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**THESIS**

**TURKEY AND THE MIDDLE EAST: THREATS AND  
OPPORTUNITIES**

by

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June 2001

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**TURKEY AND THE MIDDLE EAST: THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

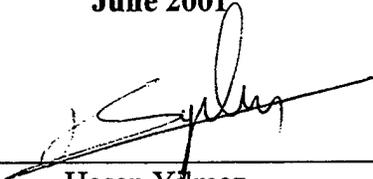
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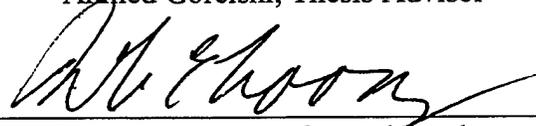


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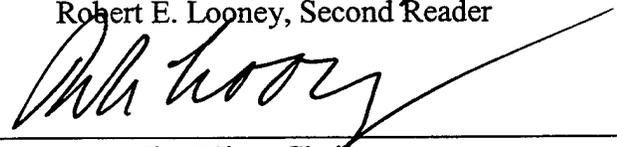
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## **ABSTRACT**

The end of the Cold War and the Second Gulf War affected the Middle East prodoundly. The role of regional countries changed when the end of the superpower competition transformed frozen animosities into new conflict areas. In this context, Turkey extremely involved in regional politics.

During the 1989-2000 period Turkey's policy toward the Middle East in general centered on security issues while Turkey encouraged regional cooperation simultaneously. PKK terrorism and the prospect of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq have been the forefront issues in Ankara's agenda.

Ankara followed an active policy in the region to counter the regional threats to Turkey, to recover its declining image in the West, and to improve its economy through regional opportunities.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Contrary to popular belief, Turkey's policy toward the Middle East has not changed in principle but has become more assertive than ever because of the changes the Cold War and the Gulf War created in the region. Turkey emerged as a relatively stronger country in the region while its neighbors were marginalized, owing to either war or to the absence of a superpower patron. However, this change in the international system and in the regional power structure transformed frozen animosities between Turkey and its neighbors into new conflict areas. As a result, Turkey's policy toward the Middle East has become mostly security-centered while Turkey also simultaneously encouraged cooperation with its neighbors.

Turkey's relations with Iraq and the developments in northern Iraq occupied much of its Middle Eastern politics. For decision makers in Ankara dealing with the conjunction of numerous developments in northern Iraq, the Western approach to that area, and the present Iraqi regime's stance toward Turkish northern Iraq policies is a complex and prime policy to formulate. First of all, the emergence of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq is a serious threat to Turkey. Such a development would inspire Turkey's Kurdish population and would risk national unity and territorial integrity of Turkey. Developments in or about northern Iraq also affect Ankara's relations with all its Middle Eastern neighbors and with the West. Hence, Turkish foreign policy toward northern Iraq must be and has been a very cautious balance between its commitment to the West and to its own national interests.

Behind the water problem between Syria and Turkey are their projects on the Euphrates river, which are crucial to solve these two countries' domestic problems—ethnic and economic. While Turkey has control of the water, Syria tried to counter Turkey's advantage by resorting to PKK terrorism. The Southeast Anatolian Project (GAP, a Turkish acronym) aims to elevate the prosperity of the economically underdeveloped and Kurdish populated east and southeast areas of Turkey. Syria, to buy the loyalty of the Sunni majority of its population, pursues economically inefficient but

politically lifesaving agricultural projects. A comparison, based on scientific data, of water potential and water demand of the riparian countries of the Euphrates River reveals that Syria overdemand water from the Euphrates while Turkey uses less water than it is supposed to use. Since the domestic stability of Syria depended on its water policy, Syria tried to dictate Turkey on water by resorting to PKK terrorism. Syria was the largest outside supporter of the PKK. The PKK cost Turkey 20,000 to 30,000 lives and \$85 billion, more than Turkey's foreign debts. This situation led to great frustration in Turkey forcing Turkish political and military leaders to eliminate the PKK and its patron Syria. Turkey, by threatening to use force, convinced Syria to abandon its support for the PKK and to extradite the PKK leader, Abdullah Ocalan. The October 1998 agreement satisfied Turkey, but Ankara is still wary about Syrian observance of the agreement.

Turkey's "strategic cooperation" with Israel in 1996 changed the balances in the Middle East in favor of Turkey and Israel. The driving force behind the two important military agreements, "Military Training Agreement" and "Military Defense Industry Agreement," was Turkey's need to stop its isolation in the region and to recover its declining image in the West. Turkey's regional concerns were increasing and the West's attitude toward Turkey's concerns were not satisfactory. In addition, Israel and Syria were about to reach a peace agreement, which, if finalized, would free Syria to pressure Turkey more by deploying its forces from south to north. Thus, Ankara had to secure a cooperation with Israel to ease its global and regional concerns before Israel and Syria reached a peace agreement. Turkey achieved its objectives from the cooperation: Syria was marginalized and Turkey strengthened its position with the West by cooperating with Israel. Subsequently, the confidence Turkey acquired with this cooperation revealed itself in Turkey's S-300 missile crisis with Greece, in its October 1998 crisis with Syria, and in its August 1999 dispute with Iran. In all these disputes, Turkey was able to eliminate the sources of threats to its national security.

Turkish-Iranian relations in the post-Cold War era were initially strained due to their regional rivalry and ideological differences. The opposing regimes of Iran and Turkey have been the source of their skepticism about each other's policies. The revisionist

aspect of the Iranian Islamic regime has concerned Turkey since this aspect justified Iranian support for PKK and Islamic terrorism aimed at Turkey. Turkey presenting a secular regime compatible with Muslim society was a challenge to Iran at its door. Iran also suspected that the US, the main enemy of Iranian regime, would further encircle Iran by supporting the “Turkish Model” in the newly dependent Central Asian states. Thus, Iran used its terrorism card to contain Turkey’s policies in northern Iraq, Central Asia, and the Caucasus.

However, the initial conflict gave way to cooperation when Iran and Turkey realized that pursuing policies based on religious and ethnic kinship would benefit neither side. Their mutual geographic advantages enticed Iran and Turkey to cooperate rather than to confront each other. In short, though ideological differences between Turkey and Iran create a rift, the pragmatism deriving from mutual regional interests refrained Iran and Turkey from serious confrontation in the post-Cold War environment.

The chapters of this thesis will discuss Turkey-Middle East relations in the post-Cold War era along the above lines. The author invites any comments pertaining to this thesis and the issues addressed in it. All comments should be forwarded to the author at E-mail account: [hasanyilmaz28@hotmail.com](mailto:hasanyilmaz28@hotmail.com)

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## I. INTRODUCTION

As Turkey undergoes the most profound economic, social, and political crisis of the republican period, Ankara also finds itself involved in the affairs of the Middle East with unprecedented intensity.<sup>1</sup>

The demise of the Soviet Empire left the United States as the only major power with leverage on Middle Eastern developments. The 1991 Gulf War changed the balance of power among the regional nations eliminating Iraq as a regional power for some time to come. The peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians that followed the Gulf War brought further changes to the political landscape of the Middle East.

In general, the end of the Cold War had the following repercussions on the region:<sup>2</sup>

- The US emergence as the single power whose authority and preferences must be contended with,
- An end to raising strategic rents by manipulating the superpower competition,
- The prevalence of liberal capitalism and the free market after the Soviet collapse and the necessity of rentier states to adapt to the competitive market rules of the emerging order, (In this context, Turkey stands as the only Middle Eastern country in the ten big emerging markets.)
- Without the Cold War and the intensity of the Arab-Israeli conflict the fact that many Middle Eastern states were superficially constructed and masquerading as

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<sup>1</sup> Soli Ozel, "Of Not Being a Lone Wolf: Geography, Domestic Plays, and Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East," in Geoffry Kemp and Janice Gross Stein (eds.), *Powder Keg in the Middle East: The Struggle for Gulf Security* (Washington: American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1995), p. 164.

<sup>2</sup> Henri J. Barkey, "Turkey and the Middle East: A Geopolitical Exploration" in Henri J. Barkey (ed.), *Reluctant Neighbor: Turkey's Role in the Middle East* (Washington D.C.: US Institute of Peace Press, 1996) pp. 26-29.

“states” became visible. Corollary to this were domestic challenges to the legitimacy of these regimes.

What then President George Bush called “the new world order” or “the new Middle East” has yet to materialize—Iraq’s Saddam Hussein still remains in power, and the Arab-Israel peace process has changed little except for the mutual recognition of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (the PLO) and Israel—the new power structure of the region has had significant bearings on Turkish Middle East policy decisions. As a result of the changes in the international system, in the region, and in Turkey, Turkey emerged as a prominent actor in the Middle East during the 1990s. These developments and Turkey’s involvement in them strongly influenced its perception of its national interests in the region.

During the Cold War, protecting the Western interests and preventing the Soviet influence in the region were the primary issues forming Ankara’s foreign policy. Yet, in the post-Cold War era, especially after the Gulf War, Turkey found itself drawn into the center of Middle East politics by its internal ethnic and religious identity debates. On the one hand, the tone of Turkey’s Kurdish ethnic problem increased because of the power vacuum in northern Iraq. This provided new sanctuaries for the terrorist organization, the Kurdistan Workers Party (Partiya Karkeren-i Kurdistan or the PKK),<sup>3</sup> and raised the prospect of a Kurdish state. On the other hand, polarization in domestic politics deepened because of the electoral victory of the Islamic Refah Party and its anti-Western and pro-Islamic policies. Coupled with this situation, the Islamic Republic of Iran resorted to subversive means bringing “irtica” (reactionism) fears back to the agenda of the secularist Turkish regime. As a result, the Middle East became Turkey’s number one security problem with enormous domestic repercussions, to which Ankara has shaped its relations with the region as heavily “security centered.”

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<sup>3</sup> The PKK was declared a terrorist organization by such countries as Turkey, the United States, Syria, and Iran.

The factors that impelled Ankara to become involved in Middle East politics in the post-Cold War era follow:<sup>4</sup>

- The domestic PKK problem and its connections to northern Iraq, Syria and Iran,
- Tehran's challenges to Turkey's secular regime,
- The increasing significance of the Southeastern Anatolia Project (the GAP) for Syria and Iraq and their access to fresh water,
- Turkey's need to bolster its economic position in order to obtain the membership of the European Union (the EU) and, to that end, the economic importance of the Middle East as an immediate area of opportunities for Turkey (Turkey is unique in the Middle East in terms of having inexpensive agricultural, food and water sources.),
- Challenges to the Gulf Cooperation Council (the GCC) regimes from Iran, Iraq, and the Arab-Israeli peace process, and the possibility of Ankara playing the role of an intermediary role.

If the ensuring external and domestic security is the forefront issue for Turkey's Middle Eastern agenda, enhancing regional cooperation that would create interdependence is the second. Indeed, these factors are components of each other in that a cooperative interdependence between the regional countries would automatically curb attempts of hostile actions and lessen their security concerns.

Turkey has as many opportunities as threats in the region. The region is a potential market for inexpensive Turkish agricultural and industrial products. If the mutual mistrust, which compels the regional regimes to be economically self-sufficient and to seek distant economic partners instead of establishing trade with the neighbors of these regimes, can be removed, Turkey will have a highly promising export market and

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<sup>4</sup> Barkey, p. 25-26.

will attract Arab petro-dollars for internal investment.<sup>5</sup> Also, Turkish investors have interests in the regional construction and tourism sectors. Moreover, proximity to inexpensive oil and natural gas reserves is a principal benefit for Turkey's energy hungry industrialization. Nevertheless, turning these opportunities into benefits is not as easy as it might appear.

Today we are observing two major tendencies among the nations of the world: globalization and regionalization. On the one hand, due to technological changes and liberal policies, the world is becoming one single unit. On the other hand, more and more countries are uniting to create regional mechanisms, as observed in Asia, Europe, and North America. Unfortunately, the Middle East appears to have missed both of these tendencies. Conflict, turmoil, border disputes, economic imbalances, religious differences and the existence of terrorism in the region are blocking the countries of the Middle East from integrating themselves into the global system as well as from establishing regional cooperation mechanisms.

In this sense, the parameters of the regional politics compel Turkey to follow a fine line between restraint and cooperation. First, the traditional and mutual mistrust among the regional regimes stemming from their aspirations for regional hegemony and historical animosities forces them to be economically self-sufficient and not to depend on one another. This accurately portrays the case of Turkey and Syria. For example, Syria, instead of developing inefficient agricultural programs on non-arable land, could benefit from the inexpensive and immediate agricultural products of Turkey's GAP project. But Syrian misgivings about Ankara's regional intentions prevent it from such a move.

Mutual distrust is also the cause of regional arms proliferation, which drains scarce sources which otherwise could be used in more positive regional and domestic economic and social development. Traditional enmities between Iraq and Israel, Iraq and

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<sup>5</sup> "Turkey seeks to boost trade with the United Arab Emirates (the UAE)," *Turkish Daily News*, 4 April 2001. UAE Minister of Finance Sheikh Hamdan said the UAE could consider investing in Turkish markets. "Turks Sign \$80 Million Contract in UAE, Kuwait," *Directorate General of Press and Information, Office of the Prime Minister, Turkish Press Review*, 13 April 2001.

Iran, Syria and Israel, Syria and Iraq, and Turkey and Syria have resulted in high levels of arms procurement. This has continued to the extent that many possess Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) or the capability of acquiring them. In this context, it is not surprising that Turkey has an estimated \$150 billion arms modernization and procurement program to the year 2030.

Second, how long the rents of regional rentier states can last is crucial. These rentier states perceive any threat to their regimes as the number one national security threat, and allocate sources for military spending and patronage (buying loyalty) in order to perpetuate their regime. Yet, maintaining the status quo is more costly than ever for the elites of these regimes in the face of new post-Cold War challenges, such as political instability and Islamic fundamentalism. As long as these personalized regimes, in which “the elite, the regime and the state overlap to the point that they are almost indistinguishable,”<sup>6</sup> can fund this cost by oil revenues or foreign aid, they are unlikely to engage in regional economic cooperation that would provide the source to meet this cost.

In the scarcity of the resources, the elites of rentier states can maintain the status quo by allowing the emergence of state controlled quasi-pluralism. Egypt and Jordan, and recently Iran, are examples of this phenomenon in the Middle East. Nevertheless, the existence of some sort of pluralism and the scarcity of resources compel these states to diversify their economy and embark on regional cooperation to achieve it. “Declining rents induces the idea of sharing the, so-called, common regional gains from trade through the sale of more diversified foreign trade schemes instead of petroleum (or rent).”<sup>7</sup> Since such countries are inclined to engage in cooperative economic relations, such as free trade area “negotiations” and free trade “agreements,” we can call them

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<sup>6</sup> Murfah Joueati, “Water Politics as High Politics: the Case of Turkey and Syria,” in Henri J. Barkey (ed.), p. 131. Iran stands as an exception in this case because of the democracy-like power distribution in its constitution.

<sup>7</sup> Sema Kalaycioglu, “Regional Economic Cooperation in the Middle East,” *Perceptions, Journal of International Affairs*, 1:3 (September-November 1996), p. 12.

“like-minded”<sup>8</sup> countries. The ongoing economic cooperation between Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, and Israel, and recently between Turkey and Iran are the tangible examples of this “like-minded-ness” of Egypt, Jordan, and Iran.

Turkey is in a dilemma. Its area of opportunities and area of threats in the region overlap. For instance, although Syria offers an immediate market for Turkish exports, the water dispute, its irredentist claim to the Turkish province of Hatay, its past support of the PKK, and its general anti-Western political tone have weakened the chances of any cooperation between Turkey and Syria. Likewise, Turkey wants normalized relations with Iraq for economic (i.e. oil pipeline revenues, exports) and security reasons (i.e. prospect of a Kurdish state), but Iraq’s perception of Turkey after Turkey joined the 1991 anti-Saddam alliance and the water problem diminish the hopes for the same rate of trade between these two countries as in the past. Also, relations between Turkey and Iran could not flourish until the end of the 1990s. The ideological conflict between the two, rivalry for influence over both Central Asia and northern Iraq, and Iranian support for anti-Turkish and anti-secular terrorist groups impeded cooperative attempts of mutual interests. Fortunately, now, Turkey and Iran have started to realize common projects, such as natural gas pipelines and railroad transportation between Europe and Central Asia, putting their ideological differences aside. Yet, this does not mean problems between Turkey and Iran are resolved. The ideological differences and Iran’s inclination to subversive actions (not because of President Khatemi himself, but the institutions, which he is unable to control owing to the power distribution within Iranian political structure) will continue to support Turkish suspicions in Turkish-Iranian relations.

However, it should not be forgotten that the post-Cold War and post-Gulf War environment and resulting developments have placed Turkey in a far better position compared to its neighbors in this high-level power politics. Turkey is more assertive than ever in regional politics with its geopolitical, military and economic advantages. There are five major considerations to examine to understand Turkey’s position.

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<sup>8</sup> Kemal Kirisci, “Turkey in Search of Security in the Middle East: The Economic Dimension,” *Perceptions Journal of International Affairs*, 3:4 (March-May 1996), p. 7.

First, while these autocratic countries were left without a patron following the demise of the Soviet Union, Turkey still enjoys US support. The strengthening of ties with the West was the main motivating force behind Turkey's participation in the Second Gulf War.<sup>9</sup> Turkish President Ozal, apprehensive that the demise of the Soviet threat and East-West rivalries would undermine Turkey's geo-strategic role, saw the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait as an opportunity to demonstrate his country's geo-strategic importance to the West and managed to maneuver Turkey into a key role in the allied coalition. Since the Gulf War, despite their incompatible approaches to the Baghdad regime and the Kurdish question, Turkey has remained an important US ally, especially on its Iraqi policy by allowing the use of the Incirlik Air Base to impose and to patrol the no-fly zone above the 36<sup>th</sup> parallel.<sup>10</sup> Turkey's significance increased even more after its "strategic cooperation" with Israel. In response, Turkey enjoys its ally's support in its fight against Kurdish separatism with less human rights criticism on its regional policies. The US backing of Turkey creates a significant regional imbalance before all other factors.

A second consideration to understand: Turkey's new posture involves the strength of the Turkish Armed Forces, which serve as a source of profound deterrence over Turkey's neighbors. Turkey possesses an experienced, mobile, and modern military as a result of its 15-year conventional and unconventional operations against the PKK in southeastern Turkey and in northern Iraq. In addition, Turkey plans to spend over \$30 billion on arms in the next eight years and up to \$150 billion by 2030.<sup>11</sup> This posture provides Turkey with a greater preparedness to deter any aggression. Except for their WMD, Syria, Iraq, and Iran have no equivalent armed forces to counter such deterrence and instead they resort to subversive terrorism. However, Turkey has established security agreements with Syria and Iran, resulting in the expulsion of PKK leader, Abdullah Ocalan, from Syria and the end of Iranian support for the remaining PKK and Islamic

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<sup>9</sup> Sabri Sayari, "Turkish Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era: The Challenges of Multi-Regionalism," *Journal of International Affairs*, 54:1 (Fall 2000), p. 171.

<sup>10</sup> The conflict in their approaches will be discussed in Chapter Three, Turkey-Iraq Relations.

<sup>11</sup> Umit Ergunsoy, "Turkish Budget Anticipates Arms-Buying Program," *Defense News* (October 26-November 1), p. 32.

terrorist groups in Turkey. Therefore, Syria and Iran's potential for using subversive means to counter Turkey has greatly diminished.

A third issue that has improved Turkey's regional stance is Turkey's "strategic cooperation" with Israel in the mid-1990s. Combined with Turkey's military strength this cooperation proved to be a breakthrough, which silenced Iran, Iraq, and Syria as well as angering them. Such cooperation between two democratic, economically and militarily strong, pro-Western, and non-Arab states deepened the imbalance between Turkey and its neighbors. This situation has silenced their conventional and subversive threats, yet has increased their frustration and criticism. Though Iran, Iraq, and Syria attempted to counter this "alliance" by forming counter alliances in response, the means at their disposal have made it impossible for them to match the scale. Also, the US backing of and contributions to Turkish-Israeli strategic cooperation has been important in pacifying Turkey's neighbors.

A fourth and equally important factor that has raised Turkey's political status is that Turkey is capable of using its control over the Euphrates water as leverage in its relations with Syria and Iraq (though Turkey officially repudiated such claims). When the Ataturk Dam was filled in 1990, those two countries were deprived of water for one month. Later Turkey compensated for the reduction of water flow by increasing the flow of water. This incident illustrated how seriously Turkey could affect these downstream riparian countries when necessary. The GAP project, consisting of a series of 22 dams, 19 hydroelectric plants, and a network of irrigation canals to harness the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates, could be a grave concern for these countries when it is completed by the year 2010, for Turkey will not have the flexibility on the flow of Euphrates water that it has now.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, Turkey's emergence as a regional economic power following the Cold War has had a nurturing affect on what is listed above. Major reforms undertaken in 1980

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<sup>12</sup> Frederick M. Lorenz and Edward J. Erickson, *The Euphrates Triangle: Security Implications of the Southeastern Anatolia Project* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1999), p. 37.

moved Turkey from statism toward private initiative and export orientation.<sup>13</sup> Turkey has averaged more than five percent real growth per annum in the 1990s.<sup>14</sup> The structural changes in Turkey's economy in the past two decades are likely to sustain long-term economic performance. Entrepreneurial success and growing prosperity still distinguishes Turkey from its neighbors and imbues the Turkish elite with a sense of genuine accomplishment and self-confidence in the region despite several crises it has undergone in the last decade, which can be named as "cleaning up the last pieces of a statist economy."

The economic crises Turkey has been experiencing does not suggest the Turkish economy is really in a desperate situation. For example, that Turkey had only \$5 billion in its treasury in the 1994 economic crisis and had \$25 billion in the March 2001 economic crisis highlights this ironic reality. In addition, The World Bank lists Turkey as the 17<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world, and Turkey is very likely to overcome the current economic crisis with its dynamic economic structure.<sup>15</sup> The new economic reform package recently declared and supported fully by the coalition partners, the World Bank, the IMF, the US and European states, and the sustaining initiative spirit of Turkish firms attending a chain of international fairs at the time of the crisis<sup>16</sup> indicate Turkey's likelihood of sustaining its long-term economic development. Hence, compared to other states in the Middle East, which are mostly rentier and do not have a proper economic structure for a market economy, Turkey is in a far better position with its dynamic market

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<sup>13</sup> Bela Balassa, "Outward Orientation and Exchange Rate Policy in Developing Countries: The Turkish Experience," *The Middle East Journal*, 37:3 (Summer 1983), pp. 429-447.

<sup>14</sup> Alan Makovsky, "The New Activism in Turkish Foreign Policy," *SAIS Review*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy ([www.washingtoninstitute.org](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org)), (Winter-Spring 1999), p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> "Foreign Minister Cem Met with National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice," *Milliyet*, 30 March 2001.

<sup>16</sup> See the news about the support of Turkish coalition partners, the World Bank, the US; the IMF's support and additional funding of the program; Germany's support and its Finance Minister's call for investment in Turkey; the Turkish investors' nonstop participation in the economic fairs throughout the world during the crisis at "Turkish Press View, 17 April 2001," *Directorate of Press and Information, Office of the Prime Minister*, [www.byegm.gov.tr/YAYINLARIMIZ/chr/ing2001/04/01x04x17.HTM#3](http://www.byegm.gov.tr/YAYINLARIMIZ/chr/ing2001/04/01x04x17.HTM#3).

economy supported by vast human and material resources. Thus, it would be legitimate to claim that Turkey is a regional economic power in the Middle East.

In short, the reasons for Turkey's greater assertiveness are various and overlapping: relative prosperity and a better economic infrastructure, a better equipped and more experienced military, the decline of power in the neighboring states, and a greater sense of policy independence marked by the end of the Cold War.

What Turkey foremost wants to achieve is stability in the region, which would generate a cooperative environment, if not through friendly means, by strong deterrence. It prefers stability in the region through powerful military coalitions rather than continuation of old animosities and individual confrontations in the region. Turkey's strategy is to ensure its security with the most convenient (less destructive) means and to contribute to the stability and "confidence building" in the region with all means possible in order to realize mutual benefits. While Turkish military authorities develop the military deterrence, the authorities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs attempt to lessen the influence of traditional misgivings and search for cooperation with its neighbors through intense diplomatic efforts.

For instance, Iran and Turkey possess mutual geographical opportunities, such as transportation between Central Asia and Europe, economic trade on goods, natural gas pipeline projects. Despite the dramatic ideological differences between the two countries, offers of cooperation over these mutually beneficial areas have developed successfully. Next, Turkey's insistence on sustaining diplomatic relations, reviving economical relations, and opposing the birth of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq are examples of Turkish diplomatic initiatives to normalize Turkish-Iraqi relations despite some US criticism. Furthermore, small-scale trade between Turkey and Syria, and their bordering cities,<sup>17</sup> and Turkey's suggestions for more trade—as the outputs of GAP offers more—are other examples of Turkish Foreign Ministry's diplomatic efforts for cooperation.

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<sup>17</sup> "Aleppo Governor Kennec Visited Kilis Governor Kutuk," *Ozgur Politika* ([www.ozgurpolitika.com](http://www.ozgurpolitika.com)), January 19, 2001.

Therefore, it can be said Turkey is pursuing a “constructive engagement” in the Middle East.

From the above one might conclude that Turkish foreign policy toward the Middle East has changed, yet the reality is quite different.

Turkey’s foreign policy toward the region obviously changed in the mid-1960s because of its fears of international isolation and economic depression. Turkey, the “old faithful ally,” felt alienated when President Johnson issued his infamous letter warning Turkey against any intervention in Cyprus and when the US Congress imposed an arms embargo on Turkey in the mid-1970s. Turkey continued its policy of neutrality, non-interference, and non-involvement in regional policies but this time its neutrality was more inclined to favor the Arab cause against the Zionists, and with small scale and limited involvement in regional politics, which Turkey’s economic ties with Arab countries required. In other words, Turkey left its West dominated foreign policy and moved toward a “balanced” policy with western allies and regional neighbors.

However, contrary to common belief, Turkey’s “new foreign policy”<sup>18</sup> did not change after the end of the Cold War and the outbreak of the Kuwait-Gulf War. Naturally, the impact of regional developments on Turkey’s domestic agenda determines the degree of Turkish involvement in regional politics. In the “new Turkish foreign policy era,” trade relations necessitated political arrangements with the Middle East, whereas now, in the post-Cold War era, ethnic and Islamic considerations and possible economic incentives have driven Turkey into regional politics. For example, Turkey is assertive on crucial security concerns as illustrated in the expulsion of Ocalan and the PKK from Syria, and in the Turkish involvement in northern Iraq policies in order to curb the emergence of a Kurdish state and to contain Iran and Iraq in this authority vacuum. Turkey is also assertive in using regional opportunities to raise its economy to the EU standards, as revealed through Turkey’s insistence on cooperating with Iran over economic opportunities in Central Asian states and its eagerness to normalize relations

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<sup>18</sup> Bilge Criss, “Turkish Foreign Policy Toward the Middle East,” *MERIA*, issue #2/ January, 1997 or [www.cc.columbia.edu/sec/dlc/ciao/olj/meria/meria97\\_criss.html](http://www.cc.columbia.edu/sec/dlc/ciao/olj/meria/meria97_criss.html), p. 6.

with Iraq for its former export and pipeline revenues. In this sense, the intensity of security threats and economic interests has illustrated an unprecedented Turkish involvement in regional politics when combined with Turkey's assertive stance, which the factors listed above have generated.

In fact, Turkey still preserves its neutrality in interstate conflicts, such as in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, in the Iraq-Iran animosity, and in the Iran-Gulf states problems. Turkey's strategic cooperation with Israel was a move to compel Syria to abandon supporting the PKK. Other than that, one should not assume that Turkey is siding with Israel on its dispute with Syria. Even if one interpreted it that way, it would not be wrong to view that policy that Turkey's security concerns likely justified its decision. Neither Turkey nor Israel seems enthusiastic about bonding on the bases of having a common enemy. Therefore, they avoid taking sides in their disputes with other third-party countries

Moreover, the West is still important to Turkey and it still attaches itself to western security systems and alliances, yet it also encourages regional economic opportunities. Its participation in the UN alliance against Saddam's regime and its persistence in capitalizing on regional economic opportunities, such as with Jordan, Egypt, Israel, and Iran, are no different than its previous security cooperation with the West to counter the former Soviet Union and Turkey's economic investments in Arab countries in the 1980s. Although Turkey is more involved than ever in regional politics, Middle Eastern political issues now occupy the Turkish foreign policy agenda less than the Western political or economic issues. Relations with the West are still a priority but "balanced" with attention to regional politics, which Turkish national interests require as they did in from 1964 to 1989. For instance, while Turkey supports the US-led UN inspection of weapons program and sanctions regime imposed on Baghdad, it has recently resumed its diplomatic relations with Iraq at the ambassador level—even though Washington does not like that move—to ensure Iraqi control over northern Iraq and to gain access to the Iraqi export market and to have some share of Iraqi contracts when the sanctions are removed.

Furthermore, Turkey no longer needs Arab support since the Arab world has not provided that support anyway. Religious rapprochement with the Middle Eastern states and the Turkish support of the Arab cause did not obtain the desired results for Turkish foreign policy. Religious brotherhood with the Arab world cannot be a crucial criterion for developing policies related to the national security of Turkey whenever an Arab nation or its interests are involved. Instead, Turkey now enjoys the support of the US, Israel and other countries in the Balkans, the Black Sea region, and the Caspian and Central Asia on international platforms with more pragmatic terms. This stance allows Turkey to pursue a *balance* policy between its relations with the West and its interest in the Middle East in “specific” rather than general regional issues, as exemplified above by the Iraqi case.

Turkey breached its non-interference policy for a while when it committed its troops to the Operation Provide Comfort II, which aimed “to protect” Kurds in northern Iraq against Saddam’s further assaults. The United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 688 allowed the use of the military for only “humanitarian” help to northern Iraqi Kurds. Thus, Turkey’s policy of stipulating the use of NATO forces in non-NATO areas to a UNSCR, even only for deterrence, conflicted with its non-interference policy with the absence of such UNSC resolution.<sup>19</sup> However, this does not indicate an intentional change in the principles of Turkish Foreign Policy. This is a responsive action, which Turkey had to take during an era of stormy changes in the international and regional system.

The activist trend in Turkish foreign policy since the Gulf War includes both a wider scope for imaginative diplomatic relations and a greater preparedness to use or threaten to use force. Ankara is far from adventurist in its foreign policy. It continues to try to use diplomacy and multi-lateralism, as far as possible, to promote stability and prosperity. Most manifestations are in the realm of diplomatic initiative, not the use of force. Its activism is a measured activism.

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<sup>19</sup> Mahmut Bali Aykan, “Turkiye’nin Kuveyt Krizi Sonrasındaki Basra Korfezi Guvenligi Politikasi: 1990-1996 (Turkey’s Persian Gulf Security Policy in the aftermath of Kuwait Crisis)” in Meliha Benli Altunisik (ed.) *Turkiye ve Ortadogu: Tarih, Kimlik, Guvenlik (Turkey and the Middle East: History, Identity and Security)* (Istanbul: Boyut Yayinlari, 1999), pp. 29-30.

This activism represents a trend resulting from structural factors in Turkey's domestic regional and international environment and, as such.<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, Turkey's policy toward the Middle East has not changed in principle, but has become more assertive and active than ever because of the change from a bipolar to a unipolar international system and because of the influence of the Gulf War.

Chapter Two provides a brief history of Turkey-Middle East relations and lists Turkey and the Middle Eastern states' perceptions of one another, which resulted from historical animosities.

Chapter Three focuses on Turkey's Iraq policy and its domestic and foreign dimensions. The main argument is that the involvement in northern Iraqi policies is a must for Turkey and has not changed the principals of Turkey's traditional policy. Presently, the consolidation of Baghdad's power over Iraq, no matter what regime holds the power, is a prime national security issue for Ankara. Turkey's national interests in its relations with the West and with Iraq, and its domestic considerations with northern Iraq forces Ankara to follow a pragmatic and balanced policy toward all players of the game.

In Chapter Four, Turkish-Syrian relations will be discussed. The discussion will revolve around hydro-politics and its implications. Here, the argument will be that convergence of prospective solutions of crucial domestic concerns, either ethnic or economic, of these two neighbors on the water supply of Euphrates has caused the so-called water problem in the Euphrates basin. While Turkey has control of the water, Syria has tried to counter this advantage by appealing to PKK terrorism.

Chapter Five focuses on the Turkish-Israeli "strategic cooperation" discussing the factors that caused it and the implications of this cooperation in the region. Behind the emergence of close ties between the two states in the 1990s were Turkey's deep strategic concerns with its Middle Eastern security and the Western attitude toward these concerns

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<sup>20</sup> Makovsky, p. 3.

as the main motives. Israel's benefits were also significant but were responsive outcomes of Turkish calls for cooperation, which at one point enticed Israel to gain more political leverage reducing the importance of a deal with Syria to secondary. For the first time in its relations with the Middle East, Turkey is highly confident, strong, and assertive as a result of its cooperative relations with Israel.

Chapter Six explores the Turkish-Iranian relationship. My contention will be that albeit ideological differences strain relations frequently, the pragmatism deriving from Turkey and Iran's identical foreign policy principles and their mutual economic considerations detour Turkey and Iran from a serious confrontation. Thus, both states seek reconciliation rather than confrontation in their dealings with each other.

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## II. PERCEPTIONS AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### A. PERCEPTIONS

Before analyzing the history of Turkish-Middle Eastern relations, mentioning some key historical and traditional perceptions of Turkey and the Middle East about one another is useful. The differences inherent from these perceptions form the contemporary Turkish-Middle Eastern relations.

History, identity, and security dimensions play important roles in Turkey's relationship with the Middle East.<sup>21</sup> The collapse of the Ottoman Empire left a legacy of territorial grievances, historic resentments, political tensions and mutual suspicions that neither Turks, Arabs, or Persians have so far overcome. Turks, Arabs, and Iranians differ on a broad variety of international issues. Their differences revolve around their pro-Western and anti-Western political characters.

Since its foundation, Turkey has consistently aspired to be a part of the West. The military and civilian founders of the Turkish Republic envisioned a Western identity for this new country. Turkey has identified itself with Western security institutions and has eschewed any kind of membership in Third World "anti-imperialist fronts" or nonaligned groupings. Even in the post-Cold War era, Turkey has persisted in its pro-Western orientation. Its participation in the UN alliance against Iraq was no less representative than its participation in the Korean War, to join the Western-led security institution, NATO. Turkey has generally set itself sharply apart from the hostile anti-Western character of Arab politics.

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<sup>21</sup> Meliha Benli Altunisik, "Doksanli Yillarda Turkiye ve Ortadogu (Turkey and the Middle East in 1990s)" in Meliha Benli Altunisik (ed.) *Turkiye ve Ortadogu*, p. 11.

A summary of cultural, historical, political, and social differences between Turkey, the Arab world, and Iran follows (note that Turkish-Iranian differences began after Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979):<sup>22</sup>

- Turkey has had a long history of rule in the region while Persians and Arabs have generally been ruled by either Turks or Western imperialist states over the last millennium. This has had an important psychological impact on Arabs' and Persians' sense of "victimization" in history.
- The Arab rebellion during World War I angered Turks.
- Following Ataturk's transformation of Turkey in 1923, Western Europe ceased to threaten Turkey. Yet, most Arab states and Iran continued to languish under colonialism, imperialism, and even Western armed intervention.
- Turkey's alliance with the West conflicted with the interests of most of its Arab neighbors, who see Ankara as the servant of Western interests.
- The Russian threat of Czarist and Bolshevik impelled Turkey to turn to the West for security. The Arabs felt little threat. Indeed, armed attack on the Arab states came consistently and solely from the West (except intra-Arab disputes).
- The creation of Western supported Israel posed a direct threat to the Arab states resulting in territorial losses and military defeats. Turkey sees no threat from Israel; on the contrary, both are US-supported strategic allies.
- Turkey has had no "natural" allies in terms of ethnic or cultural values, while Arab nations have enjoyed such alliances. For example, the Arab world supports Syria regarding its water and border disputes with Turkey. In turn, Turkey has appealed to pro-Western, Northern Tier type security alliances, which would also redefine the identity of the Middle East often associated with an Arab one.

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<sup>22</sup> Graham E. Fuller, *Turkey Faces East: New Orientations toward the Middle East and the Old Soviet Union* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1992), pp. 15-18.

- The secularist political structure of Turkey has rejected its Islamic heritage of the Ottoman Empire, whereas the Arab world and Iran powerfully symbolizes it.

## **B. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Despite its geographical position, Turkey decided to isolate itself from the developments in the Middle East and to adopt a very cautious hands-off policy toward the region historically. Strict adherence to the following principles have been the predominant feature of Turkey's relations with the Middle East:

- Non-interference and non-involvement in the domestic and interstate conflicts of regional countries, and
- The development of bilateral political and economic relations with as many states in the region as possible.

In short, Turkey's policy toward the Middle East has been historically largely reactive, politically non-interventionist and characterized by a very cautious and pragmatic approach.

Turkish Middle Eastern political history can be analyzed in four phases:<sup>23</sup>

- First, a more neutral and self-determined Ataturk<sup>24</sup> era (1923-38);
- Second, a cautious but Western alliance dominated period (1938-1960s);
- Third, a period of rapprochement with the Arab world because of the resentment against the US and expected economic benefits from the oil rich Arab world (1960s-1980s); and
- Lastly, the activist post Cold-War era, which will be the main focus of this thesis.

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<sup>23</sup> Criss, p. 1

<sup>24</sup> Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the leader of the Turkish Independence War and the founder of modern Turkey.

## 1. The Ataturk Era

Turkish foreign policy stands on well-established principles from the Kemalist legacy. “Peace at home and peace abroad”<sup>25</sup> is the keystone of Turkish foreign policy. This principle is better understood in Ataturk’s own words: “It is quite natural and therefore simple to explain the fact that a country which is in the midst of fundamental reforms and development should sincerely desire peace and tranquility both at home and in the world.”<sup>26</sup>

Ataturk’s peculiar dislike for military alliances and pacts stemmed from his conviction that every alliance provoked a counter-alliance by causing suspicion and insecurity among other countries, which would be against both Turkey’s principles and interests.<sup>27</sup> Hence, Turkish foreign policy orientation during the Ataturk era was neutrality due to the needed peace for reforming a war-torn country. Two basic foreign policy aims prevailed in this period: Creating a strong, modern state which could defend its territorial integrity and political independence, without external assistance, against aggression; and to make Turkey a full, equal member of the Western European community of nations.<sup>28</sup>

For the Middle East, Turkey’s main policy was one of non-involvement in the region’s affairs. Ankara illustrated this stance in the 1937 Sadabat Pact, formed among Turkey, Iran, Iraq (then a pro-Western kingdom) and Afghanistan, whose main principles were non-interference in each others’ affairs and cooperation on the unnamed “Kurdish” issue.<sup>29</sup> However, this distanced stance from the Middle East should not be interpreted as

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<sup>25</sup> *Ataturk’un Soylev ve Demecleri* (Ataturk’s Speech and Statements), TTK Publication, Ankara, 1961, p. 356.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 358 ( his State of the Nation speech on November 1, 1928).

<sup>27</sup> Criss, p. 2 (Her quotation from Aptlahat Akin, the First Turkish Ambassador to Syria).

<sup>28</sup> Criss, p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> Author’s interview of Dr. Ahmed Goreishi, 10 January 2001.

total abandonment of the Middle East. For example, Ataturk's strategy to incorporate a then French-mandated Hatay (Alexandretta) province<sup>30</sup> in northern Syria to Turkey demonstrated that Turkey was interested in the Middle East as far as its national interests allowed. Ataturk sent a strong message to France that he could use force to determine the fate of Hatay in favor of Turkey. That Turkey did not recognize Morocco's independence movement in exchange of French and Spanish support for Turkey in the Turkish-British dispute over Mosul, a then British-mandated oil-rich province in northern Iraq, is another example. Thus, given the priority of the relations with the West, the core of Turkey's Middle East policy was neutrality, non-involvement and prudence, but not total avoidance of the Middle East in this era.

## 2. The Western Dominated Era

In the second phase, from World War II to the 1960s, Turkish foreign policy again carried on its basic principles: "preservation of national integrity, modernization along Western standards, and non-involvement in domestic issues of neighboring countries that could endanger peace and stability."<sup>31</sup> But with one difference: No more could Turkish security stand alone in the face of rising communism. The "without external assistance" position had to be abandoned during and after WWII. During the war, virtually no relation existed between Turkey and the Middle East since Turkey had to turn to the West, namely Great Britain and the US for security reasons.

Turkey's recognition of Israel in 1949 was an outcome of its desire to be with the West despite much domestic and regional criticism.<sup>32</sup> Participating in the Korean War together with the US troops, Turkey was accepted as a new member of the newly established Western security alliance, NATO, against Soviet communism. Later,

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<sup>30</sup> Hatay and Mosul were within the national borders of Turkey's map designed during the Turkish War of Independence.

<sup>31</sup> Heinz Kramer, *A Changing Turkey: The Challenge to Europe and the United States* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000) p. 118.

<sup>32</sup> Bulent Aras, "The Impact of the Palestinian-Israeli Peace Process in the Turkish Foreign Policy," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, 20:2, (Winter 1997), p. 51.

Turkey's foreign policy decisions were aligned mostly with the West, especially with the United States. Turkey's withdrawal of its ambassador from Israel during the Suez Crisis yet informing Tel Aviv that it would remain friendly, its voting against Algerian independence in the UN General Assembly in 1955, and its negative vote again for an Afro-Asian proposal for Algerian self determination are examples of Turkey's Western preference at the expense of Arab alienation.<sup>33</sup>

In the years that followed, Turkey became a member of the pro-Western Baghdad Pact and later the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), further alienating Turkey from the Middle East.<sup>34</sup> Yet, given the fact Turkey shared borders with the Soviet Union, which voiced claims on the Straits and Eastern Anatolia, and the two socialist Arab countries of Syria and Iraq (after the Monarch was toppled with a bloody coup by General Qasim in 1958), during this second phase, Turkey had no option but to adopt pro-Western policies to gain NATO and Western support against possible threats from the Soviet bloc.

### **3. The New Turkish Foreign Policy**

In the 1960s, a shift occurred in Turkish foreign policy from a one-sided, pro-Western stance to a multilateral stance. This shift was due to the US's indifferent approach toward some of Turkey's main security issues.<sup>35</sup> Turkey became more independent in its foreign policy interacting more with regional countries to counter declining US support for Turkey. This third phase is called "The New Turkish Foreign Policy" because of this shift.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Criss, p. 5.

<sup>34</sup> Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Pakistan were the original members of the Baghdad Pact. After the 1958 Qasim coup, Iraq withdrew from the pact and the name of the pact was changed to the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO).

<sup>35</sup> Oral Sander, *Türk Amerikan İlişkileri, 1947-1964* (Turkish-American Relations, 1947-1964), (Ankara: Sevin Publication, 1979) p. 204.

<sup>36</sup> Criss, p. 6.

In the early sixties, with the 1960 military coup, there was no significant change in Turkey's Middle East policy, as revealed in Ankara's reaction to Syria's breakaway from the United Arab Republic. Turkey became the second state after Jordan to recognize the new regime, satisfied to see a rift between the region's two most anti-Western states that could otherwise affect regional balances in favor of the Soviet bloc.<sup>37</sup> Ankara's suspicion regarding the reliability of its Western allies surfaced when the US withdrew its missile systems from Turkey after the Cuban Missile Crisis and when President Johnson sent his famous letter to Ankara in 1964. In his letter, Johnson warned Turkey to halt preparations to intervene in the "communal fighting" on Cyprus, even though Turkey had—and still has—the guarantor right to intervene on behalf of Turkish Cypriots.<sup>38</sup> It appeared to Ankara that the US was ignoring Turkish security and even exposing it to the growing Soviet threat.<sup>39</sup> Thus, carrying on its non-interference, neutrality policies, Ankara sought rapprochement with the Arab states for international support regarding the Cyprus issue and for Arab aid to Turkey's deteriorating economic conditions.

Nevertheless, Turkey's pre-1960 policies proved to be obstacles during this rapprochement. Regarding Cyprus Turkey was left isolated at the UN. Understanding the fallacy of placing too much emphasis on the "faithful ally," Ankara reduced the US influence in Turkish foreign policies and continued with this rapprochement. Ankara refused to allow the use of NATO bases for non-NATO purposes during the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israel Wars, and leaned toward the Arabs. In doing this, Turkey calculated each plus and each minus—the effects of the oil crisis on its economy. In other words, pragmatism, one of the main principles of the Kemalist foreign policy, prevailed.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Omer Kirkoglu, *Turkiye'nin Arap Ortadogu'na Karsi Politikasi* (Turkey's Foreign Policy toward the Arab Middle East), (Ankara: Sevin Publication, 1972), p. 31.

<sup>38</sup> Malik Mufti, "Daring and Caution in Turkish Foreign Policy," *The Middle East Journal*, 52:1, (Winter 1998), p. 41.

<sup>39</sup> Amikam Nachmani, "Turkey and the Middle East," *Security and Policy Studies*, no. 42, (May 1999)(Israel: Begin Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Bar Ilan University), p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Criss, p. 7.

The twin crisis of the late 1970s—the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iranian revolution—brought Turkey closer to NATO and the US, while at the same time it began to enjoy trade relations with the Arab countries as a result of its rapprochement. The second Cold War the Soviet Union initiated impelled Ankara to cooperate with the US on security issues. It was after this increasing Soviet threat that the Grand National Assembly (GNA) permitted the use of the Incirlik Air Base during the 1983 Lebanon crisis.

At the same time, Turkish construction companies launched an investment wave in the Arab Middle East, especially in the Gulf States. Turkish contractors during this period enjoyed extraordinary success in Arab countries, such as Libya and Saudi Arabia, when the domestic market was weak, Turkey was able to obtain \$3.5 billion worth of contracts by January 1981. By the end of 1982, the value of Turkey's contracts in Libya, Saudi Arabia and Iraq totaled \$10 billion.<sup>41</sup> By the end of 1984, the value had risen to \$14.74 billion.<sup>42</sup> By 1983, approximately 150,000 Turkish workers were employed in the Middle East. They had sent some \$500 million in currency earnings in 1981 alone. In addition, Turkey's export to the Middle East doubled between 1979 and 1981.<sup>43</sup>

This economic rise of Turkey coupled with the fundamental economic reforms of the early 1980s rendered more bilateral relations between Turkey and Middle Eastern countries. Turkey gained much more freedom in its relations with the Middle East especially in trade while preserving its attachment to Western security pledges regarding the region through NATO.

The eruption of the First Persian Gulf War (or Iran-Iraq war), which lasted eight years, increased trade between Turkey, Iran, and Iraq. Turkey preserved its neutrality

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<sup>41</sup> Ali L. Karaosmanoglu, "Turkey's Security and the Middle East," *Foreign Policy*, Fall 1983, pp. 165-166.

<sup>42</sup> George E. Gruen, "Turkey's Relations with Israel and Its Arab Neighbors," *Middle East Review*, Spring 1985, p. 42.

<sup>43</sup> Karaosmaoglu, pp. 165-166.

while enjoying economic gains resulting from the war. Iran, which was suffering from an American trade embargo, became Turkey's foremost export market in 1983-84, but at the same time Turkey allowed Iraq to pump oil through the double pipeline over its territory to the Yumurtalik terminal on the Mediterranean. "Racked by war both Iran and Iraq needed Turkey as an overland economic lifeline and transportation link to the West as well as a source of products."<sup>44</sup>

In the late 1980s Turkey's relations with Syria deteriorated because of the simmering conflict about the use of water resources of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, which become more acute as the GAP, with its huge dam on the Euphrates, neared completion. Syria tried to pressure Turkey by supporting the PKK; the implied bargain being that Damascus would cut off its support to the PKK if it received guarantees concerning the water supply. In a protocol of 1987, Turkey guaranteed the passage of at least 500 cubic meters of water per second into Syria provided Syria initiated effective measures against the PKK, which eventually occurred with the relocation of the PKK headquarters from Damascus to the Syrian-controlled Beeka Valley in Lebanon.<sup>45</sup>

After the Iranian war, Saddam Hussein's administration, bitter at what it perceived to be price gouging and Turkey's reluctance to extend credit to Baghdad, sharply curtailed Iraq's purchases from Turkey.<sup>46</sup> As a result, on the eve of the second Gulf War, Turkish exports had decreased to a trickle. In addition, Turkey faced a refugee problem during the 1987-88 period on its borders when Saddam's forces employed chemical weapons in assaults on Kurds, who had helped Iran by rebelling against Saddam during the Iran-Iraq War.

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<sup>44</sup> Graham E. Fuller, *Turkey's New Geopolitics: From the Balkans to Western China* (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1993), p. 59.

<sup>45</sup> Kramer, p. 138.

<sup>46</sup> Henri J. Barkey, "Hemmed in by Circumstances: Turkey and Iraq since the Gulf War," *Middle East Policy*, 7:4 (October 2000), or [www.mepc.org/journal/0010\\_barkey.htm](http://www.mepc.org/journal/0010_barkey.htm), p. 2.

Through a 1985 agreement with Saddam, Turkey was able to make several air raids against the PKK, establishing a new pattern of involvement in northern Iraqi Kurdish affairs that has since continued and increased. Furthermore, Turkey followed a tough line against the Kurdish insurgency in Iraq. Upon the loss of government authority in northern Iraq, a Kurdish threat of cutting Iraq's oil pipeline to the Mediterranean and most importantly the PKK's establishing bases in the area became forefront issues that Turkey had to consider in its relations with Iraq in the late 1980s. Among all these considerations, Saddam complained about Turkey's water regime. This complaint did not result in any action since he was at the time busy recovering from the First Gulf War and preparing for yet another venture.

In the early 1980s, Turkey was highly suspicious about the Iranian Islamic regime. Turkey, Iran, and Israel, of course, had enjoyed close relations as the pro-Western Middle Eastern states. Important to note is that, until the Iranian revolution, there was a regional security cooperation between the three. The *Trident*, a secret trilateral security agreement between the intelligent services of Israel (Mossad), Turkey (MIT), and Iran (SAVAK), provided the base to cope with mutual threats and to maintain the regional power of the US against possible Soviet penetration.<sup>47</sup>

After the Iranian Revolution, Tehran declared Turkey's founder Ataturk as an enemy of Islam. Tehran flirted with Turkey's quasi-Shi'ite Alevi population, lent moral and financial support to Turkey's own Sunni fundamentalist groups, and played the Kurdish card in northern Iraq, which threatened the Iraqi pipeline and thereby Turkish economy.<sup>48</sup> Ankara, on the other hand, felt it was important to treat Iran's revolutionary stance with as much tolerance as possible because of its considerations of Soviet inroad attempts into Iran, which had begun in the early 1980s. Yet, the war with Iraq compelled Iran to exercise more pragmatic tendencies in its relations with Turkey. An outcome of this stance was the 1985 Economic Cooperation Organization between Turkey, Iran, and

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<sup>47</sup> Spyridon Mimikos, *Strategic Implications of Expanded Turkish-Israeli Military Relations*, Master's Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, December 1999, pp. 50-52.

<sup>48</sup> Fuller, p. 65.

Pakistan. However, the demise of the Soviet Union and outbreak of the Second Gulf War doomed this stance bringing new considerations to the decision-making processes of both countries.

#### 4. The Gulf War and Afterward

“As Turkey undergoes the most profound economic, social, and political crisis of the republican period, Ankara also finds itself involved in the affairs of the Middle East with unprecedented intensity.”<sup>49</sup> The demise of the Soviet Empire left the United States as the only major power with leverage in the Middle Eastern developments. The Gulf War in 1991 changed the balance of power among the regional nations eliminating Iraq as a regional power for some time to come. The peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians that began in the aftermath of the Gulf War brought further changes to the political landscape of the Middle East. These developments and Turkey’s involvement in them strongly influenced Ankara’s perception of its national interests in the region. The era that US President Bush called “the new world order” or “the new Middle East” has yet to materialize, yet the changing power structure in the region has significantly altered Turkey’s policy toward the Middle East.

For almost a decade prior to the developments listed above, Prime Minister Turgut Ozal had favored a more active approach to the regional political affairs, using Turkey’s emerging economic potential as a catalyst for forging a new cooperative regional environment.<sup>50</sup> He attempted to gain leverage over relations with the West by trying to be a prominent factor or a regional power in the Middle East. The strengthening of ties with the West was the primary motivation behind Turkey’s participation in the Second Gulf War. Ozal, apprehensive that the demise of the Soviet threat and East-West

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<sup>49</sup> Soli Ozel, “Of Not Being a Lone Wolf: Geography, Domestic Plays, and Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East,” in Geoffry Kemp and Janice Gross Stein (eds.), *Powder Keg in the Middle East: The Struggle for Gulf Security* (Washington: American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1995), p. 164.

<sup>50</sup> Ozel, pp. 167-171; Ziya Onis, “The State and Economic Development in Contemporary Turkey” in Vojtech Mastny & Craig Nation (eds.), *Turkey Between East and West*, (Colorado: Westview Press, 1996), p. 161, Table 7.1 illustrates how Turkey’s emphasis changed from import substitution to export expansion.

rivalries would undermine Turkey's geo-strategic role in the eyes of the West (especially in NATO and EC), saw the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait as an opportunity to demonstrate his country's geo-strategic importance to the West and managed to maneuver Turkey into becoming a central player in the allied coalition.

Turkish participation in the coalition was a way to emphasize Turkey's status as a Western stronghold in the Middle East and even to force Turkish entry into the EC, very much in the way Menderes had secured Turkey's membership in NATO by sending Turkish troops to Korea.<sup>51</sup>

UN Security Council Resolution 661, which prescribed a complete embargo on Iraq, was applied in August 1990 with the closure of Kirkuk-Yumurtalik oil pipeline and with the suspension of all commercial links with Iraq and "occupied Kuwait" on the Turkish side. The participation in the Gulf War, despite much opposition from the public and even from the military leadership, did not change Ozal's stance, and he managed to pass an extended war powers bill on January 17, 1991. In addition, he opened the second front by enabling US fighter aircrafts to fly sorties against Iraq from the Incirlik Air Base and by deploying Turkish troops to the Turkish-Iraqi border.<sup>52</sup>

If the traditional western alliance was the first motive behind Ozal's strategy, Turkey's own security consideration was the second. Iraq's position as a war prone country, as seen in its assault on Iran, the invasion of Kuwait, assaults on its Kurdish population and its fast WMD and Nuclear-Biologic-Chemical (NBC) weapons procurement posed a threat to Turkish national security and interests. It was more desirable to see a democratic Iraq that would have many mutual economic and strategic interests by cooperating with Turkey and the West. Thus, Ozal sacrificed short-term economic benefits (losses from the sanctions) for possible long-term economic and political gains.

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<sup>51</sup> Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London-New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd Publishers, 1994), pp. 317-318.

<sup>52</sup> William Hale, "Turkey, the Middle East, and the Gulf Crisis," *International Affairs*, vol. 68, (October 1992), pp. 679-92, esp. p. 686.

However, what was expected—"a quick war and a decisive allied victory, followed by the replacement of Saddam's regime with a democratic system in Iraq"<sup>53</sup>—did not happen. According to 1995 figures, Turkey's losses amounted to \$30 billion.<sup>54</sup> Turkey received in compensation only \$1 billion in oil from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and \$2 billion in upgrades of its military through Western assistance, especially from the United States.<sup>55</sup>

In addition, Turkey has had to deal with other domestic and international repercussions of the Gulf War—the PKK and the prospect of the establishment of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq.

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<sup>53</sup> Sabri Sayari, "Turkey: The Changing European Security Environment and the Gulf Crisis," *Middle East Journal*, vol. 46, (Winter 1992), pp. 9-21, esp. p. 14.

<sup>54</sup> Kemal Kirisci, "Post Cold-War Turkish Security and the Middle East," *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA) Journal*, issue #2 (July, 1997), p. 3 or [www.cc.columbia.edu/sec/dlc/ciao/olj/meria/meria797\\_kirisci.html](http://www.cc.columbia.edu/sec/dlc/ciao/olj/meria/meria797_kirisci.html), (information from interview with Serif Egeli, Chairman of the Turkish-Jordanian and Turkish-Pakistan Business Councils and former Chairman of Foreign Trade Association of Turkey, 11 October 1996).

<sup>55</sup> Lenore Martin, "Turkey's National Security in the Middle East," *Turkish Studies*, 1:1, (Spring 2000), p. 93.

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### III. TURKEY AND IRAQ

Of the three Middle Eastern neighbors, it is Iraq with which Ankara has the best potential for balanced relations. Iraq is dependent on Turkey for access to Europe, the trade relationship, the common desire to subdue Kurdish ethnic consciousness, and even the similarity in regime types as far as the approach to religion is concerned.<sup>56</sup>

Turkey's geostrategic and economic interests point to a gradual, if reluctant, normalization of relations with Iraq, even while Saddam is in power. Were he to be replaced, this process would be speeded up.<sup>57</sup>

Although much may have changed on the ground since these assessments were made, the fact remains that these statements are still correct.

There are few countries where the Gulf War and its aftermath have left greater policy dilemmas than Turkey. Before the war, relations between Turkey and Iraq, while not warm, were pragmatic and cooperative on most issues of concern to both countries, despite their highly different regimes and foreign policy orientations. Economic ties were strong, based on shipments of oil through a pipeline from northern Iraq to Turkey's Yumurtalik Port on the Mediterranean shore, expanded to carry out more oil in the 1980s. Oil provided Turkey with rental revenue of \$1.2 billion a year.<sup>58</sup> For Iraq this oil pipeline provided an outlet to the Mediterranean that allowed Iraq to bypass Syria, whose frequent disruptions of the Iraqi pipeline through its territory had finally caused Iraq to seek a replacement. During the Iran-Iraq War inexpensive Turkish goods appeared increasingly attractive as the war drained both Iran's and Iraq's precious foreign exchange resources. By 1985, Turkish exports to Iraq had reached \$961 million or 12 percent of all Turkish exports.<sup>59</sup> Water problems, based on Turkey's progressive construction of the

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<sup>56</sup> Philip Robins, *Turkey and the Middle East* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1991), p. 58.

<sup>57</sup> Phebe Marr, "Turkey and Iraq," in *Reluctant Neighbor: Turkey's Role in the Middle East*, ed. Henri J. Barkey (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1996), p. 67.

<sup>58</sup> The Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU), *Iraq, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter, 1994*. (London: EIU, 1994), p. 12.

<sup>59</sup> Henri J. Barkey, "The Silent Victor: Turkey's Role in the Iran-Iraq War," in *The Iran-Iraq War: Strategic and Political Implications*, ed. Efraim Karsh (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 133-153.

Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP) have been serious but not sufficient to disrupt relations. Besides, most of the blame for the diminution of the water flow into the Euphrates in these periodic crises has been accorded to Syria, with whom Iraq had extremely discordant relations. On the key issue of importance to both countries—the Kurds—there was positive cooperation particularly during the Iran-Iraq war, when the Turkish government was allowed to help police the frontier by carrying out its hot pursuit of the PKK across the Iraqi borders. And while Turkey maintained diplomatic relations with both Iran and Iraq during the war, even providing Iran with a commercial outlet to the West, Turkey saw Iraq's Pyrrhic victory in its interests, like the US, that is, in containing the spread of Iran's revolutionary impulse.

Turkey had high expectations from the end of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988. The devastation on combatants meant that massive reconstruction projects would be up for bids, and Turkish construction companies, which after 1980 had proven themselves in Middle Eastern markets, had the likelihood of winning many. This was not to be, Saddam Hussein, feeling the pinch of his extravagant wartime spending, decided to compensate for his losses with another misadventure, invading Kuwait.

Although early signs of tension between the two countries appeared during the first months of 1990,<sup>60</sup> the relationship was dramatically changed by Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 and subsequently by Turkey's support of the Gulf War coalition. For the first time an Arab country was bombed from Turkish soil.<sup>61</sup> The Kurdish rebellion and subsequent flood of Kurdish refugees on the Turkish border, the successful coalition resettlement effort, and Operation Provide Comfort, the groundbreaking experiment in protecting the nascent local Kurdish regime in northern Iraq, all served to heightened the tension. The UN sanctions, particularly the closure of the Kerkuk-Yumurtalik oil pipeline in August 1990, ruptured the already declining

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<sup>60</sup> Saddam Hussein, recovering from the war with Iran, became more assertive about "water," wanted Ankara to write off Iraq's debt to Turkey and later suddenly reduced the trade with Turkey to a trickle. Barkey, "Hemmed in by Circumstances: Turkey and Iraq Since the Gulf War," p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> Kramer, *A Changing Turkey*, p. 119.

economic cooperation between Turkey and Iraq. Diplomatic relations with Baghdad were broken, although they have been revived first partially by the return of a Turkish charge de affairs who held ambassadorial rank and finally, in early 2001, fully revived by raising Turkish representation in Baghdad to ambassadorial level.

Turkey's relations with Iraq and its policies toward the developments in northern Iraq occupies much of its Middle Eastern politics. For decision makers in Ankara dealing with the conjunction of numerous developments in northern Iraq, the Western approach to that area, and the present Iraqi regime's stance toward Turkish northern Iraq policies is a complex and prime policy to formulate. Developments in or about northern Iraq affect Ankara's relations with all its Middle Eastern neighbors as well as with the West. Hence, the Turkish foreign policy toward northern Iraq must be and has been a very cautious balance between its commitment to the Western circle and to its own national interests based on its geographic location.

Having assessed the Turkish-Iraqi relations before the Gulf War, we can now explore the factors that determine Turkish foreign policy toward Iraq in the post-Gulf War era. The main argument will be that Turkey's national interests in its relations with the West and with Iraq, and its domestic considerations with northern Iraq impels Ankara to follow a pragmatic and balanced policy toward all players of the game, not taking sides in the post-Gulf War conflict without the following legitimate bases:

- United Nations Security Council Resolutions [UNSC] in its support of US and UK operations against Iraq;
- Economic and domestic considerations in normalizing relations with Baghdad;
- Domestic security considerations in Turkey's military incursions to northern Iraq and in Turkey's close contact with the northern Iraqi Kurdish leaders.

In analyzing the factors that have shaped Turkish policy toward Iraq in the post-Gulf War era, the following sections of this chapter will focus on four points:

- The misperceptions on Turkey's post-Gulf War Iraqi policy,

- Turkish concerns about and benefits from the US policy toward northern Iraq and Baghdad, and
- Turkey's policy toward northern Iraqi Kurds and Turkish military incursions into northern Iraq.
- Ankara's insistence on normalizing relations with Baghdad.

The first section will address the misperceptions about post-Gulf War Turkish policy toward Iraq. Here, the contention will be that, contrary to popular belief, the principles of "the new Turkish foreign policy"—dating from the mid-1960s—continued in the post-Gulf War Turkey-Iraq and Turkey-US relations.

Turkish concerns and benefits with the US policy toward northern Iraq and Baghdad will be discussed in the second section. The argument of this section will be that careful calculation of the dynamics in northern Iraqi politics impels Ankara to extend the mandate of "the Poised Hammer" <sup>62</sup> forces of the US and the UK in Adana. Ankara has extended the mandate despite the Turkish concerns of the US's northern Iraq policy that could result in the establishment of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq. Ankara's decision implies that Turkey's benefits from the US northern Iraq policy outweighs the risks taken by approving the policy.

The third section will analyze Turkey's policy toward the Northern Iraqi Kurds and Turkish military incursions in northern Iraq. That Turkey binds northern Iraqi Kurdish leaders to adopt policies in compliance with Turkish national interests in the region will be the initial concept to be addressed in this section. Turkey does so by having two important leverages: a) the area's dependence on Turkey as the only trade route after Saddam Hussein imposed a de facto embargo on the Kurdish area from the south and b) the presence of the Poised Hammer that was established to protect northern Iraqi Kurds. Regarding the Turkish military incursions in northern Iraq, I contend that the authority vacuum in northern Iraq and the rivalry between the two northern Iraqi Kurdish

leaders forced Turkey to depend increasingly on its own forces to terminate the PKK existence in northern Iraq.

Finally, the last section argues that Turkey's adherence to preserving Iraq's national and territorial integrity and its major economic considerations have been significant elements in shaping Ankara's desire to establish normal relations with Baghdad, no matter what its regime may be.

#### A. MISPERCEPTIONS

Many suggested that Turkey's exclusive cooperation with the West against Iraq during the Kuwait crisis, a policy pursued under the "single-handed" leadership of the Turkish President Turgut Ozal and representing a fundamental alteration of Turkey's traditional "balanced" regional policy, continued after the crisis.<sup>63</sup> Almost all arguments stressed that with the decision of July 1991 to allow the deployment of a Western multinational force on Turkish territory (Operation Provide Comfort or OPC), which also included a small Turkish unit, Turkey became an instrument of US foreign policy in the Persian Gulf and was interfering in the internal affairs of a neighbor.<sup>64</sup> Washington, these critics believed, secretly desired the establishment of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq through which it hoped to strengthen its ability to direct and to control all the developments in the volatile oil region of the Persian Gulf. The "Poised Hammer" was intended, Turkish critics argued, as a means of achieving this objective. By providing such a force with a base to operate in Turkey not only would foreign countries be able to

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<sup>62</sup> "Poised Hammer" is used by Turkish media, academia, and politics to refer to "Operation Provide Comfort" (OPC) before 1996 and "Operation Northern Watch" (ONW) replacing the former in 1996.

<sup>63</sup> Prof. Fahir Armaoglu in Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Western European Series (FBIS), 8 July 1991, p. 40.

<sup>64</sup> Mahmut Bali Aykan, "Turkey's Policy in Northern Iraq, 1991-95," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 32:4 (London, October 1996), p. 344.

monopolize Turkey's long-term relations with Iraq and other Arab countries but they would also inspire hope in the separatist elements in Turkey.<sup>65</sup>

Certain foreign observers of Turkey's foreign policy, on the other hand, seemed essentially opposed to this argument. These foreign observers claimed to have detected in Turkey's regional policy "the beginnings of a change" in Turkey's behavior—hitherto represented by close cooperation with the West—on its southern and eastern borders.<sup>66</sup> According to supporters of this view, this change in Turkey's regional behavior became distinctive when it began holding meetings with Syria and Iran in November 1992 in order to convey its irritation with the West over the perceived possibility of Iraq's territorial integrity and political unity being damaged by the UN economic embargo against that country.

Contrary to popular belief, Turkish foreign policy during the Kuwait crisis was not, in fact, a deviation from Turkey's traditional foreign policy of maintaining a balance between the requirements of Turkey's membership in the Western alliance and those requirements of preserving friendly relations with its neighbors. First of all, though Turkish-Iraqi relations had been notable for cooperation and political propriety before the Kuwait crisis, by the late 1980s the two countries were moving toward a collision.<sup>67</sup>

From an Iraqi viewpoint, Turkey represented a dangerous dependency regarding oil and water. About 96 percent of Iraq's income was from oil exports and when the Gulf route was closed to oil tankers during the Iran-Iraq War, almost 100 percent of Iraq's oil—80 million tons annually—was exported through the pipeline that reaches Turkey's Mediterranean port of Yumurtalik (thus reducing transportation time from forty-five days

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<sup>65</sup> Sabri Sayari, "Turkey: The Changing European Security Environment and the Gulf Crisis," *Middle East Journal*, 46:1 (Winter 1992), pp. 13, 16-7; Prof. Fahir Armaoglu in Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), Western Europe Series, 8 July 1991, p. 40; Prof. Haluk Ulman in FBIS, 16 April 1991, p. 43.

<sup>66</sup> Aykan, "Turkey's Policy in Northern Iraq, 1991-95," p. 345.

<sup>67</sup> Amikam Nachmani, "Turkey in the Wake of the Gulf War: Recent History and Its Implications," abridged version, with permission from *Journal of Modern Hellenism*, Vol. 15 (1999), (Israel: Bar Ilan University, BESA publications, 1999), p. 2. Available [Online]: <http://www.biu.ac.il/SOC/besa/publications/pub42.html>.

to two). This dependency explains, for instance, Iraqi silence in the face of Turkey's damming of the Euphrates, which, although begun in the early 1980s, only drew Baghdad's protests in 1988, when its war with Iran was at an end. Furthermore, Turkey was a principal import gateway (almost the only one in emergencies) through which Iraq shipped in 75 percent of its foodstuffs.<sup>68</sup> Thus, at the root of this re-emerging uneasiness seemed to be a feeling in Iraq that during the war it had become over-reliant upon Turkey and now wished to reassert its independence.

During the war with Iran (1980-1988), Iraq permitted the Turkish army to operate against the PKK in northern Iraq. However, after the war, Baghdad felt free to deal with the Kurdish rebellion, and its treatment was harsh, notably the Halabjah incident, in September 1988, in which chemical weapons were employed. As a result, Turkey had to accommodate 50-60,000 Kurdish refugees along its southeastern borders. More important, Saddam Hussein provided enclaves for the PKK to pressure Ankara on the issues of water sharing and debt canceling during the period from 1988 to 1990.<sup>69</sup> Hence, Hussein's Kurdish policy was also a contributing element to the collision course.

Iraq's debt to Turkey was yet a further cause for conflict, albeit insufficient in itself to draw the two states into confrontation. But when compounded with other elements, this debt helped further exacerbate bilateral relations. Iraq owed Turkey \$2.5 billion, of which it had repaid only \$600 million by August 1990, when it ceased payments. Baghdad made the resumption of payment contingent upon the resolution of the conflict between Turkey, Iraq, and Syria over the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Ismail Soysal, "Seventy Years of Turkish-Arab Relations and an Analysis of Turkish-Iraqi Relations (1920-1990)," *Studies on Turkish-Arab Relations. Special Issue on Turkey and the Gulf Crisis*, Annual 6 (Istanbul: Foundation for the Study of Turkish-Arab Relations [TAIV], 1991), p. 70; Philip Robins, *Turkey and the Middle East*, pp. 110-111.

<sup>69</sup> Marr, p. 68.

<sup>70</sup> Nachmani, "Turkey in the Wake of the Gulf War," p. 4.

Furthermore, there was growing unease in Turkey at the qualitative improvements in Iraqi weapons. Turkey, along with all of Iraq's neighbors, had increasingly become alarmed at the stockpiling, use (chemical weapons against Iran and Kurds), and the increasing threat of use of non-conventional weapons by Iraq. The development of longer-range missiles in Iraq raised the prospect that it might be able to hit targets in Turkey with non-conventional payloads. The development of such weapons on its borders sharpened Turkey's perception of the Iraqi threat.

Turkey responded to the events enumerated here, and to the profusion of Iraqi-Turkish conflicts, actual and potential, by increasing its defense budget. In 1989, the allotment stood at \$1.7 billion. In 1990, even before the Gulf crisis erupted, the budget was doubled to \$3.4 billion, rising in 1991 to \$4.8 billion, or 12.5 percent of the overall national budget. The figures show that Turkey was continually strengthening its military in preparation for a possible showdown with Baghdad. (Compare this to the fact that the estimated defense budget for 1995 was only \$3.9 billion. Iraq's defeat in the 1991 Gulf war was the reason for this Turkish defense budget reduction.)<sup>71</sup>

Thus, Iraq's pre-Gulf War posture as an aggressive regional player with hegemonic aspirations had already started to occupy the agenda of Turkish national security planners. Saddam Hussein's belligerent attitude against the visiting Turkish Prime Minister, Yildirim Akbulut, only three months before invading Kuwait, saying, "NATO is disintegrating. Your friend, the US is losing power... Nobody listens to the US anymore. She cannot help you"<sup>72</sup> epitomized the collision course of the relationship between Turkey and Iraq given Turkey's insistence on staying within the Western camp. Therefore, Ankara's decision to be in the anti-Saddam camp in the Kuwait crisis, to some extent, was an unsurprising consequence of Turkey's pre-Gulf War concerns about the threat Saddam's regime posed.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>72</sup> Kemal Kirisci, "Post Cold-War Turkish Security and the Middle East," *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA) Journal*, issue #2 (July, 1997), p. 3.

Additional evidence that Turkey was not drifting from its traditional policy was clear when Iraq's occupation of Kuwait threatened a specific regional common interest, that is, protecting the regional status quo. This was why all the Western and other states had the political will to coordinate their policies within the framework of the United Nations. Turkey, too, did not wish to see a regional Arab superpower, especially along its borders, which would "call the shots" in regional politics, especially in the disputes between Turkey and Arab countries. Thus, during the Kuwait crisis Turkey did not cooperate only with the West, but actually cooperated with a United Nations alliance of which the West, particularly the United States, given its capability and readiness to head the anti-Iraq international coalition, acted as the jointly accepted leader. Turkey's traditional Persian Gulf Security policy had not excluded such a regional role for Turkey under the international circumstances described above; on the contrary, it had foreseen one.<sup>73</sup>

A third factor demonstrated that Turkey's traditional foreign policy was firm: the following four points, all historical evidence, belied the allegation that Turkey has been an instrument of US foreign policy in the aftermath of the Gulf War:

- In the first place, the wartime consensus between Turkey and the United States over the policies to be pursued toward a Saddam Hussein-led Iraq collapsed with the liberation of Kuwait.<sup>74</sup> President Ozal had calculated that the allied onslaught on Iraq would dislodge Hussein's regime. Therefore, it was paramount for Turkey to be at the "post-war settlement table" and not just as a spectator.<sup>75</sup> Yet, there was not to be a "post-war settlement table." President Bush's unwillingness to extend the conflict and challenge Iraqi helicopters raining death on Kurdish and Shia rebels ended any hope that Saddam Hussein would be

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<sup>73</sup>Aykan, "Turkey's Policy in Northern Iraq, 1991-95," p. 346.

<sup>74</sup>Turan Yavuz, *ABD'nin Kurt Karti (Kurdish Card of the US)*, (Istanbul: Milliyet Yayinlari, 1993), pp. 17-19, 133, 171-172.

<sup>75</sup>Necip Torumtay, *Orgeneral Torumtay'in Anilari (Memoirs of General Torumtay)* (Istanbul: Milliyet Yayinlari, 1993), pp. 115-116.

quickly overthrown. President Bush was reluctant to make such an attempt, not because he did not want to see Saddam Hussein overthrown but because he believed that repercussions of such a move—dismemberment of Iraq “after” the overthrow of Hussein—might be devastating for the region whose stability is significant for the global economy. In contrast to the US’s alleged enthusiasm for keeping the US presence in Iraq so that an independent Kurdish state could be established under its control, the Bush Administration had already decided in favor of a quick US withdrawal from Iraq even before the outbreak of armed hostilities between Iraq and the international coalition forces. In accordance with this decision, the US pursued a policy of non-involvement in the ensuing fighting between Saddam Hussein and his domestic Kurdish opponents after the liberation of Kuwait. This lasted until the outbreak of the Kurdish refugee crisis in March-April 1991. Bush was then persuaded to attempt a policy reversal owing to the insistent arguments of the Turks, British and French in favor of establishing “safe havens” for the Kurds in northern Iraq, under UN military protection, if necessary, to repel Saddam Hussein's army.

- Second, it appears evident that President Ozal's efforts to call upon the help of the US in setting up “safe havens” in northern Iraq had nothing to do with his personal relationship with President Bush but with the following aspects of the severe Kurdish refugee crisis, which was harming the Turkish state. By 8 April 1991, there were reports that 250,000 Iraqi Kurdish refugees had already crossed into Turkey. The Turks were spending \$1.5 million a day for these people without receiving sufficient help from the West. Not only was the outflow straining Turkey’s resources, but these refugees were Kurds, whose presence in the primarily Kurdish-inhabited southeastern provinces threatened to further polarize the situation there. Turkey's domestic, economic, and social order was being upset by the presence of these refugees. Turkish statesmen, and particularly the military, were irritated by the fact that among these refugees unknown numbers of terrorists belonging to the PKK had been able to cross into Turkey without difficulty.

- Finally, the allied forces moving in the wake of the refugee crisis were stationed only along the Turkish-Iraqi border. In most of Iraqi Kurdish populated areas (Sulleymaniyah, Kerkuk, Irbil) there was no allied presence. By the time the allied forces began withdrawing from northern Iraq on 12 July 1991, they had successfully moved tens of thousands of refugees from mountain camps along the Turkish-Iraqi border, thereby satisfying urgent Turkish needs: removal of the fears of the creation of a permanent, Gaza-type refugee implantation, of the linkage of the two Kurdish communities, and of the economic burden of caring for so many people.<sup>76</sup> This fact suggests that the allied forces, despite their alleged intentions of keeping the region under their control, were determined to keep their involvement in northern Iraq quite limited. It also appears to confirm the view that the coalition forces had arrived in the region primarily for the sake of Turkey, not for the Kurds.”<sup>77</sup>

Fourth, though it is true that President Ozal's certain novel methods with respect to northern Iraq reflected important deviations from Turkey's traditional ways, the final aims envisioned were traditional. In March 1991, for example, Jalal Talabani and a representative of Masud Barzani, the leaders of the rebellious Kurdish groups fighting against the Saddam Hussein regime in northern Iraq, were invited to visit Ankara secretly, signaling a change in Turkey's previous policy of not contacting the Kurds of northern Iraq. This policy was not considered to be in accordance with the principle of non-interference governing Turkey's relations with her neighbors. Ozal's personal initiative to amend the Turkish law that severely restricting the use of the Kurdish language, part and parcel of his plans to grant ethnic, cultural and social rights to Turkey's Kurdish citizens, was also untraditional. These initiatives of Ozal produced much domestic controversy in Turkey.

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<sup>76</sup> Baskin Oran, *Kalkik Horoz: Cekic Guc ve Kurt Devleti (Poised Hammer and Kurdish State)* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1996), pp. 50-53.

<sup>77</sup> Barkey, "Hemmed in by Circumstances: Turkey and Iraq Since the Gulf War," p. 4.

However, the ultimate objectives to be achieved through these novel methods were all traditional: contributing to stability in the region, preventing the establishment of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq and promoting Turkey's political unity. The invitations extended to the Iraqi Kurdish leaders to visit Ankara appears to have been motivated by the following considerations:<sup>78</sup>

- To obtain first-hand information about the developments in northern Iraq;
- To exert some influence over the developments there by inducing the Kurds not to attempt to establish an independent Kurdish state;
- To isolate the PKK among other Kurdish groups with the aim of neutralizing its operations from its bases in northern Iraq.

As for the amendment of the Turkish law circumscribing the Kurdish language in January 1991, only days before the outbreak of the Gulf War, this move, although limited, was expected to save Turkey not only a striking contradiction between its foreign policy (protectorship of the northern Iraqi Kurds) and its domestic policy, but also to strengthen Turkey's internal unity, as well as improving Turkey's image in the eyes of the Western states, which were critical of Turkey's human rights record.<sup>79</sup>

Insistence on the overthrow of Saddam Hussein abandoned, Ankara has perpetuated the policies of military cooperation with Western states and of contact with the northern Iraqi Kurdish leaders to maintain stability in northern Iraq up to the present.

## **B. TURKEY'S CONCERNS ABOUT AND BENEFITS FROM THE US POLICY TOWARD IRAQ**

ONW is a sword that cuts both ways. On the one hand, it undermines the Turkish position in Iraq and encourages Kurdish aspirations for autonomy. On the other hand, it is the one card Ankara possesses that binds Washington to its priorities and needs because ONW

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<sup>78</sup> Aykan, "Turkey's Policy in Northern Iraq, 1991-95," pp. 347-348.

<sup>79</sup> Aykan, "Turkey's Policy in Northern Iraq, 1991-95," p. 347.

(with its southern equivalent) has come to represent the primary leg on which US Iraq policy is based.<sup>80</sup>

One of the most important factors affecting future Turkish-Iraqi relations is Turkey's ties to the United States. The Kurdish question aside, the United States and Turkey share a basic approach to Iraq. They both adhere to the principle of Iraq's territorial unity and fear, perhaps for different reasons, the consequences of the instability that would ensue if Iraq were to break up. Also, they see in Saddam a potential regional hegemon likely to disrupt the established order with the zeal to acquire large quantities of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). Moreover, for both, a humbled and somehow weakened Iraq serves as a balance to Iranian regional aspirations.

#### **1. Concerns:**

But with Ozal's demise, differences between American and Turkish interests became more pronounced. Ankara's unease with the OPC (ONW), with the economic sanctions on Iraq, and with Washington's different approach to northern Iraqi Kurds and to the Iraqi anti-Saddam opposition grew with time.

Neither the Turkish decision favoring the deployment of the force in question (Operation Provide Comfort [OPC] II, later Operation Northern Watch [ONW]) nor the subsequent extensions of the mandate of this force at six month intervals have been easy decisions for Ankara to make. Utmost caution has been shown by the Turkish government to keep the mission and activity of this force in accordance with the principles of Turkey's traditional foreign policy.

One of the reasons for the Turks' uneasiness about the Poised Hammer force had ultimately to do with the collapse of the international consensus over the policies to be pursued toward Iraq in the aftermath of the Gulf War. From the beginning of the deployment of the Poised Hammer both the Turkish Foreign Ministry and the Chief of the General Staff's Office have been concerned about the possibility that the Western states—particularly the United States—could be tempted to use this force to intervene in

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<sup>80</sup> Barkey, "Hemmed in by Circumstances: Turkey and Iraq Since the Gulf War," p. 2.

any other crisis in the Middle East, whether or not it involved Iraq.<sup>81</sup> This concern reflects Turkey's reluctance to appear to be siding with the West in the region in violation of its traditional foreign policy. The possibility of creating such an appearance was real enough when one considers the general reluctance in the UNSC to approve UN intervention in Iraq during the Iraqi refugee crisis of March-April 1991.

UNSCR 688 of 5 April 1991 envisaged relief action for the Kurdish refugees and the dispatch of a UN fact-finding mission to the affected area. It fell short of military intervention to deter Saddam Hussein. Now, however, with that mission successfully completed, despite its limited, disputable, but necessary military intervention tolerated by international community, the existence of the Poised Hammer force on Turkish soil still continues. UNSC members particularly worry that given the enthusiasm of the United States to see Saddam Hussein removed from power, the force will remain in the region indefinitely until Hussein is overthrown through a domestic revolt, or even, worse still, that it will be used by the United States to strike at Iraq in order to bring about that desired result.

Turkey cannot help sharing the same concerns. The openly declared goal of Poised Hammer was not to topple Saddam Hussein, or to interfere in Iraq's internal affairs. Rather, the allies were technically only seeking to ensure Iraqi compliance with UN resolutions, acting in line with the authority granted by UNSCR 688. It was hoped that Iraq would reach an agreement with Kurds on autonomy as stipulated by the Iraqi constitution.<sup>82</sup> The Turks expected that this force would guarantee the continued security of the activities undertaken by the UN affiliated bodies in order to provide for the humanitarian needs of the regional population, while at the same time, protecting Iraq's territorial integrity.

However, Ankara became very suspicious of the West's overall intentions concerning both post-Gulf War order in Iraq, the region and the world situation in

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<sup>81</sup> FBIS, 14 November 1991, p. 43.

<sup>82</sup> Aykan, "Turkey's Policy in Northern Iraq, 1991-95," p. 349.

general. It was clear that Iraq had been violating the UN Resolutions on various fronts since the cease-fire of March 1991. What appeared uncertain, however, were the viability and the international legitimacy of the ways in which the allied powers, led by the United States, preferred to cope with these Iraqi challenges. The allied powers responded to Iraqi violations by using force against that country in the forms of air strikes and other military actions and by establishing an air exclusion zone in southern Iraq, south of the 32nd parallel. Rather than being a part of a long-term strategy developed by the UNSC, these Western responses came case-by-case after the challenges occurred.<sup>83</sup>

- Establishing a “southern no-fly zone” (August 1992-present)
- Responding to inspection and no-fly zone standoffs (December 1992-January 1993)
- Deterring an invasion of Kuwait (1994)
- Punishing the Iraqi thrust into northern Iraq when Barzani invited Iraqi troops against Talabani-Iranian military coalition in northern Iraq (1996)
- Halting the defiance of UNSCOM (1997-1998)
- Forcing compliance with UNSCOM (Operation Desert Fox, December 1998)

Furthermore, these responses came “in the absence of specific authorizations by the UNSC.”<sup>84</sup> Apart from increasingly revealing the breakdown of the international consensus in the United Nations, the way the Western allies dealt with the challenges of Iraq also seemed to legitimize those challenges. Hussein will continue challenging the West to increase the support for his regime at home and abroad as long as the US and the

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<sup>83</sup> Daniel Byman and Matthew Waxman, *Confronting Iraq: US Policy and the Use of Force Since the Gulf War*, “Chapter Five: Attempts to Coerce Iraq: Historical Accord” (Santa Monica: Rand Publications, 2000), pp. 37-77. Available [Online]: <http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1146/>

<sup>84</sup> Aykan, “Turkey’s Policy in Northern Iraq, 1991-95,” p. 350.

UK continue their militarized actions. Thus, it was not surprising to see Turkish Prime Minister Ecevit, as the premier of a Western country, which, unlike the US and UK, has to live with the neighbor Iraq, accusing Washington of having no policy except growing militarization toward Baghdad.<sup>85</sup> The ensuing deepening rift between Washington and Baghdad since Operation Desert Fox in 1998, which ended the UN arms inspection program in Iraq, has not been all to the pleasure of Turkey's political leadership, which feared negative repercussions in Turkish-Iraqi relations.

The international community criticized the US and the UK actions on the grounds that they were disproportionate, causing casualties and destruction, and escalating the tension in the region. A double standard in the enforcing UNSC resolutions the case of Israel and the case of Iraq—has questioned the legitimacy of US-led Western actions in the region in the eyes of Muslim populated regional states. Turkish leaders felt that the UN injustice in these cases increased regional instability, thus posing a threat to Turkey's national security. They were also aware that it strengthened the hands of the Islamic radicals, both in Turkey and in the Islamic world at large, who were maintaining that having gained victory against communism the US was now interested in destroying Islamic unity. These radicals portrayed the US attitude toward Iraq as part of such an overall Western policy.

Another reason for the Turkish uneasiness in consenting to the deployment of the Poised Hammer force in Turkey and later in extending its mandate was the Turks' concern over the possibility that it might be impossible for Turkey to exercise full control over the activities of this force and over Western policies in general. Parliamentary debates on the renewal of OPC accordingly became more contentious. OPC was accused of all kinds of mischief, from dropping ammunition for the PKK to stopping and picking up wounded PKK fighters. The underlying concern was the particular sensitivity of the

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<sup>85</sup> *Turkish Daily News*, 31 January 1999.

Turkish Armed Forces about the possibility that the force might, even unintentionally, extend help to the Kurdish separatists and that supplies might accidentally reach them.<sup>86</sup>

Former President Evren crystallized this concern when he suggested that “a force that is protecting the Kurds of northern Iraq today, one day can turn around and say that it is protecting those in the southeast.”<sup>87</sup> It is precisely this fear that terrified the Turkish establishment even though it knew fully well that the United States had no such intention. In fact, while supporting the right to have a life free of Saddam Hussein's repression, Washington provided complete support—certainly at the rhetorical level—for Ankara's struggle against the PKK.

Turkish leaders however, did not leave any room for suspicion and took some initiatives to control the facilities of the force and to balance US northern Iraqi policy in general. The aims were, first, not to upset Turkey's good neighborly relations with Iraq, second, to remove any possibility that the force intentionally or unintentionally would help the PKK, and third to prevent the establishment of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq.

Limitations were imposed on the activities of the force since 1991 when the Turkish Foreign Ministry announced that: “The force may not use Turkish territory and airspace against Iraq without the Turkish government's permission.”<sup>88</sup> In the same vein, the Turkish Armed Forces demanded that Turkish officers supervise coalition forces' helicopter, cargo, and AWACS flights from the Incirlik Air Base and that the Poised Hammer Force and Turkish officers should jointly assess the films and photographs taken by the reconnaissance aircrafts.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> FBIS, 6 December 1991, p. 43.

<sup>87</sup> Quoted in Oran, p. 115

<sup>88</sup> FBIS, 24 July 1991, p. 39.

<sup>89</sup> *Milliyet*, 18 December 1995. The authors' own experience as a Turkish liaison officer to control helicopter and cargo flights from Incirlik between July 1998 and January 1999.

A means the Ankara government resorted to in order to counter the US northern Iraqi policy was to hold regular tripartite meetings with Syria and Iran beginning in November 1992 to discuss the situation in Iraq. Ankara declared that these meetings did not target Western policies, rather it expected to bring some balance to Turkey's relations with the US and Europe.<sup>90</sup> The endeavor came to an end after five meetings in February 1994 because of growing differences among the three countries,<sup>91</sup> yet the communiqués of these meetings stressed that Iraq's territorial integrity must ultimately be preserved and its political unity be secured ultimately for the sake of regional peace and stability. Also, that the communiqués did not provide a specific remedy to the existing situation in northern Iraq implied the three states advocated normalizing relations with the Saddam Hussein regime.<sup>92</sup>

Still another balancing means Ankara resorted to was gradually developing diplomatic contact with Iraq in an effort to normalize relations between the two countries. Turkey acted quickly to upgrade diplomatic representation in Baghdad immediately after the cessation of armed conflicts. In 1991, Ankara occasionally sent a diplomat to Baghdad to gain first-hand information concerning the developments there. In March 1993, Turkey's embassy resumed its functions in Baghdad under the direction of a charge d' affairs. With this move, Turkey became the first NATO country to restore diplomatic relations with Iraq.<sup>93</sup> In late 1998, when the "Washington Agreement," was signed by the Kurdish leaders under the sponsorship of the US (which did not inform or invite Turkey), Ankara announced that relations with Baghdad would be upgraded to the ambassadorial level. In late 2000, Ankara reiterated this policy when the (so-called) Armenian genocide bill was introduced in the US Congress, sending its ambassador to Baghdad in early

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<sup>90</sup> Statement by Ozdem Sanberk, Undersecretary of the Turkish Foreign Affairs Ministry, FBIS, 20 November 1992, p. 42.

<sup>91</sup> Kramer, *Changing Turkey*, p. 121.

<sup>92</sup> Aykan, "Turkey's Policy in Northern Iraq, 1991-95," p. 355.

<sup>93</sup> Aykan, "Turkey's Policy in Northern Iraq, 1991-95," p. 356.

2001.<sup>94</sup> Moderation, however has always accompanied Ankara's stance: Turkey informed Iraqis that this process would be contingent on their making greater efforts to comply with the UN decisions.<sup>95</sup> This Turkish posture revealed the fact that Turkey wanted to base its relations both with Washington and Baghdad on legitimate grounds—indisputable economic losses and security threats, and the UN resolutions it strictly observes—so that it can both criticize and cooperate with Iraq and the US when necessary.

Turkey's current dilemma is that while it is participating in the UN embargo against Iraq, in order to cooperate with US and UN policies, it is actually working against its own interests.<sup>96</sup>

US insistence on sustaining economic sanctions on Iraq, in order to curb Saddam Hussein from acquiring sources to redevelop its WMD facilities, has been against the interests of all of Iraq's trade partners, especially Turkey. Turkey has been hard hit by the embargo. Iraq was not only a major trading partner, but also a conduit for getting Turkish agricultural products into the Middle East. Turkey's loss from the economic sanctions by the year 2001 is estimated at \$35-40 billion.<sup>97</sup> The figure culminates each year as the sanctions imposed by the UN continue to be enforced under US and UK military supervision. Turkey's economic and political efforts to raise the prosperity of its Southeast Anatolia region so that it can integrate its Kurdish citizens into the rest of the society have been hampered by the continuing sanctions, which so far have restricted border trade, an important source of income for the inhabitants of the region, and the oil flow through the Kirkuk-Yumurtalik oil pipeline.

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<sup>94</sup> "Turkey Names Ambassador to Iraq," *Shia News.com*, 5 January 2001.

<sup>95</sup> FBIS, 17 March 1993, p. 58.

<sup>96</sup> Mahmut B. Aykan, "Turkish Perspectives on Turkish-US Relations Concerning Persian Gulf Security in the Post-Cold War Era: 1989-1995," *Middle East Journal*, vol. 50 (Summer 1996), p. 353.

<sup>97</sup> Douglas Frantz, "At Iraq's Backdoor, Turkey Flouts Sanctions," *New York Times*, 30 March 2001.

Before Turkey's participation in the Gulf War, the US had promised President Ozal that Turkey would receive substantial economic aid and extensive military equipment, while enjoying greater access to the US market for textile products in exchange for fulfilling the requirements of the economic sanctions: shutting down the Kirkuk-Yumurtalik pipeline and closing the border gate. This promise was partially fulfilled.<sup>98</sup> Turkey has received some compensation from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, which each supplied \$1 billion of oil at the intervention of the US, and from its Western allies, which upgraded Turkey's military arsenal at a cost of around \$2 billion.<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, these aids are trickles when compared to Turkey's loss since the beginning of the economic embargo on Iraq. It is unfair that Turkey still suffers from the sanctions though it has been the US policy's center-of-gravity toward Iraq. Since the Arab world was alienated by the US either through a stumbling Arab-Israeli peace process or through Saddam's provocations and manipulations of the ONW flights and air strikes to gain the hearts of Arabs, Turkey has become the primary leg of Washington's northern Iraq policy by extending the mandate of ONW every six month. "Saddam Hussein is seen as a figure who resisted the West. With the hostility all across the Arab world toward Israel and the US, the political climate is very conducive to being exploited by Saddam."<sup>100</sup>

Although the UNSC oil-for-food resolutions 986 and 1284, of which Ankara performed enormous diplomatic efforts in favor, eased Turkey's grievances about the sanctions to some degree, the fact that these resolutions helps northern Iraqi Kurds develop administrative institutions for a formidable Kurdish government from the revenues provided, still remains a problematic issue for Turkey. On one hand, for domestic and economic reasons Turkey needs the sanctions lifted. On the other hand it is

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<sup>98</sup> Berdal Aral, "Dispensing With Tradition? Turkish Politics and International Society During Ozal Decade, 1983-93," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 37:1, (London: Jan 2001), p. 78.

<sup>99</sup> Lenore Martin, "Turkey's National Security in the Middle East," *Turkish Studies*, 1:1 (Spring 2001), p. 93.

<sup>100</sup> Feridun Sinirlioglu (Director of the Middle East desk at the Turkish Foreign Ministry), quoted in "US Ally Turkey Doubting Iraq Embargo," *Chicago Tribune*, 12 November 2000.

concerned that the revenue to the Iraqi Kurds would enable them to develop administrative structure for “self governing.”

Ankara accentuates the need for the opening of full economic relations with Iraq while urging dialogue as the best way to convince Iraq to conform to the UN resolutions concerning the proliferation of WMD. Ankara emphasizes this formula vehemently at a time when it is about to lose its share of the European market, which provides 60 percent of its export revenues, because of the EU’s trend to accept East European countries to the union before Turkey<sup>101</sup> and when the new US administration placed the task of overthrowing Saddam at the front of its foreign policy agenda and again raised Turkish fears of Iraq’s dismemberment in a post-Saddam era. As Turkish Foreign Minister Ismail Cem said:

The time came for the US and its allies to explore if there could be some adjustment of the sanctions. The sanctions had been in place for a decade, but had brought the US and its allies no closer to their goal of undermining the regime of Saddam Hussein. If anything, Hussein is more entrenched now than he was when the Persian Gulf War ended.<sup>102</sup>

Turkey thus has a strong economic and political interest in seeing the UN sanctions lifted.

Already the US and Britain have been under pressure from other members of the UNSC to ease the sanctions. One contention is that the borders are porous anyway; experts say illegal goods and oil flow overland from Jordan and Syria (through a pipeline) and by boats in the Persian Gulf. Another contention is that sanctions have inflicted the most damage on the Iraqi people and neighboring countries. As Cem points out:

We are not getting Iraq’s people to our side by these harsh sanctions. The reality for us is that Iraq is our neighbor and Iraq will remain our neighbor. We now have in Iraq a whole generation, which is underfed, which does

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<sup>101</sup> Sukru Elekdag, “Dunyaya Bakis,” *Milliyet*, 01 April 2001.

<sup>102</sup> Tom Hundley, “US Ally Turkey Doubting Iraq Embargo,” *Chicago Tribune*, 12 November 2000.

not have enough vitamins, which is growing up with hatred toward everyone—their environment, their parents, their leaders, their neighbors. This generation is going to govern Iraq in five years time and will create enormous danger for the whole region.<sup>103</sup>

In addition, some permanent members of UNSC have interests in the removal of sanctions. For example, Russia constantly pressures the US in the UNSC to remove the sanctions, not that it sympathizes with the plight of Iraqi people but because of its own interests in gaining billions of dollars by developing Iraq's western oil fields. If the Russians eliminate the sanctions, the Iraqis will give them the keys to the Kurna oil field in western Iraq, one of the largest in the world with a potential of 200 million tons of oil.<sup>104</sup> Thus, the Russian government has a lot to lose in Iraq, and little to lose in challenging Washington in the UN.

In the case of Turkey, the oil smuggling trade is a significant income source for local truck drivers. This illegal oil trade has continued to flout the sanctions since the opening of the Habur border gate in 1993, and even more after the UNSCR 1284, which allowed trade with the Kurdish area. However, "it is a smuggling regulated and taxed by the Turkish government and tolerated by the UN and the US."<sup>105</sup> Although the trade is outside the sanctions system, it is indispensable for Turkey, and Ankara is sensitive not to allow the illegal trade to help Iraq acquire WMD. The West justifies turning a blind eye to this because the money helps the battered economy in this volatile region of Turkey and (Kurdish-populated) Iraq. In addition, the revenue does not go in the pocket of Saddam since the Iraqi side of the border and the trade is controlled by the KDP. The oil and diesel fuel were sold by Iraq to the KDP at a very low price, despite its opposition to Baghdad. Barzani, marks up the price, adds a tax and resells the oil to the truckers.

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> George Friedman, "Meanwhile, Back in Iraq," *Stratfor.com's World View*, 20 November 2000.

<sup>105</sup> Douglas Frantz, "At Iraq's Backdoor, Turkey Flouts Sanctions," *New York Times*, 30 March 2001.

By 1999, the illegal trade accounted for a quarter of Turkey's diesel fuel consumption, and that was when the government stepped in to institutionalize the smuggling with new regulations.<sup>106</sup> Truckers were limited to one trip every three months and were required to unload at the government depot and pay taxes instead of selling diesel fuel on the open market. The government profited two ways—by taxing the fuel and reselling it to the distributors at a higher price. However, custom inspections were toughened to make sure any Iraq-bound material complied with the sanctions.

Since late 2000, international resolve to maintain stiff sanctions against Iraq has significantly slipped away as the Baghdad regime learned when it successfully resumed commercial air service through no-fly zones in the northern and southern parts of the country. Russia and France were the first major powers to break the ice on international flights when they sent aid flights to Baghdad in the fall of 2000, after obtaining UN permission for humanitarian flights. Soon after, Turkey joined the growing list of nations to challenge the flight ban. Though the two Turkish flights were cleared by the UN, in the future Turkey, like Egypt and Syria, might not feel the need to ask for UN approval. Furthermore, disappointed in its share of Iraqi contracts, Turkey has intensified its diplomatic efforts to convince the US to support lifting the UN ban on Turkey's tenders related to Turkey.<sup>107</sup>

Seeing that the economic sanctions is not easy to sustain, the new US administration is now trying to develop "smart" sanctions<sup>108</sup> that will allow more customer goods in Iraq and tighten the rein on Saddam Hussein's ability to buy weapons as he seems likely. Saddam Hussein has recently developed ties with India, who could supply military hardware and rebuild the information technology of the Iraqi military in

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> "Turkey Asks US Support at UN for Iraqi Tenders," *Turkish Daily News*, 30 March 2001.

<sup>108</sup> Sami Kohen, "ABD 'Akil'laniyor... (The US is getting "smarter"...)," *Milliyet*, 1 March 2001.

exchange for oil.<sup>109</sup> Secretary of State Powell's recent visit to the Middle East, in this sense, was important. His message was clear: the US would agree to sanctions narrowly aimed at Hussein's capacity to build new weapons if Iraq's Arab neighbors, especially Syria, who is importing 100,000 barrels of Iraqi oil a day against UN embargoes, will clamp down on the revenues flowing directly to Hussein from his spiraling exports of smuggled oil.<sup>110</sup> Likewise, Edward Walker Jr., Assistant Secretary of Near East Affairs, traveled to Ankara in March 2001 to assure Turkish officials that the administration is studying ways to reduce the impact of sanctions on Iraq's neighbor.<sup>111</sup>

Turkey's real concern is Washington's different approach to the Kurds in northern Iraq. Turkey pursues a policy in favor of consolidation of Iraqi regime's authority by encouraging Kurdish leaders of northern Iraq to engage in a dialogue with Hussein, whereas the US blocks Kurdish leaders' relations with Baghdad. The last US administration, especially former Secretary of State Albright, went so far as to promise a Kurdish federal entity within Iraq, which is unacceptable for Turkey, and alienated Turkish leaders by not consulting and informing them before and about the 1998 Washington Agreement, where the promises were made to the Kurdish leaders.<sup>112</sup> Turkey's preferred solution was to facilitate a compromise between the Barzani and Talabani groups to establish a temporary administrative mechanism that would effectively deny the PKK a stronghold in northern Iraq. This would be pending the eventual restoration of the authority of the Baghdad government throughout Iraq and following its reconciliation with the northern Iraqi Kurdish leaders.<sup>113</sup> Before the signing

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<sup>109</sup> "Unusual Partners: India Turns to Iraq," *Stratfor.com*, 5 December 2000. Available [Online]: [www.stratfor.com/home/giu/DAILY.asp](http://www.stratfor.com/home/giu/DAILY.asp)

<sup>110</sup> "Powell Aims to Plug Iraqi Oil Flow," *BBC News*, 26 February 2001. "Powell Will Scale Back Rather Than Re-energize Iraq Sanctions," *Newsweek.com*, 25 February 2001.

<sup>111</sup> Douglas Frantz, "At Iraq's Backdoor, Turkey Flouts Sanctions," *New York Times*, 30 March 2001.

<sup>112</sup> Alan Makovsky, "Kurdish Agreements Signs New US Commitment," *Policy Watch*, no. 341 (September 29, 1998).

<sup>113</sup> Aykan, "Turkey's Policy in Northern Iraq, 1991-95," p. 343-346.

of the Washington Agreement, Turkey felt itself to be in a position to promote such a modus vivendi between the two Kurdish groups with the backing of the United States. Yet, as it turned out, the US left Turkey largely out of the process.

The agreement angered authorities in Ankara. First, it came to involve a specific promise by which the two Kurdish leaders, with US support, collaborated within the framework of a Kurdish federal administration toward the eventual establishment of a federated state in Iraq.<sup>114</sup> Second, although both Kurdish leaders pledged to make a common effort to deny the PKK a safe haven from which it could attack Turkey, they also expressed in the agreement their determination to prevent any outside encroachments into northern Iraq. This suggested to the Turks that Turkish military's anti-PKK operations in northern Iraq would no longer be tolerated by the United States.<sup>115</sup>

Turkey, in order to prove that the Washington Protocol did not bind Turkey, announced its own declaration in November 1998 concerning northern Iraq, deciding to retaliate by "upgrading" its diplomatic relations with Baghdad to a full ambassadorial level.<sup>116</sup> This declaration appeared to be intended to replace the Washington Protocol, stating that the future of Iraq would be decided by the free will of the Iraqi people as a whole.<sup>117</sup> At the same time, Ankara brought Kurdish leaders Barzani and Talabani to Turkey. Both emphasized that, although federation remained their aspiration for the future of Iraq, its realization depended on the free will of the people of Iraq as a whole and on the cooperation of the central authority in Baghdad.<sup>118</sup>

This type of independent attempts by Washington have been a source of resentment for Turkish decision makers as well as for Iranian and Syrian statesmen

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<sup>114</sup> For the full text of agreement, see *Milliyet*, 2 October 1998.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Mideast Mirror*, 1 October 1998.

<sup>117</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, 5 November 1998.

<sup>118</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, 8 November 1998, *Milliyet*, 9 November 1998.

whose countries also have Kurdish populations great enough to cause trouble if inspired by the founding of an internationally recognized Kurdish entity in northern Iraq. That is why Turkey, Iran, and Syria began holding meetings in November 1992, when the Kurdish factions (the KDP and the PUK) held their first elections in northern Iraq, to convey their irritation over the possible dismemberment of Iraq.

Since “the inhabitants of those parts of Turkey and Iraq were nothing more than feudal clans led by incompetents,”<sup>119</sup> these inhabitants do not have the skills to form a self-governing institution. Furthermore, “the US officially does not have an overreaching government policy toward the Kurds.”<sup>120</sup> However, Ankara is still suspicious of the multinational desire to establish a Kurdish state in northern Iraq. This suspicion is not dispelled when the following factors are considered:

- The US is encouraging northern Iraqi Kurds in separate dialogues.
- The US and the UK are protecting Kurds in northern Iraq against Saddam Hussein’s threat.
- The Iraqi Kurdish leaders are gradually developing administrative structures and skills competing with one another to provide the best public services to their followers as they receive revenues from the “oil-for-food” program.

The Iraq Liberation Act passed by the US Congress in autumn 1998 was another irritation to Ankara. This legislation provided \$97 million in aid for the Iraqi National Congress (INC), an umbrella organization of Iraqi exiled opposition groups, to topple Saddam Hussein and to replace him with a democratic government. Thus, the US government for the first time openly advocated overthrowing Iraq’s regime. This, in turn, raised concerns in Turkey. Ankara, as mentioned earlier, did not favor any policy to

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<sup>119</sup> Bulent Ecevit, “The Middle East and the Mediterranean,” address to the 45<sup>th</sup> IPI World Congress in Jerusalem (Ankara: Democratic Left Party, mimeograph, 25 March 1996), p. 6.

<sup>120</sup> Francis J. Riciardone, Special Coordinator for Transition in Iraq, “An American Diplomat’s Perspectives on Kurds in the Global Arena,” remarks at the American University, Center for Global Peace (Washington, DC: April 17, 2000).

dispose Saddam Hussein that did not match the scope of the UNSC sanctions: namely, to force Hussein to relinquish his existing WMD and to prevent him from expanding his arsenal. "If your official policy is to remove the regime, you cannot expect the regime to comply with the UN resolutions."<sup>121</sup>

Ankara, also, feared that the exiled INC, led by Dr. Ahmed Chalabi in London, had no popular base in Iraq and did not entice even the Kurdish leaders, who represented the largest local opposition to Saddam regime. Moreover, Ankara believed that the INC could not establish a functioning political organization capable of ruling after Saddam Hussein's regime. First, the INC is not in Iraq. Second, participating in such an opposition movement is an open invitation to provoke Saddam Hussein (Turkish political elites are sensitive to any development that will provoke Saddam Hussein to render another refugee crisis in Turkey's southern borders). Third, for the "democracy" INC favors, since none of the various ethnic groups in Iraq ever lived in a democratic system, their loyalty remains firmly attached to their cultural roots and the concept of democracy is not as appealing as might be imagined. Thus, the INC is likely to fail as other US attempts to oust Hussein failed.<sup>122</sup>

Even though the INC seems likely to fail, the current US administration is adamant about removing Saddam from power and focusing a great amount of the US's efforts immediately and intently on achieving that goal. This situation greatly concerned Ankara.<sup>123</sup> Ismail Cem, the Turkish Foreign Minister, seemed cool to the US ideas of more aggressive backing for Iraqi exiles seeking the overthrow of Hussein, saying "any opposition not rooted in its own country will not be significant."<sup>124</sup> The George W. Bush administration is expected to take some serious steps toward accomplishing that goal,

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<sup>121</sup> Tom Hundley, "US Ally Turkey Doubting Iraq Embargo," *Chicago Tribune*, 12 November 2000.

<sup>122</sup> For example, Operation Provide Comfort (OPC) failed to stabilize northern Iraq when Kurdish groups drew outside support from Baghdad and Tehran. Another example was the failure of the CIA when it was forced to evacuate precipitately several thousand Kurdish collaborators from northern Iraq.

<sup>123</sup> Alan Sipres, "The Iraqi Foes to Get Aid From US," *Washington Post*, 2 February 2001.

<sup>124</sup> Ismail Cem, interview before his visit to Washington, *Turkish Daily News*, 30 March 2001.

considering their desire to stay in power four more years.<sup>125</sup> Therefore, Turkey must develop a policy that will allow it to have a hand in the developments of the post-Saddam Hussein Iraq. However,

As long as the opposition groups cannot convincingly prove they can replace the Iraqi regime, Ankara prefers Saddam to stay, which would, at least for the time being, foreclose a breakup of the regional political balance and give some security for the realization of Turkish national interests in developments in and around Iraq.<sup>126</sup>

## **2. Benefits:**

It appears that all these economic and political considerations have resulted in Turks' growing perceptions of themselves as the victims of the UN embargo against Iraq. However, the repeated the mandate of the Poised Hammer Force appears to be Turkish leaders' rational calculation of the benefits and the disadvantages, explained above, in keeping this force on Turkish soil. Ankara and Washington's mutual dependence convinced Turkish elites to favor extending the mandate of the force. The need to both contain Saddam Hussein regime and to protect the Kurdish enclave elevated the Poised Hammer to a critical component of Washington's policy. In effect, the US became dependent on the forces based on the Incirlik Air Base to sustain its anti-Saddam policy. The US did not just need Turkey for OPC/ONW, but also to put pressure on Hussein during the periods of acute tension between Baghdad and the international community. This in turn provided Ankara with significant bargaining chips. Thus, there seems to have been a consensus among Turkish civilian and military leaders to the effect that the benefits outweighed the disadvantages.

The first benefit that Turkey received from the US's Iraqi policy involved higher security. In the eyes of Turkish leadership the function of the Poised Hammer Force is twofold: it could deter Saddam Hussein from initiating a military attack, as was likely to happen when Saddam deployed 200 SAM missiles and 20 divisions next to the 36<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Sukru Elekdag, "Saddam Sonrasi (After Saddam)," *Milliyet*, 25 March 2001.

<sup>126</sup> Kramer, *A Changing Turkey*, p. 126.

parallel in 1993; and if this deterrence fails, Turkey would not be left to stand alone to cope with the consequences, i.e., one million refugees on its border.<sup>127</sup> Since the end of the Gulf War, the Iraqi army has been kept weakened, significant parts of it were annihilated and the country has been subjected to extensive intelligence surveillance. Turkey's continuing perception of Baghdad as a WMD threat became once more obvious in Ankara's request for Patriot anti-missile systems just after the December 1998 Operation Desert Fox. Turkey's security concerns were taken into account by the American delivery of the Patriots in January 1999. In addition, Turkey, leaving war to others, has sustained the success of not having a war on its territory since its foundation.<sup>128</sup>

The second benefit for Turkey involved the fact that OPC/ONW bought a certain degree of immunity from US criticism of its cross-border raids into Iraq as well as its alleged human rights violations. The criticism about these alleged human rights violations, brought to the table of the US Congress by anti-Turkish groups such as Greek and Armenian lobbies in the US, represents nothing more than the double standard of the US when its support for countries governed by kingdoms, monarchs, even by dictators is considered.<sup>129</sup> The Turkish Armed Forces welcomed the extensions of the OPC/ONW because the constant allied military involvement in northern Iraq could help soften public international reactions, especially the American ones, to Turkish military incursions in northern Iraq to destroy the bases of the PKK. In addition, the Turkish defense industry's dependence on the US, (Turkey purchases around 75 percent of its arms from the US), also entices the Turkish military to favor the continuance of the Poised Hammer.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Aykan, "Turkey's Policy in Northern Iraq, 1991-95," p. 353.

<sup>128</sup> Nachami, "Turkey in the Wake of the Gulf War," p. 10.

<sup>129</sup> Nurhan Aydin (Deputy Council General of Chicago), "Turkey and the Middle Eastern Stability: Iraq, Iran, Israel and the Kurdish Question," *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 63:5 (New York, 15 December 1996), p. 135.

<sup>130</sup> Barkey, "Hemmed in by Circumstances," p. 7.

The third way Turkey benefited from the US Iraqi policy was in gaining a bargaining chip, Turkey's ratification of six-month extensions, that enables Turkish authorities to extract concessions from the US regarding Iraq. For example, Turkish officials demanded the opening of the Kirkuk-Yumurtalik pipeline. Washington had to argue at the UNSC to mandate that Iraq export at least 50 percent of its oil through Turkey as part of the "oil-for-food" resolution, UNSCR 986. The US also sided with Ankara recently during discussions relating to UNSCR 1284, the latest iteration of UNSCR 986, to exclude Turkey's trade with Iraq through the Kurdish areas from the sanctions regime.<sup>131</sup> In addition, regarding the status of northern Iraq, the West now at least says, "We do not want a Kurdish state established in northern Iraq."<sup>132</sup>

Another benefit to Turkey was that Ankara also has used the approval of extending the mandate for the force and developing diplomatic relations with Iraq as political leverage against the US Congress. The last Armenian bill in late 2000 calling for the declaration of 24 April as the commemoration of the so-called Armenian genocide was withdrawn by the Speaker of the House when Turkey announced it would send its ambassador to Baghdad,<sup>133</sup> would consider fully opening the pipeline<sup>134</sup> and would open a second border gate<sup>135</sup> to increase the volume of cross-border trade. (Ankara also used the influence of the pro-Israeli lobby in the US to curb the passage of the bill.)

The existence of the Poised Hammer served as an important bargaining chip for Ankara in its contacts with both northern Iraqi Kurdish leaders, too. The presence of the force in Turkey is crucial for the Iraqi Kurds as an assurance against Saddam Hussein's attacks. Ankara uses this leverage to discourage the Kurdish leaders to establish an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq. In addition, although the 1998 Washington

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>132</sup> Aykan, "Turkey's Policy in Northern Iraq, 1991-95," p. 354.

<sup>133</sup> "Turkey Names Ambassador to Iraq," *Shia News.com*, 5 January 2001.

<sup>134</sup> "Turkey Prepares Shut Iraq Oil Line for Full Use," *Reuters*, 12 October 2000.

<sup>135</sup> "Second Border Gate to Iraq," *Milliyet*, 10 October 2000.

agreement angered Ankara, it provided the basis that Ankara further binds Barzani and Talabani by stating, "a firm commitment of both group to deny sanctuary to the PKK throughout the Iraqi Kurdish region and to prevent the PKK from destabilizing and undermining the peace, or from violating the Turkish border."<sup>136</sup>

Finally, Ankara so far has had Washington's support for its straightforward fight against PKK terrorism, and its significant regional projects such as the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline project for Baku oil in the Caspian Sea. For example, the US State Department approved Turkey's plan to establish a three- to six-mile-wide "security zone" in northern Iraq as a buffer against PKK terrorists in September 1996<sup>137</sup> and recently the new US administration announced its support for the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline project.<sup>138</sup>

In sum, mutual dependence between Turkey and the US has enabled each to make certain concessions to the other. The US was careful enough not to criticize Turkish cross-border operations, gave full support to the anti-PKK struggle, was somewhat subdued in its criticism of Turkish human rights violations, and supported Turkish demands for exceptions from the sanctions regime. In exchange, Turkey made the best of what it perceived as an unfavorable set of conditions in northern Iraq to satisfy US preferences. At the fundamental level, however, Turkish and American preferences are incompatible. While the US will accept nothing less than a new regime in Baghdad, Turkey is wary that a new regime will be weak and beholden to the northern Kurdish groups.

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<sup>136</sup> Harun Kaaz, "Final Statement of the Leaders's meeting September 17, 1998," *Turkish Daily News*, 5 October 1998.

<sup>137</sup> Compiled by Janet McMahon, "Facts for Your File: A Chronology of U.S.-Middle East Relations," *Washington Report on Middle Eastern Affairs*, November/December 1996, pages 117-118. Available [Online]: [www.washingtonreport.org/backissues/1196/9611117.htm](http://www.washingtonreport.org/backissues/1196/9611117.htm)

<sup>138</sup> American President George W. Bush's special advisor on Caspian Energy Policies, Elizabeth Jones, stated the Bush Administration supported the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline project. *Aksam*, 2 February 2001. The US oil company Chevron stated they were interested in participation of engineering studies of the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline project. "Chevron Interested in Baku-Ceyhan Line," *Reuters*, 9 February 2001.

### **C. ANKARA, THE KDP, THE PUK, AND THE FIGHT AGAINST THE PKK**

Turkey's policy toward northern Iraqi Kurds is quite interesting in that Turkey has to balance its policy of protecting Kurds in northern Iraq with its policy of preserving Iraq's territorial and national unity. On one hand, Ankara has taken an active role in the international effort to protect the Kurds and other minorities living in northern Iraq. The planes of Operation Northern Watch, which patrol the no-fly zone, are based at Incirlik, Turkey. On the other hand, the Ankara government, which fears the de facto creation of a Kurdish state in the safe haven, has always been uneasy about the power vacuum in northern Iraq and has therefore done its best to ensure that the Kurdish regional authorities never gain too much strength.

In addition, Turkey, while openly illustrating its opposition to a Kurdish state in northern Iraq and even encouraging Barzani and Talabani to engage in dialogue with the Baghdad regime, sought their cooperation in its fight against the PKK. The relations reached the point of providing representative offices in Ankara for these Kurdish factions. The aims of the Turkish government's "contact policy," as mentioned earlier, were to obtain first-hand information about the developments in northern Iraq; to exert some influence over the developments there through inducements to the Kurds not to attempt to establish an independent Kurdish state; and to isolate the PKK among other Kurdish groups with the aim to neutralize its operations from its bases in northern Iraq. Turkey has accomplished these goals for the most part either binding the Kurdish leaders to its interests by various means (ONW provides protection for Kurds, and Turkey is the lifeline of the Kurdish area to the outside world), or by eradicating the PKK presence in northern Iraq through intense fighting.

The joint government established just after the Gulf War in northern Iraq did not last long and collapsed soon after the 1992 elections because of the never-ending rivalry between KDP leader Barzani and PUK leader Talabani. Before the collapse of their treaty, the Turkish government tried to enlist their help. In 1992, both groups cooperated with the Turkish military in a sweep of the area. However, the rivalry between them

erupted in military clashes that finally ended in partitioning the region among the parties in 1993.<sup>139</sup> Barzani and his KDP controlled the northwestern part of the region, including the border with Turkey. The more southern and eastern parts, including Erbil and the border with Iran, came under the PUK control. The situation deteriorated after the outbreak of fighting between Barzani and Talabani factions in 1994 because of the differences over power sharing and dividing oil revenues. As a result, the PKK, using the mountainous area of northern Iraq along the Turkish border as bases for their operations in Turkey since the loss of Baghdad's authority in the area, took almost unhindered advantage of border areas to conduct maneuvers.

Turkey, in turn, had to rely increasingly on its forces to fight the PKK. In March 1995, for instance, Ankara conducted a large six-week long military operation with 35,000 troops.<sup>140</sup> (This type of large incursion continued until spring 2000.) Still, geography and Masud Barzani's more traditional and less nationalistic outlook allowed Ankara to work more closely with the KDP. Most PKK terrorists tended to be holed up in the mountains controlled by the KDP, which also meant that Turkey needed the KDP more than the PUK, whose territory bordered Iran.

Because PUK leader Jalal Talabani refused for more than a decade to unequivocally denounce the PKK, Ankara mistrusted the PUK. Ankara suspected that the PUK was providing safe passage to Iranian land and even basing rights on its territory in collaboration with Iran. Talabani used the PKK as an instrument against the increasing influence of the KDP—as the KDP controlled revenues of the Habur border gate—and sought the Iranian support to balance the KDP-Ankara cooperation.

In summer 1996, Barzani invited Iraqi troops to help him drive Talabani forces from Erbil and most of northern Iraq. Barzani felt threatened by an Iranian military presence that Talabani allegedly called into the area under PUK control to fight against

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<sup>139</sup> The history of this rivalry is described at some length by David McDowall, *A Modern History of Kurds* (I.B. Tauris, 1996), pp. 302-91.

<sup>140</sup> Kemal Kirisci, "Turkey and the Kurdish Safe-Haven in Northern Iraq," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, 19:3, (1996).

the Kurdistan Democrat Party of Iran (KDP-I).<sup>141</sup> He saw no alternative to asking support from Saddam Hussein to hold his position against the perceived Talabani-Tehran coalition. However, under pressure from the US, which employed cruise missile attacks on Iraqi military installations in southern Iraq, Saddam Hussein withdrew his troops from the area, and in October 1996 Talabani was able to recapture his lost territory.<sup>142</sup> A preliminary cease-fire was established under the guidance of the US, Turkey and Britain that was turned into the "Ankara Process" aimed at brokering peace between the two Kurdish groups.<sup>143</sup> These events further demonstrated the inability of Iraq's Kurdish leaders to control the area effectively by themselves. This meant both good and bad news for Turkey: good news because it reassured Turkey that the Kurds would not reach their aim of a Kurdish federate state rapidly; bad news because the authority vacuum and PUK's reluctance to reject the PKK existence in its territory provided the PKK a vast space to maneuver in northern Iraq.

This inability was confirmed once more by the slow progress of the Ankara Process. Despite some headway on procedures and organizational structures, only a control regime for monitoring the cease-fire with representatives of non-Kurdish northern Iraq people, the Turkoman and Assyrians, was in place by 1997 when Turkey started another large spring incursion to destroy PKK bases in northern Iraq.<sup>144</sup> This time, KDP fighters were involved in activities against PKK targets because of the latent KDP-PKK differences that had flared up again.<sup>145</sup> Despite the criticism from the Iraqi government and various Arab countries as well as from its main European partners, Turkey continued the operation with about 50,000 troops and strong air support for more than six weeks. It

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<sup>141</sup> KDP-I is a Kurdish opposition group in Iran.

<sup>142</sup> "Strategic Strike," *PBS Online NewsHour*, 4 September 1996. Available [Online]: [www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/middle\\_east/september96/iraq\\_9-4a.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/middle_east/september96/iraq_9-4a.html).

<sup>143</sup> Henri J. Barkey, "Kurdish Geopolitics," *Current History*, vol. 96 (January 1997), pp. 1-5.

<sup>144</sup> "Turkey Defies Pleas to End Kurdish War," *CNN*, 20 May 1997. Available [Online]: [www.cnn.com/WORLD/9705/20/turkey.iraq/](http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9705/20/turkey.iraq/).

<sup>145</sup> Metehan Demir, Saadet Oruc, "Turkish Army's Annual Spring Clean in N.Iraq," *Turkish Daily News*, 26 May 1997.

can be assumed that since then a small number of Turkish troops stayed in Iraqi territory and from time to time have been reinforced in operations against PKK bases. (Reportedly, Turkey signed an agreement with the KDP in May 1997 to use its forces as a border police.)<sup>146</sup>

In any case, the Turkish military staged large operations in northern Iraq in September 1997, December 1997, May 1998, February 1999, April 2000, and December 2000.<sup>147</sup> In these operations the military often cooperated with KDP forces, which had come under attack by the PKK and sometimes by the PUK, which sought to regain the position stipulated by the ceasefire agreement of October 1996. Because the PUK seemingly cooperated with PKK forces that had established a stronghold in PUK controlled territory, the Turkish military believed that supporting KDP counterattacks was legitimate.

In September 1998, the US administration succeeded in ending the feud between the KDP and the PUK. Meeting in Washington for the first time in four years, Barzani and Talabani reached an agreement to end the fighting and again tried to establish a functioning common Kurdish administration in northern Iraq. The so-called Washington Agreement called for a commitment to a federative Kurdish political entity within a “united, pluralistic, and democratic Iraq” that “would maintain the nation’s unity and territorial integrity.” It contained the elements present in previous pacts: revenue sharing, power sharing (including elections), and security arrangements (including a pledge to deny use of northern Iraq to the anti-Turkish PKK). The Kurds agreed on the organization of “free and fair elections for a new regional assembly” that were to take place by July 1999. In this assembly the Kurdish, Turkoman, Assyrians, and Chaldean populations would be represented.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> UNHCR June 2000, p. 5 cited at [www.db.idproject.org/Sites/idpSurvey.nsf/](http://www.db.idproject.org/Sites/idpSurvey.nsf/)

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Harun Kaaz, “Final Statement of the Leaders’s meeting September 17, 1998,” *Turkish Daily News*, 5 October 1998; Alan Makovsky, “Kurdish Agreements Signs New US Commitment,” *Policy Watch*, no.341 (September 29, 1998).

This agreement caused some irritation in Ankara, although the US administration and the Kurdish leaders were quick to declare it had to be regarded as a further result of the Ankara Process.<sup>149</sup> Turkish political leaders were embarrassed that Turkey had been excluded from the final rounds of negotiation as well as from the signing of the agreement. They had the barely concealed suspicion that the agreement would open the way to an eventual establishment of a separate Kurdish state and would complicate future Turkish military incursions across the border.<sup>150</sup> To demonstrate its opposition and its political independence, Ankara announced relations with Baghdad would be upgraded to the ambassadorial level and received the visit of Iraqi Foreign Minister Tarik Aziz.<sup>151</sup>

Turkish concerns about northern Iraq relaxed somewhat as it became clear, especially after a meeting of Talabani and Barzani in Ankara in early November 1998,<sup>152</sup> that nobody really wanted to dissociate Turkey from northern Iraq lastingly and that implementing the Washington Agreement did not go as smoothly as foreseen on paper. Indeed, it paved the way for an Ankara-PUK rapprochement in the following years. However, in the immediate future, successfully implementing the agreement could not be totally excluded, and if a functioning Kurdish administration in the three northern Iraqi provinces of Erbil, Dohuk, and Suleymaniye could be established, a spillover into Turkey's Kurdish question cannot be excluded. Such a development could encourage Turkey's Kurds to increase their efforts to reach some political autonomy within the Turkey.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> David Welch, Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East, in "Welch WorldNet Dialogue On Northern Iraq Accord." Available [Online]: <http://www.usembassy-israel.org.il/publish/armscontrol/archive/1998/october/aco1019a.shtml>

<sup>150</sup> Ilnur Cevik, "US on the Iraqi Kurdish Accord: Give Us the Benefit of the Doubt," *Turkish Daily News*, 30 September 1999.

<sup>151</sup> Alan Makovsky, "Kurdish Agreements Signs New US Commitment," *Policy Watch*, no. 341 (September 29, 1998).

<sup>152</sup> "Talabani and Barzani Meets with Turkish officials in Ankara," *Anadolu Agency: News in English*, 8 November 1998.

<sup>153</sup> Kramer, *A Changing Turkey*, p. 125.

As there has been no return to the pre-Gulf War status quo, Ankara's second-best option in northern Iraq has been to weaken and to contain signs of consolidating the northern autonomous government. In this respect, the Kurdish elections of 1992 and the 1998 Washington Agreement were unwelcome events. On the other hand, the division of northern Iraq between the two factions has clearly set back the ambitions of these Kurds. In addition, Ankara, as evidenced so far, has been inclined to play one Kurdish faction against the other in order to weaken their consolidation efforts for a Kurdish federated state. However, although Turkey benefits from continued divisions among the Kurds, a unified Kurdish leadership beholden to Ankara might provide it with a greater say in future Iraqi developments.

Currently, Ankara has control over much of the developments in northern Iraq by its close cooperation with both Kurdish factions and Turcomans in northern Iraq. Talabani's reluctance to take arms against the PKK ended in mid-2000. Just after his visit in Ankara in July 2000, fierce clashes erupted between the PUK and the PKK in the eastern part of the Kurdish enclave in northern Iraq where PKK terrorists had retreated after the capture of their leader Abdullah Ocalan in early 1999. This change in PUK's behavior can be attributed to the points agreed on in Washington in 1998 as understood in PUK Ankara Representative Shazad Saib's statements:

We informed the PKK two years ago. We do not want their fighters to enter our areas. Turkey threatened Syria, and Syria forced PKK out. We cannot resist Turkey. We have faced many problems. . . . We gave our word to Ankara that we will not allow the PKK in our territory.<sup>154</sup>

On 10 January 2001, when the PUK-PKK fight was continuing with more intensity, and days after the Turkish military sent troops to the southern part of northern Iraq upon the call of the KDP, the PUK leader Talabani visited Turkey once more after meeting with Barzani at KDP headquarters in Selahaddine for the first time in three years.<sup>155</sup> Three days before the visit, Ecevit confirmed that Turkish troops had led an

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<sup>154</sup> "PUK Representative: We Promised Ankara," *Kurdish Observer*, 1 October 2000. Available [Online]: <http://www.kurdishobserver.com/2000/10/01/hab01.html>

<sup>155</sup> "Rival Kurdish Factions Hold Peace Talks After 3 Years," *Times of India Online*, 10 January 2001.

incursion into northern Iraq to provide technical help for the PUK and KDP in their efforts to fight PKK terrorists. Reportedly, when retreating from the area in March 2001, Turkish troops left 40 howitzers, 300 soldiers to be stationed in the PUK controlled areas of Suleymaniye and Cankurna for firepower and technical assistance and 200 MIT (National Intelligence Service) members in the Soran area for intelligence facilities.<sup>156</sup> During the visit, Prime Minister Ecevit and other Turkish officials received Talabani—a sure sign that relations between the Turkish government and the PUK have greatly improved. For years, Ankara had sought to convince the PUK to cooperate against the PKK, but unlike his rival Barzani, Talabani had shown great reluctance to confront the PKK. Now, about the PKK, Talabani said, “They claimed they stopped fighting in Turkey but they started in northern Iraq. We will oblige them to leave by all means.”<sup>157</sup>

On the other hand, Ankara's relationship with the KDP has shown signs of strain, especially since Ocalan's arrest and the end of the PKK-led insurgency. With the violence abating in the southeast and subsequent decline in the need to cooperate with Barzani's forces, the Turkish leadership has tried to demonstrate the limits of its tolerance for Kurdish activity. In March 2000, at the instigation of the military high command, a furor erupted over the KDP Ankara representative's Nevruz (Kurdish New Year) reception, which European Union representatives attended. In July 2000, the Turkish establishment viewed the KDP representative's invitation as a ruse to pass itself off as a diplomatic mission.<sup>158</sup> The Turkish government's invitation to Talabani to visit Ankara and treating him with a warm reception was interpreted by many as another slap at the KDP.<sup>159</sup> In April 2001, just before the prearranged visit of Barzani to Ankara, there was news in the

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<sup>156</sup> “Turk Orduyu Güneyde (Turkish Army in the South Again),” *Ozgür Politika*, 20 April 2001. Available [Online]: <http://www.ozgurpolitika.org/2001/04/20/hab06.html>

<sup>157</sup> “Kurdish Leader Talabani Visits Turkey,” *Turkey Update*, 11 January 2001. Available [Online]: [www.middleeastwire.com/turkey/stories/200110112\\_2\\_meno.shtml](http://www.middleeastwire.com/turkey/stories/200110112_2_meno.shtml)

<sup>158</sup> *Radikal*, 23 March 2000.

<sup>159</sup> “Turkey's high level reception of Talabani also signals Ankara's growing unease over the KDP's activities. Ankara has been particularly disturbed by the KDP's using titles which give the impression of an independent state,” *Turkish Daily News*, 27 July 2000.

Turkish press that a new anti-Turkish separatist movement called Kurdistan Revolution Party (Partia Sorejan Kurdistan or PSK) was sponsored by Barzani.<sup>160</sup>

To blunt arguments about Kurdish exceptionalism, Ankara has also trumpeted the rights of Turcomans in northern Iraq. Ironically, Ecevit has been at the forefront of the quest for recognition of the Turcomans as a separate ethnic group in Iraq, even though he does not envisage a separate area for them. In Ankara, as a result of attempts to interfere in the politics of the Turcomans in Iraq, more than one "representative" organization exists today. Turcomans were employed by the international community as cease-fire observers. For Turkey, the Turcomans represent a card which, if well played, can give Ankara some say in post-Saddam Hussein arrangements, especially should the Kurds decide to ignore them.<sup>161</sup>

While both Kurdish factions have maintained contact with the regime in Baghdad for good measure, Barzani has had the closest links. Ironically, as much as the Turks would like to see the two Kurdish factions cooperate with Saddam Hussein, the very existence of a Turkish-KDP tie has enabled the latter to keep Baghdad at arm's length and keep its options somewhat open. Iran plays a similar role with the PUK.

Turkey's greatest challenge is the fact that after almost ten years of not living under Saddam Hussein's tutelage, the Kurdish population in northern Iraq is likely to resist strongly any effort aimed at bringing back total Iraqi control. Despite the hardships caused by intra-group fighting, Kurds in northern Iraq have not previously experienced as long a period of "independence" as this one. This situation has served to strengthen their consciousness and deepen their ethnic ties. Moreover, the oil-for-food resolutions (favored by Turkey), by allocating 13 percent of all Iraqi income to the north, have given rise to an unprecedented level of prosperity there. The Iraqi regime had always avoided non-oil investments in the north. Perhaps the greatest irony is that the separation of the

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<sup>160</sup> Tuncay Ozkan, "Barzani Turkiye'yi Sirtindan Vurdu (Barzani Stabbed Turkey in the Back)," *Milliyet*, 18 April 2001.

<sup>161</sup> "Turkey Plays Its Cards in Northern Iraq," *Turkey Update* (online), 1 December 2000. Available [Online]: <http://www.turkeyupdate.com/tu2000/arbil.htm>

north has even injected an element of competition between the two Kurdish parties, each trying to show its residents that it is better at providing vital service.

In general, however, Ankara has so far called the shots in the region precisely because it controls the Habur crossing and access to the United States. Ankara has correctly calculated that, irrespective of Washington's efforts with regards to the PUK and the KDP, these two factions must eventually pay a great deal of attention to Turkish wishes.

#### **D. RELATIONS WITH BAGHDAD**

Despite US criticism, Turkey facing the political and economic repercussions of the Iraqi situation every day has been continuing its intense diplomacy to normalize relations with Baghdad regardless of its regime type. Preserving Iraq's territorial integrity and national unity is crucial for Turkey before any economic considerations. Turkey's insistence on developing diplomatic relations, which were recently fully established, and its insistence on using economic areas to bolster ties with Iraq can be easily understood in this sense. Ankara perceives Saddam's hegemonic aspirations and his regime as being dangerous enough to destabilize the region, but Ankara does not care about Baghdad's regime type when removing from power would risk dismembering Iraq and therefore would jeopardize Turkish national unity and territorial integrity. The only formula feasible and acceptable to Ankara for now is rehabilitating the Baghdad regime through dialogues on regional security while integrating Iraq into the international community through economic cooperation. However zealous Ankara seems in reestablishing its overall relations with Iraq, Ankara, in accordance with its foreign policy principles, in fact, urges Baghdad's conformance to the UN resolutions.

Turkey and Iraq indeed have various areas of economic and political cooperation. Iraq's dependence on Turkey for access to Europe, Turkey's dependence on Iraq for cheap oil, the benefit in trade relationship, the common desire to subdue Kurdish ethnic separatism, and even the similarity in regime types as far as the approach to religion is concerned are the factors that inevitably bond them. But the existence of the Poised Hammer in Turkey, the concern about a new Kurdish refugee crisis, Baghdad's WMD

facilities in compliance with UN resolutions, and Saddam Hussein's feeling of "over-dependency" on Turkey, which originated from the Iran-Iraq War, are the main obstacles that hinder the progress for normal relations. However, the two countries are seeking ways to skirt these obstacles in improving economic and diplomatic relations, perhaps for different reasons.

While Turkey sees the normalization of relations with Iraq benefiting it economically and politically, Saddam Hussein's regime sees any attempt to normalize relations as a way of eroding the US imposed sanctions and thereby embarrassing Washington considering. This is particularly true when one considers Ankara's position as a main US ally in the region. Yet, Turkey will not abandon its relations with the US for the sake of good neighborly relations with Iraq. The Ankara government certainly makes rational calculations not to be on the losing side in case of new developments. That is why it employs intense diplomatic efforts to demonstrate its legitimate concerns in its balance policy to both sides.

Turkey and Iraq are engaged in gradual economic relations as far as UN resolutions allowed. Recent developments illustrated an increase in the pace of economic relations and Turkey's initiatives at the UN to lift the sanctions as they started to crumble. Turkey like France and Russia sent "aid flights" to Baghdad. In addition, Baghdad and Ankara have discussing opening a second border gate and resuming the operation of the Baghdad-Turkey railway, through which Turkey can import petroleum from Iraq to increase the volume of border trade.<sup>162</sup> In addition, they have embarked on realizing a \$2 billion natural gas pipeline project, which will transport of northeastern Iraq natural gas to Ceyhan.<sup>163</sup> In April 2001, a delegation from Turkey's state run pipeline company, BOTAS, went to Iraq to discuss the contracts for this pipeline.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> "Irak'a İkinci Sınır Kapısı (Second Border Gate to Iraq)," *Milliyet*, 10 October 2000.

<sup>163</sup> "Iraq and Turkey Plan Gas Export Pipeline," *Oil & Journal*, 20 Jan 1997.

<sup>164</sup> "BOTAS Team to Visit Baghdad," *Turkish Daily News*, 4 April 2001.

From Baghdad's perspective, the evolution of the Kurdish entity in northern Iraq preoccupied Baghdad as much as Turkey. Given limited capabilities of Saddam Hussein administration to influence events in the north, Hussein probably sees Turkey's involvement as a counterbalance to this evolution and Iran's ambitions in northern Iraq, his rhetoric criticism against Turkish involvement and incursions notwithstanding. Baghdad has no patron as Turkey has, representing the forward line of US power, but it can be satisfied with the fact that, if not deserting the US, Ankara has had a measured approach to Iraq by not siding with US "overthrow strategy," and even by continuously encouraging the Kurdish factions to make their peace with the regime. Ankara's November 1998 declaration, as a reaction to the Washington Protocol, and by subsequently bringing the northern Iraqi Kurdish leaders to Turkey and having them emphasize "the cooperation with central government" is an example of Turkey's firm approach. In addition, Turkey is still an important outlet for Iraqi exports and a source of imports and will remain so, no matter what happens to the regime in Baghdad. Thus, Hussein is unlikely to do anything at this stage, which would enrage Ankara to further embrace the US and to deny himself the profits. Nevertheless, he had upgraded its support for the PKK by allowing it to open offices in Baghdad-controlled southern Iraq in 1997. This stance posed a threat to Turkey, raising questions in Turkey about the relations with Iraq after a possible consolidation of power of the Baghdad regime.

Regarding the problem of water,<sup>165</sup> recently Syria and Iraq, the traditionally two rival regimes of the region, jointly criticized Turkey for not sharing the water. Marginalized during the last decade through either war or strategic alliances, the rapprochement of these two traditionally rival regimes was normal but not enough to dictate Turkey on the water issue. They both complained that Ankara's ambitious program of dam building within the framework of the GAP on the Euphrates and the Tigris is a threat to their water supply. Ankara's reply was very simple: Downstream countries would receive only 50 cubic meters per second if there were no dams on the rivers. Turkey's dams allow the flow of more than 500 cubic meters per second but Syria

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<sup>165</sup> The water problem between Turkey-Syria-and Iraq will be discussed with details in Chapter Four.

and Iraq use water inefficiently.<sup>166</sup> Neither Syria nor Iraq, at present, seem to have the means to dictate Turkey on its water policies.

## E. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Turkey's mixed and somewhat contradictory policies and the dilemma it faced as a result of the Gulf War can be summarized as follows:

The establishment of a Kurdish state as a result of the weakening of Saddam Hussein's regime has to be prevented because of its possible consequences of Turkey's own Kurdish population. But major Iraqi assaults on the Kurds to restore Iraqi rule in the area are also not welcome because of the likelihood of invoking large refugee movements toward Turkey. Kurdish autonomous political authority in northern Iraq also had to be kept weak enough to prevent the creation of a Kurdish state but strong enough to be able to prevent the PKK from getting a lasting foothold south of the Turkish border. American interests in keeping Saddam ineffective by enforcing the UN sanctions and UN led elimination of Iraq's potential of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) also had to be duly taken into account by Ankara. In addition, Turkish economic interests demanded that Ankara keep relatively continuous and harmonious relations with Baghdad. Finally, all elements could not hinder Turkey's maneuverability in following its security interests in its fight against the PKK terror in the southeast.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Benny Morris, "Turkey Cuts Iraq's Water," *Dawn Internet News Service (www.down.com)*, 3 October 2000.

<sup>167</sup> Kramer, *Changing Turkey*, p. 126-127.

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#### IV. TURKEY AND SYRIA

In any given problem between states, there are at least two simultaneous games at work, one at the inter-state level and the other at the level of a state's domestic constituencies.<sup>168</sup> In the case of the water dispute among Turkey, Syria, and Iraq, satisfying the agricultural sectors (domestic level) of these riparian countries, very much depended on the waters of Euphrates and Tigris, are undeniably important because of the following considerations:

- To secure the loyalty of ethnic groups who live in the Euphrates and Tigris basins and who generally oppose the regimes they live under.
- To be self-sufficient in food production not to depend on neighbor countries, which are traditionally perceived as hostile.

In other words, a high level of dependency on Euphrates and Tigris water in solving crucial domestic concerns or sustaining the status quo has been the key factor that shapes the foreign policies of these countries.

This chapter explores the factors that have shaped Turkish-Syrian relations to date. The main argument will be that the convergence of prospective solutions of crucial domestic concerns, either ethnic or economic, of these two neighbors on the water supply of the Euphrates has caused the water problem on the Euphrates basin. While Turkey has control of the water, Syria tried to counter Turkey's advantage by resorting to PKK terrorism. The chapter focuses on the technical issues of the water usage in the Euphrates basin and on how it became a political issue. It argues that Syria's over-demand and inefficient use of water due to political reasons belie the claims that the GAP aimed to cut the water of downstream riparian states. The underlying problem is Syria's desire to preserve the domestic status quo. If the GAP did not exist, the downstream riparian countries would get only 50 cubic meters per second compared to 800-900 m<sup>3</sup>/s of water

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<sup>168</sup> R. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization*, 42:3 (1988), p. 427-460.

flow they received during the 1998-1999 period, well above the previously-agreed 500m<sup>3</sup>/s.<sup>169</sup> Second, the Syria-PKK linkage, which cost Turkey 30,000 lives and \$85 billion, will be discussed. Syria's intransigence on using the PKK card to control Turkey over water-sharing failed and produced no results except international humiliation of the Ba'ath regime in Damascus. This resulted from Turkey's assertiveness derived from post-Cold War conditions and the "strategic cooperation" with Israel to the extent that it threatened Syria with a military invasion. Finally, the post-October 1998 crisis relations will be discussed. The argument will be that Turkey is skeptic and wary because of Syria has not observed previous agreements between the two states. Turkey is eager to cooperate economically while still holding security issues as a priority.

#### **A. THE WATER PROBLEM**

Turkey's original hydro-power producing damming projects were transformed into huge irrigation projects to elevate the economically deprived Kurdish population in the east and the southeast. Syria's authoritarian regime, which were previously satisfied with the hydro-electric dams, which regulated the flow and prevented the loss of the water, was suddenly alarmed. The reason for this concern was the anticipated reduction in the flow and quality of the water, which is immensely important for Syria's economically inefficient but politically lifesaving agricultural projects.

The Southeast Anatolia Project is the largest and the most comprehensive regional development project ever implemented in Turkey. This project covers 9 provinces and approximately 10 percent of Turkey's land area, and will comprise 22 dams, 19 hydroelectric power plants, and 2 huge irrigation tunnels on the Euphrates and the Tigris Rivers and their tributaries. When completed, it will increase the ratio of the total GAP area from 2.9 percent to 22.8 percent, accounting for 19 percent of all the economically irrigable area in Turkey. It will also increase Turkey's capacity for electric power

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<sup>169</sup> Ali Cakiroglu and Mine Eder, "Domestic Concerns and the Water Conflict over the Euphrates-Tigris River Basin," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 37:1 (January 2001), p. 62.

generation 70 to 80 percent, accounting for 22 percent of the country's economically viable hydroelectric power potential.<sup>170</sup>

There are two reasons for the Turkish government's to design and to implement of such a large project in the Southeast Anatolia. First, Turkey's major water and land resources are located in Southeast Anatolia and Turkey aims to use these resources optimally for the local region as well as for Turkey as a whole. Second, Southeast Anatolia is the most backward region of Turkey. There are huge economic and social differences between this region and the rest of Turkey. To ease the social unrest of the Kurdish population of Turkey, the improvement of economic life and thereby integration of this region to the rest of Turkey has become the key state policy an indispensable tool for political parties. For these crucial reasons, the Southeast Anatolia Project is being developed on the Euphrates and the Tigris rivers and their tributaries, which originate in Turkey.

The technical explanations of the water problem of Turkey-Syria and Iraq are enlightening. First of all, Turkey, contrary to popular belief, is not a "water-rich" country, rather it is a "water-stressed" country. Insufficient water availability, rapid population growth, and industrialization coupled with pollution have brought water scarcity to the forefront in the Middle East. Turkey is not an exception. However, in many studies, Turkey, with its snowy mountains and climate characterized by relatively abundant precipitation, is perceived as holding the key to the solution for the Middle East water shortages. Many observers consider the Euphrates as a regional water resource capable of overcoming water shortages in other Middle Eastern countries. This misperception makes assessing Turkey's water policy realistically in international forums difficult.

In the water related theoretical literature there are commonly accepted limits, which were designated by hydrologists and experts, for water richness and water

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<sup>170</sup> Servet Mutlu, "The Southeastern Anatolia Project of Turkey: Its Context, Objectives, and Prospects," *Orient*, vol. 37 (March 1996), pp. 59-86.

shortages.<sup>171</sup> If we assess Turkey's water resources according to these limits classifying Turkey as a "water-rich" country is unrealistic.

According to experts, to be rich in water resources a country must have more than 10,000 cubic meters (m<sup>3</sup>) per capita per year. Water supplies between 1,000-2,000 m<sup>3</sup> per person/year make a country "water-stressed." When the figure drops below 1,000 m<sup>3</sup>, nations are considered "water-scarce." When a country becomes water-scarce, it means that the country experiences a severe constraint on food production, economic development, and ecological systems.

With a population of 65 million, Turkey has an average annual renewable water potential of 205 billion m<sup>3</sup>, or approximately 3150 m<sup>3</sup> per capita per year which is far below the 10,000 m<sup>3</sup> mark necessary to make a country "water-rich." If we consider the economically usable water potential of the country (110 billion m<sup>3</sup>) the available per capita water per year goes down further and becomes equal to approximately 1700 m<sup>3</sup>, which makes Turkey "water-stressed."<sup>172</sup> Furthermore, rapid population growth, industrialization and rising living standards were expected to decrease the renewable water potential per capita per year to 2500 m<sup>3</sup> by the year 2000, and to 2000 m<sup>3</sup> by 2010. If we look at the economically usable water potential per capita per year we see a more severe situation whereby the available water decreases to 1580 m<sup>3</sup>, or even less by the year 2000.<sup>173</sup> As the data reveal, Turkey's water resources are far from abundant. Turkey has only about a fifth or sixth of the water available in water-rich regions such as North America, Latin America, the Caribbean and even western Europe.

Out of 26 hydrologic basins in Turkey, the Euphrates and Tigris contain the largest volume of flow, with 28 percent of the nation's total surface flow. This

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<sup>171</sup> Serageldin Ismail, *Toward Sustainable Management of Water Resources* (The World Bank, 1995); Malin Falkenmark in Sandra Postel (ed.), *Last Oasis*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997); Thomas Naff, "Water: That Peculiar Substance," *Research and Exploration* (Water Issue, 1993), pp. 6-17.

<sup>172</sup> Mehmet Tomanbay, "Turkey's Approach to Utilization of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 22:2 (Spring 2000), pp. 80-81.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

dependency explains Turkey desire to build more dams, hydroelectric power plants and other water-related construction to harness water both to produce energy and to irrigate lands on the Euphrates and Tigris basins than other river basins.

However, this does not mean that Turkey has fully exploited these resources. Approximately 37 billion m<sup>3</sup> of 110-billion m<sup>3</sup> usable water is actually used. In other words, almost 33 percent of economically usable water is presently used. The remaining 67 percent of economically usable water is what Turkey has not yet exploited owing to the financial constraints in allocation. Thus, what Turkey fails to use for the time being cannot truly be called excess water.

Therefore, two inescapable consequences emerge: first, it appears unrealistic to classify Turkey as a water-rich country, second: the Euphrates and the Tigris Rivers are the major water resources of Turkey which must be harnessed for the benefit of the region as well as for the entire country. Experts make another valid point regarding Turkey's water problem. This point involves the comparison of the water supply and the water usage of Turkey, Syria, and Iraq. Syria and Iraq emerge as over-demanding water users whereas Turkey conserves its water resources more efficiently (Table 1).<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> "Water Issues Between Turkey, Syria and Iraq," *Perceptions, Journal of International Affairs*, 1:2 (Ankara: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, June-August 1996).

Countries	The Euphrate Basin		The Tigris Basin	
	Water Potential	Consumption Targets	Water Potential	Consumption Targets
Turkey	31.58 (bil m <sup>3</sup> ) 88.70%	18.42 51.80%	25.24 51.90%	6.78 14.10%
Syria	4.00 11.30%	11.30 31.80%	0.00 0%	2.60 5.40%
Iraq	0.00 0%	23.00 64.60%	23.43 48.10%	45.00 92.50%
Total	35.58 100%	52.92 148.7%	48.67 100%	54.47 112%

Table 1. Comparison of the Water Contribution from the Territories of the Riparian Countries to the Flow of Euphrates-Tigris Rivers with the Demands of the Riparian States' from These Basins.

When we look at the demand side, we see that the demand of Syria and Iraq exceed their contribution to the water of the rivers. Syria wants 32 percent and Iraq wants 65 percent of the Euphrates. Turkey plans to use about 52 percent of the Euphrates to which it contributes 89 percent. On the other hand, Syria and Iraq's demands on the Tigris are 5.4 percent and 92.5 percent respectively. Turkey plans to use 14.1 percent of the Tigris. The combined demands of the riparian countries thus amount to 148 percent of the total flow capacity of the Euphrates and 112 percent of that of the Tigris. When we look at these figures, seeing Syria and Iraq's argument as valid is quite difficult. The demands

of Iraq and Syria tacitly assume that Turkey releases all of the flow of the rivers without using any of it.<sup>175</sup>

In fact, Turkey is more dependent on the waters of the Tigris and the Euphrates than Iraq and Syria. The other two countries can rely on their petroleum for energy production whereas Turkey, as an oil poor country, must rely on its water resources for energy. In addition, Turkey's dependence on these two rivers for irrigation is greater than that of Syria and Iraq. The area of land that Turkey can irrigate by using the waters of the Euphrates is far greater than comparable Syrian land; therefore, the proportionate need for water is larger.

Comparing the quality and the area of lands to be irrigated by the riparians will clarify the issue. Irrigation is the largest water-consuming sector. Therefore, identifying the quality and the quantity of land to be irrigated becomes important. Land has been classified according to six land-use capability groups, of which Classes 1 through 3 are efficiently irrigable; Class 4 land is of marginal value. Yield can be obtained from Class 5 land only with a considerable amount of investment. Class 6 lands are those that are impractical for agriculture.<sup>176</sup>

The area that can be irrigated from the Euphrates in Syria is officially 640,000 hectare (ha), of which merely 307,000 ha, or 48 percent, is designated class 1, class 2, or class 3 land. According to the general director of the Syrian Public Establishment for Utilization of the Euphrates River, 345,000 ha area can be irrigated.<sup>177</sup> The area to be irrigated in the basin of the Khabur River, a major tributary of the Euphrates in the Syrian territory, is 137,000 ha. Thus the total area that can be irrigated in Syria from the Euphrates is 482,900 ha. However, the figures declared by Syria in official meetings are higher than these figures. Although the data from different sources reveals discrepancies

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<sup>175</sup> *Facts about Euphrates-Tigris Basin* (Ankara: Center for Strategic Research, 1996), p. 7.

<sup>176</sup> John F. Kollars and Mitchell A. William, *The Euphrates River and the Southeast Anatolia Development Project* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: South Illinois University Press, 1991).

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

ranging from 320,000 to 800,000 hectares, it is still not comparable with the size of irrigable land of Turkey from the Euphrates.

Comparable data from Iraq shows that it has a larger irrigable area than Syria. However, by means of the canals like Thartar Canal, which link the Euphrates and the Tigris, Iraq has the option of using the waters of the Tigris for irrigation, which would otherwise flow unused, instead of those of the Euphrates. Consequently, a transfer of water from the Tigris to the Euphrates can alleviate the water shortage of the latter. Furthermore, as is the case with Syria, most of the Iraq's land is low-lying and afflicted by deposits of gypsum and salt. A large portion of Iraqi territory rarely exceeds 300 m elevation; only 15 percent is as high as 450 m. This topography limits Iraq's ability to impound the waters of the Euphrates behind high dams; consequently, the water empties into the Gulf without being put to use.<sup>178</sup>

In the Turkish territory, an area of nearly 2.5 million ha of Class 1, 2, and 3 land can be efficiently irrigated from the Euphrates and the Tigris within the scope of the Southeast Anatolia Project.<sup>179</sup> The area Turkey plans to irrigate from the Euphrates and the Tigris within the scope of GAP is 1,693,027 ha.<sup>180</sup> Thus the GAP schemes will irrigate only 67 percent of good quality land that would benefit from efficient irrigation. If we consider the land, which can be irrigated from the Euphrates, the percent decrease to 60. An area of 1,796,568 ha of Class 1, 2, and 3 land can be efficiently irrigated from the Euphrates, and not from the Tigris, within the scope of GAP. The area Turkey plans to irrigate from the Euphrates within the scope of GAP is 1,091,203 ha.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Mehmet Tomanbay, "Turkey's Approach to Utilization of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers," p. 87.

<sup>179</sup> *GAP: Southeastern Anatolia Project Master Plan Study, Final Master Plan Report* (State Planning Organization of Prime Ministry, Republic of Turkey, 1989), vol. 4, Table D.2-D.5.

<sup>180</sup> *Southeastern Anatolia Project* (Ankara: GAP Regional Development Administration of Republic of Turkey, 1997), p. 10.

<sup>181</sup> Mehmet Tomambay, "Sharing the Euphrates-Tigris," *Research and Exploration Water Issue*, no.9 (November 1993), pp. 53-61.

Given these facts, comparing the surface areas to be irrigated by Syria and Turkey from the Euphrates would be useful. The good quality land, which, though irrigable from the Euphrates, is not included within the scope of GAP irrigation schemes, is 705,365 ha. In Syria, as indicated, the total area irrigable from the Euphrates is 482,000 ha of which a good part is already under irrigation. As can be seen from these figures, Turkey's claim on water for irrigation is a strong and valid claim. Turkey has approximately four times more irrigable land than Syria, which can be irrigated from the Euphrates. If we take into account the entire basin (the Euphrates and the Tigris), we see that Turkey has almost seven times more irrigable land than Syria does.

Even these very general data provide some bases for rational, reasonable, and optimal use of the Euphrates by the three countries. Ankara believes that Syria and Iraq do not use the proper technology to make the optional use of the available water, and consequently place exaggerated water demands on the flow. Syria, for the sake of barren land, which is not irrigable, wants to see the waters of the Euphrates flow through its territory, uselessly. Iraq demands a flow, which, for topographical reasons, it would be unable to control, and, wants to have Euphrates waters for areas that can be irrigated by the Tigris. A review of political motives behind these technically irrational approaches will explain why "water" is a problem among Turkey, Iraq, and Syria.

Syria's water supply almost solely depends on the Euphrates. Paradoxically, the users of the Euphrates water consist of small landowners who have been traditionally a source of unrest against the Alawi-dominated Syrian regime.<sup>182</sup> The Syrian government has made efforts not only to provide cheap and abundant water to these small landowners but also to secure their loyalty through land reclamation policies. The support of these groups is crucial for sustaining and consolidating the new Bashar regime. Moreover, owing primarily to faulty technology chosen at the Taqba dam, any drop in the river flow, which is characteristic of the Euphrates River, especially during the summer months

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<sup>182</sup> S. A. Ahsan, "Economic Policy and Class Structure in Syria," *Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 16 (1984), pp. 301-323.

results in cut-offs in irrigation water as well as energy production.<sup>183</sup> Hence, every extra drop of Euphrates water Syria can get means more patronage to sustain the survival of the Damascus regime, without caring about the efficiency of water usage techniques.

Iraq has similar domestic concerns in the usage of water, too. Securing the loyalty of the Shiites—60 percent of total Iraqi population—living in the Euphrates basin through policies, which develop their living standards, has long been a priority of the Iraqi administration.<sup>184</sup> That is why it is not difficult to understand Saddam's enthusiasm to launch the complex Tigris-Euphrates diversion scheme. The Thartar Canal, which diverts the water of Tigris to Euphrates, is also a "double-edged flood weapon." While deliberately flooding large areas of agricultural land in the Amara region, the Thartar Canal dries the marshes of the south, thereby making the Marsh Arabs an easy target for Saddam Hussein's forces.<sup>185</sup> Thus, manipulating the flow of the water, Saddam Hussein, like Syria, paying no attention to the rational use of water, intends to both buy the loyalty of the country's majority and to subdue the domestic opposition.

In addition, the tendency of all these downstream riparian states to use water as a domestic ideological tool also exacerbates the problem.

Water disputes may be handy to politicians in personifying real or perceived outside threats in the domestic context, and in this way serve to unite the society against "foreign enemies" and mobilize support for the government.<sup>186</sup>

Indeed, the water issue has been effectively used in projecting the developmental needs in each country as an indispensable part of independent, autonomous development.

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<sup>183</sup> Muserref Yetim, *The Political Economy of the Euphrates-Tigris Basin Dispute* (Master's Thesis, Bogazici University, Institute of Social Sciences, Istanbul, 1998), pp. 116-117.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>185</sup> Michael Schultz, "Turkey, Syria and Iraq: A Hydropolitical Security Complex," in Leif Ohlsson (eds.), *Hydropolitics: Conflicts over Water as a Development Constraint* (London: Zed Books, 1995), p. 110.

<sup>186</sup> Gulen Kut and Ilter Turan, "Political-Ideological Constraints on Intra-Basin Cooperation on Transboundary Waters," *Natural Resources Forum*, vol. 21 (1997), p. 140.

Therefore, given the data and the political considerations, which inflict maximalist positions on autocratic Syrian and Iraq regimes about the water usage, of the riparians of the Euphrates-Tigris Basin, the regime types of Turkey's southern neighbors appear as the source of the problem. Whereas Turkey aims to integrate its not only economically underdeveloped but also mostly Kurdish populated southeast region by its efficient GAP project targeting to use only 44 percent of its contribution to this basin, Iraqi and Syrian regimes consider their survival as their priority no matter what it takes: irrational and inefficient irrigation projects that over-demand the waters of the basin. Hence, it is not difficult to understand why these regimes oppose Turkey's purely technical and rational "Three-Staged Plan," which suggests the allocation of water resources based on systematic assessment of water needs for irrigation of all parties, perceiving it as an infringement in their domestic affairs. Indeed, except for Syria's and Iraq's ideological make-ups, there is no reason why food self-sufficiency policies, which essentially lead to ineffective allocation of resources, cannot be replaced by policies of food interdependence and food trade. However, this is perceived by Damascus and Baghdad as a Turkish straitjacket because, as one Turkish official said, "in this region interdependence is understood as the opposite of independence."<sup>187</sup> Considering it will take a long time until these regimes are replaced with better ones, Turkey is trying to install some confidence building measures that may help remove the ideological aspects of the dispute, carrying the issue from the rhetoric of national unity and national security to one of cooperation and the effective use of water.

To solve the water scarcity problem, Turkey has offered the "Three-Staged Plan for Optimum, Equitable, and Reasonable Utilization of the Transboundary Watercourses of the Euphrates Basin."<sup>188</sup> The first stage involved the inventory studies for water resources where all sides exchange data on gauging stations, flows, and quality of water. The second stage referred to the inventory studies for land sources where data on land

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<sup>187</sup> Murhaf Jouejati, "Water Politics as High Politics: The Case of Turkey and Syria," in Barkey, ed., *Reluctant Neighbor*, p. 146.

<sup>188</sup> "Water Issues Between Turkey, Syria and Iraq," *Perceptions, Journal of International Affairs*, 1:2 (Ankara: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, June-August 1996).

classification, soil conditions for projects planned or under construction and operation, and drainage conditions are all exchanged among the three riparian states. The final stage is the evaluation of water and land resources, which includes activities that range from determining optimal irrigation types to determining water consumption and evaluating the economic viability of the planned project. In other words, the plan foresees establishing a purely technical water management regime that will rely on scientific data in order to prevent the waste of already scarce water resources.

Nevertheless, the downstream riparian states' different approach to the issue of sovereignty over water, their resort to power politics and subversive means have blocked any reconciliatory attempts to negotiate on this plan. They do not want the emergence of Turkey as a regional power, which controls the water, which is very decisive for their regime's survival, and which will export an increasing amount of agricultural products and hydro-energy to the Arabs, and thereby make them dependent on Turkey by developing huge economic and energy potential in the GAP area.

Whereas Ankara defines the Euphrates-Tigris river system and even the Orontes river as "transboundary system," rejecting co-sovereignty, Baghdad and Damascus call it "international water," thus claiming their share. While Turkey claims *sovereign rights* over the Euphrates and Tigris on the basis of being the upstream country, according to the *Harmon Doctrine*, Syria and Iraq argue that all riparian states should have equal *rights* over international water, according to *Prior Appropriation Doctrine*.<sup>189</sup> However, Syria contradicts itself by not applying the same doctrine in its other water disputes with Israel, with Iraq and with Turkey (about the Orontes [Asi] River which flows from Syria to Mediterranean through Turkey's Hatay province). For example, when Syria completes the building of two dams on the Asi River, the available portion of 1.2 billion m<sup>3</sup> Asi water for Hatay's farmers will decrease from 120 million m<sup>3</sup> to 25 million m<sup>3</sup> (from 10 percent to 2 percent), a figure incomparable with Turkey's release of 50 billion of the 75 billion m<sup>3</sup> of Euphrates-Tigris water to downstream countries. This picture portrays how

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<sup>189</sup> *Water and Conflict in the Middle East: The Euphrates River Dispute* (A research paper for the "Environmental Security" class at Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, Summer 1999), pp. 33-34.

Syria contradicts its own water-sharing formula. Turkey also argues that both rivers should be seen as a single water system since both rivers join before reaching the Persian Gulf and since Iraq has developed the Thartar Canal project transferring the waters of the Tigris to the Euphrates. Syria and Iraq, however, object to such interpretation, arguing that each river should be discussed separately.

## **B. SYRIA-PKK LINKAGE**

While there is no law binding Turkey internationally on the water issue, Turkey granted an annual flow of a minimum 500 m<sup>3</sup>/s water into Syria in a 1987 protocol. But, there are internationally accepted laws and norms about state-sponsored terrorism and the observance of bilateral agreements, especially on security issues. That brings us to the connection between the Syrian regime and its measures to pressure Turkey: to play the terrorism card. Syria, sponsoring international terrorism—against either Israel or Turkey—deliberately fits the definition of what is called a “rogue state.” As mentioned early, Syria, as a rogue state, justifies any method that will sustain the domestic status quo—the regime survival. Thus, previously the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) terrorism,<sup>190</sup> later PKK terrorism, in this consideration, have been a strong leverage for Syrian Ba’ath regime to force Turkey to accept the Syrian terms on the water issue.

However, Turkey, in response, has reflected its traditional foreign policy approach and rejected basing its cooperation of the Euphrates water on an exchange of water concessions and halting of support for the PKK. Submitting such a pressure would mean the acceptance of the use of international terrorism in the bilateral disputes of the states and cast a shadow on the legitimacy of the Turkish state. Turkey, thus, has conditioned a security agreement that would stop PKK terrorism before any negotiations for the water. Such agreements, which bind Syria to cease any kind of support for the

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<sup>190</sup> For ASALA-Syria-PKK connection see, “Terrorist Group Profiles,” *Dudley Knox Library-Naval Postgraduate School* website at <http://web.nps.navy.mil/~library/tgp/armenian.htm>; “ASALA Nasil Ortaya Cikti? (How did ASALA Come to Being?),” *Populer Tarih (Popular History)*, April 2001, pp. 68-72, or available [Online]: <http://www.haberbilgi.com/bilim/tarih/asala.html>.

PKK and to extradite the PKK and its leader, were signed by Damascus four times—in 1983, 1987, 1992, and again in 1993. Nevertheless, Syrian leadership did not abandon resorting to the PKK, and even increased its support for it when the northern Iraq power vacuum provided the PKK with moreroom to maneuver in the post-Gulf War era.

The PKK has threatened Turkey's national unity and territorial integrity in a more direct and dangerous way than the Soviet Union did in the course of more than 40 years of the Cold War. The PKK has its roots both inside and outside the country. Inside it exploited Turkey's economically underdeveloped southeast region in an effort to carve out an independent Kurdish state. It was not supported by the bulk of the Kurdish population, most of which was concentrated in the big cities of Turkey's west. Outside Turkey, the PKK was supported by regional neighbors in various degrees to extract various concessions from the Turkish state. Turkish civilian and military officials believed that coping with the domestic economic reasons for the PKK's existence would be easier once it was forced to abandon the armed struggle against the government. The Turkish Armed Forces had demonstrated growing effectiveness in the 1990s in reducing the fighting ability of the PKK and in restoring order in the southeastern cities, but this success had come at a high cost: 30,000 military and civilian casualties (including the elderly and children) and \$86 billion, which approximated Turkey's entire external debt.<sup>191</sup> The government could not achieve lasting success unless the PKK's outside support was curtailed.

Syria, as the primary supporter of the PKK, has always been the focal point in Turkish post-Cold War strategy. Syria's support for the PKK differed from that provided by the other regional states. From the time that Abdullah Ocalan first settled there in 1979,<sup>192</sup> Syria provided financial, military, and logistical support to the PKK, hosting its headquarters and training camps. It helped recruit personnel and exerted influence on

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<sup>191</sup> Statement by Ambassador Ulug Ozilker, deputy undersecretary of the state in charge of bilateral relations in the Turkish Foreign Affairs Ministry. *Hurriyet*, 13 October 1998.

<sup>192</sup> On November 27, 1978, Ocalan founded the Workers Party of Kurdistan (PKK) and after the declaration of martial law by the government in Southeast Turkey, he fled to Syrian controlled Lebanon to organize the PKK's terrorist activities. Since then he held bases and offices both in Lebanon and Syria.

PKK strategy and tactics.<sup>193</sup> According to Turkish intelligence officials, Damascus also provided 80 percent of the basic necessities of the PKK camps functioning in northern Iraq.<sup>194</sup>

In 1987, Prime Minister Turgut Ozal himself went to Damascus to conduct negotiations for a security and water protocol. The 1987 protocol however resulted in only a temporary assuaging of differences. The Syrians sent terrorist leader Abdullah Ocalan temporarily to the Beqaa Valley in Lebanon and soon after the protocol was signed allowed him to meet with Soviet officials in Damascus.<sup>195</sup> Ankara and Damascus were allied temporarily in the U.S.-led coalition against Iraq. Both countries benefited from the alliance, although it did nothing to resolve the differences between them concerning the PKK and water. But the Gulf War provided the environment for the first significant security protocol between the two capitals. In April 1992, top Turkish officials headed by Foreign Minister Hikmet Cetin made their way south to negotiate with President Hafiz al-Asad, Foreign Minister Faruk Sharaa and top Syrian military officials. The security agreement of April 1992 is worthy of detailed examination: 1) both countries would cooperate against terrorism, "including its international form," and prevent terrorists from crossing from one country to the other; 2) neither country would permit any organization outlawed by the other to organize, train or make propaganda, and any captured member of an outlawed organization would be returned; 3) both would exchange information regarding outlawed organizations; 4) both would undertake measures to prevent infiltration and smuggling; and 5) both would take measures to prevent "unnecessary" armed incidents on their borders.<sup>196</sup> However, this security agreement defused the tension between the two countries but was short-lived. After a

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<sup>193</sup> "Special Report" on Syria's support for the PKK prepared and submitted for the consideration of the Turkish National Security Council by Turkish intelligence units, *Hurriyet*, 8 October 1998.

<sup>194</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, 2 November 1998.

<sup>195</sup> Ismet G. Imset, *The PKK: A Report on Separatist Violence in Turkey (1973-1992)* (Ankara: The Turkish Daily News Publications, 1992), p. 174.

<sup>196</sup> Robert Olson, "Turkey-Syria Relations since the Gulf War: Kurds and Water," *Middle East Policy*, 5:2 (May 1997), p. 171.

brief respite, PKK activities emanating from Syria resumed with attacks on targets in Turkey. On November 1993, the two countries signed another security protocol, regarding the PKK and other "terrorists," and Syrian high ranking officials and Syrian media made statements such as, "Syria would not be a thoroughfare for those who are against Turkey's interests," and "Syria had begun to ban the PKK on President Asad's orders." This rhetoric delighted Turkey for a short time, but Syrian's reluctance to fulfill these promises further infuriated Turkish authorities in Ankara.<sup>197</sup>

In the security meetings that followed between Turkey, Syria, and Iran, which aimed to illustrate the determination of these states on the preservation of Iraq's territorial integrity, Syria, as well as Iran, did not show the same enthusiasm in withdrawing their support from the PKK. Turkish officials emphasized they would not pursue earnest negotiations on the water question until Syria assured them that they would no longer support PKK activities or shelter Abdullah Ocalan. Until an agreement was reached, Ankara stressed that it would be difficult to move forward on other problems such as the distribution of the Asi (Orontes) River (al-Asi in Arabic), which flows through Syria before entering Turkey's Hatay province. The Turks wanted an agreement that would prohibit the Syrians from severely restricting the Asi's flow before it enters Hatay. Ankara also indicated that it sought indemnification for property in Syria belonging to Turkish citizens, some cases of which date prior to World War I.<sup>198</sup>

On December 1994, Turkey showed its eagerness for friendly relations and economic cooperation one more time by sending a 100-person delegation to Damascus to engage in trade discussions. Syria's response was absurd: Syrian's foreign minister stated that Syria was interested in improving trade relations if Syria's \$300 million trade deficit with Turkey could be reduced. Ankara's motive for such an attempt was to prepare itself for a post-Syrian-Israeli peace agreement environment in which Syria would cease its support for the PKK in an effort to remove its name from the list of "terrorist states."

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

Nevertheless, not only did Syria continue supporting the PKK, but it also tried to tempt the US and Israel to assert concessions from Turkish water for Syria in exchange of Golan waters Israel had confiscated. Ankara bluntly rejected such a formula that would encroach on Turkish sovereignty.

By mid-summer of 1995, reports that the PKK was attempting to establish an organizational structure in Hatay, a Turkish province, which borders Syria, and which Damascus has irredentist claims, once again soured what seemed to be improving relations. In 1939, with Syria under French mandate, Paris granted then northern Syrian Alexandretta independence as a prelude to a referendum in which—as expected—Alexandrettans opted to join Turkey. France took the action as enticement to Turkish neutrality in its brewing war with Germany.<sup>199</sup> To this day, Syria claims sovereignty over Hatay.

The PKK tried to infiltrate the Cukurova Plain by using the road from Lataqiya in Syria to Samadag, a village in the Amanus mountains in Hatay.<sup>200</sup> Relations were further strained when Damascus hosted high-ranking German intelligence officers who met with Ocalan to discuss the PKK demonstrations in Germany, which caused intolerable disorder, and PKK involvement in drug trafficking.<sup>201</sup> For his part, Ocalan stressed his desire for Germany to recognize the PKK as a legitimate entity and to stop characterizing it as a terrorist organization. Thus, Damascus was the site of negotiations which, if implemented, would prove detrimental to Turkey's policy of delegitimizing the PKK by referring to it as a terrorist organization.

Syria also put pressure on Turkey by bringing the water issue into the international sphere, using historical Arab solidarity against Turkey (and the Ottomans), international law, and the special position of Syria in the peace process. The Arab League

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<sup>199</sup> Erik Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 1994), pp. 211-212.

<sup>200</sup> Olson, "Turkey-Syria Relations since the Gulf War: Kurds and Water," p. 174.

<sup>201</sup> *Hurriyet*, 22-26 November 1995.

and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have called upon Turkey to be more cooperative toward Syria and Iraq on the water issue. For example, the late 1995 Damascus Declaration by six GCC countries plus Syria and Egypt strongly criticized Ankara's intention to build another dam at Biricik on the Turkish-Syrian border as a part of the GAP and complained that water coming from Turkey was heavily polluted.<sup>202</sup> Ankara denied these charges, and again pointed to PKK terrorism to which Syria resorted. This tactic of Syria's had also been the reason why Turkey could not get World Bank credit for the GAP development project and had had to use its own resources. Still another component of Syrian policy was strategic cooperation with neighbors who had similar motivations. In 1995, Syria agreed to permit the Greek Air Force to land at Syrian air bases.<sup>203</sup>

These developments consumed Turkish patience and contributed to the toughening of the Turkish stance toward the Arab world in general and Syria in particular. In a memorandum issued on January 23, 1996, Turkey charged Syria with having engaged in de facto aggression by supporting the PKK and stressed that, according to Article 51 of the U.N. Charter, Turkey was entitled to adopt self-defense measures against Syria.<sup>204</sup> Ankara demanded that Syria extradite Abdullah Ocalan. While Turkey had previously clarified its unhappiness with Damascus' sheltering of the PKK leader, this marked the first time that it publicly announced its demand. Syria's irresponsive stance to the Turkish calls became the straw that broke the camel's back and Turkey suspended all relations with Syria in 1996.

Ankara made this demand at a time when Syria and Israel were about to cut a peace deal, which would have an adverse impact on Turkish national security. If

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<sup>202</sup> *Hurriyet*, 30 December 1995.

<sup>203</sup> Kemal Kirisci, "Post Cold-War Turkish Security and the Middle East," *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA) Journal*, issue #2 (July, 1997). Available [Online]: [www.cc.columbia.edu/sec/dlc/ciao/olj/meria/meria797\\_kirisci.html](http://www.cc.columbia.edu/sec/dlc/ciao/olj/meria/meria797_kirisci.html)

<sup>204</sup> Mahmut Bali Aykan, "The Turkish-Syrian Crisis of October 1998: A Turkish View," *Middle East Policy* 6:4 (June 1999), p. 3.

succeeded, the deal would free Syria from its debacle in the south and allow it to focus on the north more by deploying its forces along its border with Turkey, thereby posing an additional threat to Turkey. Its implication on Turkish national security, however, would be far worse, when a possible negative US and Europe attitude toward Turkey about the water issue in a post-peace era was considered. Also, that would mean Turkey would be left with unfair human rights criticism in its dealing with PKK terrorism, while Syria would still enjoy supporting the PKK, and would succeed in removing its name from the US "terrorist states" list in exchange for its signature on the peace deal.<sup>205</sup> This posture prompted Turkey to distract Israel from the peace negotiations with Syria by offering Tel Aviv an irrefutable military cooperation.

The signing of the February 1996 "Military Training and Cooperation Agreement" and later "Military Defense Industry Agreements" between Turkey and Israel was a huge blow to Syria's strategic position as well as Iraq's and Iran's positions in the Middle East. Ankara, securing this cooperation, ranging from exchange of military personnel and air spaces for training to intelligence cooperation and co-production or upgrade of strategically important weapons system, changed the balance structure of the Middle East in its favor. In so doing, it raised the pressure on Syria by raising Turkey's geo-strategic significance to the West, especially to the US. The support of the United States and the pro-Israeli lobby in the US to this new "strategic cooperation" meant the tide turned favoring and making Ankara the strongest capital of the Middle East. Hence, the strategic cooperation heightened Ankara's assertiveness, which already demonstrated itself in the cross-border operations in northern Iraq against the PKK bases, and in its connections with the Kurdish leaders of northern Iraq. Regionally, this cooperation served to enhance Turkey's defense posture, to deter Syria from supporting the PKK and the Arab countries from supporting Syria, and to enable Ankara to contribute more to the Palestinian-Israeli peace process through enhanced relations with Israel and continuing support for the Palestinian cause.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Chapter Five about Turkey-Israel relations explains this issue in depth.

<sup>206</sup> Aykan, "The Turkish-Syrian Crisis of October 1998: a Turkish View," p. 177.

Despite strained relations with Syria and the Arab world in the wake of Turkish-Israeli military cooperation, Turkey made a last attempt to use diplomacy to mitigate the tension. In early 1998, Turkey posed a peace initiative for the Middle East aimed at regional cooperation for stability. The head of the Middle East Department at the Turkish Foreign Affairs Ministry, Ambassador Aykut Cetirge, visited Damascus in February 1998 in an attempt to re-start the dialogue that had been cut off since early 1996.<sup>207</sup> This move was reciprocated by the visit of Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Adnan Omran to Ankara in July of the same year. These contacts came to nothing.<sup>208</sup> The Turkish side later pointed to this diplomatic failure as justifying Turkey's resort to gunboat diplomacy, which lasted with the October 1998 crisis successfully.<sup>209</sup>

There are significant factors that led to Turkey's "flexible response" strategy that would gradually escalate the crisis so long as Syria declined to respond to Turkey's demands.<sup>210</sup> First is the frustration Turkish authorities feel with Syrians' indifference to the Turkish call for the end of Syrian support for the PKK, as previously mentioned. This frustration swelled into the public sector in 1998 when Sirri Sakik, a well-known PKK leader, revealed the Syrian connection with the PKK in the official interrogations.<sup>211</sup>

A second factor that frustrated Turkey was , the September 1998 Washington Protocol. This protocol prompted Turkish military and civilian elites to take action because this protocol deliberately designed the realization of Turkish fears: a blue print for a viable Kurdish state and prevention of Turkish cross-border military operations into

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<sup>207</sup> "Turkey, Syria to Continue Dialogue," *ArabicNews.com*, 28 February 1998. Available [Online]: [www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/980228/1998022814.html](http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/980228/1998022814.html).

<sup>208</sup> "Damascus, Ankara Fail to Settle Disputes," *ArabicNews.com*, 04 July 1998. Available [Online]: [www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/980704/1998070433.html](http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/980704/1998070433.html).

<sup>209</sup> Aykan, "The Turkish-Syrian Crisis of October 1998: a Turkish View," p. 178.

<sup>210</sup> For this strategy, see *Milliyet*, 10 October 1998, and *Cumhuriyet*, 8 October 1998.

<sup>211</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, 4 October 1998.

northern Iraq to destroy the PKK camps.<sup>212</sup> This meant that previous Turkish efforts to control the situation in northern Iraq were now jeopardized by the Washington agreement. According to statements made by Turkish intelligence officers at the time, forcing Syria to cease support to the PKK became a perceived necessity to neutralize the militants there before they became more active thanks to the help provided by the Washington accord.<sup>213</sup>

A third element deepened Turkish frustration. If the Washington agreement was the trigger, the increasing disappointment among the Turkish military with the perceived failure of the Turkish Foreign Ministry to launch an effective international campaign against Syria was the finger that pulled it.<sup>214</sup> The Turkish military's active role in foreign policy became much more pronounced during the REFAHYOL (Welfare Party-True Path Party Coalition) government, in 1996-97, under the Islamist Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan. During this period a National Security Council Memorandum of February 28, 1997, warned the Erbakan government of "sanctions" if it failed to take effective measures against "separatist and fundamentalist" activities in Turkey.<sup>215</sup> At the time, the Turkish Armed Forces felt that the Foreign Ministry was not active enough in initiating an international campaign to deny supporters of the PKK a free hand.<sup>216</sup>

The "flexible strategy" was about military coercion without the direct application of force. The crisis that it started was perceived with equal apprehension both within the region and outside. It was feared that if Turkey resorted to military force against Syria, the bilateral crisis could turn into an Arab-Turkish one, further exacerbating tensions caused by the stalling of the Arab-Israeli peace process. It was precisely for this reason

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<sup>212</sup> For more information about this protocol see chapter about Turkey and Iraq.

<sup>213</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, 2 November 1998.

<sup>214</sup> Aykan, "The Turkish-Syrian Crisis of October 1998: a Turkish View," p. 181.

<sup>215</sup> See the full text of this memorandum in *Milliyet*, 1 March 1997.

<sup>216</sup> Statement by a high level official of the Turkish Armed Forces to that effect in *Milliyet*, 8 October 1998.

that Turkey had restrained itself for more than ten years. However, Turkey's strategy in its initial stage involved explaining its case before international bodies such as the U.N. Security Council, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and the Arab League. If this move did not generate international pressure on Syria to stop supporting the PKK, then diplomacy would give way to military escalation ranging from the harassing of Syrian ships in the Mediterranean to the aerial bombing of key targets in Syria.<sup>217</sup> The fact that the Turkish government did not go before the Grand National Assembly (GNA) to ask permission to use force against Syria suggests that it still preferred other options. While quite threatening, Turkish public statements simultaneously emphasized Turkey's willingness to establish normal relations as soon as Syria agreed to cease support of the PKK.<sup>218</sup>

In what appeared to be a calculated move, strong verbal warnings to Syria from high-ranking Turkish military and civilian officials to the effect that Turkey was running out of patience concerning the support for the PKK suddenly escalated the tension between the two countries. A crisis ensued when Turkey began massing troops along the border and Syria retaliated, following the blunt statement made by Turkish Chief of Staff General Huseyin Kivrikoglu to the effect that Turkey was engaged in an "undeclared war" with Syria over its support of PKK terrorism.<sup>219</sup>

This policy was successful in gradually influencing the Syrian leadership. Divisions within the Syrian cabinet and among different sectors of the Syrian military became public knowledge. Assad apparently decided that he could not take on the Turks. As Turkish threats intensified, Syria's rhetoric suddenly cooled off. Damascus emphasized the need for "discussions." With its troops overwhelmingly based in Lebanon and the Golan, Syria never even reinforced its lightly policed Turkish border. It is likely

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<sup>217</sup> Statement of a high-level official of the Turkish Armed Forces to that effect in *Cumhuriyet*, 8 October 1998.

<sup>218</sup> Aykan, "The Turkish-Syrian Crisis of October 1998: a Turkish View," p. 179.

<sup>219</sup> Alan Makovsky, "Defusing the Turkish-Syrian Crisis: Whose Triumph?," *Middle East Insight* (January-February 1999), p. 3. Available [Online]: [www.washingtoninstitute.org/media/makovsky.htm](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/media/makovsky.htm)

that Egyptian President Husni Mubarak—who visited Damascus and Ankara to mediate, and hosted Assad in Cairo shortly thereafter—helped convince the Syrian president that the Turks were serious about resorting to military action. Hafiz al-Asad soon sent Turkey an unwritten message via Iranian Foreign Minister Kemal Kharrazi to the effect that Syria had already begun arresting PKK militants and would expel them along with Ocalan without publicizing the event.<sup>220</sup>

The senior bureaucrats of the two sides met in Adana, Turkey, on October 19 and 20. On October 20, Premier Yilmaz announced that Ocalan was no longer in Damascus.<sup>221</sup> Turkey insisted that the only topic on the agenda would be Syrian support for terrorism, and the October 20 agreement reflected that viewpoint.<sup>222</sup> Contrary to the conventional expectation that Turkey would decrease the flow of water into Syria during the crisis, Syria was receiving 850 m<sup>3</sup> of water per second on average, which was 150m<sup>3</sup> more than what Syria had preciously claimed: 700m<sup>3</sup>.<sup>223</sup> In the agreement Damascus specifically pledged to prevent, on Syrian territory, PKK propaganda activities, the supply of weapons and logistical and financial support to the PKK, PKK commercial activities, the establishment of PKK camps and “other PKK facilities for training and shelter, entry of PKK members or their transit to third countries, and the presence of PKK leader Ocalan.”<sup>224</sup>

The agreement included a clause, which said that the parties “agreed to establish certain mechanisms so that the measures (that are supposed to be taken by Syria against the PKK) will be implemented in an effective and transparent way.”<sup>225</sup> These

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<sup>220</sup> “A Message From Damascus,” *Hurriyet*, 10 October 1998.

<sup>221</sup> *Milliyet*, 21 October 1998.

<sup>222</sup> Makovsky, “Defusing the Turkish-Syrian Crisis: Whose Triumph?” p. 4.

<sup>223</sup> Statement by General Director of the State Water Works (DSI) Dogan Altinbilek “We Give Sufficient Water Syria,” *Sabah*, 20 October 1998.

<sup>224</sup> Makovsky, “Defusing the Turkish-Syrian Crisis: Whose Triumph?,” p. 5.

<sup>225</sup> The text of agreement in *Turkish Daily News*, 21 October 1998.

“mechanisms,” which included establishing a hotline between the two countries and the appointment of two (later to be increased to four) special officials to each other's diplomatic representations, were in place within ten days of the conclusion of the agreement.<sup>226</sup> The mechanisms also included the holding of a tripartite security meeting with Lebanon to cooperate against the PKK and to establish a system for evaluating the effectiveness of confidence-building measures proposed by the Turkish side. According to the Adana agreement, the Syrian negotiating team pledged to submit this Turkish proposal for the approval of Syrian authorities. The agreement reportedly concerned an on-site inspection by the Turks. The Syrians had been sensitive about this on-site inspection from the beginning.<sup>227</sup>

Though it seemed to many observers that Syria surrendered and was fulfilling its commitments, Turkish authorities reacted cautiously to the agreement, saying Ankara would monitor compliance and respond accordingly. Not surprisingly, Syria tried to achieve a reciprocal victory over the water issue by defying the international community. Shortly after the Syrian concessions during the October crisis, the Syrian side requested that joint committee meetings be renewed (suspended by Turkey on the grounds that Syria must first cooperate on the terrorism question) and that experts from Turkey and Syria broach “security, water, and other political issues.”<sup>228</sup> Until the end of 1998, Turkey has not answered these Syrian calls on the grounds that since expelling Ocalan, the Syrian side has evaded its general responsibilities under the Adana protocol (reportedly in implementing the “technical details.”) The Turkish side remained skeptical on the implementation since Syria had signed a very similar protocol in 1993. So much similar that the same Ambassador who had signed the 1993 protocol, signed the 1998 protocol.<sup>229</sup> If the Turkish leaders were to conclude that Syria, having expelled Ocalan to

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<sup>226</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, 1 November 1998

<sup>227</sup> Aykan, “The Turkish-Syrian Crisis of October 1998: a Turkish View” p. 179.

<sup>228</sup> Aykan, “The Turkish-Syrian Crisis of October 1998: a Turkish View” p. 184.

<sup>229</sup> Makovsky, “Defusing the Turkish-Syrian Crisis: Whose Triumph?” p. 5.

avert Turkish military intervention, is inclined to backslide, possibly on the grounds that Turkey is not reciprocating on water, the crisis could reignite.

Though Turkey was satisfied with the expulsion of Ocalan from Syria, its relations with West European countries have become particularly tense in the wake of the capture of Ocalan in Italy. After their meeting on November 27, 1998, the prime ministers of Italy and Germany announced that they had decided to lead an all-European initiative to "find a political settlement" to Turkey's Kurdish problem.<sup>230</sup> Their announcement created an uproar in Turkey. Later, the U.S. Ambassador to Rome declared that the United States was in favor of solving the Kurdish issue in the international arena.<sup>231</sup> Turkish leaders stated that these announcements amounted to gross interference in Turkey's internal affairs, touching on a life-and-death question for Turkey. These developments came as no surprise since the differences of approach and solution to the Kurdish issue between Turkey and the West have been a continuing source of tension.<sup>232</sup>

Despite the crisis and the lingering skepticism, Turkish-Syrian relations have largely stabilized since 1998. In March 1999, for instance, the two sides agreed to open borders to allow the families on both sides to unite during the religious festivities.<sup>233</sup> In May 2000 Turkish Minister of State, Recep Onal, was joined by some 100 businessmen and state officials on his visit to Damascus to restart the Fourth Joint Economic Council, which had been completely inactive for the prior 12 years.<sup>234</sup> Ironically, despite the tensions, Turkish-Syrian profits from trade, though low for neighboring countries, had

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<sup>230</sup> Related statements concerning the European initiative by the Turkish Minister of State in charge of EU Affairs, Sukru Sina Gurel, in *Cumhuriyet*, 29 November 1998.

<sup>231</sup> Alan Makovsky, "Turkey, the United States, and Ocalan: The Stakes," *Policy Watch*, no. 352, 20 November 1998. Available [Online]: [www.washingtoninstitute.org/watch/Policy\\_Watch1998/352.htm](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/watch/Policy_Watch1998/352.htm).

<sup>232</sup> Mahmut Bali Aykan, "Turkish Perspectives On Turkish-US Relations Concerning Persian Gulf Security in the Post Cold War Era: 1989-1995," *Middle East Journal*, 50:3 (Summer 1996), pp. 350-351.

<sup>233</sup> Cakiroglu and Eder, "Domestic Concerns and the Water Conflict over the Euphrates-Tigris River Basin," p. 62.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*

still been around \$600 million per year.<sup>235</sup> In 2000, Syria was the second largest market of GAP exported goods with \$33.3 million.<sup>236</sup> On May 9, 2001, Syrian Transportation Minister Makram Obeid visited Turkey on an official invitation made by Turkish Transportation Minister Enis Oksuz to develop cooperation on the land, air, and railway transportation between the two countries.<sup>237</sup>

The two sides are seeking a partnership, initially began by Turkish insistence, with security issues as exemplified in the developments of 2001. Early in 2001, Turkish Interior Minister Saadettin Tantan and his Syrian counterpart signed agreements to cooperate against terrorism, drug trafficking, money laundering, and counterfeiting.<sup>238</sup> On 20 April 2001, in the visit of General Resart Turgutlu to Damascus, the two states held preparation meetings for the first time for a military cooperation agreement, which envisions mutual visits by commanders, joint training and invitations to exercises.<sup>239</sup> Officials said Turkey has even proposed to Syria projects to develop defensive systems jointly to increase border surveillance.

Its PKK advantage gone, Syria, is no more a significant threat to Turkey. Though Syria has the largest ballistic missile arsenal, most of them chemical, in the Middle East,<sup>240</sup> Turkish military planning does not perceive this as a serious threat at the moment considering Syrian Ba'ath regime's prudence to preserve the status quo, its more

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<sup>235</sup> William Hale, "Economic Issues in Turkish Foreign Policy," in Alan Makovsky and Sabri Sayari (eds.) *Turkey's New World: Changing Dynamics of Turkish Foreign Policy* (Washington D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2001), p. 36.

<sup>236</sup> "Gap Exports Products Mainly to Italy, Syria, Germany, Britain and Romania," *Middle East News Online*, 3 February 2001. Available [Online]: [www.middleeastwire.com/turkey/business/stories/20010202\\_meno.shtml](http://www.middleeastwire.com/turkey/business/stories/20010202_meno.shtml)

<sup>237</sup> "Syrian Transportation Minister Arrives in Istanbul," *Turkish Daily News*, 9 May 2001.

<sup>238</sup> "Turkiye and Syria Signed Agreement," *ExportTurkey.com*. Available [Online]: [www.exportturkey.com/news/opennews.asp?NewsID=498](http://www.exportturkey.com/news/opennews.asp?NewsID=498)

<sup>239</sup> Sami Kohen, *Milliyet*, 20 April 2001. "Turkey and Syria Explores Military Cooperation," *Middle East Newslite*, 19 April 2001. Available [Online]: [ww.menewslite.com/stories/2001/april/04\\_19\\_3.html](http://ww.menewslite.com/stories/2001/april/04_19_3.html)

<sup>240</sup> Al J. Venter, "Syria's Nuclear Alternative," *The Middle East*, December 2000.

serious dispute against the "Arab enemy" Israel, and the obvious imbalance of powers created by Turkish-Israeli military cooperation against Syria since the mid-1990s. Still, though mostly against Iraq, the anti-ballistic missile system program Turkey has been developing is a counter-measure to ward off this possible threat.

### C. CONCLUSION

Convergence of prospective solutions of crucial domestic concerns, either ethnic or economic, of Syria and Turkey on the Euphrates water has generated the so-called water problem on the Euphrates basin. While Turkey has control of the water, Syria has tried to counter Turkey's advantage by resorting to PKK terrorism.

Over-demand and inefficient use of water by Syria due to political reasons, belie the claims that the GAP aimed to cut the water of downstream riparian states and reveal that the underlying problem is Syria's hope to preserve their domestic status quo. If the GAP did not exist, the downstream riparian countries would get only 50 cubic meters of water per second compared to 800-900 m<sup>3</sup>/s of water flow they received during 1998-1999 period, well above the previously-agreed 500m<sup>3</sup>/s. Indeed, except for Syria's and Iraq's ideology, no reason exist why food self-sufficiency policies, which essentially lead to ineffective allocation of resources, cannot be replaced by policies of food interdependence and food trade. However, this is perceived by Damascus as a Turkish straitjacket because, as one Turkish official said, "in this region interdependence is understood as the opposite of independence."<sup>241</sup>

The Syria-PKK linkage cost Turkey 30,000 lives and \$85 billion. Syria's intransigence on using the PKK card to dictate Turkey's actions regarding the water-sharing issue failed and produced no results except international humiliation of the Ba'ath regime in Damascus. This resulted from Turkey's assertiveness derived from the post-Cold War conditions and the "strategic cooperation" with Israel to the extent that Turkey threatened Syria with a military invasion. Turkey's flexible strategy achieved their

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<sup>241</sup> Murhaf Jouejati, "Water Politics as High Politics: The Case of Turkey and Syria," in Barkey, ed., *Reluctant Neighbor*, p. 146.

needed results by escalating the tension between Turkey and Syria to October 1998 crisis where Hafiz Asad could not risk further. Though satisfied, the Turkish side was still skeptical about the implementation of the October 20 agreement. There Syria was forced to give the same promises it did in the 1992 and 1993 security agreements. Turkey demonstrated this skepticism by holding security issues as priority before any cooperation since the signing of the 1998 agreement.

## V. TURKISH-ISRAELI RELATIONS

The Turkish-Israeli cooperation has been one of the most important factors that changed the political landscape of the Middle East in the post-Cold War era. The two military agreements concluded in 1996 profoundly transformed the regional balances. Surely, as stated in the “alliance theory,” the cooperation between Turkey and Israel was born out of the mutual need to balance external threats due to these two countries’ geographic proximity, offensive capabilities, and perceived intentions.<sup>242</sup> That is why we can call it a “strategic cooperation,” without missing the significant volume of its economic and cultural aspects. However, it would not be wrong to claim that global factors played a more important role than regional parameters in determining the pattern Turkey would pursue to achieve its national interests in the Middle East. The changing Western perception of Turkey following the end of the Cold War created Turkish fears of marginalization and consequently prompted Turkey to follow a more active and assertive policy in the Middle East. As a result, to counter the challenges from the Middle East and the decline of its Western image, which left Turkey alone in dealing with its regional security problems, Turkey appealed to the Israeli option.

This paper will explore the factors that brought Turkey and Israel under a military, as well as economic, strategic partnership. The main argument will be that behind the emergence of close ties between the two states in the 1990s are Turkey’s deep strategic concerns regarding its Middle Eastern security and the Western attitude toward these concerns as the main motives. Israel’s benefits are also significant but are responsive outcomes of Turkish calls for cooperation, which at one point enticed Israel to gain more political leverage, reducing the importance of a deal with Syria to secondary. The first section—History of Relations—of this chapter reveals that the cooperation between Turkey and Israel is not surprising given the history of their relationship and their socio-political similarities. In the second section, I discuss Turkey’s global considerations—attitude of the West toward Turkey—that forced Turkey to initiate a

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<sup>242</sup> Stephen Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 22-26.

“strategic cooperation” in the post-Gulf War era. An analysis of Turkey’s regional concerns in initiating such cooperation and the changes in both Israel and Turkey’s military doctrines resulting from the 1996 military cooperation is the focus of the third section. The benefits offered by civilian aspect of the cooperation since the beginning of 1990s will be the subsequent issue to discuss. The final contention will be that Turkey was the main reason for such cooperation and the two military agreements in 1996 are the backbones of this cooperation, despite almost 20 other economic, cultural, trade, agriculture agreements, in that they unprecedentedly transformed the regional balance structure in favor of Turkey and Israel.

#### A. HISTORY OF RELATIONS

The history of Turkish-Israeli relations differs from the European-Jewish community and Arab-Jewish (Israel) relations with one distinct feature: “Jews never suffered persecution in Turkey, no Jewish blood has ever been spilled by the Turks.”<sup>243</sup> Historical relations between Turks and Jews date back to 15<sup>th</sup> century. In 1492, Sultan Beyazid II welcomed the Sephardic Jews expelled from Spain. On that occasion, Sultan Beyazid II stated: “The Catholic monarch Ferdinand was considered as wise since he impoverished his country with the expulsion of the Jews and enriched ours.”<sup>244</sup> The Jews in the Ottoman State enjoyed special recognition as the third *millet* along with Armenians and Orthodox Christians, and this permitted them to preserve and to continue their culture to the present. Ataturk, in the new Turkish Republic, strongly opposed any manifestation of racism or anti-Semitism and Turkey has been treating its Jews on an equal footing with other citizens. Ataturk’s fierce and determined reaction in the face of an attempt by an anti-Semitic group, in the summer of 1934, to force Jews out of several places in Thrace was acknowledged with praise by the Turkish Jewish community.<sup>245</sup> He welcomed

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<sup>243</sup> Amikam Nachami, *Israel, Turkey, and Greece. Uneasy Relations in the Mediterranean* (London: Frank Cass, 1987), p. 45.

<sup>244</sup> Molly Mcanaily, “Jewish History in Anatolia,” *Turkish Daily News* (1 December 1997).

<sup>245</sup> Kemal Karpat, *Turkey’s Politics: Transition to a Multi-Party System* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), endnote 51, p. 268.

thirty-five Jewish professors from Nazi Germany and offered them the opportunity to resume their academic work at Turkish universities. Later, the Istanbul offices of the Jewish Agency were allowed to organize the emigration to Palestine-both the local community and those in transit from Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Bulgaria. Today, there is an estimated 120,000 Turkish Jews in the coastal city of Bat Yam as a result of this emigration and this community is quite active as a lobby on Turkey's behalf because their sense of Turkish identity is very important to them.<sup>246</sup> There are approximately 24,000 Jewish Turks predominantly concentrated in Istanbul and very influential thanks to their wealth and historically prominent position in commercial life. More interesting, politicians like "the president, Yitzhak Ben Zvi, the prime minister, David Ben Gurion, and the foreign minister, Moshe Sharett,"<sup>247</sup> studied in Turkey and within the Israeli elite Ataturk is admired as an important historical figure.<sup>248</sup>

Both Turkey and Israel have a pro-Western foreign policy orientation and commitment to democracy and secularism and similar economic interests. In addition, the "common sense of otherness"<sup>249</sup> in a region dominated by Arabs and non-democratic regimes, and where "they (Turkey and Israel) feel profoundly ill at ease,"<sup>250</sup> naturally helps these countries maintain friendly relations. However, responsive to regional and global developments, the relations between Turkey and Israel fluctuated historically between intense cooperation and almost imperceptible interaction, but never ended. Relations between the two countries could be divided into two periods. The first, from 1948 to the early 1980s, comprised generally covert links, fluctuating in volume, military and intelligence oriented in nature. The second era, since the early 1980s, has included an

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<sup>246</sup> Philip Robins, *Turkey and the Middle East* (London: Pinter, 1991), p. 85.

<sup>247</sup> Nachami, p. 58.

<sup>248</sup> Robins, p. 84.

<sup>249</sup> Alain Gresh, "Turkish-Israeli-Syrian Relations and Their Impact on the Middle East," *Middle East Journal*, 52:2 (Spring 1998), p. 192.

<sup>250</sup> Robins, p. 82.

astounding expansion of connections—military, economic, and civilian. These ties then reached to unknown heights in 1996.

It was mainly due to US pressure that Ankara granted, in March 1949, de facto recognition to the state of Israel. Also, it would be plausible to discern that Turkish elites' perception of Israel as an example of a modern and Western state and their admiration for the strength demonstrated during the 1948 War positively influenced Ankara.<sup>251</sup> In short, the Turkish policymakers saw the recognition of Israel as further demonstration of Turkey's Westernness and in clear opposition to the ostensibly neutralist position adopted by the Arab states in the East-West conflict.

Israelis, on their part, immediately showed their enthusiasm, especially to convince Turks that Israel was not “red (communist),”<sup>252</sup> in further developing bilateral ties with Turkey as part of the “periphery strategy”—devised by David Ben Gurion—in an effort to develop friends beyond the “Arab fence.” However, Ankara met the Israeli attempts with substantial ambivalence throughout most of the 1950s because of the task of compelling the Arab countries to adhere to regional defense pacts against the Soviet Union, given by the US and Great Britain in exchange for Turkey's membership in NATO. <sup>253</sup> Ankara did not hesitate to stress repeatedly the limitations of its ties with Israel and its refusal to issue a declaration of support for Israel's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Turkey acted in accordance with the US during and after the Suez war and reduced its diplomatic relations to the lowest level to save the image of the Baghdad Pact (1955) in the eyes of the Arab world.

In 1958 when Turkey and Israel really embarked on the beginning of a fluctuating but never-ending alliance. Although what had been envisioned could not be realized then,

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<sup>251</sup> Hakan Yavuz, “Turkey's Relations with Israel,” *Foreign Policy* (Ankara) 5:3-4 (1991), p. 45.

<sup>252</sup> Nachami, p. 48.

<sup>253</sup> Wolfango Piccoli, *Alliance Theory: The Case of Turkey and Israel*, a Copenhagen Peace Research Institute working paper, August 1999, p. 13. Available [Online]: <https://www.cc.Columbia.edu/sec/dlc/ciao/wps/pic01/pic01.html>

it prepared the groundwork for a strategic cooperation of twenty-eight years later. The increasing evidence of Soviet-backed Communist and Nasserist subversion, the fall of the pro-Western Hashemite regime in Iraq, the Soviet “war of nerves” and the contemporaneous emergence of the US as the dominant Western power in the region pushed Turkey to hasten to join Israel in a secret “peripheral alliance.”

According to this “peripheral strategy” doctrine, still prevalent, Israel should seek to offset the diplomatic and economic boycott of the Arab world by forging close ties with non-Arab, Muslim states, and nations on the periphery of the region, including countries, which opposed the establishment of the state of Israel but had no conflict with it. Accordingly, Turkey, Iran, Ethiopia, Sudan, Lebanon, and Kurds were potential allies for Israel. The aim was to create the image, in the region and in the world at large, that the Middle East is not exclusively Arab or even Islamic but rather a multi-religious, ethnic, cultural, and national area.<sup>254</sup>

The cooperation included a wide range of areas but only the military intelligence part of it, which actually started in 1954 with the residency of an Israeli military attaché in Ankara,<sup>255</sup> survived because the disappearance of the confluence of regional and international developments, which acted as a catalyst for the alliance, soon removed the importance of other areas. Intelligence cooperation survived because of their common denominator, counter intelligence against the Soviet Union. *Trident*, a secret trilateral agreement between the intelligent services of Israel (MOSSAD), Turkey (MIT), and Iran (SAVAK),<sup>256</sup> formed the mutual base of security cooperation for these countries, bringing officials together to discuss the regional developments each three or six months during the Cold War (with the absence of Iran after the revolution).

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<sup>254</sup> Picolli, p. 50, endnote 92, citation from Michael Brecher, *The Foreign Policy System of Israel. Setting, Images, and Process*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 278.

<sup>255</sup> Spyridon Mimikos, *Strategic Implications of Expanded Turkish-Israeli Military Relations*, (Master’s Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, December 1999), p. 25.

<sup>256</sup> Mimikos, p. 51.

The two events in the early 1960s—the Cuban and the Cyprus crises—precipitated a search for a foreign policy approach less dependent on the US and NATO. Because of the Turkish resentment toward the US after these events and of the improved commercial opportunities in the Arab countries, Ankara adopted a “multi-faceted foreign policy,”<sup>257</sup> which diminished cooperation with the US in the region, efforts to strengthen the ties with the Arab states and a more balanced attitude toward the Arab-Israeli dispute. This inevitably led to the steady reduction of ties with Israel.

Turkish neutrality, more aligned to the Arab side, in the Arab-Israel dispute allowed Turkey on the one hand to express its solidarity to the Arab cause, while on the other hand allowed it to maintain its relations with Israel. To secure the Arab support against its isolation on the Cyprus issue and to expand economic ties with the oil-rich countries, Ankara had to downgrade its relations with Israel and show sympathy to the Arab countries at war with Israel. Starting from end of the Six Day War, Turkish diplomacy generally supported the Arab resolutions at the UN General Assembly, including the 1975 resolution labeling Zionism as a form of racism.

The increase of anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism in Turkish domestic politics was felt conspicuously when Israeli Knesset decided to enact a law declaring Jerusalem as the permanent capital of Israel. In addition, diplomatic representatives from fifteen Islamic countries and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) pressured the Turkish Prime Minister to sever all ties with Israel. The Prime Minister refused it. However, by condemning the decision and declaring the closure of its Jerusalem consulate on 28 August 1980, and by recalling the Turkish charge d'affaires,<sup>258</sup> the Turkish government adopted the minimum move necessary to alleviate domestic criticisms and to maintain friendly relations with the Arab states, a skillful action that subsequently harmed its relations with the US.

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<sup>257</sup> Piccoli, p. 17.

<sup>258</sup> Hakan Yavuz, “Turkish-Israeli Relations Through the Lens of the Turkish Identity Debate,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 17:1 (Autumn 1997), p. 24.

On December 2, 1980, the military regime of Turkey formally downgraded the relations with Israel at the second secretary level. The official reason was Israel's intransigent policies and the *fait accompli* it wished to create about the status of Jerusalem. Despite this official explanation, the real reason behind this move was Turkey's budgetary crisis. In 1980 Turkish exports was about \$2.2 billion, while Turkish oil import expenditure was itself \$2.6 billion.<sup>259</sup> Thus, Turkish authorities had to seek assistance from Arab countries in order to obtain the necessary oil for the upcoming winter. On the same day Turkey downgraded diplomatic relations, Saudi Arabia delivered to Turkey a check of \$250 million. Turkey's political and economic interests, rather than its ideological orientation, were of high importance for the military regime in this period. The structural economic reforms undertaken by the military regime and forwarded by the Ozal government five-folded Turkey's trade with the Middle East countries. The above picture illustrates the correlation between Turkey's economic expansion in the Arab Middle East and downgrading its economic and political relations with Israel.

Nevertheless, the 1980s also demonstrated the resumption of security, politics, and economy-based relations between Turkey and Israel as Turkey's hopes for the Arab support on the Cyprus issue proved wrong (most of the Arab world, especially the PLO, sided with Greece). The falling oil prices also reduced the significance of Arab markets in Turkey's trade profile. Furthermore, former Turkish Prime Minister Ozal's desire to improve relations with the US added other reasons to swing back to Israel. He openly relied on the sympathy of the influential pro-Israeli lobby in the US to reach his aim. This desire appeared as the principle motive behind Turkey's rapprochement to Israel at the end of the Cold War when Turkish fears of marginalization increased as it lost significance to the West.

In February 1982, Ankara declined voting on the UN's resolution that condemned Israel's annexation of the Golan Height. This Turkish abstention from the UN voting was

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<sup>259</sup> Yavuz, "Turkey's Relations with Israel," *Foreign Policy* (Ankara) 5:3-4 (1991), p. 43.

reciprocity for the useful information that Israelis provided for the Turks about the Armenian terrorists who killed several Turkish diplomats abroad.<sup>260</sup> Moreover, the two cooperated with the US during its notorious Iran-Contra affair. The Turkish and Israeli airports served as intermediaries for the transportation of illegally sold weapons to the Iranian rebels from 1980 to 1985.<sup>261</sup>

By the late 1980s, relations between Israel and Turkey were growing again. Diplomatic relations were officially restored to the rank of charge d'affaires in 1985. Economic cooperation especially in agricultural sectors started in 1986. In August 1987, American pro-Israeli lobby helped to convince the US Congress to vote against a resolution declaring April 24 as "the day of the (so-called) Armenian genocide." In addition, the Turkish and Israeli foreign ministers, V. Halefoglu and S. Peres, met officially in New York after a UN General Assembly meeting in September 1987. After that meeting Peres stated publicly to the reporter, "Israel and the Jewish lobby in the United States support Turkey."<sup>262</sup>

During the Intifida (1987-1993), Turkey simply condemned the cruel actions by the Israeli military and did nothing else diplomatically. In 1988, Turkey recognized the State of Palestine declared by the Palestine National Council for domestic reasons (Turkey's population is 99 percent Muslim and its natural that a good portion of it sympathizes with the Palestinian struggle) and to preserve its diplomatic consistency (its vote for UN Security Council Resolution 242, "asserting the right of all regional states to live within secured and recognized boundaries," and its neutrality in the conflict entailed

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<sup>260</sup> During the Israeli military expedition against the Palestinians in Lebanon 1982, the Israelis arrested many Armenian terrorists, members of the Armenian extremist group ASALA, and captured their bases, which were full of archival material. Turks were very interested in all the information they could get about the ASALA and the Israelis gave it to them. Robert Fisk, "Jerusalem Draws in the Turks to Spy on Arab Foes," *The Independent of London*. Available [Online]: <http://salam.org/turkey/fisk-on-turkey-alliance.html> [20 August 1999].

<sup>261</sup> Mimikos, p. 30.

<sup>262</sup> Mimikos, p. 32.

such a move). The Israeli reaction was mild and cautious so as not to harm the good relations with Turkey. In 1989, Turkey for the first time voted in the UN against a proposed resolution to reject Israel's credentials.

In the early 1990's, the period in which Israel and Turkey started to declare overtly their relationship and the cooperation began. Turkey, not to show inconsistency in its diplomacy,<sup>263</sup> abstained from voting for the repealing of the 1975 UN resolution equating Zionism with racism. With the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference and the 1993 Oslo "Declaration of Principles" Turkey saw no use in "being more Arab than Arabs"<sup>264</sup> as the Arab states and the PLO were eager to develop relations with Israel. The Israeli Palestinian agreement released Turkey from the difficulty of balancing between its commitments to maintain diplomatic and political ties with Israel and to show solidarity with the Arab world in the Arab-Israeli conflict. One month after the Madrid Peace Conference, Turkey upgraded its diplomatic relations with Israel to the level of ambassador (it did the same for the PLO to show neutrality in the conflict or in the peace process, and that it could be a mediator in the negotiations if proposed). Furthermore, Arab-Turk tensions on the use of the Incirlik Air Base by the US, Turkish incursions in northern Iraq to pursue and destroy the terrorist organization, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkeran-I Kurdistan* or the PKK),<sup>265</sup> Arab support to the PKK and Syria in its water dispute with Turkey, and the general lack of Arab support for Turkey's international position greatly diminished Turkish support for Arabs, simultaneously creating cooperation with Israel and the US.

More important, the end of the Cold War engendered fears of marginalization for the Turkish elite as Turkey lost its significance in the Western security system. Turkish

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<sup>263</sup> Turkey had voted for the 1975 resolution. To vote in favor of repealing the same resolution would create an inconsistent outlook for Turkish diplomacy. Thus, by abstaining in voting, Turkey showed Israel that Turkey was not against the repeal.

<sup>264</sup> Yavuz, "Turkish-Israeli Relations Through the Lens of Turkish Identity Debate," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 17:1 (Autumn 1997), p. 29.

<sup>265</sup> US Department of State designates the PKK as a terrorist organization. Available [Online]: [http://www.state.gov/www/global/terrorism/terrorist\\_orgs\\_list.html](http://www.state.gov/www/global/terrorism/terrorist_orgs_list.html)

suspensions about the intentions of the US and Israel toward the future of northern Iraq. Thus, to compensate for the loss of Western support and to succeed in adding its security concerns to the regional policy calculations of the US and Israel, Turkey, ignoring the Arab criticism, started to pursue an active and independent policy to seek ways to engage Israel in cooperation.

In 1992, the commemoration of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the admission of the expelled Sephardim by the Sultan Beyazit II to the Ottoman Empire illustrated the full restoration of the Turkish-Israeli relations at the international level. A year later in 1993, for the first time a high-ranking Turkish official, the Turkish Foreign Minister Hikmet Cetin visited Israel. It was the beginning of a budding relationship for the restructuring of the Middle East. A memorandum of understanding between Turkey and Israel established the framework for wide bilateral negotiations on issues regarding trade, investment, and cooperation in scientific, military, and other fields. Military attachés, withdrawn in 1981, were assigned back to the embassies in Tel Aviv and Ankara.<sup>266</sup> Top level visits gained intensity in 1994. In January, Israeli President Weizman, in April, then-Foreign Minister Shimon Peres went to Ankara. In June, for the first time, Turkey and Israel conducted a joint midair refueling exercise with a variety of Turkish planes.<sup>267</sup> In response to official visits from Israel, then-Prime Minister Tansu Ciller went to Israel in November.

Ciller's visit was politically important because for the first time Turkey openly showed its tilt toward Israel and that symbolized a political change in the region. Ciller met a Palestinian delegation at Orient House of East Jerusalem to demonstrate that Turkey was neutral in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the peace process. Meanwhile, at the dinner in her honor by Israelis, she openly praised Zionism, mentioned Israel as "promised lands," compared Ataturk and Ben Gurion and called for cooperation against

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<sup>266</sup> Meliha Benli Altunisik, "Soguk Savas Sonrasi Donemde Turkiye-Israil Iliskileri (Turkey-Israel Relations in the post-Cold War Era)," in Meliha Benli Altunisik (ed.), *Turkiye ve Ortadogu: Tarih, Kimlik, Guvenlik (Turkey and the Middle East: History, Identity, Security)*, (Istanbul: Boyut Publications, September 1999), p. 192.

<sup>267</sup> Mimikos, p. 34.

Islamic terrorism.<sup>268</sup> In this visit, several agreements including cooperation in the fields of trade, telecommunications and postal services were signed. Moreover, negotiations for cooperation on intelligence and on the fight against terrorism and drug dealing began with this initiative.<sup>269</sup>

Turkish and Israeli officials negotiated on the two military agreements of 1996 in the 1994-1995 period. The landmark agreements on military training cooperation in February and on military industrial cooperation in August 1996 profoundly affected the power structure of the Middle East by emphasizing five principle areas: armament upgrades; arms sales; joint production and the exchange of technical expertise and knowledge; training issues; intelligence sharing and security forum for semi-annual strategic dialogue. In the years that followed, top level military and civilian visits were exchanged and this particular dose of cooperation provide Turkey with the endowment for a more assertive and active role in the Middle East than ever.

In short, the Turks and the Jewish community have never had problems that would create long-term or traditional resentments for each other and the vacillation in the history of relationship between Israel and Turkey up to 1980s was due to Turkey's political and economic interests with the Arab world. As these interests, which served as obstacles in front of a rapprochement, disappeared in the early and mid 1980s, it has not been surprising to see the rapid development of Turkish-Israeli relations with the following rationale:<sup>270</sup>

- Both states are Western-oriented and pro-US with military inventories based mainly on US equipment.
- Both are deeply concerned about terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism.

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<sup>268</sup> Altunisik, p. 195.

<sup>269</sup> Altunisik, p. 195.

<sup>270</sup> Alan Makovsky, "Israeli-Turkish Cooperation: Full Steam Ahead," *Policy Watch*, no. 292 (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 6 January 1998), p. 2.

- Both are Non-Arab and largely secular and are generally mistrusted in the region that is dominated by Arabs and conservative Islam.
- Both are also the most democratic and militarily powerful states in the region.

## **B. POST-COLD WAR WESTERN ATTITUDE TOWARD TURKEY**

Between 1989 and 1991 the global geopolitical mold broke. The revolutionary transformation of East-West security relations meant that the military importance of Turkey for the West as a key NATO front-line state bordering a hostile Soviet Union was undermined. Turkey, as a “geo-strategic rent-seeking country,”<sup>271</sup> was worried that the West and especially its main ally, the US would no longer be willing to extend its unconditional protection, its political support, and its financial contribution to Turkey’s security. At the advent of accommodation between the Super Powers, Turkey’s defense requirements constituted a marginal concern for Washington and the practical consequence of this situation was that Turkey had to shoulder its own defense costs as a member of the NATO-US alliance and had to assume the defense risks associated with being geographically isolated.<sup>272</sup>

Moreover, the end of the Cold War revealed the political and social tensions and incompatibilities between Turkey and its Western partners, which were hidden, but never cancelled, under the fight against Communism. Ambiguities and differences were accentuated by two main developments: 1) questions of human rights and democracy were brought to the forefront of the Western agenda; 2) the West was forced to give urgent priority to the task of assisting the economic and political transformation of the former Eastern European Communist Countries.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Piccoli, p. 19.

<sup>272</sup> Duygu Sezer, “Turkish Foreign Policy in the Year 2000,” in Turkish Political Science Association, *Turkey in the Year 2000* (Ankara, 2000), p. 94.

<sup>273</sup> Piccoli, p. 19.

To Ankara, Turkish exclusion from full participation in both the European Union (the EU) and the Western European Union (WEU) demonstrated Europe's unwillingness to grant Turkey a legitimate security and political role in Europe. The EU's decision to exclude Ankara from the membership list while it extended invitations to several formerly communist European Communist countries and Greek-Cyprus at the December 1997 summit in Luxemburg demonstrated that Europe gave priority to the Eastern European states over Turkey for cultural reasons. (Though the EU accepted Turkey as a candidate to the Union two years later, participation negotiations revealed that the EU's unwillingness to accept Turkey as an equal partner continues.)

Turkey's fear of being marginalized by its Western partners were swept away by two developments—namely, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990 and the disintegration of the Soviet Union in December 1991—that temporarily reversed the geo-strategic balance in favor of Turkey. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait provided Ankara with a new trump card to reconfirm its strategic value to its Western allies. By supporting the US-led coalition against Baghdad, Turkey managed to transform itself into an indispensable partner in a particularly sensitive region, the Middle East, and in particular in the Gulf area.

However, while these events in the Gulf returned Turkey to the front rank of strategic attention, they did not yield tangible political, military, and economic benefits. The reassertion of Turkey's strategic importance after the Gulf War focused on the country's role in the Middle East rather than its role European security.<sup>274</sup> This sparked a growing tension between Turkish political aspirations and traditional Western foreign policy orientation, and Western images of and interests in Turkey. Ankara's essential role in the Gulf War reinforced the widespread European perception that Turkey is a part of the Middle East, thus Turkey was, and still is, increasingly perceived by the European countries as a strategic liability because of the additional burden imposed by its exposure in the Middle East. In response, Ankara felt it had to become more assertive in pursuing

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<sup>274</sup> Bruce Kuniholm, "Turkey and the West," *Foreign Affairs* 70:2 (1991), p. 34.

security policies in its Middle Eastern neighborhood and, at the same time, it had to develop a “new strategic cooperation” with the US. President Ozal’s strategy of closely cooperating with the Bush administration was primarily “designed to reaffirm Ankara’s commitment to US-Turkish bilateral relations and to highlight Turkey’s importance for US strategic interests and concerns in the Middle East.”<sup>275</sup>

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of newly independent Turkic states in the Transcaucasus and Central Asia provided Ankara with the hope of boosting Turkey’s international image, enhancing the prospects of its admission to the EU, and improving its Turkish-American relations. Turkish authorities thought that Turkey would serve as a gate for the West to these new countries and as a model for their political orientation. But these expectations could not be achieved because the US persisted in a “Russian-first” policy.

Attempts to gain the US as a “strategic partner” in the region were hampered by the conflicting Turkish and US approaches to the Kurdish issue. The pro-human rights, pro-Greek, and pro-Armenian lobbies in the US Congress politicized arms sales and blocked economic aids to Turkey. On one hand, Ankara suspected the US’s intentions in northern Iraq. On the other hand, it found the US an increasingly less reliable source of arms as Congress blocked a shipment of ten Super Cobra helicopters and froze the transfer of three frigates to Turkey. Furthermore, the US security and economic assistance decreased steadily (and ended completely in the 1999 fiscal year budget.)

These circumstances forced Turkey to follow a more active, yet still Western oriented foreign policy in solving its problems in the surrounding regions. It was in this context that Turkey, left alone by the West with its regional security problems, appealed to the “always there” Israeli option both to regain its Western image and to solve its security problems in the Middle East.

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<sup>275</sup> Sabri Sayari, “Turkey: The Changing European Security Environment and the Gulf Crisis,” *Middle East Journal*, 46:1 (Winter 1992), p. 14.

The Israeli lobby in the US is far superior to all other ethnic lobbies combined. Ankara deeply believes that its alignment with Israel would ease Turkey's way to the US legislature and seduce the US Congress on its behalf.

This has not been a futile belief as evidence proved. For example, in 1987 the pro-Israeli lobby secured a negative vote against the resolution declaring 24 April as a commemoration of the Armenian massacre. During the last decade, the lobby also helped to unfreeze Congressional blocking of the two frigates purchased by Turkey, placed high pressure on oil companies to build a major pipeline for Caspian crude through Turkey,<sup>276</sup> and to withdraw the same Armenian resolution from a vote in the Congress. Israelis do not seem bothered by this phenomenon; rather they openly express their support for Ankara's goal of strengthening ties with the US.

Through the two military agreements with Israel, which was discussed earlier, Turkey achieved US support for Turkey's regional policies in the Middle East. The strategic cooperation established by these agreements attracted US support to create a stable environment in a region where the US has hostile countries along Turkey's borders-namely Iraq and Iran. By enhancing the US position in the Persian Gulf through the Turkish corridor, this alliance ensured US approval of Turkish Middle Eastern policies and impelled the US to consider Turkish national security concerns in its regional calculations. Thus, "The strategic alliance Turkey really wants, then, is not with a regional power, even if the name is Israel, but with the US."<sup>277</sup>

In conclusion, Ankara sees its alliance with Israel as a part of its triangular relationship with the US that may well compensate for Turkey's

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<sup>276</sup>American President George W. Bush's special advisor on Caspian Energy Policies, Elizabeth Jones, stated the Bush Administration supports the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline project. Jones stated that the US Administration supported the construction of the pipeline project to help the Caspian States win their economic independence from Russia. Jones added, "We want this pipeline project to develop new and reliable energy sources and to support the investments of the American companies, which will construct it. All of these strategic targets are in compliance with the views of the new Administration and its opinions about how the American foreign policy should be carried out in the Caspian region. *Aksam*, 2 February 2001. US oil company Chevron stated they were interested in participating in engineering studies of the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline project. "Chevron Interested in Baku-Ceyhan Line," *Reuters*, 9 February 2001.

<sup>277</sup>Zvri Bar'el, "A Turkish Love Story," *Ha'aretz*, 14 December 1997.

weakening ties with the European Union. . . . It is certain that Turkey's cooperation with Israel has fundamentally a Western rather than a Middle Eastern "target."<sup>278</sup>

While this alliance has served to counter anti-Turkish lobbies in the US Congress through the American pro-Israeli lobby and to strengthen Turkey's relations with the US, the Israeli defense industry—the world's fifth largest arms exporter<sup>279</sup>—also reduced Turkey's dependence on conditional and politicized Western arms selling. In addition to arms selling, sharing the military technology with Turkey, Israel defense industry presented Turkey with an invaluable substitute for Western arms sources. Israel's comfort with Turkish demands to transfer technology incorporated in the particular weapon systems has enticed Turkey to purchase arms from Israel.

In short, Turkey's perennial insistence on staying within the Western political and security circle was the main motive behind its initiatives to secure cooperation with Israel in the post-Cold War era. Turkey aimed to both save its declining Western image and to have the US on its side in Middle Eastern politics. While Ankara's Westernization goal was largely the reason to propose a military cooperation with Israel, the regional factors that caused the Turkish-Israeli "strategic cooperation" were more complex and security oriented as we will discuss in the next section.

### **C. THE REGIONAL FACTORS BEHIND TURKISH-ISRAELI RAPPROCHEMENT**

Contrary to the general Arab view that Israel was the driving force behind the Turkish-Israeli military cooperation, it was the Turkish military establishment which insisted on such a military cooperation.<sup>280</sup> While Israel's periphery strategy was the main reason for the cooperation in 1958, acceleration of regional threats to Turkey in the post-

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<sup>278</sup> Picollo, p. 28.

<sup>279</sup> Sharon Sadeh, "Israel's Beleaguered Defense Industry," *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA)*, 5:1 (March 2001), p. 1.

<sup>280</sup> Gresh, p. 190.

Cold War era and Ankara's isolation to encounter them were the main motives for Turkey to attract Israel to the cooperation.

The Syria-northern Iraq-and the PKK triangle occupied the Turkish agenda intensely after the 1991 Gulf War. The power vacuum in northern Iraq after the defeat of Saddam Hussein had serious domestic repercussions in Turkey. The prospect of a possible Kurdish state and provision of new sanctuaries for the PKK in northern Iraq put Ankara in a dilemma and aroused Turkish fears of Iraq and Turkey's dismemberment. Syria, providing shelter, and military support for the PKK since the early 1980s, stood as the central figure that Turkish national security planners had to eliminate.

Of the three contentious states—Iran, Iraq, and Syria—Syria is considered by the Turks to be most efficient contiguous state for causing serious troubles in Turkey. Iran has been isolated internationally after the Islamic revolution, and Iraq lost a vast amount of its military capabilities after the Gulf War. Damascus, like Tehran and Baghdad, does not have the capability to threaten Turkey militarily. Ironically, Turkey and Syria relations were warming in 1993 when they signed a new security protocol (renewing the one in 1987). In various bilateral meetings, Turkish authorities repeatedly expressed a desire to improve relations with Syria in every field and commended Syria for increasing cooperation on the PKK issue. More important, together with Turkey and Iraq, Syria shared a common perspective on opposing an independent Kurdish homeland in northern Iraq that would divide Iraq and inspire other Kurdish populations in Iran, Syria, and Turkey. Furthermore, Syria and Turkey have secular regimes and perceive Islamic fundamentalism and political Islam as internal threats to be thwarted.

Syria with traditional claims over Turkey's Hatay province and Euphrates water used the PKK card against Turkey to achieve these claims for a long time. Especially the *Guneydogu Anadolu Projesi* (the Southeastern Anatolia Project or the GAP) of Turkey is a grave concern for Syria in that when it is completed around 2010, Turkey will not have the flexibility on the flow of Euphrates water to Syria as it has presently. Ankara signed a protocol guaranteeing Syria a flow of 500 cubic meters per second in 1987. So far, Turkey has strictly honored this agreement. However, since the mid-1990s, Syria, to develop its inefficient but domestically important irrigation and agriculture projects, has

been demanding an increase in the flow and even further, demanding an equal share of water among three riparian countries—Turkey, Syria and Iraq. Furthermore, because of the historical animosities with Turkey and of the need to preserve its significance in the Arab world, Damascus is inclined to explain the GAP, which envisions increased prosperity in Kurdish populated Southeast Anatolia, and Turkish military incursions to northern Iraq, which is solely for pursuing and destroying the PKK and its bases, as a Turkish conspiracy over the Arab world. According to this interpretation, Turkey will use the GAP as the “water weapon” against Syria and Iraq, and Ankara has not given up its ambitions to control the oil-rich Mosul and Kirkuk provinces in northern Iraq.

In 1994 and 1995, when Turkey was really concerned about an imminent Kurdish state in northern Iraq and was suspicious about the US and Israeli intentions on the matter, Syria heightened tensions with Turkey suddenly by bringing the water dispute to the attention of the Arab world and the West and by increasing its support for the PKK. Furthermore, the beginning of PKK’s efforts to establish a footing in the Hatay province (Syria was provoked when Hatay was incorporated to Turkey in 1939) further alerted Ankara. Consequently, Ankara, frustrated by Damascus’ irreconcilable stance, and by the death toll of 30,000 because of PKK terrorism, made Syria’s aid to the PKK the primary criterion on which to base their bilateral relations.

At the October 1995 security and cooperation meeting between Syria and Turkey, Turkey harshly demanded that Syria immediately extradite the PKK leader, Abdullah Ocalan, and suspend all PKK facilities in Syrian controlled Lebanon territories. The agreement between Syria and Greece, which provided Syrian air space and airbases for the use Greek military planes,<sup>281</sup> and Syria’s irresponsive stance to the Turkish demands forced Turkey to suspend all relations with Syria in 1996. Syria-Israel peace negotiations, did not consider Turkey’s regional concerns and even factored assumptions about

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281 “Damascus Assures Ankara,” *Turkish Daily News* (4 April 1996). Available [Online]: [www.hri.org/news/agencies/trkn/96-04-04.trkn.html#03](http://www.hri.org/news/agencies/trkn/96-04-04.trkn.html#03)

Turkish water into the deal without consulting Turkey.<sup>282</sup> Thus, Ankara had no choice but to gain Israeli support by offering an irrefutable military cooperation, which would immeasurably strengthen Israel's security while reducing its perceived need to negotiate a settlement with Syria. Otherwise, without Israel's cooperation Turkey would have been encircled by its antagonists: Syria-Iran, Iran-Armenia, Armenia-Greece flanking cooperations and by Syrian, Iranian, and Greek support for the PKK terrorist actions.

While Ankara felt free to improve relations with Israel overtly after the 1991 Madrid Conference and the 1993 Oslo Accords, the same occasions prompted Syria to embark on peace negotiations with Israel, which might have resulted in an imminent settlement. A peace agreement between Israel and Syria would pose an extra threat to Turkey because Syria, by moving its troops from the Israeli borders in the south to the Turkish borders in the north, could become more assertive in pursuing its Hatay and water policies. If such a peace agreement occurred, Damascus would press to remove its name from the US's "terrorist states" list after clamping down on the anti-Israel, but not anti-Turkish, terrorist groups based in Syrian or in Syrian-controlled Lebanon territories.

In addition, the international community might have forced Turkey to concede its water rights to compensate for Syrian loss of the Golan water to Israel if a peace deal between Syria and Israel could be finalized. Furthermore, by losing significance due to a Syrian-Israeli peace agreement, Israel's periphery strategy would not require cooperation with Turkey. Consequently, Turkey would lose its "back door," the pro-Israeli lobby, to Washington while Syria would enjoy close ties with the US, as Egypt and Jordan did after making peace with Israel. Such a situation would isolate Turkey in the region.

Additionally, while emerging as a militarily and economically stronger state than its neighbors in the post-Cold War Middle East, Turkey would have to drain its energy to solve its security concerns rather than using that energy in its Westernization efforts. Therefore, Turkey was reluctant to see a peace settlement between Israel and Syria before

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<sup>282</sup> Alan Makovsky, "Syrian-Israeli Negotiations and Turkey." *Peacewatch* (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy), n. 236, 17 December 1999, p. 2.

Ankara itself cooperated with Israel and eased Turkish security problems in the Middle East.

Thus, Ankara's regional aims in the cooperation were first to strengthen its niche in the region, and second to isolate Syria by revealing its support for international terrorism including the PKK.

In the early 1990s, despite the fact that Israel and Turkey shared a similar approach to terrorism, Israel rejected Ankara's pleas for cooperation against the PKK and Syria. The Turkish position presented by Foreign Minister Cetin during his visit to Israel (13-14 November 1993) that several terrorist factions, which Syria protected and sponsored equally threatened Ankara and Tel Aviv, did not entirely convince the Israelis. Israel stayed neutral on Kurdish terrorism, resulting principally from the fears of opening a new terrorist front with the PKK and from pro-Kurdish sentiments in Israel, as demonstrated by the extensive support for the Kurdish struggle in the 1960s and 1970s. Realizing that Israeli military help against the PKK was impossible, Ankara sought Israeli assistance against Syria, the main sponsor of the PKK. However, the Rabin and the Peres governments of Israel were clearly ambivalent about opposing Syria. "They believed that good relations with Turkey might interfere with Israelis' plans to make peace with Syria."<sup>283</sup>

Ankara, by offering enticing strategic opportunities, tried intensely to convince Israel that Syria was a terrorist supporter. Likewise, it pressured Syria by demanding that Syria extradite Abdullah Ocalan.<sup>284</sup> "As no positive reply came from Syrian leader Hafiz

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<sup>283</sup> Picolli, p. 29, citation from Efraim Inbar, "The Turkish-Israeli Strategic Partnership," paper presented at the Woodrow Wilson Center, Washington DC, 16 September 1998.

<sup>284</sup> Robert Olson, "Turkey-Syria Relations since the Gulf War: Kurds and Water," *Middle East Policy* 5:2 (1997), p. 177.

Asad, the subsequent step was to leak to the press the news regarding the (already secured) Turkish-Israeli military agreement.”<sup>285</sup>

A peace settlement between Syria and Israel could not be reached. Israeli leader Peres and Syrian leader Asad blamed each other for slowing the process as they could not agree on the security and water issues of the Golan Height. Peres wanted to accelerate the process with the forthcoming election in mind, but Asad refused that suggestion.<sup>286</sup> Ironically, Turkish-Israeli military relations began in late February just as Syrian-Israeli talks was breaking down.

Fortunately, Turkey was able to attract Israel into a strategic cooperation with the February 1996 military training agreement. For Israel, the agreement was irrefutable since it provided Israel with a significant strategic depth against Iraq and Iran. In addition, “it was a positive factor for Israel that Syria has an enemy on its northern frontiers. . .”<sup>287</sup> (Such a scenario came very close to reality during the Turkish-Syrian crisis September-October 1998.)

Moreover, with Netanyahu in power in 1996, Israel did not hesitate to emphasize the anti-Syrian nature of the cooperation nor did it abstain from supporting Turkey in its fight against separatist terrorism. In fact, a few days after Turkish Defense Minister Turhan Tayan’s visit to Israeli occupied Golan Heights, Netanyahu publicly rejected the idea of a Kurdish state and condemned the PKK for the first time saying, “Turkey has suffered from terrorist attacks from the PKK and we see no difference between terrorism of the PKK and (terrorism) that Israel suffers.”<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Piccoli, p. 29, citation from Steve Rodan, “Ties with Turkey—The Most Important Story of the Decade,” *Jerusalem Post*, 13 June 1996.

<sup>286</sup> Gresh, pp. 198-199.

<sup>287</sup> Gresh, p. 192.

<sup>288</sup> Gresh, p. 194. Interview of Netanyahu on Turkish television printed in *Ha’aretz* (Tel Aviv), 27 May 1997.

This first military agreement enabled the exchange of military information, experience, and personnel for training between Israel and Turkey. It also envisioned joint training exercises, exchange of military observers at each other's exercises, and reciprocal port access for naval vessels. Each country's planes have exercised in the other's airspace for one week four times a year and since April 1996 these exercises have occurred regularly. Such visits are beneficial. These exercises have enabled the Israeli pilots to gain experience flying long-range missions over mountainous areas, a skill that would be necessary for a mission over Iran, and provide greater opportunities for overland training than are available in a small country like Israel. In exchange, Turkish pilots benefited from Israel's systems of training in advanced technology warfare, in particular, the air combat maneuvering instrumentation range in the Negev. Such exercises have also enabled both air forces to become familiar with procedures and tactics used by their counterparts. This familiarity could facilitate cooperation in wartime.<sup>289</sup> Turkey could also give Israeli Air Force planes sanctuary and could allow Israel electronic surveillance flights along Turkish borders with Syria, Iraq and Iran.

In January 1998, the navies of Israel, Turkey and the US held joint naval search and rescue exercises—the Reliant Mermaid—similar to naval operations aimed at localizing and intercepting an enemy vessel, in the Eastern Mediterranean. This trilateral exercise has been held every year, with the participation of a Jordanian military observer, and has become the symbol of the US support for the Turkish-Israeli cooperation.

Intelligence sharing and the institutionalized joint forum for strategic research and assessment, which meets every six months, “probably are the heart of the relationship”<sup>290</sup> between Turkey and Israel.

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<sup>289</sup> Michael Eisentadt, “Turkish Israeli Cooperation: An Assessment,” *Policy Watch*, no. 262 (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 24 July 1997).

<sup>290</sup> Picolli, p. 32, citation from Efraim Inbar, “The Turkish-Israeli Strategic Partnership,” paper presented at the Woodrow Wilson Center, Washington DC, 16 September 1998.

It is well known that Turkey and Israel have cooperated and shared information on the activities of the Kurdish separatist movement, Kurdish nationalist organizations, and the PLO for decades.<sup>291</sup>

Turkey and Israel, since the 1950s have had a tacit and frequent intelligence sharing. The main reason for that was that the shared information was primarily concentrated on the two common threats to both countries' national security: terrorism and the neighbors.

Since 1996, Turkey has benefited from intelligence gathered by Israel's Mossad on terrorism and narcotics trafficking. During Turhan Tayan's visit in April of 1997, Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai promised his counterpart that he would assist Turkey in gathering information with the purpose of fighting terrorist groups in the region. He stated that "both our states are victims of terrorism. Israel is prepared to assist Turkey with know-how and other means in the fight against terrorism."<sup>292</sup> Given the fact that Israel has had secret ties with Kurds and an extensive intelligence net in northern Iraq, Turkey has been able to intensify intelligence gathering in areas of conflict—southeastern Turkey and northern Iraq—in order to downplay the influence of the PKK. Therefore, it was not ironic to see that PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan was captured in Nairobi, where Israeli Intelligence Service's (MOSSAD) African headquarters is located .

During Mordechai's visit to Turkey in December 1997, Turkish and Israeli officials developed plans for Turkey to establish a border security and monitoring system similar to the one on Israel's border with Lebanon.<sup>293</sup> It seems likely that—despite the denials by the Turkish and Israeli authorities—Israeli military advisors have been

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<sup>291</sup> Robert Olson, "Israel and Turkey vs. the PKK," *Middle East International*, no. 554 (21 February 1997), p. 14.

<sup>292</sup> "Turkish Defense Minister Begins Three-Day Visit to Israel," *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, 30 April 1997. Available [Lexis/Nexis]: MDEAFR/CURNWS

<sup>293</sup> Demir Metehan, "Turkey and Israel Focus on Main Threats: Iran, Syria, and Iraq," *Turkish Daily News* (9 December 1997).

involved in the planning of the Turkish military offensive in northern Iraq and in the laying of mines and trip-wire sensors along the Turkish Iraqi border.<sup>294</sup>

A semi-annual strategic dialogue has been in place since 1996. The exchanges of high-level military and civilian visits were so frequent that during the early part of 1997 nearly all high-ranking flag officers of both militaries visited each other. The talks were aimed at evaluating threats against both nations in an effort to prepare for and to initiate joint measures in the event of future instability in the region.

The "Military Defense Industry Agreement," signed on August 26, 1996, enabled the transfer of military technology and know-how from Israel to Turkey. This has allowed Turkey to obtain weapons and technology that Turkey could not purchase from Europe and the US because of human right criticism and Turkey's dispute with Greece. For Israel, Turkey, with its large military modernization budget, serves as a good arms export market for the giant Israeli defense industry, which is in dire need of new markets.

The list of Turkish-Israeli arms deal is as follows:

- An upgrading program composed of \$632 million for 54 F-4 fighter jets and \$80 million for 48 F-5 jets (this project was started in Israel and will be finished at Eskisehir, which means considerable technology transfer),
- The purchase of 200 Popeye I standoff missiles, which equip the transformed F-4 Phantom 2000,
- Common production of hundreds of Popeye II missiles with a range of 150kms, which can be used in F-16s,
- Memorandum of understanding concerning jointly developing and producing a medium-range antitactical ballistic missile system.

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<sup>294</sup> Robert Olson, "Turkey-Syria Relations since the Gulf War: Kurds and Water," *Middle East Policy* 5:2 (1997), pp. 178-179.

Also, Turkey is interested in Israel's early warning, radar control, unmanned air vehicles, special fences systems to seal off the borders with Iraq and Syria, and the Galil infantry rifle to replace Turkish G-3 infantry rifles. In addition, the Israeli military industry, with its Merkava III battle tank, is among the bidders of Turkey's \$4.5 billion project of co-producing modern battle tanks to replace the aging ones.

The implications of these agreements in the region have been tremendous. Facing the long-range missile threats that have made the home front more vulnerable, Israel is now focusing more on "over-the-horizon capabilities" that would allow its Air Force to hit a distant enemy, possibly with a preemptive strike. Turkey allowing Israel to use its air base and naval port facilities could play an important role without directly participating in a war. (During the February 1998 Iraqi crisis, Saddam threatened to hit Israel. Turkish Ambassador to Washington openly stated that Turkey would consider allowing Israel to use Turkish airspace to retaliate for a possible missile attack on Israel.<sup>295</sup>) To counter Iran's support to Hizbullah terrorism against Israel in south Lebanon, Israel reportedly established intelligence listening posts along Iranian borders and could use the "over-the-horizon capability" to launch air strikes on Iran's WMD production facilities.

For Iran and Iraq, Turkish-Israeli military cooperation has brought Israel to their borders. Israel now has a "window" on the territories of the both "rogue states" through which it can undertake monitoring and electronic listening operations and stage air strikes on Iran's non-conventional weapons infrastructure. What is certain is that Syria, Iran, and Iraq now have to consider the new strategic reality by the Turkish-Israeli axis when developing their military-strategic plans: "element of uncertainty."<sup>296</sup>

Syria has become the most directly affected country from the Israeli-Turkish military cooperation. Damascus is particularly concerned about the problems this alliance

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<sup>295</sup> Ugur Akinci, "Kandemir: Turkey May Allow Israel to Retaliate Against Iraq," *Turkish Daily News*, 21 February 1998.

<sup>296</sup> Eisenstadt, *Ibid.*

could pose in the event of a war with Israel. Asad had to consider the possibility of waging a war on two fronts. Syria will never attack Turkey, but it cannot exclude the reverse. The crisis in September-October 1998 brought this scenario very close to reality when Turkish government sent troops to the Syrian border and strongly hinted that Turkey would attack Syria if it did not comply with Turkish demands—the expulsion of Ocalan from Syria and the cessation of Syrian support for the PKK.

In late October, Syrian leader Asad signed the Adana agreement in which Syria would end its support for the PKK and would expel its leader. Doing that, Syria, after Iran and Iraq, was marginalized in the region, too. On one hand, the Turkish-Israeli military cooperation has had a psychological effect over Syria's will to wage a war against Israel. On the other hand, entrapped by the alliance, Syria had to abandon its "terrorism card," which offset Turkey's "water weapon."

Though Syria-Iran, and even Syria-Iraq, the two historical hostile regimes, tried to make counter-alliances, the total of their capabilities did not match the scale of Turkish-Israeli strategic cooperation. Hence, Syria and those other rogue countries are still likely to appeal to the subversive terrorism and the procurement of WMD in order to elevate their regional stance quickly.

Turkey, enhancing its power in many ways by this alliance, emerged as the strongest country of the Middle East. Ankara has been playing a more assertive and active role in regional policies by the confidence the strategic cooperation with Israel and US provided. Two incidents exemplified this position: the October 1998 tension with Syria and Turkey's dispute with Greece about the deployment of Russian air-defense missiles, S-300, in Greek Cyprus.

As mentioned above, Turkey threatened Syria by invasion if it did not comply with its demands. This was a very important sign of the regional imbalance created by the military cooperation. Syria did not have any choice but to oblige. At the end, Damascus extradited PKK leader, Abdullah Ocalan, and ended its support for the PKK. Subsequently, with its leader arrested and its main supporter eliminated, the PKK fell into

strategic defeat. Hence, Turkey achieved its main aim in the cooperation and focused more on northern Iraqi politics to curtail the emergence a Kurdish state.

In the S-300 missile crisis, Turkey voiced its opposition to the deployment of S-300 missiles to the Greek part of Cyprus since they had a range of 150 kilometers and could reach areas in the Turkish heartland. Ankara stated that it would accept such a move as a “war cause” and warned that it would take all measures possible to stop the island from deploying the missiles, even to bomb them. Greece, in December 1999, agreed to divert the missiles to a remote island in the Aegean Sea after the Turkish threats “and after the pressure from the US and the EU, which hinted that the row was hurting Cyprus’s chances of joining the EU.”<sup>297</sup> This outcome can be attributed to Turkish-Israeli cooperation since it strengthened Turkey’s regional position and provided the support of the pro-Israeli lobby for Turkey in the US.

In short, the two military agreements between Turkey and Israel changed the power structure of the Middle East. While Turkey eradicated the PKK and marginalized Syria, Israel sent harsh messages to hostile Iran and Iraq by having the “over-the-horizon capability” through Turkey. More important, the US support for this collaboration enhanced the positions of Turkey and Israel both in the Middle East and in the West. The stability provided by this strategic cooperation might entice Europe and NATO to consider these countries’ importance in their East Mediterranean security calculations.

#### **D. OTHER DIMENSIONS OF TURKISH-ISRAELI CLOSE RELATIONSHIP**

Turkish-Israeli relations have developed unprecedentedly in the domains of culture, education, and science; mail and telecommunications; efforts to stop smuggling of drugs and narcotic substances; health and agriculture; regulation of free customs of duties; encouragement and protection of financial investments; avoidance of dual taxation; and technical and economic cooperation.<sup>298</sup> The 19 agreements concluded,

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<sup>297</sup> Mimikos, p. 86.

<sup>298</sup> Amikam Nachmani, “The Remarkable Turkish-Israeli Tie,” *Middle East Quarterly*, 5:19 (1998), p. 26.

since 1990, by Turkey and Israel clearly manifest the importance attached by both sides to their bilateral relations. In short, alongside military ties, Turkey and Israel have cooperated extensively in civilian sectors.

In July 1997, the Turkish government approved the decree that put into force the free-trade area agreement between Israel and Turkey. The two sides mutually eliminated custom duties for more than 90 percent of goods. The agreement was originally signed during Turkish President Suleyman Demirel's visit to Israel (March 1996), and ratified by the Turkish Parliament in April 1997, but the necessary final approval by the government had been postponed several times by the Islamist Refahiyol government, which carried anti-Israel sentiments.<sup>299</sup>

The decree opened new possibilities for economic relations between the two countries, in commerce, in investments, and in industrial and agricultural cooperation. The aim of both sides was to reach \$2 billion bilateral trade volume in 2000, an ambitious target but not unachievable: in 1998, bilateral trade amounted to more than \$700 million, whereas only eleven years earlier it was approximately \$18 million.

Israel has also opened the US market to Turkish products. Turks sell textiles and other commodities duty-free to Israel, which adds its labor to the product and re-exports them to the US duty-free.<sup>300</sup> This trade boosts the Turkish economy, which in turn hires Israeli companies to develop irrigation and agricultural projects in the GAP (the Southeastern Anatolian Project) region. Israeli firms have shown a considerable interest in the GAP. Several textile firms attracted by the lower labor costs moved from Israel to Turkey's Southeast. Many opportunities to use Israeli technology to transport and distribute water are also foreseen. The economic cooperation also includes training activities: Turkish officials involved in the GAP project are regularly attending training

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<sup>299</sup> *Turkish Probe*, "Turkey, Israel move closer to custom pact," 15 March 1996, p. 24.

<sup>300</sup> Saadet Oruç, "Turkish Trade via Israel to the US Expected to Boost Export Volume," *Turkish Daily News*, 5 January 1999.

courses at the International Training Center for Agricultural Development and Cooperation (CINADCO), Israel's large agriculture research and training center.

Tourism is a prominent part of non-military relations: 300,000 to 400,000 Israeli tourists visit Turkey each year, spending more than \$400 million,<sup>301</sup> an impressive growth in comparison with just 7,000 Israelis who visited Turkey in 1986.

Moreover, Turkey has been showing a marked interest in selling water to Israel since 1990. Water was, once again, a major topic of discussion during the July 1999 visit of President Demirel in Israel. Turkey's latest offer to sell 180 million cubic meters of its Manavgat water per year to Israel, which had repeatedly refused in the past similar Turkish proposals, attracted the interest of Ehud Barak's government of Israel. Israel and Turkey decided to create a joint committee to discuss the commercial aspects of the project as well as its feasibility.<sup>302</sup> In April 2001, after finalizing the details of the process, transportation of water via super-tankers (this was a historic event for water never have been transferred in this way before), Ankara and Tel Aviv sealed an agreement to transport Turkish water from the Manavgat River to the Israeli port of Ashkelon.<sup>303</sup>

Economic relations are highly important due to the existing opportunities for further developments in Turkey and Israel and in Central Asia and in the Transcaucasus, where a Turkish "entrance card" may facilitate Israel's desire to expand exchanges.<sup>304</sup> The Israeli Trade Minister Micha Harish, during Turkish Foreign Minister Hikmet Cetin's visit in November 1993, indicated that Ankara was a cardinal partner in the Israeli plan to increase Israeli commercial ties with the countries of Central Asia and the Transcaucasus. The Israeli minister openly stated that "Turkey can play an essential role

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<sup>301</sup> Figures indicated by Ekrem Guvendiren, President of the Joint Turkish-Israeli Council for Economic Cooperation and reported by the *Turkish Daily News*, 7 February 1998.

<sup>302</sup> *Turkish Daily News*, "Turkey, Israel to Establish a Water Commission," 16 July 1999.

<sup>303</sup> Selcuk Gultasli, "At Last, Water Deal with Israel in Late April," *Turkish Daily News*, 30 March 2001.

<sup>304</sup> Picolli, p. 33.

as an intermediary between Israel and the Muslim Republics of the former Soviet Union.”<sup>305</sup> Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres attracted the interest of the Turks when he proposed the possibility of a collective partnership between the US, Israel and Turkey aimed at launching economic projects in the Central Asian Republics of the former Soviet Union. Following Washington’s approach, Peres declared that “any person of common sense should pray for the success of the secular and democratic Turkish model over the Iranian in the competition to achieve influence over the Central Asian Muslim Republics.”<sup>306</sup> A few months later, an agreement was signed between Turkey, Israel and the US to launch a common agricultural program in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.<sup>307</sup> Recently, Israel has manifested its interest in gaining access to oil and gas from Turkey should Turkey’s ambition to become a major pipeline route for energy resources from the Caucasus and Central Asia be realized.<sup>308</sup>

#### E. CONCLUSION

Behind the emergence of close ties between the two states in the 1990s were Turkey’s deep strategic concerns regarding the Middle East and the Western attitude toward these concerns. Israel’s benefits were also significant but were responsive outcomes of Turkish calls for cooperation, which at one point enticed Israel to gain more political leverage reducing the importance of a deal with Syria to secondary.

Global factors played a more important role than regional factors in determining the pattern Turkey would pursue to achieve its national interests in the Middle East. The changing Western perception of Turkey following the end of the Cold War raised Turkish fears of marginalization and prompted Turkey to follow a more active and assertive

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<sup>305</sup> *Jerusalem Post*, 15 November 1993, p. 2.

<sup>306</sup> *Jerusalem Post*, 15 April 1994.

<sup>307</sup> *Turkish Daily News*, 1 November 1994.

<sup>308</sup> Saadet Oruç, “Turkey Wants to Become A Transit Country for Turkmen Gas to Israel”, *Turkish Daily News*, 11 March 1998; and by the same author, “Turkey, Israel to Enhance Strategic Ties with Caucasus,” *Turkish Daily News*, 16 March 1998.

policy in the Middle East. Feeling isolated in the region, Turkey appealed to the Israeli option to counter the challenges from the Middle East and the declining Turkish image in the West.

Syria-northern Iraq-the PKK triangle occupied the agenda of the Turkish civilian and military decision-makers intensely after the 1991 Gulf War. Syria, providing shelter and military support since the early 1980s, stood as the central figure that Turkey had to eliminate. The Syria-Israel peace negotiations did not seem to consider Turkey's regional concerns and even factored assumptions about Turkish water into the deal without consulting Turkey. Ankara, in turn, had no choice but to turn Israel's attention to Turkey's concerns by offering irrefutable military cooperation, which would immeasurably strengthen Israel's security and would reduce its need to negotiate a settlement with Syria.

Fortunately, Turkey was able to attract Israel to a strategic cooperation by the February 1996 "Military Training Agreement." For Israel, the agreement was irrefutable since it provided Israel with a significant strategic depth against hostile Iraq and Iran. In addition, it was a positive factor for Israel that Syria had an enemy on its northern frontiers. The August 1996 "Military Defense Industry Agreement" further benefited Turkey and Israel. While Turkey found an invaluable substitute for politicized Western arms, Israel, whose defense industry was in dire need of a market, enjoyed Turkish arms market.

The two military agreements between Turkey and Israel changed the power structure of the Middle East. While Turkey eradicated the PKK and marginalized Syria, Israel sent harsh messages to hostile Iran and Iraq by having the "over-the-horizon capability" through Turkey. More important, the US support for this collaboration enhanced the positions of Turkey and Israel both in the Middle East and in the West.

Turkish-Israeli relations have developed unprecedentedly in civilian domains, too. The 19 agreements concluded, since 1990, by Turkey and Israel clearly manifest the importance attached by both sides to their bilateral relations.

the region since the strategic cooperation with Israel. Turkey demonstrated this stance in the October 1998 tension with Syria and in the S-300 missile crisis with Greece.

## VI. TURKEY AND IRAN

Turkish-Iranian relations have been characterized by mutual distrust since the Islamic revolution in Tehran because the two countries have differing world views and ideologies that are probably impossible to reconcile fully. However, both also have traditions of pragmatic foreign policies that enable them to strive for neighborly relations from which they may derive mutual advantages as long as neither feels threatened by the moves of the other. Consequently, depending on which element of the relationship has prevailed, Turkish-Iranian relations have experienced ups and downs in the past twenty years.<sup>309</sup>

This chapter will explore the determinants of the Turkish-Iranian relations in the post-Gulf War era. The main argument will be that ideological differences between Turkey and Iran create a rift and strain their relations frequently, but the pragmatism deriving from their identical foreign policy principles retract them from a serious confrontation. In the following paragraphs, after giving the historical background of Turkish-Iranian relations, I will focus on the contemporary elements that strain the relations between Turkey and Iran in the post-Cold War era. Doing so, I will detail the problem areas in their relations. These areas constitute power politics in northern Iraq, terrorism (ethnic and fundamentalist), and rivalry in Central Asia and the Caucasus. The analysis will reveal that while both countries desire stability in their surrounding areas and direct their efforts to that aim, the revisionist aspect of the Iranian regime, which has often associated itself with subversive means—namely the PKK and Turkish Hizbullah—and which even the reformist President of Iran, Khatemi has not been able to control effectively, has perpetuated the tension in bilateral relations. This analysis will also reveal that despite this tension, which is not unnatural considering the contiguousness of two incompatible regimes, the geopolitical and economic considerations Turkey and Iraq coupled with their realist and pragmatic foreign policy principles have compelled Turkey and Iran to accommodate rather than to confront each other in their dealings.

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<sup>309</sup> Kramer, *A Changing Turkey*, p. 141.

## A. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### 1. Before the Revolution

The visit of Reza Shah, the founder of modern Iran and a great admirer of Ataturk, to Turkey in 1934 with a delegation of high-ranking and mostly "Turkish speaking"<sup>310</sup> political and military officials became the symbol of modern Turkish-Iranian relations. This visit was when both countries were struggling to overcome constraining historical traditions and to establish modern institutions to gain access to the West. At the time of this visit, Turkey and Iran had several common goals.<sup>311</sup> They were both working to separate the state from tradition and religion. Both countries also perceived a common threat from the spread of communism from abroad as well as internally. In addition the principles of their foreign policies were identical: 1) resistance to territorial demands by outside powers; 2) disavowal of irredentist adventures; 3) friendship with the West; and 4) active support of efforts designed to achieve international cooperation. This pragmatic feature of the foreign policies of Turkey and Iran still prevails even though the revolutionary aspect of the new Iranian regime creates some inevitable friction between Turkey and Iran.<sup>312</sup>

Between 1926 and 1937, a set of tariff, border, trade, and security agreement were signed between Turkey and Iran.<sup>313</sup> The April 1926 friendship and security agreement became a significant focus in Turkish-Iranian relations. This agreement was signed a little after the unsuccessful Kurdish Sheik Said revolt against the Turkish government and during the midst of actions by the Kurdish tribal chief Ismail Simqu against the authority

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<sup>310</sup> One third of the Iranian population is (Turkish speaking) Azeris. Iranian Azeris have served in high-level offices in Iranian state under both the Shah regime and the Islamic regime.

<sup>311</sup> Tchanguz H. Pahlavan, "Turkish-Iranian Relations: An Iranian View," in Henri J. Barkey (ed.), *Reluctant Neighbor*, p. 71.

<sup>312</sup> Michael B. Bishku, "Turkey and Iran during the Cold War," *Journal of Third World Studies*, 16:1 (Spring 1999), p. 14.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

of the Iranian government.<sup>314</sup> Turkey and Iran agreed “not to allow in their territory the formation or presence of organizations or groups of persons whose object is to disturb the peace and security of the other country or to change its government, or the presence of persons or groups of persons planning to attack the other country by propaganda or by any other means.”<sup>315</sup> Thus, signing security agreements to prevent encouraging domestic opposition by the counterpart dates back to the 1920s and is not a new feature of Turkish-Iranian relations.

Despite this treaty of friendship, further Kurdish unrest in eastern Turkey, as a result of the process of Turkification, created a situation in which at times the conflict spilled over the border into Iran. While the Iranians implemented similar policies in their process of “Persianization,” the Turks felt that Iran was neglecting its responsibilities on the frontier as insurgents in Turkey were supplied and launched attacks on Turkey from Iranian territory. Turkish cross-border operations and the increasing number of Kurds fleeing from Turkey convinced Iran of the need to clearly define its boundaries with its western neighbor.<sup>316</sup> The two countries reached an agreement on that issue by signing the Turkish-Iranian Frontier Treaty in Tehran in January 1932. According to this treaty, Iran received the portion of territory around Qotur, a city 40 miles south of the triangle where the borders of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq meet, in exchange for granting the right to Turkey to the eastern slopes the “strategic” hill, Mountain Ararat, from which Kurds had staged a rebellion in 1930.<sup>317</sup> At the same time, a treaty of arbitration, judicial settlement, and conciliation was signed. This was followed in November by a further treaty of friendship. The agreements of 1932 laid the bases for warmer relations between Turkey and Iran.

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>315</sup> The treaty is reprinted in J. C. Hurewitz (ed.), *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics: A Documentary Report* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 370-371.

<sup>316</sup> David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996), p. 206.

<sup>317</sup> Bishku, “Turkey and Iran during the Cold War,” p. 15; Robert Olson, “Turkey-Iran Relations, 1997 to 2000: Kurdish and Islamist Questions,” *Third World Quarterly*, 21:5 (2000), pp. 878-879.

The Saadabad Pact, named for its venue: the Shah's palace in northern Tehran, was signed between Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan on July 4, 1937. The agreement basically reiterated points accepted in many bilateral treaties that Turkey and Iran had concluded with their respective neighbors since the early 1920s: 1) non-interference in other's internal affairs; 2) respect for common frontiers; 3) consultation on issues of common interest; and 4) non-aggression. Moreover, Article 7 of this pact was very similar to the wording of Article 5 of the 1926 treaty of friendship and security between Turkey and Iran.<sup>318</sup> This stance against the Kurdish separatism also prevailed on 1955 Baghdad Pact.

Implicit in ...[both the Saadabat and Baghdad] pacts was an understanding that Iraq, Iran, and Turkey would cooperate in suppressing any Kurdish nationalist movement intent on altering the political status quo in the region.<sup>319</sup>

Thus, the common understanding between Turkey and Iran on the Kurdish separatism has become a striking feature in modern Turkish-Iranian relations.

After World War II, Turkey and Iran's strategic significance carried particular importance in Western strategy against the Soviet communism. The Baghdad Pact (1955), the Central Treaty Organization (1959), and the Regional Cooperation for Development (1964) were all designed to contain Soviet penetration to the Middle East. Turkey and Iran allied with the US, and the *Trident*, a secret trilateral security agreement between the intelligent services of Israel (Mossad), Turkey (MIT), and Iran (SAVAK), provided the base to cope with mutual threats and to maintain the regional power of the US against possible Soviet penetration.<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> The treaty is reprinted in Hurewitz, *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics*, p. 510.

<sup>319</sup> Recited in Bishku, "Turkey and Iran during the Cold War," p. 20 from J.M. Abdulghani, *Iran and Iraq: The Years of Crisis* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), pp. 131-132.

<sup>320</sup> Spyridon Mimikos, *Strategic Implications of Expanded Turkish-Israeli Military Relations*, Master's Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, December 1999, pp. 50-52.

Concerning regional politics, Turkey and Iran pursued similar policies toward the US and Israel. Turkey and Iran both had declines in their relations with Israel and the US when their regional geopolitic, economic, and domestic interests gained priority, but they never abandon their security alliance with the US and Israel against the Soviet Union and its Arab clients.

During the Shah Muhammad Reza's reign, the son of Reza Shah, Iran's economic, as well as political relations with Turkey fluctuated. When the U.S. imposed an arms embargo on the Turks in 1975 following their invasion of Cyprus a year earlier, Iran signed a five-year economic agreement with Turkey designed to establish a joint defense industry.<sup>321</sup> In an interview with *U.S. News & World Report* in June 1978, the Shah said: "One thing the U.S. could do to help Iran and improve security in the [Middle East] area would be to remove the arms embargo against Turkey immediately."<sup>322</sup> However, six years earlier when Turkey was selling medicinal opium (used as morphine or codeine) under a United Nations program at \$10 a kilogram, Iran began to sell it at half the price trying to get the Turks to stop their production. Iranian officials had estimated that there were 400,000 opium addicts and an additional 10,000 heroin addicts in their country and that half of their supply came illegally from Turkey.<sup>323</sup> In November 1964, when the Shah sent the Ayatollah Khomeini into exile for attacking his policies, Turkey accepted the cleric, who remained in Bursa for a year under the watchful eye of Turkish authorities.<sup>324</sup> Yet, despite some cooperation, the Iranian leader "preferred to bypass Turkey in his dealings with the West."<sup>325</sup> Each country has felt the urge to cooperate

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<sup>321</sup> Michael M. Boll, "Turkey's New National Security Concept: What it Means for NATO," *Orbis*, 23:3 (Fall 1979), p. 615.

<sup>322</sup> Recited in Biskhu from "The Shah's Message to Carter," *U.S. News & World Report*, 26 June 1978, p. 38.

<sup>323</sup> Recited in Biskhu from Thomas J. Hamilton, "Iran to Export Cut-Rate Opium," *New York Times*, 17 January 1969, p. 5.

<sup>324</sup> Dilip Hiro, *Iran under the Ayatollahs* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), p. 49.

<sup>325</sup> Andrew Mango, *Turkey: The Challenge of a New Role* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), p. 116.

with its neighbor only when it suited its particular interests. Thus, when the Shah was overthrown and an Islamic regime was established in 1979, Turkey quickly adapted to the changed political situation with its main concern being preserving Iran's unity.

Although historical skepticism between the two non-Arab juxtaposing state has never disappeared, especially in the post-Ataturk and Reza Shah period, as seen in frequent minor incidents until the Iranian revolution,<sup>326</sup> historical pragmatism coupled with their common stance against the Soviet Union helped them to ease tensions through negotiation and encouraged their peaceful coexistence.

Thus, one may describe modern Turkish-Iranian relations before the Iranian revolution as a series of "marriages of convenience." The treaties between 1926 and 1937, the Saadabad Pact of 1937, the Cold War's Central Treaty Alliance (CENTO) and its economic offshoot, the Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) organization reflect this reality.

Of all the Republic of Turkey's borders, the only one that approximates a pre-nineteenth-century boundary of the Ottoman Empire, its predecessor state, is the one with Iran. While there was a long history of competition between the Ottomans and the Iranian state, the latter, unlike the Arabs who were subjugated, maintained its independence. Thus, as one observer astutely points out: "Both Persians and Turks feel a sense of superiority in the area, which inevitably places them in a competitive mode. . . . [However,] the balanced nature of the historical relationship provides the basis for a balanced contemporary relationship as long as each side consider the other's self-interest."<sup>327</sup>

## **2. After the Revolution**

The Iranian Revolution in 1979 transformed the nature of relations between Turkey and Iran from a pro-West camp to an anti-West-pro-West polarization. Iran's

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<sup>326</sup> For these incidents see Pahlavan, "Turkish-Iranian Relations: An Iranian View," p. 72.

<sup>327</sup> Philip Robins, *Turkey and the Middle East*, p. 20.

adoption of a new, revolutionary anti-Western and Islamic vocabulary and orientation aiming to influence and sway the Islamic world (though the exact definition of the Islamic world was not made clear) posed a threat to the secular Turkish Republic. Turkey tried to restrain such polarization. Escalating tension along this line would not only create regional problems but also could negatively affect Turkey's Westernization attempts. Such an Islamic-secular polarization would made Turkey potentially vulnerable to Iranian-led efforts to radicalize non-Westernizers within Turkey thereby polarizing the country internally.<sup>328</sup> Religious fundamentalism in Turkey is a product Turkey's internal problems.<sup>329</sup> As a result of industrialization, people from rural areas migrated to cities for better living. However, they were dissatisfied with the economic conditions and were still attached to traditional life style. Unable to adapt to the city life, these people turned to extreme religious tendencies, which formed the basis of Islamic fundamentalism in Turkey. Yet, this situation made Turkey domestically vulnerable to the Iranian Islamic regime's revisionist face, which divines the export of Islamic revolution and thus create inevitable frictions between Turkey and Iran. Iran does hold a natural attraction for Turkey's fundamentalist religious elements to undermine Turkey's emergence as a regional superpower, which is an existential client of the "evil" US.

While the new Islamic regime was willing to export its regime under the leadership of Khomeini, Saddam Hussein's timely attack on Iran did not allow this to happen. The Islamic revolution of Iran threatened the global security by challenging the domestic stability of Muslim Arab states in the Persian Gulf, an important source of energy—oil, natural gas—for all developed and developing countries. Thus, Iran felt internationally isolated during their eight year war, while Iraq enjoyed the support of its Arab brethren and the West.

Turkey, if not supporting Iraq explicitly, favored the containment of Iranian Islamic revolution, and adopted an attitude of "active neutrality." This meant that

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<sup>328</sup> Atilla Eralp, "Post-Revolutionary Relations with Iran," in Barkey (ed.), *Reluctant Neighbor*, p. 95.

<sup>329</sup> Pahlavan, "Turkish-Iranian Relations: An Iranian View," pp. 73-74.

contrary to the overall US policies, the Turkish government did not pursue a policy that Iran would consider hostile.<sup>330</sup> During the Iran-Iraq War, both Iran and Iraq were forced to rely on Turkey as a major source of needed commodities imported from Turkey or from the West. Turkey's trade with Iraq surpassed that the trade with Iran especially when Baghdad became dependent on Turkish routes to export Iraqi oil upon the closure of its Persian Gulf outlet. Subsequently, Turkey purchased 60 percent of its oil from Iraq and secured Baghdad's permission in 1984 for Turkish cross-border military operations to pursue the PKK terrorists based in northern Iraq. This stance bothered Iran considering its international isolation and its support for the northern Iraqi Kurds to undermine Saddam Hussein's power.

Nevertheless, during the mid-1980s, Turkey and Iran made efforts to improve relations. Prime Minister Turgut Ozal believed that trade links were the backbone of Turkey's relations with Iran and the Middle East in general. Thus, a number of economic agreements were signed between Iran and Turkey. Ozal felt that building economic links and networks would eventually resolve political problems. Moreover, his success of integrating Islamic identity with Western modernity helped Turkey act as a role model and as a broker for Western interests in the region and soften the anti-Islam, anti-Arab perceptions about Turkey in the region.<sup>331</sup> This posture to some degree impelled Iran to show a level of restraint in exporting its Islamic revolution to Turkey that it did not show toward other countries in the region. Turkish trade from Iran reached \$1.3 billion in 1985 including exports and transition fees. In 1985, Tehran's and Ankara's interests in increased trade showed itself in the revival of RCD renamed as the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). Subsequently, improving economic relations led to improving security relations. On November 28, 1984, Tehran signed a security agreement, similar to 1926 and 1937 agreements, designed to allay Turkish anxieties on the use of KDP camps in Iran by the PKK. In this period, apparently the importance of

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<sup>330</sup> Eralp, "Post-Revolutionary Relations with Iran," p. 99.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

economic relations with Turkey compelled Iran to restrict, if not completely halt, the PKK activities in Iran.

In short, Ozal's foreign economic and consolidating domestic policy restrained the Islamic regime of Iran from undermining the secular regime of Turkey from the Iranian revolution to the end of the Cold War.

### **3. The End of the Cold War**

With the end of the Iran-Iraq War in July 1988, trade relations between Turkey and Iran decreased as Iran and Iraq began to diversify its trade relations and increasingly focused on Western European countries, particularly Germany. It seemed that Iran's interest in trade with Ankara had been mainly due to the exigencies of the war. Thus, as the decade ended, economic links between Turkey and Iran were not as vigorous as previously. Iran was trying to lessen its dependence on Turkey while Turkish entrepreneurs were turning to European markets realizing the instability of the Middle Eastern markets.

The Gulf War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union left Turkish and Iranian decision-makers uncertain on what to pursue as a policy in the new environment. Beduffed, with similar concerns, the two countries initially engaged in conflicting policies in the areas—northern Iraq, the Caucasus, and Central Asia—where their geostrategic and economic interests coincided. Thus, Turkey and Iran bilateral relations were strained from 1990 to 2000. The underlying factors were their skepticism on each other's intentions and their ideological differences in the new environment.

## **B. PROBLEM AREAS**

### **1. Northern Iraq and the PKK**

The first problem area that has most occupied Turkish and Iranian foreign policymakers is their concerns about each other's policies in northern Iraq. In principle both Turkey and Iran agreed on preserving Iraq's territorial integrity and welcomed restoring Baghdad's control over all Iraq. However, the northern Iraq power vacuum

created a conflict between Turkey and Iran when the Kurdish factions of northern Iraq sought patrons in their rivalry. Because of their geographic locations and political orientations Turkey cooperated with the KDP against the PKK and Iran cooperated with the PUK, which then was frequently collaborating with the PKK against the KDP.<sup>332</sup>

These balancing policies were the natural consequence of the “realist” approach common in relations between nations. Tehran suspected that Ankara would gain either direct or indirect control of Iraq’s Mosul and Kirkuk oil fields through large scale Turkish military incursions in northern Iraq, which in essence was to eliminate the PKK. Ankara suspected Iran’s efforts to influence Iraq’s Shi’a population and to undermine Turkish secularism and nationalism by using PKK terrorism. Not surprising, in 1989 Iran had made an agreement with Osman Ocalan, brother of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, which provided the PKK with 20 camps along the Iranian side of the Turkish-Iranian border.<sup>333</sup>

What bonded the two states was the US’s different approach to the Kurdish issue in northern Iraq, which risked dismembering Iraq by favoring the creation of a separate Kurdish entity. Ironically, the two supporters of the PKK in the Middle East, Syria and Iran, agreed to act with Turkey in November 1992 to show their determination to the US and the West on preserving Iraq’s territorial integrity. The risk of Iraq’s dismemberment also raised Turkey and Iran’s fear of increased Kurdish national aspirations within their own countries.

Since Turkey and Iraq agreed to preserve Iraq’s territorial integrity and restore Baghdad’s authority, what remained as the real problem was Iran’s PKK affiliation, which had been far more devastating than Turkey’s reported support for *Mojahedin-i Khalq* and the KDP-I.<sup>334</sup> When Turkey began to clean the other side of the Iraqi border

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<sup>332</sup> PUK-PKK collaboration has diminished in great deal after the 1998 Washington Agreement, and the two have been fighting since mid-2000.

<sup>333</sup> McDowell, *A Modern History of Kurds*, 1996, p. 348.

<sup>334</sup> Robert Olson, *The Kurdish Question and Turkish-Iranian Relations from World War I to 1998* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1998), p. 41.

area from the PKK existence by large incursions and by cooperation with the KDP, PKK militants found enclaves first in the PUK controlled territories and later in Iran's Kurdistan province, where Iranian central authorities have never been able to control the boundaries with Turkey.

Iran tried to balance Turkey-KDP alliance by cooperating with the PUK and its ally the PKK.<sup>335</sup> Iran's motivations behind this action was multifaceted in the early 1990s: 1) to counter Turkish designs in northern Iraq; 2) to deflect US/Western influence in the region; 3) to counter Turkish support of Azerbaijan; 4) to ensure an independent Kurdish state went unrealized to preempt Kurdish-Iranian irredentism;<sup>336</sup> 5) to have a word in northern Iraqi politics in case of Iraq's dismemberment. However, Iran hit two birds with one stone with the PKK issue: while serving as a means for the above objectives of Iran, the PKK card was also a precious tool to undermine the domestic stability of Turkey.

Iran-PKK linkage was also related to Iran-Turkey rivalry in the Caucasus and Central Asia Turkish influence in these areas was threatening Iran's domestic stability. For example, the then pan-Turkist Azeri President Elcibey expressed his desire for unity with Turkey and Iranian Azerbaijan.<sup>337</sup> Elcibey's stance at the time raised Iranian concerns about its national unity though Iranian Azeris were well-integrated into Iranian society. In addition, Ozal was trying to bridge Central Asia to the West area by offering a "Turkish Model" which envisioned reconciling Muslim culture with Western democracy. This risked further isolation of Iran with the possible US encroaching in Iran's surrounding regions via Turkey. Already discontent with the US existence in the Gulf and in northern Iraq, such a development was not acceptable for Iran. Hence, it was not

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<sup>335</sup> See Chapter Three about Turkey-Iraq relations and about the northern Iraq developments in the 1990s.

<sup>336</sup> Michael S. Grogan, *National Security Imperatives and the Neorealist State: Iran and Realpolitik* (Master's Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, December 2000), p. 79.

<sup>337</sup> The inhabitants of northern Iran are Iranian Azeris and the area is called "Iranian Azerbaijan."

surprising to see Iran countering these threats by using PKK terrorism, which significantly threatened Turkish national unity and territorial integrity.<sup>338</sup>

The end of competition Iran's support for the PKK decreased in parallel to its decreasing concerns when Elcibey was ousted and replaced by Haydar Aliyev in 1993. Aliyev's rejection of pan-Turkist ideologies alleviated Iran's serious concerns. Since 1993, Turkey and Iran signed a series of security protocols, which stipulated neither country would permit any terrorist organization to exist on its territory. This understanding went so far that Iran gave permission to bomb PKK bases located in and near Iranian territory when Ankara requested this in June 1994.<sup>339</sup>

The flaring up of rivalry between the KDP and the PUK in 1994 and 1995 once again increased Iran's support for the PKK. When the fight between the KDP and the PUK escalated during the, each faction turned to its patron for help. In 1996, during the intensified fight between the KDP and the PUK, Iran reportedly deployed troops in northern Iraq, helped the PUK and the PKK to contain the Turkish-KDP alliance.<sup>340</sup>

When Turkey secured a military cooperation with Israel, this was an immense strategic shock to Iran since Israel gained the capability of striking and surveillance over Iran by using Turkish air space.<sup>341</sup> This created a regional imbalance by marginalizing Iran as well as Syria and became another reason behind Iranian desire to use the PKK card. However, improving economic relations encouraged by the foreign ministries of the two countries led Iran to follow a more conciliatory line about the PKK issue. In 1998,

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<sup>338</sup> Eralp, "Post-Revolutionary Relations with Iran," pp. 103-106; Pahlavan, "Turkish-Iranian Relations: An Iranian View," pp. 87-88.

<sup>339</sup> Olson, *The Kurdish Question and Turkish-Iranian Relations from World War I to 1998*, p. 42.

<sup>340</sup> Kramer, *A Changing Turkey*, p. 138.

<sup>341</sup> See Chapter Five about Turkish-Israeli relations.

for example, the foreign ministers of Turkey and Iran agreed to take allied actions against the PKK when they met during the Islamic Conference in Doha.<sup>342</sup>

This warm period did not last long. After the expulsion of the PKK leader Ocalan from Syria in October 1998 and his capture in February 1999, Turkey turned to Iran and pressured it to end its support for the PKK. External support for the PKK has been more influential than the domestic support, and Iran, by many, was seen as the largest outside supporter of the PKK after Syria. Thus, for Ankara it was essential to make this second step in order to bring down PKK terrorism. Ankara's timing for this move was perfect when Iran's domestic problems were considered. (In 1999, Iranian domestic turmoil reached its peak by the street demonstrations of 100,000 people.<sup>343</sup>) Turkey alleged that despite the recent border security agreements, Iran was unwilling to abandon the PKK card as evidence demonstrated: Iran permitted the PKK to hold its Sixth Annual Congress in Urmiya in February 1999 and provided sanctuary to Osman Ocalan and other PKK commanders in Iranian territory.<sup>344</sup> Abdullah Ocalan's explanations from prison confirming the PKK-Iran linkage increased pressure on Tehran. He stated that Iran supplied the PKK with weapons and bases and allowed weapons to be transferred via Armenia and Russia and that Tehran pressed Jalal Talabani, the leader of the PUK, to allow his territory to be used by the PKK to stage raids into northern Iraq.<sup>345</sup>

Despite denials by Iranian authorities that they were providing support to the PKK by saying it is the game of the US and Israel to sabotage the friendly relations between Turkey and Iran, Turkish intelligence reports, as recent as in 1999, demonstrated the opposite. There were approximately 50 PKK camps in Iran, in which 1200 terrorists were

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<sup>342</sup> "Turkey and Iran Agree to Cooperate in Combating PKK," *Stratfor.com*, 19 March 1998.

<sup>343</sup> Olson, "Turkey-Iran Relations, 1997 to 2000: Kurdish and Islamist Questions," pp. 875-877.

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 877.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 877.

being trained every year, transported to the Turkish border by Iranian military planes.<sup>346</sup> In addition, Iranian *Pasdaran* (Iran's Revolutionary Guard Command) officers trained PKK terrorists in these camps as well as in northern Iraq. According to these reports, Iran also provided financial support to the PKK from 1995 to 1999 in exchange for PKK killings of leading figures and members of Iranian Kurdish opposition group, the KDP-I.<sup>347</sup>

Ankara exploited Iran's domestic turmoil by explicitly siding with the Iranian reformists in the political struggle between the reformists, symbolized by President Khatemi and his followers, and the hardliners, the Mullahs and their affiliations. In several remarks, Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit praised Iranian people indicating that the demonstrations were a natural reaction of the Iranian people to an oppressive regime and Iranians are a people with rich historical and cultural background who could not be expected to bear the outdated regime of oppression for a long time.<sup>348</sup> He also distinguished between the Iranian supporters of terrorism and the Khatemi government indicating Khatemi's difficulties to control them due to the Iranian constitution.<sup>349</sup>

A Turkish bombing of an Iranian border town suspected to be a PKK enclave on July 18, 1999<sup>350</sup> was enough to make Tehran realize that, amid the turmoil of the

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<sup>346</sup> Recited in Michael S. Grogan, *National Security Imperatives and the Neorealist State: Iran and Realpolitik*, pp. 80-81 from "Intelligence Reports Say There are 50 PKK Camps in Iran," *Turkish Daily News*, 9 August 1999.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> *Hurriyet*, 14 July 1999.

<sup>349</sup> Olson, "Turkey-Iran Relations, 1997 to 2000: Kurdish and Islamist Questions," p. 885. Iranian constitution limits the power of presidency by giving the Mullahs and ultimately the Supreme Guide the authority to check government policies.

<sup>350</sup> Alan Makovsky, "Turkish-Iranian Tension: A New Flashpoint?," *Policy Watch 404* (The Washington Institute of Near East Policy). Available [Online]: [http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/watch/Policy\\_Watch/Policy\\_Watch1999/404.htm](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/watch/PolicyWatch/Policy_Watch1999/404.htm).

demonstrations, as well as the Jewish spy case,<sup>351</sup> Turkey was trying to assert pressure on Iran to sever its ties with the PKK and any lack of a strong response on its part would have weakened its position in northern Iraq, and hence, its entire geopolitical position in the Gulf region, with eventual repercussions in the Caucasus.<sup>352</sup> In addition, an indifferent response to Turkish calls would cause international humiliation of Iran, as had happened to Syria, and consequently would hamper reformist President Khatemi's efforts to save the "terrorist" image of Iran. On August 11, 1999, Turkey and Iran signed another border security cooperation agreement and since then Iranian support for the PKK has diminished in great scale.

## 2. Islamic Fundamentalism: Hizbullah-Iran Connection<sup>353</sup>

As previously mentioned, Islamic tendencies in Turkey have originated mostly from Turkey's internal situation. Yet, the existence fundamentalist inclinations in Turkey left it vulnerable to Iranian encroachment on Turkish domestic politics as evidenced several times. Iran's charm offensive has alerted Ankara when Iran's need to cooperate with Turkey decreased due to the end of Iran-Iraq War and the uncertainty by the end of the Cold War.

Turkish concern about Islamic fundamentalism, or *reactionism*, increased obviously, when the Islamist Refah Party emerged as the first party out of the 1995 elections with one-fifth of the Turkish votes. The rise of an Islamic party was due to the impotence of the Turkish center political parties to satisfy the needs of traditional Turkish people living in the suburbs of major cities. However, the rise of concerns about reactionism was not because of the election results but because of the untraditional policies of Refah leader Erbakan after he formed the coalition government as the Prime

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<sup>351</sup> Iran arrested 13 Iranian Jews with charges of espionage on behalf of Israel and the US. This brought immense counter criticism from the US and Israel. "Israel, U.S. call on Iran to free 13 Jews accused of spying," *CNN*, 8 June 1999. Available [Online]: <http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/meast/9906/08/iran.jews/>.

<sup>352</sup> Olson, "Turkey-Iran Relations, 1997 to 2000: Kurdish and Islamist Questions," p. 883.

<sup>353</sup> Though religious fundamentalist groups in Turkey call themselves by different names, Turkish government, press, and academia refer to them as, "Hizbullah." Turkish Hizbullah has no connection with the Hizbullah in south Lebanon.

Minister. His catering approach to Syria and Iran in the face of their deliberate support for anti-Turkish terrorism and his accommodating attitude toward domestic sources reactionism—namely Turkish tariqas, which intend to establish the *Sharia* in Turkey—were seen as policies weakening Turkey's domestic and external security. In this context, Iran's sympathy to Erbakan government coupled with remarks criticizing the secular regime in Turkey alerted Turkish military establishment to target Iran as the enemy of Kemalist regime of the Turkish Republic.

Ankara, reiterated its claims that Iran was sponsoring Islamic fundamentalism and PKK terrorism. These claims came at a very critical time when Syria and Israel was about to reach a peace deal, thereby risking the isolation of Turkey in the Middle East.<sup>354</sup> For Ankara these claims aimed three objectives: 1) to pressure Iran to end providing enclaves and supplies for the PKK; 2) to receive more Western support by indicating that Turkey is vulnerable to Iran-sponsored Islamic terrorism as well as Israel and the US; and 3) to gain leverage against the domestic reactionism.<sup>355</sup>

Turkish security authorities repeatedly stated that they can prove Iranian attempts to undermine the secular order of Turkey via furthering Islamist propaganda and even training and support of Islamist terrorist organizations in Turkey such as Hizbullah. This led to mutual extradition of diplomats. In April 1996 eight Iranian diplomats were accused of being involved in terrorist activities after the testimony of a captured Turkish Islamist hit man.<sup>356</sup> In February 1997, the Iranian ambassador to Turkey was forced to leave the country after he had made a public speech during a meeting called "Jerusalem Night" in the Sincan suburb of Ankara in which he openly praised antiseccular, fundamentalist positions.<sup>357</sup> During 1999 and 2000, the captured Hizbullah members

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<sup>354</sup> See the chapter about Turkish-Israel relations for the reasons behind the Turkish concerns of isolation in the Middle East in the mid-1990s.

<sup>355</sup> Piccoli, *Alliance Theory: The Case of Turkey and Israel*, p. 17.

<sup>356</sup> Nazlan Ertan, "Take Back Your Spies," *Turkish Probe*, no. 174 (12 April 1996), pp. 8-9.

<sup>357</sup> Semih D. Idiz, "Crisis with Iran," *Turkish Daily News*, 5 March 1997.

confessed that they had received political and military training and support from the operatives and the agents of the Iranian intelligence in the "Jerusalem Warrior's Organization" within Pasdaran.<sup>358</sup> The Turkish media reported that the Tevhid Selam organization in Malatya, its newspapers Selam, and the Jerusalem Warriors were part of an assassination brigade created within Iran's Pasdaran and were behind the assassinations of 17 well-known Turkish journalists, politicians, professors, other public figures, and around 100 Iranian dissidents living in Turkey.<sup>359</sup> The confirming declarations by the Super-Governor of the Southeast Under Martial Law, by the Director of Security in Ankara, and by the Ministry of Interior Affairs<sup>360</sup> coincided with Ankara's demand that Tehran halt its support for the PKK and with Iran's domestic turmoil. Apparently, Ankara wanted to finish off both the PKK and the Hizbullah-affiliation of Iran by using this opportunity to make Tehran come to terms with Turkish security requirements.

However, Ankara did not let these incidents deteriorate the overall relations, which consisted of significant economic interests for Turkey. The Turkish Foreign Ministry was not as quick as the Ministry of Interior Affairs to accuse Iran of Islamic terrorism. The natural gas pipeline project envisioned to transport Iranian and Turkmen natural gas to Europe via Turkey, a railroad project that would connect Central Asia to Europe, a plan to turn the ECO into a common market by incorporating the Central Asian republics and similar interests required Ankara, as well as Tehran, to warm the relations. The wariness of Turkey not to harm relations with Iran was obvious when Turkish Prime Minister refrained from blaming the Iranian government distinguishing between the people responsible for terrorist actions and the reformist Khatemi cabinet.

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<sup>358</sup> Olson, "Turkey-Iran Relations, 1997 to 2000: Kurdish and Islamist Questions," p. 884.

<sup>359</sup> *Hurriyet*, 9 May 2000.

<sup>360</sup> See for these statements Olson, "Turkey-Iran Relations, 1997 to 2000: Kurdish and Islamist Questions," pp. 883-885.

### 3. Rivalry in Central Asia and in the Caspian Basin

The competition in Central Asia and the Caucasus in early 1990s was about the Turkish desire to create a Turkish world "from the Balkans to the Great Wall of China" and the Iranian attempts to counter it by appealing to anti-Turkish terrorism and by exporting the Islamic revolution to the newly independent states. This was basically a competition to fill the vacuum created by the disintegration of the Soviet Union and produced no satisfactory results for either side. Turkey wanted to gain more leverage in its relations with the West in the post-Cold War era by presenting a "Turkish Model" against the "Iranian Model" for these newly independent Turkic states. Iran became very concerned about further international isolation by possible US penetration into Central Asia via Turkey and about Elcibey's pan-Turkist propagations aimed at Iranian Azeris. In response, Tehran adopted a friendly posture toward Azerbaijan's enemy Armenia and cultivated relations with Moscow. In addition, economic expectations of Ankara and Tehran from this new market were another reason for this serious competition.

However, neither Turkey nor Iran could receive what they expected due to some restraining factors. Eventually, both realized the benefits of cooperating instead of being rivals in the region. For example, Turkey did not have the economic means to invest in rebuilding these newly independent states as imagined. Turkish officials realized that their expectations were too high and that Turkey's resources were simply inadequate to play out the activist role in the region. Turkey was also frustrated with the level of support and commitment it received from the West upon Washington's "Russian-first" policy. Thus, it has not been possible for Ankara to progress as much as imagined, except for Turkey's sincere efforts in developing linguistic and cultural ties with the Central Asian states.

The Central Asian states did not welcome Iran with its emphasis on Islamic unity.<sup>361</sup> In the first place, 90 percent of Central Asians are Sunni rather than Shi'a as in Iran and Turkey and Saudi Arabia were promoting Islam with an emphasis on a Turkish-

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<sup>361</sup> Pahlavan, "Turkish-Iranian Relations: An Iranian View," p. 83.

Islam synthesis in order to prevent the spread of “Iranian-type fundamentalist Islam” in Central Asia.<sup>362</sup> In addition, Iran shares little cultural heritage with the people of Central Asia. Even in Tajikistan, where Iran has a linguistic affiliation, Iran is not welcome due to its regime.<sup>363</sup> Thus, Iran does not have the advantage of basing its relations with Central Asia on “ethnic kinship.”

In addition, these former Central Asian clients of the Soviet Union were cautious not to disturb the regional interests of their former patron Russia. Thus, this reservation was an obstacle to Turkey and Iran in developing relations with the former Central Asian clients of Russia.

The fall of the Elcibey government in Azerbaijan symbolized the end of serious competition between Turkey and Iran. They realized the impossibility of developing pragmatic relations with these new countries based on a “common” ethnic or religious identity. Even among themselves these Central Asian countries lack a sense of unity and have several border or ethnic disputes. Pursuing an ethnic or Islamist policy would destabilize the region, which has precious natural energy sources or economic opportunities. Thus, since the mid-1990s, Turkey and Iran, putting their unrealistic and dangerous aspirations aside engaged in cooperative policies that would enable them to develop separate relations with each Central Asian and Caucasus country.

There is also rivalry over the Caspian Basin. However, this is not a rivalry only between Turkey and Iran. This is a symbol of the US-Russian competition for influence in the area. Russia is pressing for the passage of pipelines that will distribute Caspian and Kazakh oil from Russian territory, thereby wishing to increase its strategic and economic position with Europe and the world market. The US supports policies that would curb the acceleration of Russian and Iranian influence in the region. In this context, Washington supports the realization of Turkish Baku-Ceyhan oil pipeline project that would carry

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<sup>362</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

Azeri oil to the Mediterranean Sea through Turkish territory.<sup>364</sup> However, the moment Washington's continuing policy of isolating Tehran internationally ends, which is very unlikely to happen in the long term, Ankara's chances of tapping Caspian energy would be seriously weakened since Iran has the potential of connecting not only the Caspian oil but also the Central Asia trade to the world markets.<sup>365</sup>

#### 4. Iranian WMD Facilities

Turkey is concerned about Iran's activities on missile technology and weapons of mass destruction. The successful test of a medium range of Chebab-3 missile in July 1998 that could reach large parts of Turkey and the development of longer ranged Chebab-4 reminded Turkey of its vulnerability to WMD threats.<sup>366</sup> Also, Turkish authorities are uneasy with the Russian support for finalizing the Iranian nuclear complex near Busheer<sup>367</sup> and the recent decision of Russian President Putin to revoke a 1995 agreement with the US not to sell arms to Iran.<sup>368</sup> Although one may assume that Tehran's armament endeavors are not directed at Turkey but serve a more general strategic purpose in the competition for hegemony in the Persian Gulf, Ankara cannot ignore these developments in a neighboring country.

### C. AREAS OF COOPERATION

Indeed, Turkey and Iran have more to cooperate on than to dispute. The geographies of each country provide advantages to the other. These advantages are coupled with their desire to expand the definition of the Middle East to Central Asia and the Caucasus against the Arab world. Whereas Turkey serves as a conduit for Iran's

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<sup>364</sup> "The Bush Administration Supports the Baku-Ceyhan Pipeline Project," *Aksam*, 2 February 2001. "Chevron Interested in Baku-Ceyhan Line," *Reuters*, 9 February 2001.

<sup>365</sup> Pahlavan, "Turkish-Iranian Relations: An Iranian View," p. 85.

<sup>366</sup> Kramer, *Changing Turkey*, p. 142.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>368</sup> "Putin Reaffirms Arms Sales, Nuclear Assistance to Iran," *Arms Control Today*, April 2001. Available [Online]: <http://www.armscontrol.org/ACT/april01/iran.html>.

European economic links, Iran provides an invaluable transit route for a Turkey-Central Asia link to connect the Turkic world and their precious natural resources to the West. Both Ankara and Tehran were not late to realize the benefits of cooperation even during the competition phase. The inactive ECO, which attempted to promote trans-regional trade, banking, transportation, and telecommunications, was revived in November 1992 by the incorporation of the newly independent states of Central Asia and Azerbaijan.<sup>369</sup> Under the same organization, in May 2000, Turkey and Iran signed many trade agreements, which reduced the customs tax at their border crossings, and pledged to cooperate more closely to turn the ECO into a common market.<sup>370</sup>

There is also a \$23 billion natural gas pipeline project signed in August 1996 that will sell Iranian natural gas to Turkey over the subsequent 23 years upon its completion by July 2001.<sup>371</sup> This will increase the trade volume with Iran more than two-fold, to nearly \$1.7 billion.<sup>372</sup> Turkey is primarily buying petroleum from Iran and selling machinery, agricultural products, and chemicals on a barter basis.

Turkey has also improved its railway connection with Iran since Tehran opened a new line to link up with the Turkmen railway network in May 1996. This connection will constitute the only functioning railway of the "new Silk Road" until plans for a trans-Caspian ferryboat-based railway connection can be realized.<sup>373</sup> Consequently, transportation regulations are important to Turkish-Iranian official economic relations because Turkey is the basic outlet for Iranian overland trade with Europe. In this context, the recent meeting of the Joint Transport Commission, which convened prior to Turkish Foreign Minister Ismail Cem's visit to Tehran was also promising. The Commission

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<sup>369</sup> Eralp, "Post-Revolutionary Relations with Iran," p. 106.

<sup>370</sup> *Hurriyet*, 21 May 2000.

<sup>371</sup> Kramer, *Changing Turkey*, p. 143.

<sup>372</sup> "Unofficial Information on Foreign Minister Ismail Cem's Visit to Iran," 12-13 February 2001, *Turkish Foreign Ministry*. Available [Online]: [www.mfa.gov.tr](http://www.mfa.gov.tr).

<sup>373</sup> Kramer, *Changing Turkey*, p. 144.

decided to reestablish train links between Istanbul-Tehran and Damascus-Tehran (via Turkey).<sup>374</sup>

In addition to these areas of existing and hoped-for economic cooperation, there has been increasing collaboration in preserving Iraq's territorial integrity and in curtailing the emergence of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq. Both states do wish to see stability in the volatile Middle East and both want to thwart any phenomenon that would inspire their Kurdish population for separatism. However, Iran is unhappy with the support Turkey has given to the enforcement of the no-fly zone in northern Iraq. In this regard, Tehran has been attempting to convince Ankara to end the US and UK flights out of Turkey and find a regional formula to replace the multinational force. Nevertheless, Turkey's calculation of regional and international interests concerning northern Iraq impels Turkey to extend the mandate of Operation Northern Watch.<sup>375</sup> By keeping the force functioning and having the only trade outlet for northern Iraqi Kurds, Ankara binds Iraqi Kurdish leaders with its own terms, which indeed, also serve the Iranian interests.

In addition, the recent agreements signed for the border security and cooperation against terrorism and smuggling warmed relations between Ankara and Iran. During the January 2000 visit of Iranian Foreign Minister Harrazi to Ankara and the February 2001 visit of Turkish Foreign Minister Cem to Tehran, the cooperation achieved through the Turkish-Iranian High Commission for Security and Joint Security Committee was satisfactory. Both states also pledged the continuation and further strengthening of this cooperation.<sup>376</sup> President Khatemi's success in bringing the members of Iranian secret service, who were responsible of murdering Iranian opposition politicians, before the Iranian courts indicated that the Iranian government could control illegal actions within the Iranian state. This development encouraged Ankara to believe the sincerity of Iranian

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<sup>374</sup> "Unofficial Information on Foreign Minister Ismail Cem's Visit to Iran."

<sup>375</sup> See Chapter Three about Turkey-Iraq relations.

<sup>376</sup> "Regional Report: Turkey," *Western Policy Center* 5:1 and 6:2 (January 2000, February 2001). Available [Online]: [www.westernpolicy.org/publications/reports](http://www.westernpolicy.org/publications/reports).

reformists in their pledges to cooperate against terrorism. Ankara in turn wanted to remove all suspicions that would create tension between Turkey and Iran. To that end, Ankara presented all of its Iran-related security concerns about security to the reformist Iranian government. On 8 May 2001, the Turkish Minister of Interior Affairs, Saadettin Tantan, visited Tehran with a 163-page file that included allegations that PKK and Islamic militants received training at camps in Iran. In short, to further improve relations with Tehran, Ankara demands Iran have a “hands off” policy regarding Turkey’s domestic affairs.<sup>377</sup>

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

Turkish-Iranian relations in the post-Cold War era were initially strained due to their regional rivalry and ideological differences. The opposing regimes of Iran and Turkey have been the source of their skepticism about each other’s policies. The revisionist aspect of the Iranian Islamic regime has concerned Turkey since this aspect justified Iranian support for PKK and Islamic terrorism aimed at Turkey. Turkey presenting a secular regime compatible with Muslim society was a challenge to Iran at its door. Iran also suspected that the US, the main enemy of Iranian regime, would further encircle Iran by supporting the “Turkish Model” in the newly dependent Central Asian states. Thus, Iran used its terrorism card to contain Turkey’s policies in northern Iraq, Central Asia, and the Caucasus.

However, the initial conflict gave way to cooperation when Iran and Turkey realized that pursuing policies based on religious and ethnic kinship would benefit neither side. Their mutual geographic advantages enticed Iran and Turkey to cooperate rather than to confront each other. In addition, the sincere approach of the Iranian reformists to curtail terrorism originating from Iranian territory encouraged Turkey to boost economic relations. Currently, Turkey and Iran are engaged in diplomatic efforts to remove all suspicions that would hinder the progress in cooperation.

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<sup>377</sup> “Tantan in Iran for Talks,” *Turkish Daily News*, 8 May 2001.

In short, though ideological differences between Turkey and Iran create a rift, the pragmatism deriving from mutual regional interests refrained Iran and Turkey from serious confrontation in the post-Cold War environment.

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