumat-i Islami' the so-called 'Vilayet-el Faqih' or 'the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist' that insists on the governance and jurisdiction of the Faqih/Jurist who is conferred legitimacy by the clerics and people conditioned that he descends from the family of Prophet Mohammed Ahl al-Bayt. For the regional implications of this role, the theological Shia doctrine of *Vilayat-el Faqih* has substantively succeeded in the case of Lebanon under Hezbollah, which Mneimneh describes as "the Islamic Republic of Iran's most important creation in its larger efforts to export its revolution and system as a model for all Muslims."[403]

The Iranian model role conception is not limited to the revolutionary spirit that promises the struggle against the imperialist powers 'anti-imperialist' and 'justice among the peoples and the states,' but for further Iranian exceptionalism.[404] It views that Iran is

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[401] Hamid Dabashi, *Iran: The Rebirth of a Nation*, Palgrave Macmillan US, 2016, p. 69.
[402] Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Sayyed Ali Khamenei, "North Africa Events Echo Iranians' Voice," *The Office of the Supreme Leade*, 2011, https://www.leader.ir/en/content/7774/Friday-prayers-at-Tehran-University.
[403] Hassan Mneimneh, "The Arab Reception of Vilayat-e-Faqih: The Counter-Model of Muhammad Mahdi Shams Al-Din," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, vol. 8 (2009), p. 40.
[404] Henner Fürtig, *Regional Powers in the Middle East*, *Palgrave Macmillan*, ed. by Henner Fürtig, New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2014, p. 27.

also a 'role model of Islamic democracy.'[405] For the supreme leader Khamenei, the Iranian role model' is polarized in:

> "The Islamic Revolution created a role model and a discourse, and this is one of the things that affected these events. The Islamic Revolution became a model for Muslims. The Islamic Revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic presented a system of government with a complete Constitution. Moreover, the Islamic Republic managed to practice this system of government. This system stood firm for 32 years, and nobody could harm it. The system was increasingly strengthened. Today the Islamic Republic is not comparable to 10, 20, 30 years ago in terms of its firmness. The Islamic Republic made different advances- scientific advances, technological advances, industrial advances, social advances. Thoughts matured, and new ideas were produced [...]. A great scientific movement started in the country and different activities were carried out. The construction projects which have been carried out in the country have in some cases, put the country among the top countries in the world. These are the things which have already taken place. These things are tangible for Muslim nations. They can see these things. The revolution came and established a system of government, and this system prevailed and achieved increasing power and progress on a daily basis. This is how a role model is formed. Such an effort to create a role model creates a discourse: 'the discourse of Islamic identity and dignity."[406]

2.1.3. Anti-Terrorism Agent

Following the Arab Spring uprisings across the region, Iran has expressed its position as responsible for stabilizing the region through military involvement in Iraq and Syria in the fight against Islamist extremism. It has taken a contradictory line in advocating Arab uprisings to change the status quo while presenting the Syrian revolution as a foreign conspiracy and an act of terrorism. The international and regional position of ISIS in Syria and Iraq provided Iran with a legitimate card and access to the global war on terror. Tehran schemed an anti-terrorism agent in both Syria and Iraq in a deterrent calculation to maintain and sustain the status quo of the post-2003 Iraq invasion that accelerated Iran's clout in the region. Alone in Syria, Iran has been involved in the Syrian conflict to secure the Assad regime through direct military, advisory, economic support, and Hezbollah training of Syrian paramilitary forces. The Islamic Revolutionary Guards

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[405] Ellinor Zeino-mahmalat, *Saudi Arabia's and Iran's Iraq Policies in the Post-Gulf War Era*, Hamburg University, 2012, p. 94.

[406] Khamenei, "Leader's Speech to Assembly of Experts - Khamenei.Ir," 2011, http://english.khamenei.ir/news/1431/Leader-s-Speech-to-Assembly-of-Experts., quoted in Akbaba, Özdamar, *Role Theory Middle East North Africa*.2019.p.59.

Corps (IRGC) elite Quds Force was involved and helped establish the Syrian National Defense Forces (SNDF).

In Iraq, Iran has been attempting to stabilize Iraq to fight ISIS, claimed to be backed by Saudi-Wahabi Islamists. The Iranian role in Iraq grounds on ideological and geopolitical interests. The shared cultural relations between Iraq and Iran are deep in history, being the former makes up the most massive Shia Arab majority in the Arab world, cradle of holy Shia cities Najaf and Karbala and shrines of Imams Ali and Hussein. The Iranian involvement in Iraq aims to pave the geostrategic corridor to Syria and Lebanon through the Iraqi territories. The Iranian anti-terrorism role has been materialized in direct military and intelligent involvement and training of the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) and the Badr Brigades. Despite this, it seemed that this role did not satisfy the US President Trump and his regional allies who decided to eliminate the godfather of this role, the commander of the IRGC Quds Force Qassem Soleimani along with his Iraqi companion Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis on January 3, 2020.[407]

2.2. Competitive Roles

The competitive role composition concerns the Iranian foreign policy orientation and behavior regarding regional role conceptualization, which prescribes Iran to compete with other regional peers over the regional leadership, order, and power status quo. Such role set is the following:

2.2.1. Regional Leader

According to both role and status theories, Iran seeks to revive its historical role status of both the Persian Empire and Safavid state, particularly in the sub-Gulf region. Since then, and as usual, Iran's regional politics may have changed in instruments and some roles, but the status of 'place in the sun' as proclaimed Aaryan, supremacist Shia, and high regional power would continue forever.

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[407] Edward Wastnidge, "Iran's Own 'War on Terror': Iranian Foreign Policy Towards Syria and Iraq During the Rouhani Era," *Foreign Policy of Iran under President Hassan Rouhani's First Term (2013–2017)*, ed. by L. Zaccara, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, pp. 107–29.

As an aspiring regional leader, the Iranian self-conception has been articulated based on ideological leverage,— at least in and among the Shia populations and pragmatist orientations,— in terms of hegemonic and destructive agendas regionwide. On the other hand, motives of 'memories of a glorious past' have always been referred to in the ideational element of *Īrānīyat* (historical national identity) whenever Iran exposed to humiliation like during the Iran–Iraq war,[408] nuclear ambition exclusion, and US killing of its regional figurehead in Iraq in January 2020.

Iran has attempted to mobilize the Palestine issue in a broader Islamic context and detach it from its traditional logo 'Arab-Israeli dispute.' from an Iranian view, this policy of Islamization of regional issues would credit and give Iran an Islamic and regional role and status over other competing regional powers such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia. In alliance with Syria, Iran would have it a 'geographic gateway' for manipulating a leading role and building a resistance front head off Israeli territory.[409]

2.2.2. Protector of the Oppressed

The Iranian Islamic revolution has so far founded normative ideals and discourses. At its core, Iran has been destined to construct a new international system, 'pax-Islamica,' contrary to pax-Americana. This imagined system is ideologically inspired by two universalist concepts Shia Islamism and Third Worldism. This dichotomy is that Shia Islamism is the normative engine behind oppressed people of the third world. As embedded in the Manichean philosophy of oppressed 'Mustazefin,' Iran vowed to protect them against oppressors 'Mustakberin' of all sorts of US and Western arrogant powers. This role conception is highly insured in Iran's Constitution and foreign policy discourse and activism.[410] As confirmed in the Iranian Constitution, article 154, Iran "*supports the just struggles of the oppressed against the oppressors in every corner of the globe.*"[411]

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[408] Penelope Kinch, *The US-Iran Relationship: The Impact of Political Identity on Foreign Policy*, I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2011, p. 59.
[409] S. Fürtig, H., & Gratius, "Iran and Venezuela: Ideology-Driven Foreign Policies in Comparison," *Regional Leadership in the Global System: Ideas, Interests and Strategies of Regional Powers*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2016, p. 188.
[410] Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf: A Cultural Genealogy*, Routledge, 2006, pp. 23–26.
[411] Kasra Aarabi, "The Fundamentals of Iran's Islamic Revolution," p. 29.

Iran has portrayed itself as a voice of Muslims and the Third World against Western imperialism. On numerous occasions, this feature had existed, such as when President Rafsanjani spoke of "*solidarity among Third World and oppressed nations against both super-powers*"[412] during his visit to China in 1985. For Ayatollah Khomeini, the world is split into oppressed and oppressors. On this point, Iran took on the leading role of freeing the oppressed masses and guiding them to justice. Once Imam Khomeini proclaimed that: "*to liberate the discontented masses of Muslims, whether they live in the independent states of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Morocco or under non-Islamic government.*"[413]

Despite the continuous imposition of pressure and economic sanctions on Iran, it seems that the Iranian regime pledges to keep committed to its regional role enactment of 'protection of oppressed people.' In a clear manifestation of continuity of such a regional role, supreme leader Imam Khamenei stubbornly commented after the JCPOA deal in 2015 that:

> "*Whether this document [the JCPOA] is ratified or not, we will not we will not abandon our regional friends: the oppressed people of Palestine, the oppressed people of Yemen, the people and government of Syria, the people and government of Iraq, the oppressed people of Bahrain and the sincere mujahids of the Resistance in Lebanon and Palestine. These people will always enjoy our support.*"[414]

2.2.3. Defender of the Faith

As a religious power, Iran has ever claimed to have been a self-appointed defender of the faith. On several occasions, Iran has embarked on protecting Islamic faith in general and Shia identity. Together, the multi-faceted role conflicts with each other's expectations and orientations. Consequently, defending Shia faith versus Sunni identity and states has formed Iran as a sectarian state. Iran's ideological and political credibility for such a role stems from its many other regional roles, including anti-Western and

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[412] Ray Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, 2009, p. 156.
[413] cited, p. 20.
[414] Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, "Leader's Sermons at Eid Ul-Fitr Prayers - Khamenei.Ir," 2015, http://english.khamenei.ir/news/2102/Leader-s-sermons-at-Eid-ul-Fitr-prayers.

Zionist discourses and roles, and support for Islamists and proxy groups, including Hamas and Hezbollah.

In other terms, Iran takes the number, presence, and engagement of Shia Muslims for granted. As Shia Muslims make up around 10 to 15 % of the overall number of Muslims globally, this amount makes Iran play the leader and vanguard roles of the global Shia population. Across the Middle East, Iran and Iraq make up the Shia majority which motivates them to struggle to preserve their Shia religious values.[415]

This role has appeared since the earlier stages of the revolutions in the 1980s and continued until the Arab Spring. It has always been controversial as its objective and means incite regional criticism about how Iran has enacted the role and how the regional actors perceive and react to it. The concept itself implies the protection and sympathy for Shia-driven movements and claims in the region where Iran stands as the custodian of Shia Muslims worldwide. For at least Arabs as the historical rivals with Iran, they have always been contradicting its roles whenever it comes to the Shia issue in the region to the extent that the Shia Crescent became a regional paranoia. Despite the above regional misperceptions, Iran since 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini set up Iran to protect and unite Muslims with no discrimination of sect, race, and country. On two occasions, Imam Khomeini stated:

> "*Our Islamic scheme which is an Islamic one is to create a kind of unanimity of view among Moslems of the world, to unite the Islamic countries, to establish fraternity among different Moslems of the world, to make a pledge with all Islamic governments of the world.*"[416]

Gholizadeh and Hook argue that Khomeini's Shia-based discourse appears explicitly in his historical and cultural reference to the metanarrative of the Battle of Karbala, which is a symbol of both oppressed Shias (Mazlumiyyat) and discriminated faith.[417] Regarding the Iran-Iraq war, Ayatollah Khomeini viewed the decision to fight with Iraq as a part of his anti-Westernization, and Saddam Hussein was a persistent

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[415] Geneive Abdo, *The New Sectarianism : The Arab Uprisings and the Rebirth of the Shi'a-Sunni Divide*, Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 12.
[416] Imam Khomeini cited in Mahdi Mohammad Nia, "Understanding Iran's Foreign Policy: An Application of Holistic Constructivism" p. 165.
[417] Gholizadeh, Hook, "The Discursive Construction of the 1978-1979 Iranian Revolution in the Speeches of Ayatollah Khomeini," pp. 174–86.

obstacle to the rising 'Islamic world order.' In Iran, either to defeat Saddam Hussein or not, the revolution's keeping was self-determination and an ideological, moral mission as the war set for their "*religion and not for territory.*"[418]

In recent years, particularly after the Arab Spring and the emergence of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, Iran has often expressed its position and role of Shia protection to the extent President Rouhani vowed that Iran would defend holy cities and shrines in Iraq. In a televised speech in mid-2014, the President declared that:

> *"Regarding the holy Shia shrines in Karbala, Najaf, Kadhimiya and Samarra, we announce to the killers and terrorists that the big Iranian nation will not hesitate to protect holy shrines."*[419]

Therefore, under the banner of Shia solidarity, Iran provides a plethora of patronage, including training, logistics, financing, and advisory support to Shia-affiliated groups and regimes in the region. Among these groups, Iran supports the Lebanese Hezbollah, the Syrian Alawite regime, the Zaidi Houthis in Yemen, and the Shia-dominated government and militias in Iraq. It also provides cultural support, for example, building and financing Shia places of worship and reviving Shia events such as the *Event of Ghadir Khumm/ Eid Al-Ghadeer.*

2.3. Regional Status quo Roles

Iran's revisionist attitudes towards the regional and international status quo have traditionally been embedded in two interlinked components- pan-Shi'ism and Khomeinism. The two sources of political revisionism have extensively motivated and articulated Iran's revolutionary and resistance culture. Firstly, political Shi'ism provides a deep understanding of the political behavior of Shia politics over history. The Shia theology builds inherently on martyrdom for justice and resistance. By reading the historiography of Shi'ism, the synthesis of Imam Hussain's martyrdom and Karbala's battle is a symbolic presentation of holy resistance and bastion of revolution against injustice and prejudice referring to a crooked and oppressive Yazid of the Umayyad Caliphate.

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[418] David M. Zionts, "Revisionism and Its Variants: Understanding State Reactions to Foreign Policy Failure," *Security Studies*, vol. 15, no. 4 (2006), pp. 631–57, doi:10.1080/09636410601184611.
[419] Rick Gladstone and Dan Bilefsky, "Insurgency in Iraq Widens Rivals' Rift," *The New York Times*, (06/18/2014), https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/19/world/middleeast/iran-iraq.html?_r=0.

Secondly, the revival of Shia and Khomeinist doctrine brought about a set of revolutionary codes and themes that have been the ideational guiding directions of Iranian revisionism since that time. At the heart of these key themes are (1) pan-Islamism, (2) independence, and (3) resistance. Indeed, each of these three principals has political and juridical interpretations, conditions, and relevant national role articulation and commitments. Here we dissect the inherent themes of each principal. At the worldviews of Imam Khomeini, pan-Islamic foreign policy would bring justice to the oppressed/downtrodden, estranged, and humiliated people (Mustazefin) and fight the oppressors or arrogant 'Imperialist others'— *Mustakberin*.

Table 5: **Iran's Revisionism Framework**

Sources of revisionism	Principals	Role conceptions	Instruments
Political Shiism	1-Martyrdom 2-Revolution 3-Karablism	1-anti-imperialism 2-resistance bloc 3-anti-Zionist 4-independent 5-bastion of revolution	Religious nationalism, teachings of pious Ahl al-Bayt (Prophet Family), and Twelfth Imamism.
Khomeinism	1-Pan-Islamism 2-Resistance 3-Independence		1. Export revolution 2. resistance axis 3.Islamic governance via *Vilayat-el Faqih* 4. Shia militancy 5. proxy wars 6.Nuclear weapon development 7. Shia Islamic movements

2.3.1. Bastion of Revolutionary Islam

In theory, as Holsti highlights the commitments and responsibilities of leaders of revolutionary bastions, there they should act as:

"*A source of physical and moral support, as well as an ideological inspirer. [this] involves such actions as training guerrilla leaders from other countries, sending military and other supplies to revolutionary forces*

abroad, organizing, and leading foreign political factions, and undertaking an extensive ideological-propaganda program."[420]

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the exceptionalism dimension of the bastion of revolutions is rooted in Imam Khomeini's revolutionary ideology. Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic, Iran has vowed in its constitution and then in foreign policy's principles to act as a regional and international bastion and catalyst for revolutions and liberation movements under the banner of 'Islamic awakening.' Under the ideological factors, there sit sub-ideological elements, (1) historical memory and culture of Westoxication, (2) revolutionary Shi'a internationalization, and (3) Islamic ideals versus non-Islamic universalism.

For Khomeini, the Islamic revolution was "*for an Islamic goal, not for Iran alone. Iran has only been the starting point.*"[421]The primary purpose of Iran's revolution Imam Khomeini said, "*we do not have any options but to destroy those systems that are corrupt and to dethrone all regimes that are oppressive and criminals.*"[422] Traditionally, Shia Islamism dictates a revolutionary ideology imbued with Imam Hussein's martyrdom as the first revolutionary act in Islamic history. As in the preamble of Iran's 1989 constitution, Iran "*provides the necessary basis for ensuring the continuation of the revolution at home and abroad,*" [423] and accordingly, "*will strive with other Islamic and popular movements to prepare the way for the formation of a single world community.*"[424]

The export of revolution role became a consensus in Iranian foreign policy behavior, which repeatedly occurred in several speeches of current supreme leader Khamenei and successive Presidents. During the accommodating era, in one of his speeches, President Rafsanjani affirmed Iran's continued commitment to the role of exporting revolution as "*it is not enough for us to say we were not defeated. We have to strengthen the revolution, and the interest of the revolution is to win the war and spread its ideas.*"[425]   Amidst the Arab Spring, the supreme leader Ali Khamenei described

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[420] Holsti, "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy," 1970, p. 261 and 292.
[421] Ray Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, p. 21.
[422] cited, p. 18.
[423] Farideh Farhi and Saideh Lotfian, "Iran's Post-Revolution Foreign Policy Puzzle," p. 141.
[424] Ibid, p.141.
[425] Ray Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, p. 93.

uprisings as "*natural extensions of Iran's Islamic revolution in 1979*"[426] and attributed to "*the Islamic Revolution, which was launched and pursued by the people of Iran, that it turned into an inspiration for other nations around the world.*"[427]

Geopolitically, this role is not ideological based per se. However, we should not underestimate the pragmatic political factors that continue to drive Iran in the same revolutionary direction. However, the regional order and international environment during the Cold War and Iraq-Iran war have bothered Iran to survive the counter Western powers and their regional allies. Iran pledged to expand its ideological revolution that could attract the Shia populations and provoke them to crackdown their pro-West regimes. Such examples of rhetorical pledges to export the Islamic revolution by military leaders, Iran's IRGCQF Commander Qassim Soleimani boasted, *"we are witnessing the export of the Islamic revolution throughout the region.*"[428]Finally, Iran has worked hard over the forty years of Islamic revolutionary activities to export Islamic revolutionary ideologue and norms including (1) Shia Islamism; (2) political Shia thought of *Vilayat-el Faqih* (Guardianship of the Jurist) regionally and globally; (3) subversion of pro-West regimes in the Arab Gulf region and across the Middle East.

2.3.2. Anti-Imperialist Agent

Iran's international revisionism, by nuclear power, interprets the pursuit of ontological security against the Western strategy of exclusiveness as Behravesh explains:

> *"Iran's nuclear venture will be delineated as a manifestation of identity-driven defiance of the status quo order, but also of a proactive attempt by the Islamic Republic to revise its international share of power and reassert itself as the predominant player in the wider Middle East."*[429]

The Iranian traditional role conception of the anti-imperialist role has ever been at the core of revolutionary Iran's identity and strategic culture pursued regionally and

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[426] Ali Alfoneh, "Middle Eastern Upheavals: Mixed Response in Iran," *Middle East Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 3 (2011), p. 37.
[427] Luíza Gimenez Cerioli, "Roles and International Behaviour: Saudi–Iranian Rivalry in Bahrain's and Yemen's Arab Spring," *Contexto Internacional*, vol. 40, no. 2 (2018), p. 299, doi:10.1590/s0102-8529.2018400200010.
[428] Lela Gilbert, "Iranian Revolution, Phase Two: Hidden in Plain Sight," *Hudson Institute*, 2019, https://www.hudson.org/research/14943-iranian-revolution-phase-two-hidden-in-plain-sight.
[429] Behravesh, "State Revisionism and Ontological (in)Security in International Politics: The Complicated Case of Iran and Its Nuclear Behavior," p. 838.

internationally. At the core of Iran's Islamic revolution, the so-labeled anti-imperialism has been at the center of Iran's foreign policy toward the region, among other revolutionary Islamist norms. Similarly, this role became a unitary slogan of Iran's foreign policy during the Arab Spring era to negate Western powers' interference in that events and maneuvering to twist the outcomes in their favor.[430]

The regional discourse and roles in post-revolutionary Iran have been conceptualized and determined. Thus, the anti-regional status quo orientation has led to an anti-imperialist-shaped regional order and the Axis of Resistance strategy. Such regional discourse and roles mark three ideological elements: anti-arrogance Islamism, unitary Shi'ism, and independence.[431]

Regionally, eliminating hegemony and the Great Satan at home, in the Gulf region, and the world was at the core of Khomeini's progressive ideology. Such a vision suggests that the peoples of the Arab Gulf will not enjoy peace and prosperity unless they begin to resist the arrogant West. Practically, Iran will incite Shia communities in the region to combat pro-Western regimes and create governments that imitate the Iranian regime, acknowledge Iran's regional leadership role, and join Iran's regional resistance axis.

Iran seeks a custodial role by acquiring a nuclear status that would deter the US's status quo bloc.[432]It also plays a regional nuclear hedger that would upgrade Iran's regional influence and hegemony, and "*at worst, an inflated sense of the value of hedging could embolden Iran in a conventional military sense and contribute to further conflict in the region.*"[433] The Iranian politics of anti-imperialism has also manifested in the Iran-West dispute on Iran's nuclear program. Supreme leader Khomeini's strategy of heroic flexibility and maximum resistance, are two contradictory policies to follow.

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[430] Akbaba, Özdamar, *Role Theory Middle East North Africa*, p. 60.
[431] Gonabad, Fayaz, Naderi, "Review of Discourse Components of Islamic Republic of Iran in the Middle East," pp. 105–15.
[432] Derrick Frazier, Robert Stewart-Ingersoll, "Regional Powers and Security: A Framework for Understanding Order within Regional Security ComplexesRegional," *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 16, no. 4 (2010), p. 747-748, doi:10.1177/1354066109359847.
[433] Wyn Bowen, Matthew Moran, "Living with Nuclear Hedging: The Implications of Iran's Nuclear Strategy," *International Affairs*, vol. 91, no. 4 (2015), p. 697, doi:10.1111/1468-2346.12337.

Iran also materializes this role by plotting subversion of Arab regimes. Iran also plays this role by staging the subversion of Arab regimes. Iran holds such an explicit aim to the point that Rafsanjani has asked his Chinese host to "remove the cancerous tumor of imperialism in our region," [434] referring to pro-Western regimes in the region. Having a self-proclaimed vanguard role, Iran has ruthlessly been determined to battle the great Satan and its regional tools at all costs.[435]

During the events of 9/11, Tehran concentrated on the second move, taking advantage of the distorted Sunni ideology and the alleged involvement of Saudi citizens in the incident to build a positive image of Shias around the world. Since the United States found the event to be an opportunity to intervene in the region, this message was sent to Iran to increase deterrence and exploit opportunities simultaneously.

2.3.3. Independent State

The independent role of Iran has been expressed mainly since 1979 as an interpretation of Imam Khomeini's core themes of 'independence and justice.' Analytically, the concept of an independent state has been internally socialized and internationally internationalized through discursive and systemic instruments. Discursively, either before or post-Islamic revolution, three narratives have tailored this role as "*Iran's glorious past; historical victimization by invaders; and (semi)-colonial/imperial encounters that led to Iran's dependence and underdevelopment.*"[436] In modern times, Iran has endured military and political intervention from the West in its internal affairs, such as Russia and Britain in the 19th and 29th centuries, and the US since the 1950s, especially during the US coup d'état against Prime Minister Mussadiq and the reinserting attempt of the regime of Mohammad Reza Shah.[437]

Structurally, in the post-revolutionary era, Iran has pursued an independent state's role through two policies. In the endogenous dimension, Iran drew a grand leap to hyper-independence: self-reliance and self-sufficiency 'Khod Kafai' in all aspects of life, Iran's

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[434] Ray Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, p. 156.
[435] cited, p. 163.
[436] Moshirzadeh, "Discursive Foundations of Iran's Nuclear Policy," p. 529.
[437] Gülden Ayman, "Regional Aspirations and Limits of Power-Turkish-Iranian Relations in the New Middle East," p. 89.

2005 Strategic 20-Year Vision Document emphasized. Officially, it confirms that Iran should be "*a technological and scientific power in the [Southwestern Asia] region in 2025.*"[438] In this regard, the nuclear ambition policy has ever been meant for Iranians to be the last mark of internal independence and the final test of Western bragging about equality and justice. Functionally, the nuclear project is thought to bring power and status. In the exogenous dimension of independence, since the post-Islamic revolution, Iran has worked ceaselessly from a sense of obligation to spread the political culture of an independent role model throughout the region. In other words, this role means that Iran has an obligation to liberate other marginalized and dependent states and citizens from arrogant powers so that they can stand on their own feet.

The nuclear policy itself is an idiosyncratic post-revolutionary meaning of Iran's independence. The Iranian leadership believes in the continuation of independence, and justice should pass through five steps. Namely, the Iranian concept and discourse of independence derive from two expectations: internal and external independence and hyper-independence. Iran, from Imam Khomeini's revolution to nuclear ambition, has struggled for power and status in the name of independence through the following steps: (1) domestic causes for independence manifested in the regime change of West-dependent Shah; (2) articulation of a political culture of independence began with Imam Khomeini's concepts of justice and resistance; (3) foreign policy choice and orientation call for non-polar attitudes 'neither East nor West'; (4) adoption of missionary independence that entails exporting the Iranian role model in terms of revolutionary ideals and building a resistance bloc; (5) with these preceding steps, Iranian approaches to the hyper-independence within and beyond borders. On the one hand, acquiring nuclear independence, either civil or military, would mark Iran's ability to ensure equality ('justice') and, on the other hand, would embolden it to seek collective independence of the Ummah.

The dichotomy of independence within and socialization of independence abroad propels Iran into a state of revisionism and role conflict. This role concept embroiled Iran in negative and positive consequences. Iran sees itself as a norm entrepreneur dedicated

[438] Rahman Ghahremanpour, "Iran Looking West: Identity, Rationality and Foreign Policy: In Ran and the West," 2011, p. 64.

to the good of nations by casting for an active independent role at home and socializing aspirant states and groups in the region. Thus, the culture of independence included other critical foreign policy roles, including anti-imperialism, the leader of the refusal Axis, and the promoter of liberation. On the contrary, it has caused Western counter-roles and alter-casting tactics to curb Iran's roguish activism as expressed in its nuclear ambition.

American President Trump's maximum pressure on Iran over its regional revisionism and nuclear-deterrence ambition has reached one of the worst moments in Iran-US relations. As usual, Iran both maneuvers and consolidates its roles but never gives up the reason itself, displayed in Khamenei's beliefs of *heroic flexibilit*y and *constructive evil* in motivating Iran to pursue its relentless struggle for independence and self-reliance.

2.3.4. Anti-Zionist Agent

This role is half the credo of anti-Westernization and second to anti-imperialism. Although Iran has no shared borders with Israel, it uses this role as a double pattern to show Iran's position and role excel those of Arab states by defending an Islamic and Arab issue and justifying its regional discourse and behavior. These role expectations and others lay in Bayar's words:

> "*Supporting Palestine is an opportunity to avert allegations on Iran's sectarianism, to create a common denominator with the Arab World and, as a power-projection-opportunity, to reprove the 'Judeo-Western political and cultural onslaught on the Muslim world."*[439]

The other side of anti-Zionist role expectations is the Arab world. The overthrow of the Shah was a herald of Iran's support for Arabs over the enigmatic Arab-Israel conflict. After the revolution, the significantly earlier sight of Iranian foreign policy was to mold Zionism as the second side of the imperialist coin. Upon such a principle, Iran's foreign policy and regional role conceptualization touched firmly upon Palestine question in discourse and practice. Therefore, the anti-Zionist Arabs, both Islamists and leftists, welcomed the Iranian new roles, especially those concerned with anti-Zionism and imperialism.

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[439] Tuğba Bayar, "Multiple Dualities: Seeking the Patterns in Iran's Foreign Policy," *All Azimuth*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2019), p. 46, doi:10.20991/allazimuth.456272.

Despite late controversial allegations about Iran's sectarianizing policies, the Iranian Palestine policy has attracted the eyes of Arabs and Muslims in general, and that was functional because of Iran's generous and continuous anti-Zionist discourse and military support to anti-Israel groups. Discursively, Iran founded the IRGC Quds Force, committed to liberating Palestine and Lebanon from the 'Zionist entity.' Functionally, Iran has created the Lebanese Hezbollah 'Party of God' in 1982 after Lebanon's Israeli invasion. On the other hand, it has also backed financially and militarily the Palestinian Sunni groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad (PIJ). In the early days of the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini created and popularized the Quds Day/ Jerusalem Day that became a famous and symbolic festival in the Arab world.

In a very early response to the Iranian proactive Palestine policy, PLO chief Yasser Arafat's visit to Tehran a few days after the revolution was a clear sign of praise of Iran's new regional role and status. In the following decades, Hamas leaders visited Tehran and expressed gratitude to Iran's assertive role in Palestine's question. Among those leaders, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin of Hamas visited Tehran in 1998 and met with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Mohammad Khatami. In the same fashion, Hamas' leader Khalid Masha' al, who visited Tehran after the 2006 Israeli attack on Hamas, stated, "just as Islamic Iran defends the Palestinians' right*s, we defend the rights of Islamic Iran. We are part of a united front against the enemies of Islam.*"[440] In the same year and once again in 2012, Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas leader, visited Tehran to solicit Iranian support for an ongoing intifada against the 'Zionist entity.'[441] Once, Imam Khamenei stated that "*we will support and help any nations, any groups fighting against the Zionist regime across the world.*"[442]

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[440] Gabriel G. Tabarani, *How Iran Plans to Fight America and Dominate the Middle East*, AuthorHouse, 2008, p. 144.

[441]Rachel Brandenberg, "Iran and the Palestinians," *U.S. Institute of Peace.*, 2016, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2010/10/iran-primer-iran-and-the-palestinians.html.

[442] Thomas Erdbrink, "Ayatollah Khamenei Says Iran Will Back 'Any Nations, Any Groups' Fighting Israel," *Washington Post*, (2012), https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/iran-says-it-launched-satellite/2012/02/03/gIQARNuDmQ_story.html.

2.3.5. Leader of Resistance Axis

The dichotomy of the axis of evil and the axis of resistance has dominated the veins of international relations and foreign policy studies. The national role of leader of resistance bloc Iran has conceptualized and pursued since the early advent of Iran's Islamic revolution ascribes theoretically to Holsti's role typology, namely 'bloc leader.'

The axis of resistance pillars on three cultures: resistance, jihad, and martyrdom that Iran has been socializing members of the axis. Iran is proud of this role and implicitly and explicitly supports its state and non-state actors across the region, including the Syrian regime, Hizballah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), Asaib Ahl al- Haqq, Kata'ib Hizballah, and Yemen's Houthis.[443]

Since the Arab Spring, a shift in regional power has benefited Iran in expanding the axis. Although the axis was founded on ethical grounds like resistance against traditional enemies, the US, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, the region's events following the Arab Spring were a new impetus for new members to join it. More militarily than before, Iran engaged in different parts of the region under the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Quds Force Commander Qassim Soleimani.

3.   ROLE EXPECTATIONS

At the core of role theory, the relationship between the *self*-role conception and the *other*-community is determined by the expectations (cooperation, goods, and support) the *others* expect from the self-part/role maker. On the other hand, according to status theory, the community of *others* does not accept the role and status claims unless the self-community/the role and status seeker fulfills the expectations of *other*-community. Here, applying these theories to Iran, this section underpins the extent to which the regional *others*/states have expected from Iran's regional roles since the Islamic revolution.

Despite growing inconsistencies in Iran's roles and regional concerns about Iran's progressive regional roles, regional communities have grabbed hope and expectations,

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[443] Michael Eisenstadt, "The Strategic Culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Religion, Expediency, and Soft Power in an Era of Disruptive Change," *Middle East Studies at the Marine Corps University*, no. 7 (2015), pp. 1–51, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-strategic-culture-of-the-islamic-republic-of-iran-religion-expediency-a.

especially from those roles of anti-communist-Zionist-American policies in the region. The regional sympathy to the rise of Iran's Islamic revolution brought both hopes and fears to the people in a regional fractioned system. For this section, I would shed light on the pro-Iranian revolutionary bloc and the various ideational and material bases of their reasons and interests. However, the pro-communities of Iran's revolutionary roles are classified into four groups as the following:

3.1.   Expectations for the Palestine Question

The overthrow of the Shah was a herald of Iran's support for Arabs over the enigmatic Arab-Israel conflict. After the revolution, the early sight of Iranian foreign policy was to mold Zionism as the second side of the Imperialist coin. Upon such a post-revolutionary principle, Iran's foreign policy and regional role conceptualization touched firmly on Palestine's question in discourse and practice. Therefore, the anti-Zionist Arabs, both Islamists and leftists welcomed the Iranian new roles, especially those concerned with anti-Zionism and imperialism.

Despite the late controversial main Iranian-backed counter-Israel group Hezbollah, the Iranian Palestine policy has attracted the eyes of Arabs and Muslims in general, and that was functional because of Iran's generous and continuous anti-Zionist discourse and military support to anti-Israel groups. Discursively, Iran founded the IRGC Quds Force, committed to liberating Palestine and Lebanon from the 'Zionist entity.' Functionally, Iran has created the Lebanese Hezbollah 'Party of God' in 1982 after Lebanon's Israeli invasion. On the other hand, it has also backed financially and militarily the Palestinian Sunni groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad (PIJ). In the early days of the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini created and popularized the Quds Day/ Jerusalem Day that became a famous and symbolic festival in the Arab world.

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same fashion, Hamas' leader Khalid Mishaal who visited Tehran after the 2006 Israeli attack on Hamas, stated, "*Just as Islamic Iran defends the rights of the Palestinians, we defend the rights of Islamic Iran. We are part of a united front against the enemies of Islam.*"[444] In the same year and once again in 2012, Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas leader visited Tehran to solicit Iranian support for an ongoing intifada against the 'Zionist entity.'[445]

3.2.   The pro-Revolutionary Nationalists and Islamists

Despite the ideological differences, the Muslim Brotherhood movement saw the revolution and its principles and roles as a victory for their global teaching and objectives. Since the early rise of Iran's Islamic revolution, the Muslim Brotherhood embraced it discursively and practically. For Iran, the Brotherhood would play a 'Sunni bridge role' between the Shia and Sunni Muslims, a 'mediator role' between the hardline anti-Shia Sunnis and Iran, and a 'potential Sunni more solid' in the Iranian-led "axis of resistance."[446]

Apart from ideological uniformity, Iran's Islamic revolution was born to "a multi-organic ideology" at home and outside. Within Iran, for example, the Stalinist Tudeh party supported the revolution. Outside it, a leftist, nationalist, secular, and pan-Arab Ba'athist Syria, even with some shared Shia ideology with Iran, Assad's state identity has matched with Iran's populist anti-Zionism and imperialism. In general, Iranian Islamism and Syrian Baathism have a common ideational and geopolitical role conception: liberating the 'the Arab people' from imperial and Zionist hegemony by Syria and the 'Muslim people' by Iran.[447]

3.3.   The Shia Communities

The Islamic revolution in Iran brought a gifted defender of Shia causes and communities worldwide. Since the early stage of the revolution, Shia populations across

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[444] Brandenberg, "Iran and the Palestinians," p. 8.
[445] ibid, pp. 1–9.
[446] Tamer Badawi and Osama al-Sayyad, "Mismatched Expectations: Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood After the Arab Uprisings," 2019, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/3-13_Badawi_and_Sayyad_Iran.pdf.
[447] Stein, "Ideological Codependency and Regional Order: Iran, Syria, and the Axis of Refusal," pp. 676–80.

the region hold expectations and raised demands from Iran to support them in political empowerment over Sunni-dominated and led regimes.

In the Iranian revolutionary fashion and since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and successive Arab Spring uprisings, Shia masses have found grounds to assert themselves after they have allegedly been oppressed since the Karbala Battle. Arguably, the Iranian controversial role conceptions of bastion of revolution, defender of the faith, and protector of the oppressed were ideologically set to mobilize the whole respective masses and pragmatically dedicate how to use their potentialities, defend their Shia faith, and protect them against Sunni-led regimes oppression. Therefore, with Shia clergy and belief, the Shia Arabs in Iraq and everywhere else considered the Khomeini's revolution spirit to resemble Imam Hussein's revolution in the 7th century.

As s revolutionary Islam based on justice-seeking is a constitutive element of everyday Shia theology, Iran's Khomeinian identity has found identical grounds with transborder Shia identities in the Arab world. Since the Islamic revolution, Iran's role expectations have increased due to some Shia Arab sympathy in the region. However, large parts of the Sunni masses rejected Iran's role legitimacy, particularly the regional leader, protector of the oppressed, defender of the faith roles.

As widely noticed, Iran's Islamic revolution vision became "exclusivist and not universalist,"[448] which means Iran's regional roles are active more exclusively in Shia-dominated or Iran-affiliated states such as Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Bahrain, Yemen, and some other parts of the Gulf. Practically and through the bastion of revolution role, Iran could successfully export the Islamic revolution's ideals and tactics to Islamic movements, including Lebanese Hezbollah and Yemen Houthis (Ansar Allah).

Since the establishment of revolutionary Shia Iran, Shia liberation movements have revived and received Iran's generous support. To revive and provoke the self-proclaimed oppressed Shias (Mustazefin) in the region, Ayatollah Khomeini conceptualized the role of faith and oppressed defender of exclusivist revolutionary Shias rhetorically. Moreover, to materialize the defense and protection, he formulated Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps and affiliated Quds Force as the guards of revolution,

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[448] Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *After Khomeini: The Iranian Second Republic*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2002, p. 218.

oppressed, and faith and broadly "the guardians of the revolution and the fighting sons of Islam."[449]

In the early decades of IRI, Iran's proxy Shia revolutionary movements have expanded throughout the region during the 1980s and 1990s, including the Islamic Revolution Organization of the Arabian Peninsula, Islamic Liberation Front of Bahrain, Hezbollah of Kuwait, Hezbollah of Lebanon, Islamic Tawhid Movement of Lebanon, Al-Dawa Party of Iraq (Islamic), Islamic Action Organization of Iraq, and High Council of the Islamic Revolution of Iraq.[450] Furthermore, since the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and Arab uprisings in 2011, Iran has found another footprint in the region through tailoring new groups such as the Hashd al-Sha'abi (Popular Mobilization Forces)in Iraq and its affiliated (Badr Organization, Kata'ib Hezbollah, and Asaib Ahl al- Haq); groups in Syria such as Lebanese Hezbollah; and the Houthis (Ansar Allah) in Yemen.

3.4.   Arab Gulf States

In the wake of the Islamic revolution in Iran, the Gulf Arab states praised and embraced the new regime in Iran with expectations that, on the one hand, would reverse the problematic nationalist Shah's regional policies and capitalize on the new Islamic regime for the potential assets:

1-   It would reverse or reduce Iran's nationalist and hegemonic roles and policies toward the region; therefore, disputable issues between Iran and Gulf states such as the UAE's claimed islands of the Greater and Lesser Tunbs and Abu Musa might be positively negotiated.

2-   Unlike the Shah regime, which had strong relations with the West and Israel, the new Islamic regime would most probably side with the Arabs against Israel.

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[449] Seth G. Jones, "War by Proxy: Iran's Growing Footprint in the Middle East," *CSIS Briefs*, no. March (2019), pp. 1–16, https://www.csis.org/war-by-proxy.
[450] Ehteshami, *After Khomeini: The Iranian Second Republic*, p. 205.

3- The Iranian regional role will be weaker for years due to the domestic post-revolution reforms and challenges, and thus this will let Iran articulate more cooperative relations with the regional neighbors.[451]

4. ROLE CONTESTATION

Iran's foreign policy identity and roles have brought Iran a bundle of advantages and challenges**.** These self-proclaimed role conceptions are established on the 'double anti-Zionism and Imperialism' and have been branded regionally as an organic ideology that mesmerized the hearts and minds of the public.[452] As foreign policy is a buffer between domestic and external affairs, this does not mean in pragmatic calculations that Iran has not faced structural constraints both internally and externally and at least at times of internal and external transformations. Therefore, Iran faces three role challenges as the following:

4.1. Domestic Contestation

Apart from structural constraints, Welch draws on role theory to argue that foreign policy roles and orientations might change when leaders of certain personality and ideological traits expect counter-foreign policy roles and challenges emanating from *others*.[453] He refers to 'painful losses' instead of counter-reactions; thus, "*foreign policy is most likely to change dramatically when leaders expect the status quo to generate continued painful losses. States will not alter their behavior simply to try to realize some marginal gain*."[454]

In Iran's case, foreign policy change begins at home and is shaped by the outside world of two oppressors/ (Istikbar) 'Imperialist and Zionist.' The struggle for role change is mainly understood through Iranian political factions, which are divided into pragmatists/reformists and Rejectionists/Principlists. The reformist camp has always

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[451] Shireen Hunter, "Iran's Policy Toward the Persian Gulf: Dynamics of Continuity and Change," *Security and Bilateral Issues between Iran and Its Arab Neighbours*, Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017, pp. 11–38, doi:10.1007/978-3-319-43289-2_2.

[452] Stein, "Ideological Codependency and Regional Order: Iran, Syria, and the Axis of Refusal," p. 677.

[453] David A. Welch, *Painful Choices : A Theory of Foreign Policy Change*, Princeton University Press, 2005.

[454] cited, p. 8.

attempted to defy the Khomeinian[455]self-perception of Islamic deficiency and resistance as they endanger the *other*-external expectations of Iran's normative roles.

The domestic role contestation dictates the 'reformist approach' or 'factionalist contestation' that appeared after the inimical Iran-Iraq war and during Rafsanjani's presidency and successor Khatami. They called for a more 'Reduction of Tensions' approach *Tasjanoj Zadaei*[456] based on cooperative roles over confrontational export of revolution, exclusivist Third Worldism, and Shia faith in guardianship roles. Although Iran's foreign policy change is a rather strategic tactic, the faction-based and reaction-motivated modes of Iran's policymaking have ever been in the front line. Therefore, reaction to the Iran-Iraq war's consequences has paved the reformist way for accepting the United Nations Security Council Resolution 598 and Rafsanjani's 'Critical Dialogue' approach and Khatami's approach 'Dialogue of Civilizations.' The domestic role contestation is not of little effect; at least, it balances Iran's irrational roles beyond borders and proves once upon a time Iran's formulation of cooperative roles such as a regional-sub-system collaborator, role model, and good neighbor during the late 1980s and 1990s. For instance, in the 1990s, a reformist faction emerged consisting of Mohtashemi, Karoubi, and Khoinia, some of them included in the Green Movement reformists like Mir Hossein Mousavi, Zahra Rahnavard, and Mehdi Karroubi, who led the 2009 Uprisings.

For the Iranian public, charity starts at home. In one of the symbolic anti-Khomeini-led foreign policy disapprovals, young protestors amid the Green Movement protest in 2009 conveyed a message to leaders to exist from "Khamenei's black turban." During the protests, the public anger impulse went nationwide with chants and slogans of "*No Gaza, no Lebanon, I sacrifice my life for Iran,*" and similar discontent featured in Tehran bazaar in 2012 where traders chanted "*stop supporting Syria-focus on our situation.*"[457]

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[455] Ehteshami (2012) argues that Iran More since the revolution's rise still "ill-defined, as indeed does its role conception." In Domestic politics and foreign policy, "Iran and the International System". pp.129

[456] Hunter, "Iran's Policy Toward the Persian Gulf: Dynamics of Continuity and Change," p. 30.
[457] Akbaba, Özdamar, *Role Theory Middle East North Africa*, p. 62.

4.2.   Regional Contestation

As role theory promises to solve the black box of state identity; therefore, it empowers our analysis of the asymmetry of Iran's role conceptions and regional threat perceptions. Unlike other dominant international relations and foreign policy theories, role theory informs the puzzling phenomena that every Iranian role conception is respectively met by a regional threat perception in the Gulf states. When a holistic framework expands on various matters, role theory goes into cognitive segments of state identity as it explains role by role of the self-country and threat by threat perception by the other-country. This means each role conception has a reactive threat perception and action justification.

Upon this background, in our case, the regional counter-roles and threat perceptions posed by Iran's assertive roles could be understood in two dimensions:

First, geopolitically, the concern of the regional states regarding Iran's role as a bastion of revolution under its applicable label of exporter of revolution seems to (1) conspire with local militias to scheme political subversion and infiltration in the neighboring states under the pretext of Iran's support for the oppressed peoples against their authoritarian and pro-imperialist regimes; (2) aspire to be a regional leader and to have more political leverage over the Arab and Sunni powers; (3) challenge and destabilize the pro-US-Saudi Arabia status quo by agitating regional militancy and acquiring nuclear weapons and long-range ballistic missiles; (4) attempt to formulate an Iranian geo-ideological sphere of influence labeled as the 'Shia Crescent.'

Second, socio-ideologically, exporting revolution means to (1) export Persian supremacy by inciting Persian ethnicity groups in the Gulf region; (2) indoctrinate people to emulate Iran's role model, which is based on Islamic efficiency and revolutionary justice introduced by Imam Khomeini, known as Vilayet e-Faqih; (3) surpass Arabness by imposing Iran's Iranism/Persian-ism (Iraniyat) and Shia Islamism (Islamiyat); (4) empower Shia communities across the region and protect them if being allegedly oppressed.

4.2.1. Iran's Regional Roles and Gulf Region

Within the nature of role theory, identity and role marry and divorce at certain times of internal politics change and international circumstances. This, indeed, means that national identity, in general, produces necessary means for higher status enhancement and role enactment while state identity causes leaders to select roles according to their worldviews. This thesis explains how the emergent Islamist and revisionist identity of Khomeinian Iran has immediately distressed the regional order and antagonized the Gulf region's neighbors.

Since the advent of the Islamic revolution, and against all expectations of Iran's regional roles, the Arab Gulf states have been the focus of Khomeini's popular anti-imperialist role, namely the regional agents of imperialist oppressors. Beyond that role and being in the same sub-regional system, the Arab Gulf states feared Iran's signal of discursive and geopolitical superiority in the name of 'godly roles' vs. 'Satan roles.'

For Saudi Arabia mainly, the Islamic revolutionary Iran has ever been asserting revisionist roles against its direct interests and allies for the sake of legitimizing its regional power status by strategic imposition and subversion. The Saudi's concerns of Iran are of *a **threefold concern***: Firstly, geopolitical concerns emanate from the Iranian godly role conceptions of anti-Imperialism/Zionism, faith defender, oppressed people protector. These role conceptions have geopolitical connotations for Saudi Arabia and other Arab Gulf states as they view those roles are direct and persistent threats as they call for the following:

1- They are inciting anti-Saudi Arabian and Sunni world proxy groups.
2- A competitive aspiring regional leader.
3- A nuclear-armed Iran would make Iran a more emboldened actor in the region or a direct nuclear bomb attacker.
4- A challenger to the regional status quo at the expense of its sphere of influence and against its allies across the region.
5- A threat to the international commercial shipping routes in the Gulf region.
6- Fear of Iran's demand for the guardianship of the two Islamic holy cities, Mecca, and Medina, claiming they represent the whole Muslim world, not only Saudi Arabia.

Secondly, the ideological concern lies in the fact that the nature and objective of the Iranian 'export of revolution role' have implicitly been assigned mainly to spread revolutions based on Iranian-led Shia culture, threatening Saudi Arabia's ideological structure pillared on Wahabi Sunni norms. From the viewpoint of a power relationship, Iran's gateway to the region, through the binary role of the revolution export and the protection of oppressed protesters, has alerted Saudi Arabia to Iran's intention to erect a broader axis of resistance symbolically branded as a Shia Crescent.

Saudi Arabia's rivalry with Iran's roles is as well reasoned, as expressed in Ehteshami's portrayal of Iran as a "*missionary actor par excellence in [its] conceived roles.*"[458] In a similar vein, Soltaninejad argues that the growing tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia emanates from the nature of power relations where Saudi Arabia is preyed upon by Iran's "*irrationality and evil nature*"[459] justified by its revolutionary and Islamic roles and demands. The threats of Iran's regional roles have been perceived by and reflected in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy actions. From the romantic era of Iran's Islamic revolution in the 1980s to the Golden stage of the Arab Spring, which I call 'Khomeini's rebirth,' Saudi Arabia has been at the frontline of the Muslim Brotherhood and Shia revolutions. These threat perceptions are influenced by conventional and modern expectations of Saudi leaders. The continuity of anti-Iranian actions is still rooted in their cultural perspective, shaped by identity, political culture, and national and regional memory.[460]

This section will illustrate two scenarios of Iran's role-play vs. Saudi Arabia's counter-role behavior, before and after the Arab Spring uprisings. Analytically, it expands on the socio-ideological, geopolitical, and security concerns, normative and structural factors, and then reactive counter-roles.

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[458] Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "The Middle East's New Power Dynamics," *Current History*, vol. 108, no. 722 (2009), p. 399.

[459] Mohammad Soltaninejad, "Iran and Saudi Arabia: Emotionally Constructed Identities and the Question of Persistent Tensions," *Asian Politics and Policy*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2019), p. 118, doi:10.1111/aspp.12435.

[460] Cinzia Bianco, "Gulf Security after 2011: A Threat Analysis," *Middle East Policy*, vol. 25, no. 2 (2018), p. 31, doi:10.1111/mepo.12340.

4.2.2. Iran's Regional Roles and the Middle East

The Iranian regional roles have triggered three regional concerns and threats like the following:

4.2.2.1. Socio-ideological Concerns

These concerns have been manifested in the following critical points:

1. Iran's revolutionary mission initially targeted neighboring nations, beginning with Saudi Arabia. Relatively soon after the revolution in Iran, the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran emerged in the background of the Iranian provocation of the Qatif Shia uprisings in 1979 and the clerical propaganda directed at Al Saud and their guardianship of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. These activities are the first signs of the unfinished tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia.[461]

2. Iran has been seeking to erect an ideological-based crescent[462] coded as a 'Shia Crescent' equivalent to the geopolitical 'axis of resistance.' To this end, regional competitors have regarded Iran as having strategic patience to revolutionize the Arab streets, particularly the Shia sympathizers, mobilizing them with anti-imperialist and dictatorship rhetoric, protecting them as marginalized protestors, and defending them as true Muslims. During the Arab uprisings, Iran's regional roles intensified and contradicted themselves. Notably, Iran appeared to resume the conventional roles of 'bastion of revolutions,' 'defender of the faith,' 'protector of the oppressed people,' and 'anti-imperialist' incorporating new divisive roles of 'liberation champion' and 'defender of peace and security.'[463]

3. The golden stage of Iranian expansion came to its peak during the Arab Spring to spread the Shia spirit of Islamic revolutionary that imitated Iran's Islamic revolution in 1979. Thus, for the Supreme Leader Khamenei, Khomeini's dream came true by referring to Iran's role model as 'Islamic awakening' and a complement of Iran's Islamic

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[461] Casey L Addis et al., "Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy," *Current Politics and Economics of the Middle East*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2011), p. 111.
[462] Kayhan Barzegar, "Iran and The Shia Crescent: Myths and Realities," *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2008), p. 90.
[463] Akbaba, Özdamar, *Role Theory Middle East North Africa*.

revolution. For Egypt, Iran's support of the Muslim Brotherhood was considered rapprochement to Egypt to build a Shia-Sunni alliance of necessity. Another ideological concern for Egypt is that Iran might benefit from the chaos to incite the Shia Egyptians known as 'Ashraf.'

4.2.2.2. Geopolitical Concerns

1. The territorial dispute over the United Arab Emirates' two islands: Greater and Less Tunb and Abu Musa Island.

2. Iran's leverage on small Gulf states, such as Oman, has led them to pursue an Omni-balancing approach, which also gives rise to the skepticism of Saudi Arabia.

3. Iran has been empowering proxy Shia and Sunni groups within the articulated Axis of Resistance in Lebanese Hizballah, Hamas, and lately Houthis in Yemen since 2003 until they seized Sana'a in 2014.

4. Iran's growing role in the region, penetrated in the name of Muslim causes for Shia empowerment to the detriment of Sunnis, has, as a result, effectively "*unbalanced the bases of power and politics in the Middle East*."[464]

4.2.2.3. Security Concerns

1. Iran's nuclear ambition and ballistic missile arsenal build a strategic deterrence that would boost Iran's regional power position and supersede the Saudi-led regional status quo.

2. Leveraging the Strait of Hormuz and carrying out attacks and hijacking of oil tanks. There is a recurrence of such accidents, such as the British-registered tanker intercepted by Iran in July 2019.

3. Iran assisted and trained proxy groups in the 1980s, including (1) the Shia of Saudi Arabia (Intifada) and Kaaba's occupation in 1978. [465] (2) The sponsored bombing of Kuwait in the 1980s by the Shia Iraqi Da'wa Party (Islamic Call) targeted the U.S. and French embassies and threatened to assassinate the Amir in 1985.[466]

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[464] Barzegar, "Iran and The Shia Crescent: Myths and Realities," p. 88.
[465] Faisal M. Al- Shogairat, Vladimir Yurtaev, "The Prospect of the Relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Saudi Arabia: Plausible Scenarios," *Journal of Politics and Law*, vol. 10, no. 3 (2017), p. 88, doi:10.5539/jpl.v10n3p83.
[466] Addis et al., "Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy," p. 124.

4. In response to Saudi Arabian interference in Bahrain during the Arab Spring to crackdown on the Shia-Bahraini protests, Iran plotted attack activities on Saudi officials such as Saudi diplomats in Egypt and Pakistan and an attempted assassination of the Saudi ambassador in Washington, DC.[467]

4.2.3. Regional Reaction to Iran's Roles: Alter-casting

1- Saudi Arabia criticizes Iran's involvement in what it sees as Arab causes, such as the Israeli-Palestinian problem, and is currently challenging Iran's proxy in Lebanon with material support to Sunni political parties.[468] In this regard, Saudi Arabia fears Iran's growing prestige for supporting Islamic issues, including Palestine.

2- Saddam Hussein's war with Iran was seen in international relations as a preventive ideological war against the Shia revolutionary Iran. At the time of the war, Saudi Arabia supported Saddam Hussein.

3- Worries over Iran's regional roles have prompted Arab presidents and officials to condemn Iran for using Shia minorities and populations. Among other critical viewpoints, former President of Egypt Hosni Mubarak warned that "*the Shias in the region are more loyal to Iran than their own countries*."[469] Similarly, the King of Jordan once described Iran's regional ambition as a likely way forward to create a 'Shia Crescent' in the region.

4- The Bahraini government often accused Iran of training and funding a group called Bahraini Hezbollah, which reportedly carried out a series of aggressive attacks in the Kingdom.[470]

5- With Iran's influence and increasing role in the region, there is a sharp reaction and controversy among the Sunni political elites, especially the Arab ones. Sunni elites view Iran's threat from three central angles: (1) their power and regional role have diminished; (2) fears regarding Shia disruption and sectarian expansion; and (3) Iranian intervention in Arab affairs, manifested after the fall of Bagdad in 2003.[471]

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[467] Eisenstadt, "The Strategic Culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Religion, Expediency, and Soft Power in an Era of Disruptive Change," p. 16.
[468] Addis et al., "Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy."
[469] Barzegar, "Iran and The Shia Crescent: Myths and Realities," p. 89.
[470] Abdo, *The New Sectarianism : The Arab Uprisings and the Rebirth of the Shi'a-Sunni Divide*.
[471] Barzegar, "Iran and The Shia Crescent: Myths and Realities," p. 88.

4.2.4. Iran's Regional Power Status Rejection

Iran is an influential state in the Middle East, but that does not mean that it is a potential regional power unless the vast regional masses and states accept it as such. It otherwise benefited regional transformations such as filling the power vacuum in Iraq after the decline of the Ba'athist regime and the US's withdrawal. Although Iran promised to address the demands of Muslims and Middle Eastern peoples, such as advocating for Muslim unification and serving as a regional model, its ideological aspirations have overshadowed the promises and expectations.

Iran's role in spreading the Islamic Revolution had detrimental repercussions for enhancing its international recognition as a regional power. Among the concurrent ramifications of this was first Iran's policy of socializing these populations in resistance and Wilayat al-faqih ideas. Over time, these two concepts have been assimilated into the Shia Arab cultures and have contributed to their alienation from their societies. Second, Iran's regional roles, based on the principles of resistance and revolution, the global Islamic government, and the elimination of the Gulf regimes have given rise to Arab nationalism and Sunni solidarity. Third, Iran's understanding of regionalism as merely preventing America's presence has negative consequences for its regional aspirations and status. Such actions assumed that it was not acceptable for the countries of the region to collaborate with Iran without the US's participation. Accordingly, regional actors interpreted Iran's behavior as an attempt to neutralize the United States for Tehran to play a leading role, especially in the Gulf States.

From the outset, Iran has played a revolutionary ideology to gain domestic and external legitimacy centered on the synthesis of Shia and Persian Iran, avoid internal division, and unify external roles under Iran's Islamic and Persian ideals. The presentation of these two components in its rhetoric and external activities expresses the regional roles that Iran plays for the Persian dominance of the Gulf region and splitting the Islamic world into two security communities: Sunni and Shia.

In the Arab societies where the belief prevails that Sunnis should dominate if they make up the majority, Khomeinian Iran arose, claiming to be a defender of the oppressed Shia minority. Such presumption and claim have incited a flame of sectarian tension

between the two sides. It did not preclude Iran from taking the opportunity to attract certain Shia groups to its orbit, but it nevertheless revealed Iran to be just a regional sectarian power. Finally, if the demographic factor matters, we will infer that Iran will not have a regional role acceptable to the Sunni mainstream, which sees Iran as simply a revisionist state trying to overthrow the ideological and political status quo favored by the Sunni Arab-Western axis.

FOURTH CHAPTER

SAUDI ARABIA'S NATIONAL ROLE CONCEPTS AND BEHAVIOR IN THE MIDDLE EAST SINCE 1979

"Saudi Arabia is the heart of the Arab and Islamic worlds, the investment powerhouse, and the hub connecting three continents."[472]

-Saudi Arabian 2030 Vision

After the oil revolution in the Gulf region and the fall of Arab nationalist leaderships like the Egyptian Nasserist and Iraqi Baathist, Saudi Arabia has steadily strengthened its regional influence and status in the Gulf region, Arab, and Muslim world. Domestic, regional, and international factors and sources have influenced its regional foreign policy and roles. At home, the Islamic identity, oil economy, and regime legitimacy have become the main foundations of Al Saud's influence and politics. Regionally, concerns of transition in the regional status quo have also been at the core of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy. Saudi Arabia has struggled to deter Iran's regional aspirations and influence, competed with other nationalist Arab powers, faced post-9/11 radicalization, and adapted to the repercussions of the Arab Spring. Internationally, Saudi Arabia's place in the capitalist world as an OPEC member improved its international status and encouraged its ties with the West, particularly the United States. Its rising Petro-economy qualified it as a member of the G20.

The Arab Spring uprisings have evoked the Saudi traditional cautious and pragmatic foreign policy to contain the revolutionary movements. As usual, such containment policy has always pertained to regime survival.[473] During the Salman(s) era, Saudi Arabia started to adopt a reformist and proactive approach, the former notably transformed a domestic policy toward a series of reforms promoted by the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in his 2030 vision, and the latter drew on a hawkish foreign policy to prevent the repercussions of the Arab revolutions. As one of the other aspiring

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[472]"Home | Kingdom of Saudi Arabia - Ministry of Foreign Affairs," (10/09/2019), https://www.mofa.gov.sa/sites/mofaen/Vision2030/Pages/default.aspx.

[473] Crystal A. Ennis, Bessma Momani, "Shaping the Middle East in the Midst of the Arab Uprisings: Turkish and Saudi Foreign Policy Strategies," *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 6 (2013), p. 1131,1132, doi:10.1080/01436597.2013.802503.

regional powers in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia has always been in a binary position to reconcile domestic and foreign policies, as Ennis and Momani describe:

> *"Saudi Arabia is a peculiar middle power… walks a fine line between managing domestic and external pressure so as to guarantee regime survival and regional authority…Not only does Saudi Arabia want to maintain its role as a soft power mediator and be seen as advancing and even leading Arab causes, it wants to be the dominant religio-regional figurehead, opposite Iran."*[474]

1. ROLE SOURCES

Saudi Arabia's regional roles vary according to the diversity and degree of influence of its internal, regional, and international sources. The internal sources stem from the Saudi religious standing, the Wahhabi ideology, the legitimacy of Al Saud, and the oil wealth, while the regional competition and the crystallization of alliances constitute the external sources for Saudi roles. These sources are as the following:

1.1. Domestic and International Sources

Saudi Arabian primary domestic role sources are ideational, material, discursive, and instrumental. They are as the following:

1.1.1. Ideational Sources

Major ideational sources of Saudi Arabia's role conceptualization and enactment are three: national identity, Wahhabi doctrine, and Al Saudi family state identity and leadership style. They are as the following:

1.1.1.1. National Identity

The famous scholar of Middle Eastern studies, Raymond Hinnebusch, debates the 'identity dilemma' that undermines 'identity unitarity' in the Arab region. He argues that although the significance of Islamic-Arab identities, those leaders make alternatives to their national identity according to their regime survival interests and threat vulnerability. Moreover, he rationalizes this as:

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[474] cited, p. 1134.

"Rulers in the contemporary Arab states vacillate between legitimizing themselves as Arab-Islamic leaders and relying on state identities; they cannot fully rely on Arabism or Islam since their borders are not congruent with the Arab or Islamic communities, and adherence to Arabism may sacrifice state interests; yet they cannot fully rely on state identities which lack sufficient credibility."[475]

In retrospect, in the earlier times of Saudi Arabia, King Abd al-Aziz Ibn Saud' emphasized the nature and identity of the newborn state, namely, *"two things are essential to our State and our people [...] religion and the rights inherited from our fathers."*[476] These two basic origins of Saudi Arabian self-identification are divided into sub-ideational components, including Islamic ideals, House of Saud allegiance, the 'Khaleeji'-Gulf Arabs, and the tribal lineages of Adnan and Qahtan. Rather than a single Saudi national identity, all these four constitutive characteristics make sense of collective identity (Ummah).

In deconstructing the lexical components of *Saudi Arabia,* the adjective 'Saudi' was derived from the common noun of Ibn Saud, the founder of the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. As a tribute to his victory and unifying of the Kingdom, the emerging state was named after him. This name came to nullify other historical components and tribal identities that today, some Saudis think they had to be proud of.

In Saudi Arabia, it is the House of Saud and oil that enabled 'Saudization' of Najd and Hijaz to be converted into 'Saudis' in which *"religious faith and loyalty to the ruling family are still predominant components of the collective identity, which is, no doubt, the Saudi parallel of nationalism."*[477] The Saudi scholar Madawi Al-Rasheed argues that the historical narratives of Al Saud:

> *"Create memories of a population riven by warfare, instability, and rivalry as a prelude to the paramount role of the Wahhabi call adopted by the Saudis in the eighteenth century. The narratives assert the leading role*

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[475] Raymond A Hinnebusch, *The International Politics of the Middle East*, *Regional International Politics Series*, Manchester University Press, 2003, p. 57.
[476] Joseph Nevo, "Religion and National Identity in Saudi Arabia," *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 34, no. 3 (1998), pp. 35–36, doi:10.1080/00263209808701231.
[477] cited, p. 35.

of the Najdi religio-political leadership in delivering the rest of Arabia from its previous state of 'chaos and ignorance.'[478]

Throughout her seminal book, a History of Saudi Arabia, she neglects Saudis' fixed national identity. In it, the roots of Saudi state identity are cynically marked. Referring to 'homogenization,' 'official historical narratives,' she highlighted two factors that have consolidated the state's name and self-identified the people: asabiyya najdiyya (Najdi solidarity) and *asabiyya madhhabiyya* (sectarian solidarity). These two factors have given rise to the unified geography, the same dress, and the dominant Wahabi doctrine. The state identity of Saudi Arabia has its historical and political roots deep in the early stages of contemporary times of the Arab Peninsula. The early foundation of Saudi Arabian state identity goes back to the period following Ibn Saud's conquest over his regional competitors Ibn Rashid of Jabal Shammar and Sharif Hussein of Mecca (Hijaz). To consolidate their ruling legitimacy Umara and Ulema (statemen and clerics), Ibn Saud, and his allies (Wahabi Brothers) *Ikhwan* started (Najidisation) *siyasat al-tanjid* of all other Hijazi and Shia regions.[479]

In consolidating historical credentials and legacy of the role of Al Saud in building the successive Saudi states since the first state of 1744, in 1932, King Abd al-Aziz (Ibn-Saud) installed the two pillars of the third Saudi state (modern Saudi Arabia) that were: "*religion and the rights inherited from our fathers*."[480] The reference to 'our fathers' in Ibn Saud gives clues to Islam's role and the Arab Umara (Princes) and Ulama (clerics) alliance that unified the state. The faithful King Fahad praised and tracked his father's discourse by adding nationalist language to buy exterior legitimacy (Arab populations), diversify national identity sources, and enhance Saudi Arabian regional status.

For two reasons, the balance between Islamic and national identities has been appealing to the Kingdom. First, to ease the strict Wahabi doctrinal dictates by diversifying national identity sources that would establish a common sense of self-identification internally and qualify Saudi Arabia for a leadership role in the Arab region.

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[478] Madawi Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, second New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 186,187.

[479] Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*; Altoraifi, *Understanding the Role of State Identity in Foreign Policy Decision-Making*.

[480] Ameen Rihani, *Ibn Sa'oud of Arabia, His People and His Land,* London: Constable & Co., 1928, p. 39.

Second, to reconcile ideology with modernization, which requires openness to all global cultures and tolerance with all religions. Unlike other pan-Arab ideologies, Saudi Arabia has state-*ized* Salafi Islam since the foundation of the Kingdom in 1932.[481]

Joseph Nevo demystifies the puzzling relationship between state and religion in Saudi Arabian politics concerning the analogous history of Islamic statehood. He showcases the Saudi Arabian regime uses religion as a discourse and material to stand a 'faith defender' and enhance 'Saudism' by:

> *"[first]the resources and apparatus of the state were used to promote Islam, as in the time of the Prophet and the first four Khalifas; [second]Islam was mobilized to protect the state. Saudi Arabia is a modern manifestation of the latter."[482]*

Religion is, for Saudis, the key factor in constructing national identity. Compared to their Arab counterparts, they are more nationalistic, where almost 17% of the Saudis identify themselves as Saudis and the rest as Muslims.[483]Saudi Arabia's worldviews, threat perceptions, and foreign policy policies have been traditionally conditioned by ideological and political accounts. The former accounts for the religious identity, and the latter the monarchical system. These two factors are both responsible for the actions of Saudi Arabia in the region and world.

Religion is also a crucial factor in the conduct of foreign and security policy. It is supposed to unify the region, but the reverse is the case— the similarity in ideologies results in political competition and ontological insecurity. In other words, Darwich illustrates regional identity similarities and their implications for inter-state relations in the Middle East; as stated in this quote, "*similarities in identity can both unite and divide.*"[484] As the traditional assumption suggests, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Muslim Brotherhood would converge on pan-Islamism, but the search for self-distinctiveness versus 'other' has always been a source of conflict between them.[485]

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[481] Hinnebusch, *The International Politics of the Middle East*, p. 57.
[482] Nevo, "Religion and National Identity in Saudi Arabia," p. 34.
[483] Mansoor Moaddel, "The Saudi Public Speaks : Religion , Gender , and Politics," *International Journal of Middle East Studie*, vol. 38, no. 1 (2006), p. 85.
[484]May Darwich, "The Ontological (in)Security of Similarity : Wahhabism versus Islamism in Saudi Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy Analysis.*, vol. 12, no. 3 (2016), p. 28, https://doi.org/10.1093/fpa/orw032.
[485] Ibid ibid.ibid.

Thus, competition for pan-Islamic identities in the Middle East has led Saudi Arabia to use identity manipulation to address foreign policy demands, evaluate new ideological threat perceptions, and distinguish Saudi Arabia from other regional powers. The Saudi identity reduction strategy—a utilitarian approach— has been applied in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy. At the height of the pan-Arab movement, Saudi Arabia acted as a mantle of pan-Islamic identity versus pan-Arabism. Again, following the advent of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, Saudi Arabia reduced its identification to pan-Sunnism versus Shi'ism. And since the Arab Spring uprisings, Saudi Arabia has reduced its identification to pan-Salafism versus revolutionism and pan-Arabism versus non-Arab identities— Iran and Turkey.[486]

The oscillation of Saudi Arabia's role identity is a hallmark. The three regional movements in the Middle East: the pro-Arab revolutions of the 1960s, the Islamic revolution in Iran, and the Arab Spring uprisings are clear examples of this. In every scenario, Saudi Arabia responded assertively to protect its regime and regional identity.

First, in reaction to the Nasser-led revolutionary movements of the 1960s, Saudi Arabia disavowed them by defining itself as a defender of pro-Islamic conservative monarchies and a defender of Islamic faith against pro-Western secularism and communism. However, this was aptly clear in the Saudi Arabian strict position on the Egyptian incursion in Yemen to help change the monarchical system led for centuries by the Hashemite dynasty. Given the distinction between the Yemeni Hashemite-Zaydi and the Saudi Wahhabi Sunni doctrines, at least, the monarchical system of both governments was identical. During that Arab Cold War in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s between Egypt and Saudi Arabia, King Faisal wanted to contain Nasser's Arab ambition by setting a pan-Islamic foreign policy doctrine. Namely, this doctrine called for (pan-Islamism) in terms of a collective Ummah identity that would foster Muslim solidarity (al-Tadamun al-Islami). Since then, Saudi Arabia continued the raison d'être onward until the Arab Spring.[487]

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[486] May Darwich, "The Ontological (in)Security of Similarity : Wahhabism versus Islamism in Saudi Foreign Policy," pp. 469–88.

[487] Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 17.

Second, with the rise of Iran's political-Islamist regime, Saudi Arabia concurrently entered the second wave of pan-Islamism and pro-Western realignment. These two dynamics are paradoxical, without a doubt. On the other hand, despite sectarian discrepancies between pro-Sunni Muslim Saudi Arabia and pro-Shia Muslim Iran, the Islamic revolution in Iran has produced 'ideational similarity' between Saudi Arabian pan-Islamism and Iranian pan-Islamism. Subsequently, the ruling Saudi family found the Shia rival and its new Islamic regime to be a potential threat to its regime and favorite regional status quo. In the words of Turki al-Faisal Al Saud, Saudi Arabia's critique of Iran is as follows:

> *"Saudi Arabia is the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, and the Birthplace of Islam, and as such it is the eminent leader of the wider Muslim world. Iran portrays itself as the leader not just of the minority Shia world, but of all Muslim revolutionaries interested in standing up to the West."*[488]

Third, the new wave of Saudi Arabian state identity insecurity arose amid the Muslim Brotherhood-led revolutions that had shaken the Arab region since the Arab Spring. This time, to maintain the regional status quo of its favor, improve its regional power status, and reshape its state identity, Saudi Arabia has invented two state identity narratives that I call 'identity paradox'—*Islamic Salafism and Arab nationalism*. In an unprecedented way, these new narratives of Saudi state identification are intended to downgrade rival *otherness* (Shias, Iran, Iran's proxies, Turkey, and Muslim Brothers) either within or outside Saudi Arabia. The Muslim Brotherhood has become the second regional 'other' entity after Iran that Saudi Arabia is determined to dismantle, as Darwich states:

> *"The Kingdom aimed to forge a new, distinctive identity narrative, not only as the sole leader of Sunni Islam in the region, but also as the upholder of a strict Salafi-Wahhabi interpretation of Islam."*[489]

The methods used by Saudi Arabia to undermine the Muslim Brotherhood are two: upgrading Saudi-branded non-partisan Salafism in the region and conceptualizing

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[488] Turki Al Faisal bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, "Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy," *Middle East Policy*, vol. 20, no. 4 (2013), p. 38, doi:10.1111/mepo.12044.
[489] May Darwich, "The Ontological (in)Security of Similarity : Wahhabism versus Islamism in Saudi Foreign Policy," p. 38.

two regional roles as guardian of 'true' Islam versus partisan Islam and leader of pacific Sunni Islam versus radical Sunni Islam— referring to the Muslim Brotherhood.[490]

As for the second Saudi state identity narrative (pan-Arabism), the Kingdom, Egypt, and the UAE have architected—the instrumental Arab nationalism—the Salafi-Nationalist axis. With this identity fusion, Saudi state identity is being transformed into a rising regional identity. Constitutively, the axis objective has covertly tended to create a collective Arab community against a non-Arab and Muslim Brotherhood. The recent influx of Saudi state identification has given rise to three manifestations: nationalist rhetoric in Saudi official records and media, several national reforms like the Saudi 2030 Vision, and pro-active foreign policy on regional issues such as its military coalition against Houthis in Yemen since mid-2015.

Diversification of Saudi Arabia's identity and roles is also a response to international outrage over Saudi Arabia's fundamental Wahabism, which has suppressed local modernization and fueled international radicalism. The new alternative to Saudi state identification, namely Arab nationalism, is justified by Saudi Arabia to create a new self-image in the West about the Kingdom and Islam after Wahhabism has distorted them.[491] Such a narrative recently embedded in Saudi Arabian foreign policy and discourse is aptly to achieve the following:

1- Pan-Arabism would enhance Saudi legitimacy, regional roles, and causes in the region. The carved Arabism is presupposed to a Saudi Arab leader role and portrays the Kingdom as an upholder of Arab self-distinctiveness against 'other'- non-Arab communities and political-Islamism (Muslim Brotherhood). From a structuralist point of view, tying pan-Arabism to national and state identities conveys a message to the West (Core of the world system) its desired modal of independence from the rentier economy, losing pro-West patronage, which thus acquires regional interdependences and regional identity.[492]

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[490] May Darwich, "The Ontological (in)Security of Similarity : Wahhabism versus Islamism in Saudi Foreign Policy," pp. 469–88.
[491] Zeba Khan, "Sectarianization of Identity and Nation Building in Saudi Arabia," *Ortadoğu Etütleri*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2019), pp. 114–41, https://orsam.org.tr/tr/ortadogu-etutleri-haziran-/-cilt11-/-sayi1.
[492] Hinnebusch, "The Middle East in the World Hierarchy: Imperialism and Resistance."

2- Arab nationalism is believed to disband political Islamists regionally and Saudi Arabian *'Sahwa Islamists'* nationally, discredit their regional voice and incriminate their acts as a sort of national insurrection.

3- As nationalism implies an impulse of secularity and modernization and consolidation of national identity, the Kingdom under the Salman(s) and their famous 2030 Vision seeks to reshape the Saudi conservative mindset by socializing it into concepts of nation-building, regional collectivity, and innovative society.

4- The engagement of Saudi Arabian society in the Arab causes would reduce domestic pressure on the royal family.

5- The manipulation of pan-Arab rhetoric would increase Saudi Arabia's national pride and legitimize its regional roles.[493]

In Saudi Arabia, religious perceptions organize society and moralize foreign policymaking. Religion gives meaning and stability to Saudi Arabia's regional roles, including a *protector of Islamic faith* dedicated to propagating Islamic values and traditions in the Kingdom and the Islamic world. The Saudi role as a *custodian of the two holy mosques* has a religious symbolic dimension in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy-making and contributes to the legitimization of the Al Saud regime. In general, two political and religious establishments regulate Saudi Arabia's foreign policy and conduct. Politically, the Al Saud—Saudi leadership—shapes strategic aspects, including foreign policy orientation and roles. Royal leadership styles, belief systems, and worldviews generally influence the conduct of foreign policy. For example, the transition from King Abdullah to King Salman in 2015 has turned Saudi Arabia's reactive foreign policy into an offensive.[494] Religiously, the Saudi clerical foundation is known as *Ulema*, including the clergy of Al-Shaykh and the descendants of Mohammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, serves as a local facilitator for any foreign policy decision.

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[493]"Why Saudi Arabia Is Embracing a New Nationalism," (10/14/2019), https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/why-saudi-arabia-embracing-new-nationalism.
[494] Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Saudi Arabia as a Resurgent Regional Power," *International Spectator*, vol. 53, no. 4 (2018), pp. 78–79, doi:10.1080/03932729.2018.1507722.

1.1.1.2. Wahabi Doctrine

Religion is a key source of role conceptualization and enactment in the Muslim world. It serves in three ways; according to Ghose and James, they are:

> *"(A) religious views and beliefs of policymakers...(b) a source of legitimacy for foreign policy actions recommended by both government and critics…. [and] religious issues can spread across borders.*"[495]

In Saudi Arabia, the faith-based foreign policy typically takes four forms: *fatwa* (religious guidelines) on foreign affairs; doctrines of Sunniism and Salafism; discursive campaigning; and religious legitimacy, known as the Baya'a (oath of allegiance to a leader) principle. The former and latter are exploited and institutionalized by the ruling family and clerics, and the third continues to be religiously popularized by people and propagandized by the official and social media. The final form—the oath of allegiance to a leader— through which the ruler is legitimized and respected by *Sharia rule* (Islamic law).[496] Alone, Saudi Arabia is proud to host the two holy cities of Mecca and Madina and claims that it is committed to representing the issues of the Muslim world. Officially, this synopsis, posted on the front page of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia, confirms that:

> *"Islam has always been the most important factor affecting the determination of priorities of Kingdom's foreign policy. Since the foundation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom works to devote and dedicate Her potentials and resources to serve issues of Islamic World and achieve the motives of solidarity and unity based on the fact of belonging to one belief. The Islamic symbiosis is the method to regain Muslims position and honor."*[497]

This section shows that the Saudi regime has always used the above-mentioned religious foundations to accomplish three objectives:

1. Identity homogenization of various tribal and sect cultures
2. Solicitation of religious legitimacy

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[495] Gaurav Ghose, Patrick James, "Third-Party Intervention in Ethno-Religious Conflict: Role Theory, Pakistan, and War in Kashmir, 1965," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 17, no. 3 (2005), p. 427,428, doi:10.1080/09546550590929200.

[496] Magdalena Charlotte Delgado, *A Constructivist Analysis of Religion's Role in Foreign Policy:The Cases of Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia under the Leaderships of Menachem Begin, Ayatollah Khomeini and Fahd Bin Abdulaziz*, p. 183.

[497] *Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs* – *http://www.mofa.gov.sa/sites/mofaen/KingdomForeignPolicy/Pages/ForeignPolicy24605.asp*

3. Justification of foreign policy activities and roles, particularly those sectarian ones targeting Iran.

Clerical guidelines (*fatwas*) have always consolidated and justified the roles and actions of Saudi foreign policy. For example, Saudi Arabia reacted religiously and militarily to the Arab Spring revolutions. Islamists, both Sahwa leaders and Wahhabi hardliners, supported Saudi positions on the Syrian regime, Bahraini uprisings, Saudi Shia protests in eastern provinces, and the military campaign against the Houthis.

The Wahhabi worldviews contributed to shaping the threat perceptions at the local, regional, and international levels. Domestically, the scholars '*Ulema*' adopted a major campaign against the Awakening (*Sahwa*) movement, claiming it is linked to the Muslim Brotherhood and criticizing its scholars such as Salman al-Awda. Regionally, the Saudi regime relies on the twin religious source of foreign policy *Sharia* and *Wahhabi* doctrine for reshaping certain foreign policy decisions. Usually, '*fatwas*' are not taken directly but might turn into popular culture and awareness. While internationally, Islamization has ever been instrumentalized by Saudi Arabia in the foreign arena to appease Western allies and oppose regional self-proclaimed leadership roles. In past scenarios, for instance, during the first Arab Cold War in the 1950s and 1960s, Saudi Arabia used pan-Islamic discourse and other tools against the Nasser-led pan-Arab camp to maintain the balance of power and protect conservative Arab monarchies, including itself.

The Wahhabi doctrine is implicitly viewed as a counter-instrument against the Shia doctrine of Iran. In competition with Iran's revolution export ideology, Saudi Arabia has generously sought to export Wahhabism to the world through funds and religious institutions. Saudi Arabia has been active in the globalization of Wahhabism (Global Da'wa) by but not limited to the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, the Da'wa and Guidance; the Muslim World League (MWL); the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY); and the Islamic University of Medina (IUM).[498] The objective of these institutions is to show *"the Muslim exterior as an arena for managing both domestic and foreign*

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[498] Eliora Katz, Peter Mandaville, Shadi Hamid, "Islam as Statecraft: How Governments Use Religion in Foreign Policy," *Brookings*, 2018, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/FP_20181116_islam_as_statecraft.pdf.

antagonists."[499] Also, Saudi Arabia used them on numerous occasions, as in the aftermath of the Mecca insurrection, the Afghanistan war, and in retaliation to Iran's revolutionary ideology. In response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia used the Muslim World League, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Pakistani Jamaat-i Islami and Ahl-i Hadith networks (intermingled through the Islamic University of Medina) to donate money to the Mujahidin.

Discursively, Saudi Arabian foreign policy designed media strategies to propagate religious propaganda campaigns against Saudi Arabia's perceived enemies and threats. For example, when Saudi Arabia launched the military offensive in 2015 against the Houthis, Saudi preachers, including A'yid al-Qarni and Muhammad al-Arifi, supported and approved the military effort. The former wrote a priding poem—titled '*Labayk ya Salman'*/ '*here we are, Salman, at your service*,' converted into a song— showing his full support for King Salman's war decision. In his opinion, the war was justified for demonstrating how 'Junud Allah/Soldiers of God' would defeat the 'Majus'/Magi, referring to Iran. While the latter appeared in his Twitter posts endorsing the military campaign and urged the Yemeni people not to follow them as supporters of what he described as 'Safavid Iran.'[500] Saudi Arabia has institutionalized the propagation of Wahhabism internationally to combat the Iranian political and Islamic theology of Vilayet-il-Faqih. Argues Abdo that "*Saudi tolerance of the Salafists is related directly to how the latter serve as echo chambers in support of the rivalry with Iran.*"[501] Likewise, Halliday argues that Saudi Arabia uses religion as a common source for its political authority and regional role:

> *"Further state interests against those of rival claimants for Islamic and regional influence – secular rivals such as Egypt and Iraq, religious rivals such as Iran – and, never to be forgotten, to engage, or as it turned out, appease, Islamist critics at home."*[502]

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[499] Andrew Hammond, "Producing Salafism: From Invented Tradition to State Agitprop," *Salman's Legacy. The Dilemmas of a New Era in Saudi Arabia*, ed. by Madawi Al-Rasheed, Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 155, https://www.academia.edu/36465506/Producing_Salafism_From_Invented_Tradition_to_State_Agitprop.
[500] Toby Matthiesen, "The Domestic Sources of Saudi Foreign Policy: Islamists and the State in the Wake of the Arab Uprisings," 2015.
[501] Abdo, *The New Sectarianism : The Arab Uprisings and the Rebirth of the Shi'a-Sunni Divide*, p. 73.
[502] F. Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics and Ideology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Kamrava, 2005, p. 280.

Saudi Arabia has chosen a new political Islamic model based on Salafism since its foundation. It uses Wahhabism as a missionary ideology that seeks to promote a Saudi Sunni model distinct from Sunni and Shia Islam and support Saudi policies externally.[503] Officially, when King Faisal commented on the importance of religious doctrine for Saudi Arabia's foreign policy, he said, "*the affair of Israel and usurped Palestine is neither political nor economic. It is an affair putting in question the basics of Islam.*"[504]

Saudi Arabia has always struggled to achieve supremacy over Iran by investing in the construction of ideological grounds in the Middle East and the Muslim world. According to leaked cables, Saudi Arabia has tailored a *'two-track religious agenda'* and a massive sponsorship to religious institutions supporting Saudi-Wahabi Sunniism. It has often worked on the first track by branding Saudi-Wahabi Sunniism worldwide, building religious institutions, and distorting Iranian Shi'ism in media outlets and on international occasions.[505] The Kingdom has delegated these two tasks to several government agencies, including the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, the Interior and Islamic Affairs, the Intelligence Service, and the Royal Court, all in cooperation with the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs. To fulfill this function, Saudi Arabia founded a range of religious organizations, including the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) in 1972, to socialize Muslim societies and youth worldwide on Salafi values and promote Salafi Tawhid (Unicity) education.

In Saudi Arabian 2030 vision, religion is claimed to be an integral part of modernizing Saudi Arabia. The vision book stipulates that "*the principles of Islam will be the driving force for us to realize our Vision.*"[506] All in all, Dekmejian summed up, "*Islam has become, once again, a two-edged political instrument-as the Kingdom's primary medium of self-legitimation, and as the main venue of protest for opposition elements.*"[507]

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[503] Muharrem Hilmi Özev, "Saudi Society and the State: Ideational and Material Basis," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, vol. 39, no. 4 (2017), p. 999, doi:10.13169/arabstudquar.39.4.0996.
[504] William Ochsenwald, "Saudi Arabia and The Islamic Revival," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 13, no. 3 (1981), p. 276.
[505] Dilip Hiro, *Cold War in the Islamic World Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Struggle for Supremacy*, Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 222.
[506] Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, "Saudi Arabia Vision 2030," (2018).
[507] R Hrair Dekmejian, "The Rise of Political Islam in Saudi Arabia," *Middle East Journal*, vol. 48, no. 4 (1994), p. 627.

1.1.1.3. Al Saud Family

The politics and conditions of the House of Saud should be carefully reviewed. Primarily, the political structure of Saudi Arabia has been ascribed to this kind of dynasty ruled by the Saud family since the 18th century. Therefore, the House of Saud is considered the second fundamental source of Saudi Arabia's national identity.

Unlike some other places, Stepan's categorization of ruling families describes the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as being ruled by one model of 'large dynastic ruling families.' This type of royal family includes and excludes what is seen to interest its favor and serve its regime survival. It also describes it as a kingdom of 'twin-toleration' that requires a sort of negotiation between heaven (Ulema) and earth (Al Saud).[508]The influence of the Al Saud-Wahhabi historic accord is still essential to understanding the foreign policy orientation and regional roles of Saudi Arabia up to this day. In brief, Zeino-mahmalat highlights such influence in this quote:

> *"The Saudi state identity generates foreign policy roles and norms that give an idea about what is considered "appropriate" in foreign policy and that may impact the content or way of conduct of Saudi foreign policy. The main sources of Saudi Arabia's foreign-policy role- conceptions are the Saudi state's (Wahhabi)-Islamic identity and a 'statized' form of Arab identity attached and subordinated to Islam."[509]*

Since Saudi Arabia's foreign policy is as exclusive as a 'family affair,'[510] therefore, the Saudi leadership style is likewise a family-style. From a hyper-centralized regime in the 1960s and 1970s to a horizontal fluid distribution of power to non-Al Saud- "princely quasi-states"[511] either autocrats or clerics and vertical distribution of power to 'Al Saud princes' means that "*the king is not a forceful personality, the decision-making circle widens.*"[512] Royal family members lead the diplomatic and security ministries—

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[508] Alfred C. Stepan, "Religion, Democracy, and the" Twin Tolerations," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 11, no. 4 (2000), pp. 37–57, doi:10.1353/jod.2000.0088.
[509] Zeino-mahmalat, *Saudi Arabia's and Iran's Iraq Policies in the Post-Gulf War Era*, p. 90.
[510] Laura Hartmann, "Saudi Arabia as a Regional Actor: Threat Perception and Balancing at Home and Abroad," 2016, p. 2.
[511] Fred Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations*, *The Middle East in International Relations*, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 52.
[512] F. Gregory Gause III, "The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia," *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002, p. 204, doi:10.4324/9781315615462-3.

the Ministries of Sovereignty/Wizarat al-Siyada— including Interior, Foreign Affairs, and Defense.[513]

Leadership style and foreign policy decision-making in Saudi Arabia as a "state of conquest" is characterized by "double patience, followed by action." As Al Rasheed points out, the House of Saud could rule the state by the "*manipulation of a cultural ideal related to leadership,*"[514] which is centered, in a discursive and structural way, on two leadership styles. The first style refers to socio-historical narratives and royal legacies, including tribal pride, generosity, courage, and forgiveness, and the second style refers to political wisdom. The leadership style and traits of the founder King Abd al-Aziz ibn Saud are also celebrated. The second style of leadership is expressed in Islamic idealism and politics. This style is based on varying interpretations in the formal and informal circles of the Saudi clergy. Within the Salafi doctrine of loyalty to the *wali al-amr* 'leader of the Muslim community,' the Grand Mufti, along with other clerical factions, facilitate the justification and articulation of domestic and international affairs.

Given Saudi Arabia's foreign policy is a 'family affair,' this political legacy has always been evident in Saudi foreign policy's consistency and conduct. However, it is polymorphous in sources such as oil, royal family, holy places, and alliance with the West; and roles such as cooperative, competitive, and status quo orientations.[515] All these sources determine the Saudi raison d'état. Royal factionalism is also a central issue in coping with Saudi Arabia's foreign policymaking. In the early stages of Saudi foreign policy, pro-Arab nationalists and pro-Americans arose as two Saudi factions.[516] Furthermore, Cordesman insists that "*the Sudairis were from the Western-oriented wing of the family,*" while he identifies others, including King Abdullah as a 'traditionalist.'[517]

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[513] Michael Herb, *All in the Family : Absolutism, Revolution, and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies*, State University of New York Press, 1999, p. 8.
[514] M Al-Rasheed, "Circles of Power: Royals and Society in Saudi Arabia," *Saudi Arabia in the Balance: Political Economy, Society, Foreign Affairs*, ed. by P Aarts & G Nonneman, New York: New York University Press, 2005, p. 192.
[515] Mann, 1986 cited in Halliday, *Middle East Int. Relations*, p. 305.
[516] John K. Cooley and N. De Marino, "Royal Factionalism and Saudi Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 85, no. 1 (1979), pp. 181–84, doi:10.2752/089279389787057885.
[517] Anthony H Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia Guarding The Desert Kingdom*, New York, NY: Routledge, 1997, p. 23.

The House of Saud has also witnessed competition for power, mostly ministerial defense and foreign affairs portfolios, despite being known for coherence and allegiance. Dynamic intra-family politics has fluctuated over time, and there have been cases of exclusions and royal rebellions. Prince Talal fled to Egypt, one of the family members assassinated King Faisal, and recently the expulsion of princes hit Miteb and particularly Mohammed bin Nayef who had headed the Kingdom's security affairs for years.

1.1.1.3.1. King Fahad

King Fahd is well characterized as a pro-American king and paradoxically a pro-Wahhabi, while some have coded him as an arbiter covering all factions. The King believed in this school from the self-pragmatic belief that religion was just a romantic aspect of Saudi Arabia's Muslim-oriented roles (godly roles), while pragmatic princely politics called for modern civilization.[518]

The ideological aspect of King Fahd's belief systems was evident in his religious rhetoric and symbols. The King ordered the abolition of the Kingly title 'His Majesty and Highness' and replaced it with the religious title 'Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' in 1986. This was political, as Altoraifi suggests, that this:

> "*symbolic change in the monarch's title was seen as a direct response to Iranian criticism and propaganda that often loathed the monarchy and thought it was unfit to serve and guard the holy places.*"[519]

The ailing health of the King turned many portions of power to Crown Prince Abdallah since 1995. Despite the ideological difference between the King and Crown Prince (pro-West versus pro-Arab), Saudi Arabian foreign policy decision-making was prominently determined by the King's power. During the reign of King Fahd, Kechichian summaries the Saudi foreign policy behavior was:

> "*The kingdom has flexed its muscles, built an ever-stronger base of support, and moved toward consolidation of its regional power base. Riyadh cajoled Iran, confronted Iraq and cornered the conservative Arab Gulf monarchies.*"[520]

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[518] John K. Cooley and N. De Marino, "Royal Factionalism and Saudi Foreign Policy," pp. 181–84.
[519] Altoraifi, *Understanding the Role of State Identity in Foreign Policy Decision-Making*, p. 140.
[520] Joseph A. Kechichian, "Saudi Arabia's Will to Power," *Middle East Policy*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2000), p. 47,48.

Unlike the previous rulers, King Fahd crystallized Saudi Arabia as a loyal ally of the West, reflected in his generous support for America's containment of Soviet influence. The King's Wahhabi card was mainly used in the context of Mujahidin religious assistance in Afghanistan. At the Arab level, King Fahd continued to support the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. In reaction to the Arab expectation and discourse, King Fahd disapproved of the Camp David peace deal and thus arranged the 1981 Fahd Plan, which was coordinated with the Rejectionist Front, including Iraq, Syria, and the PLO.

King Fahd's inherent ideology and geopolitics allowed him to have an earlier and complete understanding of both Imam Khomeini's ideological revolution and Saddam's Baathist aspiration and their threatening effect on Saudi Arabia's position in the regional status quo. Thus, in the first case, King Fahd offered financial and military assistance to Saddam Hussein in his eight-year war with Iran. On the other hand, King Fahd viewed the invasion of Kuwait by Saddam as arrogance after his victory over Iran and a regional ambition that might increase to the detriment of the Kingdom. Moreover, even though the council of Ulema firmly opposed, King Fahd welcomed and supported the US-led military coalition against Saddam Hussein to compel him to leave Kuwait. Another thing to note is that the 1997 Saudi rapprochement to Iran resulted from the de facto transition of power to Crown Prince Abdullah.[521]

1.1.1.3.2. King Abdullah

King Abdullah is a son of a mother who descends from the Shammar tribe, whom King Abdul Aziz married to mitigate his rival dynasty of Al Rasheed of Hail. He was also presented as a protector of tribal interests. McHale described Prince Abdullah's character before his throne as "*who is considered conservative, close to the tribal segments of Saudi society and less than enthusiastic about current high rates of oil production and the pace of development.*"[522]He was considered a conservative moderator and possibly a defender

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[521] Altoraifi, *Understanding the Role of State Identity in Foreign Policy Decision-Making*, p. 193.
[522] T. R. McHale, "A Prospect of Saudi Arabia," *(Royal Institute of International Affairs*, vol. 56, no. 4 (1980), p. 643.

of broader regional Arab interests. He was well known in Saudi society as a substantial model of national and intercultural dialogue *-the man of dialogue and reform.*

As far as foreign policymaking is concerned, King Abdullah was a hardliner for the 'pro-Arab faction,' a conservative pluralist and modernizer. His pro-Arab inclination arose in the early years when he was Crown Prince.[523] Internally, he initiated various systemic and social reforms and unprecedentedly cracked down Wahhabi-led educational institutions and teachings. Besides, to meet the internal demands of reforms and appease the international pressure on Saudi Arabia after the 9/11 events, King Abdullah actively pursued a more realistic stance than that of the Salafi idealistic faction.[524]

The era of the late King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz witnessed several achievements in his country's foreign policy. He consolidated the unity of the 'Gulf House' and launched a new cooperation phase with moderate states, including Egypt. His declaration of war on the Islamic State in a military alliance outside the Kingdom's borders is a precedent in Saudi Arabian foreign policy. Regionally, Yamani notes that the pluralist King brought about an array of reforms with:

> "*A much freer hand to develop foreign policy alliances, which he is using to an extent not seen since Faisal's reign. Indeed, Abdullah has come to be seen as a leader of the region's moderates, alongside Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and King Abdullah of Jordan.*"[525]

King Abdullah also held a regional role in maintaining genuine ties with Arabs, Muslims, and allies. Clearly, with his pan-Arabism, he remained firm and loyal to the Arab and Muslim causes. The Palestinian issue was his top priority. In 2001, the crown prince sent a strongly worded letter to the United States to denounce the Bush administration's failure to salvage the fading peace process.[526] Once again, in the Arab Summit held in Beirut in 2002, he launched his peace vision for the Palestinian question, which included eight principles known as Prince Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz Project.

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[523] John K. Cooley and N. De Marino, "Royal Factionalism and Saudi Foreign Policy," pp. 181–84.

[524] Ahmed Al - Azdi, "Alththabit Walmutaghayir Fi Alsiyasat Alkharijiat Alsewdy," 2015, http://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/reports/2015/02/2015241112496202.html.

[525] Mai Yamani, "The Two Faces of Saudi Arabia," *Survival*, vol. 50, no. 1 (2008), p. 152, doi:10.1080/00396330801899488.

[526] David Ottaway, "The King and Us - U.S.-Saudi Relations in the Wake of 9/11," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 88, no. 3 (2009), p. 122, doi:10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004.

In response to the international outcry of Saudi Arabia's complicity and funding of international terrorism after the events of 11 September 2001, King Abdullah initiated a program of deradicalization in the Kingdom, identifying radicals as 'deviants.' He also launched the King Abdullah International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID).[527]

1.1.1.3.3. The Prince of Foreign Policy: Saud Al Faisal

Prince Saud Al Faisal was the 'Saudi Kissinger' and a 'colossus of Arab diplomacy'[528] orchestrating Saudi foreign policy strategies and diplomatic mechanisms and approaches from American Presidents Ford to Obama. The highly educated son of King Faisal and the world's longest foreign affairs minister in office from 1975 up to 2015, Prince Saud al-Faisal was according to Altoraifi:

> *"Able to gain an exceptional amount of independence from the other organs of state, although his ministry still operates in conjunction with the royal court and takes direction from the king. It is also common for individuals with particular expertise."*[529]

Prince Saud Al Faisal was known for diplomatic efficiency based on persuasion, multilinguistic eloquence, intercultural intelligence, and devotion. His long-term service as a foreign minister of Saudi Arabia for forty years sharpened his experience and knowledge of the international system and mechanisms. In homage to his diplomatic legacy, Former Soviet President Michael Gorbachev said, "*If we had a man like Prince Saud Al-Faisal, the Soviet Union would not have disintegrated.*"[530] Also, Amr Moussa, former secretary-general of the Arab League, praised his diplomatic quality and efficiency as:

> *"His bold stances benefited the Arab world. His was the voice of reason and sobriety.[…]If the Arab world had 100 people like Prince Saud Al-Faisal, its situation would have been much better."*[531] *Prince 'Saud was in the middle of it all,' between being 'traditional, state diplomacy that was*

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[527] Abdul Ghafour, "Saudi Arabia King Abdullah Center Promotes Dialogue between Cultures," *ARAB NEWS*, (11/17/2013), https://www.arabnews.com/news/478826.

[528] Simeon Kerr, "Prince Saud Al-Faisal, World's Longest Serving Foreign Minister, 1940-2015 |," *Financial Times*, (07/10/2015), https://www.ft.com/content/dd8ac814-2676-11e5-bd83-71cb60e8f08c.

[529] Altoraifi, *Understanding the Role of State Identity in Foreign Policy Decision-Making*, p. 197.

[530]Arab News, "'If We Had a Man like Prince Saud Al-Faisal, Soviet Union Would Not Have Disintegrated,'" *Arab News*, 07/10/2015, https://www.arabnews.com/saudi-arabia/news/774321.

[531] ibid.

conservative, quiet and logical,' using Saudi oil wealth, Muslim-Arab norms, and strong relations with major power leaders to exert Saudi Arabian influence and role regionally and internationally."[532]

Prince Saud was the godfather of Arab diplomacy and doctor of Saudi Arabian internal evils and interests outside. Fandy links Saudi foreign policy and Prince Saud as "*the history of Saudi foreign policy is Al Faisal, both him and his father… It's how the world knew Saudi Arabia, through Al Faisal.*"[533] Serving for forty years in Saudi foreign affairs circles, Prince Saud conceptualized and stabilized the Kingdom's regional roles from the Lebanese civil war in the 1970s to the Arab Spring era.

Influenced by his charismatic father, late King Faisal, aware of Saudi Arabian favored status quo orientation, regional role significance, and regional power status ambition, Prince Saud "*became a fixture of international and regional diplomacy, whether at Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, the Arab League or the Gulf Cooperation Council.*"[534] As the representative face of the Kingdom outside, he walked a thin line between domestic idealism (Wahhabi doctrine), regional pan-Arabism and Islamism (rejectionist fronts), and international political pragmatism (West versus the Soviet Union). Despite all this, he engaged in a reactive multidimensional foreign policy and engineered Saudi Arabian foreign policy roles.

Through his conciliatory experience, he first served as a mediator to end Lebanon's civil war; aspired to a Sunni regional leadership role in supporting Saddam in defeating Iran during the Eight-Year War. Second, he believed that Saudi Arabia is the guardian of the Gulf region and challenger to the 'emerging Baathist Iraq' because, together with King Fahd, he could suppress the rejectionist Ulema and accept the US military offensive against Saddam. Third, he supported the Afghan Mujahideen to show that Saudi Arabia was a faithful ally of the West. Fourth, he warned the US of a continuous war and chaos after Iraq's invasion in 2003, which subsequently '*gave Iraq a golden plate to Iran.*' Fifth, he regretted that he had not been able to bring a solution to

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[532] Ben Hubbard, "Saud Al-Faisal of Saudi Arabia, Quiet Force in Middle East, Dies at 75," *The New York Times*, (2015), https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/10/world/middleeast/prince-saud-al-faisal-longtime-saudi-foreign-minister-dies-at-75.html.
[533] Mamoun Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent*, Macmillan, 1999.
[534] Ben Hubbard, "Saud Al-Faisal of Saudi Arabia, Quiet Force in Middle East, Dies at 75."

the Palestinian issue. Sixth, unlike other Saudi leaders, he nominally accepted the allegation of Saudi citizens complicit in the 11/9 attacks.

1.1.1.3.4. King Salman and His Son MbS

King Salman is a son of King Abdul Aziz from the Sudairy mother called 'Sudairy Seven.' He is known for being well educated and has an enlightened worldview. The power transition to King Salman bin Abdulaziz in 2015 has triggered a transformative era. Over five decades, his long experience as governor of Riyadh enriched him with high leadership qualifications and a network of social, royal, and clerical allies.[535] He is also known as 'the decisive arbiter'[536] or the 'King of Decisiveness and Determination' *Malik al Hazm wal Azm* for his progressive decisions. After becoming King, he immediately made several reforms, including royal and ministerial reshuffles, breached the royal successional doctrine (will to power) by naming his son Mohammed bin Salman as Minister of Defense and then Crown Prince, and decided a war on Yemen and a blockade of Qatar. He came to power in a turmoiled regional order. In her seminal book 'Salman's Legacy,' Al Rasheed describes the new era when King Salman came to power:

> *"King Salman began his rule in 2015 with a series of unprecedented challenges. From leadership shuffles and falling oil prices to regional and international upheaval, he faced new dilemmas."*[537]

Analyzing King Salman's belief systems needs a careful look at his beliefs before the Arab Spring to understand objectively whether intrinsic ideological norms or pragmatic demands shaped why he looks like such a hawk now. Ideologically, the king memorized the Quran in his teenage life.

Arab Spring revolutions shocked Saudi Arabia's southern flank—Yemen, entered the Gulf region in Bahrain, and emboldened another wealthy Gulf state— Qatar, seen by the Kingdom as promoting revolutions and leaning toward the Muslim Brotherhood arch. The new King has introduced some initiatives in both domestic and foreign policy fields. We see there might be a new Saudi doctrine known as the 'Salman Doctrine.' The two

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[535] Ehteshami, "Saudi Arabia as a Resurgent Regional Power," p. 79.
[536] ibid.
[537] Madawi Al-Rasheed, *Salman's Legacy The Dilemmas of a New Era in Saudi Arabia*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 1.

conservative-liberal hawks are dynamizing this doctrine, the King, and the Prince, who based their doctrine on two attitudes of likely 'progressive domestic modernization and assertive multidimensional foreign policy.'[538]

There are three dimensions of the Salman doctrine: security, reformism, and diplomacy. First, for the security dimension, the doctrine seeks to follow a confrontational approach to theological and military threats based on the principle of military intervention to deter allies of Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood. Second, the reform dimension is based on eliminating radicalism and embracing a modernization vision—2030 Vision. Third, the diplomatic dimension is defined by rebuilding diplomatic relations centered on strategic interests, transforming into a new rapprochement with Israel and Iraq.

The Arab spring has brought about a shift in Saudi foreign policy described by the Saudi scholar Al Tamamy as "*a kingdom in transition through evolution, not revolution*"[539] and similarly in terms of the Kingdom's role identification, Ehteshami describes this period as a shift "*from the Arab ringleader to the Arab patron*"[540] that proved adventurism rather than activism. This proactive foreign policy recognizes the dimensions of regional threat perceptions and emerging regional partnerships.

Mohammed bin Salman saw there must be a regional alliance that includes Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the UAE to contain the alleged triangle of evil from the Muslim Brotherhood, Iran, and Al Qaeda. Such an alliance capitalized on Trump's pragmatic Middle East policy.[541] Despite not being educated in the West like other Saudi princes, he is a conservative Western-style modernist. The Guardian describes him as "*impatient, and a workaholic... But critics say he also struggles to recognize errors or accept even*

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[538] In the aftermath of Arab Spring and rise of Salmans, the ruling family saw a necessity to balance everything liberalization and democratization, religion and foreign policy, deterrence and intervention and alliance and partnership. This era is the adaptation to every traditional threat domestically and internationally. Assertive foreign policy needed the Salmans to reiterate the "twin tolerations" doctrine of Stepan to trump Ulama in favor for national liberalization first and international pressure of globalization at second place.

[539] Saud Mousaed Al Tamamy, "Saudi Arabia and the Arab Spring:Opportunities and Challenges of Security," *Journal of Arabian Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2012), p. 143, doi:10.1080/21534764.2012.734117.

[540] Ehteshami, "Saudi Arabia as a Resurgent Regional Power," pp. 75–94.

[541] Tayyar Arı, "Comparing the Bush, Obama, and Trump Foreign Policies: ContinuityAnd Change in American Middle East Policy," Ultrnationalists Policies of Trump and Reflections on the World, ed. by M. K. Öke& H. Yazici, Berlin: Peter Lang Gmbh, 2020, pp. 61-68, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338558545

mild criticism."[542] The Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the de facto king of Saudi Arabia, is to be seen domestically and globally as an ambitious young ready to change the Saudi role sources of Wahhabism, oil, and America.

Furthermore, Mohammed bin Salman is preoccupied with three motivational dimensions. First, psychologically, he has a puritanical pride being genetically described to resemble his grandfather Ibn Saud in physical appearance and temperament. This hereditary attribute motivates him to search for self and social distinction and reputation inside the royal ruling circles. Second, socially, he self-proclaims that Saudi Arabia could prosper by other means, including modernization versus conservatism and diversified economy versus rentier wealth. Third, geopolitically, he believes that Saudi Arabia should achieve regional power status and regional roles through the key foreign policy values of the Kingdom and adjust to regional and international transformations.

The likely reformer of everything, the Crown Prince appears to have read the political history of his grandfather's kingdom going through its evils and goods. His knowledge of history motivated and led him to rethink his predecessors' incompetence in dealing with regional and foreign crises and threats. For him, Saudi Arabia should interfere militarily whenever its national security is at stake, instead of using religious proxy forces, endorse legitimate governments, and collaborate with regional and foreign partners at times of crisis.

The second ibn Saud—Mohammed bin Salman—is ideal for his country's regional and global role. On several occasions, he presented himself as the *Arab reformer* by highlighting the regional roles of the Kingdom and the conditions that are important to those aspirations. Among the key roles that he perceives, Saudi Arabia should play a regional modernizing role dedicated to cracking down on political and radical Islamist movements and authorities and a regional leader committed to defending the Gulf, Arab, and Sunni Muslims. In an interview with the Guardian, he vowed to 'return Saudi Arabia to moderate Islam' and emphasized Saudi Arabia's future status as:

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[542] Emma Graham-Harrison, "Saudi's Impatient, Workaholic Prince with a Very Thin Skin," *The Guardian*, (2018), https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/13/mohammad-bin-salman-saudi-arabia-profile-crown-prince.

"We are a G20 country—one of the biggest world economies. We're in the middle of three continents. Changing Saudi Arabia for the better means helping the region and changing the world. So, this is what we are trying to do here. And we hope we get support from everyone."[543]

He also asserted that the Iranian revolution had been the main cause of the escalating instability in the region, that *"We did not know how to deal with it. And the problem spread all over the world. Now is the time to get rid of it*."[544] Similarly, concerning the future liberal and modernizing role of Saudi Arabia, the new Crown Prince with complete de facto authority pledged in his address at the Future Investment Initiative Forum in Riyadh in late 2018 that "The *Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in five years will be completely different"* and retrieved *"I believe the new Europe is the Middle East*."[545]

1.1.2. Material Sources

Saudi Arabia occupies 2,150,000 square kilometers of land and is located on the western and southern flank of the Gulf region. Its geopolitical depth derives from two geo-historical legacies: the cradle of Islam and the ocean of crude. In the Middle East geopolitics, Saudi Arabia is strategically set to play a global energy hub linking Africa through the Red Sea; the Indian Ocean, the Horn of Africa, and the Arabian Sea through Yemen; and East Asia through Oman and other Gulf Arab states.

Moreover, Saudi Arabia's strategic depth provided goods and evils. Oil and the Holy Mosques are two sources that the Kingdom leverages over others. Saudi Arabia used oil money and holy warriors (Mujahedeen) in its fights with communism and Shi'ism. Nevertheless, unfortunately, the Kingdom is plagued by a geography trap between the northern Gulf of Iran and Iraq and a fragile and unstable Yemen on the southern side.[546]

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[543] Martin Chulov, "I Will Return Saudi Arabia to Moderate Islam, Says Crown Prince," The Guardian, (10/24/2017),

[544] Ibid

[545] Frank Kane and Lojien Ben Gassem, "MBS: Middle East Can Be the 'New Europe,'" *Arab News*, (2018), https://www.arabnews.com/node/1393491/saudi-arabia.

[546] Yemen is a twofold issue for Saudi Arabia, that brings opportunities and insecurities to the stable Kingdom. Saudi Arabia sees Yemen a backyard that forms a socio-economic bridge Saudi Arabia with the endogenous Yemeni-rich culture and labor as well as a trade route to the Arabian Sea. On the other hand, Yemen has ever been a security threat heaven for the Kingdom due to its weak economy, huge population, and political instability.

Demographically, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's population reached 32 million in 2017, with 12 million foreigners employed in economic sectors, mostly in the private sector. This hybrid demographic element is a security and cultural concern to the Kingdom. As a result, the Saudi government has put in place a strict system that controls the movement of expatriate workers through the sponsorship system (Kafala system), where any expatriate must find a Saudi sponsor (Kafeel) who guarantees to obtain a residence permit.[547]

Economically, Saudi Arabia is the wealthiest country in the Gulf region and the broader Middle East, relying primarily on Petro-religious wealth. The energy sector accounts for 45 percent of GDP, while the other sectors account for 50 percent of GDP, 90 percent of total production, 80 percent of government revenue, and oil exports surpassed US$ 222 billion in 2017.[548] Economic estimates released in 2017 expose that Saudi GDP was $1,798 trillion in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms in 2017, ranking 16th in the world. However, the allocation of resources shows that per capita GDP was $55,300 in 2017, making Saudi Arabia the 21st largest globally.[549]

Saudi Arabia is estimated to be the world's largest producer and exporter of crude oil, producing about 10 million barrels a day. The Kingdom is now expected to be the 18th largest country in terms of proved oil reserves, with a reservoir of one-fifth of the world's oil reserves estimated at 262 billion barrels in 2012. It is the largest producer in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries OPEC. Ultimately, Saudi shipments of hydrocarbon materials accounted for 76.7% of its overall exports in 2017, relative to 83.2% in 2014. [550]

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[547] Adrien Faudot, "Saudi Arabia and the Rentier Regime Trap: A Critical Assessment of the Plan Vision 2030," *Resources Policy*, vol. 62, no. August 2018 (2019), p. 96, doi:10.1016/j.resourpol.2019.03.009.

[548] Fredj Jawadi, Zied Ftiti, "Oil Price Collapse and Challenges to Economic Transformation of Saudi Arabia: A Time-Series Analysis," *Energy Economics*, vol. 80 (2019), p. 13, doi:10.1016/j.eneco.2018.12.003.

[549] Anthony Cordesman, "Military Spending: The Other Side of Saudi Security," 2018, https://www.csis.org/analysis/military-spending-other-side-saudi-security.

[550] Andrew Scott Cooper, *The Oil Kings: How the US, Iran, and Saudi Arabia Changed the Balance of Power in the Middle East*, Simon & Schuster, 2011, p. 1; Shirzad Azad, "Saudi Arabia Looks East: Imperatives and Implications," *The International Spectator*, vol. 00, no. 00 (2019), p. 6, doi:10.1080/03932729.2019.1643550; Faudot, "Saudi Arabia and the Rentier Regime Trap: A Critical Assessment of the Plan Vision 2030," p. 65.

The Crown Prince envisioned the well-known Vision 2030 with an array of socio-economic reforms. The 2030 Vision sets out three long-term economic reforms. Firstly, the strategy aims at diversifying the economic sectors rather than relying solely on the oil industry. It intends to reduce the hyper dependency on oil that has led the Kingdom to ups and downs in oil prices, varying from $116 a barrel in 2014 to $40 in 2016.[551] Secondly, it seeks to modernize the private industry and qualify business legislation and policies to make Saudi Arabia a global investment club on three continents, Asia, Africa, and Europe. Thirdly, the Vision defines a modern restructuring strategy to turn certain state-owned corporate enterprises into better qualified private companies.

The massive surplus of oil makes it possible for the Kingdom to develop its military arsenal and armed forces. According to the 2018 SIPRI Factsheet, Saudi Arabia's defense budget invested $ 67,6 billion in 2018, making it the seventh-highest military expenditure globally, the Gulf's most lavish military spender, and the world's biggest importer of arms from 2014 to 2018. Relatively, Iran is estimated to have $13.2 billion in military expenditure in 2018, lower than that of the UAE in 2014.[552]

In comparison, Saudi Arabia is rated by the GFP (Global Firepower) as the fifth biggest military power in the Middle East, after Turkey, Egypt, Iran, and Israel in 2019. According to the 2019-GFP index, the Kingdom is globally ranked 25th with a score of 0.4302 in terms of the defense budget and arms stocks.[553] Despite the vast spending on arms in general, Saudi Arabia's military power is still relatively weak compared to other regional and international powers. These weaknesses stem from two factors. Firstly, the royal family worries about building up a strong national army; hence prefers an army with

[551] Mohammed Nuruzzaman, "The Myth of Saudi Power:The 'Salman Doctrine' Can't Back up Its Tough Talk," *The National Interest*, (2016), https://nationalinterest.org/feature/the-myth-saudi-power-15727.
[552] Wezeman and Kuimova, "Military Spending And Arms Imports By Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, And The UAE," 2019, https://www.sipri.org/publications/2019/sipri-fact-sheets/military-spending-and-arms-imports-iran-saudi-arabia-qatar-and-uae.
[553] Globla Firepower, "2019 Saudi Arabia Military Strength," *Globla Firepower*, 2019, https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=saudi-arabia.

more loyalty to them than to the nation.[554] Secondly, there is also a lack of professionalism and combat experience.[555]

1.1.3. Instrumental Sources

The instrumental sources of Saudi Arabia refer to the degree and quality of diplomatic employment and distribution of Saudi Arabian economic and political sources to gain interests and deter threats at the regional and international levels. Such sources are as the following:

1.1.3.1. Oil Diplomacy

In the 1960s and 1970s, with its immense oil resources, Saudi Arabia could play the role of oil 'swing producer' in reshaping progressive global politics by spending or manipulating counter-productive politics. Historically, the ruling family has used this oil wealth to reinforce the role of government institutions, reach out to the sparse pockets of the population, and quash the instability of the southern frontier. Saudi Arabia could flood the market by pumping sufficiently surplus crude oil into the international market to crack the supply mechanism and drive prices back down.[556]

Oil has also been a foreign policy tool using a stick and carrot strategy in domestic and international theaters. In 1956, Saudi Arabia embargoed oil exports to France and the United Kingdom on the military operation against Egypt following the nationalization of the Suez Canal by Egypt. Some of the only foreign policy instruments used during the Cold War before the Islamic Revolution of Iran to preserve the global status quo were oil cut-off and price lowering. The former was the Saudi Arabian blockade on the US in the wake of the Israeli-Egypt war in 1973, and similarly, the application of oil price cuts has also been used to deter Iran's regional hegemony. [557]

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[554] Henner Fürtig, *Reg. Powers Middle East*, p. 183.
[555] For more details about the Saudi Arabian military power and expenditure, see Cordesman, "Military Spending : The Other Side of Saudi Security"; Pieter D Wezeman, "Saudi Arabia, Armaments and Conflict in the Middle East," SIPRI, 2018, https://www.sipri.org/commentary/topical-backgrounder/2018/saudi-arabia-armaments-and-conflict-middle-east.
[556] Cooper, *The Oil Kings: How the US, Iran, and Saudi Arabia Changed the Balance of Power in the Middle East*.
[557] Crane, Keith etal, "Oil as a Foreign Policy Instrument," *Imported Oil and U.S. National Security*, RAND Corporation., 2009, vol. 289, p. 2, doi:10.1057/978-1-349-94848-2_231-1.

Irrespective of the aphorism of the rentier curse, the power from below, i.e., oil, has been the raison d'être of Saudi Arabia's international prestige, erecting a throne on the sands, crowning Al Saud, enriching the Saudi people, and encouraging the country to dream of playing a regional leadership role. Thanks to the birthplace of Islam and the oil lake, Saudi Arabia has opted to use oil revenue to invest in society and above the targeted redistribution criteria, which means purchasing domestic and foreign allegiance and investing in the sectarian political economy by funding sectarian friends and partners against sectarian enemies including Shias and Iran-affiliated groups.[558]

1.1.3.2. Alignments

The relationship between Saudi and the West is unique as compared to its relations with other states in the region to the point of 'oxymoron.' The Kingdom of Al Saud came into being with the assistance and recognition of Great Britain and then established the third monarchy under the mentorship of the USA. Since the 1940s, the Kingdom has been developing into a special partner of the USA. This partnership primarily focuses on mutual security arrangements for energy and security. In defining the convergence of the Saudi-Western alliance as one of Saudi Arabia's long-standing strategic assets, we may refer to Eddy's 1963 quotation from Ibn Saud's coinage:

> *"We Muslims have the one, true faith, but Allah gave you the iron, which is inanimate, amoral, neither prohibited nor mentioned in the Qur'an. We will use your iron but leave our faith alone.*"[559]

Saudi Arabia's stability, power, and role depended much on the US's tutelage to maintain the status quo and suppress competing ideologies of communism and, more recently, Iran. From Nixon's twin pillars doctrine to Trump's stalled Middle East policy, Saudi Arabia continues to mold the US interests in the region. Nonetheless, the US still needs Saudi Arabia because of its energy and regional role. For the US, Saudi Arabia is

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[558] Morten Valbjørn, Raymond Hinnebusch, "Playing 'the Sectarian Card' in a Sectarianized New Middle East," *Babylon Nordic Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 0, no. 2 (2019), p. 42, doi:10.5617/ba.6727.
[559] William A Eddy, "King Ibn Sa ' Ūd : " Our Faith and Your Iron "," *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 17, no. 3 (1963), p. 257.

a significant ally in the Middle East for being a swing oil producer and its leading role and presence in the Arab and Muslim world.

Despite the advantages of such close alignment, Saudi Arabia has always agonized with its burden and complexities. Since the 1950s, the kingdom has been harshly criticized by anti-America Arab nationalists and Islamists (Muslim brothers and Shia revolutionaries) for its pro-Western partnership.[560] Moreover, this relationship has fluctuated from time to time due to American roles and strategies towards the region, such as the American lax stance towards the Arab-Israeli dispute, the invasion of Iraq, the conciliatory approach to Iran's nuclear aspirations, the American democratization project, President Obama's hands-off policy, and finally President Trump's contradictory policy.

Regionally, Saudi Arabia has formed a new network of alliances to fight rising competitors seen as Turkey and Qatar, and their regional allies. This conduct of Saudi foreign policy is somewhat likely to alter the religious role of Islamism in the Muslim world. The U.S and the House of Saud have a growing role in fostering the War on Terror in the region. Such a Saudi viewpoint arose to meet the regional and western expectations, distinct from those of the Cold War, the pre-9-11, and the pre-Arab Spring. In the post-ISIS era and American oil independence, Saudi Arabia's role as a Sunni Muslim defender would be odd and contradictory.

Saudi Arabia has engaged the UAE (hardline modernizer) with other leaders specifically for the first time in GCC's history to improve the 'role model' dictated by Western allies and competed against other regional roles. The new alliance emerged as a direct result of the post-Arab Spring regional order and linked to the shared agenda and the leadership styles of the two assertive young men, Mohammed bin Salman and Mohammed bin Zayad. The purpose of their ideological alliance is mainly national security, which attempts to crack down on domestic and Arab upheavals and to erect a resistant and counter-revolutionary camp against what Riyadh and Abu Dhabi have proclaimed Turkey and Iran-incited anarchy.

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[560] Altoraifi, *Understanding the Role of State Identity in Foreign Policy Decision-Making*, p. 63.

1.1.3.3. Foreign Aid

The Kingdom is actively engaged in a stick-and-carrot diplomacy. Saudi Arabia's foreign assistance focuses on the Muslim world as part of its national strategy. The content of foreign aid is as follows: assisting Islamic organizations, paying membership fees to certain Islamic institutions, and donating to many humanitarian organizations. For instance, Saudi Arabia donated $800,000 to the Islamic Chamber of Commerce to build its new headquarters in Karachi, Pakistan.[561]

1.1.3.4. Soft Power

As an aspiring regional power with vast material capabilities, Saudi Arabia also has relatively soft sources. Even though Saudi Arabia is not a democratic country, it has always shown that it can attract the hearts and minds of at least the regional and Muslim world. The critical components of the Kingdom's soft power are divinity and petrodollar. The Kingdom is a composite phenomenon of bi-relationship between God-made power (religion and hydrocarbon) and King-made (Al-Saud legacy). Saudi Arabia's divine influence grants the Kingdom internal-external power as the Kingdom holds the custodianship of two holy cities and pan-Islamic Salafism.

In either scenario, these three plus Saudi soft power sources have two constitutive dimensions: internal and external. Internally, Saudi Arabia's soft influence stems from:

1) The legacy and legitimacy that the Saudi family has influenced and modeled Saudi soft images on the outside. The stable and coherent royal family has conquered, stabilized, and named the land of conquest 'Saudi Arabia' after the name of Al Saud. These family characteristics have contributed to widespread recognition within the Kingdom and abroad. Furthermore, the most significant part of the public reputation accorded to Al Saud is attributed to their guardianship of two holy mosques.

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[561] Yi Li, "Saudi Arabia's Economic Diplomacy through Foreign Aid: Dynamics, Objectives and Mode," *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1 (2019), pp. 110–22, doi:10.1080/25765949.2019.1586367.

2)   Saudi Arabia envisions its soft power by embodying the Kingdom of Holy Saudi Arabia with exceptionalism as the chosen cradle of Islam, the purest and most righteous branch of Islam— Salafism.

3)   A conservative-liberal role model (Salman 2030 Vision).

4)   Petroleum wealth is the backbone of its hard and soft influence. The distribution of wealth to the people has contributed to national welfare and affluent reputation outside Saudi Arabia.

Externally, Saudi Arabia has heavily used oil revenues to boost regional and international soft bids for regional power. Most of these soft power-target instruments are as follows:

1)   Saudi Arabia's natural and creative endowments (large territory, wealth, history – the religious heritage of Arab and Muslim civilizations and recent international political posture) all bolstered its soft power projection.

2)   With its location in the four realms of the Mediterranean, Islamic, Sunni Muslim, and global energy have shaped and dedicated the Kingdom to regional and international issues. Discursively and materially, Saudi Arabia's proactive approach to Muslim causes, such as disputes in Bosnia, Palestine, Chechnya, and Afghanistan, has consolidated the image of the Kingdom's Arab and Muslim identity.[562]

3)   To institutionalize its presence and role in these five communities, Saudi Arabia has founded and funded multilateral organizations such as the League of Arab States, the Muslim World League, and the OIC. The Kingdom also played a significant role in mediation, foreign aid, humanitarian donation,[563] and cooperation subsidies. Each of the above indicators of pan-Arabism and Islamism have provided the Kingdom with political influence and diplomatic actorness.

4)   The international role of the Kingdom's swing producer in OPEC, membership in the G7, and the World Trade Organization have enhanced Saudi Arabia's regional leadership and global image.

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[562] Lawrence Rubin, "A Typology of Soft Powers in Middle East Politics," 2014, p. 11.
[563] Khalid Al Yahya, Nathalie Fustier, "Saudi Arabia as a Humanitarian Donor: High Potential, Little Institutionalization," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, Elsevier BV, 03/17/2011, doi:10.2139/ssrn.1789163.

5)   The media is another face of Saudi Arabia's moral strength. In all kinds of media, Saudi Arabia has lavishly invested in media channels to convey theological and political messages and foreign policy roles to the masses in the Kingdom and abroad. Both owned and sponsored media outlets from satellite companies such as Nile sat, Arabsat, television networks like MBC (MBC FM, Panorama FM), and ART (ART Zikr, ART Music) to news channels like Al Arabiya, as one of the most famous TV channels in the region.[564]

1.1.3.5. Discursive Power

The political discursive power of Saudi Arabia is driven by its strategic culture, backed by oil wealth, and mobilized by religious rhetoric. In the very rationale of the Middle East's religious debate, 'Islam is both social fact and spiritual sorcery.' As the cradle of Islam, the common language of the Saudi people is Allah, king, and nation. The discursive efficiency of the Kingdom is characterized by influence and misguidance. Saudi Arabia's foreign policy discourse has been focused on those regional perceptions and representations. Saudi political discourse revolves around three main areas (1) containment discourse of Communism, Arab revolutionism, Iran, and the recent political Islam; (2) Identity discourse (Gulf-*ism*, Arabism, and pan-Islamism) and power discourse.

Throughout the Cold War period, Saudi Arabia often discursively established an enemy of our values versus our normative and political status quo norms. Saudi discourse-based power has undergone three transformations of the status quo soft power underpinning Al Saud's legacy 'Three Plus' (Al Saud, oil, religion, and modernization). Alshamsi suggests that the 'counter-discourse' driven by reformist leadership (Sahwa) during the 2000s was:

> *"Giving more attention to regional and international politics than in the discourse of the 1990s, the reformist leadership has given the external factor a priority which indicates the exigent character of this factor in the reformist leadership's political agenda in the post-prison era."*[565]

[564] Giulio Gallarotti, Isam Yahia Al-Filali, "Saudi Arabia's Soft Power," *International Studies*, vol. 49, no. 3&4 (2012), pp. 233–61, doi:10.1177/0020881714532707.

[565] Mansoor Jassem Alshamsi, *Islam and Political Reform in Saudi Arabia*, New York, NY 10016: Routledge, 2011, p. 202.

As one of his official speeches, King Salman expressed the role of Saudis in captivating and serving pilgrims:

> *"Allah has honored Saudi Arabia to serve the Two Holy Mosques and the guests of Allah, a service we are proud of; we have made their care and safety the top of our concerns and harnessed everything that helps them to perform their Hajj by integrated projects aiming to facilitate the performance of Hajj and the safety of visitors to the Grand Mosque and the Prophet's Mosque, complementing the great efforts exerted by the kings of this country since the era of its founder, the late King Abdul Aziz."*[566]

1.1.3.6. Institutional Bodies

First, the Saudi political system consists of institutions that have a voice and an impact on Saudi foreign policymaking, including:

(1) The Royal House; (2) the Council of Ministers; (3) Majlis al-Shura [Consultative Council]; (4) Hay'at Kibar al-'Ulama [Council of Senior Clerics].[567]

Saudi Arabia has sponsored regional and international organizations of different kinds: commercial, educational, diplomatic, and cultural, to pursue global influence. For example, as far as educational institutions are concerned, the King Abdullah scholarship system was an excellent effort to improve Saudi Arabia's reputation abroad. The Arab League, the Muslim World League, and the OIC are such organizations.[568]

2. ROLE ORIENTATIONS AND CONCEPTIONS

Since the establishment of Saudi Arabia by King Abdul Aziz Al Saud until King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz, Saudi foreign policy has been guided by three fundamental principles, pan-Arabism, religion, and reconciliatory foreign policy. To maintain the regional status quo, the Kingdom has been tasked domestically to secure the regime's

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[566] "King Salman Holds Annual Reception for Senior Officials Performing Hajj," *Arab News*, (08/13/2019), https://www.arabnews.com/node/1539126/saudi-arabia.
[567] Alshamsi, *Islam and Political Reform in Saudi Arabia*.
[568] Kholoud T. Hilal, Safiyyah R. Scott, Nina Maadad, "The Political, Socio-Economic and Sociocultural Impacts of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) on Saudi Arabia," *International Journal of Higher Education*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2015), pp. 254–67, doi:10.5430/ijhe.v4n1p254.

survival, regionally advocate for Arab and Muslim interests, and internationally improve ties with Western powers for security and economic purposes.

In brief, academics and analysts of Saudi Arabia's politics and international affairs have recognized the continuity of objectives, tools, and directions since King Faisal. Ehteshami defines "*the Kingdom's default foreign policy as a form of passive engagement, timid in its relations, reactive and non-confrontational.*"[569] Likewise, Riedel argues that:

> "*Traditional Saudi foreign policy since King Faisal has been reactive and cautious. The kingdom was risk averse. National security policy was often done by clandestine means; force was avoided. Kings were decisive but careful not to overextend their capacity.*"[570]

Changes in domestic and international contexts have influenced Saudi Arabia's foreign policy behavior from the Islamic revolution of Iran to the post-Arab Spring upheavals. Separately, Saudi Arabia's foreign policy decisions have witnessed three patterns of domestic change since 1979. In the past and today, Saudi Arabia has always been concerned with two national security pillars: regime survival and the maintenance of its regional 'Vatican role' in the Arab and Muslim worlds.[571]

Firstly, in reaction to regional and international transformations and challenges, Saudi Arabia could flexibly and cooperatively address them. Such progress is attributed to the foreign policy efficiency and decision-making shift from the Dir'ayyah-oasis by the Al Saud family to the institutionalized foreign policy.

Secondly, Saudi Arabia has witnessed a shift from consensual foreign policy to confrontational since the Arab Spring and the rise of Crown Prince Salman in 2017. In his article published in the National Interest, Nuruzzaman argues that the new Saudi foreign policy has implemented two controversial instruments:

> "*First, Riyadh approached China, Russia and India to enhance its economic and diplomatic clout. But the first two states were already more*

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[569] Ehteshami, "Saudi Arabia as a Resurgent Regional Power," p. 82.
[570] Bruce Riedel, "Saudi King Shows No Signs of Slowing Aggressive Foreign Policy," *Al-Monitor*, (07/09/2017), https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/07/saudi-arabia-king-salman-yemen-war-foreign-policy-qatar-g20.html.
[571] Alan Munro, "The Dilemma for Saudi Foreign Policy," *RUSI Journal*, vol. 147, no. 5 (2002), p. 46, doi:10.1080/03071840208446815.

aligned with Iran, and the third enjoys no significant leverage in Middle Eastern affairs. It was hard to find an alternative ally. Instead, close trade, military and diplomatic relations prompted the Saudis to avoid completely jumping out of the U.S. orbit. Second, Riyadh decided to flex its military muscles and contain Iranian influence by forming new Arab and Muslim military alliances—the Arab coalition to eliminate the Houthi rebels in Yemen, and the thirty-four-nation Islamic military alliance to defeat terrorism and extremism."[572]

The use of hard power instead of 'extensive use of long-term soft power' has provided evidence of the use of proactive foreign policy and military intervention as foreign policy tools in a variety of situations, including in 2009 airstrikes against the Houthis in Yemen, overt military involvement in Bahrain in 2011, and a military offensive in Yemen against the Houthis since 2015.[573]

In analyzing the last two changes in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy orientation, Saudi scholar Al Tamamy claims that this proactivity is due to three constitutive factors:

"The high level of polarization within the Kingdom's geopolitical environment; Riyadh's decreasing confidence in the US commitment to preserving stability and security in the region, especially after the US invasion of Iraq; and the growing self-confidence in the Kingdom's domestic capabilities."[574]

Consequently, these three role orientations are to be explored in this section.

1) The conservative phase of King Fahad after the Holy Mosque's Seizure attempt by Juhiman Al-Utyibi in 1979.

2) The Pluralistic phase of King Abdullah.

3) The assertive phase of King Salman. In this period, a possible change from the realistic defensive state to a realistic offensive state.

Due to the rise of the twin fears- the Arab Spring revolutions and Islamic political movements, Saudi Arabia has changed its constructive foreign policy approach. Unlike before, Saudi Arabia's foreign policy activity has demonstrated repressive geopolitics in

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[572] Nuruzzaman, "The Myth of Saudi Power:The 'Salman Doctrine' Can't Back up Its Tough Talk."

[573] Saud Mousaed Al Tamamy, "Saudi Arabia and the Arab Spring: Opportunities and Challenges of Security," *Regional Powers in the Middle East*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2014, p. 194,195,196, doi:10.1057/9781137484758_11.

[574] cited, p. 196.

terms of regime survival, military interference, alliance transition, armament, and domestic reforms. As geopolitical reasoning implies, Aras and Falk underline that the geopolitical strategy of Saudi Arabia was proactively articulated by considering three steps to defend its status quo position:

> *"First, set firewalls beyond the borders to prevent any further diffusion of the transformative impact. A second step is to get involved in several countries that are facing popular uprisings in order to help eliminate any threat of political transformation from below. The third step is to create regional blocs for the sake of pursuing a region-wide rivalry."*[575]

To deter Iran's Axis of Resistance, Saudi Arabia has proven proactively hostile and sought to create an anti-revisionist bloc. Preserving the regime and the regional status quo, Saudi Arabia has justified every proactive stance against the region.

The Arab Spring has made a positive contribution to Saudi legitimacy by pretending to be the Custodian of Two Holy Mosques and the defender of the Arab and Sunni worlds. For the Kingdom, the maintenance of the Al Saud regime and the Saudi regional role would justify new foreign policy choices and instruments. Against the backdrop of the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia has resorted to assertive foreign policy with various instruments. Saudi Arabia has since developed its identification and securitization through a Sunni World protector discourse to counter the growing rhetoric and militancy provoked by Shia in the region. This latest identification has five dimensions:

First, institutionalized sectarianization (Sunni vs. Shia) has become a weapon of foreign policy in the Middle East in general and Saudi Arabia in particular, regardless of what can be used in domestic contexts. Hurd describes it as follows:

> *"A particular, modem discourse of religion-in-politics. It is authorized and often institutionalized by those in positions of power in the service of particular political needs, desires, and agendas.*"[576]

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[575] Bülent Aras, Richard Falk, "Authoritarian ' Geopolitics ' of Survival in the Arab Spring," *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 2 (2015), p. 330, doi:10.1080/01436597.2015.1013307.
[576] Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, "Politics of Sectarianism: Rethinking Religion and Politics in the Middle East," *Middle East Law and Governance*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2015), p. 73, doi:10.1163/18763375-00701001.

The construction of a sectarian identity for '*othering*' Iran and Shia regional identity is part of the central Saudi securitization strategy. Since the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia and Iran have sought to transform conflicts in Syria, Bahrain, and Yemen into geo-sectarian wars. Sectarian rhetoric is often used to regulate domestic affairs and as a diplomatic justification to interfere in regional politics by client states and non-actor proxies. Institutionally, Saudi Arabia has sectarianized any event that Iran has instigated in the region. Sectarianizing took on two forms, either sectarian-for or against, the former in Sunni support and mobilization against ostensibly Shia-motivated and Iranian-made factions like Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq, and the latter in the context of counter-revolution mobilization against Shia revivalist movements like Bahrain and Yemen.

In the same way, Matthiesen argues that "*the support of the Syrian revolution did also have a sectarian component, because it was framed as a 'Sunni' uprising against the 'Shia,' 'Alawite' and 'sectarian' regime.*" [577] Therefore, for suppressing the Shia-Alawite regime in Damascus, Saudi Arabia funded and inspired fundamentalist forces, including al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, using different tactics of media and religious institutions. For example, the Saudi-sponsored sectarian discourse in the Saudi-led military offensive against Houthis in Yemen is a genuine demonstration. To justify the military campaign, the Kingdom saw popular mobilization and rhetoric sparked by prominent clerics, including Salman al-Awda, Muhammad al-Arifi, and A'yid al-Qarni. In his tweets, Tv interviews, and his website Islam Online after the military campaign launch, the former had praised and supported what described the right war against Iran's proxies, who are inciting 'fitnah' and taking over the land of Arab and Sunni Muslims.[578]

Second, since the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia has often attempted to crack down on the Muslim Brotherhood viewed as a revolutionary movement like the Shia revolutionary ideology. This transformation continues to the extent that the Muslim Brotherhood has been declared a terrorist movement and further led Saudi Arabia to establish a network of repressive allies, including Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sissi and the UAE Mohammed bin Zayed both are very resentful of MB. This coalition

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[577] Matthiesen, "The Domestic Sources of Saudi Foreign Policy: Islamists and the State in the Wake of the Arab Uprisings," p. 6.
[578] Abdo, *The New Sectarianism : The Arab Uprisings and the Rebirth of the Shi'a-Sunni Divide*.

condemned Qatar and Turkey for supposed affiliation and funding for such an organization.

Third, Saudi Arabia's current 'interventionist approach' represents the Crown Prince's doctrine, the Saudi security strategy, and Saudi Arabian reaction to President Obama's Middle East hands-off policy[579] and Iran's regional expansion. As President Trump promised a lot but did less, his talk war signaled a two-sided message to Saudi Arabia that the first is likely President Trump's 'greenlight of action' and the second is 'take the role, we stand by you.' That the changing nature of the US-Saudi Arabia alliance, respectively, from Obama to Trump, has directly contributed to the imagination and articulation of a new Saudi interventionist foreign policy. Al Rasheed argued that:

> *"After unsuccessful attempts to draw the USA into a military conflict with Iran since 2008, the Saudi regime shifted its own policy towards more military interventionism. The Saudi regime regards its 2011 military intervention in Bahrain and later in Yemen in 2015 as necessary measures to protect itself from Iranian expansion."*[580]

In definition, cooperative roles seek to advance the status and prestige of regional powers, competitive roles seek to counter rival roles, and status quo roles seek to defend regional order architecture. Here, the following section will highlight the Saudi Arabian role conceptions and orientations.

Table 6: **Saudi Arabia's Role Behavior in the Middle East**

Role orientation	Role conceptions	Role sources	Role expectations
Cooperative	• Regional mediator • Regional model • Regional donor	• Oil-wealth (economic diplomacy) • Religion (holy status) • International weight	**Low Expects** <u>Saudi expects:</u> • International image • Gulf-Arab-Sunni-Muslim recognition • Security and stability building. <u>Regional expects:</u> • Pan-Islamic unity • Regionalist institutions and norms
Competitive	• Regional leader	• Oil wealth	**High Expects**

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[579] Tayyar Arı, "Comparing the Bush, Obama, and Trump Foreign Policies: ContinuityAnd Change in American Middle East Policy," Ultrnationalists Policies of Trump and Reflections on the World, ed. by M. K. Öke& H. Yazici, Berlin: Peter Lang Gmbh, 2020, pp. 55–61, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338558545.

[580] Al-Rasheed, *Salman's Legacy The Dilemmas of a New Era in Saudi Arabia*, p. 10.

	• Faithful ally of West • Defender of the Sunni faith • Normalizer with Israel * (*needs more reflections*)	• Islamic world status • Gulf-Sunni-Arab status • Alliances • Regional competition • Wahhabism	Saudi expects: • Regional leadership • Sunni Hegemony • Ally commitment <u>Regional expects:</u> • Sunni leadership • Pan-Arabism • Gulf security • Containment of Iran and Shi'ism
Status quo	• Defender of the status quo	• Regional revisionism (communism, Iran's revolutionism, pan-Arabism, Ba'athism etc.) • Threat perceptions (Muslim brotherhood, competing regional powers, e.g., Turkey and Iran) • Ally commitment	**High Expects** <u>Saudi expects:</u> • Insurance of regime survival • Maintenance of regional status quo <u>Regional expects:</u> • Stability • Arab world security • Safeguard of allies' interests in the region • Regional deterrence building

2.1.   Cooperative Role Orientation

Since the beginning of the last decade, part of Saudi Arabia's cooperative foreign policy orientation has gradually been bested with the 9/11 terrorist event and the post-Arab Spring revolutions. These two events unveiled Saudi Arabia's two faces, the liberal face versus the counter-revolutionary. In the post-9/11 terrorist attacks, Saudi Arabia started to reassess the legal responsibility and redeem its reputation. In reaction to international outrage that emerged shortly after the 9/11 attacks, Saudi Arabia has continued to invest in rebuilding its debilitating reputation. The consequences of the Arab Spring have led to a complete turnaround. This indicates that the degrading global image of Saudi Arabia since 9/11, and the potential threats posed by the Arab Spring revolutions, have put Al Saud under increasing strain and caused a political re-evaluation of the royal family to at least cope with global liberalization.

2.1.1. Regional Mediator

Saudi Arabia has made various attempts to support the Palestinians and use its financial resources and diplomatic leverage on their behalf, but it has also acted as the chief supporter of the Arab League peace initiatives. Mediation became a crucial role in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy for its Islamic and Arabic credentials in the region.

Moreover, as a regional mediator, Saudi Arabia has frequently been featured in most regional disputes and issues, acting as a third-party facilitator, good offices, and conciliatory party. It has fulfilled a multitude of important mediation initiatives that contained the effects of conflict and resolved some tense civil wars in the region, including the following:

1991: Mediation between Qatar and Bahrain

2002: The peace initiative of Prince Abdulla aimed at resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict.

2005: King Abdullah mediation between the United States and Syria on the questioning of senior Syrian officials on the murder of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri.

2007: Mediation efforts between Somali parties.

2007: Mecca Accord between Fatah and Hamas

2010: Mediation between the Taliban and the Government of Afghanistan.[581]

2020: Riyadh Agreement between Southern Transitional Council and Yemen Government.

2.1.2. Regional Role Model

Since King Salman's rise, Saudi Arabia has envisioned a new regional leadership role to enhance the Kingdom's regional power status and deflect international criticism of Saudi fundamentalism and Islamization of its foreign policy behavior. Given the expediency and repercussions at the domestic and international levels, the 'twin modernizers' father and son (Salman(s)) did not shy away from questioning the Wahhabi orthodoxy to implement the controversial 2030 Vision. Commenting on that, King Salman said, "*my primary goal is for Saudi Arabia to be an exemplary and leading nation in all aspects, and I will work with you in achieving that endeavor.*"[582]

2.1.3. Global/Regional Donor

Saudi Arabia plays a pivotal role as a global donor in the world. It is considered the world's biggest non-OECD-DAC donor of humanitarian aid[583] and the 19th largest

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[581] Mehran Kamrava, "A Small Sample of Saudi Mediation Efforts Includes the Following:," *Orbis*, vol. 57, no. 1 (2013), p. 153,154, doi:10.1016/j.orbis.2012.10.010.
[582] Arabia, Saudi Arabia vision 2030, pp. 1–69.
[583] Al Yahya, Fustier, "Saudi Arabia as a Humanitarian Donor: High Potential, Little Institutionalization."

globally.[584] In total, Saudi Arabia allocates 1.9% of its GNI to foreign aid.[585] Donorship has become an instrument of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy at times of peace and war to maintain allies and contain enemies—Rial diplomacy.

Such a role is attributable to Saudi Arabia's multiple role identities, as a Muslim world leader and custodian of holy cities which dictate the traditions of giving and solidarity, as a global energy hub, and a member of the G20, dictate economic diplomacy, and as a Gulf-Arab leader dictates the financing of fragile regional states.[586] Furthermore, there are key motives behind Saudi Arabia's development and humanitarian donorship such as (1) humanitarian obligations toward Muslim and non-Muslim societies— the *Humanitarian Kingdom*, (2) Islamic principles of charitable giving such as *Zakat* and *Sadaqa*, (3) the diplomatic tool used to rally and reward allies especially during conflicts and enemy containment as in the case of Saudi Arabia's assistance to Lebanon, (4) the regional security tool used to support and build fragile and conflict-affected counties like neighboring Yemen and Iraq, (5) soft power tool used to enhance Saudi Arabia's regional and international image and obtain the Gulf, Arab, Sunni, Muslim world, and the West's recognition.[587]

As a global donor, Saudi Arabia targets three key aid areas: development, humanitarian, and strategic. With these three sectors, 59% of the overall foreign aid goes to social development and infrastructure, 34.1% goes to economic development, 3.7% goes to humanitarian aid, and the rest goes to other sectors.[588] Institutionally, Saudi Arabia's foreign aid is channeled organizationally (UN), bilaterally and multilaterally, and maintained through national institutions including the King Salman Center for Relief and Humanitarian Aid, the Saudi Relief Committees and Campaigns department, the Saudi Fund for Development (SFD), the Saudi Red Crescent Authority, and other Royal foundations.[589]

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[584] "Donors," *The Global Fund*, 2020, https://data.theglobalfund.org/donors/partners/Saudi Arabia.
[585] Li, "Saudi Arabia's Economic Diplomacy through Foreign Aid: Dynamics, Objectives and Mode," p. 111.
[586] ibid.
[587] Al Yahya, Fustier, "Saudi Arabia as a Humanitarian Donor: High Potential, Little Institutionalization."
[588] Li, "Saudi Arabia's Economic Diplomacy through Foreign Aid: Dynamics, Objectives and Mode," p. 113.
[589] Sherine El Taraboulsi-McCarthy, "A Kingdom of Humanity? Saudi Arabia's Values, Systems and Interests in Humanitarian Action Humanitarian Policy Group I," HPG, London, 2017.

Geographically, Saudi Arabia's foreign aid contributes to three geographical categories, Arab countries, Muslim countries, and strategic non-Muslim countries. Traditionally, the Arab and Muslim countries have priority in Saudi Arabia's aid, particularly and weak and conflict-ridden countries, including Yemen, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Palestine, Pakistan, Somalia, and Sudan. Particularly, Yemen as a direct neighbor is a top recipient of Saudi Arabia's aid.

2.2. Competitive Role Orientation

This type of role set refers to Saudi Arabia's competitive motives and expectations as role holder and their implications for the regional states as role recipients. This role relationship is determined by the quality of expectations for each role Saudi Arabia plays according to its objectives and degree and the type of regional expectations and audiences. In other words, the competitive role orientation of Saudi Arabia lies in certain regional roles that concern regional leadership aspirations like the Sunni-Arab leader; alignment polarization like the US faithful ally; and religious ideology like the defender of the Sunni faith. Such role set is illustrated in the following:

2.2.1. Regional leader role: Triple Role

This role is based on two goals (security and political) and has two sub-leadership roles and functions with three instruments (ideological, material, and discursive). Saudi Arabia's regional leadership role is uniliteral and competitive, based on competition with other regional powers in its Gulf, Arab and Islamic contexts. It is motivated by internal self-influencing factors of ideology, politics, and security. It is worth noting that this sort of role is appointed to be exemplary since Saudi Arabia does not have civilizational and liberal roles that can activate or play, like Turkey and Iran. Therefore, not only does it want to "*maintain its role as a soft power mediator and to be seen as advancing and even leading Arab causes, it wants to be the dominant religious-regional figurehead, opposite to Iran.*"[590] Spatially, the Saudi leadership role is a 'bottom-up' as Al Saud believes that

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[590] Crystal A. Ennis, Bessma Momani, "Shaping the Middle East in the Midst of the Arab Uprisings: Turkish and Saudi Foreign Policy Strategies," *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 6 (2013), p. 1134, doi:10.1080/01436597.2013.802503.

this role will be 'exceptional' and comprehensive as the Kingdom leads, stabilizes, and protects the three overlapping regions the Gulf, Arab nation, and Islamic world, in particular the Sunni community.

The regional leadership role of Saudi Arabia is based on three constituent elements: (1) ideal and structural capacity, (2) internal and external legitimacy, and (3) domestic and external expectations. The significance is still in describing and examining the different dimensions of the role legitimacy, enactment, and expectations concerning the role behavior and instruments. Legally, however, there are four dimensions of legitimacy that inspire Saudi Arabia's regional leadership role. First, internally, the consensual legitimacy derives from the Saudi regime and Ulema's worldviews, who propose that the Kingdom be a God-given state in geography and wealth capable and responsible for serving and leading the Umma. The second dimension of legitimacy is the Arab community, which ascribes such a leading role to the Kingdom for its unique religious position, super-wealthy economy, stability, and special relations with the West. The Arab states and societies expect Saudi Arabia to unite the Arabs, resolve the Palestinian question, and counter non-Arab hegemons, including Iran, Turkey, and Israel. Third, legitimacy conferred by the Sunni communities over Saudi Arabia for its custodianship of the Two Holy Mosques and stance on Iran. Fourth, Western legitimacy bestowed on the Kingdom for its loyal ally role in defending the regional status quo and fighting against Communism during the Cold War and Iran's revisionism.

Being the most important and broader role, our knowledge of expectations and the internal and external legitimacy on which the role is based help us to understand and analyze the behavior, sustainability, and fluctuations of the role over two periods, the first since the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the second since the beginning of the Arab Spring Revolution in 2011. Since the rise of the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, Saudi Arabia has realized the ideological and geopolitical threat that revolutionary Shia Iran would pose to its regime, national, and allies. To counter such a possible existential threat, the Kingdom has developed a self-recognized regional leadership role in protecting its domestic, Arab, and Sunni interests, coupled with a determination to socialize the US's ascribed role, which complements the interests of both. Against this backdrop, the regional leadership role of Saudi Arabia claims to meet the following expectations:

Geopolitically, Saudi Arabia conceptualizes the Kingdom's unique geopolitical status in the Islamic world. For Saudis, Saudi Arabia is the undisputed leader of the Islamic world. In this broad role, the Kingdom plays other sub-regional roles that have prevailed as follows:

1) Mediation-*mediator*.

2) Crisis management-*crisis manager.*

3) Involvement in international organizations: *manager role.*

4) This institutional engagement in international political and economic organizations provides Saudi Arabia a global status. Saudi Arabia is a member state in regional and international bodies, including G20, WTO, Arab League, Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC).

5) International alignments-*coalition builder.*

6) Provision of regional protection: *regional protector.*

Such a role refers to security and protection from both ideological and political threats, as summarized by Cigar:

> "*The Muslims' Qibla [i.e., the geographic focus for prayer]. the cradle of Islam. the bearer of the banner of Islam, and the defender of the causes of Arabness and of the Muslims in both material and moral terms in all quarters and all lands*."[591]

During the Cold War, Saudi Arabia had a different perception of geo-security threats, including the threat of global communism and the rising Shia revolutionism posed by revolutionary Iran. In the post-Arab Spring era, the new changing regional order surprised Saudi Arabia with two security variables: (1) new sources of threat perceptions and (2) new foreign policy orientation and tools to counteract it. As for geopolitical concerns, Saudi Arabia is vigilant in introducing soft and hard security measures to resolve regional security challenges, including the following:

- *Regional counterterrorism*

First, this strategy tends to advance the international profile of the Kingdom in the face of external condemnation of the alleged overt and indirect involvement of Saudi

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[591] Norman Cigar, *Saudi Arabia and Nuclear Weapons: How Do Countries Think about the Bomb?*, Routledge, 2016, p. 35.

Arabia and the funding of extremist and militant organizations. Second, to defend its homeland's interests, regional and international partners and allies, particularly international energy routes. Saudi Arabia has implemented soft and hard policies to combat extremism at home and abroad through the following initiatives and institutions:

> a. Etidal and the Ideological Warfare Center.
>
> b.) Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare (PRAC)
>
> c. Islamic Military Counterterrorism Coalition.
>
> d- Interfaith Dialogue

- Protection of Regional Partners from International Subversion

Saudi Arabia assumes itself on being the regional actor responsible for protecting the regional status quo from disruptive activities by rogue states such as Iran. Officially, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia claims that the primary factor behind the sectarian and disorderly aggravation of the Iranian regime is its blatant intervention in the Arab affairs in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon, and Bahrain. The behavior of Iran in the region hinders the regional roles of Saudi Arabia.

Generally, Saudi Arabia has always urged the international community to work hard to reverse Iran's defiant roles in the region by taking a firm stance on Iran's actions and emphasizing Saudi Arabia's six demands stated by former Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubeir:

> *"The kingdom's position will bring it back here so that they may hear: stop your support for terrorism, the politics of chaos and destruction, and interference in the internal affairs of the Arab states…stop the development of weapons of mass destruction, the ballistic missile program, and to act as a natural country and not as a rogue state sponsor of terrorism."*[592]

- *Military Supremacy*

Saudi Arabia bases its regional power and prestige on the attributes of natural resources and perceptions of alarming threat vulnerabilities in the troubled region while

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[592] Anadolu Agency, "Aljabir Yuelin 6 Matalib Saeudiat Min 'iiran Wayastabeid Alhiwar Maeaha Bishan Alyaman-Al-Jubeir Announces 6 Saudi Demands from Iran and Excludes Dialogue with Them Regarding Yemen," *Anadolu Agency*, (10/02/2019), https://www.aa.com.tr/ar/-من-سعودية-مطالب-6-يعلن-الجبير/العربية-الدول إيران-ويستبعد-الحوار -معها-بشأن-اليمن/1599575.

trying to strengthen its defensive strategy and policies to safeguard two goals of survival of the regime and regional stability, as Saudi Nawaf suggests:

> *"(1) To protect the KSA against internal threats such as extremism and terrorism; and (2) to protect the Arab world from instability created by hegemonic politics, power struggles, and sectarian divides, thus maintaining order in the Middle East & North Africa (MENA) region."*[593]

Saudi Arabia adopts three regional defense policies to foster regional and international military strength: (1) regionally, Saudi Arabia would counter Iran's increasing regional dominance in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen by military intervention and the modernization of Saudi military equipment, manpower, and weapons; and (2) internationally, Saudi Arabia should establish a 'unique' strategic relationship with the West in particular. (3) to serve as a defender of the Islamic world through soft power and political support and direct aid.[594]

- *Deterrence of the Spread of Nuclear Weapons*

Saudi Arabia assumes that it would not continue its regional power projection and leadership role unless regional conditions do not allow Iran to acquire nuclear weapons for military and psychological reasons. Indeed, nuclear-armed Iran will either directly attack the Kingdom and regional allies or embolden it to threaten, blackmail regional partners proactively, and increase its support for regional proxies.[595]Although Iran and Saudi Arabia both signed the NPT, Saudi Arabia called for a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East and persuaded Israel to join the NPT. It seems that both also decided to compete with each other for a Muslim nuclear bomb.[596] To address and challenge the vulnerability of Iran's nuclear strategy, Saudi Arabia has committed itself to ensure the non-Middle East nuclear strategy, deter Iran's nuclear strategy, and aspire to acquire counter-civil and probable nuclear weapons if Iran is to do so in the future. The policy of Saudi non-nuclear Iran prevails in a series of initiatives, including:

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[593] Nawaf Obaid, "A Saudi Arabian Defense Doctrine: Mapping the Expanded Force Structure the Kingdom Needs to Lead the Arab World, Stabilize the Region, and Meet Its Global Responsibilities," 2014, p. 4, http://belfercenter.org.

[594] Obaid, "A Saudi Arabian Defense Doctrine: Mapping the Expanded Force Structure the Kingdom Needs to Lead the Arab World, Stabilize the Region, and Meet Its Global Responsibilities."

[595] Dalia Dassa Kaye, Frederic M. Wehrey, "A Nuclear Iran: The Reactions of Neighbours," *Survival*, vol. 49, no. 2 (2007), pp. 111–28, doi:10.1080/00396330701437777.

[596] Gawdat Bahgat, "Nuclear Proliferation: The Case of Saudi Arabia," *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 60, no. 3 (2006), pp. 421–43, doi:10.3751/60.3.11.

First, Saudi Arabia adopts a nuclear hedging and latency strategy (nuclear hedger status) to balance Iran's nuclear capability in pursuit of either exerting pressure on the US for multilateral nuclear containment and halting Iran's nuclear program or developing its nuclear defense capabilities.[597] The increasing suspicion is that Saudi Arabia recently purchased a 1988 Chinese nuclear reactor, signed arrangements with France and Argentina, reportedly a Saudi-Pakistani nuclear contract, and recently a Saudi-US nuclear deal.[598] However, Saudi Arabia's officials have repeatedly argued for equal legitimacy and the right to acquire whatever civilian or deterrence nuclear capability is needed if Iran does. For example, Prince Mohammed Bin Salman told CBC News-60 Minutes that "*Saudi Arabia does not want to acquire a nuclear bomb ... but, without a doubt, if Iran has developed a nuclear bomb, we will follow suit as soon as possible.*"[599]Second, Saudi Arabia made efforts to the Middle East Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone (NWFZ) suggested and updated by the 1995 NPT Review Conference. Mutual understanding of the nuclear threat has led to a new alignment framework in the region connecting Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Israel.[600] Third, Saudi Arabia plays a role in the international economic sanctions campaign against Iran known as US President Trump's 'maximum pressure,' coinciding with the US withdrawal from Iran's deal- Joint Comprehensive Action Plan (JCPOA).

- *Economic Inspirations*

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is aspiring to be a global *oil swinger* because of its petroleum supremacy, and this status is a central element in Saudi ambitions for regional leadership and a driver for regional expectations. The Saudi regional leadership role's auxiliary roles are *regional foreign aid-facilitator, disaster relief donation-donor, regional institutional funding-funder, and oil pricing manager.*

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[597] See Ariel E Levite, *Nuclear Latency and Hedging :Concepts, History, and Issues*, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2019.

[598] Bowen, Moran, "Living with Nuclear Hedging: The Implications of Iran's Nuclear Strategy," pp. 687–707; David E. Sanger, William Broad, "Saudis Want a U.S. Nuclear Deal. Can They Be Trusted Not to Build a Bomb?," *The New York Times*, (11/22/2018), https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/22/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-nuclear.html.

[599] Norah O'Donnell, "Mohammed Bin Salman, Saudi Crown Prince 60 Minutes Interview," CBS News, 2018, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/saudi-crown-prince-talks-to-60-minutes/.

[600] Tomisha Bino, "The Pursuit of a WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East," 2017, https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2017-07-27-WMDFZME.pdf.

- *Ideological Aspirations*

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has committed itself to confront and manage all collective ideological threats in the post-Arab Spring competitive multipolarity that contradicts the standards of its orientations and interests and thus sees it as having a responsibility to neutralize, adapt, and contain opposites. As a regional power with its weight and influence, Saudi Arabia believes it has an immense responsibility to resolve all binary political challenges emanating from counter-ideologies that challenge the legitimacy of its regime, identity, theology, and that of its international allies. Accordingly, the Kingdom's ambition for regional leadership in the first place stems from the threat perceptions rather than from regional expectations. Competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran is all about the concerns of binary collective identities, as Colombo et al. argue:

> *"The competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which runs alongside and amplifies Sunni-Shia, Arab- non-Arab and pro-Western-anti-Western enmity relations – they may also run counter to one another, for instance as in the case of Hamas."*[601]

Also, Kamrava argues that *"Saudi Arabia claims the mantle of Islamic leadership. It has used Mecca as a tool of foreign policy since 2006."*[602] This leadership role has emerged in Saudi Arabia and other Arab and Muslim countries since the fall of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924. Although Saudi Arabia hopes to construct a regional system, it seems impossible once two camps are divided, those who prefer an Islamic system, and the other groups prefer a Middle East system. Institutionally, Saudi Arabia has a two-legged balance between the Arab League and the Organization for Islamic Cooperation. In order to balance such influence, Hillal Dessouki explains the role of Saudi Arabia as:

> *"The objective of many western and Israeli politicians which aims at restructuring the region and expanding the scope of the Arab regional system to include non-Arab states such as Israel and Turkey in order to form 'a multinational regional system' in which the Arab character would be non-existent."*[603]

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[601] Silvia Colombo, Lorenzo Kamel, Jordi Quero, "Re-Conceptualizing Orders in the MENA Region. The Analytical Framework of the MENARA Project," 2016, p. 44.

[602] Kamrava, "A Small Sample of Saudi Mediation Efforts Includes the Following:," p. 156.

[603] Ali El Deen Hillal Dessouki, "The Arab Regional System: A Question of Survival," *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2015), p. 104, doi:10.1080/17550912.2014.990797.

The transition of Saudi Arabia's decision-making from King Abdullah to Salman and his son contributed to devising a new regional alliance map, regional roles, and domestic-international reforms. Regarding Obama's doctrine of regional power-sharing with Saudi Arabia and Iran, Saudi Arabia was left with two options "*either to accept President Obama's advice or to proactively counter Iran by itself, assuming a regional leadership role far less dependent on the US.*"[604]

Four factors have also been attributed to Saudi Arabia's conceptualization and projection of this role. The first is Washington's growing independence from Saudi oil, Obama's appeasement of Iran, and a noticeable US withdrawal from the region, especially during President Trump's reign. Given this, Saudi Arabia considers Washington to underpin Riyadh's unilateral role and behavior as observers explain it as "*a much more proactive leadership role, thereby getting involved independently from the US in almost all the Middle East conflicts associated with the Arab Uprisings.*"[605] The second is Saudi Arabia's ability to fill the Arab regional power vacuum in the collapse of pan-Arab Egyptian leadership, Saddam and Syrian Baathist Arabism, and Islamist political movements in the post-Arab Uprising. The third is Riyadh's aim of forming and leading the oil-rich small Gulf states of the GCC. The fourth and foremost is Saudi Arabia's economic dominance, where Riyadh aspired to get the upper hand over all else only by relying on 'oil-Islam leverage' to weaken other competing Arab regimes and win people's hearts and minds.

The 22nd annual Arab-U.S. Policymakers Conference in Washington, D.C., on 22 October 2013, Prince Turki Al Faisal bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud underscored Saudi Arabia's candidacy for leadership and the influence of its regional role:

> "*Saudi Arabia, with its stability and influence, plays an important regional and international role. Working diligently to address many of its major international and domestic concerns, the Kingdom is a confident participant in world affairs and keeps an ever-vigilant eye toward its own internal safeguarding.*"[606]

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[604] Umer Karim, "The Evolution of Saudi Foreign Policy and the Role of Decision-Making Processes and Actors," *International Spectator*, vol. 52, no. 2 (2017), p. 72, doi:10.1080/03932729.2017.1308643.
[605] Luíza, Cerioli, Saudi Arabia's national roles conceptions after the Arab Uprisings. In Dania Koleilat Khatib, The Arab Gulf States and the West, The Arab Gulf States and the West, Routledge, 2019, p. 198.
[606] Al Faisal bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, "Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy," p. 37.

Also, about King Abdallah's aspiration for his country's leadership role, the Arab summit in Riyadh in 2007 demonstrated this claim and revealed the following:

> "*How Saudi Arabia is reviving not only its regional role and power, but also becoming the only Arab country capable of challenging Iranian ambitions in Iraq and Lebanon. With Egypt lagging owing to critical domestic problems, Saudi Arabia appears the single player in Arab affairs.*"[607]

To facilitate and socialize its secondary role as an Arab leader, the Kingdom securitized and ideologized the Iranian-Shia threat as "*a pretext to justify a shift in foreign policy from diplomacy to direct military intervention in the Arab region.*"[608] Competitively, Saudi Arabia affirms its regional status by checking other aspiring regional powers employing material and institutional measures. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia just had begun to check Turkey after the JDP gained office in 2002.

2.2.2. Faithful Ally

The key goals of this role are anti-communism and security cooperation. Although this role is the hallmark of Saudi Arabia's alliance with the West, it collided domestically with Ulema and Sahwa's disapproval. Regionally, pan-Islamic, and pan-Arab nationalists also criticized Saudi Arabia for strong ties with the US. In order to clarify the clash between pragmatic Saudi foreign policy behavior and conservative internal wings, Alshamsi posits that:

> "*The Monarchy [Al Saud] is faced with a dilemma between the desire to maintain the Saudi royalist position as an ally to the West, wanting to be seen as a moderate or more 'open' Muslim country, and a need, legitimately based on the Saudi State Law and history, to maintain the Islamic identity of the State and society.*"[609]

The two roles as the cradle of Islam and faithful ally of the United States collide and characterize the Kingdom as pragmatic and moral-realistic. This paradox tends to reconcile internal demands and external interests and constraints. The pro-Western orientation was part of Saudi Arabia's commitment to combat regional ideological and

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[607] Al-Toraifi cited in Korany and Fattah, Saudi Foreign Policy between the Ulama and the US, Korany, and Dessouki, *The Foreign Policies of Arab States: The Challenge of Globalization*, The American University in Cairo Press, 2008, p. 367.
[608] Al-Rasheed, *Salman's Legacy The Dilemmas of a New Era in Saudi Arabia*, p. 11.
[609] Alshamsi, *Islam and Political Reform in Saudi Arabia*, p. 20.

political threats, including Nasser's communist and pan-Arab ideologies in the 1950s and 1960s. Since the early days of the Kingdom foundation, Ibn Saud believed in cooperation with the USA, loathed 'Godless Communism,' and vowed with his staunch anti-communism to fight it everywhere, whoever and by whatever means. At home, King Abdul-Aziz promised, in his talk with Brigadier General Edwin M. Day in 1951, that "*if you could find a communist in Saudi Arabia, I will hand you his head.*" [610] Regionally agreed to fight Communism, Nasserism, and Baathism. Likewise, King Faisal vowed to fight Communism, in his letter to President Lyndon B. Johnson proposed that the US should propel against the spread of Communism:

> *"Our aims are the same in this matter. It is my belief that the Communist elements in the Middle Eastern area regard it as only a part of the broad scale Communist plan for establishing bases for itself in the various parts of the world in order to spread out therefrom to carry out its aims and to realize its intentions. In view of the many ties and the traditional friendship which bind our two countries…in order to coordinate our joint efforts aiming at putting an end to the spread of Communism in the world as a first step toward eliminating it.*"[611]

Following two global transformations, the end of the Cold War, and the alleged involvement of Saudi citizens in the terrorist attacks of September 11, this role became under-expected.

2.2.3. Defender of the Sunni Faith

In general, Saudi Arabia's aspiration for the defender of the faith role originated from four main ideological counter-political and theological narratives (1) global communism, (2) nationalist Arab Nasserism and Baathism, (3) Shia Islamic Revolutionism, and (4) the Muslim Brotherhood. Both these different ideas are likely to be counterproductive and undermining Saudi Arabia's conservative Salafism.

From the Afghanistan war in the 1980s to the post-Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979 to the post-Arab Spring protests, Saudi Arabia has worked tirelessly to create a regional Sunni belt dominated by the Salafist clergy and proxies. To combat the

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[610] Toby Matthiesen, "Saudi Arabia and the Cold War," *The Salman's Legacy: The Dilemmas of a New Era in Saudi Arabia*, ed. by Madawi Al-Rasheed, Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 217.
[611] ibid.

Communist and Shia challenges, Saudi Arabia has identified an incentive to assume a competitive role tasked to defend the faith. Over three waves of political struggles Communist, revolutionary Islamic Iran, and pro-democracy Arab Spring, Wahabism has become a sacred two-edged sword for preserving the royal family regime and the defense of Saudi global theological faith.

Throughout the first wave, during the Cold War, Saudi Arabia vowed to eradicate and suppress global communism in or outside the Middle East. Saudi Arabia engaged in a regional Cold War based on anti-Communism rationale and for the sake of God, where Wahhabism became "*a bulwark against Arab nationalist rivals like Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, who were turning to the Soviets in the 1960s and 1970s*." [612]

Throughout the second wave since Iran's Islamic revolution, Saudi Arabia has been in a position of lonely Arab and Sunni actor fighting Shia revival dreams and Shia Crescent walls. Sunni concerns and resentment of Shia domination have denounced Iran's Islamic revolutionary strategy, which "*is likely to fall on deaf ears in the Sunni world*." [613] However, in 2006, high-ranking Saudi scholars described Shia as an "*evil sect… more dangerous than Jews or Christians*."[614]

Although the war against communism persisted, the advent of Iran's Shia revolutionary reversed the regional power structure, marked a Shia revival, instigated sectarianism and extremism. As Imam Khomeini had declared his ideology of 'export revolution,' Saudi Arabia intuitively decoded as an inevitable Persian and Shia threat and pledged to combat it at all expense. That was in practical response to Iran's plotted and backed militant activities inside or close to Saudi Arabia's homeland, including Mecca's siege by Shia Saudi leader Juhayman al-Utaybi in 1979 coupled with Kuwait's attacks.

With the third wave, since the post-Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia has wedded a predominantly Sunni populace across the region, trying to suppress Shia minority groups

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[612] Carol E. B. Choksy and Jamsheed K. Choksy, "The Saudi Connection: Wahhabism and Global Jihad," *World Affairs*, vol. 178, no. 1 (2015), p. 27.

[613] Sabri Ciftci and Güneş Tezcür, "Soft Power, Religion and Anti-Americanism in the Middle East," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, vol. 12, no. 3 (2016), p. 7.

[614] Curtin Winsor, "Saudi Arabia , Wahhabism and the Spread of Sunni Theofascism," *Mideast Monitor*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2007), p. 5, http://www.mideastmonitor.org/issues/0705/0705_2.htm.

and revolutionary movements. During this period, Saudi Arabia turned to the third line of the Islamic awakening, namely the Muslim Brotherhood. The Saudi regime has dismantled the Saudi Sahwa, which instead supports the scholastic (*ilmi*)/quietist Salafis, which favors the loyalty of Muslim rulers, rejects national disorder and revolutions (*fitna*), and criticizes revolutionary movements such as the Muslim Brothers described as enemies of Islam.[615]

The Arab Spring uprisings triggered the new Middle East cold war by sectarian divisions and geopolitical games and interests. Like dealing with the communist threat in the past, recently, Saudi Arabia operates under the guise of pan-Sunniism to deter Iran. In order to socialize its current regional role and alter Iran's expansionist stance, Saudi Arabia initiated 'measures and wars of necessity' and according to Al Rasheed:

> *"The kingdom intensified its own outreach to Muslim countries, from Morocco to Malaysia. Saudi Arabia invited Muslim countries to joint military exercises. These events became opportunities to demonstrate the solidarity of other Muslim nations and their support for the Saudis. These initiatives are also intended to isolate Iran in the Muslim world. It is in this context that Saudi Arabia projected itself as the defender of Sunni Muslims after decades of carrying the banner as defender of all Muslims."*[616]

This assertive role is strongly encapsulated in King Fahad's famous and honorable royal title of Custodian of Two Holy Mosques. It has two dimensions, the first being institutionalized by Al Saud in the service of pilgrims in Mecca and Madinah. Second, the religious legacy of such a role raises Saudi Arabia's prestige and reputation in the world, and the Saudi Kings also share their respect and glory in representing the two Holy Mosques, as reflected here in King Salman's words:

> *"Allah has honored the Kingdom with the service of the Two Holy Mosques, and taking care of their guests, providing them safety and comfort, given all attention and care since King Abdul Aziz founded it, and that was followed by the successive kings. We will continue to do so, as we deeply believe that serving Haj pilgrims, Umrah performers and visitors of the Two Holy Mosques is our duty and is a great honor of which we feel immensely proud of."*[617]

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[615] Laurent Bonnefoy, "Saudi Arabia and the Expansion of Salafism," *Noref*, 2013.
[616] Al-Rasheed, *Salman's Legacy The Dilemmas of a New Era in Saudi Arabia*, p. 10.
[617] "King Salman Affirms Saudi Arabia's Pride in Serving Pilgrims, Fighting Terror," *Saudi Gazette*, (08/22/2019), https://saudigazette.com.sa/article/541743.

This protector of Umma (Muslim world) is contentious because of its exclusive expectations of Sunni and Salafi Muslims while ignoring non-Muslim and Shia expectations. The affirmation of Saudi Arabia's identity as a Sunni Muslim protector depends on faith allegiance, political loyalty, and followers' cooperation. The Kingdom has employed various schemes to defend Sunni doctrine and populations, such as the following:

- *Maximizing Sunni Groups*

Saudi Arabia's role in driving Sunni Muslims through Salafism is significant. It praises the traditionalist Salafis (Salafiyya al dawwiyya), who help the king and opposes *Fitnah* (rebellion against the ruler). Another method of Sunni model promotion may be in the form of unique relations with well-known conservative scholars and clerics who could present Saudi Arabia as a pure Muslim model.

- *Financing Sunni Regimes and Institutions*

With billions of petrodollars, Saudi Arabia has long promoted and funded Sunni politics and political Sunni theology, what the former head of the CIA, Woolsey, labeled 'Sunni theocratic totalitarianism' or Wahhabism. Estimated figures show that official and private Saudi support for religious organizations and corporate patronage is approximately $87 billion, which is greater than the Soviet Union's investment in communist ideology in the 1990s, which amounted to approximately $ 7 billion. [618] Saudi Arabia invests about $4 billion annually in building and financing Salafi mosques, madrassas, and preachers to propagate Wahhabism vs Shia theology throughout the Middle East and beyond.[619] For example, in Lebanon alone, Saudi Arabia has funded Sunni political and religious activities worth $4 billion. [620]

- *Backing Sunni Causes*

At home, the Al Saud government used the 1979 Shia leader Juhayman al-Utaybi revolt to suppress the Shia minority and propagate Shia conspiracy and allegiance to Iran as one of the leading Wahabi scholars cautioned Sunni Muslims to recognize the growing

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[618] Winsor, "Saudi Arabia , Wahhabism and the Spread of Sunni Theofascism," pp. 1–14.
[619] Carol E. B. Choksy and Jamsheed K. Choksy, "The Saudi Connection: Wahhabism and Global Jihad," p. 27.
[620] Abdo, *The New Sectarianism : The Arab Uprisings and the Rebirth of the Shi'a-Sunni Divide*.

danger of the Shia Arc (*al-Qaws al-Rafidi*) following the Shia-led revolt in Iraq in the 1990s.[621]

2.3.   Status quo Role Orientation

This role typology refers to the highest expectations of Saudi Arabia's regional roles. It aims at maintaining the regional status quo vis-à-vis regional subversion and revisionism that occasionally occurred during the 1950s and 1960s—, e.g., Nasserism—and since the breakout of the Islamic revolution of Iran and the Arab Spring uprisings.

2.3.1. Regional Defender of the Status quo

As a status quo power, Saudi Arabia has long struggled to shape Middle Eastern power structure through its own political, material, and alignment capabilities. The rising wealthy power wanted to use any chance to preserve the regional status quo that had been in its favor for a long time. This role is likely to undermine the Saudi leadership role and contradict the multilateral spirit of regional leadership. The Arab Spring has checked the impatience and weakness of regionalism in the Middle East. Keeping in mind the regional distribution of power, the Iraq invasion in 2003, and the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia and Iran have engaged in the repolarization of the regional system to their political presence and interest.

Analyzing Saudi Arabia's power expansion and the struggle to maintain the regional status quo, we can track the historical record of regional transformations, regional power relations, regional security system, and international politics, both of which influence regional revisionism and status quo dynamics in the context of Saudi Arabia's foreign and security policies. However, the permanent Saudi quest for and preservation of the status quo has been a hallmark of its slogan and role of defending the regional status quo over three periods from mid of the Cold War to the post-Arab Spring era.

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[621] Yamani, "The Two Faces of Saudi Arabia," pp. 143–56.

2.3.1.1. First Cold War Era (the 1950s-1960s)

While many Middle Eastern studies tend to fall into a detective analysis of Saudi Arabian-US relations based on 'the security regime for oil frameworks,' other considerations should then be considered. The Saudi regional and global role of anti-global communism should be highlighted in the context of the Saudi-US relationship. Such a role is either prescribed by the West or self-proclaimed to be tasked with the containment of regional revisionism and maintaining the regional status quo.

Here, for example, to draw an ideological jigsaw on the relationship between the Saudis and the US, Bronson describes it as 'thicker than oil' built on shared fears and strategic containment of regional and global communism.[622] In the same vein, Matthiesen labels Saudi Arabia as a 'Cold War actor' in the international and regional arenas during the Cold War era. [623] However, the political enmity of Saudi Arabia at that time was 'two-fold,' both Arab and global Communism.

In the name of God, Saudi Arabia prided itself on combating Godless Communism by way of political ideology, jihad movements, and material outlets. Nevertheless, during the Cold War, Saudi Arabia's foreign policy conduct was in a close fit in terms of orientation and goals and *role congruence* in terms of the reconcilable ideological role as 'defender of the faith and status quo' against Godless, revisionist Communism.[624] Anti-Communism rhetoric was cleverly designed by the House of Saud's political culture and ideology. Of that, in 1966, in a letter referring to anti-Communism, King Faisal told President Johnson that "*we combat on religious grounds, and that you combat for doctrinal reasons.*" [625] More pragmatically, Prince Bandar ibn Sultan Al Saud professed:

> "*We did not use East–West arguments or America's anti-communism, we used religion. We said, 'the Communists are atheists, they don't believe in religion and we are fighting them for religious reasons.' We galvanized the Muslim world behind us, which fitted perfectly into Reagan's strategy for*

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[622] Rachel Bronson, *Thicker than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia*, Oxford University Press, 2006.

[623] Matthiesen, "Saudi Arabia and the Cold War," p. 218.

[624] Korany Bahgat and Moataz A. Fattah, "Irreconcilable Role-Partners? Saudi Foreign Policy Between the Ulama and the US," *The Foreign Policies of Arab States*, 2011, p. 364, doi:10.5743/cairo/9789774163609.003.0011.

[625] Matthiesen, "Saudi Arabia and the Cold War," p. 217.

fighting the Soviet Union in an area where they could not influence it in a way that we could."[626]

Retrospectively, Saudi Arabia has vowed to restore anti-Communism to its goal by:

- *Wahhabism versus Communism*

Saudi Arabia and the US also recognized the importance and leadership role of the Kingdom in the 'greater Islamic world stretching from Morocco to the Philippines.' Saudi Kings' staunch anti-Godless Communism, particularly King Faisal's 'Muslim solidarity' along with American doctrines concerning the Middle East and Eisenhower-Dulles letter to Ibn Saud about Reagan's Mujahedeen policy of the 1980s. The vital route to proselytize anti-Communist ideas was through Islamic organizations, namely the Muslim World League, the Organization of Islamic Conferences (OIC), and other Wahhabi-oriented madrassas and universities such as the Islamic University of Medina.[627]

- *Joint Intelligence Apparatus (Safari Club)*

Saudi Arabia and the US operated together to suppress communism anywhere, notably in Africa and the whole of the Third World, through a complicated network of intelligent agencies, especially the CIA. The Safari Club was mostly responsible for organizing intelligence, militant, and financing for other Western Anti-Communist organizations. A relative of Al Saud, Kemal Adham, headed the Saudi role of anti-Communism from 1965 to 1979. He orchestrated the first Saudi intelligence agency, mastered regional alliances. Among his most outstanding achievements, he lured Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat to relinquish Egypt's tilting to the Soviet Union, funded Mujahedeen, and organized operations in the Horn of Africa in particular. The Saudi side's expense of the anti-Communist battle was nearly $ 3 billion in cash and recruitment of anti-Communist fighters (Jihadists).[628]

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[626] cited, p. 218.
[627] Matthiesen, "Saudi Arabia and the Cold War," pp. 217–33; Bronson, *Thicker than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia*.
[628] Rachel Bronson, "Rethinking Religion : The Legacy of the U . S . -Saudi Relationship," *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 4 (2005), p. 124.

- *Anti-pan-Arabism*

The key source of the first Arab Cold War in the 1950s and 1960s was, in several respects, the political divide between Nasir-led Arab nationalism-Qawmiya, and Saudi-led Wataniya state nationalism. Through the Arab nationalist vanguard, Nasir found the Arab world to be split into two identities: conservative states and anti-imperialist states.[629] Not only did the security regime decide the self-identification of the state, but in the case of Saudi Arabia, among other monarchical states in the world, its foreign orientation and alignments even contributed to Nasser's goals. In the mid-1950s and 1960s, Saudi Arabia took the side of monarchy, status quo, and pro-West (Jordan and Iraq until 1963) against traditional Arab nationalist, republican, and pro-communist states (Egypt, Syria, and Iraq). Egyptian interference in Yemen to clamp down on the monarchical system supported by Saudi Arabia was the standout cause of the Arab Cold War and the break between the two Arab powers.[630]

2.3.2.2. Second Regional Cold War (1979-2011)

The timing of the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan and the break-up of the Islamic Republic, Iran, has unexpectedly disturbed Saudi Arabia's strategic estimates. Subsequently, the Kingdom needed to combat the new ideological challenge and stay loyal to its ally-the US committed to the containment of the Soviet Union. Saudi Arabia and its partners then sought to counter the twin revisionist challenges of international Communism and Iran's radical Islamism.

First and foremost, Saudi Arabia was rigorously prepared to combat the strategic adventurism of the emerging Iran-led revolutionary axis that would later have affected (Arab Gulf region, Iraq, Syria, Hezbollah, Hamas). At the core of Saudi threat perception, Iran presents an existential ideological and geopolitical challenge from the 'Khomienian Revolutionary Doctrine,' Iran's military supremacy, and the Iranian aspiring to a regional hegemonic leadership role.

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[629] Tayyar Arı, *Geçmişten Günümüze Ortadoğu, Irak, Iran, ABD, Petrol, Filistin Sorunu ve Arap Baharı*, Cilt 2, Bursa: Alfa Yayınları, 2017, s.140-141.
[630] See Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in 20th Century:From Triumph to Despair*, Princeton University Press, 2003; Malcolm H. Kerr, *The Arab Cold War, 1958-1964; a Study of Ideology in Politics*, Oxford University Press, 1967.

Second, Saudi Arabia has also been dedicated to maintaining the defense, demographic and political status quo of the Arab Gulf in the face of expansionist Iran, which aspires to create a new Pax-Iranica order by championing and engendering Shia populations to join the Iranian-led resistance bloc. Therefore, Saudi Arabia has been dismissive of Iran's sectarian strategy focused on stirring controlled regional chaos. That aimed at mobilizing Shias, who are reported at 75 percent in Bahrain, 60 percent in Iraq, a majority but not evident in Lebanon, 15 percent in Saudi Arabia, and 30 percent in Shia-Zaydis in Yemen.[631]

Following the three turbulent incidents of 9/11, the invasion of Afghanistan, and the invasion of Iraq, Saudi Arabia had to respond to Iran's emboldened supremacy. Throughout the former, Iran tended to denounce and oppose the Salafi radicalization of Saudi Arabia and demonstrate its assertive willingness to reinforce intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq, both conjugal to its boundaries. Saudi Arabia claims that Iran seeks to expand the Saudi natural zone of influence by building a Shia Crescent that will separate Yemen from the southern flank, Bahrain from the eastern flank, Syria, and Lebanon from the north (Levant) of the Mediterranean region in which Russia is pursuing regional influence as an oil-rich and strategic military base.

However, Saudi Arabia's preservation of Arab Gulf security and the status quo is concerned with cutting off the 'snakehead' – Iran, due to its propagation of revolutionary ideology throughout the region by mobilizing support for the Arab Shias to wage insurgencies against their regimes. In response to Iran's subversion, Saudi Arabia has also claimed that it only establishes itself in an ethical position of protection against Iran's political Shi'ism and sectarianism because of its traditional consistency in instigating and exploiting Arab Shias in certain aspects. After the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, the Iranian government has been a nationalist ideologue for radical and militant Arab Shias throughout the sub-region. At the beginning of the 1980s, Imam Khomeini's iconic slogan of export of revolution role inspired Iran to establish Shia militias and governments such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, Saudi Hezbollah in Hijaz, Hezbollah in

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[631] Lionel Beehner, "Shia Muslims in the Mideast," *Council on Foreign Relations*, 2006, http://www.cfr.org/religion/shia-muslims-mideast/p10903.

Bahrain, the Zaynaboun Brigade, the Afghan Fatimid Brigade, the Popular Mobilization Units in Iraq, and Ansarullah (Houthis) in Yemen.

Furthermore, Saudi Arabia also stepped on a fine line between utilizing and opposing Saddam Hussein's hegemonic posture. First, Saudi Arabia perceived Hussein's steadfast stand on Iran's Khomeini ideology of export revolution as a regional blocking power that prevailed in the Iraq-Iran War (1981-88). Second, Saudi Arabia had to counter Saddam Hussein's Gulf hegemony, which caused the (Kuwait invasion) as an omen of the Gulf's backsliding political order.[632]

After Iran haunted Iraq's domestic politics following the collapse of the Baathist Saddam regime in 2003 and doubled its power and prestige after actively fighting ISIS in the region, Saudi Arabia lagged beyond the Iranian position. With no more ideal choice, Saudi Arabia has realized a zero-sum game between Iran and Arab states in Iraq after the US sold Iraq to Shia Iraqis on a golden plate. To legitimize its role in Iraq, Saudi Arabia criticized Iran for solidifying influence in Iraq based on dirty sectarianism that, during Al Maliki's rule, triggered Sunni militancy under ISIS and other groups.[633]

2.3.2.3. The Third Regional Cold War (2011-present)

Saudi Arabia also plunged into a new regional Cold War and faced the precarious Arab Spring challenges to the regional status quo that the Kingdom has been maintaining since the Cold War. In comparison, the post-Arab Spring security environment has stunned Saudi Arabia with an abrupt shift in its foreign policy trajectory through pro-activism rather than conventional re-activism as a Saudi scholar terms "*transition through evolution*"[634] relating to the pre-Arab Spring period.

This tumultuous period has taken over Saudi Arabia's foreign policy at three justifiable intervals. The first was almost the 'shocking initiation' of Arab uprisings that culminated in regime crackdowns and, eventually, political transitions. The second phase triggered interventionist foreign policies after the outbreak of civil war and Islamist

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[632] Tayyar Arı, Yükselen Güç Türkiye ABD Ilişkileri ve Ortadoğu, Bursa: MKM Yayınları, 2010, s.40.
[633] Fatma Aslı, "Saudi-Iranian Entanglements in the Persian Gulf: Is Rapprochement Possible," p. 33.
[634] Al Tamamy, "Saudi Arabia and the Arab Spring: Opportunities and Challenges of Security," p. 143.

movements in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. The third phase marks the Saudi reconciliation policy towards national reforms and regional concerns, like Yemen and Qatar. Upon Saudi Arabia's expectations, the Arab Spring was a bowl of opportunities and challenges, and thus sought to obtain the gains and ruin the evils through a set of tactical and strategic foreign policy instruments as follows:

- *Counterrevolutionary Activism*

The Arab Spring has triggered a fresh surge of political Islamism and revolutionism. Events have also created incentives for regional powers to flex their muscles and roles. Individually, Saudi Arabia has followed a flexible line between mainstream reactive foreign policy and proactive interventionist policies to combat Iran's radical Shi'ism and the Muslim Brotherhood's revolutionary Sunniism. At home and abroad, Saudi Arabia suppressed uprisings in the Eastern Province of the Shia Saudi populated region, silenced intervention in Libya, encouraged political transition in Yemen, plotted a military coup in Egypt, mobilized the international community, financed Syrian opposition groups and radicals in Syria, and balanced the influence of the twin-axis of Turkey and Qatar.[635]

In most ways, Saudi Arabia has softly resorted to counterrevolutionary measures. Among such measures,— in addition to petrodollar rewards, sectarian proxy groups, and the US security umbrella,— is "*the cynical exploitation of reactionary Islam is at the heart of Saudi Arabia's counter-revolution,*"[636] referring to the Salafi clergy and militancy. To play in the Syrian game against Iran, Saudi Arabia collaborated closely with Turkey to impose joint pressure on Assad regime by funding and training local and foreign Islamist fighters. Furthermore, discursively, Saudi Arabia was ambivalent about utilizing religion either as a uniting weapon or a battling tool that yet split Saudi religious scholars and affiliated media into "*a religious one in support of Sunni unity against Shia heretics, and a so-called liberal discourse denouncing religious scholars and their sectarianism.*"[637]

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[635] Karim Makdisi et al., "Regional Order from the Outside in: External Intervention, Regional Actors, Conflicts and Agenda in the MENA Region," *MENARA Methodology and Concepts Papers*, 2017, p. 5.
[636] Toby Craig Jones, "Saudi Arabia versus the Arab Spring," *Raritan*, vol. 31, no. 2 (2011), p. 57.
[637] Al-Rasheed, "Sectarianism as Counter-Revolution: Saudi Responses to the Arab Spring," p. 522.

At the height of the uprisings, Saudi Arabia has tailored two discourses. First, a geopolitical discourse based on a perceived threat posed by Iran that aimed at destabilizing the Saudi geopolitical margin of Bahrain. Second, Saudi Arabia has created ideological discourses and narratives about Iran's aspirations for both the Velayat -el Faqih doctrine and the Shia hegemony that the Arab Spring, according to Saudi media, has shaped such an ambition. Officially, Mohammed bin Salman commented on Iran's role in these events, referring to a sectarian competition. He stated:

> "*We are pushing back on these Iranian moves. We have done this in Africa, Asia, in Malaysia, in Sudan, in Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon. We believe that after push back, the problems will move inside Iran. We do not know if the regime will collapse or not – it's not the target, but if it collapses, great, it's their problem. We have a war scenario in the Middle East right now. This is very dangerous for the world. We cannot take the risk here. We have to take serious painful decisions now to avoid painful decisions later.*"[638]

Third, the Kingdom's new discourse on regional threat perceptions has evolved around the ideo-historical narratives of the Islamic Caliphate ideology whereby Saudi Arabia sees Turkey and Arab Islamists would transform the uprisings and power vacuums into their undying dream of Sunni leadership under Turkey.

- *Balance of Regional Influence (Iran, Turkey, and Russia)*

In brief, Saudi Arabia's foreign policy behavior amid the Arab Spring turmoil comprises three primary considerations: (1) balancing Iran's growing status quo and hedging with its nuclear aspiration; (2) balancing Turkey's regional leadership role and curbing its associated regimes and non-actor groups; and (3) balancing Russia and luring it into economic rewards.

To Iran's disruptive involvement in the Arab Umma, Saudi Arabia has changed from an "*Arab ringleader to an Arab patron*"[639] who is expected to counter the triangle of evil headed by three Islamist groups- the Muslim Brotherhood, hard-liner Salafis encompassing all militant organizations such as al-Qaeda and ISIS, and Iran along with its proxy gangs in the region.[640] In this way, Saudi Arabia has been awkwardly positioned

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[638] Quoted in Ehteshami, "Saudi Arabia as a Resurgent Regional Power," p. 91.
[639] cited, p. 88.
[640] cited, p. 89.

to cripple three growing regional powers over three spheres of influence. Unlike before the Arab Spring, Turkey and Russia's interference in the region signaled Saudi Arabia's return to the geopolitics of either the Ottoman legacy of Turkey or the Soviet legacy of Russia. In Turkey's case, Saudi Arabia and Turkey formed a symbolic coalition amid the outbreak of the Arab Spring; both attempted to eradicate Assad from Syria and then, in mid-2015, to counter the Houthi militia. This is clear that the contrasting understanding of their roles and perspectives on several different issues drastically hindered their potential cooperation and, as a result, drifted apart.

By comparison, Turkey has established itself as a liberal regional model and a bastion of Islamic pro-democracy movements in the region that the Turkish elites viewed Turkey as an ideological third-line option between hardline Shia and Salafi Islamism. Amid the uprisings, Turkey proceeded to sustain its role by engendering and maintaining its prospective allied regimes in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Yemen.

On the contrary, Saudi Arabia also described itself as the Arab patron and the "*de facto guarantee of regional significance*"[641] and the birthplace of Islamic leadership. For example, as Turkey began to support the Libya Dawn and then the internationally legitimate Government of the National Accord (GNA), Saudi Arabia and its Arab allies supported General Hafter and his (Libyan National Army) to suppress the Turkish-backed Government of the National Accord (GNA).

Unlike other sectarian conflicts, Saudi Arabia and its allies regard Turkish interference in Libya as a question of ideo-geo-political concern, narrating Turkey as some sort of 'other's penetration into inter-Arab affairs for imperialist ambition in the Mediterranean Sea in general and economic interests in the Libyan substantial energy resources and an ideological dedication to the protection of Libya's Islamic client regime. Such narratives about the Libyan crisis may also give rise to a new wave of Arab nationalism in political and religious realms and discourses. Examples include the

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[641] Ennis, Momani, "Shaping the Middle East in the Midst of the Arab Uprisings: Turkish and Saudi Foreign Policy Strategies," 2013, p. 1128.

frequent Saudi denunciations and the Arab League and the Muslim World League's criticism of Turkish military existence in Libya at the GNA's behest.[642]

- *Balance of Sectarianism*

Although Saudi Arabia blames Iran for being a non-Arab state meddling in the Arab region and which has been using a sectarian identification game since 1979, it has retaliated by the same means to defend the status quo of its favor and to break the status quo favored by Iran in Iraq, Syria, and the Houthi-dominated part of Yemen.[643] As early as feasible, the Saudi scholar Madawi Al-Rasheed claimed that:

> *"In response to the Arab Spring, sectarianism became a Saudi pre-emptive counter-revolutionary strategy that exaggerates religious difference and hatred and prevents the development of national non-sectarian politics."*[644]

Consequently, a regional competition for Middle East supremacy has contributed to the development of the Third Arab Cold War by external intrusive '*others*' and internal sectarian clients, that according to Hinnebusch:

> *"Leadership was now sought, not of the supra-state community (Arabism or Islam) but of only one of the sectarian sides, Sunni or Shia, and was conducted by sectarian discourse wars in which the 'other' was widely demonized."*[645]

Even though the multipolarity of ideologies plagues the Middle East, this does not prevent regional actors from cooperating symbolically to form such coalitions as the Turkish-Saudi coalition over Syria and Yemen.[646]

Besides Turkey, which has been working to promote Islamic revolutionary Muslim brothers, Saudi Arabia and Iran have battled sectarian dominance in the region. Al Saud presents the Kingdom as the security guarantor of the Arab Gulf, where the international energy routes, the Holy Mosques, and the allies' military bases are situated. Amid the Arab Spring uprisings, Saudi Arabia then considered that the desirable status quo would be retained mainly and quickly in Bahrain and Yemen. In Bahrain's case,

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[642] "Saudi Arabia Condemns Turkey's Military Interference in Libya," *Arab News*, (2020), https://www.arabnews.com/node/1608391/middle-east.;

[644] Al-Rasheed, "Sectarianism as Counter-Revolution: Saudi Responses to the Arab Spring," p. 513.

[645] Raymond Hinnebusch, "The Sectarian Revolution in the Middle East," *Global Trends & Regional Issues*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2016), p. 141.

[646] Hinnebusch, "The Sectarian Revolution in the Middle East," pp. 120–52.

Saudi Arabia took military measures to combat the Shia uprising and protect the Sunni ruling al-Khalifa dynasty.

Yemen, the southern backyard of Saudi Arabia, has always been an uncontrollable and unstable neighbor to the detriment of a stable and prosperous kingdom. As the Houthi movement arose in the 2000s to join Iran's leading regional resistance, Saudi Arabia initiated an airstrike against the group as a preventive measure to curb Iran's initial influence in Yemen. Again, Saudi Arabia has militarily responded to the Houthi militia's coup d'état over the internationally recognized government that resulted in Sana'a's seizure and the President's escape. Nonetheless, the Saudi-led international coalition in Yemen has been justified as legitimate self-defense by Saudi Arabia, and as former Saudi Foreign Affairs Minister Adel Al Jubier described as a 'war of necessity.'

In Syria, Saudi Arabia and its partners waged a war of discourse and proxy against the Syrian regime and identified it as the 'Alawite dictatorship' and an infidel, rogue and abhorrent to Sunni faith. At the height of the sectarian rhetoric and mobilization, Saudi Arabia, in cooperation with the other regional anti-Assad partners, backed Syrian opposition with arms and ideas. Besides, Saudi-sponsored media outlets and religious preachers talked about Assad's sectarian godlessness (Rafidah) and war crimes. Formally and informally, Sunni scholars from the mainstream, including Yousef Al-Qaradawi, the Saudi cleric Aidh Al-Qarni, and the General Mufti of the Kingdom 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Sheikh, and many others, were ruthlessly committed to this task.[647]

In Lebanon, Saudi Arabia is pursuing a carrot-stick approach supporting Lebanon's economic recovery and Sunni revival. First, to counter Hezbollah's influence, Saudi Arabia devotes substantial resources to the economic and military sectors, including the Lebanese Central Bank, and approximately $ 1 million to finance the Lebanese Army. Second, Saudi Arabia has installed Salafism in some northern parts of

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[647] Marina Calculli, "Sub-Regions and Security in the Arab Middle East: 'Hierarchical Interdependence' in Gulf-Levant Relations," *Regional Insecurity After the Arab Uprisings*, Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015, p. 72, doi:10.1057/9781137503978_4.

Lebanon, such as Tripoli and Muhafazah opposed to the Shia strongholds in southern Lebanon.[648]

- *Dual Containment Doctrine*

To counter the current surge of revolutionary Islamism led by Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has reinforced its military capabilities and adopted the doctrine of dual containment for eradicating these two threats. This bold Saudi foreign policy coincided with the rise of the Trump administration and the indignant Israeli stance on Iran, which the Kingdom had at least used to undo the Iranian nuclear deal reached under the Obama presidency.

- *Consolidation of New Regional Alignments: 'Triple-Axis.'*

To confront the liberal revolutionary axis led by Turkey and Qatar, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates have formed an Arab counter-revolutionary axis. This axis has emerged out of frustration with Turkey's regional policy, which has recently become the champion of Sunni political Islam.

The Saudi-led axis has considered that Qatar undermines the Saudi regional leadership role, competes for regional hegemony, and contributes to the shift of the status quo in favor of Turkey and Iran. By the advent of the Arab Spring, Qatar used the Al Jazeera channel and funded other social media platforms to misrepresent Saudi Arabia's global image. Saudi Arabia also claims that Qatar seeks to circumvent its regional leadership and mediating roles and criticizes it to mobilize and fund radical groups, including the Muslim Brothers.[649]

Despite the historical differences between Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the Arab Spring revealed a clear divergence in preferences as Qatar acted like a small power in regional power guise, seeking a higher regional status. This behavior has manifested in Qatar's diversification of regional security alliances and championing of trans-Gulf identities. In reaction, the Saudi-led axis narratives and discourses raged by extreme

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[648] Augustus Richard Norton, "The Geopolitics of the Sunni-Shia Rift," *Regional Insecurity After the Arab Uprisings*, Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015, p. 143, doi:10.1057/9781137503978_7.

[649] Ennis, Momani, "Shaping the Middle East in the Midst of the Arab Uprisings: Turkish and Saudi Foreign Policy Strategies," 2013, pp. 1127–44.

propaganda depicting the Qatari regime and Emir as a brother who betrays Arabism by allying with Turkey. The affiliated media of these axis countries has frequently accused Qatar and Turkey of funding Islamist organizations, such as the Free Syrian Army, and other hyperlinked organizations such as al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra.[650] Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt have begun to isolate and impose sanctions on Qatar through various means. For example, in 2014, Saudi Arabia withdrew its ambassador from Doha.

- *Consolidation of Third-line Ideology: Arab vs. non-Arab Identities*

During the Arab Spring, Saudis were subjected to two contradictory state-sponsored discourses: a religious one in favor of Sunni solidarity against Shia heretics and a liberal discourse denouncing religious scholars and sectarianism. In the aftermath of the Arab Spring events, Saudi Arabia has become a geopolitical and ideological victim. On the one hand, Saudi Arabia did not find itself in a fixed abode where traditional Wahhabism had become a matter of burden at home. On the other hand, the recently trans-national Islamic movements, including Shia Arabs and the Muslim Brotherhood, became an ontological challenge.

Saudi Arabia has lately realized that the international criticism of sectarianism and radicalism must be alleviated when pragmatically Saudi Arabian interests require adopting a foreign policy that combines nationalism with modernization. With new leadership and vision, Saudi Arabia has begun to revive Arab nationalism and to develop post-Islamism for the following strategic reasons: first, the cost of sectarianism seems to be higher and has led to adventurism since Saudi Arabia has gradually realized its incompatibility and inefficiency in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, where Iran has relatively won. This is observable both within and outside the Kingdom, as one of the leading experts of Middle East studies admits that "*Iran is the undoubted winner in regional-power terms in the past decade of Middle Eastern upheaval*"[651] because it was unbalanced collectively.

With the rise of regional non-Arab powers, the trans-national ideology of Islamist movements, and the fall of pan-Arabism, Saudi Arabia is left with fewer friends. Of

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[650] See Calculli, "Sub-Regions and Security in the Arab Middle East: 'Hierarchical Interdependence' in Gulf-Levant Relations," pp. 58–81.
[651] F. Gregory Gause, "Ideologies, Alignments, and Underbalancing in the New Middle East Cold War," *PS - Political Science and Politics*, vol. 50, no. 3 (2017), p. 672, doi:10.1017/S1049096517000373.

course, it seems that the twist of fate is moving Saudi Arabia and the entire Arab world into a fresh dose of pan-Arabism and advocacy for unity, even though the former will use it for its own sake and under its wheels.

Second, with every occurrence of a regional power vacuum, like in the 1950s and 1960s, and after 2011, Saudi Arabia immediately lost to non-Arab players, including Israel, Iran, and Turkey. The consequence, according to Amr Moussa, the Egyptian former-Secretary-General of the Arab League, that the Arabs lagged and the "*hegemony of Israel, Iran, and Turkey, humiliated and turned them in a laughingstock.*"[652] Politics of faith has put Saudi Arabia at the whim of rivalry with two defenders of the faith, Sunni Turkey and Shia Iran, whom the Arab Spring has installed as historical and ideological non-Arab nemeses of Saudi Arabia.

- *Global Counterterrorism*

The importance of religion underwent a seismic change in the 2010s, which took the Kingdom into close alignment with the West. Saudi contributions to the war on global terrorism included a range of internal reforms and financial grants to the United Nations Centre for Counterterrorism, which amounted to around $100 million in August 2017. This current Saudi approach was planned to restore the Kingdom's image in tandem with international pressure on the Kingdom over allegations of complicity in the funding of terrorist organizations.[653] The Saudi Arabian need for such a change in traditional foreign policy is justified as a smart response to Iran's maximum escalation and expansion in the region by using other tools in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, as Al-Sulami indicates:

> "*The Iranian regime continues to use similar tools in its expansionist drive to "export the revolution." Beneath the religious extremist exterior, however, the primary force driving this expansionism is colonialist anti-Arab Persian ethno-nationalism, which twists history and geography, as well as dehumanizing and demonizing Arabs as culturally and racially inferior, as a way of justifying Iran's conquests.*"[654]

[652]Roger Cohen, "This Angry Arab Moment," *The New York Times*, (05/14/2015), https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/15/opinion/roger-cohen-this-angry-arab-moment.html.
[653] Ehteshami, "Saudi Arabia as a Resurgent Regional Power," p. 86.
[654] Mohammed Al-Sulami, "Why Iran's 'Awakening' Created a Nightmare for the Gulf," *Arab News*, (09/23/2019), https://www.arabnews.com/node/1558201.

Last, in the post-Arab Spring period, Saudi Arabia was left to conceive of erecting a de facto security bloc composed of secular and anti-Iran allies, including Israel, the UAE, Egypt, and other non-state actors such as Libya's Hafter and Salafi factions.

3.   ROLE EXPECTATIONS

Saudi Arabia's regional roles represent both national and regional expectations. By the way, Saudi accomplishment of both types of role expectations consolidates its national and regional legitimacy. Internally, the Kingdom's regional roles revolve around three expectations: First, low internal expectations related to both the preservation and legitimacy of its regime. Such expectation happens as the Kingdom appeases domestic demands and restrictions, particularly those of the conservative Salafi Ulema, seeking Saudi ideological roles of faith and Muslim protection and representation. Second, Saudi Arabia has high expectations that arise from self-interested pragmatism and drive Saudi hegemonic aspirations for regional power and leadership in the Arab world and the Middle East. Third, Saudi Arabia also has high expectations of its regional roles connected to the relentless preservation of the status quo. These regional expectations of Saudi Arabia have shown a high degree of stability and consistency since the Cold War and the Islamic Revolution in Iran to the post-Arab Spring era. Such expectations and aspirations related to the role of (defender of the regional status quo) cost the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia a great deal and required complementary roles from its regional and international pro-status quo allies. In the name of this proactive role, the Kingdom waged numerous overt and indirect conflicts with the communist and pan-Arab movements during the Cold War and the revolutionary tide of Iran, and then the repercussions and actors of the Arab Spring revolutions, both Islamists and liberals.

Regionally, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia derives its regional legitimacy from the Gulf, Arab and Sunni societies due to its sacred status and international weight. These three societal components expect from the Kingdom the following:

First, the Gulf community expects essential roles from the Kingdom, such as guarding the Gulf region as the largest country in that security complex against Iran's ideological and security threats. Second, other Arab societies expect the Kingdom to play pan-Arab roles to fulfill such aspirations: 1)- Demanding justice and representation of the

higher Arab issues such as the Palestinian issue. 2)- Confronting Iranian and Turkish ambitions and expansion in the Arab security complex since it possesses enormous material capabilities and international influence, especially in the US. 3)- Leading and uniting the Arab nation to activate regional Arab institutions such as the Arab League and establish Arab institutions for economic and security integration. Third, Sunni communities respect the Kingdom as a guardian of the two holy mosques and expect it would deter the growing regional influence of Shias and Iran, defend the Sunni faith, and align itself with other Sunni powers like Pakistan and Turkey to form a strong Sunni alliance. Fourth, the West expects Saudi Arabia to play a progressive liberal role that would improve the Saudi cultural structure, which has long been criticized for being a significant cause of the spread of Islamic extremism through its support for Salafi groups and schools. It seems that the international pressure and criticism of the Kingdom in this regard has yielded results in tandem with the rise of King Salman and his son Muhammad bin Salman. They proposed an unprecedented vision (2030 Vision) for modernizing the Kingdom in several areas, including neutralizing Salafism.

4.   ROLE CONTESTATION

The current role conflict in Saudi foreign policy results from the contradictions between constants and variables. The elements of such a transition come from three directions: domestic, regional, and international. The rival roles between the Saudi defender of the status quo and the Iranian roles: defender of the faith and the Iranian revolutionary exporter, anti-imperialism, contributed not to a balancing of power but also a sectarian divide.

4.1.   Domestic Contestation

At the national and regional levels, three roles of Saudi Arabia have frequently been contested. Given the inconsistency and temporality of such roles, all three conservative and ideological roles have significant implications. The pan-Islam, pan-Arab, and pan-Sunni communities (three Pans) are ideologically questioned by locals and contested and alter-casted by regional rivals. Because Saudi Arabia has four self-worlds,

the Gulf, Arab, Sunni, and Muslim forming Saudis' broad self-identity, Western allies have always been a matter of value and moral burden.

Thus, Saudi Islamic orientation has created Muslim solidarity and improved the Saudi profile in the Muslim world. Saudi Arabia's pan-Muslim foreign policy is indeed a sensible response to Western hegemony and an overt interpretation of the Clash of Civilizations proposition. On the other hand, in the West, Saudi pan-Islamic politics utterly raged an increasing fear about Saudi Arabia's proselytizing of Wahhabism all over the world. The merging of domestic and international interests and values in Saudi foreign policy has always incited domestic contestation. Saudi Arabia's foreign policy does not directly influence this kind of contestation because reasonable justification is part of Al Saud's strategy, and gentle guidance is also part and parcel of Saudi clergy-*ulema*.

4.2. Regional Contestation

One of the most likely examples of Saudi Arabia's role conflicts occurred during the Second Gulf War. It happened when the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia allowed the US forces on its soil during Saddam's Kuwait invasion. There are two critical factors to the understanding of the conflict. First, a significant change in the internal context of Saudi Arabian foreign policy behavior had given priority to regime survival once Saddam Hussein's regional hegemony became a threat to Saudi Arabia. Second, Saudi Arabia was indeed committed to its two roles: *the guardian of Gulf security* and *faithful ally of the US*.

Regionally, as Saudi Arabia plays multiple roles in the Gulf, Arab and Sunni regions, this often causes role load and conflicts. The Saudi roles as a guardian of the Gulf region and a leader of Arabs and Sunnis contradict each other. After the Second Gulf War and US invasion of Iraq in 2003, Iraqis, Arabs, and Sunnis rapidly became disillusioned with their fraternal ally- Saudi Arabia. [655]

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[655] Barnett, "Institutions, Roles, and Disorder: The Case of the Arab States System," p. 271.

Shias have ever interpreted the Saudi role as defender of the faith across the region as a matter of virtual role institutionalized by Saudi Arabia to dominate the Muslim world, discredit Shia Muslims, and balance against Iran as a global voice of Shias. The latter role has become a source of Saudi Arabia's rivalry with Iran and a versatile sword for sectarianism in the region. Consequently, the role contestation of defender of the faith as integral roles of both Saudi Arabia and Iran has divided the Muslim world into ontological and ideological multipolarity- '*we-ness vs. other-ness,*' namely Shia vs. Sunni.

Despite Saudi Arabia's capabilities in terms of military, economy, and alliances, there is a debate held about the historical and current restrictions that have limited the Kingdom's regional role. First, it lacks combat expertise, as its massive expenditure on arms is not enough. As incidents demonstrate, Yemen's Saudi military campaign has almost failed to eradicate the Houthis and counter their drone attacks. Second, Wahhabism became a strain on the Kingdom at various levels as a radical doctrine that turned into a stumbling block in the face of domestic liberal reforms. Wahhabism also became a cross-border effect in spreading extremist ideas that reflected on the Kingdom's image.[656] Third, Saudi Arabia could not bring all other regional Sunni allies to balancing Iran, including Egypt and Turkey. This is partly attributed to cultural and political considerations. Each Sunni regional power has its regional aspirations to assume regional leadership roles and domestic differences in the political structure and culture; for example, democratic liberal Turkey and Egypt see Iran differently. Overall, this kind of differentiation in the Sunni world has led to under-balancing vis-à-vis Iran.[657]For these factors, the regional acceptance of Saudi Arabia as a regional power is controversial.

If any inconsistency between role conceptions and behavior creates role strain and conflict, this happened during the Arab Spring, when the Kingdom defied its qualifications for a regional leadership role by opposing Arab pro-democratic movements. This is not new to Saudi Arabian counterrevolutionary behavior but continues from the 1950s. As the prevalent proverb says, 'nothing makes a dent,' which suggests that Saudi Arabia's aspiration to regional leadership is still far-fetched. For

[656] Thomas Richter, "Saudi Arabia: A Conservative P(l)Ayer on the Retreat?," *Regional Powers in the Middle East*, Palgrave Macmillan US, 2014, p. 182, doi:10.1057/9781137484758_10.
[657] Gause, "Ideologies, Alignments, and Underbalancing in the New Middle East Cold War," 2017, pp. 672–75.

example, Saudi Arabia intervened militarily in Bahrain to end the popular uprising and played an important role in Egypt's coup.

Both the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US and the following allegations of Saudi involvement in the event, along with the Saudi undue stance towards the US invasion of Iraq, have reduced the regional status of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabian counter-revolutionary foreign policy following the Arab Spring has revealed the deficit morality and default theology of the Saudi regime and weakened the potentiality of Saudi regional leadership. The Qatari role of championing the political Islamists to remove the incumbent Arab regimes during the Arab Spring has angered Saudi Arabia, which did not want to lose them as being loyal regimes to the Kingdom. The interventionist foreign policy of the KSA during the era of King Salman contradicted Saudi traditional conciliatory foreign policy. Moreover, drone attacks on the Saudi pivotal petroleum complex Aramco marked Saudi Arabian defensive capabilities.

Local and regional interactions are often reflected in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy, especially concerning its alliance with the West in general and the United States in particular. The interaction between these two influences had contributed to the formation of Saudi Arabia's foreign roles, as it adopted a participant role in the fight against global terrorism and the role of the guardian of the Gulf region. On a larger scale, the Kingdom played Arab regional roles instructed by the United States and motivated by self-proclaimed perceptions. [658]

With the arrival of US President Donald Trump, first, Saudi Arabia realized that it was dealing with a tumultuous Republican president who blackmailed the country, causing a vacuum of power in the region with America's withdrawal from Iraq and a likely general American orientation toward Asia and the Pacific. This, in turn, frustrates the Kingdom's goals to draw the United States into efforts to isolate or take military action against Iran. Second, with time, the Kingdom has noticed that President Trump uses rhetoric that denies actions against Iran, which is dominated by a security strategy of offshore-balancing to prevent America from a war with Iran. All this confounded the Kingdom, which initially seemed optimistic since it had internally prepared

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[658] Tim Niblock, *Saudi Arabia Power, Legitimacy and Survival*, New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 20.

and risked introducing a series of reforms to entice Washington and alleviate the burden of the Wahhabi ideology, which had always impeded its relationship with the West. Third, therefore, the Kingdom seems to have been deluded. To find other alternatives, it seems that Saudi Arabia has determined to switch to the other gate of Washington through normalizing ties with Israel, that the UAE had already preceded it.

CONCLUSIONS

By drawing on role theory to address the amity and enmity patterns in the Middle East, this thesis has explored how the evolution and shift of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey's role conceptions and orientations have contributed to that at varying degrees. The rise of Iran's Islamic revolution in 1979, Saudi Arabia's reactive politics to Iran, and Turkey's JDP regional engagement have revitalized their state identities and regional roles, and consequently, reformulated the Middle Eastern power structure. The Iranian Islamic revolution as a turning point in the regional political landscape shows how Iran's new state identity and relevant roles have shaped its regional behavior and triggered Saudi Arabia's reactive roles. Furthermore, including Turkey's regional roles in this study is to discern how Turkey's return to the region initially in the 1980s and actively since 2002 has significantly redrawn the regional security order.

Although Turkey's foreign-policy and roles in the 1980s resurrected an Ottoman and Islamic tendency towards the Middle East, it continued its Western-oriented paradigm and served as a bulwark against Communist influence. In the 1990s, Turkey's uncertain future in post-Cold War NATO, domestic unrest, and regional troubles such as the Second Gulf War, water disputes, and PKK escalation forced Turkey to assume competitive roles colored by securitization and Westernization discourses. These assertive regional roles portrayed Turkey as a hard regional power in the Middle East. From 2002 to 2011, Turkish foreign policy has articulated a collaborative approach to the Middle East based on soft power, multicultural diplomacy, historical legacy, and liberal experience. Accordingly, Turkey could diversify its alliances and roles rather than deviate from the regional status quo. Likewise, it decided to balance its foreign policy orientation between emulating Western values (Europeanization) and stimulating the Middle East. While in the third phase (2011-2020), after the Arab Spring, Turkey passed through a fine line of regional politics and experienced a doctrinal shift from Davutoglu's idealism to Erdogan's realism. As a result, it encountered crucial challenges at home: the 2016 coup attempt, terrorist attacks, and political criticism of JDP's regional strategy. Regionally, Turkey became trapped in the Syrian quagmire, failed to maintain the status quo in Egypt, Syria, Libya, and Yemen, and faced the Qatari crisis and the Mediterranean dispute. Subsequently, Turkey conceptualized three new assertive roles: active independent, anti-

terrorism, and regional protector. The active independent role emanated from Turkey's political loneliness, particularly during the US President Trump's era. In contrast, the regional protector role has become a moral justification for the continuation of Turkey's foreign policy.

Consequently, Turkey has faced three competing regional blocs and counter roles, including the Russian-Iranian, the Arab, and the US-European-Israeli blocs. Each of these counter blocs has been critical of Turkey on certain regional issues. Mostly, Russia worries that Turkey would extort its foothold in the Mediterranean, topple its ally, and mobilize Islamist forces in Syria. By meddling in Syria and across the region, Iran has impaired Turkey's regional aspirations. The rift in their relations has resulted from the ideational and geopolitical competition. The Arab bloc criticized Turkey's assertive roles in the region over supporting the Islamic political movements regionally and Qatar in the Gulf. Geopolitically the regional competition between Saudi Arabia and Turkey emanates mainly from the contested aspiration for the Sunni regional leader role and the Saudi reaction to Turkey's growing ambition, particularly the military presence in the Red Sea region, such as in Somalia, Djibouti, and Sudan, the Arab Gulf as in Qatar, and the Mediterranean as in Libya. Finally, the critical remarks of the US-European-Israeli bloc about Turkey arise primarily from the JDP's Islamic foreign policy towards the region and the growing assertive rhetoric against Israel.

This thesis has offered a broader synthesis of ideological and behavioral perspectives of Iran's self-identified regional roles since 1979. It looked at the Iran-Middle East relationship, from both vantage points— Iran's roles vis-à-vis regional expectations,— rather than is traditionally handled in the Middle Eastern IR studies. Thus, it argued that Iran's chosen approach to the Middle East is fashioned by its own state identity and associated role set mainly (Islamic role model and anti-imperialism) to reconcile the expectations of Shia parties, the axis of resistance members, and certain significant others. It established how Khomeinian political Shi'ism and Persian romanticism had raised an Iranian sense of regional solidarity, geographical intersection, and cultural exceptionalism. As political Shi'ism calls for a state of change in terms of revolution and resistance, Iranian Mullahs saw Iran as a revolutionary and anti-imperialist ideal for the regional others. In particular, Imam Khomeini's concepts: pan-Islamism,

resistance, and independence; and ethical comparisons: oppressor-oppressed, unjust-just, dependent-independent, became the core drivers of Iran's role conceptualization and enactment.

This synthetic perspective brings together three role sources of Iran's role conceptualization affected by Khomeinism and political Shia romanticism. First, the normative (approach) sources are mainly rooted in clerical assumptions such as the guardianship of the Islamic jurist mandate (*Vilayat-el Faqih*) and Ummah solidarity. Second, geopolitical approach and sources— Shia-Persian geopolitics— which proposes that Iran should operate in the Persian and Shia influence zones. According to this approach, Iran's Mullahs proposed some Iranian visioned regional and regional order like the state of Umm al-Qura, Global Mahdi State, and Middle East Project. This assumption is at the core of Iran's regional policy and strategy, according to Sultan Al-Nuaimi, aims at fulfilling five stages: "*the Iranian revolution…goes through five stages: the Islamic revolution, then the Islamic regime, then the Islamic government, then the Islamic state, and finally the global Islamic civilization ... and it is now in the third phase.*"[659]Third, behavioral/instrumental approach/sources dictate Iran to practically play the bastion of revolutions, protector of the oppressed, and anti-imperialism and Zionism roles.

This thesis also concluded that Iran's regional roles are more competitive and revisionist than cooperative. Even if some cooperative roles of Iran are occasionally recorded, they likely reflect either the Iranian reformist tendency which developed during the 1990s the temporary 'good neighbor role' vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia or the type of role expectations held by like-minded partners of Iran like the Syrian regime, Hezbollah, and the Houthis.

In the case of Saudi Arabia, this study has argued that Saudi Arabia's regional role set has recorded a certain degree of stability, especially since the rise of the Iranian Islamic revolution. As mentioned earlier in Chapter Four, Saudi Arabia's foreign policy-making has prominently been shaped by ideational, material, and geopolitical sources overlapping at the domestic, regional, and internal levels. At the domestic level,

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[659] Sultan Al-Nuaimi, "Alsyasa Alkharjya Al'iirania Bayn Almrtkz Wal Mutaghayar[Iranian Foreign Policy between the Centered and the Variable]."

ideationally, the parochial Sunni Wahhabi identity, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, and regime legitimacy shape Saudi Arabia's regional role conceptualization and behavior and consolidate a self-image of its social status vis-à-vis the significant and historical others like Shia Iran or Ottoman and secular Turkey. Materially, the massive petroleum wealth has economically activated Saudi Arabia's regional influence roles, most notably the regional donor role. At the regional level, ideationally, Saudi Arabia's regional roles emanate from the threat perception and ontological insecurity exposed mainly by Iranian sectarian rivalry and infiltration and Turkish regional ambition. Saudi Arabia's high status in the Arab world has also doubled its regional leadership aspiration and responsibility to maintain the regional status quo, deter Iran, and balance Turkey. This multi-responsibility of Saudi Arabia as a Sunni-Arab-Gulf power has entailed Riyadh to play a tri-regional leadership role in fulfilling expectations of Sunnis versus Shias, Arabs versus non-Arabs, and Gulf monarchies versus other Arabs. Materially, the Saudi leadership always relies on petrodollar diplomacy to buy regional and international loyalties. At the international level, Saudi Arabia's global status as a warrior of global communism, US ally, and swing oil producer did and would still influence its role identity and behavior.

The Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 and the Arab Spring revolutions are two major shocking trajectories in Saudi foreign policy. In comparison, the former propelled Saudi Arabia into reactive sectarian roles against Iranian-incited conservative revolutions and the latter into various counterrevolutionary measures against Turkish-Qatari-Muslim brotherhood-led pro-democratic uprisings. Coinciding with post-Arab uprisings, growing international criticism of Saudi Arabian Wahhabi extremism, and the rise of King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman— the descendants of the (Sudairi branch of King Abdulaziz Al Saud's sons), progressive and loyal to the West— brought about concomitant role transformations. First, Saudi Arabia witnessed a foreign policy shift from reactive to interventionist and domestically conservative to reformist. The implications of this new leadership for Saudi Arabia's regional roles could be realized in the newly roles set: role model and normalizer with Israel. The first was initially conceived by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and embodied in his 'Vision 2030' to distance Saudi society from religious fanaticism and make Saudi Arabia a regionally innovative model. The second Saudi role as a 'normalizer with Israel—

although Saudi Arabia has not yet officially announced it— features in Riyadh's silence about the UAE's normalization of relations with Israel and its need for Israel to co-balance against Iran and Turkey.

Theoretical Implications

The objective of the thesis was to study, through an interactionist role theory, the concept of national role conceptions and to understand how they affect foreign policy behavior of regional powers in the context of the Middle East and with a particular focus on the cases of Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia since 1979. In chapter 2, I discussed the foreign policy roles of Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia considering regional powerhood approaches not limited to the behaviorist approach- that role theory belongs to- but also the positional approach in terms of status, orientational in terms of role orientations, expectational in terms of role expectations, and contestational in terms of role challenges.

Unlike constructivist assumptions, this thesis argued that state identity is made up of various role identities institutionalized by a state to fulfill what it perceives to be the right obligations and expectations for itself and others. On that, state identity socially reflects regime-made worldviews while role identity(s) indicate what that regime exactly wants and expects from the external audience. This to confirm that roles speak just loader than identities in international affairs. This thesis contributes to the Middle Eastern studies by attempting to bridge some explanatory agency-structure gap: agential role conceptions and expectations and structural role sources, enactment, and contestation.

In this dissertation, I have offered theoretical and analytical frameworks to analyze a specific topic on regional patterns of cooperation and competition in light of three potential regional powers Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. I would recommend academic researchers develop this sort of study by looking at the relations between state identity and roles, threat perceptions, and role conceptions of these three states and other ones. I also recommend that there should be a deep understanding of interactionist approaches to IR and Middle East studies from a perspective of regionalism and competition instead of keeping merely eyes on the constructivist layers of the regional rivalry. Therefore, role theory was used to touch on what I have already recommended.

Key Findings

Role theory used throughout this thesis has demonstrated its theoretical use and empirical significance to study regional power behavior in the Middle East. Using qualitative content analysis and interpretive case study, I have attempted to signify key variables and characteristics of Iranian, Turkish, and Saudi NRCs since 1979. Furthermore, I charted the role behavior of each of these three regional powers individually, analyzed differences in state and role identities and foreign policy orientations in each of them, and discussed the role shift after the Arab Spring, particularly considering Turkey's regional role competition. By focusing on ideational and structural dynamics, I have proven how changes in domestic and external role sources— particularly in state identity, foreign policy discourse, and regional challenges—indicate changes in foreign policy roles, and therefore a shift in the cooperation-competition patterns between the three states and the region in general. This was augmented by qualitative content analysis of ruling elites' speeches, foreign policy discourses, and regional orientations towards the region and drew on role-by-role literature available and new content that has not been utilized on the subject since the Arab Spring period. Without neglecting the importance of other approaches to Middle East studies, I have argued that, since the 1980s, regional rivalry in the Middle East has been influenced by, but not limited to, shifts in role conceptions and enactment. Besides, each regional role has been institutionalized as instrumental in fulfilling national expectations: self-assertion, regional acceptance, and regional hegemonic leadership. This was clarified by analyzing the role variations and behavioral features of each state's three main role orientations and the negative or positive regional reactions to them. I will summarize a few findings derived from this dissertation:

The first finding is regarding role sources. The thesis found that these three countries' regional role conceptions and behavior are variable and depend on a mix of (1) cognitive role conceptions, threat perceptions, and self-images of leaders, (2) ideational sources like state identity, belief-systems, and leadership style, (3) geopolitical sources such as aspirations for regional leadership, regional order architecture, alliance politics, and regional influence. This research attempted to refute the unilateralism assumption of role sources in general, and in each of these countries under study. In the case of Turkey, for example, the normative and historical sources of Turkey's roles that the JDP

formulated did not negatively affect its relationship with its neighbors, especially the Arabs. With a holistic look, we can conclude that the alternation between sources and orientations has caused a contrast in the level of regional and international expectations and contestation.

On the Iranian side, despite the pretended function of factionalism in foreign policy-making, Iran's religious foundations, including the mullahs and Shia clergy, have explicitly formulated Iran's Shia revolutionary approaches and roles in foreign policy. This makes a valid argument that even though their geopolitical approaches influence foreign policy-making, stable pan-Islamic and Shia-revolutionary principles and sources suggest coherence and continuity of Iran's regional roles and orientations vehemently. From Imam Khomeini's seminal book Hukumat-i Islami (Islamic Government) to the 'Twenty-Year Vision Document,'— despite the rapprochement in the 1990s,— Iran would still be seen by Saudi Arabia as a threat to its religiopolitical legitimacy, Western allies, and regional influence.

On the Saudi side, this research debated in Chapter Four that the sources of Saudi Arabia's regional roles are dominated by the influence of the state identity of Al Saud, the Islamic Wahhabi dimension, and the oil wealth. Such sources have been affected by Iran's revolutionary behavior, not to mention pan-Arab revisionism. These sources have been established, especially the religious and royal, the first to maintain the regime's survival and the second to distinguish Saudi Arabia from others in the Sunni world. What made it more necessary for it to continue has mainly been Iran's revolutionary behavior. To clarify, this research also dealt with revealing structural signs in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy to reconsider its ideological sources, wildly the Wahhabi missionary, which impeded the process of modernity internally and troubled the reputation of Saudi Arabia regionally and internationally. As it has been observed since the ascension of King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, there appeared two unprecedented transformations in Saudi Arabia's political history: the first is the noticeable distancing from religious influence in Saudi Arabia's discourse and roles, and the second, the cautious progressive orientation in foreign policy. Whether these transformations reflect the regional dynamics or the doctrine of Mohammed bin Salman directly, it is worth noting that the discourse and vision of Mohammed bin Salman show two manifestations

of Saudi Arabia's orientation towards progressive regional roles. Also, to tackle a new Islamic revolutionary wave led by the Muslim Brotherhood since the Arab Spring, Riyadh determined to formulate two significant counter-roles: the "Arab role model" in terms of pursuing a modernist vs. Islamist approach and a populist/pan-Arabist role or the "Arab leader" in terms of Arab vs. non-Arab regional powers.

On the Turkish side, this study in Chapter Two argued that Islamic sources, based on collaboration, directly contributed to Turkey's return to the region, even though they sent a double alerting signal about the revival of Ottoman Turkey in the region and the shift from West to East. Moreover, the Turkic role sources created a regional competitive distinctiveness, causing ontological insecurities. Similarly, Saudi Arabian pan-Islamic, Sunni, Arab role sources

The second finding is about role expectations/expectational dimension. In this thesis, I argued that states are committed to fulfilling two constitutive role expectations, *self*-expectations that include high and low expectations held by the role maker, and *other*-expectations held by the associated society about the role maker. This study showed that despite the varieties of sources and orientations embedded in the regional role conceptions of states like Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, they might also terminate in diverse perspectives of these role expectations domestically and externally. For instance, although Iran usually conceptualizes regional roles based on its self-proclaimed virtuous principles and views, this does not necessarily mean that it largely retains positive expectations by the regional states and masses, particularly Sunnis. This phenomenon affirms that a significant number of Middle East-oriented roles are either ideologically or geopolitically biased. Similarly, associated role expectations held by the prospective audiences are selectively appreciated or rejected according to the ideological and political relationship between the role maker and receiver.

The third finding concerns regional rivalry/contestational dimension per role competition between Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. One may conclude that regional competition in the Middle East has gradually accelerated after Iran's Islamic revolution in 1979 and Arab Spring uprisings. Indeed, this is not to ignore the general consequences of regional and extra-regional competition for hegemonic roles and counter roles.

However, in part, this thesis found that the role rivalry between these regional powers emanates from *strategic intentionality* of roles— 'as if' dilemma and *functional incompatibility*.

Firstly, strategic intentionality of roles lies in two ideal strategic intentions: hegemony by role exceptionalism and self-visioned articulation of the regional system, which caused the erection of a threat perception almost against every role conception. As Iran's regional roles are normative in nature and instrumental in behavior, this suggests that Iran's Islamic idealism has driven role exceptionalism, and instrumentalism has driven regional role revisionism— Iran's reformulation of the Middle Eastern system. To apply its role exceptionalism regionally, Iran has primarily been drawing on moral and solidarity approaches and socializing roles like the 'Protector of the Oppressed' and 'Defender of the Faith.' Although they seemed initially welcomed by the regional masses as a foreign policy normative distance from the secular West-allied Shah and advocacy for the Palestinian issue— Sunni regimes and populations debated the sectarian intention of such role 'exclusive Shia-oriented roles.' Equally important, given the history and implications of Iran's new state identity, its regional roles stem from a self-claim that Iran possesses exceptional resources and roles with Persian and Islamic credentials that most other regional countries lack that Iran describes as Western puppets. Thanks to the Iranian Islamic Revolution, these roles emerged, which the Iranian leadership described since its dawn as a global leader in the Third World, protecting the oppressed, defending the faith, and liberating from imperialism. Based on these revolutionary and emancipatory concepts and roles, Iran began to operate regionally by playing the protector of the oppressed role that would challenge Israel, West, and the regional US allies, mainly Saudi Arabia that Imam Khomeini once described as "vile and ungodly Saudis' [being] 'daggers that have always pierced the hearts of Moslems from the back."[660] Secondly, Iran's defender of the faith role has frequently targeted Saudi Arabia, discrediting Wahhabism as 'an anti-Qur'anic religion.' Since then, particularly for Saudi Arabia, these two Iranian roles became questionable and sharply accused of being instrumentalized to socialize Iran's

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[660] Simon Mabon, "Muting the Trumpets of Sabotage: Saudi Arabia, the US and the Quest to Securitize Iran," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 45, no. 5 (2018), p. 748, doi:10.1080/13530194.2017.1343123.

revolutionary norms and infiltrate the region to protect and defend Shias and Shi'ism vs. Sunnis and Sunnism.

To apply its second strategic purpose of regional roles, Iran has resolved to use regional roles to formulate the regional system that fits its own state identity and roles. Such competitive and revisionist roles: anti-imperialism, the bastion of revolutions, Islamic role model, and the leader of the axis of resistance— although Iran does no show intention to direct them against any specific state,— have been purposed to replace the Westphalian state system with the Islamic state system-*Vilayat-el Faqih*. Indeed, to achieve such a mission in Khomeini's worldview, Al Saud as a Western puppet, a cancerous tumor of imperialism, and a historical reminder of the Umayyad state in the 19th century that killed Al-Hussein in Karbala and hindered the leadership of the House of the Prophet and the Shias, should be removed. Again, as I have shown in the third and fourth chapters, Iran has tended to socialize and instrumentalize its roles in the region in a hegemonic bid to challenge the regional status quo.

Saudi Arabia's regional roles are ontologically normative and functionally reactive. They are also locally regime survival-preoccupied, regionally Sunni-Arab-Gulf-oriented, and globally US-prescribed, thus, opposing Iranian Shia revisionist and Turkish liberal roles. Parochially, Saudi Arabia identifies itself as the cradle of Islam, godly blessed with stability and wealth that would accredit its regional role exceptionalism. With this in mind, Saudi Arabia designated itself a Sunni-Arab-Gulf leader vs. other potential Shia-weak Arab-small Gulf leaders. The revival of Shia Iranian and Sunni Turkish competition over the regional leadership coupled with the decline of other Arab competitors has motivated Iran to take the competitive Sunni-Arab leader role. On the other hand, Saudi Arabian massive oil wealth and religious status entitle Riyadh to play the cooperative regional donor role and mediator. As for the second strategic objective of its regional roles, Saudi Arabia's role commitment to its foreign allies and regional status quo maintenance has ever been manifested in Riyadh's reactive roles: 'defender of the regional status quo,' 'defender of the Sunni faith,' and 'US faithful ally.' So, Saudi Arabia has always considered Iran's roles are nothing but instruments to overthrow the regional system for its interests by exporting the Iranian revolution, building a Shia crescent under

the name of the axis of resistance, and seeking to overthrow the monarchies in the Gulf by questioning their legitimacy and replacing it with *Vilayat-el Faqih* mandate.

Given that Turkey's regional roles are ontologically normative and historical, and functionally transformative, these explain why Turkey feels that it enjoys role exceptionalism and how it instrumentalizes those regional roles in architecting a Turkish visioned region. The Turkish feeling of having role exceptionalism emanates from the Ottoman legacy, liberal experience, strategic geopolitical location, and international status. Such role sources have motivated Turkish leaders from Turgut Özal to Erdogan to conceptualize and enact ideal regional roles that would exceed Saudi conservative and Iranian revisionist roles. Turkish prominent roles, including the civilizational bridge, virtuous power, good neighbor, role model, and defender of the faith, are just clear manifestations of this case in point. On the other hand, this study attempted to challenge idealistic views by affirming that persistent domestic and regional transformations— the shift from Western-oriented to JDP's Islamic approach, the Arab Spring, and the 2016 coup attempt— have subsequently transformed Turkey's roles from regional status quo to semi-revisionist.

Accordingly, until the breakout of Arab Spring uprisings, the strategic aim of Turkish roles was not to challenge the existing regional status quo states like Saudi Arabia but rather to convince them to share Turkey's Islamic and liberal views of developing the regional order. Only when counterrevolutionary regional actors started to suspect and challenge this vision and roles did Turkey re-articulate a U-turn in foreign policy from normative to security-oriented. To illustrate this argument, we can refer to Turkey's recent regional roles, namely the regional leader, regional protector of the oppressed (e.g., Syrians and Palestinians), and voice of Ummah in the international community, which Turkey instrumentalizes to gain more political and security leverage.

Secondly, as for the *functional incompatibility* of regional roles, this thesis argued that besides the agential and structural hinders, Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia had suffered incompatible functioning of their roles due to intra-inter role conflict, rival roles, and alter-casting roles. In Turkey's case, the rise of JDP has relatively led to a role shift from the US and West faithful ally to Middle Eastern roles, therefore caused intra-role

conflict— return to the Middle East, and downplaying the Western expectations. Also, since 2011 Turkey's regional roles have fluctuated due to doctrinal change in foreign and security policy and regional transformations and therefore caused intra-role conflicts as shifting from cooperative roles like a role model, good neighbor, and mediator to competitive roles like a regional leader, active independent, regional protector, etc. Such role contradiction has disappointed some regional expectations from Turkey, provoked counter regional roles including those of the Arab Axis (Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the UAE), and implied a regional feeling that Turkey seeks regional hegemony.

Moreover, particularly since the Arab Spring and the attempted coup in 2016, Turkey has already experienced a role dissonance/inter-role conflict due to incompatibility in balancing cooperative and competitive roles. Although the Turkish soft power, pan-Islamic discourses, and roles may seem unprecedently new to the regional population since the Republican era— the cooperative orientation towards playing mediating, liberal modeling, trading, and protecting roles for one decade— Turkey experienced a departure in its regional roles from the 'Good Neighbor' and 'Role Model' roles of JDP which had improved Turkish-Arab relations and other parts of the region. However, this role shift alerted Turks—, particularly the center-left party CHP—, to Turkey's limited capacity and way to act in a dynamic region and evoked Western and Arab memories of Ottoman Turkey and a hostile reaction (alter-casting role politics). All this does not suggest that we consider Turkey's foreign policy to be overshadowed by pragmatism— which some academics interpret as merely a doctrinal shift from the normative idealism of Davutoglu to a realistic idealism of Erdogan— but rather, a competitive multilateral approach that tries to compete with its peers and for roles based on two dimensions: Turkic and pan-Islamic.

Saudi Arabian inter-intra-role conflicts have influenced Riyadh's aspiration for regional power status and regional recognition. This study has argued that the Saudi–Middle East relationship undergoes inter-role conflict over some regional expectations. It originates from the expectations set that the regional audiences hold about Saudi Arabia as an Arab-Sunni leader and Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. However, Saudi Arabia experienced inter-role conflict during its Cold War involvement in the Western side against Egyptian Nasser wherein its clashing roles (Arab leader and US ally, and

status quo) caused a disparity between Riyadh and regional expectations. Since the 1980s, although Saudi Arabian has mostly directed its roles versus Iran, this study also shows that Saudi Arabia countered inter-role conflicts with other regional states. To exemplify, most of Saudi Arabia's inter-role conflict lies in the clash between the role compositions of ethnoreligious roles, namely the Custodian of Two Holy Mosques, defender of the faith, and Arab leader and strategic roles like US ally, defender of the status quo, and latent normalizer with Israel. Consequently, some occasions like Saudi Arabia's reluctant stance towards the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, Afghanistan invasion, counterrevolutionary roles during the Arab Spring, and recently latent normalization with Israel suggest apparent contradiction inherent in prioritizing its national and allies' interests over those of the region.

Also, Saudi Arabia experiences intra-role conflict, which interprets more of Saudi-regional rivalry. For instance, the Saudi self-identified regional leader role' shows incompatibility in real Saudi repertoire of behavior and associated regional demands. Such inconsistencies emanate inherently from a lack of role recognition consensus, a divergence of expectations, and source incompetency. First, the lack of consensual recognition of this role by three associated expected audiences: Sunnis, Arabs, and GCC states plus the US, Turkey, and Iran has caused role strain and regional competition. Although identified as a Sunni leader and determined to compete with Shia powers, including Iran, Saudi Arabia does not evenly enjoy recognition by the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood or the Sunni power Turkey. In the Arab world, Saudi Arabian 'Arab leader' has occasionally been challenged by other aspiring Arab powers like Egypt, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, Iraq, and Syria. At the Gulf level, as the giant and self-identified guardian of the GCC region, Saudi Arabia experienced challenging recognition by Iraq in the 1990s and recently and famously by Qatar, which recognizes Turkey as a vital alternative regional leader for its security and economic interests. Second, the divergence of demands and expectations held by the regional and external states and masses about the Saudi regional leader role has challenged Saudi Arabia to balance domestic and regional demands and respond to each expectation set of these role locations. Accordingly, Sunnis expect Saudi Arabia to defend Sunni Muslim interests and faith, Arabs expect it would liberate Palestine and distance the US and offset Iran, GCC states expect it would collaborate with them and guard the region, and the US expects that Saudi

Arabia would continue committed to defend regional status quo and maintain US interests. Third, role source incompetency in Saudi Arabian regional leader role making has caused role understatement, rejection, and withdrawal. Variously, some states like Iran and Turkey understate this role of Saudi Arabia as allegedly unqualified enough due to being claimed by an autocratic and dependent state. This also interprets why Iran has always presented itself as a significant other vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia for the region and forcibly ensured its pan-Islamic and revolutionary roles would be alternative regional models. Likewise, Turkey more or less behaves in this way vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia.

The post-Islamic revolution changes in the Iranian role composition vis-a-vis the Middle East – from a victim of great powers, Western-allied *other* towards a virtuous self-identification – triggered intra-role conflicts between various Iran's domestic and regional role expectations. Although Iran vowed in the earlier days of the revolution to play neutral roles, 'neither East nor West' and collaborative roles, the present indications of its foreign policy behavior in the region prove otherwise. Furthermore, despite the domestic contestation between political factions over Iran's foreign policy-making, the reformist faction could develop the 'good neighbor' role in the 1990s to reapproach Arab Gulf states. Nevertheless, to a certain extent, it is still that Iran's Constitution and conservative faction shape role conceptualization and making. With a self-identified virtuous Islamic model based on pan-Islamist and revolutionary roles, Iran has experienced intra-role conflicts resulting from inconsistencies between its Self-role expectations and Other-role expectations. With an exception, Iran's anti-Zionist agent' role has enormously been appreciated by Arabs and Muslims in general.

More significantly, Iran's regional behavior observed during the Arab Spring era suggests contradictory behavior and role dissonance in its master bastion of revolutions and protector of the oppressed roles vis-à-vis regional liberation movements and uprisings. It indicates the inter-conflict between Iran's regional role conceptions and behavior, authentic and sectarian roles, and ideological and strategic roles. For instance, Iran's Russia and China partner' role collides with the 'independent state' role— 'Neither East nor West' mantra—, counterrevolutionary support for Assad regime under cover of 'anti-terrorism agent' role collides with its liberating-revolutionary roles. In sum, this

demonstrates that Iran's sectarian and strategic role agendas and expectations are a top priority.

Finally, the thesis found it is still far challenging to see any near moves towards Middle East regionalism, as this study found that Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia have likely declined to meet the criteria of cooperative regional powerhood, including distribution of goods, multilateralism, good governance, soft power usage and acceptance by the regional masses.

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ÖZGEÇMİS			
Adı-Soyadı	Omar		Munassar
Doğum Yeri ve Yılı Bildiği			
Yabancı Diller Eğitim Durumu	Englizce, Arapça,Türkçe		
Eğitim Durumu	Başlama - Bitirme Yılı		Kurum Adı
Lise	1999	2002	Al Gail School
Lisans	2003	2007	Sana'a University
Yüksek Lisans	2009	2011	University of Warsaw
Doktora	2014	2020	Bursa Uludağ University
Çalıştığı Kurum (lar)	Başlama- Bitirme Yılı		
1	2014	2020	PhD scholar-independent researcher
2	2012	2013	Partnership Officer-Oxfam GB-
3	2007-	2009	Sana'a University
Üye Olduğu Bilimsel ve Meslekî Kuruluşlar			
Katıldığı Proje ve Toplantılar	*Middle East Studies Association (MESA) Annual Meeting Conference 2020. (05/10/2020-17/10/2020). *International Conference on "The Future of EU Foreign Policy: And the Vision of Turkey Accession to the European Union. An International Conference on the Political, Economic and Cultural Dimensions of EU Foreign Policy" icd-Institute for Cultural Diplomacy Berlin, 4-6th January 2011.		
Yayınlar:	Academic Papers: *Two Stages of Turkey's Quest for a Regional Power Status in the Middle East: An Integrated Role-Status-seeking Approach, Journal of Gazi Academic View. (will be published in November 2020) Press papers: *Yemen's Stockholm Agreement: One Step Forward, One Step Back? London School of Economics and Political Science, Middle East Center Blog. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2019/04/15/yemens-stockholm-agreement-one-step-forward-one-step-back/ Conference papers:		

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