

## TURKISH AIRLINES: TURKEY'S SOFT POWER TOOL IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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### Abstract

*In recent years, Turkey has accelerated its efforts to further integrate with its neighborhood in the Middle East. Several instruments have been used in order to corroborate Turkey's opening up to the region in political, economic and societal levels. As one of Turkey's soft power tools, Turkish Airlines helps the fulfillment of Turkey's goals in the region via facilitating trade and promoting people to people contact. In this article, the rise of Turkey as a regional power and the increasing activism of its national airline company are analyzed by focusing on Turkey's bilateral political and economic relations with the countries in the Middle East. It is demonstrated that Turkey's liberal visa regime and its vision for the region are complemented by the involvement of Turkish Airlines as a soft power instrument. The article consists of a theoretical discussion on the concept of power, the relationship between Turkish Airlines and politics, and the involvement of Turkish Airlines in the Middle East in line with the developments in Turkey's foreign policy with more emphasis given to Iran, Iraq, Israel and the Gulf countries.*

**Key Words:** *Soft Power, Middle East, Turkish Foreign Policy, Turkish Airlines.*

### TÜRK HAVAYOLLARI: TÜRKİYE'NİN ORTA DOĞU'DAKİ YUMUŞAK GÜÇ ARACI

### Özet

*Son yıllarda Türkiye Orta Doğu'daki komşularıyla daha fazla entegre olabilmek için çabalarını artırdı. Şu ana kadar Türkiye'nin bölgeye siyasi, ekonomik ve toplumsal açılımlarını desteklemek için birçok araç kullanıldı. Türkiye'nin yumuşak güç araçlarından biri olan Türk Hava Yolları (THY) da ticaret ve turizm potansiyeline olumlu katkıda bulunarak Türkiye'nin bölgedeki amaçlarını kolaylaştırıcı bir rol oynamaktadır. Bu makalede, Türkiye'nin bölgesel güç olarak yükselişi ve eş zamanlı olarak ulusal havayolu olan THY'nin bölgedeki artan etkinliği bölge ülkeleriyle ikili siyasi ve ekonomik ilişkiler bağlamında incelenmiştir. THY'nin bir yumuşak güç aracı olarak Türkiye'nin liberal vize politikasını ve bölge için sahip olduğu vizyonu desteklediği makale boyunca anlatılmıştır. Makalede güç kavramı üzerine teorik bir tartışmanın ardından THY ile siyaset arasındaki ilişki ve THY'nin Türkiye'nin dış politikasındaki gelişmelere paralel olarak Orta Doğu'daki varlığı İran, Irak, İsrail ve Körfez ülkeleriyle olan ikili ilişkiler üzerinden anlatılmıştır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Yumuşak Güç, Orta Doğu, Türkiye Dış Politikası, Türk Hava Yolları.*

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## Power

Power is a widely used concept among the social scientists. The concept itself is a controversial one which has been fiercely debated by many authors so far. Not surprisingly, a consensus has not been reached on how to define power. Whether a widely-accepted definition is necessary or not, there is a need to elaborate on power to enhance our understanding of international politics. In this article, it is felt necessary to start with a brief theoretical discussion considering the relevance of the broad concept (power) for our specific topic (Turkish Airlines and Turkish foreign policy).

Although there have been many attempts to define power in the simplest and most comprehensive way, certain ones have gained more acceptance and circulated more compared to others. One well-known definition of power was made by Max Weber who defined power as the “probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which the probability exists.”

<sup>1</sup> Weber’s definition emphasizes conserving and defending your own position against the influence and the pressure of another actor. A similar definition was made by Robert A. Dahl which reverses Weber’s logic by underlying the ability to break the resistance of the other actor. According to him, “A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do.”<sup>2</sup> His definition explains the actions taken by an actor in an unwilling way just because an actor that is stronger desired so. If we apply this definition to international politics, we can contend that the inability of a country to change the position of another country that it openly opposes demonstrates that it lacks the power that is required to achieve the goal. Hence, it is assumed that the magnitude of power is relational to the actor that will decide to comply or not.

Although Weber’s and Dahl’s definitions seem to be supported by historical and contemporary evidence, it does not mean that they elucidate all forms of power that we encounter at the international level. Alternative definitions of power help us find out different perspectives depending on where and how you look at it. For instance, identifying four different forms of power in international politics (compulsory power, institutional power, structural power and productive power) Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall define power as “the production, in and through social relations, of effects that shape the capacities of actors to determine their own consequences and fate.”<sup>3</sup> It is

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<sup>1</sup>Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: The Free Press, 1947), p.152.

<sup>2</sup>Robert A. Dahl, “The Concept of Power,” *Behavioral Science* 2, no.3 (1957), pp.202-203.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall “Power in Global Governance,” in *Power and Global Governance*, ed.Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

beyond the scope of this article to make a detailed analysis of the theoretical debates among the scholars on the concept of power. For that reason, in the upcoming sections more emphasis is given on the concept of soft power and its implications for the case study of Turkish Airlines and Turkish foreign policy.

### **Soft power**

The attempts to define power are not limited to the ones given above. Several other authors have attempted to elaborate further to reinforce our understanding of the concept. Defining power as “the ability to influence the behavior of others to get the outcomes you want,”<sup>4</sup> Joseph Nye coined the concept of soft power that is widely used both in the academia and the policy-making level. Soft power differs from military and economic might that is traditionally seen as the only way “to get others to change their positions.”<sup>5</sup> In his book *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, it is defined as “getting others to want the outcomes that you want”<sup>6</sup> through cooptation rather than coercion.<sup>7</sup> He considers a country’s cultural assets that are attractive to the people in other countries such as literature, art, education and popular culture; political values that are admired, and the positive perception of its foreign policy as the main sources of soft power.<sup>8</sup> Nye also underlines the importance of commerce as a way of transmitting culture through personal contacts, visits and exchanges.<sup>9</sup> As an example, he lists some specific qualifications that make Japan the strongest soft power in Asia. Those include Japan ranking first in the world in number of patents, third in international air travel, second in book and music sales, second in high-tech exports, first in development assistance and first in life expectancy.<sup>10</sup>

In order to actively use the soft power instruments to win the hearts and the minds of foreign publics, Nye proposes the increasing use of public diplomacy as an effective tool.<sup>11</sup> To make a country’s soft power potentials better known by the target foreign publics, public diplomacy activities should be given more importance.<sup>12</sup> He cites many examples of public diplomacy tools

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2005), p.8.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), p.2.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.85.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr., “Public Diplomacy and Soft Power,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, no.94 (2008), p.95.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.103.

that promote soft power, including Voice of America, BBC World Service and Hollywood.<sup>13</sup> Thus, public diplomacy and soft power cannot be conceived as separate from each other. To shape the perceptions of the foreign publics, states engage in such deliberate activities through certain mechanisms. The receivers of public diplomacy campaigns and soft power instruments may not always be conscious of their influence on themselves and their way of thinking with regard to that specific country. It creates an embedded affiliation through latent power penetration. In other words, soft power instruments aim to enhance the prestige and the perception of the nation through the promotion of its name, culture, values and foreign policy.

There are other scholars that have put an effort to critically assess and clarify the concept of soft power. For instance, Steven Lukes points out that Nye's conception of soft power resembles to what he called power's third dimension that is "the power to shape, influence or determine others' beliefs and desires, thereby securing their compliance."<sup>14</sup> Apparently, what Nye calls soft power and Lukes calls power's third dimension are inherently similar to each other with their emphasis on intangible aspects of power. According to Guilio M. Gallarotti,

Soft power represents a form of meta-power. Meta-power describes situations in which power relations themselves are embedded within some greater constellation of social relations that influence those power relations and thereby influence final outcomes that derive from the interactions among actors. The structures of the bargaining boundaries are determined by processes going on in the greater social relations within which they are embedded (i.e., endogenous rather than exogenous).<sup>15</sup>

Because of this embeddedness and indirectness, the benefits of soft power are difficult to measure especially in the short-term.<sup>16</sup> One of the scholars who raised a similar concern is David W. Kern. There are limitations of soft power for him that originates from its "inherently fuzzy nature."<sup>17</sup> In that sense, Kern put forward soft power's "hard truths" as its reliance on a relationship of interdependency; assumption of common goals and values; and the presence of a hegemonic power.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp.94-109.

<sup>14</sup> Steven Lukes, "Power and the Battle for Hearts and Minds," *Journal of International Studies* 33, no.3 (2005), p.486.

<sup>15</sup> Guilio M. Gallarotti, "Soft power: what it is, why it's important and conditions for its effective use," *Journal of Political Power* 4, no.1 (2011), p.28.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.40.

<sup>17</sup> David W. Kern, "The hard truths about soft power," *Journal of Political Power* 4, no.1 (2011), p.71.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.81.

## **Turkish Foreign Policy and Soft Power**

The theoretical debates on soft power are not limited to the works that are mentioned in this article. More specifically, a closer look into the use of soft power by the scholars that aim to explain Turkey's foreign policy activism would be essential for this article. Parallel to the increasing use of soft power all around the world, the concept is used by scholars and policy-makers that deal with the puzzling questions of Turkish foreign policy. Those works mention about Turkey's rising soft power capacity and the tools behind this achievement.

It was pointed out by Tarık Oğuzlu that the de-securitization of Turkish foreign policy and its increased credibility among the eyes of the Western and Middle Eastern countries could be considered as new developments that contribute to Turkey's soft power potential. In addition, he put emphasis on the economic diplomacy of AKP (Justice and Development Party) rule and its multilateral and cooperative foreign policy based on a win-win approach in contrast to the traditional zero-sum game approach.<sup>19</sup> From a similar perspective, Meliha Benli Altunışık contends that the perception of Turkey's political and economic transformation process during the AKP period in the eyes of the peoples of the Middle East could be a source of soft power. Moreover, she gives emphasis on the role of Turkey's mediation efforts as an honest broker in order to resolve the regional conflicts as another source of soft power.<sup>20</sup>

By working on the data on the flow of people across borders during the Cold War, Kemal Kirişçi enunciates that Turkey's liberal visa system embodies a peace building and a soft power aspect that enabled the free movement of people across borders that were once considered spatially distant from each other.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the new geographical imagination of Turkey that manifests itself in its liberal visa regime adds up to Turkey's positive image. As the Chief Advisor to Prime Minister Erdoğan, İbrahim Kalın asserts that history, culture and geography are the main tenets of Turkey's soft power potential. In order to promote Turkey's soft power via public diplomacy as it is also suggested by Nye, he drew attention to the roles played by many public institutions including

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<sup>19</sup> Tarık Oğuzlu, "Soft Power in Turkish Foreign Policy," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 61, no.1 (March 2007), pp. 81-97.

<sup>20</sup> Meliha Benli Altunışık, "The Possibilities and Limits of Turkey's Soft Power in the Middle East", *Insight Turkey* 10, no.2 (2008): pp. 41-54.

<sup>21</sup> Kemal Kirişçi, "A Friendlier Schengen Visa System as a Tool of „Soft Power“: The Experience of Turkey Soft Power," *European Journal of Migration and Law*, no.7 (2005), pp.355-356.

TİKA (Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency), Kızılay (The Turkish Red Crescent) and TRT (Turkey's state television).<sup>22</sup>

### **National Airlines and Soft Power**

The concept of national airlines is relevant to these theoretical debates on soft power. I argue that the responsibility of national airlines to promote the name, prestige and foreign policy of their nations fits well to the conceptualization of soft power. Fulfilling a political goal to promote the foreign policy objectives makes a national airline a soft power tool. A successful national airline has many utilities. As the airline company's ranking and visibility increases among the airlines all over the world, it has positive repercussions for its home country not only in the area of politics but also in the area of commerce. For instance, if a national airline can achieve making its city of origin an aviation hub, it adds up to the tourism and business potential of that city and the country.

The more people use the airports in a country to transfer to other international flights, the more the geographical location of the country will be perceived as central. Perhaps, the availability of high quality airline connections to a country is an asset to enhance that country's political and economic potential worldwide. National airlines that help their states achieve certain goals in the area of culture, commerce and foreign policy can be regarded as tools of soft power. In that sense, the theoretical debates on soft power contribute to our understanding of national airlines and their relationship with politics.

Similar to other national airlines such as Qatar Airways and Emirates, Turkish Airlines can be seen as a soft power tool for Turkey. Primarily, as the flag carrier airline of Turkey, Turkish Airlines promotes its name in the skies and all over the world in airports. Its advertising campaigns in foreign media and sponsorship deals with movie stars, football teams, basketball players and tournaments not only promote its own brand but also enhance Turkey's image and prestige in the eyes of foreign publics. The President of Turkish Airlines Board of Directors, Hamdi Topçu acknowledges that promoting Turkish Airlines worldwide also promotes the image of Turkey.<sup>23</sup> The development of Turkish Airlines into a global airline network with a high number of transfer passengers has made İstanbul Atatürk Airport an aviation hub at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. As a consequence of this transportation network, İstanbul has become more attractive for business people and tourists. Aware of this

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<sup>22</sup> İbrahim Kalın, "Soft Power and Public Diplomacy in Turkey," *Perceptions* 16, no.3 (Autumn 2011), pp. 5-23.

<sup>23</sup> Turkish Airlines, Minutes of Ordinary General Assembly Meeting 2011, *Turkish Airlines Investor Relations*, p.2.

potential, the Turkish government is planning to build a new airport to the European side of İstanbul to better meet this increasing demand.

In the realm of foreign policy, Turkish Airlines supports Turkey's foreign policy openings that aim to establish diplomatic and commercial relations with countries in specific geographies. The availability of Turkish Airlines flights shortens the spatial distances between countries and facilitates the movement of business people and tourists on both sides. In the context of the Middle East, Turkish Airlines complements to Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's ideal of increasing interdependence with the countries and developing peaceful relations that value cooperation over conflict. More and more people in the region are exposed to Turkish culture thanks to the popularity of Turkish soap operas depicting the modern Turkish way of life. The attraction of those soap operas results in an increasing demand among the people of the region to visit Turkey. People's desire to encounter the Turkish experience by visiting the country is facilitated by the increasing number of Turkish Airlines' regular flights from İstanbul to the countries in the region. Turkish Airlines as a high quality global airline represents Turkish culture and values not only in the Middle East but also in other parts of the world. Thus, it boosts Turkey's potential to attract the others.

### **Turkish Airlines and Politics**

In the civil aviation industry, without exception, political developments, considerations and preferences always influence the policies adopted by the managerial bodies of the airline companies. In the case of national airlines, this influence is much more blatant. Politics, one way or another, is one of the major factors influencing the decision-making process of the state-affiliated airlines. Politics usually influences decisions such as route openings and the purchase of new aircraft. Turkish Airlines as the national flag carrier of Turkey since its establishment in 1933 has not been exempt from this general trend.

Although the majority of its shares do not belong to the Turkish state anymore, Turkish Airlines continues to act like a public institution especially in the realm of foreign policy. With the latest (2006) wave of privatization, the Turkish state possesses 49% of the shares of Turkish Airlines. On paper, Turkish Airlines lost its status as a public entity, since the majority of its shares are traded on the İstanbul Stock Exchange by private investors. Legally, it is treated as a private company where the state holds a minority of its shares. In practice, the Turkish state retains the golden share (49%) that enables it to strongly influence the decision-making process of Turkish Airlines. The rest of the Turkish Airlines' shares that are traded on the İstanbul Stock Market belong to investors of a strictly limited size. Those shareholders are unable and

unwilling to come together to raise their voices in the management of the company.

This stems from the fact that the privatization of Turkish Airlines in 2006 was made in such a way that no other shareholder could challenge the dominance of the state in the decision-making process. According to *Turkish Airlines Inc. Articles of Association* Article 10c,

In order to be able to nominate candidates for the Board of Directors by the shareholders holding Group A shares open for public, they are required to be represented at the rate of minimum 2% of the total issued share capital of the Incorporation during the Shareholders Assembly in which the members of the Board of Directors will be elected. Calculation of the aforementioned rate of 2% will be based only on the Group A shares open for public.<sup>24</sup>

Although two of the seven members of the Turkish Airlines Board of Directors can be nominated by the private investors<sup>25</sup>, in practice it does not often take place due to the majority vote principle to pass a resolution. It is very rare that the small investors are able to come together in the Shareholders Assembly and get their representatives elected to the Board of Directors. Because of these factors, the members of the Turkish Airlines Board of Directors are practically appointed by the Turkish government. In addition, Turkish Airlines is no longer audited by the Prime Ministry Inspection Board since it lost its status as a public economic enterprise after the shares of the state had diminished below the 50% threshold. Hence, government influence in the management of Turkish Airlines has not disappeared but present in a different format.

In the preface of a book prepared for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of Turkish Airlines in 2008, Prime Minister Erdoğan emphasized the significance of Turkish Airlines for him by referring the developments in the realm of foreign policy. He viewed Turkish Airlines as a flag carrier of Turkey's road to modernization and a symbol of multilateral foreign policy serving for the purpose of a strong and prosperous Turkey.<sup>26</sup> He stressed the significance of the success of Turkish Airlines to contribute to the tourism potential of Turkey. Considering that 70% of the tourists prefer air transportation during their visits to Turkey, he emphasized the importance of Turkish Airlines for Turkey's growth and development.<sup>27</sup> It should be mentioned that the growth of the civil aviation sector in Turkey coincides with the AKP period. A more liberal structure also enabled the development of

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<sup>24</sup> Turkish Airlines, Turkish Airlines Inc. Articles of Association, *Turkish Airlines Investor Relations*, Article 10c.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 10b.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.21.

private airline companies that compete with Turkish Airlines both in domestic and international markets. Perhaps, the growth of Turkish Airlines as a global airline company can partly be attributed to the presence its domestic counterparts.

A closer look at the strategies adopted by Turkish Airlines shows that its vision is very similar to Turkey's foreign policy vision. Especially, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's principles of rhythmic diplomacy, multi-dimensional foreign policy, zero-problems with neighbors, order instituting actor, international cooperation, proactive foreign policy<sup>28</sup> coincides with Turkish Airline's motto "globally yours." Therefore, there is a political background for Turkish Airlines' aggressive expansion strategy all over the world, increasing focus on Turkey's neighborhood and strategy that aims to make İstanbul a global aviation hub.

### **Turkish Airlines in the Middle East**

Turkish Airlines is a soft power tool that facilitates the achievement of two main pillars of Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East: developing business ties through free trade agreements and increasing tourism potential through a liberal visa regime. Turkey aims to foster economic interdependence at the macro level and cultural interaction at the personal level as part of its general foreign policy agenda in the region. Thus, Turkey aims to win the hearts and the minds of the people in the Middle East to be perceived as a regional leader in politics, economy and culture.

Henceforth, Turkish Airlines' aggressive expansion strategy in this market is not independent from Turkey's foreign policy engagement in the region. The sponsorship deals and the promotion of the Turkish Airlines brand seem to have positively influenced the demand for Turkey's national airline, which also enhances Turkey's receptiveness in the region. As of October 2011, Turkish Airlines was flying to 26 destinations in 13 countries in the Middle East compared to 10 destinations in 9 countries in 2005. In six years, it added four countries (Iraq, Qatar, Yemen and Oman) and 16 more cities to the list of destinations (Table 1). More concrete examples are given in the country-specific analysis of the tandem involvement of Turkey as an emerging regional power and Turkish Airlines as one of its soft power assets.

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<sup>28</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Türk Dış Politikası'nın İlkeleri ve Bölgesel Yapılanma," *SAM Vision Papers*, no.3 (August 2012), p.4.

**Table 1. New Destinations Opened by Turkish Airlines since 2005 in the Middle East**

Country	City	Date	Country	City	Date
UAE	Abu Dhabi	January 2006	Iran	Mashhad	March 2009
Yemen	Sana'a	February 2006	Iran	Shiraz	March 2011
Iran	Tabriz	February 2006	Iraq	Arbil	April 2011
Oman	Muscaat	March 2006	Iraq	Basra	May 2011
Qatar	Doha	March 2006	Iraq	Najaf	July 2011
Saudi Arabia	Medina	November 2007	Iraq	Sulaymaniya	July 2011
Syria	Aleppo	May 2008	Iraq	Mosul	October 2011
Iraq	Baghdad	October 2008	Saudi Arabia	Dammam	October 2011

*Data Obtained from Turkish Airlines Head Office*

Turkey's involvement in the Middle East has never attracted such attention on either the domestic or international level before. The rising attraction of Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East can be considered one of the soft power tools of the country. Turkish foreign policy in the region aims to make borders in the Middle East meaningless through lifting visa requirements, developing commercial ties and integrating infrastructure.<sup>29</sup>

Considering the figures of trade and tourism, this policy has succeeded to a certain degree. In 2001, Turkey's trade volume with the countries in the Middle East was 5.7 billion dollars. By 2010, this number had reached 35.9 billion dollars (Table 2). Moreover, the number of citizens of Middle Eastern countries visiting Turkey in 2001 was around 850,000, which reached approximately 3.5 million in 2010 (Table 3). Turkey aims to create a zone of peace and stability through free trade agreements with its Middle Eastern neighbors and lift visa requirements to facilitate the movement of people and goods. Indeed, Turkey is integrated into the Middle Eastern region more than ever in terms of economic interdependence through trade, investment and tourism. Turkey's opening up to these countries in the context of this vision in its foreign policy is complemented by Turkey's use of Turkish Airlines as a soft power tool.

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<sup>29</sup> International Crisis Group, "Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints," *Europe Report*, no.203 (7 April 2010), p.i.

**Table 2. Turkey's Trade with the Countries in the Middle East<sup>30</sup> (\$ millions)**

Middle East	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Import	2811	2983	4030	5142	7391	9882	12,021	16,172	8556	14,932
Export	886	3100	4876	7309	9375	10,191	13,366	22,744	17,013	20,935
Total	5696	6083	8906	12,451	16,768	20,073	25,389	38,916	25,570	35,868

*Note: Numbers are rounded. Sums may not match.  
Data Obtained from Turkish Ministry of Economy*

**Table 3. Number of People Entered Turkey from Middle Eastern Countries (in thousands)**

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Iran	327	432	495	632	957	866	1058	1135	1383	1885
Bahrain	2	4	4	3	4	4	6	8	9	9
UAE	3	5	7	7	9	12	13	20	22	30
Iraq	16	16	25	112	08	123	180	250	285	280
Israel	311	70	321	300	94	363	511	558	312	110
Qatar	1	1	1	1	2	3	4	5	5	6
Kuwait	5	7	8	7	11	2	13	22	27	27
Lebanon	22	31	34	36	41	36	45	54	72	135
Syria	110	126	55	196	289	278	333	407	510	899
Saudi Arabia	21	26	24	25	36	39	41	56	67	85
Oman	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	6	5	5
Jordan	7	3	7	0	4	7	1	4	88	97
Yemen	1	2	2	4	3	3	4	5	6	6
Total	850	957	1115	1366	1900	1787	2272	2602	2792	3577

*Note: Numbers are rounded. Sums may not match.  
Data Obtained from Turkish Statistical Institute*

One indication of how the growth of Turkish commercial relations had a positive impact is the number of passengers carried by Turkish Airlines between 2001 and 2010. In 2001, Turkish Airlines carried around 450,000 passengers in the Middle Eastern market compared to around 2 million

<sup>30</sup> Countries in the Middle East include Syria, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Yemen.

passengers in 2010 (Table 4). There is a positive correlation between Turkey's trade volume with the region and the number of passengers carried by Turkish Airlines. Therefore, the general trend is as follows: In the Middle East, the more Turkey increases its trade potential, the more tourists come to Turkey and the more people use Turkish Airlines to travel to and from Turkey. Aware of this general trend, the Turkish celebrity Kivanç Tatlıtuğ who appears in soap operas that are very popular in the Arab world, has become the new face of Turkish Airlines in the region.<sup>31</sup> The combination of the attraction of Turkish TV series and Turkish Airlines adds up to Turkey's soft power in the region.

There is a reciprocal relationship between Turkish Airlines and Turkish foreign policy. The CEO of Turkish Airlines, Temel Kotil, acknowledged that Turkish Airlines benefits from the liberal visa regime of Turkey.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, it has become much easier for a person from a country in the Middle East to board a Turkish Airlines flight and visit Turkey without any visa requirement. The increase in Turkish Airlines flights also benefits Turkey in terms of tourism income, foreign exchange earnings and the ability to attract and shape the perception of the foreigners. However, it should be kept in mind that the growth of Turkish Airlines in the Middle East is a fragile one. For instance, due to the civil war in Syria, Turkish Airlines halted its flights to Damascus and Aleppo. Further instability in the region and the possibility of the violence to spread up to other countries may push Turkish foreign policy to a security-based approach that will be detrimental for the interest of Turkish Airlines in the region.

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<sup>31</sup> *Sabah*, "THY'nin Ortadoğu'daki Yüzü Tatlıtuğ", 3 April 2010.

<sup>32</sup> *Radikal*, "THY Dış Politikadaki Gelişmelerden Memnun", 9 January 2011.

**Table 4. Passengers Carried by Turkish Airlines in the Middle East (in thousands)**

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010 <sup>33</sup>	Total
Bahrain	10	11	10	10	11	11	21	44	56	58	241
Iran	54	76	78	87	91	104	132	200	314	326	462
Iraq	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	53	62	120
Israel	194	177	183	187	210	215	291	348	331	297	2434
Jordan	39	45	43	56	63	66	93	115	151	146	818
Kuwait	19	18	19	25	29	33	38	43	53	65	341
Lebanon	23	26	23	25	28	24	47	75	143	141	555
Oman	0	0	0	0	0	8	22	21	25	33	108
Qatar	10	11	9	10	10	18	28	40	61	58	255
Saudi Arabia	56	88	95	102	115	108	112	214	250	304	1443
Syria	19	31	32	40	45	58	70	157	220	242	915
UAE	34	44	58	66	88	107	121	237	245	238	1237
Yemen	0	0	0	0	0	9	18	24	27	24	102
Total	460	528	552	610	92	763	997	1525	1931	1995	10,033

Note: Numbers are rounded. Sums may not match.

Data Obtained from Turkish Prime Ministry Public Diplomacy Office

### **Turkish Airlines and Turkish Foreign Policy in Iran**

Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Turkey and Iran have represented rival political systems. Therefore, the regimes in Ankara and Tehran have abstained from pursuing close relations with each other. Mutual distrust has been one of the main factors shaping the perceptions of “the other” in Turkey and Iran. Especially in the 1990s, each side accused the other of supporting dissident movements, Kurdish separatists and Islamist.<sup>34</sup> However, this started to change with the realization of a convergence in their common economic interests and their opposition to any territorial break up of Iraq that might lead to the establishment of an independent Kurdish state in the north.<sup>35</sup> According to Mohammed Ayoob, “Turkish and Iranian interests converge more

<sup>33</sup>2010 figures do not include December.

<sup>34</sup> Robert Olson, “Turkey-Iran Relations, 1997 to 2000: The Kurdish and Islamist Question,” *Third World Quarterly* 21, no.5 (2000), p.889.

<sup>35</sup>William Hale, “Turkey and the Middle East in the New Era,” *Insight Turkey* 11, no.3 (2009), pp.153-154.

than they diverge and there is a great realization of this fact in both Ankara and Tehran now than there was 10 years ago.”<sup>36</sup>

For Turkey, Iran is a very important market for Turkish products with a population that is comparable in size to that of Turkey. In addition, Turkey runs a large trade deficit with Iran due to its energy imports.<sup>37</sup> Hence, developing commercial ties by increasing the volume of exports to Iran could help Turkey balance its trade deficit. There is also an existing visa-free travel agreement between the two countries that was introduced in 1964.<sup>38</sup> Thanks to this, the free movement of people on both sides has already been achieved. What is needed is the political will to encourage and open the path for further developing business and tourism ties. In this context, Turkish Airlines through its regular flights contributes positively to the commercial and tourism potential between Turkey and Iran, a goal which is set by both countries. In addition to the existing Tehran route, Turkish Airlines has recently launched new flight destinations in Iran in order to facilitate the movement of people and goods on both sides. Since 2005, Turkish Airlines started to operate scheduled flights to Tabriz (February 2006), Mashhad (March 2009) and Shiraz (March 2011) (Table 1).

As of 2010, Turkey's exports to Iran reached three billion dollars. At the same time, Turkey's imports from Iran were around seven billion dollars. The total trade volume between the two countries was 10 billion dollars in 2010 with the potential to increase further (Table 5). This potential can be fulfilled as more Turkish business people travel to Iran and Iranian business people travel to Turkey.

**Table 5. Turkey's Trade with Iran ( \$ millions)**

Iran	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Import	840	921	1861	1962	3470	5627	6615	8200	3406	7645
Export	361	334	534	813	913	067	1441	030	2025	3044
Total	1200	1255	2394	2775	4383	6694	8057	10,229	5431	10,689

*Data Obtained from Turkish Ministry of Economy*

*Note: Numbers are rounded. Sums may not match.*

<sup>36</sup> Mohammed Ayoob, “Beyond the Domestic Wave: A Turko-Persian Future?” *Middle East Policy* 18, no.2 (Summer 2011), p.118.

<sup>37</sup> Kemal Kirişçi, “Comparing the Neighborhood Policies of Turkey and the EU in the Mediterranean,” in *Turkey: Reluctant Mediterranean Power* (Washington DC: The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2010), p.29.

<sup>38</sup> Kemal Kirişçi, “Comparing the Neighborhood Policies of Turkey and the EU in the Mediterranean,” p.29.

The tourism dimension also requires mention. Although the upward trend in the number of Iranian tourists entering Turkey cannot be attributed to the engagement of Turkish Airlines alone, its role should not be underestimated. The number of tourists entering Turkey from Iran is the highest among the Middle Eastern countries considering its geographical proximity and size of its population (Table 3).

According to a paper written by Kirişci, Tocci and Walker,

The visa-free policy has also enabled large numbers of regime opponents to flee the country and enjoy temporary protection in Turkey before settling elsewhere in the West. Turkey is one of the few countries that the Iranian middle-class can visit freely and in which they can enjoy the benefits of a liberal economy and society.<sup>39</sup>

Turkey offering a more liberal and open society can be considered an additional source of Turkey's soft power in the eyes of the Iranian population. Moreover, Turkish Airlines acts as a soft power tool to present itself as the modern airline company of a country that is attractive to Iranians. The fact that Turkish Airlines flies to four destinations in Iran can also be used as a counter-argument for those who claim that Turkey is leading a Sunni bloc in the Middle East. Despite this, Turkish Airlines might be adversely affected by the conflict of interest between Turkey and Iran in accordance with the new developments in the region.

### **Turkish Airlines and Turkish Foreign Policy in Iraq**

Traditionally, Turkey's relations with Iraq have been dominated by security considerations. Economic relations have remained on a limited level. However, Turkey has always been affected by the internal developments in its neighbor Iraq. For instance, in the 1990s, Northern Iraq was a safe haven for the PKK, which is considered to be a grave security threat to the territorial integrity of Turkey. Thus, the escalation of terrorist attacks and the presence of a Kurdish population in Northern Iraq were seen in terms of security in the context of Turkey's policies towards Iraq.

The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the post-Saddam order have changed the balance of power among the ethnic and religious groups in the country. The Turkish parliament's refusal to allow American troops to use Turkish soil to open a second front in 2003 perhaps reduced Turkey's say in the future of Iraq. Currently, Turkey's policy in Iraq is to preserve the territorial

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<sup>39</sup> Kemal Kirişci et al., *A Neighborhood Rediscovered: Turkey's Transatlantic Value in the Middle East* (Washington DC: The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2010), p.22.

integrity of the country and the prevention of sectarian divide in order to prevent a further destabilization that might create an independent Kurdistan.

After the cross border military operation in 2008, Turkey started to develop its relations with all parties in Iraq, but more specifically with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).<sup>40</sup> From 2008-2009 onwards, corresponding with the inauguration of Barack Obama as the new American president, Turkey has developed its relations with Iraq. Thus, abandoning the traditional security-only approach, the Turkish government has transformed its relations with the KRG.<sup>41</sup> Especially, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's visit to Arbil in October 2009, with a delegation of around 70 officials and business people including the trade minister Zafer Çağlayan, is considered to have been contribution to the normalization of Turkey's relations with the KRG.<sup>42</sup> Turkey's improvement of relations with the KRG was also praised by the European Commission in Turkey's 2009 Progress Report.<sup>43</sup>

In this context, Turkish Airlines restarted scheduled flights to Baghdad in October 2008 (Table 5), a route which had stopped operating for 17 years due to the First Gulf War and its aftermath.<sup>44</sup> According to a report published by the International Crisis Group, “As of September 2009, 500 Turkish companies had invested in Iraq, and Turkey as a country was among the top ten foreign investors.”<sup>45</sup>

**Table 6. Turkey's Trade with Iraq ( \$ millions)<sup>46</sup>**

Iraq	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Import	0	0	84	468	459	376	645	1321	952	1355
Export	0	0	718	1821	2750	2589	2845	3917	5124	6036
Total	0	0	802	2288	3209	965	490	5238	6076	7391

*Data Obtained from Turkish Ministry of Economy*

*Note: Numbers are rounded. Sums may not match.*

Turkey's volume of bilateral trade with Iraq reached 7 billion dollars by 2010 despite the global financial crisis that affected Turkey's bilateral trade

<sup>40</sup>Serhat Erkmen, “Türkiye-Irak İlişkileri,” *Ortadoğu Analiz* 1, no.4 (April 2009), p.6.

<sup>41</sup> Kemal Kirişçi, “Comparing the Neighborhood Policies of Turkey and the EU in the Mediterranean,” p.28.

<sup>42</sup> Ufuk Ulutaş, “Turkish Foreign Policy in 2009: A Year of Pro-activity,” *Insight Turkey* 12, no.1 (2010), p.4.

<sup>43</sup> European Commission, *Turkey Progress Report 2009* (Brussels: European Union, 2009), p.30.

<sup>44</sup> Mesut Özcan, “From Distance to Engagement: Turkish Policy towards the Middle East, Iraq and Iraqi Kurds,” *Insight Turkey* 13, no.2 (2011), p.85.

<sup>45</sup> International Crisis Group, “Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints,” p. 10.

<sup>46</sup> There is no data for 2001 and 2002.

with many countries negatively. Especially, in 2010 Turkish exports were around 6 billion dollars, giving it a trade surplus with Iraq (Table 6). The number of Iraqi tourists entering Turkey is also on the rise (Table 3). Turkish nationals need visas to enter Iraq (Table 7), Iraqi nationals also need visa to enter Turkey from land border but can get the visa at the airport easily if they use air transportation (Table 8). If the visa requirements are lifted reciprocally, that may increase the rate of people-to-people contact. Turkish Airlines in the future can also play the role to expand commercial relations as well as reciprocal tourism revenues. Another factor that can contribute to the people-to-people contact is the reopening in February 2010 of the Istanbul-Baghdad railway line that was built before the World War One.<sup>47</sup> All these actions taken by or with the encouragement of the Turkish government have had an impact on developing relations on both the government and society level.

**Table 7. Visa Requirements for Turkish Citizens**

Bahrain	Exempt	Lebanon	Exempt
UAE	Needs Visa	Oman	Border Visa
Iraq	Needs Visa	Syria	Exempt
Iran	Exempt	Saudi Arabia	Needs Visa
Israel	Needs Visa	Jordan	Exempt
Qatar	Needs Visa <sup>48</sup>	Yemen	Needs Visa
Kuwait	Needs Visa		

- *Data Obtained from Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs*

**Table 8. Visa Requirements for Entering Turkey**

Bahrain	Border Visa	Lebanon	Exempt
UAE	Border Visa	Oman	Border Visa
Iraq <sup>49</sup>	Border Visa	Syria	Exempt
Iran	Exempt	Saudi Arabia	Border Visa
Israel	Exempt	Jordan	Exempt
Qatar	Border Visa	Yemen	Needs Visa
Kuwait	Border Visa		

*Data Obtained from the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs*

<sup>47</sup>Kadri Kaan Renda, “Turkey’s Neighborhood Policy: An Emerging Complex Interdependence,” *Insight Turkey* 13, no.1 (2011), p.101.

<sup>48</sup> Visa granted at the airport for Turkish citizens fulfilling some financial requirements.

<sup>49</sup> Border visa granted at airport but for land crossings visa is required.

Turkish Airlines has increased its presence by starting to operate five new flight destinations in the country in addition to the capital. Especially the start of the Arbil flights has been given wide coverage in the Turkish and Iraqi media. It was initially the Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, who mentioned Turkish Airlines' plan to fly to Arbil in a bilateral meeting with the KRG leader Mesud Barzani in June 2010 as a part of a common strategy in energy, trade and transportation between the two countries.<sup>50</sup> Within ten months, Turkish Airlines launched its first flight to Arbil, the base of the KRG (Table 1).

This role is also praised by the President of Turkish-Iraqi Friendship Council, which stated that Turkish Airlines' involvement in Arbil had contributed to business people's commercial activities in Iraq.<sup>51</sup> It also should be noted that Atlasjet Airlines, which is another airline company in Turkey, started flying to Arbil as well as Suleymaniyah before Turkish Airlines.<sup>52</sup> Pegasus Airlines, which is a private airline company in Turkey, started to operate flights to Arbil by October 2011.<sup>53</sup> Even though they also facilitate the movement of people between the two countries, since they do not have any kind of affiliation with the state, it is not possible to call them foreign policy tools similar to Turkish Airlines. One thing that the involvement of all airline companies in this market demonstrates is that there is also the demand side behind the growth of airline companies in Iraq that has become possible in the context of Turkey's developing relations with Iraq.

In addition to the new Arbil route, in 2011, Turkish Airlines added Basra, Najaf, Mosul and Suleymaniyah to the list of cities to which it flies. The political meaning behind these four destinations is to express Turkey's desire to engage with all ethnic and religious groups in Iraq. It is not hard to guess the political bargaining behind these decisions to start flying to new routes. Each route opening has a symbolic meaning. As Arbil represents the political power of Barzani, so does Suleymaniyah represents his archrival Talabani. Another instance is Najaf which is considered to be the center of Shi'a political power. The new route is expected to increase the flow of tourists and Shi'a pilgrims to the city, home to the shrine of Imam Ali, Prophet Mohammed's cousin and a figure regarded by Shi'a Muslims as the first Imam.<sup>54</sup> Basra, which is the

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<sup>50</sup> *Sabah*, "THY'den Erbil'e Sefer", 3 June 2010.

<sup>51</sup> Turkey-Iraq Friendship Association, 4 October 2010, "Türk Hava Yolları Erbil Ofisini Ziyaret," Accessed on 24 March 2012, Available [online] at: <<http://tidd.org.tr/eng/Events/17-turk-hava-yollari-erbil-ofisini-ziyaret>>

<sup>52</sup> Global Aviator, "Turkish Airlines Launches Flight to Iraq," Accessed on 24 March 2012, Available [online] at: <<http://www.globalaviator.co.za/Countries/stories/turkishairlines.htm>>

<sup>53</sup> *Zaman*, "Pegasus Erbil'e Uçmaya Başlayacak", 11 October 2011.

<sup>54</sup> Iraq Business News, "First Direct Flight from Istanbul to Najaf," Accessed on 24 March 2012, Available [online] at: <<http://www.iraq-businessnews.com/2011/07/06/first-direct-flight-from->

second largest city in Iraq, is also a major port city that has economic potential value for Turkey's trade with Iraq.

Overall, the momentum change in Turkish foreign policy towards Iraq has fostered Turkish Airlines as a tool in this context. It facilitates the movement of people and goods to contribute to the achievement of Turkish foreign policy. At the same time, as an airline company, it benefits from the Iraqi market and increases its share in the Middle East civil aviation market. However, it should also be noted that this growth is very much dependent on the course of bilateral relations and the internal dynamics. Although business people on both sides of the border objected a security-based approach<sup>55</sup>, Turkey has resolved neither the Kurdish issue nor the PKK problem yet. A possible escalation of violence in Turkey's territories with regard to those issues bares the potential to have a negative impact on Turkey's relations with Iraq. Furthermore, the future of Iraq's territorial integrity remains an important issue that has the potential to shake the dynamics in the bilateral relations. One needs to be cautious rather than too optimistic before talking about a rosy picture yet. On the other hand, if Turkey and Iraq resolve those issues, political, economic and cultural potential between the countries will expand. It will also influence the strategies adopted by Turkish Airlines.

### **Turkish Airlines and Turkish Foreign Policy in Israel**

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Turkey was one of the first countries to recognize the independence of Israel.<sup>56</sup> The fact that both countries were the allies of the United States in the Middle East was the main determinant of the relations between Turkey and Israel during the Cold War. Surrounded by hostile Arab neighbors, Israel viewed Turkey's friendship as an asset in the region. However, those two countries could not develop close relations due to the Arab-Israeli conflict until the Oslo Process in the 1990s. Since the Oslo Process, two countries have worked closely in the areas of commerce and military cooperation. Turkey's threat perception from its neighbors Greece, Syria and the PKK pushed it towards an alliance with Israel in order to counterbalance those actors.<sup>57</sup> However, as Turkey has improved its relations with Greece, Syria and the leader of PKK Abdullah Öcalan was captured in 1999, alliance with Israel for Turkey lost its relative significance compared to the 1990s. Despite this change in the political conjuncture, Turkey and Israel have pursued good relations as the two functioning democracies and developing economies in the Middle East.

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istanbul-to-najaf/>

<sup>55</sup> Özcan, p.86.

<sup>56</sup> Dov Waxman, "Turkey and Israel: A New Balance of Power in the Middle East," *The Washington Quarterly* 22, no.1 (Winter 1999), p.30.

<sup>57</sup> Malik Muftu, "Daring and Caution in Turkish Foreign Policy," *Middle East Journal* 52, no.1 (Winter 1998), p.35.

In line with these close contacts, commercial relations and people-to-people contact have been regarded as two important aspects of the relations between the two countries.

The relations entered an era of continuous decline after Israel's military operation in Gaza in December 2008. A series of events including the Turkish prime minister's harsh criticism of Israel at the Davos World Economic Forum and the so called “sofa crisis”<sup>58</sup> further deteriorated the relations. Israel's military operation in May 2010 against a flotilla carrying humanitarian aid to Gaza and the death of nine Turkish activists in international waters caused the relations to reach a nadir. Since Turkey's three conditions (an official apology by Israel for the killings, compensation for the victims, and lifting the Gaza blockade) to normalize the relations have not been met by the Israeli side, the relations remain at a considerably low level.

Although Turkey has taken some steps to degrade the level of its relations with Israel, including recalling its ambassador and suspension of military agreements, nothing has been done to abrogate the free trade agreement.<sup>59</sup> In addition, the visa-free travel for Israeli citizens was not questioned.<sup>60</sup> Those two steps illustrate that Turkey still prioritizes commercial relations, tourism and personal contact with Israeli people in a way to facilitate the improvement of relations in the political arena. Indeed, Turkey's business relations with Israel seem to be developing in spite of the tensions in the political realm.<sup>61</sup>

**Table 9. Turkey’s Trade with Israel (million \$)**

Israel	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Import	529	544	459	714	805	782	1082	1448	1075	1360
Export	805	861	1083	1315	1467	1529	1658	1935	1528	2080
Total	1335	1406	1542	2029	2272	2311	2740	3383	2603	3440

*Data Obtained from the Turkish Ministry of Economy  
Note: Numbers are rounded. Sums may not match.*

At first glance, it might seem that Turkish Airlines as the only airline company operating in İstanbul-Tel Aviv route<sup>62</sup> could have been negatively

<sup>58</sup> *International Crisis Group*, “Turkey's Crisis over Israel and Iran,” Europe Report , no.208 (8 September 2010), p.3.

<sup>59</sup> Kemal Kirişçi, “Comparing the Neighborhood Policies of Turkey and the EU in the Mediterranean,” p.34.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *New York Times*, “Despite Raid, Mostly Business as Usual for Israel and Turkey”, 2 July 2010.

<sup>62</sup> By June 2012, Pegasus Airlines started to fly between İstanbul and Tel Aviv as the second Turkish airline company in this route. It is interesting that a Turkish company could get the slot

affected by all these tensions. Especially considering the decline in the number of Israeli tourists visiting Turkey since 2009, one might expect that the demand for Turkish Airlines would have shrunk. Contrary to this assumption, it rather has been the charter flights between Tel Aviv and Antalya<sup>63</sup> that have been affected negatively from the rising tension between the two countries.<sup>64</sup> According to the CEO of Turkish Airlines, Temel Kotil, regular scheduled flights continue without interruption since Turkish Airlines not only carries Turkish passengers from İstanbul to Tel Aviv, but also transfer passengers from other destinations such as New York-İstanbul-Tel Aviv route, which is used by 80 to 100 passengers on every New York-İstanbul Turkish Airlines flight.<sup>65</sup>

### **Turkish Airlines in the Gulf Countries<sup>66</sup>**

Turkey's relations with the Arab states of the Persian Gulf traditionally have been limited both politically and economically until recently. The sub-region has been out of Turkey's direct sphere of influence mainly for geographical reasons. With the exception of Saudi Arabia, which is significant for the Muslim population in Turkey for religious reasons, Turkey's interest in the sub-region has been to a limited extent. However, the rise of the AKP in Turkey, which has Islamic roots, has provided new opportunities to improve the relations with the Gulf countries.

Economic motives also have played an important part in this policy change. Turkey's need for new markets and foreign capital has accelerated the efforts to further develop the relations.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, the fact that the Gulf countries are mostly oil rich increases the potential of trade and investment. Turkey's growing and dynamic economy has also been regarded as a positive factor which increases the Arab capital inflow to Turkey. From 2001 to 2010, bilateral trade between Turkey and six Gulf countries quadrupled. It reached its peak in 2008 with 16.6 billion dollars, but had a decline of 50% due to the global financial crisis (Table 10). In addition to the economic reasons, Turkey aligns itself with Saudi Arabia and Qatar to topple the Assad regime in Syria which is a considerably new development. In the near future, we may witness Turkey's increasing cooperation with the countries of the Gulf region with regard to the issues in the Middle East.

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from the Israeli civil aviation authorities when there is a political crisis between the countries. There is no Israeli company that operates in this route.

<sup>63</sup> One of the largest cities in Turkey that is a holiday destination for Israelis as well as the citizens of other countries.

<sup>64</sup> *Hürriyet*, "İsrail Türkiye charter uçuşları iptal", 14 September 2011.

<sup>65</sup> *Airkule*, 14 September 2011, "İsrail Krizi THY'yi Etkiledi mi?" Accessed on 24 March 2012, Available [online] at: <<http://www.airkule.com/default.asp?page=haber&id=10031>>

<sup>66</sup> Gulf Countries: Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman and the United Arab Emirates.

<sup>67</sup> Birol Başkan, "Turkey-GCC: Is There a Future?" *Insight Turkey* 13, no.1 (2011), p.163.

**Table 10. Turkey's Trade with Gulf Countries<sup>68</sup> (\$ millions)**

Gulf Countries	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Import	939	951	1123	1478	2209	2774	3174	4360	2665	3638
Export	1036	1215	1677	2297	3012	3636	5568	12268	5390	6409
Total	1974	2165	2802	3776	5222	6410	8742	16628	8056	10049

*Data Obtained from the Turkish Ministry of Economy*

*Note: Numbers are rounded. Sums may not match.*

The role played by Turkish Airlines in the Gulf is appreciated by Turkish state officials. For instance, the president of Turkey, Abdullah Gül, emphasizes how Turkish Airlines' inauguration of a new flight route to Muscat shortened the distances and increased interaction between Turkey and Oman.<sup>69</sup> In addition to this role, a specific task has traditionally been assigned to the national airline by the Turkish state to carry the Muslim pilgrims to Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia. For instance, in 2010, 100,000 people were carried by Turkish Airlines for this specific purpose alone.

Another factor that increases the significance of the Gulf for Turkish Airlines is the existence of its regional competitor airlines. As Turkish Airlines aims to make İstanbul an aviation hub, Emirates has the same purpose for Dubai. It is also true for Etihad, Gulf and Qatar Airways, aiming to increase their share in the world aviation market, to make their places of origin aviation hubs (Abu Dhabi, Bahrain, Doha) in addition to representing their states by carrying their flags worldwide. Qatar Airways, for example, represents a micro-state like Qatar by flying airplanes with the country's name into airports around the world and the word Qatar appearing in its advertising.<sup>70</sup>

The strategies adopted by Turkish Airlines for promoting its own brand, which at the same time promotes the image of Turkey, are similar to the strategies adopted by the airlines of the Gulf.

To make a comparison, as a part of promoting its own brand, Turkish Airlines sponsors sports teams, players and events such as FC Barcelona,

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<sup>68</sup> Gulf Countries: Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman and the United Arab Emirates.

<sup>69</sup> *Turkish Presidency*, "Cumhurbaşkanı Gül Omanlı Bakanları Kabul Etti," Accessed on 24 March 2012, Available [online] at: <<http://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/170/49018/cumhurbaskani-gul-omanli-bakanlari-kabul-etti.html>>

<sup>70</sup> J. E. Peterson, "Qatar and the World: Branding for a Microstate," *Middle East Journal* 60, no.4 (Autumn 2006), p.747.

Manchester United FC, Kobe Bryant, Caroline Wozniacki and Turkish Airlines Euroleague<sup>71</sup>; Emirates sponsors Arsenal FC, AC Milan, Emirates Cup, Rugby World Cup.<sup>72</sup>

Another parallel with Emirates is the role played by the both in humanitarian relief. Recently, Turkish Airlines has involved in humanitarian relief in Somalia, Japan and Libya. Compared to Turkish Airlines, which operates on an ad hoc basis, Emirates is more institutionalized with its Emirates Foundation specifically for the purpose of humanitarian, philanthropic aid and services for children in need.<sup>73</sup> As Turkish Airlines' involvement in such areas contributes to the image of Turkey worldwide as a soft power tool, so does Emirates' involvement for Dubai and the United Arab Emirates.

### **Conclusion**

Although majority of its shares do not belong to the Turkish state anymore, Turkish Airlines is used as a foreign policy tool due to the golden share that the state retains. As one of Turkey's soft power tools, Turkish Airlines helps Turkey's capacity to attract. Despite the fact that soft power is a difficult term to measure, the strategies adopted by Turkish Airlines as a national airline contribute to Turkey's soft power potential. It promotes Turkey's name and flag all over the world and makes İstanbul a central location through air transportation. In the case of the Middle East, Turkish Airlines facilitates the goal of Turkish foreign policy that aims to establish a region of peace and stability through a liberal visa regime and free trade agreements. The route openings of Turkish Airlines in the Middle East positively contribute to Turkey's trade potential with the countries in the region. As the number of passengers carried by Turkish Airlines increases, more people from the Middle East visit Turkey and more Turkish citizens visit the countries in the Middle East. In the medium run, this will positively contribute to the perception of Arabs and Iranians in Turkey and vice versa. In sum, Turkish Airlines makes Turkish foreign policy in the region to be more receptive and credible. In an indirect way, it gets others what Turkey desires as a soft power tool. Unless Turkey abandons its policy that emphasizes regional cooperation in favor of a more security-based approach in the near future, Turkish Airlines will continue to be an important instrument parallel to the vision of its foreign policy.

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<sup>71</sup> Turkish Airlines, "Sponsorships," Accessed on 24 March 2012, Available [online] at: <<http://www.turkishairlines.com/en-TR/sponsorships/index.aspx>>

<sup>72</sup> Emirates Airlines, "Sponsorships," Accessed on 24 March 2012, Available [online] at: <<http://www.emirates.com/english/about/sponsorships/sponsorships.aspx>>

<sup>73</sup> Emirates Airlines, "The Emirates Airline Foundation," Accessed on 24 March 2012, Available [online] at: <<http://www.emiratesairlinefoundation.org/english/index.aspx>>

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