Saudi Influence on Islamic Institutions in Turkey Beginning in the 1970s

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This article investigates the influence of Saudi Arabia on aspects of Islamic social, political, and economic life in Turkey. Since the 1970s, long before the rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) of today, Turkish-Saudi Arabian relations have been characterized by an increasing degree of cooperation, solidarity, and partnership centered on certain economic, diplomatic, social, and cultural activities with a good deal of Islamic content. Turkey's orientation toward the Middle East in general and Saudi Arabia in particular traces to the global oil crisis that started in 1973 and its severe effects on the Turkish economy; it also stems from some of Turkey's foreign policy goals with regard to the Cyprus issue and its relations with regional and global actors. Examples of Saudi influence have included the involvement of Saudi-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and multinational corporations (MNCs) in Turkey, Turkey's membership in the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), and Turkish labor migration to Saudi Arabia, with a spillover effect in a wide range of other arenas. This particular aspect of Turkish-Saudi Arabian relations is analyzed using the theory of complex interdependence, which underscores the importance of economic, social, and cultural issues in international relations in addition to that of traditional political, diplomatic, and military goals.

Islam in Turkey has usually been studied with a focus on its various political, social, cultural, and economic aspects. A systematic examination of some extraneous factors that have impinged upon these aspects throughout the Turkish Republican era can offer a new perspective. Some of these extraneous factors, all of which have influenced Islam in Turkey, include the Cold War and the bipolar global political structure; US support for religious movements to fight against communism; the establishment of a Jewish state in the Middle East and the Palestinian Intifada; the 1973 oil crisis and Saudi Arabian international Islamic activism; the Iranian Revolution and Iranian international Islamic activism; jihadist movements in Afghanistan and the Caucasus; and labor immigration to Europe and the Middle East. The purpose of this article is to offer a theoretical and empirical analysis of the Saudi Arabian factor, among others. What are the main arenas of Islamic life in Turkey in which Saudi Arabia has been involved, and in what ways has this constituted a major variable? Who are the main actors? Has Saudi Arabia promoted "Islamic fundamentalism" in Turkey as it is sometimes claimed?

This article analyzes these issues from the perspective of the theory of complex interdependence, which argues that international relations is not only driven by security matters, but also by various economic, social, cultural, ecological, and other concerns in varying degrees, as influenced by a plethora of actors that may include members of

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diplomatic missions, transnational and trans-governmental organizations, intergovernmental organizations, individual persons, etc., and which may take place through official and unofficial channels. Turkish-Saudi Arabian relations have been characterized by an increasing tone of rapprochement, cooperation, and solidarity beginning in the 1970s, with occasional fluctuations, and relying on some commonly shared historical and cultural values in addition to the awareness of shared economic and diplomatic interests related to the 1973 Arab-Israeli War and ensuing global oil crisis, the Cyprus issue, and problems of the Turkish population in Bulgaria, as well as the questions of the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem and the Palestinian Intifada. A common theme in most of these areas is the shared Islamic identity of Turkey and Saudi Arabia. While the aforementioned issues led to closer relations in the 1970s and 1980s, the growing cooperation has remained in effect to the present.

THE THEORY OF COMPLEX INTERDEPENDENCE EXPLAINED

"Complex interdependence" offers a refinement and synthesis of traditionalist (realist) and modernist (idealist) theories of international relations, with an argument that neither of these two schools presents a complete picture of global politics and that in a progressively more sophisticated global political environment, a more accurate view could be developed through their amalgamation. Thus, Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye merged parts of each theory with additional empirical analysis to produce the theory of complex interdependence. But it could be more accurate to say that complex interdependence is a revision of the modernist school, supplemented with some arguments from the traditional school to challenge the traditionalists.[1] The theory does not reject the realist assumption that military security is a crucial foreign policy goal, but it adds that economic, social, cultural, and ecological concerns could also rank high on the political agenda with changing degrees of significance.[2]

Complex interdependence borrows the idea from the modernist school that the nation-state is not the only actor in international relations; many other intergovernmental, nongovernmental, transnational, social, and cultural actors interact in an international system not invariably characterized by a state of anarchy or restricted to matters of survival. Global politics has gradually evolved into a highly integrated international system, where the pursuit of military goals bears enormous costs for all parties. The actors have more things to gain through international peace and cooperation, as they are much better off when they promote economic, ecological, and social goals.

In the sphere of international political economy (IPE), complex interdependence is similarly closer to the modernist school (idealist, liberal) rather than the realist school, which proposes that states gain economic and political advantage only at the expense of other states.[3] The modernists point out that economic prosperity and political stability is highly associated with the promotion of international peace and security. The vol-

1. Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, *Power and Interdependence* (New York: Longman, 2001), pp. 3–5.

2. Keohane and Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, pp. 3–5, 20–21.

3. Stephen Krasner, "The Accomplishments of International Political Economy," in Steve Smith, Ken Booth, and Marysia Zalewski, eds., *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 109.

ume and kind of interactions among societies have proliferated to such an extent that there are more things to gain through economic and political cooperation than through aggressive economic policies. Besides, an increasing proliferation of multinational corporations (MNCs), predominantly economic entities, challenge the autonomy of states.[4] In an increasingly integrated world economy, countries are highly susceptible to imbalances that could spring from overly aggressive political and economic policies, and though states can occasionally opt to pursue a realist foreign policy stance, actors are more commonly aware of the advantages that they could gain from international peace and cooperation.

Arguing that global politics is shaped by a shifting degree of influence among military, economic, social, cultural, and ecological interdependencies, Keohane and Nye elaborate a concept of interdependence. They briefly describe it as the mutual dependence of actors on each other, as a norm of contemporary global politics. It is a process that characteristically limits the autonomy of states to formulate independent policies, but also contributes to international peace and environmental protection and facilitates global economic growth and welfare.

The authors introduce the concept of asymmetrical interdependence as a degree of imbalance in the dependence of each actor on one another, a process that provides relatively less dependent actors with sources of power to apply influence over more dependent ones.[5] A distinction is also made between "sensitivity" and "vulnerability" interdependence. Sensitivity refers to situations where liabilities are short-term, limited, and small-scale, while vulnerability refers to opposite cases where the liabilities have more long-term, deep, and widespread effects stretching over a wide range of areas. Global politics is thus shaped by asymmetries in interdependence and the sensitivity or vulnerability of each actor to these particular liabilities.[6]

OIL REGIMES, ISLAM, AND POLITICS

The oil-producing countries of the Middle East have had a great impact on regional and global politics as a result of their ability, in the 20th century, to secure greater control over their domestic oil industries and unite in some international organizations with other producing countries to regulate the oil market. Saudi Arabia, as the leading actor in the oil supply market, has been particularly successful in leveraging its oil power for diplomatic, cultural, economic, and other related purposes.

The period between the discovery of oil fields in the Middle East and the nationalization of the oil industry can be classified as the first oil regime, during which more than 50% of extraction, refinery, transportation, and marketing of oil was controlled by

4. Richard Cooper, "National Economic Policy in an Interdependent World Economy," in George T. Crane and Abla Amawi, eds., *The Theoretical Evolution of International Political Economy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 110–120; Richard Rosecrance, "The Trading State: Then and Now," in Robert J. Art and Robert Jervis, eds., *International Politics: Enduring Concepts and Contemporary Issues* (New York: Harper Collins College Publishers, 1996), pp. 344–345, 348; Richard Rosecrance and Arthur Stein, "Interdependence: Myth or Reality," *World Politics*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (1973), pp. 11–12.

5. Keohane and Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, pp. 7–9.

6. Keohane and Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, pp. 9–17.

major industrial states and oil companies. The oil-producing states were substantially dependent on these Western states and companies. It was during this period that Israel was established.[7]

After the 1940s, growing global oil consumption and the decline of US oil production capacity led to the revision of the concession agreements according to which owning states would participate in the oil industry with a 50% share of the total profits.[8] Before this, more than 85% of the oil industry was under the control of Western states and companies. However, though the producing countries secured greater revenues from oil production after the 1950s, the oil industry was still not an effective source of political or diplomatic influence.

The emergence of the second oil regime was closely associated with the prime of OPEC (the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) and OAPEC (the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries) in the 1970s, uniting the producing countries for the control of the oil industry at a time of increasing global oil consumption and depletion of major oil fields in the West. The producing countries were highly motivated to nationalize the oil industry and use it as a foreign policy tool. Gradually, through multilateral negotiations and sometimes unilateral actions by the producing countries, these states took control of more than 80% of the oil industry.[9] The outbreak of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War and the support of major Western powers for Israel provided an opportunity to use that leverage.

During the second oil regime, the Arab-Israeli War triggered an oil embargo that severely hit all oil-importing states, some of them being "sensitive" in the sense of the term defined earlier, and others "vulnerable." Turkey was one of those vulnerable states, an industrializing country with an acute dependence on imported oil and a deficit of currency reserves. Among all imported products, the ratio of currency Turkey spent for oil imports between 1973 and 1980 rose from 10% to 50%. The amount spent for oil imports was 30% greater than Turkey's entire export revenues.[10] As a consequence, Turkey was compelled to re-orient its relations with Saudi Arabia and other OAPEC countries by improving bilateral and multilateral relations based on economic, political, cultural, and social bases, and reinstating its historical common bonds with neighboring Muslim countries, which had been downplayed due to the secular and European orientation of the Turkish Republic. This was reflected in Turkey's membership in the Saudi-supported Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC, recently renamed the Organization of Islamic Cooperation) with a gradually increasing level of representation; Turkey downgraded its diplomatic relations with Israel, gave legal permission to the World Muslim League (WML) and similar international Islamic organizations to

7. Benjamin Shwadran, *Middle East Oil Crisis Since 1973* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1986), pp. 1–7.

8. Shwadran, *Middle East Oil Crisis Since 1973*, pp. 6–16.

9. M. S. Daoudi and M. S. Dajani, *Economic Diplomacy: Embargo Leverage and World Politics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985), pp. 83–116; Shwadran, *Middle East Oil Crisis Since 1973*, pp. 72–77; Benjamin Shwadran, *Middle East Oil: Issues and Problems* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Pub. Co., 1977), pp. 66–71; Richard Chadbourn Weisberg, *The Politics of Crude Oil Pricing in the Middle East, 1970–1975: A Study in International Bargaining* (Berkeley, CA: Institute of International Studies-University of California, 1977), pp. 78–84.

10. Alon Liel, *Turkey in the Middle East: Oil, Islam and Politics*, trans. by Emanuel Lottem (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001), pp. 29–31.

establish contacts with religious actors in Turkey, granted permission to foreign companies to open branches of Islamic banking and finance institutions, and increased labor immigration to Saudi Arabia.

COMPLEX INTERDEPENDENCE IN SAUDI ARABIA'S INFLUENCE ON ISLAM IN TURKEY

For Saudi Arabia, Islam has been crucial to domestic and foreign policy goals as one of its leading sources of political legitimacy. Opposition to the infiltration of communism into the Arabian Peninsula, defense of the rights of Arabs and Muslims, and concern for and promotion of solidarity among Muslim nations were among the key elements of Saudi foreign policy.[11]

Domestic actors shaping Saudi Arabian politics included the royal family, the Al Shaykh (descendants of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab) family, mainstream 'ulama', radical 'ulama', and other notables, all of whom shared a strong sense of concern for these foreign policy goals. These actors have been particularly united in their strong desire and support for the establishment of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, and have defined Saudi attitudes toward Israel as well as toward third parties, including Muslim countries and other states.[12] King Faisal (ruled 1964–1975) institutionalized this orientation and his successors followed suit. Faisal dreamed of recovering Jerusalem and praying in al-Aqsa before his death, and called for Arab and Muslim states to unite against Israel and international communism, describing them as products of Western imperialism and atheism.[13]

Consequently, Saudi Arabia's diplomatic relations with Turkey were aimed at promoting Turkish support of the Arab position, as well as uniting all Muslim countries around common religious goals.

The energy crisis, and its continued impact after the 1979 Revolution in Iran, affected Turkey much more severely than any other Western country. Turkey was suffering under measures of energy austerity, limitations on domestic fuel sales, and frequent power cuts. The rise of the price of oil in international markets brought the oil-dependent domestic industries to a grinding halt and paralyzed the transportation system, hospitals, and educational institutions. Economic considerations thus played a leading role in determining the tenets of Turkey's foreign policy towards the Middle East. Turkey was in need of a stable supply of oil and needed to increase its export revenues to meet its growing expenditures on the import of oil.[14]

Turkey's foreign policy agenda in the 1970s and its need for oil supplies and credits to mitigate its domestic economic situation helped channel its relations with the Kingdom in specific directions. Turkey sought to develop relations with the Muslim world to offset deteriorating relations with the West resulting from its operation in Cyprus in

11. Sheikh Rustum Ali, *Saudi Arabia and Oil Diplomacy* (New York: Praeger, 1976), p. 89.

12. Paul Aarts and Gerd Nonneman, *Saudi Arabia in Balance: Political Economy, Society, Foreign Affairs* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), pp. 338–340.

13. Rustum Ali, *Saudi Arabia and Oil Diplomacy*, pp. 70–71.

14. Ali Karaosmanoğlu, "Turkey's Security and the Middle East," *Foreign Affairs* (Fall 1983), pp. 3–8; Alon Liel, *Turkey in the Middle East*, pp. 27–45; Interview by the author with Korkut Özal, February 2008, Istanbul.

1974 that caused a serious diplomatic crisis. Despite its role as a Western ally, Turkey was subjected to an embargo lasting for five years. In order to break this isolation, and to draw greater attention to the problems of the Turkish population in Bulgaria, Turkish foreign policy increased its orientation to the Middle East and the OIC.[15]

These factors helped persuade Turkey to modify its policies in the 1970s in the direction of OIC and Arab positions.[16] Let us examine the emergence of this particular factor in Turkey's relations with Saudi Arabia, with reference to the role of multinational, nongovernmental, and intergovernmental organizations and actors (MNCs, NGOs and IOs).

Examples of MNCs and NGOs coming into contact with actors and areas of Islamic life in Turkey include Saudi Arabian or Saudi-partnered private Islamic banks, the World Muslim League, and similar associations and foundations. Saudi Arabia-based MNCs working in the banking sector in Turkey, particularly Faisal Finance and Albaraka Turk, have been active in organizing and sponsoring a great many social, cultural, and political activities in Turkey. In carrying out this mission, they worked in partnership with leading Turkish individuals and families such as the Özal family, the Topbaş family, Tevfik Paksu, and Salih Özcan, to provide them with employment in the administrative, economic, and social sectors.[17]

Agents of international banks were not allowed to enter Turkish markets until 1983, when Prime Minister Turgut Özal spearheaded the construction of the legal infrastructure offering operational space to private banking in Turkey. Though Islamic banking has not constituted a substantial proportion of the Turkish banking sector in the years since its emergence, it is important in the context of its character and relationship with Islamic life in Turkey. Whether they are domestic or external, these banks are characterized by an alternative style of banking, with their particularly Islamic funds and credits used in business, real estate, and transportation.[18] Among the members of the founding committee of Albaraka Turk were Korkut Özal, brother of Turgut Özal, and Eymen Topbaş, in addition to other leading persons and companies. Korkut Özal and Eymen Topbaş were active in various areas of Turkish political, social, and economic life even before their service in Albaraka Turk. Korkut Özal, for instance, was a leading party member in the National View movement led by Necmettin Erbakan and contributed to the formation of the policy and programmatic orientation of the party. He later transferred to the Motherland Party founded by his brother Turgut Özal. Together with a number of others, he was encouraged by Mehmet Zahit Kotku, the leader of the

15. Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, "Turkey's Attitude towards the Middle East Conflict," *Foreign Policy*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (1976), p. 31; for the Cyprus issue, see Ayhan Kamel, "*Türkiye'nin Arap Dünyasıyla Ilişkileri*" ["Turkey's Relations with the Arab World"], *Dış Politika*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (1976), pp. 12–14; Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik:Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* [*Strategic Analysis: Turkey's Global Position*] (Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2001), pp. 249, 259.

16. Ali Karaosmanoğlu, "Islam and Foreign Policy: A Turkish Perspective," *Foreign Policy*, Vol. 12, Nos. 1–2 (June 1985), p. 69.

17. Faik Bulut, *Tarikat Sermayesi-II Yeşil Sermaye Nereye? Islamcı Sermaye Nereye?* [*Capital of the Religious Order II, Where Does the Green Capital Go? Where does the Islamic Capital Go?*] (Istanbul: Su Yayinevi, 1999); Samim Güner, "Tarikat Sermayesi," http://www.osmanakbasak.com/Samim%20G%FCner/Tarikat%20Sermayesi.htm.

18. Generally, Islamic finance is characterized by the avoidance of charging a set interest rate to avoid the religious prohibition against usury. Instead, these institutions operate on the basis of shared profit/loss. Interview by the author with Korkut Özal, February 2008, Istanbul.

Iskenderpaşa community in Turkey that is connected to the Gumushanevi lodge of the Halidiye branch of the Nakshibendi order in Turkey, to enter political life in the early years of his career to represent the voice of the religious right. Many of the leading political figures of the Turkish religious right, including Necmettin Erbakan, Turgut Özal, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Korkut Özal, Recai Kutan, and Ahmet Tekdal, were notably followers of this community prior to their rise in political life.[19]

Korkut Özal was elected as parliamentarian from the National Salvation Party and Motherland Party a number of times and was also entrusted with certain ministerial and deputy positions in various government formations and in the Islamic Development Bank, a subsidiary organ of the Organization of Islamic Conference.[20]

Eymen Topbaş was the then-head of the Motherland Party (ANAP) in Istanbul province in addition to being a leading member of the influential Topbaş family. Other members of his family were active in various religious associations and foundations in addition to their political careers even before their association with Saudi Arabian capital.[21] The partnership of the Özal and Topbaş families in Albaraka Turk contributed to their economic power, which increased their influence in Turkish business and economic life and also allowed them to participate in religious civil society with greater impact. The Bereket Foundation was established by the Topbaş Family, Albaraka Turk, and a number of other influential families. Korkut Özal, for his part, was the founder of the Özbağ Foundation.[22] Before their service in Albaraka Turk, Korkut Özal and Eymen Topbaş were working together on the managing committee of *Ilim Yayma Vakfi*

19. Yıldız Atasoy, *Turkey Islamists and Democracy: Transition and Globalization in a Muslim State* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), pp. 81–83; *Radikal*, "*Nakşibendi Şeyhi Öldü*" ["The Nakshibandi Shaykh has Passed Away"], May 2, 2001; Emin Yaşar Demirci, "*Tasavvuf Geleneği ve Iskenderpaşa Cemaati*" ["Sufi Tradition and Iskenderpasha Community"], *Eğitim Bilim Dergisi* [*Journal of Educational Sciences*], (March 2001); Metin Heper and Şule Toktaş, "Islam, Modernity and Democracy in Contemporary Turkey: The Case of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan," *The Muslim World*, Vol. 93 (April 2003).

20. Atasoy, *Turkey Islamists and Democracy*, pp. 124, 151; *Işık Binyılı* [*Light Millennium*], "Korkut Özal," September 25, 1998.

21. Hikmet Çetinkaya, "*Albaraka'dan AKP'ye*" ["From Albaraka to the Justice and Development Party"], *Cumhuriyet*, August 26, 2003; Erbil Tuşalp, "*Kimin Eli Kimin Cebinde?*" ["Whose Hand in Whose Pocket?"], *Birgun*, September 11, 2005.

22. Mumcu, *Rabıta* [*The League*] (Istanbul: Tekin Yayınevi, 1997), pp. 144–147. As the material in this article dealing with the World Muslim League draws extensively from Mumcu's work, some background is in order. Uğur Mumcu was an investigative journalist who wrote in *Cumhuriyet* as a columnist between 1975 and 1991. He could be classified as an independent member of the state elites working among its media affiliates who described himself as a loyal defender of Turkish secularism and republicanism. He often wrote on issues of corruption, terrorism, links of regional and global powers with PKK terrorism, the Kurdish issue, and Islamic communities and Sufi orders and their financial and ideological links with Saudi Arabia and Iran. He was assassinated in front of his house in 1993 by a bomb planted in his car; his assassins were never found. Mumcu's sensational book *Rabıta* is written as an investigative journalistic piece of work on a number of issues which include, first, the links of some Islamic communities and groups in Europe — like the followers of Cemalettin Kaplan and Ahmet Kütahyalı; European National View Organization; Süleymancılar; Nurcular; and the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs — with Iranian and Saudi funds and religious doctrines, and their goals to introduce Islamic law in Turkey. And secondly, and most importantly, it documents the financial, ideological, and organizational relations of the World Muslim League with various religious communities, Sufi orders, Islamic banks, foundations, associations, publishers, Turkish statesmen, officials, ministries, and various public and private personalities in Turkey.

[the Foundation for Promulgation of Knowledge] in the 1970s.

The other Saudi-backed Islamic bank, Faisal Finance, was owned by Saudi Arabian Prince Muhammad al-Faisal, who chose Salih Özcan and Tevfik Paksu to establish the Bank. Salih Özcan was also an active member of the World Muslim League, a representative of the National Salvation Party, and owner of an Islamic magazine called *Hilal* [Crescent] in addition to his activism in many other Islamic organizations. Faisal Finance had a number of other partners in addition to Prince Muhammad al-Faisal, including the Darul Malul Islami Trust and Islamic Insurance Institution [*Islami Tekaful Kuumu*] whose President was Mehmet Erdoğan Sergici, a Turkish national. In return for their service in Faisal Finance, Salih Özcan, Tevfik Paksu, and a number of Turkish partner companies were granted shares from the bank. The shares held by Salih Özcan and Tevfik Paksu were later distributed to 93 persons who were deemed to be very influential social, political, and economic actors in Turkey.[23] Uğur Mumcu claims that Albaraka Turk and Faisal Finance funded the paper expenses of more than 50 publishing companies, newspapers, and magazines known for their religious activities.[24]

Apart from these MNCs, there has been much religious involvement between Saudi Arabia and Turkey via NGOs, of which the World Muslim League (WML) has been the most famous. The WML was established in 1965 by King Faisal to serve as an international Islamic cooperation, missionary, solidarity, and charity foundation. It put particular emphasis on supporting the knowledge and practice of Islamic principles and provisions for all Muslims around the world. One thing needs to be stressed about WML: in its founding charter it states that the organization respects legal limitations in secular states with Muslim populations and does not attempt to overturn the political regime.[25] But within this limitation, the WML provided funds for many Islamic activities and worked in coordination with many similar actors in Turkey.[26] Their activities generally included donations and funding for activities, the organization of conferences and youth camps, publications, and the construction of mosques and Islamic centers.[27]

The founding members of WML included two Turkish nationals, Salih Özcan and Ahmet Gürkan. Salih Özcan's religious profile is explained above. As for Ahmet Gürkan, he was the President of the Turkish-Saudi Arabian Friendship Association and a former parliamentarian. Ahmet Gürkan was the representative of the Justice Party who submitted the legal proposal for the amendment of the penal code pertaining to

23. Mumcu, *Rabıta*, pp. 142–144, 148.

24. Mumcu, *Rabıta*, pp. 142–144, 148; also in the archive documents of Directorate General of Foundations; Interview by the author with Davut Dursun, December 2007, Ankara.

25. The WML's establishment and constitution can be seen in "Beginning of the Rabita: In the Shade of Baitullah," *The Muslim World League Journal*, Vol. 15, Nos. 1–2, (September–October 1987).

26. Interview by the author with Emin Saraç, January 2008, Istanbul; Interview by the author with Tayyar Altıkulaç, January 2008, Ankara.

27. A number of others could be added to these, such as *Deniz Feneri Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Derneği* [Deniz Feneri Cooperation and Solidarity Association], *Başkent Kadın Platformu Derneği* [Capital Women's Platform Association], *Rumeli Türkleri Kültür ve Dayanışma Vakfı* [Rumelian Turks Culture and Solidarity Foundation], *Türk ve Ortadoğu Dayanışma Vakfı* [Turkish and Middle East Solidarity Foundation]; Official document provided in response to information request by author to Turkish Ministry of the Interior, Ankara, Turkey, January 2008. Interview by the author with Emin Saraç, January 2008, Istanbul; Interview by the author with Tayyar Altıkulaç, January 2008, Ankara.

the recitation of prayer calls in Arabic.[28] A later member of the WML from Turkey was Vice Director of Turkish Religious Affairs Yaşar Tunagür.

A dramatic example of WML's involvement with Turkey, which was given a great deal of space in Mumcu's book, was its payment of the salaries of official Turkish imams working in Europe. An agreement was signed between Turkish governmental agents and representatives of the WML to pay the salaries of more than 70 imams for a period of two years between 1982 and 1984.[29] Some other well-known examples of the WML's Islamic activities include donations for the construction of the Turkish National Assembly Mosque and Kocatepe Mosque, Middle East Technical University and Ankara University mosques and Islamic Centers, and the repair and restoration of flood-damaged mosques in Adana province.[30] The proposal for the Middle East Technical University campus project was presented by Korkut Özal, a teaching faculty at this university, who received harsh criticism from the secularist intelligentsia in Turkey for this proposal. There was a sizable money transfer for these projects, but the funding was not always employed for the desired projects due to the legal and social reactions against them. The activists were fearful of the secularist backlash that could originate from the state elites — army, judiciary, media, and various civil society organizations — who might accuse them of violating the secularist principle in the constitution and cooperating with foreigners for this purpose.

Apart from these, the WML periodically organizes the international Islamic Seerat Congress to promote the education, practice, and spread of Islamic norms throughout the Muslim world. Turkey has participated in this Congress officially for some time. Turkey joined in the 1976 Congress held in Pakistan at a ministerial level, represented by the state minister Hasan Aksay.[31] Among the activities of this Congress were payments made to teachers of Arabic language at Gazi and Ankara Universities.[32]

Among other conferences organized by the WML in Turkey, the Islamic Student Union Conference was held on July 1, 1977 in Istanbul to promote unity and solidarity among Muslim student associations in Turkey. Another was held in Damascus in 1977 during which the founder of the Nurcu movement in Turkey, Said Nursi, was presented as an exemplary scholar to be followed by Turkish people. Nurcuism (or the Nurcu Movement) is a religious movement that spread in Turkey starting in the early years of the 20th century and is based on the teachings and the worldview propagated by Said Nursi in his collection of books named as *Risale-i Nur Külliyatı* [*Booklets of Light*]. Said Nursi is portrayed by his followers as a distinguished Islamic scholar, activist, and leader whose contemporary exegesis of the Qur'an is said to provide solutions to the social, political, economic, religious, and other puzzles of the time.[33]

A more provocative action by the WML was the visit of the Egyptian Islamist Sayyid Qutb's brother, Muhammad Qutb, to Turkey. While working at a university

28. Mumcu, *Rabita*, pp. 138–140.

29. Mumcu, *Rabita*, pp. 168–243; *Cumhuriyet*, "*Rabıta Parasıyla Kilit Noktalarda*" ["Rabita is at Key Points with Its Money"], November 19, 2007.

30. Mumcu, *Rabita*, pp. 198–200; Interview by the author with Emin Saraç, January 2008, Istanbul.

31. Mumcu, *Rabita*, p. 140.

32. Mumcu, *Rabita*, pp. 246–248.

33. Risale-i Nur Enstitüsü, "*Bediüzzaman Said Nursi*," *Köprü* (Spring 2000); Ahmet Demir, "*Bediüzzaman Said Nursi Hazretleri*," *Mevzuat Dergisi*, Vol. 1, No. 8 (August 1998).

in Saudi Arabia, where he was devoted to developing and propagating his brother's scholarly works on Islamic political ideals and ways, Muhammad Qutb was hired by the WML to establish communications with various Islamic communities and agencies in the wider Islamic world. His visit was very much opposed by Turkish officials, as he had previously described Turkey as part of the "land of war" (*Dar al-harb*, or outside the land of Islam) because it embodied secularism. According to him, then, Muslims were supposed to unite around domestic Islamic political movements who were trying to promote *shari'a*.[34]

A book published by the WML entitled *A World Guide to Organizations of Islamic Activities in Cooperation with Rabita* gives the names of foundations and associations that were branches and representatives of the WML in Turkey.[35] They include the Turkish National Student Union, Eastern Turkestan Immigrants Foundation, Istanbul University Islamic Research Institute, Izmir National Turkish Foundation for Building and Sheltering Islamic Institutes, Cyprus Turkish Islamic Association, Turkish-Saudi Arabian Fellowship Foundation, Turkish-Saudi Arabian Parliament Fellowship Association, and Radio Turkish Voice in Australia.[36] The religious activities of these entities include contributions to mosque and religious center construction; organizing conferences and symposiums; publishing books, magazines, and newspapers; and giving scholarships to university students.[37] In the case of Northern Cyprus, it appears that relations with the WML were more official. On one occasion, ex-President Rauf Denktaş states that they received the sum of $657, 000 from the WML for a grant payment.[38]

As one example of the interconnected relationships of some of these actors, the vice-director of the Istanbul University Institute of Islamic Research was Salih Tuğ, who was formerly on the management board of *Ilim Yayma Vakfı* [the Foundation for Promulgation of Knowledge] with Korkut Özal and Eymen Topbaş. Salih Tuğ then became President of *Aydınlar Ocağı* [Intelligentsia Foundation] and he was also on the managing board of ISAV (the Foundation for Islamic Research).[39]

Some controversial issues associated with WML's activities related to Turkey include the publication of a book about Atatürk entitled *Sanem Adam – Put Adam* (Arabic and Turkish, respectively, for "*Idol Man*") in Beirut and another, *Islam Perspektifleri* [*Islamic Perspectives*], by the Istanbul University Islamic Research Institute, an institution that was a branch of the WML in Turkey. In both of these books, Atatürk is portrayed as destructive for Islam on account of his abolition of the Caliphate, adoption of Western legal and political systems, and social and cultural reforms that prohibited religion in the public sphere.[40]

34. Mumcu, *Rabita*, pp. 332–333.

35. *A World Guide to Organizations of Islamic Activities in Cooperation with Rabita* (Mecca: World Muslim League, N.D.).

36. The original names of these entities in Turkish are as follows in order: *Milli Türk Talebe Birliği*, *Doğu Türkistan Göçmenler Derneği*, *Istanbul Üniversitesi Islami Araştırmalar Enstitüsü*, *Milli Türk Izmir Yüksek Islam Enstitüsü Yaptırma ve Koruma Derneği*, *Kıbrıs Türk Islam Cemiyeti*, *Türk-Suudi Dostluk Derneği*, *Turk-Suudi Parlemento Dostluk Cemiyeti* and *Avustralya Türk Sesi Radyosu.*

37. Cited in Mumcu, *Rabita*, pp. 199, 209–210, 220–222, 278; Interview by the author with Emin Saraç, January 2008, Istanbul.

38. Mumcu, *Rabita*, p. 243; Interview by the author with Tayyar Altıkulaç, January 2008, Ankara.

39. Mumcu, *Rabita*, p. 151.

40. Mumcu, *Rabita*, pp. 254–255.

The WML has also been similarly active in Europe, where there are more than two million Turks. The most prominent entity assisted by the WML was the Center for Islamic Culture headquartered in Belgium. Islam was recognized as an official religion in Belgium after the 1974 oil crisis. Thus, management of Islamic organizations in Belgium and the Netherlands was given to Saudi Arabia. In Belgium alone, for instance, there were 155 Islamic centers established or maintained by Saudi Arabia.[41] The Belgian Center for Islamic Culture was the headquarters for all the Islamic centers in Europe. The administrative board of this center included ambassadors of five Islamic countries, including Turkey, and another four members appointed by the WML. Aid and assistance to other Islamic centers in Europe was distributed through this center. Similarly, Islamic centers established in other European countries also included official members such as diplomats and personnel of the Turkish directorate of religious affairs as well as civilian members of Turkish origin.[42]

After the examination of the Islamic content in transnational and trans-governmental relations, we now come to those involving international organizations (IOs). IOs are institutions that can provide weak states with platforms for forming coalitions and establishing linkages between issues.[43] For our purposes, OPEC, OAPEC, and the OIC appear as the three most important IOs providing oil-producing Arab states with huge resources of power and activism. OPEC and OAPEC facilitated oil-producing Arab states' participation in and nationalization of their oil industries. They have allowed their members to use control over oil production as leverage in attaining political, diplomatic, and social gains. The Arabs were able to use their control of oil trade, price, and production as leverage for promoting their goals in other areas. They started to adjust the price and amount of oil in the market according to the willingness of their counterparts to provide some returns. The OIC, on the other hand, provided its member states with a platform to promote their common political, economic, and social goals. Turkey's membership and activism in the OIC was meaningful in the context of Islamic political economy at a governmental and diplomatic level. It was expected that Turkey would attain some privileged status among the oil-importing countries as manifested by low oil prices, financial grants and credits to meet its growing energy expenses, and diplomatic support for its involvement in Cyprus and minority issues of Bulgaria.[44]

The nature of Turkey's relations with Saudi Arabia, and with these international organizations, changed noticeably after the oil crisis of 1973. In 1969, Turkish foreign policy was characteristically concerned with regional and global power balances without much regard for cultural issues. Turkey's participation in the OIC, with an increasingly higher level of representation, was a sign of a substantial change in its traditional foreign policy orientation, from a highly rational to a partially social and cultural one. Turkey participated in the first and the second OIC summits, held in Rabat in 1969 and in Lahore in 1974 at the level of its Minister of Foreign Affairs, one level below that

41. Mumcu, *Rabita*, pp. 77–79.

42. "Muslims in Europe: An Up to Date on Mosque Projects," *The Muslim World League Journal* Vol. 9, No. 7 (May 1982); Comite de la Mosquée de Bruxelles, *Mission de la Mosquée*: *Bulletin Islamique et Culturel* [*Mission of the Mosque: Islamic and Cultural Bulletin*], pp. 17–21; Mumcu, *Rabıta*, p. 77.

43. Keohane and Nye, *Power and Interdependence*.

44. Interview by the author with Korkut Özal, February 2008, Istanbul.

of other countries. During the third summit held in Ta'if in 1981, it was raised to the level of Prime Minister. At the fourth and fifth summits, held in Casablanca in 1984 and Kuwait in 1987, Turkey was represented by the President, one level higher than the other participating countries.[45]

Its relations with Arab states had previously been shaped by the dynamics of the Cold War which required Turkey to join the Western bloc due to its security concerns. This was reflected in its relations with its Arab neighbors, as Turkey was largely uninterested in their policy concerns, especially vis-à-vis Israel.[46]

As Turkey's policies shifted towards increased relations with Saudi Arabia, so too did its foreign policy priorities: first, to provide diplomatic support to the Arabs; second, to prevent its relations with the West from deteriorating due to its improved relations with the Arab states; third, to keep its level of relations with Israel at a minimum; and fourth, to improve its relations with the Arab countries in a multidimensional way for cooperation in political, economic, technical, and commercial areas.[47]

The process, ending with Turkey's participation in the OIC, was very controversial. Turkey's type of OIC membership also changed; it began as a preliminary member as it did not approve the OIC Charter because it was found to be in opposition to the secularist principle in the Constitution, and also because the leftist Republican People's Party in the parliament opposed Turkey's participation in Islamic forums and organizations. But due to eminent foreign policy concerns, such as the oil crisis and the Cyprus issue, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Şükrü Elekdağ announced — before Islamic foreign ministers convened in Istanbul in 1976 — the government's decision to ratify the OIC Constitution to remove the last barrier to full membership. Yet Turkey maintained its reservations on the type of decisions that could bring it into conflict with the principles of Turkish secularism and its membership in the UN.[48]

The oil crisis directly affected Turkey's approach to the OIC. At the Lahore Summit in 1974, Turkey approved some of the OIC decisions, but it did not agree to demands that Turkey sever its relations with Israel. Turkey was then denied funding from the Islamic Development Bank in order to encourage its full membership in the organization and application of all OIC decisions.[49] Turkey quickly reacted to this by raising the level of its participation in the traditional OIC foreign ministers' meeting to match those of other members. While it had joined the earlier fifth meeting at the level of Directorate-General of the Foreign Office, it was declared that Turkey would be represented in the sixth foreign ministers' meeting in Jidda by Minister of Foreign Affairs Ihsan Sabri Çağlayangil. In return, Turkey's request to invite the President of the Turkish Cypriot community, Rauf Denktaş, to make a speech at the summit was accepted.

45. Liel, *Turkey in the Middle East*, p. 139; Mahmut Bali Aykan, "Turkey and the OIC: 1984-1992," *Milletlerarası Münasebetler Türk Yıllığı* [*Turkish Yearbook of International Relations*], Vol. 23 (1997), http://dergiler.ankara.edu.tr/dergiler/44/683/8691.pdf.

46. Karaosmanoğlu, "Islam and Foreign Policy," pp. 3–5; Bülent Aras, *Turkey and the Greater Middle East* (Istanbul: Tasam Publications, 2004), p. 55; Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, "Turkey's Attitude," pp. 28–31; Ayhan Kamel, "*Türkiye'nin Arap Dünyasıyla Ilişkileri*" ["Turkey's Relations with the Arab World"], pp. 5–12. .

47. Ayhan Kamel, "*Türkiye'nin Arap Dünyasıyla Ilişkileri*" ["Turkey's Relations with the Arab World"], pp.14–17.

48. Liel, *Turkey and the Middle East*, 140–142; Aykan, "Turkey and the OIC."

49. *Hürriyet*, May 6, 1974.

Turkey was also allowed to host the next OIC meeting in Istanbul.

For similar economic and diplomatic considerations, Turkey recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization as the sole representative of Palestine and established diplomatic relations with it by permitting it to open offices in Ankara in 1976. Turkey agreed to support anti-Israeli decisions made by the OIC by "downsizing" but not ending its relations with Israel.[50] In return, Turkey was allowed to invite a representative from the Turkish Cypriot community to all OIC meetings and the Conference recognized the existence of two equal communities on the island. Second, Turkey's call to hold the OIC meeting for Islamic ministers of economy, industry, and technology was accepted, which took place in October 1977. Turkey also saw benefits from this approach to the OIC. In 1979, for instance, Turkish Finance Minister Ismet Sezgin went to Riyadh with a formal request for a $1 billion loan. After negotiations of financial credits that lasted for more than a year, Saudi Arabia agreed to loan $250 million to Turkey. Interestingly, the transfer date of this loan coincided with Turkey's announcement of its decision to downgrade its diplomatic relations with Israel.[51]

Finally, Turkish labor immigration to Saudi Arabia is another arena that has indirectly affected religious life in Turkey.[52] Saudi Arabia depends on an expatriate labor force; Turkey sought to develop its trade relations with OPEC due to its domestic economic crisis and the declining volume of economic relations with the West. According to the data provided by the Turkish Employment Institution, the number of Turkish workers moving to Saudi Arabia was more than 450,000 between 1975 and 2005. The number of Turkish companies operating in Saudi Arabia and their activities also increased. Their number was 10 in 1978, 19 in 1981, 79 in 1982, and 109 in 1983. The value of their contracts was previously about $3.3 billion and increased to $5 billion in 1988.[53]

The opportunity to work in proximity to the Islamic holy cities appealed to the religious sentiment of the workers. Moreover, many of the workers were able to perform their religious duty of pilgrimage during their employment in Saudi Arabia. The influence of labor immigration on the religious life of the workers was also observed by the leading politicians of the time during their meetings with Saudi Arabian officials and visits to Saudi Arabia.[54]

50. Bülent Aras, *Turkey*, pp. 55–59; Meltem Müftülüer, in Hasan Köni, ed., *The Contribution of Turkey for Reconstruction and Development of Palestine* (Ankara: University and Friedrich Naumann Foundation in Turkey, 1995), pp. 17–18.

51. Mumcu, *Rabıta*, pp. 345–346; Liel, *Turkey in the Middle East*, pp. 113–114; Interview by the author with Şevket Kazan, December 2007, Ankara.

52. Official document provided in response to information request by author to Turkish Employment Institution, Ankara, Turkey, January 2008.

53. Karaosmanoğlu, "Turkey's Security," pp. 6–8; Official document provided in response to information request by author to Turkish Employment Institution, Ankara, Turkey, January 2008.

54. *Başbakan Turgut Özal'ın Konuşma, Mesaj, Beyanat ve Mülakatları, 13.12.1085 – 12.12.1986* [*Speeches, Messages, Releases and Interviews of Prime Minister Turkut Özal, 13.12.1085 – 2.12.1986*] (Ankara: Başbakanlık, 1986), p. 62; Interview by the author with Emin Saraç, January 2008, Istanbul; Interview by the author with Mr. Eymen, Vice-President to the Head of Saudi Arabian Cultural Attaché, December 2007, Ankara.

CONCLUSION

As a consequence of a number of developments taking place after the 1970s, Saudi Arabia increased its impact on various aspects of Islamic life in Turkey, though on a limited scale. Areas of common concern and mutual benefit facilitated the introduction of Saudi Arabian capital, MNCs, and NGOs with elements of religious content in Turkey; Turkey's minimization of its diplomatic relations with Israel; and Turkey's participation in the OIC with an increasingly higher level of representation, particularly with regard to Turkish-Saudi Arabian cooperation in Europe.

The emergence of this particular kind of relationship between two countries is explained with the aid of the theory of complex interdependence which advocates that international relations is not limited to security matters only. Rather, economic, diplomatic, social, and cultural issues can also be the primary goals of bilateral, multilateral, and multidimensional relations with the participation of state and non-state actors, as is observed in our case.

POSTSCRIPT: UNDER THE AKP TODAY

Turkish-Saudi Arabian relations have shown a trend towards even greater cooperation and proximity during the period of Justice and Development Party (AKP) government in power in recent years; a future study of this subject is projected. Influential in this process is thought to be the increasing Saudi foreign policy objective of mitigating its dependency on the US and the West, and its concerns about intense US involvement in the Middle East. Both countries have united in actions to combat al-Qa'ida terrorism, but they have also expressed their concerns about the US war in Iraq. In February 2005, the two countries signed a security cooperation agreement. Again in early 2005, a Turkish national, Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu, became President of the OIC, which meant deeper and more active Turkish involvement with the goals and issues of the organization. Yet the AKP government has also put its mark on the organization by calling for the urgent need to press for political reforms for a more democratic and liberal Middle East, combined with Turkey's new activism in the Middle East.[55] Turkey and Saudi Arabia have signed more than ten agreements, conventions, protocols, and understandings under AKP governments in various political, military, economic, social, and other areas — almost as much as the number of all the agreements signed between the two countries until 2002. In 2006, the two countries agreed to establish a "medical city" in Istanbul, to be built by Saudi-German Hospital Company with an investment value of $13 billion USD. In 2006, the Saudi King visited Turkey to be followed by a second visit in 2007. The high-level visits by Saudi Arabia have been reciprocated with the visits of the Turkish Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and other ministers.

55. Muhittin Ataman, "*Türkiye-Suudi Arabistan Ilişkileri: Temkinli Ilişkilerden Çok Taraflı Birlikteliğe*" ["Turkish-Saudi Arabian Relations: From Cautious Association to Multilateral Cooperation"], *Ortadoğu Analiz*, Vol. 1, No. 9 (September 2009), pp. 72–81.