

TURNING ENEMIES INTO FRIENDS:
THE CHANGE IN TURKEY'S RELATIONS
WITH KURDISTAN REGIONAL
GOVERNMENT, BETWEEN 2007- 2011

Thesis submitted to the
Institute of Social Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

International Relations

by

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March 2012

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1. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

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ABSTRACT

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Turning Enemies into Friends: The Change in Turkey's Relations with Kurdistan Regional Government, between 2007-2011

The purpose of this thesis is to examine why and how the relations between Turkey and Kurdistan Regional Government have underwent a drastic change. Firstly, I briefly tell about the paradigmatic change in Turkish foreign policy understanding and the place of KRG along with Iraq in this novel vision. In the second chapter I present the motivations and ambitions of Turkish side to transform its relations with the KRG. The changing relations' reflections on international and regional politics are analyzed in the third chapter with a special emphasis on the predictions for the period after US withdrawal from Iraq. In the conclusion some predictions are made assuming that Turkey and the KRG continue to develop their relations.

Key words:

Turkish Foreign Policy, Kurdistan Regional Government, Turkey's Iraq Policy, Turkish Kurdish relations

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Düşmanları Dosta Çevirmek: Türkiye ve Kürdistan Bölgesel Yönetimi İlişkilerinde 2007-2011 Arası Yaşanan Değişim

Bu tezde amacım Türkiye'nin ve Irak'ın kuzeyinde kurulan Kürdistan Bölgesel Yönetimi (KBY) ile ilişkilerinde 2007 ve 2011 yılları arasında yaşanan değişimin nedenlerini ve nasıl gerçekleştiğini anlamlandırmak ve açıklamaya çalışmaktı. Tezin birinci bölümünde Türk Dış Politikasındaki paradigmal değişimi ve oluşan bu yeni anlayışta Irak ve KBY'nin yerini inceledim. İkinci bölümde Türkiye'nin KBY ile ilişkilerini dönüştürmesinin arkasındaki amaçları ve nedenleri anlatmayı amaçladım. İlişkilerde meydana gelen değişimin uluslararası ve bölgesel yansımalarını özellikle Amerikan askerlerinin Irak'tan çekilmesinden sonraki döneme ilişkin öngörülere yoğunlaşarak inceledim. Sonuç bölümünde de ilişkilerde yakalanan bu değişimin devam etmesi halinde ortaya çıkabilecek sonuçlara değinildi.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türk Dış Politikası, Kürdistan Bölgesel Yönetimi, Kuzey Irak Bölgesel Yönetimi, Türkiye'nin Irak Politikası, Türk Kürt İlişkileri

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AK PARTY	Justice and Development Party [Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi]
BDP	Peace and Democracy Party [Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi]
BOTAŞ	Petroleum Pipeline Corporation [Boru Hatları ile Petrol Taşıma Anonim Şirketi]
CHP	Republican People's Party [Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi]
CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority
DTP	Democratic Society Party [Demokratik Toplum Partisi]
ICG	International Crisis Group
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
MGK	National Security Council [Milli Güvenlik Kurulu]
MIT	National Intelligence Organization [Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı]
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PJAK	Party for Freedom and Life in Kurdistan
PKK	Kurdistan Worker's Party
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
SACEUR	Supreme Allied Commander Europe
TAL	Transitional Administrative Law
THY	Turkish Airlines [Türk Hava Yolları]
TPAO	Turkish Petroleum Corporation [Türk Petrolleri Anonim Ortaklığı]
TRT	Turkish Radio and Television [Türkiye Radyo ve Televizyonu]
US	United States

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I have to dedicate my unlimited thanks to my parents, Ahmet and Güzin ÇELİK who devote their lives to provide me a wonderful family and pray always for my well-being. My dear friends and relatives especially my elder brother Mesut ÇELİK who did not hesitate to sacrifice their time to find me required documents, books, reports and articles deserve special thanks. I can not be successful if I did not have the opportunity to study with Assoc. Prof. Savaş GENÇ, whose guidance and tolerance are vital for me in this process. Lastly, I also want to thank to my dear brother Ensar ÇELİK and beloved fiancée Filiz YALÇINKAYA for their constant support and help which are essential to motivate myself to accomplish this thesis in such a short period of time.

INTRODUCTION

The relations between Turkey and the Kurdistan Regional Government have undergone a fundamental change since 2007. Before that time, Turkey consciously distanced itself from engaging with the KRG, due to the fact that any official link with the Kurdish entity would pave the way of recognizing it and approving its legitimacy. This non-involvement policy based on the concern that if a Kurdish entity in Northern Iraq is formally established and gains international recognition; this would have a demonstrative effect on Turkey's own Kurdish population to form a separate state within the country. Therefore, Turkey has long considered an independent Kurdish state in Northern Iraq a 'red-line'. Since the early 1990's, this concern led prioritization of security policies which has complicated the efforts for developing a de-securitized approach and diversifying bilateral relations with Iraqi Kurds. Moreover, Turkey was increasingly concerned from Kurdish gains since the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. Connectedly, acquiring constitutionally recognized autonomy in 2005, semi-autonomous KRG was perceived as a challenge against Turkish 'red-lines', thus, viewed as a threat against national security. Furthermore, increase in the number of Kurdistan Worker's Party's (PKK)¹ attacks on Turkey doubled Turkish reaction to Iraqi Kurds due to the fact that PKK has enjoyed KRG-controlled territory as a safe haven for conducting attacks to Turkish border outposts. As a serious matter of concern, the presence of PKK in the region reinforced Turkey's security oriented strategy toward Northern Iraq.

Security oriented lenses do not only thwart diversification of relations but also create stress between Iraqi Kurds and Turkey. Taking Turkey's own Kurdish population into account, tensional relations with Iraqi Kurds have domestic repercussions. Turkish governments which conducted cross-border incursions into Northern Iraq targeting PKK encampments there faced severe condemnation from Kurds in Turkey. Conflict with the KRG, hence, jeopardized any governmental attempts to put an end Turkey's Kurdish question due to the effect of strong transnational Kurdish identities.

Moreover, contradicting stances on oil-rich Kirkuk province fueled the dispute. KRG wants to incorporate the province on the ground that mass deportations occurred in Saddam Hussein era diminished the Kurdish population. For normalization of demographic structure, KRG

¹ Established in late 1970's, PKK has carried out terrorist activities against Turkey in the name of Turkish Kurds' rights. It has been labeled as terrorist organization by US and most of European countries.

claims that it has brought expelled Kurds back to the province. On the other hand, Turkey who gives great importance to Kirkuk's demographic structure due to Turkmen population², rejected Kurdish argument and maintained that KRG exploited mass deportations and imported Kurdish families to the province with the aim of showing Kurdish population more than it was before mass deportations.

Many of these problems have not been resolved yet. Nevertheless, the relations between Turkey and KRG are transformed to a positive direction since 2007. From this date on, some internal and external developments have effect on this fundamental change. In 2007, Justice and Development Party (AK Party) which was first elected to form the government in 2002, achieved to cement its authority by increasing its public support.³ It is important to note that AK Party has pursued a new foreign policy which envisions limiting conflicts and developing more cooperation with neighboring countries. Besides, from 2002, AK Party has challenged with pro-status quo military-bureaucratic establishment who had long domination over democratically elected governments. More public backing encouraged AK Party to take bolder steps to challenge against traditional policies both in domestic affairs and foreign relations. Bearing this divergence in mind, Abdullah Gül, founding member of AK Party, was elected to be the new president in 2007 and took over the post from Ahmet Necdet Sezer, a former jurist who publicly resisted AK Party's policies and holds a pro-status quo stance.

To evaluate differences between two presidents' foreign policy visions, it is enlightening to look at their opposing stances towards Iraqi Kurdish leaders. Sezer who was against establishing any tie with Iraqi Kurds, refused to meet with Iraqi President Jalal Talabani during his tenure, on the ground that he is at the same time secretary general of one of two dominant Kurdish parties, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). In contrast, Gül who served as prime minister and foreign minister during Sezer's presidency, tried hard to form links with KRG officials.

The change in top administrative level is of course very essential in strategy altering; however, it is not completely sufficient to explain the fundamental policy shift. One more factor is raise in the PKK attacks. As it accelerated terrorist assaults against Turkey, Ankara

² There is a kinship between Turks and Turkmen who live in some Middle Eastern countries but mostly in Northern Iraq. For this reason, Turkey has acted as protectorate to Turkmen and tried to protect their rights in Iraq.

³ In 2002, AK Party was able to get 34,28 per cent of total vote, whereas in 2007 its votes jumped to 46,47 per cent.

recognized that fight with terrorism does not seem to succeed without any effective cooperation with the Kurdish administration. Before 2008, Turkey accepted only Iraqi central government as the only legitimate interlocutor to negotiate security affairs. A tripartite mechanism between Baghdad, Ankara and Washington was established to coordinate common efforts against the PKK. But after a PKK attack at the Turkish border outpost in Aktütün killing 17 soldiers in October 2008, Turkey started to put more pressure on US for more cooperation against terrorism. This attack may be considered as the turning point because since then, KRG officials have also taken part in joint efforts against the PKK. So far, the KRG's opposition against the PKK has raged and the Kurdish administration has become one of the closest allies of Ankara in this regard.

Putting efforts to end PKK terrorism is not limited to establish foreign alliances. AK Party government also endeavors to tackle the issue by developing new domestic policies. In the last decade, Turkish public has started to discuss more openly that the PKK has an outcome of state pressure and ethnic discrimination, the overall perception on the issue started to evaluate to the point that separatist terrorism could only be eradicated by not only security measures but also democratic initiatives. In 2009, Turkish government initiated 'Kurdish Opening'⁴ aiming to find an ultimate solution for the country's Kurdish question. With this step, AK Party government has been trying to provide larger freedoms for ethnic Kurds and contain discrimination against Kurdish citizens by embracing their language and culture. But this process is not likely to be successful as long as Turkey's relations with Iraqi Kurds remained to be tensional. Therefore, it is rightly maintained that AK Party has strengthened its hand in 'Democratic Initiative' by abandoning to see the KRG as a national threat and finally later on developing ties with it.

In addition to internal dynamics, important external factors have played significant role too in the rapprochement process between Turkey and Iraqi Kurds. The election of Obama administration in Washington has a determining factor that convinces both parties to forge closer relations. Although the Bush administration had a vision to comprise Turkey and the KRG; its successor's strong determination to withdrawal from Iraq and setting a deadline urged Erbil and Ankara to prepare post-US period in Iraq. Obama's foreign policy perspective would provide the basics for dialogue between Kurds in Northern Iraq and Turkey. Moreover, Turkish foreign policy makers recognized American mediation between Turkey and KRG will

⁴ The initiative's name later changed to 'Democratic Initiative'

not remain as effective after withdrawal. Iraqi Kurds also realized that they will need a regional ally to counter political conflicts which are expected to arise in post-withdrawal period.

From an economic point of view, trade relations between Turkey and Northern Iraq have increased remarkably in the last decade. Turkish entrepreneurs have progressively invested more in most of the KRG's important sectors. Stronger economic ties coincided with a period Turkey has considerably become a 'trading state' that is a state which prioritizes economic considerations and trade relations in shaping foreign policy. Thus, it could be fairly argued that economic links, in addition to other factors, have undeniable influence on improving better relations with the KRG. Moreover, taking the assumption that mutual economic interdependence will lessen the possibility of conflict between trading parties, more trade between Turkey and the KRG has fundamentally changed the relations toward a positive direction. As a significant example indicating how common economic interest has a compromising effect, it is important to have a look at the agreement among Iraq, Turkey and the KRG about Iraqi oil's export via Turkey in 2009. Shared economic interest has facilitated to reach a compromise among these three parties whose relations with each other were quite tensional at that time. With this agreement Turkey increased the KRG's dependence on itself, Iraqi central government enlarged oil revenues and the KRG has also benefited from them. The agreement reaffirmed the indispensable conclusion that the KRG needs Turkey in exporting its oil to world markets which reinforce the rapprochement.

After 2007, Turkey's security-oriented involvement with the KRG has intensified and deepened in a wide range of areas. Previous conflicts were left behind and Turkey started to adapt its 'zero problems with neighbors' policy into Iraqi Kurds as well. Turkish consulate was opened in Erbil in 2010. The rapprochement has found its repercussion in fighting against the PKK. KRG leaders abandoned their inflammatory language about Turkey's Kurdish question and condemnations against Turkish military operations into their territory. Furthermore, in every single opportunity they reiterated their aspiration to play constructive role in the process of disarming, demobilizing and reintegration of PKK.

In this study, the factors are tried to be presented pushing Turkey to start a new kind of relationship with Iraqi Kurds. There are important drives for ensuring security, geo-political considerations which will potentially contribute Turkey's aspirations for regional leadership,

economic gains, political advances both in domestic and foreign policy particularly having more influence on Iraqi affairs. The regional and international factors are also analyzed with a special emphasis on Turkish-Iranian competition and US withdrawal from Iraq. Lastly, despite considerable advance in establishing relations with KRG, important issues which have the potential to derail the ongoing process are addressed.

Chapter 1: Turkey's New Foreign Policy Understanding and Northern Iraq

1. 1. Principles and Theoretical Framework of New Foreign Policy

In the last decade, especially after Justice and Development Party (AK Party) has come to power in 2002 with a remarkable public support, Turkish foreign policy has experienced swift transformation, deemphasized traditional western oriented policies and has started to pursue multidimensional pro-active strategy. After years of non-interference, resulting from basically ideological preferences, Ankara attaching primary importance to geo-political considerations, has started to take a number initiatives in a wide range of issues regarding Caucasus, Balkans, Central Asia and the most volatile region of the world, Middle East.⁵ Following a long period of benign neglect to Middle East, Turkey has been in a more influential position in the region which is hard to predict in 1990's. Ankara has engaged in numerous issues in Middle East, from governmental crisis to the region's most complicated problem, namely Israeli Palestinian dispute.

With the AK Party government coming to power, Ankara involved more in Israeli-Arab conflict, mediated in peace negotiations between Damascus and Tel Aviv, and gathered Israeli president Shimon Peres and the head of Palestinian Liberation Organization Mahmoud Abbas in Ankara. Moreover, AK Party was the first to invite Hamas to Turkey after democratically held elections in Gaza Strip in 2006. Turkish troops have been sent to Afghanistan and Lebanon in order to contribute NATO mission and UN force relatively. Moreover, as a sign of larger involvement, the political crisis in Iraq and Lebanon has become important problems in Turkish foreign policy agenda and Ankara has played constructive roles in both countries for holding fair elections (Iraq) and ending government crisis (Lebanon).

During the last 10 years, Turkey has developed very good relations with Syria, Iran, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Yemen Bahrain, Libya and Egypt. Additionally, visa abolishment agreements with many of them were signed and bilateral free trade zones has been established. Numerous heads of states, prime ministers, ministers and influential political figures with different ethnic and religious backgrounds from Arab countries visited Turkey and their Turkish counterparts reciprocated.

⁵ Banu Eligür, "Are former enemies becoming allies? Turkey's changing relations with Syria, Iran and Israel since the 2003 Iraqi War?" Middle East Brief no: 9, Brandeis University Crown Center for Middle East Studies, August 2006.

Dominated with ideological priorities, “Kemalist secularism” caused Turkey to distance itself categorically from active engagement in the political, economic and cultural affairs of modern Middle East which comprises predominantly Muslim countries.⁶ However, it should be bear in mind that from the foundation of Turkish Republic, it cannot be maintained that Turkish foreign policy makers have been indifferent to what is going on in parts of the region where a large number of Turks living such as Iraq’s Kirkuk.

The main characteristic of Kemalist secularist foreign policy could be rightly deemed as being an indisputable western ally in order to become a part of “western world.”⁷ Although acquiring full-fledged European Union (EU) membership is still the foremost ideal of Turkish foreign policy, today there is adequate number of elements which show new Turkish foreign policy is not western-oriented but multi-dimensional. In this new era of Turkish foreign policy, one could easily observe that Turkey is not an unswerving ally of western powers any more, as it prioritizes its national interests and becomes an actor that should be persuaded. It was apparent in a sufficient number of cases; Ankara is not convinced to accept the offers from NATO and US as easily as it was in the previous term. Just after coming power in 2002, AK Party government had to deal with Washington’s pressure to allow US troops to Turkish soil in order to open a northern front in Iraq. Turkish Parliament rejected the offer, a move which ignited waves of complaints against Turkey in Washington. Another case from numerous ones is Turkish resistance in the election of a new head for NATO.⁸ In 2009 former Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen was nominated for assigning NATO’s general secretary. Yet, according to Ankara Rasmussen was a problematic candidate for the office due to its resistance not to deem PKK as a terrorist organization and permit ROJ TV, a Kurdish Channel having connection to PKK operating in his country. With the aim of reducing Ankara’s reservations, US mediated with parties and finally Turkish side accepted his assignment on some conditions.⁹ Besides, attracting more international attention, Ankara provided the ground for talks with the permanent members of UN Security Council and Germany (P5+1) and Iran as an attempt to find a diplomatic solution to Iranian nuclear crisis.

⁶ Ömer Taşpınar, “Turkey’s Middle East Policies: Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism”, Carnegie Middle East Center Paper, no. 10, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D.C, September 2008, p.11.

⁷ Philip Robins, “Turkish foreign policy since 2002: Between a ‘post-Islamist’ government and a Kemalist state” International Affairs, Volume:83, 2007 p.292

⁸“Rasmussen to give Turkey senior posts in NATO”

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/turkey/5115171/Rasmussen-to-give-Turkey-senior-posts-in-Nato.html> , April, 6, 2011.

⁹ Selçuk Gültaşlı, “Rasmussen Krizinde Kaybedenler Kazananlar” <http://www.zaman.com.tr/yazar.do?yazino=836833> April 13, 2011.

A further example how Turkey started to define its interest apart from western countries” political priorities could be seen in Ankara’s objection to NATO’s plan for establishing a missile defense shield in member countries. In 2010, Turkish side insisted that in official documents there should not be a particular definition for the target of defense shield in a move to protect Iran.¹⁰

Under the rule of AK Party, Turkish foreign policy has reached to an unprecedented level of dynamism and activism, it is however worth mentioning that this is not the first time Turkey involves with surrounding region and be a part of non-western alliances despite internal and external criticisms.

Without any long-term outlook based on development of regional cooperation, Ankara has taken part in some initiatives including Sadabad Pact (1937) and the Baghdad Pact (1955) which were unsuccessful to fulfill the expectations due to the instability in the member countries and absence of super powers backing. Moreover, lining up alongside with western world during the Cold War, Turkey has opted to oppose western coalition in some occasions and attempted to create partnership with Arab countries. For illustration, during the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, Turkey did not allow American forces to use the bases in its territory to resupply Israel while Russian planes used Turkish airspace to support Syria.¹¹

Turkey’s diplomatic distance from the Arab world narrowed, especially when Turkey was in need of international support in some particular issues such as Cyprus crisis. During the Six-Day War in 1967, Turkey supported Egypt and did not take part in the group of maritime powers demanding the reopening of the Gulf Aqaba to Israeli shipping. For a more astonishing example, despite its secular attitude in international relations which prescribes non-intervention with Middle Eastern and Islamic countries, Ankara participated in the proceedings of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1969. Last but not least, Turkey, the first Muslim nation to recognize Israel, allowed Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) to open an office in 1979.¹²

¹⁰ Stratejik Düşünce Enstitüsü, “NATO Füze Savunma Sistemi ve Türkiye”, July 2011 available at <http://www.sde.org.tr/userfiles/file/Fuze%20Kalkani%20Analiz--son-son.pdf>

¹¹ Mahmut Bali Aykan, “The Palestinian Question in Turkish Foreign Policy”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Issue:25 pp. 91-110, Cambridge University Press, 1993.

¹² Ibid.

Thus, it is fairly argued that the attempts to diversify international relations agenda and having multiple orientations in foreign policy making are not unique for the term of AK Party. What differs the AK Party from its predecessors in regard with foreign policy is that the current Turkish government has a comprehensive vision, strong and well-prepared theoretical background in parallel with newly emerging and rapidly changing dynamics of international system along with the will for Turkey's transition to a "central country" as formulated by Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu in his theoretical book "Stratejik Derinlik Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu" (Strategic Depth: Turkey's International Position). In this "new bible" of Turkish foreign policy, Davutoğlu describes Turkey's international relations as being unbalanced with an overemphasize on ties with Europe and US to the neglect of Turkey's interest in establishing ties with the rest of the world.¹³

This paradigmic change in Turkish foreign policy cannot be read in isolation from internal and external factors. From a socio-economic perspective, Turkey's continuing capitalist transformation starting from the era of Turgut Özal in 1980's with introduction of market economy and subsidizing export has had an undeniable impinge on both socio-economic balances within the country and AK Party's rationally driven, materially motivated foreign policy which prioritizes to increase export to the region.¹⁴ The rise of pro-capitalist Muslim bourgeois in Anatolia which is named "Anatolian tigers" with a clear reference to "Asian tigers"¹⁵ and this class's willingness to integrate increasingly globalized world is considered to be one of the most important factor leading AK Party's policy of "zero problem with neighbors" aiming to eliminate the problems and maximize economic political and social cooperation with regional countries.¹⁶

In addition to current Turkish government's eagerness for regional leadership and internal socio-economic transition, another driving force pushing Ankara to rationalize paradigmic change in its foreign policy is the ongoing conjectural transformation in international relations after the end of Cold War. Taking the bipolar configuration of the world at that time into

¹³ Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Stratejik Derinlik Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu", Küre Publishing, 2004, Istanbul, p.312.

¹⁴ For more info about the link between export and Turkish foreign policy: Altay Atlı, "Businessmen and Turkey's Foreign Policy" International Policy and Leadership Institute, Policy Brief Series, October 2011

¹⁵ Ömer Demir, "Anatolian Tigers or Islamic Capital: Prospects and Challenges", Middle Eastern Studies, Volume:40 Issue:6 2004, pp.166-188.

¹⁶ Mustafa Kutlay, "Economy as the Practical Hand of New Turkish Foreign Policy", Insight Turkey, 13 (1), pp.67-88.

consideration, Turkey had served as a bulwark of “free world” against Soviet expansionism due to its unique geo-strategic location. In terms of foreign relations Ankara, therefore, had not so large room to maneuver. However, subsequent to the fall of Berlin Wall, Turkish foreign policy was not ready to adapt itself to emerging international dynamics. New world order caused Turkish foreign policy makers to be concerned about the suspicion whether the end of Cold War meant the fading away of Turkey’s strategic significance in the international system. One more reason for anxiety is resulted from doubts whether Turkey’s foreign policy team –including military, intelligence services, government and ministry of foreign affairs- is well-prepared for the new situation in which the constraints narrowed the maneuver zone started to be loosened.

To sum up, all these internal and external reasons have helped to create a suitable environment for a new vision to be implemented for Turkish foreign policy. However, the transformation was not possible without political stability in the country. Abovementioned factors combined with political stability, resulted from single party rule for almost one decade. Incumbent government’s willingness to make Turkey an influential regional power and international actor is another driving force of this unprecedented activism. In addition to political stability, a vision aiming to make Turkey a regional power and a “central country” is significant for explaining new activism in the new foreign policy. This vision is not based on changing stances according to altering political conditions; instead it has principles which facilitate decision-makers to have long-term goals.

1. 1. 1. Methodological and Operational Principles of Turkish Foreign Policy

As internal and external factors compounded with a stable political environment has created a receptive environment for a new foreign policy vision for Turkey, it is important to understand what this change means in global context which challenges with the post nation-state system¹⁷.

The new foreign policy vision may be deemed as an attempt to adjust the country into post-modern geo-politics¹⁸. In a period of time, when sophisticated realities of simultaneous

¹⁷ With this term I mean to refer the global transformation the world has experienced with globalization process during which the borders started to lose their meaning with the domination of transnational activities.

¹⁸ The post-modern geopolitics is an outcome of an attempt that redefines the term of geo-politics in the light of economic globalization, advance in communication technologies and transnational networks. For a detailed

globalization and regionalization process which are considered to threaten the nation state system have emerged, one of the survival strategies for the nation states might be to fiddle with themselves to globalization and regionalization. As İbrahim Kalın notes “the best way to protect the nation-state is to act as if it does not exist”¹⁹ implying that nation-states ought to generate strategies to transcend the borders of nation-state system.

To be sure, it does not appear to be possible to involve this adjustment process with the paradigms, institutions and methods of nation-state understanding. Reconstruction of national identity which entails to be more inclusive than the nation-state conceptualization, besides redefinition of terms like “national threat” and “national security” has been expected to be indispensable elements of this adjustment endeavor²⁰. While overcoming troubles for nation-state, Turkey with the heritage of Ottoman Empire naturally comes back to its past experiences in its greater hinterland where the country has connected with social, cultural religious and historical ties which is defined with the term of “geo-political frontline”. The shift from nation-state system to post-modern geo-politics forces another parallel shift to occur accordingly which is a change in classical level of analysis based on nation-states to a new framework of analysis on civilizations.

Struggling to tackle with the catastrophic situation accompanied by the nation-state building process, Turkey has attempted to re-conceptualize its geostrategic understanding along with its frontiers with historical and cultural backgrounds. Inconsistencies between national boundaries and geopolitical frontlines have been regarded as one of the main factors lying behind political and military conflicts. Legal boundaries of nation state system have not been congruent to geopolitical frontlines of the countries that have imperial heritage like Turkey.

Pointing at the geo-political frontlines, Davutoğlu suggests that supported by cultural and historical background, geo-political frontlines apart from national boundaries, have an important role in designation of a nation’s international vision.²¹ He further gives instances of Turkish-Iranian and Turkish-Iraqi borders comparatively in order to exemplify how the level of consistency between national boundary and geopolitical frontline is determinant in causing

definition of this term: Gearoid O Tuathail “Postmodern Geopolitics? The modern geopolitical imagination and beyond” in “Rethinking Geopolitics” eds. Gearoid O Tuathail Simon Dalby, Routledge, 1998, p.17.

¹⁹ İbrahim Kalın, “Turkey and the Middle East: Ideology or Geopolitics”, Private View Autumn 2008, p.3.

²⁰ An observation of the change in Turkey’s threat perception and national security considerations is found in Thanos Veremis, “The Transformation of Turkey’s Security Considerations”, *The International Spectator, Italian Journal of International Affairs*, 40:2, pp. 75-84

²¹ Davutoğlu, *Ibid* p. 18.

tension or providing political stability. Davutoğlu relates the stability of Turkish Iranian border which was determined with Kasr-ı Şirin Treaty in 1639 with the fact that geo-political frontline between Sunni Ottomans and Shiite Persians collides with national boundaries of Turkey and Iran. As an opposite case he argues differentiations between national boundaries and geo-political frontlines sparked struggles for sphere of influences in which two or more political actors involve; like in Turkish Iraqi border. Davutoğlu maintains the main factor lying behind the crisis on the border is that it was not drawn in accordance with the region's geo-cultural and geo-political structure.²² Turkey's southern province, populated predominantly Kurds is divided by a mountainous region with Northern Iraq having a similar demographic structure, culture and religious identifications. Having lived in harmony during Ottoman times, national boundaries have constituted obstacles to maintain the interconnectedness between two societies and have pushed them to experience different social, political and economic transformations.

As an attempt to adjust to “post-modern geopolitics” Turkish foreign policy is based on three methodological and five operational principles which are clearly declared by the Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu.²³ One of the main characteristics of new Turkish foreign policy is that it aims not to fluctuate in accordance with the changing political environment rather it is based on principles.

The first methodological principle is its “visionary” approach. With having a vision, Turkish foreign policy decisions abandoned a “crisis-oriented” approach that dominated during the entire Cold War era. In the relations with the KRG leaving crisis-oriented approach is visible. The vision that Turkish new foreign policy has enable Ankara to diversify its relations with Iraqi Kurds. Previously, the Kurdish groups in Northern Iraq became only a matter of discussion whenever a military incursion is conducted. Today the security issues have still the major importance but constitute only a subject among other issues in Turkey's agenda.

Secondly, Turkish foreign policy has a “consistent and systemic” framework around the world. Davutoğlu argues that all sentiments of the new strategy function in harmony and do

²² Ibid p.21

²³ Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoğlu declared his principles in Turkish Foreign Policy just 20 days after he assumed the post. Ahmet Davutoğlu “Turkey's Zero Problems Foreign Policy” Foreign Policy. 20 May 2010, available at:

http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/05/20/turkeys_zero_problems_foreign_policy?page=0.1

not have contradictory elements.²⁴ For instance, the policies pursued by Turkey in the Middle East are not in opposition to its stance in Central Asia. Adopting this principle into Turkey's relations with the KRG may be one of the most difficult tasks of foreign policy makers. It seems a contradiction between advocating Iraqi territorial integrity and at the same time improving stronger ties with the autonomous Kurdish region. However, Turkey's policy toward Iraq is also consistent because Turkey has developed relations with the KRG in a manner which reinforces the KRG's integration to the rest of Iraq. Taking the agreement which allows oil exploited in Northern Iraq to be exported via Turkey, into account provides some evidence in this regard. With this move, Turkey contributes Iraq for enlarging its oil revenues by opening it up to world markets. Yet, this is also beneficial for Iraqi Kurds that they also gain 17 percent of this income²⁵. If the KRG had taken unilateral steps to export its oil, it would have been failed since Turkey would not allow it to act independent from Iraq. Reaching consensus with Iraqi central government and the KRG, Turkey has also benefited from the agreement by increasing its geo-economic and geo-strategic importance for energy security.

The third methodological principle of new policy is adaptation of a new discourse and diplomatic style based on "soft power". He explains this principle:

"Although Turkey maintains a powerful military due to its insecure neighborhood, we do not make threats. Instead, Turkish diplomats and politicians have adopted a new language in regional and international politics that prioritizes Turkey's civil-economic power."²⁶

The Turkish soft power in the KRG is considered to be relatively limited when it is compared to other regions and countries Turkey involves. This is mainly because of Turkey's negative perception on Kurdish sides. Turkey's soft power does not solely depend on government's activities in abroad²⁷. Yet, Turkish aid organizations' activities which are essential part of Turkey's soft power are limited in Northern Iraq. Instead Turkish business engagement is quite active expanding Turkish soft power to a certain extent. More importantly, At this point it is important to highlight the importance of "Turkish Schools" as Turkey's very few sources of soft power in Iraqi Kurdistan. In this sense the Fezalar Educational institutions (FEI) which operate in Northern Iraq since 1993 is worth noting. There are currently, 10 Turkish schools

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ben Lando, "Iraqis Make Progress on Sharing Oil Sales," United Press International (UPI), June 21, 2007.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Tarik Oğuzlu, "Turkey's Soft Power in Turkish Foreign Policy", Australian Journal of International Affairs, 61:1 p.88.

from ranging from nursery to university level in Iraq. Eight of these schools are in the Suleymaniye (3), Erbil (5) and Kirkuk (2). There is also a university called Ishik University which has 4 faculties and 6 departments²⁸. Taking the long time they have operated in the region, it can be safely argued that these schools have prepared the appropriate ground for other Turkish civil society segments to step into Northern Iraq.

In addition to these there methodological principles, Davutoğlu counts five other operational principles in the same article. The first of operational ones is the “balance between security and democracy”. Second principle is “zero problems towards neighbors” which aims to resolve problems with neighbors and maximize cooperation. The main drive for resolving the problems is establishing mutual economic interdependence with neighboring countries. The third operative principle is proactive and pre-emptive peace diplomacy whose major purpose is to take measures before crises emerge and escalate to a critical level. With the words of Davutoğlu “Turkey’s regional policy is based on security for all, high-level political dialogue, economic integration and interdependence, and multicultural coexistence.” Multi-dimensional foreign policy is the fourth principle which envisions establishing complementary relations with not only a group of countries but also extend foreign relations as possible. The fifth principle is a new kind of diplomacy as Davutoğlu calls it “rhythmic diplomacy” which is a result of Turkey’s aspiration to have a more active role in international relations with active involvement in all international organizations and all issues having global importance.

Turkey’s Iraq policy is a proof of the realization of these principles into action. For instance, Ankara has developed a comprehensive strategy to handle Iraqi issues and abandoned the old policy by de-emphasizing Turkmen policy. Following the aim of multicultural coexistence Ankara generates an Iraq policy which approaches the country comprehensively, embracing all ethnic and religious groups although they have rigorous conflicts with each other. Therefore, Turkey has created links with Sunni Arabs, Iraqi Shiites and finally Kurds. Moreover, for the sake of remaining high-level political dialogue, unlike other countries Turkey resisted to keep open its embassy in Baghdad despite a bomb attack was conducted against it. As a result of pre-emptive peace diplomacy, Turkey has put remarkable efforts to convince Sunni Arabs to participate into Iraqi national elections in December 2005.²⁹

²⁸ For a detailed report see Turkish “Schools important for Northern Iraq future” Today’s Zaman, December 10, 2010, <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-229265-turkish-schools-important-for-northern-iraqs-future.html>

²⁹ Sunni Arabs boycotted to take part in national elections in January 2005.

1. 2. The place of Northern Iraq in the new foreign policy understanding

Until recent years the perception of Iraq in Turkey has been mostly associated with terrorist movements and the threat of an independent Kurdish state in northern part of the country. Ankara has long feared a Kurdish state in Northern Iraq would stimulate a demonstration effect on Turkey's Kurds and encourage ethnic separatists in the country. Turkish authorities consider it as a 'red-line' that should not be crossed. Thus, territorial integrity of Iraq has had always primary importance for Ankara.³⁰ Additionally, in its long fight with Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), Turkey has faced serious challenges due to the fact that PKK has enjoyed public and political support from Northern Iraq where the organization has encampments and headquarters in Kandil Mountains. Apart from terrorism and Kurdish independence, Iraq's Turkmen minority and the final legal status of Kirkuk constituted other significant and determinant factors for Ankara's security-oriented Iraq policy.³¹ Pursuing this stable strategy for years, Turkish foreign policy makers came to the point that the old Iraq policy was no more available since national and regional transformation stemming from US invasion of Iraq in 2003.

After a set of developments resulted from the invasion, Turkey found itself in a tough position which Ankara stepping toward the borders of its 'red-lines' about Iraq. Ankara's concerns began to realize; in addition to significant sectarian and ethnic conflicts, Iraq has turned to be a breeding ground for international terrorism. Moreover, after the fall of Saddam who had been in a severe competition with Iran, Tehran utilized power vacuum in the country and has scrambled to increase its influence especially Shiite dominated southern provinces. To be sure, the most stressing conclusions on the side of Ankara was Iraqi Kurds' acquiring autonomy and resurrection of PKK's terrorist attacks spoiling a much cherished sense of peace and stability since the arrest of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1998. As Henry Barkey interpreted, this outcome was long thought by Turks to be the worst possible outcome for Turkey.³²

³⁰Bill Park, "Iraq's Kurds and Turkey: Challenges for US Policy", Parameters Autumn 2004, available at: <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/USAWC/parameters/Articles/04autumn/park.pdf>

³¹ For a broader analyzes about Kirkuk crisis, Rifaat Aram, "Kirkuk: The Central Issue of Kurdish Politics and Iraq's Knotty Problem", Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs, Volume 28, Number 2, August 2008, pp. 251-266.

³² Henri J. Barkey, "Turkey's New Engagement in Iraq Embracing Iraqi Kurdistan", United States Institute of Peace Special Report no:37, May 2010

Although the change in Turkey's relations with Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) between 2007 and 2011 has been tried to be analyzed, two breaking events occurred before American invasion of Iraq are viewed indispensable for a comprehensive understanding for Turkey's policy shift. Once Washington administration started to push Turkey to permit its 80,000 soldiers to go through Turkey's soil to Iraq in 2002, AK Party government postponed several times the parliamentary vote on allowing the US military to use Turkish soil for the invasion of Iraq. At the end of the negotiations, US offered Turkey to provide 15 billion dollars in grants and loans along with an agreement that some 20.000 Turkish troops could enter Northern Iraq to protect Turkish interests here³³. Despite this deal the Turkish Grand Assembly rejected the bill; a move frustrated Washington administration and attracted American reaction. On the 1st March of 2002 Turkey unexpectedly spoiled US plan to open a northern front in Iraq, Iraqi Kurds were left to the only reliable party for alliance which caused the sense of anxiety to increase on Turkish part which has interpreted an independent Kurdish state in Northern Iraq as an existential threat.

From the US point of view, then deputy secretary of State Marc Grossman³⁴ acknowledged Washington's lack of preparation against PKK created difficulties for American side to persuade Ankara about the motion. More importantly, differing views on Kurdish groups in Northern Iraq between Ankara and Washington was another source of tension. The head of the Turkish delegation in negotiations with American side, Deniz Bölükbaşı expressed this different position "American administration viewed Kurdish groups as a key ally whereas Turkey saw them as a headache."³⁵

AK Party government's active engagement with Iraq's Sunni minority is the second indicator of policy change. Ankara persuaded them to take part in the general elections of 2005 December which they had planned to boycott like the previous one in January.³⁶ This move can be read as a sign of further fundamental transformation in Turkey's Iraq strategy which previously focused only on protection of Iraqi Turkmen minority. At the same time this is also a part of regional policy to revitalize the Sunni solidarity against the perceived rise up of 'Shiite Crescent' in order to balance Iran concerning regional leadership.

³³ "Top Turkish General fears Kurds will be new US ally vs. Iraq", The World Tribune, March 4, 2003, <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/856617/posts>

³⁴ Interview with Grossman, Milliyet Daily, August 08, 2005

³⁵ Deniz Bölükbaşı, "1 Mart Vakası", Doğan Egmont Publishing, Istanbul, February 2008, p.50

³⁶ Mümtaz'er Türköne, "Irak Seçimleri ve Osmanlı Barışı", Zaman, February 8, 2005

These two developments have showed that first; Turkey can reject American offers and it should not be viewed as an unquestionable US ally; secondly Ankara has changed its Iraq policy which previously put a primary focus on Turkmen minority, now generates a comprehensive understanding and creates ties with all of the parties in Iraq including Sunnis and Shiites.

1.2.1. Evolution of Turkey's Relations with KRG

Turkish politicians and statesmen were often reluctant to meet with Iraqi Kurdish leaders and political figures in front of publics for the fear that any official ties with Iraqi Kurds increase their international legitimacy. As opposed to this tendency which certainly prevented any dialogue with Kurdish leaders, three months after 2002 elections, Foreign Minister of first AK Party government Yaşar Yakış hosted then the leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) Jalal Talabani in Ankara and discussed bilateral issues including the situation of Iraqi Turkmen minority.³⁷ However, this was an exceptional case for Turkish state's traditional position which severely rejected any diplomatic contact with Kurds in Iraq³⁸. It should be added that with the term 'Turkish state' it is referred to the bureaucratic military establishment in the country which had absolute domination over democratically elected governments. While AK Party government was attempting to overcome red-lines of old establishment on the relations with Iraqi Kurds, the resistance over launching official talks remained for some years. Former Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer, a staunch 'Kemalist' who is known his opposition to AK Party government, objected to any dialogue with Iraqi Kurds. He resisted not giving any appointment to Iraqi President Jalal Talabani regardless of his official position mainly because he was of Kurdish origin. It could be argued that Sezer's adamant opposition to contact with Iraqi Kurds caused Kurdish groups to side along with the PKK against Turkey despite potential opportunities of rapprochement with Ankara.³⁹ It should be also noted that Sezer's veto was not exclusively implemented to Talabani, but also to Shiite deputy president Adil Abd-ul Mehdi. As an effort to alleviate tension resulted from an Iraqi Sunni gathering in Turkey, Mehdi was invited by then Foreign

³⁷ "Talabani Yakış'la Görüştü" <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=56744>, November 16, 2012

³⁸ The exception was of course late President Turgut Özal who closely contacted with both Kurdish parties in Northern Iraq.

³⁹ Deniz Zeyrek, "Barzani'nin Türkiye Vizesi" Radikal Daily, published on January 12, 2010 <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalYazar&ArticleID=974073&Yazar=DEN%DDZ%20ZEYREK&Date=12.01.2010&CategoryID=100>

Minister Abdullah Gül who sent state-owned private ATA airplane to bring him Turkey.⁴⁰ Unlike Sezer, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan also came together with Talabani in almost every international meeting both leaders attended.⁴¹

For this unswerving stance, Sezer was accused by Turkish liberals of bypassing Turkish diplomacy putting efforts to have a say in Iraqi politics. Explaining this Kurdophobic approach's damages to Turkey's regional aspirations, Mustafa Akyol highlighted the need for change in Turkey's Iraq policy which based on being a protectorate for Iraqi Turkmen in 2006. Yet, Akyol attracts attention to Yaşar Yakış's acknowledgements about Turkey's mistaken policies on Turkmen saying Ankara did not have contact with real representatives of the minority and exaggerated Turkmen population who based their policy not on ethnic kinship but sectarian divergences.⁴²

However, Sezer's inflexible standpoint was not shared by all the state bureaucracy. In 2005 an Ankara based English daily The New Anatolian exposed a secret meeting between Turkish delegation led by head of Turkish National Intelligence Service (MIT) Emre Taner and KRG President Mesut Barzani. In October, Taner was hosted by Barzani in latter's headquarters in Salah-al Din⁴³ and both parties confirmed the meeting. According to news reports, in the meeting Barzani wanted Turkey's recognition of Kurdish autonomous administration, providing the opportunity of having Turkish dual citizenship for Iraqi Kurds, possible cooperation in military training along with exchange programs for university students. On the other hand, Turkish side deployed Ankara's anxiety over the expansion of Kurdish authority to its border and wanted strengthening anti-PKK collaboration.⁴⁴ Taner's meeting with Barzani is different than AK Party's previous negotiations with the KRG officials because of MIT's strong position in state bureaucracy the institution is seen as a serious member of establishment. After this watershed development was unleashed, Taner's initiative was applauded by several public figures from various political backgrounds which may be commented as an approval of establishing official ties with Iraqi Kurdish leadership. A

⁴⁰ "Gül Uçak Gönderdi Sezer Görüşmedi" Sabah, February 21, 2007, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2007/02/21/gnd110.html>, access date November 21, 2011

⁴¹ For their meeting in Riyadh in 2007, "Riyad'da Talabani Erdoğan Buluşması" <http://www.turkmeneli.org/v2/dunya/572-riyadda-erdotalabani-bulu.html>

⁴² Mustafa Akyol, "Kürdofobik Politikanın Türkiye'ye Zararı" <http://www.mustafaakyol.org/dis-politika/kurdofobik-dis-politikanin-turkiyeye-zarari/>, November 26, 2006

⁴³ Milliyet Daily November 23, 2005

⁴⁴ "Türkiye Barzani'yle mutabakat yolunda mı?" <http://www.rizgari.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=2979>

prominent journalist Ertuğrul Özkök agreed with Taner's move and described it as an attempt to shape strategic balance after US withdrawal.⁴⁵ From a more comprehensive perspective, liberal Yasemin Çongar related Taner's visit as a part of larger strategy aiming to reach an ultimate solution to Kurdish problem by forming close cooperation with Kurdish authority.⁴⁶ Later on, Taner had several other meetings with Iraqi Kurds to discuss PKK militants' surrendering from Kandil Mountains and Makhmour Refugee Camp.⁴⁷

As it is seen the efforts to contact with Iraqi Kurds, the need for cooperation in struggling against the PKK reinforced the attempt for a healthy and constructive dialogue with Iraqi Kurdish leaders. After the arrest of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1999, ethnic separatist violence in Turkey decreased considerably. However, PKK re-launched its attacks on Turkish civilian and military targets in 2005 which provoked Turkey to mobilize military forces on Iraqi border in the summer of 2006, as an express of its impatience with ongoing PKK presence in Northern Iraq. In those days, an intense discussion went through about a potential cross-border operation and the possibility of Turkish forces to come across with US army in Iraq. Taking Turkey's moves seriously, in order to alleviate its tensions, Bush administration took a step by appointing retired General Joseph Ralston, former Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staffs as Special Envoy for Countering PKK. Turkey in return assigned retired general Emin Başer. However, less than a year Turkish forces again prepared for a cross border operation against PKK bases in Northern Iraq because of continuing attacks and Ralston's failure to coordinate Turkish and Iraqi governments to act together against PKK. Irrelevant to his mission, he even suggested that his responsibility was reconciling Turkey and Iraqi Kurds.⁴⁸

After one year, Ankara embarked diplomatic track aiming to contain PKK terrorism and Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki visited Ankara to sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on countering terrorism. However, Iraqi Prime Minister signaled that the right party to involve directly about PKK is Kurdish administration in Northern Iraq stating he was unable to implement MOU without the cooperation of KRG and the MOU needed parliamentary

⁴⁵ Ertuğrul Özkök, "MİT Müsteşarı Gölgeden Çıktı", November 24, 2005
<http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/printnews.aspx?DocID=3558743>

⁴⁶ Taraf Daily, December 5, 2005

⁴⁷ For one of Taner's several contacts with Kurds, "MİT Müsteşarı Taner'den Kritik Ziyaret" October 20, 2009
<http://www.milliyet.com.tr/Guncel/HaberDetay.aspx?aType=HaberDetay&KategoriID=24&ArticleID=1152361&Date=20.10.2009&b=MIT%20Mustesari%20Emre%20Tanerden%20kritik%20ziyaret>

⁴⁸ "US Strategy to Contain PKK in Turkish Election Year," Turkish Daily News, April 5, 2007.

approval.⁴⁹ However, in the early 2000's it was a taboo for Turkish government to have an open dialogue with Kurdish politicians. On the other hand, at the time Mesut Barzani did not hesitate to use inflammatory provocative language against Turkey. For instance, in March 2007 Barzani in an interview with Al Arabiya TV threatened Turkey to interfere its southeastern province which has predominantly Kurdish population if Ankara intervened in Northern Iraq.⁵⁰

As tensions raged between Iraqi Kurds and Turkey, any attempt to launch dialogue with the KRG was blocked by the military. In 2007 the dispute between AK Party government and bureaucratic military establishment on forming official channel of communication with KRG became clearly perceptible. Abdullah Gül then the foreign minister was preparing to host the KRG prime minister Nechirvan Barzani in Istanbul and was to deploy Turkey's diplomatic messages from the first hand. However, although these plans were not unleashed to the public, Yaşar Büyükanıt then the chief of general staff expressed his opposition to this kind of meeting by giving the name of Barzani. Following to Büyükanıt's statement and clear reaction to official dialogue with KRG, the government took step back and canceled the meeting⁵¹, despite Büyükanıt stated "I cannot block anyone's will but as a soldier I do not talk to them for two reasons. First they (Kurdish groups) do not view PKK as a terrorist organization and second they support them."⁵²

In October the same year, a devastating PKK attack triggered pressure on US government to cooperate with Turkish authorities in the struggle against PKK. Worrying about Turkish interference would destabilize Iraq; US President Bush invited Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan to the White House on November 5. Aiming to calm down Turkish side, Bush called PKK as "our common enemy" and promised to cooperate with Turkey in actionable and real time intelligence.⁵³ As a result of Erdoğan's visit, a consultation mechanism among the Commander of the Multinational Force in Iraq General David Petraus, the Deputy Chief of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff General James Cartwright and then Turkish Deputy Chief of the General Staff General Ergin Saygun was formed. After the visit, Turkish forces conducted

⁴⁹ "Maliki: PKK Terörünü Bitirmek İçin Her Faaliyete Destek Veririz" Milliyet Daily December 25, 2008

⁵⁰ Congress Research Service, "Turkey: Selected Foreign Policy Issues and US Views" November 28, 2008 p.7

⁵¹ Yasmeın Çongar, "Kuşatılmışlık ve Dinamik Güçler", published on February 19, 2007 Milliyet

⁵² Uğur Ergen, "ABD'ye Son Uyarı"

<http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/5969022.asp?m=1&gid=112&srld=3601&oid=1>, February 17, 2007

⁵³ "US Helps Turkey Hit Rebel Kurds in Iraq"

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/12/18/AR2007121800357.html>, December 18 2007

frequent, well-targeted air strikes against the PKK encampments in Northern Iraq. On 21 February 2008, Turkish army with the US intelligence embarked a one-week incursion into the Iraqi border area of Zap.⁵⁴ On the same day of this offensive Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, also a prominent Kurdish leader, was invited by his Turkish counterpart Abdullah Gül aiming to launch bilateral efforts to ease the tensions. This invitation implicitly indicates that Turkey was aware of the fact that Iraq should engage more in cooperation with fight against terrorism than the Washington administration. Bearing Talabani's influence in Iraqi Kurds in mind, this visit which is a clear support to Turkey's incursion, also presents that the KRG and the dominant parties the KDP and the PUK started to side along with Turkey against the PKK.

A few months later than Talabani's visit, Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan visited Baghdad 18 years after the last visit by a Turkish Prime minister. Maliki and Erdoğan agreed to establish a High Level Strategic Cooperation Council composed of ministers responsible for trade, investment, security and water resources. The Council was scheduled to generate a common security framework, high-level political dialogue, formal efforts for economic mutual interdependence and cultural cooperation.⁵⁵

Then after 33 years, a Turkish President embarked an official visit to Baghdad in March 2009. In addition being the first visit after decades, another factor signifying this diplomatic move is Gül's meeting with Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani. Similar to his meeting with President Talabani, the main topic of Turkish side's agenda was to limit PKK's activities in Northern Iraq. Taking Turkish concerns seriously, Barzani promised "We will not allow (Kurdistan) to be a launching pad for attacks against neighboring countries."⁵⁶

Despite diplomatic efforts to enforce PKK to leave from Northern Iraq, the terrorist organization continued to carry out its activities. On October 3, 2008 about 350 PKK militants conducted deadly attacks at the Turkish border outpost in Aktütün killing 17 soldiers. Then a police bus was attacked by a group of terrorists in Diyarbakır killing 6. As public pressure increased on government following the attacks, Ankara responded with more air strikes

²⁴ "Zap'a Operasyon" <http://www.taraf.com.tr/haber/zapa-operasyon.htm>, June 08, 2008

²⁵ Serpil Açıklan, "Turkish-Iraqi Relations in Light of Davutoğlu's visit to Iraq," August 21, 2011 <http://www.usak.org.tr/EN/makale.asp?id=1029>

²⁶ Charles Recknagel, "Iraq, Turkey Nearing Deal to Deprive PKK of Bases," Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, March 24, 2009

targeting PKK encampments in Northern Iraq but did not give up its diplomatic track with Kurdish autonomous administration. The government decided to establish official link to Mesut Barzani and authorized Special Envoy to Iraq Murat Özçelik for this mission. Unexpectedly, Ankara sent a military/diplomatic delegation to meet KRG leader in Baghdad on October 2008. As a result of recently beginning rapprochement, a new trilateral mechanism among Turkey, Iraq and United States was established and started to operate with the representatives of Kurdish authority. Unlike his previous inflammatory discourse, president Barzani, at the time, encouraged Turkish Kurds to demand their rights through peaceful means not in a violent way.⁵⁷ After these kinds of attacks, as public pressure on government to pursue strict policies against PKK rises up, Iraqi Kurds and Kurdish administration in Northern Iraq has been often put under the spotlight of Turkish media. As a result of this kind of propaganda, Kurdish leaders especially president Barzani was demonized.⁵⁸ In late 2009 Erdoğan embarked another Iraq visit which Turkish government signed 48 agreements for cooperation in myriad of issues ranging from areas of security, trade and culture.⁵⁹

Up to 2009, Kurdish authority and its officials were regarded as a complementary part of the Turkey's diplomatic engagements with Iraq, thus they were not viewed as direct interlocutors. Concerning an open dialogue with high-ranking Kurdish officials with Turkish counterparts, Ahmet Davutoğlu's visit to Iraq in October 2009 in which he had meetings not only Iraqi capital Baghdad but also to Basra, a southern Shiite populated province; Mousul, one of the disputed areas for central governments and KRG; and Erbil the capital of the KRG was significant to show the paradigmic change in Ankara's Iraq policy. Following the visit Turkish Consulate in Erbil was opened in March 2010, a breakthrough diplomatic move directly meaning Kurdish authority's recognition by Turkey. With this symbolic act which is a clear indication of Turkey's altering approach to Kurdistan Regional Government was actually a late step due to domestic political burdens once high level trade volume between Turkey and KRG is taken into consideration. Turkish Consulate in Erbil is serving to Iraqi Kurds willing to travel Turkey who had to travel to Mosul previously for a Turkish diplomatic representative. From the side of Turkish nationals who reside in KRG for educational and

²⁷ "PKK Mecburen Silah Bırakacak" Nur Batur's interview with Mesut Barzani, Sabah Daily, August 01, 2009

²⁸ For some examples see "Turkish media target Barzani after Maliki fails to agree to concrete measures against PKK" <http://ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2007/8/government1161.htm>, August 8, 2007

²⁹ For the full list of 48 MoU's signed between Turkey and Iraq see: http://www.icisleri.gov.tr/default.icisleri_2.aspx?id=4028, Access date: April 1, 2011.

economical purposes, opening of consulate facilitate their bureaucratic problems. Turkish Consulate in Mousul started to re-operate and Ankara opened another consulate in Basra. Interestingly, in May US House of Representatives also approved a bill concerning opening a US Consulate in Erbil.⁶⁰

In June 2010, Mesut Barzani visited Turkey with the title of President of Kurdistan Regional Government. Although his diplomatic meetings were undershadowed by Israeli attacks killing 9 Turkish citizens in international waters, he was able to come together with President Gül, Prime Minister Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Davutoğlu. Having reciprocated to Davutoğlu's visit to Erbil, Barzani has taken every step for Erdoğan's visit to Kurdish autonomous region. Diplomatic ties with KRG have reached its peak with Erdoğan's visit to Iraq in 2011. Like Turkish Foreign Minister Erdoğan's contacts include three strategic political centers of Iraq, Baghdad, Najaf and Erbil. It was a clear message of Turkey's intention about the territorial unity of the country and Turkey's comprehensive policy without any discrimination to any groups in Iraq. He became the first foreign leader to give a speech in Iraqi parliament. More significantly, with his visit to Erbil, he became the first Turkish politician spoke under autonomous KRG flag.⁶¹

This four-year evolution process about developing relations between Turkey and the KRG is an outcome of a policy shift. Turkey did not completely turn its back to security concerns but, at the same time attempts to synchronize its efforts against the PKK with the KRG's backing. The foremost purpose of developing stronger relations with Iraq Kurds is surely struggling with the PKK. Furthermore, forming ties with the KRG does not mean that Turkey is coming terms with the idea of an independent Kurdish state. Turkey still attaches primary importance to Iraqi territorial integrity, yet the understanding and means of forestalling such a development has been changed. Ankara now deals with Iraqi Kurdish leaders and tries to keep them with Turkey in fighting against the PKK. Moreover, leaving non-engagement strategy behind, Turkey has worked more to create economic interdependence with more investment in Northern Iraq in order to have a stronger position in political bargain.

³⁰ "US Consulate General Opened in Erbil" <http://www.iraq-businessnews.com/2011/07/12/us-consulate-general-opens-in-erbil/> accessed on November 21, 2011

³¹ Bilgay Duman, "Turkey's Iraq Policy After 2003 of Iraq in the Light of the recent visit of Prime Minister Erdoğan to Iraq", Ortadoğu Analiz Volume:3 Issue:28, 2011

1.3. Theorizing the change in the relations between Turkey and the KRG

1.3.1. Economic Interdependency and Trading State

While finding a theoretical basement for explaining the motivations of change in relations between Turkey and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), it is useful to employ the theory of economic interdependence. Specifically, it is argued in this thesis that more economic integration with the KRG, will lead more bargaining power in Turkey's relations with Iraqi Kurds. Therefore, more economic cooperation which leads to more interdependence is maintained to strengthen Turkey's hand to contain its concerns about the KRG that Kurdish political entity would eventually take steps towards an independent Kurdish state. Stronger economic interdependence via increasing trade relations would also push both parties to establish peace and stability by destroying the sources of instability and conflict. Taking the assumption into account that investment and trade would flourish in a peaceful and stable political environment; both parties are expected to clean destabilizing factors.

The basic assumption of the theory of economic interdependence is that the more economic interdependence among two states will likely to reduce the possibility of armed conflict. Liberal point of view asserts that, as long as high levels of interdependence can be achieved, the parties avoid taking part into a severe dispute with each other⁶². Unlike liberals, realists hold a more pessimistic attitude, arguing that high interdependence increases rather than decreases the probability of war.⁶³

The core argument of liberal position suggests that trade provides valuable benefits to any particular state. A dependent state is therefore, expected to seek to avoid war, since peaceful trading gives it all the benefits of close ties without any of the costs and risks of war. In other words, armed conflict is more costly and risky than economic cooperation, so dependent states should rationally prefer to trade not invade.

However, realists maintain that economic interdependence is not only an insufficient measure to promote peace but also increases the likelihood of war. The main assumption is that the

⁶² Dale C. Copeland, "Economic Interdependence and War: A Theory of Trade Expectations," *International Security*, Vol. 20, no.4 (Spring 1996), p.1

⁶³ John J. Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe After the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Summer 1990), pp. 5-56

interdependence is a factor that highlights dependent state's vulnerability. They argue that crucial imported goods, especially like oil and particular raw materials, could be cut off during a crisis between two states which may lead the collapse of dependent state's economic structure. Mearsheimer explains that "depend on others for critical economic supplies will fear cutoff or blackmail in time of crisis or war." Consequently, "they may try to extend political control to the source of supply, giving rise to conflict with the source or with its other customers." Interdependence, therefore, "will probably lead to greater security competition."⁶⁴

It is understood that realists have a security oriented approach which prioritizes state's security on the grounds that in the case of a crisis there will be so much to lose. Therefore, it prefers to pursue a non-engagement strategy. On the other hand, liberal perspective suggests more economic cooperation and integration will create interdependence between parties which will make them refrain from any provocative policies against each other.

At this point, states must make a decision between being a 'trading state' seeking with promoting prosperity through commerce and 'territorial states' obsessed with military expansion. Rosecrance asserts that modern conditions push states toward a predominantly trading mode which favors that wars are not only too costly but with the peaceful trading option the benefits gained from trade is achievable for others as well.⁶⁵ He continues "the benefits that one nation gains from trade can also be realized by others." When the system is highly interdependent, therefore, the "incentive to wage war is absent," since "trading states recognize that they can do better through internal economic development sustained by a worldwide market for their goods and services than by trying to conquer and assimilate large tracts of land."⁶⁶ To sum up, liberal thought argues economic interdependence fosters peace through making trade more profitable than waging war, besides ensures more security and stability for trading parties by preventing aggressive tendencies to dominate the foreign policy.

Regarding Turkey's relations with the KRG, it is important to question which option Turkey has chosen in constructing its new foreign policy vision. A significant number of indicators suggest that Turkey has turned to be a 'trading state' which is a state whose foreign policy

⁶⁴ John J. Mearsheimer, "Disorder Restored," in Graham Allison and Gregory F. Treverton, eds., *Rethinking America's Security* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), p. 223;

⁶⁵ Richard Rosecrance, "The Rise of the Trading State: Commerce and Conquest in the Modern World" (New York: Basic Books, 1986), pp. 13-14;

⁶⁶ Ibid.

becomes increasingly shaped by economic considerations and a country in whose GNP foreign trade acquired an important place.⁶⁷ As Kirişçi suggests becoming a trading state requires meeting of some economic conditions. In this regard, statistics offer that Turkey has been increasingly more prosperous as its per capita income increased from 1,300 dollar in 1985 to 2,773 in 1995. It finally jumped to 11,000 dollar in 2008.⁶⁸ Another factor that influences Turkey's being trading state is the changing place of the agricultural sector which previously constituted a remarkable part of the Turkish export products. The agricultural sector's proportion in Turkish economy fell from 30 percent of GDP to 15 percent when the figures compared with the early period of Turkish republic.⁶⁹ The agricultural sector has steadily left its place to manufacturing sector which has grown significantly along with the service sector, especially in banking, communication, health and tourism. These structural changes have found reflections on Turkey's export. The country's foreign trade witnessed a growth which was less than 20 billion dollar in 1985; whereas it hiked to 300 billion dollar in 2010. The place of manufactured goods in Turkey's export enlarged from 1, 4 percent in 1950 and 18, 4 in 1970 to 94, 2 percent in 2003.⁷⁰

While Turkey's export expanded significantly, the countries Turkey has made export diversified over the course of years. In the last decade, there has been a marked increase in Turkey's trade relations with neighboring countries. At this point, it is argued that trade relations and economic ties have been more influential in foreign policy decision making which is a clear indication of Turkey's being trading country. As it is showed in the table below, Turkey's trade with its immediate neighbor increased from about 4 billion dollar in 1991 to 82 billion in 2008. The statistics provide the information that between 2008-2010, increase in Turkey's trade with its neighbors was experienced only with the Middle Eastern countries namely Syria (%43), Iraq (%41) and Jordan (%27) despite global economy was shaken by a serious recession. Increasing trade with neighboring Middle Eastern countries coincided with the period when Turkey put immense effort to grow its political involvement with these countries. Turkey has signed free trade agreements with Jordan and Syria and

⁶⁷ Kemal Kirişçi, "The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy: The Rise of the Trading State," *New Perspectives on Turkey*, No. 40 (2009), pp. 29-57.

⁶⁸ Figures were taken from the web site of the Turkish Statistical Institute, see www.tuik.gov.tr.

⁶⁹ Yakup Kepenek and Nur Yentürk, "Türkiye Ekonomisi" (Istanbul: Remzi Publishing, 2009), p. 377.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 334.

Lebanon.⁷¹ In July 2010, “Close Neighbors Economic and Trade Association Council” with Jordan, Lebanon and Syria was established. Moreover, visa requirements with Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq were abolished during the last decade. All these efforts are the conclusion of Turkish new foreign policy which prioritizes export and aims to promote a stable and prosperous neighborhood through encouraging greater economic integration between Turkey and the Arab world.

TABLE I: TURKISH TRADE WITH SURROUNDING REGION

TURKEY	1991			2002			2008			2010			% of Change 1991-2008	% of Change 2008-2010
	Export	Import	Total	Export	Import	Total	Export	Import	Total	Export	Import	Total		
Bulgaria	76	140	216	380	508	888	2.152	1.840	3.992	1.498	1.701	3.199	1748%	-20%
Greece	144	77	221	590	312	902	2.430	1.151	3.581	1.456	1.542	2.998	1520%	-16%
Romania	105	199	304	566	662	1.228	3.987	3.548	7.535	2.599	3.448	6.047	2379%	-20%
Moldova	-	-	-	40	5	45	198	70	268	148	111	259	-	-3%
Russia	611	1.097	1.708	1.172	3.892	5.064	6.483	31.364	37.847	4.632	21.596	26.228	2116%	-31%
Ukraine	-	-	-	313	991	1.304	2.188	6.106	8.294	1.261	3.830	5.091	-	-39%
Azerbaijan	-	-	-	103	138	241	998	525	1.523	1.551	865	2.416	-	59%
Georgia	-	-	-	231	65	296	1.667	928	2.595	769	291	1.060	-	-59%
Iran	487	91	578	334	921	1.255	2.030	8.200	10.230	3.043	7.645	10.688	1670%	4%
Iraq	122	492	614	-	-	-	3.917	1.321	5.238	6.043	1.355	7.398	753%	41%
Syria	264	67	331	267	506	773	1.115	639	1.754	1.849	663	2.512	430%	43%
Neighborhood TOTAL	1.809	2.163	3.972	3.996	8.000	11.996	27.165	55.692	82.857	24.849	43.047	67.896	1986%	-18%
Lebanon	90	7	97	187	42	229	665	179	844	619	229	848	770%	0%
Jordan	158	30	188	117	18	135	461	25	486	572	43	615	159%	27%
GCC+ Yemen	650	2.220	2.870	1.334	952	2.286	12.722	4.361	17.083	6.746	3.642	10.388	495%	-39%
N. Africa	524	432	956	938	1.518	2.456	4.424	4.324	8.748	4.779	3.378	8.157	815%	-7%
Egypt	169	48	217	326	118	444	1.426	943	2.369	2.261	926	3.187	991%	35%
Sudan	20	4	24	59	12	71	234	9	243	228	5	233	912%	-4%
Arab World TOTAL	1.907	3.293	5.200	3.041	3.124	6.165	24.299	11.622	35.921	22.478	10.012	32.490	591%	-10%
Israel	79	78	157	805	545	1.350	1.935	1.448	3.383	2.083	1.360	3.443	2055%	2%
EU	7.348	9.896	17.244	20.415	25.689	46.104	63.390	74.802	138.192	52.659	72.215	124.874	701%	-10%
US	913	2.255	3.168	3.356	3.099	6.455	4.300	11.976	16.276	3.768	12.318	16.086	414%	-1%
Sub-Saharan Africa	117	269	386	430	558	988	3.212	2.503	5.715	2.258	2.108	4.366	1381%	-24%
GRAND TOTAL	13.593	21.047	34.640	36.059	51.554	87.613	132.027	201.964	333.991	113.899	185.497	299.396	864%	-10%

*Source: TUIK

**In 1991, values for Russia are values for USSR, therefore ex-Soviet contries data is not included.

***Arab World Total contains Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, N.Africa countries (Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco), GCC (Bahrein, Qatar, Kuwait, S.Arabia, U.A.E, Oman), Yemen.

****Sub-Saharan countries includes all Africa except North-African countries

Source: Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK), November 2011

⁷¹ Serah Keceç, “Türkiye’nin Avrupa-Akdeniz Ortakları ile Serbest Ticaret Anlaşmaları,” Ortadoğu Analiz, Vol. 2, No. 24 (2011), pp. 85-93 and p. 91.

Agreeing with Rosecrance that the primacy of economics has increasingly gained ground as a determinant factor of foreign policy making due to the mutually enforcing effects of an international context defined by growing global economic interdependence between nations, Altay Atli added that the reason lying behind Turkey's transformation to a 'trading state' is the pragmatism of the AK Party government basing its realpolitik on the expansion of material interests overseas.⁷² Atli relates Turkey's ambition to become a regional power by expanding its soft power and increasing economic integration with the neighboring region. Showing some proofs about how business community has become more effective in involving foreign policy decision making, he concluded:

"In sum, business associations take part in Turkey's foreign policy by establishing semi-formal platforms of interaction with the state, participating in state leaders' official visits, establishing direct contacts with policy makers and by directly taking part in the formulation of policy by representing the business community in intergovernmental meetings."⁷³

It should be also pointed at the mutual interdependence between Turkish state and business community. The lack of large state economic corporations in Turkey which has been in an attempt to increase its influence throughout the region pushes Turkey to align with private sector that has money and involvement needed by government. Reversely, engaging in an instable market, Turkish entrepreneurs need favorable foreign policies and the state's assistance to overcome barriers.⁷⁴ Although Turkish foreign policy has strong material underpinnings, Atli suggests that the alliance between business community and the government will sustain as long as the first 'does not challenge the priorities of the government, and the private sector supports the government's foreign policy incentives...'⁷⁵

However, this argument views Turkish business community solely a tool for foreign policy under governmental control. I argue that among many other cases, entrepreneurs take the lead in involving with countries and improve relations with them before Turkish state. Related to the topic of this thesis, earlier than the Turkey's initiative to launch diplomatic rapprochement with the KRG, Turkish investors have stepped in the Iraqi Kurdish market. An important point which distinguishes Turkey-KRG relations from the rest of foreign ties Turkey has, is

⁷² Altay Atli, "Businessmen and Turkey's Foreign Policy" International Policy and Leadership Institute, Policy Brief Series 2011, October 2011, p.2

⁷³ Ibid, p.5

⁷⁴ In many official foreign visits of both the prime minister and the president, they tried to resolve the problems Turkish firms face in hosting countries.

⁷⁵ Ibid, p.6

that Ankara perceived Kurdish political entity as a national threat due to its abovementioned potential for a demonstrative effect on Turkey's Kurds. Therefore, Turkish businessman who established trade links in Northern Iraq had to challenge with the state's policies. Ankara started to forge closer relations with the KRG only a few years ago; however the proportion of Turkish investment in the KRG market itself serves as a proof that Turkish business circles acted before the state. Contemporary figures offer that Turkish companies make up 55 percent of foreign companies operating in Iraqi Kurdistan. Iraqi Kurdish officials announced that there are more than 800 Turkish companies are registered to the KRG's ministry of trade and industry and that almost half of the imports are from Turkey.⁷⁶ This enormous investments and trade are not an outcome of a short period of time. Despite contradicting with the state policies, Turkish investors and businessmen have been eager to form economic relations with Iraqi Kurds. However, it ought to be also added that the ongoing rapprochement process would gradually facilitate Turkish entrepreneurs' engagement with the KRG and encourage them to involve more.

The statistics and figures show that trade relations between Turkey and the KRG have a tendency to intensify. However, it should be questioned that whether there is interdependence between the two parties. Mark Crescenzi states that not every trade interactions between two political entities are considered to create interdependence in the case that a third party provides possible market options. He explains what he called salient and symmetric trade but no economic interdependence:

“For simplicity, assume that there are only three states in the market. State C can engage in economic ties with either A or B such that both A and B are able to substitute the good(s) they get from their original trading partner. This substitution is inefficient relative to the original relationship between A and B (assuming that A and B are maximizing efficiency and welfare), but still more efficient than autarky (no trade).”⁷⁷

Giving a certain importance to the existence of trade between parties; Crescenzi maintained that the salient and symmetric trade relations would not necessarily lead economic interdependence. Nevertheless, Hirschman argues that this ability to import or export goods to a third party ameliorate the economic dependence of State A on State B.

⁷⁶ “Turkey-Kurdistan economic ties strong despite conflict”, <http://www.ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2011/10/turkey3491.htm>, access date: October 17, 2011

⁷⁷ Mark Crescenzi, “Economic Interdependence and Conflict in World Politics” University of North Carolina, 2002, p. 64

“A country menaced with an interruption of trade with a given country has the alternative of diverting its trade to a third country; by doing so it evades more or less completely the damaging consequences of the stoppage of its trade with one particular country.”⁷⁸

Therefore, the cost of exit from bilateral trade relations determines mainly whether this trade would create an economic interdependence. It is not enough that states A and B have salient or intense trade ties. In order for interdependence to exist, they must also lack the exit option such that their only alternative to trading with one another is extremely costly. To sum up, key question is how costly it would be for A or B to shift its trade ties to C. If only one state (A or B) enjoys the opportunity to easily exit from the trade relation, then asymmetric interdependence exists between the two states.⁷⁹ Asymmetrical interdependence functions when the more resources one country possesses, the stronger it is; conversely the less a country has of it, the weaker it is.⁸⁰ Thus, I argue what Turkey and the KRG have in its trade relations is an asymmetrical economic interdependence which favors Turkey due to the fact that Turkey dominates Iraqi Kurdish market fundamentally, whereas goods and products exported from the KRG does not constitute an indispensable part of Turkish market. Exit cost for the KRG, thus, is high and it is expected to want to sustain the relationship.⁸¹

This asymmetrical economic interdependence has also further political implications in addition not to permit aggressive political elements to control foreign relations. The more a country depends on the other; the stronger the bargaining power depended country has. Connectedly, Keohane and Nye maintained that interdependence provides states the opportunity to link their economic ties to the political bargaining process. Using the interstate economic relationship as a tool for bilateral political bargaining is the mechanism by which economic interdependence is connected to political behavior.⁸² Hence, the more economic engagement with the KRG would facilitate the atmosphere for Turkey to acquire political

⁷⁸ Albert O. Hirschman, “National Power and the Structure of Foreign Trade” Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1945, p.29.

⁷⁹ On the importance of alternatives, see Baldwin, "Interdependence and Power," p. 482; Keohane and Nye, "Power and Interdependence", p. 13. It is worth remembering that alternative suppliers and markets are only valuable in reducing A's dependence if A can get access to them. If B is able not only to sever bilateral trade, but also to blockade A to prevent third-party trading, then A effectively has no alternatives and is therefore dependent.

⁸⁰ Andrew Moravcsik, “Robert Keohane as Theorist” in Helev V. Milner Andrew Moravcsik eds. “Power, Interdependence and Nonstate Actors in World Politics” Princeton University Press 1997, p.251.

⁸¹ It is strategically important to note that Turkey imported oil from Iraq and even though the oil fields are in the KRG controlled areas, the central government has currently the full authority to sell oil to abroad.

⁸² Keohane, R. and J. Nye, ‘Power and Interdependence’ Glenview, Illinois, Scott, Foresman & Company, 1989 p.19.

goals regarding relations with the Kurdish administration. Therefore, stronger economic interdependence would be effective in constraining Kurdish aspiration to move toward an independent state which frustrates Turkey. Secondly, as far as exit cost remains high for the KRG, this asymmetry in economic relations has gradually pushes Iraqi Kurds to hold a more cooperative stance in struggling against the PKK.

1.3.2. De-securitization of Kurdish Question

The second theoretical approach to be employed for elucidating the change in Turkey's relation with the KRG is related to the change in Turkey's domestic affairs and is analyzed with a special emphasis on de-securitization which leads diversification of actors having a say in security issues.

To begin with, the interdependence between foreign policy discourses and national identity conceptualizations have been often subject of academic scrutiny. It is generally assumed that how the international environment is contextualized and more notably, the way that relations with other parties are decided is interrelated with national identities which is considered to be one of the main determinants effecting both people's voting preferences and decision-makers orientations in domestic and foreign policy.⁸³ The interdependence between the realms of international and domestic politics has been gradually increased as a result of several factors including globalization and advancing communication technologies.

Therefore as social constructivists advocate ideational variables including identity, culture, norms and values of a society, ought to be included in foreign policy analysis. Constructivists hold the assumption that states shape the structure of international society and then shaped by it. However, the main criticism they have often received is caused by their less interest to domestic politics impact on foreign policy making. Unlike constructivists who maintain only material power is non-sense if agents do not attach value to them, structural realists put the main focus on material interest, security and geographical location.⁸⁴

Moreover, the realms of foreign and domestic politics are expected to be more blurred when it comes to the foreign policy issues which are said to be directly interrelated with country's national security. The number and scope of the actors involving to generate policies and/or

⁸³ See David R. Davis and Will H. Moore, "Ethnicity Matters: Transnational Ethnic Alliances and Foreign Behavior," *International Studies Quarterly* 41 no:1 (March, 1997) pp. 171-84

⁸⁴ Alexander E. Wendt, "The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations Theory" *International Organization* 41 no:3 (Summer 1987) pp. 335-70.

discuss them in front of public become limited regarding national security related issues. As Tarık Oğuzlu interprets “When a foreign policy issue is depicted as a security issue through discursive practices, the conventional approach holds that traditional security actors/elites become dominant in shaping policy choices.”⁸⁵

For the assumption that in order to speak and put forward an idea about a security issue, it seems to be a precondition to have military expertise; the possibility of non-military actors including civilian politicians, experts, journalists and academicians to take part in a security related discussion for proper resolution proposals and alternative strategies decreases. In this kind of political situation, military strategies in addition to political advises of the army are attached much more importance and prioritized when they are compared to non-military strategies; due to the fact that security is seen attainable through the elimination of threat through militaristic methods.⁸⁶ Limited public discussion and less participation of non-military actors in decision making process over a securitized issue expectedly lead media organs, intellectuals and broadly public to convince and advocate the military’s discourse. In the case of any breaching against rule of law under this kind of non-civilian environment would be justified by, ironically, politicians, intellectuals and media who presumably did not have any contribution to strategy generating process. Any reaction or criticism to it has growingly become a matter of national security and would be eventually deemed as a betrayal to nation.

As opposed to this non-democratic situation in which traditional security elites have the monopoly of speaking over a securitized issue; once a market of ideas composed of conflicting approaches with several points of view is achieved, diverse groups of society from different ideological backgrounds are assumed to participate in security discussions. There is a tendency in the public of giving an ear to alternative, dissident views and contribute to redefinition as well as accomplishment of national security.⁸⁷ Therefore, the monopoly of traditional security elites begins to diminish and connectedly, the vulnerability of security related issues to be manipulated is abated. Following a competition of ideas, either one particular actor or a group of participants are successful to convince the public to impose their view to be implemented.

⁸⁵ Tarık Oğuzlu, "Turkey's Northern Iraq Policy: Competing Perspectives", *Insight Turkey* Vol.10 / No.3 / 2008 p.p. 5-22.

⁸⁶ Holger Stritzel, "Toward A Theory of Securitization Copenhagen and Beyond," *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol.13 .No.3, (2007), pp.357-383.

⁸⁷ Thierry Balzacq, "The Three Faces of Securitization: Political Agency, Audience and Context," *Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 11, No.2, (2005), pp.171-201.

With improving democratic standards and acceleration of globalization process which is stimulating to advance communication technologies, the traditional security elites have started to lose their legitimacy in terms of depicting national threats and the way how to deal with them. As the actors in strategy generating process have been proliferated, the non-military actors have gained ground to become influential in the process of identity construction.⁸⁸ In this precarious situation, the traditional security elites have faced the risk of not being regarded as one of the equal participants of market of ideas. Losing legitimacy and public confidence they may not be perceived as trustable actors and their proposals could not be taken seriously even if they are fitting best to situation.

Certainly not exempted from globalization process Turkey, striving to upgrade its democracy, has undergone such kind of process. Increase in the number of non-military actors and diversification of perspectives within this group have fueled Turkey's redefinition of the terms like national threat and national interest. The first area this changing environment affects is the monopoly of Turkish army in Turkey's Kurdish question. The self-image of Turkish military is the guardian of Turkish republic and its character and legacy of Atatürk which found its basement on secularism and denial of non-Turkish component. Turkey is long believed to be a country only inhabited by Turks and existence of Kurds was denied. As a result, Turkish army was at the forefront of pursuing isolationist and discriminative social engineering projects against Kurds like displacement of Kurdish villages in southeastern Turkey. Fighting against Kurdish secessionist terrorism, the generals had the monopoly of talking about the security issues and having the full authority to determine the threats against Turkey and its regime with the ways how to deal with these dangers. However, after 25 years of fighting against PKK, explaining the whole Kurdish question from security perspective, military is proved to be failed in ending the problem at all. Today, Turkey has undergone a dynamic process in which more civilian actors can easily enter the market of ideas and voice their policy proposals. As opposed to the previous decades, Kurdish question and non-military resolution proposals have flourished and been taken into account. As a related conclusion, proliferation of non-military stances will facilitate Turkish government to form official relations with the KRG since the main resistance in contacting with Iraqi Kurds came from the Turkish military and bureaucratic establishment.

⁸⁸ Pinar Bilgin, "Making Turkey's Transformation Possible: Claiming 'Security Speak' – Not Desecuritization", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol.7, No. 4, (December 2007), pp. 555-571.

As a result, it is argued in this thesis that economic interdependence and changing internal dynamics have played determining role in the rapprochement with the KRG. Creating economic interdependence through intense trade links will enable Turkey to strengthen its bargaining power with Iraqi Kurds. Furthermore, Turkey's internal transformation towards a more democratic political environment by providing a receptive environment for non-military political actors to have more place in foreign and domestic affairs has also helped the rapprochement to advance.

Chapter 2. Explanations of Change in Turkish Policy toward KRG

Deserving intense academic scrutiny, no single reason is enough to elucidate Turkey's policy shift. When Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan was asked in 2007 whether he would meet with Mesud Barzani, President of Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), he publicly declared he would not sit on the same table with him, in an insulting manner referring Kurdish leader as a 'tribe's chief'¹. He further stated that the main interlocutor of Turkish government is Iraqi central government in Baghdad. While astonishing hearing such kind of statements in 2011, this type of discourse fitted well with traditional Turkish outlook to Iraqi Kurds. According to this approach, to negotiate with Kurdish authorities would mean to recognize their legitimacy and weaken indirectly Ankara's hand in its struggle against Kurdish separatist movement. Therefore, any dialogue with Iraqi Kurds was considered as betrayal to Turkey whose official policy based on ignorance and do not allow federal Kurdish authority to be regarded as legitimate. However, after a 180-degree turn in its policies to Kurdistan Regional Government, Erdoğan travelled to the capital of the KRG, Erbil, as a part of his visit to Iraq in 2011. Shaking hand with Barzani, Turkish prime minister called him as 'my brother' just after four years he despised veteran Kurdish politician.²

In this part of the thesis reasons lying behind the change in the relations between Turkey and KRG is analyzed. It is probably not wrong to claim that economic motivations have primary importance for developing relations with the KRG, as the region's economic potential, foreign investment-friendly legal framework and more crucially its natural gas and oil reserves have undeniable drives of Turkey's increasing interest to the KRG. As it is argued in previous section that the main motive of rapprochement is economically driven and economic interdependency has been gradually created between the parties; trade relations are examined in a broader manner. In addition to trade relations, Turkish investment in energy sector is explored along with the potential influence of Hydrocarbon law on the KRG's relations with Turkey. Furthermore, political explanations of the change are studied with a special focus on Iraqi Kurds' enlarging power on national politics, in addition political side effects of the rapprochement such as Turkey-EU relations and Turkish image on the eyes of Kurds are also included. Additionally, taking Turkey's decades-long Kurdish question into account, better

¹ "Talabani ile Görüşürüm Kabile Reisi ile Görüşmem" <http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/28053-talabani-ile-gorusurum-kabile-reisi-ile-gorusmem> July 05, 2007

² "Erdoğan'ın İlklerle Dolu Irak Ziyareti" <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/17403074.asp>, March 29, 2011

relations with Iraqi Kurds, I argue, have also positively influenced Turkish Kurds' relations with the Turkish state and reinforced any attempts to find an ultimate solution to this problem. Thus, domestic implications of the rapprochement are inquired as well. Although the relations have significantly diversified since 2007, the PKK terrorism and other problems -like smuggling- stemming from instable and hardly controllable Turkish-Iraqi border have still primary importance. Turkey's current relations with Iraq and the KRG are not defined as security-oriented but PKK presence in Northern Iraq has constituted Turkey's first and foremost concern. Due to the importance of the security issue, the PKK presence in Northern Iraq is comprehensively presented in the related part.

2. 1. Economic Aspect of the Rapprochement with the KRG

The ongoing rapprochement between Turkey and the KRG has actually indicated a shift in Turkey's policy priorities regarding Northern Iraq. The 'security-oriented approach' has lost its centrality in overall Turkish policy toward Iraq despite the fact security-related issues such as PKK and emergence of an independent Kurdish state remain its critical position in the relations. Instead, current rapprochement may be well defined to be an economically-driven political process. As trade relations get better, this has created an economic interdependence between Turkey and the KRG which is seemingly in favor of Turkey. However, this cannot be read in isolation from Turkey's attaching significant importance to security issues. It is true that Ankara does not base its relations with Iraqi Kurdistan on security concerns, but it is also correct to maintain that PKK presence and the potential demonstrative effect of an independent Kurdish state are viewed as threats by Turkish state. At this point, I argue that there is interconnectedness between security precedence and economic interdependence. As it is mentioned in the theoretical framework, the asymmetric economic interdependence will possibly become a tool for political bargaining. This standpoint suggests that the more economic relations and interdependence strengthen Turkey's hand in the negotiation table with Iraqi Kurds and Ankara will have more influence to shape the KRG's decisions. For instance, Turkey can utilize the economic interdependency to prevent the KRG taking steps for independence or similarly the KRG will have more cooperative stance regarding Turkey's fight against the PKK. Relatedly, increasing economic dependency on Turkey will make the Iraqi Kurdish leadership to re-calculate the cost of supporting the PKK or/and seeking for independence and come to the rational point that the cost of any policy that deteriorates the relations with Turkey is high due to the strong economic dependency.

In this part of the thesis, the recent statistics are demonstrated in order to present the extent that the economic relations and dependency reached. The efforts for economic integration with the KRG has also domestic reflections as the public discussion has continued on whether Turkish investments and trade with Northern Iraq will support Kurdish cause for independence by providing them wealth. Moreover, the strong correlation between security and economic development is also addressed in this section. Turkish investments in Northern Iraq's energy sector are analyzed with the some potential problems like the ongoing conflict on Hydrocarbon law.

2. 1. 1. A hot debate: Integrate to KRG or Isolate it ?

The AK Party first came to power just a few months before US administration launched Iraqi invasion. Despite the war and instable political atmosphere, AK Party government has showed a strong determination to enlarge trade relations with its war-torn neighbor which currently resulted to more than 6 billion trade volume for 2010.

TABLE II: TRADE RELATIONS BETWEEN TURKEY AND IRAQ³

Years	Export	Import	Trade Volume
2003	829.000	112.000	941.000
2004	1.820.000	467.000	2.288.000
2005	2.750.000	458.000	3.208.000
2006	2.587.000	374.000	2.941.000
2007	2.845.000	645.000	3.490.000
2008	3.916.000	1.320.923	5.237.113
2009	5.125.933	952.392	6.078.325
2010	6.042.000	1.354.000	7.396.000

Source: Turkish Foreign Ministry website

The figures prove that, Turkish investors have taken advantage of economic opportunities offered in post-Saddam period. Iraq is Turkey's fourth-largest market and Turkey is Iraq's largest trading partner; both governments have plans to sign free trade agreement and efforts

³ Turkish Foreign Ministry, "Türkiye Irak Ekonomik İlişkileri", available at: http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye-irak-ekonomik-iliskileri-ve-turkiye_nin-yeniden-imar-surecine-katkisi.tr.mfa, access date November 22, 2011

are made to establish a common industrial zone on the border. While the trade volume was 941 million dollar in 2003, it has jumped 7 billion 396 million dollar in 2010⁴. Nearly 4000 trucks loaded with Turkish goods cross into Iraq daily and the Iraqi Kurds collect tariffs on this trade. Turkish contractors built airports in Erbil and Suleymaniye and Turkish Airlines (THY) launched flights to Baghdad, Erbil, Suleymaniye, Najaf and Basra. Surely the Kurdistan federal government is not excluded from the profits of this increasing economic cooperation between Iraq and Turkey. Due to the geographical location, the KRG is the main beneficiary of the growing trade. Relatively stable and secure environment in Kurdish controlled areas and Turkey's cautious willingness to increase the economic relations with Iraqi Kurds has helped the KRG to emerge in a substantial position within bilateral relation between Turkey and Iraq. According to the International Crisis Group' (ICG) report, 1.5 billion of total trade volume between two countries is from construction and contracting services in Northern Iraq. Additionally, about 1 billion worth of goods are consumed by Iraqi Kurds.⁵ Trade with Turkey has become essential for Iraqi Kurdistan's daily life. Eighty percent of food and clothes in Kurdish market are exported from Turkey⁶. Not only trade but Turks are influential in the region's labor market. Official figures demonstrate, by the end of 2010, more than 800 Turkish firms were operating in the KRG which constitutes 55 per cent of the foreign companies registered in the region where 20-25,000 Turkish workers are employed.⁷ Equally important, Kurdish autonomous authority has received considerable revenue by taking tariff from Turkish trucks entering Iraq from Habur border gate (known as Ibrahim al Khalil in Iraq). ICG report demonstrates the KRG gained 250 million dollar in 2008 by this levy⁸. Interestingly, there is not reliable statistics showing the exact trade volume between Turkey and the KRG and Turkish officials could only give their estimated figures whereas KRG authorities provide some numbers on trade volume. A KRG official announced that the trade between Turkey and Kurdish authority amounted to at least 4 billion dollar in 2010, excluding oil and gas produced by the region, which is handled by the central

⁴ <http://www.dtm.gov.tr/dtmadmin/upload/ANL/OrtaDoguDb/Irak.pdf>,
Access date: March 28, 2011.

⁵ ICG, "Turkey and Iraqi Kurds: Conflict or Cooperation?" Middle East Report No:81, 13 November 2008, p.13
⁶"Industrialists from İzmir in Arbil to Establish Business Ties." *Today's Zaman*, November 03, 2010,
<http://todayszaman.com/news-226151-industrialists-from-izmir-in-arbil-to-establish-business-ties.html>.

⁷For sure, usage of common language has a determining factor particularly for the increase of Turkish employment in Northern Iraq. Although Kurdish is a slightly divided language with four diverse dialects and their subgroups, some of Turkish Kurds and their Iraqi counterparts share the same Kurdish dialect which facilitates finding jobs in KRG. Financial Times "Turkey finds a gateway to Iraq" by Abigail Fielding-Smith published: April 14, 2010, accessed on November 12, 2011

⁸ ICG, Ibid. p.13.

government⁹. However Turkish Consul General in Erbil could only give estimations saying in an interview “As of 2010, our export volume to Iraq in total is \$7.5 billion. Seventy percent of this, we estimate, is towards the Iraqi Kurdistan region.”¹⁰ Regarding this point, it may be concluded that the deep fear that defining KRG on any official and semi-official documents would mean its recognition by the state still exist in Turkish bureaucracy. But still, political will exist in Turkish side for further improvements of trade relations. As a sign of this determination Turkish trade minister stated that they aim to increase the total trade volume to 20 billion dollar within five years¹¹.

As the economic relations deepen with Iraqi Kurdistan, the discussion has raged over whether Turkey should follow more economic integration with the KRG or attempt to isolate it. The controversy has lied at the heart of the question that the deepening economic ties with Iraqi Kurds would give them the economic power for acquiring independence. Ultra-nationalist circles in Turkey support the idea of economic isolation targeting KRG in an attempt to pressure the latter to abandon independence cause and demanded Ankara to cut any economic relation with Kurdish leadership. For them, any steps that deepen the economic relation with the KRG would serve Kurds’ ultimate ambition of establishing an independent Kurdish state. A nationalist aspiring politician and scholar ÜmitÖzdağ stated this view in an interview with ICG:

“Turkey has no right to complain about the way the KRG is turning into a state, because it is Turkey that has supported Northern Iraq, especially economically, through the Habur border gate [Turkey’s sole border with Iraq]. What Turkey should do is stop completely the export of Turkish goods that make up 80 per cent of the Northern Iraqi market.”¹²

On the contrary, from an opportunist perspective, it could be safely argued that KRG’s dependence on Turkish goods and investment are likely to be utilized as leverage to put immense pressure on Kurdish politicians to stand alongside with Turkish interests and leave Kurdish chauvinism especially regarding the critical issues such as incorporation of Kirkuk. However, taken the growing Iranian appetite to expand its sphere of influence in Iraq and extend it from Shiite populated southern provinces to Kurdish controlled areas in the North into consideration, any Turkish attempt to isolate the KRG would push the Iraqi Kurds to Iran.

⁹“Turkey-Kurdistan economic ties strong despite conflict”, <http://www.ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2011/10/turkey3491.htm>, access date: October 17, 2011.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹“Turkish Minister Targets \$20bn Investment in Iraqi Kurdistan.”Iraq Business News. AK News, July 04, 2010 <<http://www.iraq-businessnews.com/2010/07/04/turkish-minister-targets-20bn-investment-in-iraqi-kurdistan/>>.

¹² ICG, Ibid. p.13.

Therefore, Turkish investments and goods in KRG which is claimed to constitute 80 per cent of Kurdish autonomous region's market¹³ have turned into a significant political instrument for counterweighing Iran and containment for Tehran's intentions. Slowing down Turkish exports to Iraqi Kurds would by no means contribute for enhancement of Turkish interests and eventually push KRG administration to involve with Turkey's rival in economic terms. Similarly, the recommendations seeking to by-pass Habur border gate which is KRG's lifeline by opening another one which provides transportation to central Iraq toward Syria would be also in vain to pressure KRG. With a new border crossing aiming to avoid paying levy crossing to KRG would be majorly hindered by security concerns¹⁴.

Any sanction aiming to lessen Turkish trade would also present a clear contradiction to traditional road of trade in the region. There have been trade roads from Erbil to Turkish cities Van, Diyarbakır, Şanlıurfa and Gaziantep which are all located in southern Turkey. These cities have historically served as a connection center binding Iraqi trade roads to Syrian city of Aleppo which implicitly demonstrates interlinked character of Northern Mesopotamia.

Furthermore, this kind of steps attempting to downgrade Turkey-KRG economic integration would politically spark reinforcement of anti-Turkey circles in Erbil which would be likely to deteriorate the rapprochement process due to the centering place of economic relations between the two. Taking the enlarging influence of Kurds in post-Saddam Iraq, disintegration would not benefit Turkey's interests not only in KRG but also the entire country. Therefore, it could be directly concluded that the more trade and larger economic integration with Kurdistan federal government is the more leverage Turkey would enjoy in Iraq and KRG. It should be also added that military tension between Turkey and KRG stemming from Turkish military incursions into Northern Iraq targeting PKK camps, has had direct damaging effects on trade relations. For instance after the military operation in 2007, the number of new Turkish companies being opened in the KRG dropped swiftly from 147 to 52 in 2008.¹⁵

¹³ ICG, Ibid. p.13.

¹⁴ Turkish truck drivers have a general tendency to refuse to go further into Iraq after arriving Zaho primarily because of security threats. In the case of another border gate on Syrian border, Turkey would encounter the difficulty of having no changing center in like Zaho and would have to overcome potential security problems.

¹⁵ Abigail Fielding-Smith, "Turkey finds a gate way to Iraq" Financial Times, April 14, 2010.

More importantly, the less trade with Northern Iraq would ultimately have negative impinge on Turkish southeastern provinces containing the risk of empowerment of PKK. It is historically proven that the decline in trade interactions causes catastrophic situations for Turkey's security. Limited job opportunities compounded with low life-standards created an appropriate political atmosphere for anti-state propaganda. Given as significant example, Turkish Iraqi economic relations witnessed major shrinkage during the 1991 Gulf War. Due to UN sanctions on Saddam regime, Turkish investors, especially the ones resided in southeastern province; suffered from major economic loses until 1995 when "*food for oi*" program was launched. Decrease in trade volume with Iraq led inevitably rise in unemployment rates in Kurdish populated southeastern cities which provided PKK a receptive environment to make propaganda campaigns to recruit members. For elaborating the link between economic wellness and lessening participation to terrorist organization, it is useful to have a look at Popes' analysis:

"To take just one example, about one third of Turkey's 300,000-strong trucking fleet used to work on the Baghdad route to Iraq and the Gulf, with about 5,000 trucks a day passing through the border to Iraq. This stopped as the world clamped sanctions on Saddam Hussein. The disappearance of this source of wealth on the 'old Silk Road' through southeastern Turkey was one reason why disgruntled Kurdish youth began to join the well-funded and well-organized PKK rebels after the Gulf War. The hard-bitten truck-stop towns of Silopi, Nusaybin and especially Cizre became the scene of the hottest opposition to the Turkish security forces".¹⁶

This experience vividly demonstrates the strong correlation between terrorist recruitment and economic conditions. Poor life standards and high unemployment facilitate terrorist groups to turn the only viable employer through their ideological indoctrination. However, there is also some advocate that as pro-PKK circles are getting more prosperous they would provide more financial support to the organization. The dispute has centered on whether economic empowerment of Kurdish cities would limit the PKK's ability for recruitment or richer Kurds would give more support to the terrorist organization. On this controversy, numerous cases strengthen the first argument which is providing more economic relief. Besides, a significant number of PKK attacks targeting economic facilities, factories and dams in the province have served as a proof how beneficial economic activities which bring about lessening unemployment created disruption to PKK.

¹⁶ Nicole Pope and Hugh Pope, "Turkey Unveiled: A History of Modern Turkey" New York, 2000, pp. 240-241.

2. 1. 2. Turkish investments in energy sector

In addition to trade links, Turkish entrepreneurs have invested into several sectors of Iraqi Kurdistan. Although the lion share goes to construction sector, Turkish investments in the region's energy sector are also visible. The role of Turkish companies in the KRG's energy market should be analyzed through considering the place of energy politics (or pipeline politics) in foreign policy making. Investments in energy sector play a significantly determinant role in shaping Turkish foreign policy preferences and regional initiatives.¹⁷ To elaborate how pipeline politics have acquired priority during the AK Party era in shaping foreign policy decision, Gökhan Bacık underlines that several political problems are overlooked while cooperating some regional countries. He states:

“The government has not hesitated to cooperate with other states in terms of energy cooperation. Turkey, in spite of several problems with countries such as Iran, Greece and Russia has been successful in realizing energy-based cooperation with them. The materialistic paradigm has so far dominated normative concerns in the energy context.”¹⁸

Thus, as a part of AK Party government's broader vision to realize the transition of Turkey into a regional energy hub, Ankara support any private endeavor to increase investment in KRG's energy sector. As Turkish investment in the KRG has boosted, Turkish involvement in oil production activities in the region has been also in rise. According to the last statistics, four Turkish firms operated in Kurdish oil sectors as part of international consortiums in 14 of 40 production licenses.¹⁹ There are oil companies from 17 different countries in the KRG and US corporations have been able to only get 11 licenses whereas British and Canadian firms acquired 8 licenses each. This comparison reassured the assumption that despite Turkey decided not to be a part of coalition forces backing US in invasion of Iraq; this has not damaged Turkish attempts to take the helm of oil sector in KRG and perform better than American investors. In 2008 Turkish Petroleum Company (TPAO) and the Petroleum Pipeline Corporation (BOTAS) signed an agreement with Shell Oil Company to cooperate in the exploration, operation and transportation of oil in Northern Iraq. At the expense of

¹⁷F. Stephen Larrabee and Ian O. Lesser (eds.), 'Turkish Foreign Policy in an Age of Uncertainty', Santa Monica: RAND, 2003, pp.107-112.

¹⁸Gökhan Bacık, 'Turkey and Pipeline Politics', Turkish Studies Vol.7, No.2, June 2006, p.303.

¹⁹Sarp Kalkan, 'The Transformative Power of the Turkish Private Sector in Iraqi Kurdistan', Evaluation note, Economy Policy Research Foundation of Turkey, March 2011, p.1.

potential Iranian reaction Baghdad government wanted TPAO to take part in the process of rehabilitation of oil fields in Basra.²⁰ Until 2010 two Turkish firms, Pet Oil and Genel Enerji have signed production-sharing contracts with KRG administration to develop oil fields. Pet Oil operates in Shakal bloc located between Kifri and Kalar in Suleymaniya and also in Bina-Bawi bloc near Erbil. On the other hand, Genel Enerji has agreed with KRG to develop oil-fields in six fields including the TaqTaq and Kewa Chirmila blocs which are north east of Kirkuk.²¹ In addition to direct Turkish investment in Kurdish oil sector, Turkey, Iraq and the KRG agreed to export oil via Turkey. In June 2009, oil began to flow from fields that are under the control of KRG to Turkish terminal at Ceyhan with Baghdad's consent²². With this consensus Iraqi oil is sold to European market; but the dispute with the central government about oil contracts caused suspension of oil flow until February of 2011. The launch of oil export via Turkey shows overlapping interests and mutual interdependency among the KRG, Iraq and Turkey. Iraq and the KRG took a significant step to expand their oil revenue which is likely to help them to overcome their disputes. Furthermore, Turkey cements its position to be an energy hub and strengthen its hand in EU by intermediating to provide oil to European markets. It is also understood that as long as Turkey has problematic relations with the KRG, the land-locked Kurdish administration could have not export its oil.

Along with the exploration licenses, the long-run product-sharing projects would help more to strengthen KRG-Turkey relations as they would predictably deepen Kurdish dependence on Turkish companies. With these contracts Turkey would be able to benefit from pipeline revenues once the projects would be accomplished. The projects' political significance is also remarkable. The locations of the blocs are very close to political centers and potential tension points. Having the opportunity of operating both in Erbil and Suleymaniya prescribes continuity of political settlement between dominant Kurdish parties namely the KDP and PUK which have strongholds in these cities respectively. Furthermore, oil field developing project carried out by a Turkish firm in a location very close to Kirkuk would provide Turkey grounds for further intervention into the developments related to the disputed area. It might be proposed that on behalf of ensuring continuity of project Ankara could initiate to form a joint security forces composed of peshmerga and members of Turkish army. Such a move would

²⁰Congressional Research Service, "Iraq: Regional Perspective and US Policy", April 4 2008, p. 16.

²¹ ICG, Ibid. p.14.

²²"Iraqi Kurds launch historic oil export via Turkey" June 1, 2009,
http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?load=detay&link=176906&bolum=102

surely contribute to erode high suspicions existing between two groups and would be considered as a bold step for confidence building.

The KRG administration is determined to manage oil revenues efficiently in order to sustain economic growth. For the 2010-2014 period, it is estimated that KRG's budget revenues will increase from 10 billion to 14 billion dollars.²³ Moreover, when oil fields in Bay Hassan, Zubair, Missan Kirkuk and Western Kurna would be activated the oil production is expected to rise from 2, 4 million barrels to 5 million barrels per day.²⁴ In addition, fully-operating potential natural gas resources in Mensuriye and Akkas would also reinforce economic growth in KRG. Despite existence of natural gas reserves, Iraqi Kurds is deprived of sufficient technical infrastructure and qualified human resources to explore and utilize natural gas. Turkish medium size natural gas companies ought to extend their investments to neighboring KRG and help it to capitalize their resources for which Turkey's need increases speedily. The ironic situation about Turkey's deep need in natural gas and its neighbors' wealth is best defined with the figures that Turkey consumed 32 billion cubic meter in 2009 when 15 billion cubic meter natural gas was destroyed in Iraq due to lack of necessary technical capacity.²⁵ From a political perspective, increasing industrialization, steadily growing economy and constant urbanization have intensified Turkey's need for energy. The insufficient natural resources in the country oblige Ankara to form energy alliances which creates dependency on foreign countries. Turkey has exported natural gas mainly from Russia and Iran both of which easily instrumentalize Turkey's reliance on their resources as a political pressuring tool. By producing and then exporting natural gas from Northern Iraq, Turkey would be able to not only buy cheaper natural gas but also lessen its dependence. Therefore it could be concluded that the 'asymmetric economic interdependence' in Turkey's trade relations with the KRG is likely to turn into a 'mutual interdependency' while adding the gas and oil resources in the region.

One major issue to point at regarding Turkey and Iraqi natural gas resources is certainly the Nabucco Project which aspires to bring natural gas from the Caspian region to Austria via Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary²⁶. It is a widely known fact that the main purpose of the project is to reduce Europe's energy dependence on Russia. Since most of the projected

²³Kalkan, p.4.

²⁴Foreign Economic Relations Board, Iraq Country Report, 2010, p.4.

²⁵'Irak'tan Müthiş Petrol Teklifi' Interview with Fazıl Şenel, the head of BOTAS, Sabah, April 3, 2011. Access date: December 2, 2011

²⁶For detailed information see <http://www.nabucco-pipeline.com/portal/page/portal/en>

pipeline would go through Turkey's soil, the Nabucco fits perfectly well with the government's ambitions in this sense. Defining Nabucco's construction process, Peter Truscott states in the third phase of the project gas from Iran and Iraq would connect with Azerbaijan and flow westwards to Europe²⁷. It is a hope giving situation that Iraqi Prime Minister took part in assignment ceremony of Nabucco, showing that Bagdad does not principally refused the project.²⁸ It implies, thus, that natural gas resources in Iraq and particularly Northern Iraq would have much more importance for Turkey and broadly for Turkey-EU relations. Some claim that the main driving force for Turkey's warmer relations with the KRG is the Nabucco project. For instance Hawez maintains that the Nabucco project and Turkey willingness to Iraqi participation into the project is the determinant factor why Turkey keep warm relations with KRG.²⁹

Although the vast natural resources and Turkey's increasing energy dependency along with the projected pipelines will possibly change the interdependence in favor of the KRG and Iraq, the structural shortcomings in the Kurdish economy will make the market's dependence on Turkey to continue for a considerable period of time. As the other rentier states whose economy depend heavily on natural resources, the KRG which gets 85 per cent of its budget from oil revenues, could also potentially encounter the same need of creating new sources of income. To prevent such a consequence, Kurdish politicians have pushed hard for proliferating and diversifying the areas for foreign investment. In 2006 a law aiming to create incentives for foreign investments has been enacted. With this law which was introduced by Kurdistan Board of Investors as 'the most investor-friendly law in the region', generous opportunities are opened for investors. The law abolishes any difference between foreign and domestic investors and ensures that they are treated equally. Additionally, buying land for investment purposes and tax exemptions are granted to foreign investors.³⁰

²⁷Peter Truscott, "The fourth energy corridor: The three phases of Nabucco", Whitehall Papers, 73:1, 2009, p.33.

²⁸"Maliki: Nabucco bölge ülkelerini birbirine bağlıyor" Zaman Daily, July 13, 2009 <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=868951>, access date: 28, September,2011; in his interview Iraqi Prime Minister applauded Nabucco project saying it binds regional countries to each other.

²⁹Abdulla Hawez, "The foes has become allies: Turkey-Kurdistan Gov't ties,"October 5, 2011 <http://www.ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2011/10/state5481.htm>, Access date: November 12, 2011

³⁰Kalkan, p.6.

2. 1. 3. Dispute over hydrocarbon law and obstacles for further economic integration

Further expansion of Turkish involvement in Iraq's oil market is likely to be complicated by the Iraqi government's failure to generate a comprehensive hydrocarbon law. For Iraq a hydrocarbon law is not just legal framework regulating who has the authority to sign oil contracts and allocation of oil revenues. Since it engages directly with the issue of disputed areas which is a threatening unsettled question between central government and the KRG on determining internal borders of some provinces, hydrocarbon law has a significant impact on Iraq's state structure and the extent of federalism. The dispute has raged when Kurdish administration found Baghdad's law unacceptable and passed its own legal regulation about signing contracts with foreign companies and distribution of revenues in August 2007.

The Iraqi Constitution obliges the KRG refrain from signing independent contracts with foreign oil companies. Yet, Article 141 allowed Kurdish authority to sustain all enacted legislation and signed contracts since 1992 in force. As a tie between federal government and regional one, article 112 (1) implies joint management of current fields only meaning that partially developed, underdeveloped, developing and future oil fields are and would be under exclusive control of the KRG. Moreover, as a guarantor of implementation of laws, Iraqi constitution enhances the situation of regional law once a contradiction happens between federal law and regional one.³¹

From a different perspective, state-owned oil companies tend to dominate world oil market in last decades. Of the world's biggest 50 oil and natural gas companies 27 belong to states which is expected to produce 80 percent of world oil until 2030.³² Thus, it does not seem to be feasible to hand over full authority for exploring and producing oil to foreign companies as Iraqi Kurds currently pushes for. It is predicted that once the necessary infrastructure will be achieved in the country, Iraq will initiate to nationalize oil production.

It may appear disturbing for Turkey's interests when regarding Iraqi unity, not only territorial one but also administrative harmony of the country. However, facts on the ground prove the opposite may also occur. For instance, Iraqi oil ministry excluded the Turkish Petroleum

³¹ For the related parts see Iraqi Constitution available at: www.uniraq.org/.../iraqi_constitution.pdf, Access date:, June16, 2011

³²International Energy Agency, "World Energy Outlook 2008 Fact Sheet: Oil Supply". <http://www.iea.org/weo/docs/weo2008/fact_sheets_08.pdf>Access date: October 31, 2009

Corporation (TPAO) from its list composed of 35 companies which have received ministerial approval to bid for oil and gas bid. Unlike central government, Turkish oil companies have not faced such a strict exclusion so far from Kurdish regional authority. The case of TPAO could be only reversed during Prime Minister Erdoğan's visit to Baghdad in July 2008 when Iraqi government granted Turkey to join a contract awarded to one of the companies on the list in the case of a successful bid.³³ The superiority of regional law over federal one indicates that KRG appears to be more accessible for Turkish interests and complicated central bureaucracy may be likely to create problems for Turkish companies. More striking is that Turkish company of TPAO was replaced on the list with Premier Oil, the UK exploration and production company.³⁴

Yet, Turkey opposes federal hydrocarbon law and supports the idea of equal revenue on the grounds that the more economic independence the KRG enjoy and more income they gain increase the risks of Kurdish independence. As a result of this understanding, Turkey long resisted to allow the KRG to export oil and did not provide any material assistance to its oil sector.

Not creating major conflicts and stalemate like the dispute on hydrocarbon law, there are other structural problems the KRG face in its market. Due to these existing problems, economic development stemming from relatively stable and safe environment in KRG has no guarantee to experience a gradual increase in the future or at least remain intact. Despite potential and developing oil fields provide a promising future for the region's economy, some certain structural problems may complicate further economic advance. Whereas deficiencies of some crucial components of a well-functioning market economy, this atmosphere creates also some opportunities for Turkey.

One major problem threatening further growth in KRG economy is instability in electricity supply. Despite significant progress achieved in electricity production, it is still far away from fulfilling the conditions for sustainment of industrial enlargement. Daily electricity usage increased from 2 hours in 1991 to 14-16 hours. This hike has resulted from intensified effort in developing infrastructural capacity by building 11 production and 96 distribution stations.³⁵

³³ ICG, *Ibid.* p.15.

³⁴ Turkish Daily News, September 28, 2008

³⁵ Kalkan, *Ibid.* p.7

The Kurdish administration seems to be very determined in growing electricity capacity and almost makes it a national goal for the KRG. Therefore, in the budget of 2011, 533 million dollar was allocated to electricity production which is still unable to overcome the electricity shortage³⁶. As a quick note, Iraqi Kurds' electricity consumption practices played also a determining role for ongoing shortage. For the reason that electricity was provided free of charge for many years in the region, people in the KRG are not generally sensitive to save electricity. This brief outlook in the region's electricity market actually demonstrates major opportunities for Turkish state and investors operating in electricity production and allocation sector.

Second reason impeding Iraqi Kurds enhancement of economic wellness is the low amount of qualified labor force. As a result of internal conflict and Saddam's crackdown on Kurds compounded with limited educational services handicapped rise of blue-color employees which is essential in industrial growth. On the other hand, however, Iraqi Kurds like Turkish Kurds have also a large diaspora in Europe acquired qualified education and considerable business experience which has started to play an important role in the KRG's administrative body by providing consultancy and instrumentalizing their contacts in Europe and US to attract more investment in Kurdish autonomous region.

Kurdish authorities have also taken major steps to develop weak educational infrastructure in the region. Suleymaniya is expected to regain its central position in the region's political and intellectual life with foreign and national universities in the city. Although one of them is a Turkish private university (Ishik University) Turkey's growing educational sector has a great potential to involve in this area of KRG where American institutions seek local incentives to launch new universities and schools.³⁷ Being aware of the need, Kurdish administration provides substantial support to education sector which has increased the number of 1,320 schools and 550,000 students in 1991 to 5,500 and 1,400,000 respectively³⁸.

Insufficient capacity of banking system is considered to be another major hurdle discouraging foreign investors and adversely effecting domestic economy for further improvements. Despite growing trade relations and prospect for an enlarging domestic market with the help

³⁶ "TEPAV: Prime Minister's Arbil Visit of Significance for Bilateral Economic Relations" March 30, 2011, <http://www.tepav.org.tr/en/haberler/s/2043>

³⁷ For a broader study on Iraqi education sector, "Geopolicy, Iraq Education Sector Scoping Study", 2009 available at www.geopolicy.com/pub_1288013876, Access date: December 2, 2011

³⁸ Kalkan, Ibid. p.7.

of increase in oil export, there is no well-functioning payment mechanism in accordance with international standards. A large proportion of trade transactions are conducted in cash which sustains the absence of letters of credit and guarantee letter mechanisms, creating greater risks for investors. In the Northern Iraqi banking sector, three major Turkish banks have operated in the origin. Ziraat Bank Vakıfbank and Akbank have carried out serious transition operations and at the same time provide experience sharing for local banks.

2. 2. Political Explanations

In this thesis it is argued that improving relations with the KRG has not only resulted from economic considerations and interdependence but also political motivations. Political explanations of rapprochement between Turkey and Iraqi Kurds may be divided into three categories which are namely bilateral, regional and national. The ongoing process has had repercussions in bilateral relations of Turkey and Iraq along with Turkey's role in this country. It has also regional reflections due to Iraq's critical place and geo-strategic importance of Kurdish inhabited areas in Middle East as Turkey has been in an attempt to emerge as a regional power. Furthermore, while Turkish government has worked to resolve its own Kurdish question, warmer relations with the Kurdish administration have national implications.

Having strong ties with KRG would ultimately provide Turkey larger room in Iraqi politics in Baghdad. Moreover, as the only recognized administrative body of Kurds, world's most populated stateless nation, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) would likely turn to be de-facto representative and protector of not only Iraqi Kurds but also the rest living in the Middle East. Rapprochement with KRG would serve for Turkey which has fought with Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) for decades, to reserve the misrepresentation of being defined as 'enemy of Kurds'. Moreover, as Ankara and Erbil continue to get closer, it is safely predictable that this would have constructive repercussions on Turkish-EU.

2. 2. 1. Bilateral level: Iraqi Kurds' growing influence in Baghdad

The absolute Kurdish political, military and logistical support to US during the Iraqi invasion has enabled Kurdish politicians to enter post-Saddam re-structuring period on an equal position with Arabs. They participated in US led occupation administration called CPA (Coalition Provisional Authority) and later on Mesud Barzani, Jalal Talabani and three independent Kurds hold seats in a 25-person advisory mechanism 'Iraq Governing Council' appointed in July 2003.³⁹ Despite strong Arab objection, Barzani's former top aide Hoshiyar Zebari has taken the post of foreign ministry. Surely more important, Talabani has become Iraqi president which is considered by Turkey as a positive development because of its potential to strengthen Iraqi Kurds loyalty to newly emerging state. Barkey counts Talabani's presidency among the factors directly effecting KRG's gains in Iraqi politics. "Through his international contacts personality, Talabani has simultaneously defended the interests of KRG and Iraq even when these interests have not always been in sync with each other."⁴⁰

Therefore, it is argued that the more Turkish engagement with Kurds whose weight increases in national politics means the more Turkish impact on Baghdad. As Barkey also notes "Any increase in Turkish influence in the KRG translates into more in Baghdad because of Kurds critical political role in the government. By contributing shaping events in North Ankara plays a role in determining the political contours of the country's future."⁴¹

Iraqi Kurds generally view participation into national politics as an opportunity to enhance their advancing position and interests. Despite severe differentiation on particular issues, for presenting a unified front against other political groups, KDP and PUK forged alliances in both national and provincial elections⁴². It is worth noting that PUK has had overall tendency to adopt a closer attitude toward central government in Iraq even in Saddam era and the PUK has traditionally hold a left-leaning position whereas; the KDP is much closer to conservatism and traditional values.

³⁹ For a detailed report about the Council please see: Dan Murphy, "Why Iraq Governing Council failed?" The Christian Science Monitor, April 29, 2004; available at <http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0429/p06s02-woiq.html>

⁴⁰ Henri J. Barkey, "Turkey's New Engagement in Iraq Embracing Iraqi Kurdistan", United States Institute of Peace Special Report no:37, May 2010, p.4.

⁴¹ Ibid, p.4.

⁴² For a useful discussion on how Kurdish parties reconciled see: Harun Akyol, "From Stalemate to Soul Mate: Emergent Democracy in Kurdistan", European Journal of Economic and Political Studies, Vol.3, No:1, Summer 2010, pp.121-143.

Two Kurdish parties allied in the both national and provincial elections in 2005. In the January 30, their alliance won about 26% of the vote, earning 75 National Assembly seats out of 275. This result partly reasoned from Sunni Arab's boycott of these elections. For this reason, the Kurds also won control of the provincial council of Arab inhabited Nineveh Province, and had a strong presence on the council of the mostly Arab province of Diyala as well. However, in December 2005 elections to which Sunni Arabs largely took part, partly as a result of Turkish mediation among Sunni groups and Ankara's efforts to convince them for elections, the Kurdistan Alliance did not performed well comparatively and won 53 seats. Furthermore in 2006, another senior Kurdish political figure top Talabani aide, Barham Salih who served as the Prime Minister of the Kurdish Region before Saddam's withdrawal, was appointed as one of two deputy prime ministers. When Salih was elected as KRG Prime Minister in 2009, Dr. Rowsch Shaways, a KDP member, who had served as deputy Prime Minister in the 2004-2005 interim government, was appointed as deputy Prime Minister to fill Salih's vacant slot.

However, the last 2010 March national elections have demonstrated that, although not to a significant degree, Kurds' effectiveness in central government started to wane. Due to the emergence of a new party in the KRG, Gorran (means 'change' in Kurdish) which refused to take part into elections under Kurdistan List, composed of main Kurdish parties the KDP and the PUK; these factions' number of seats was reduced from 53 to 43 since 2006. On the other hand, Gorran and Kurdistan Islamic Union were able to win 14 seats.

Since the American invasion, the biggest concrete benefit Kurds have been able to acquire is surely acquisition of legal status for their regional administration. In March 2004 'Transitional Administrative Law (TAL)'⁴³ under which the CPA operated, preserved the Kurdish autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and its political authority to change the application of some national laws in accordance with KRG's representative body's decisions. Yet, the TAL did not fully meet with Kurds' critical demands. One of their most desired goals, control over Kirkuk is not granted to them but a restoration process promised to be ensured in order to secure Kurds' reclaim their homes who was expelled from the city by Saddam forces. Crucially important for further political structure of country, Kurds achieved to insert a provision into the TAL which permits any three provinces to veto the permanent

⁴³The text of the TAL can be obtained from the CPA website: <http://cpa-iraq.org/government/TAL.html>. June 24, 2005

constitution. This provision provides veto power to Kurds who constitute majority in three provinces; Erbil, Dohuk and Suleymaniya.

With the referendum held in 2005 for the approval of constitution, Kurds attained one more strategic and long desired political aspiration since the constitution ensured formal creation of regions which have its own regional government.⁴⁴ Erbil, Dohuk and Suleymaniya are recognized legal regions according to Article 113⁴⁵. Moreover, Article 117⁴⁶ of the constitution gives KRG the authority of amending the national laws application partially free from dependence on national government. The constitution also declares Kurdish as one of the official language along with Arabic with the Article 4⁴⁷. Worth to mentioning, strategically important for power balances between central government and the KRG, in Iraqi Constitution it is not clearly determined whether Erbil could independently export weapons for its own security forces, nonetheless Kurdish administration purchased guns and ammunition from Bulgaria in November 2008 without any vocal objection from Baghdad.⁴⁸

One other factor leading political empowerment of Iraqi Kurds is their pragmatic strategy to benefit from internal divergences among Iraqi Shiites which are the most influential political group in 'new Iraq.' The dominant Kurdish parties' relations with Iraqi Shiite groups may be deemed to be purely pragmatic as they have smartly advantaged contradictions within them. While Kurds' position toward Shiite Prime Minister Maliki has been tensional mainly because of conflicting stances on some political issues like security forces and the level of federalism, Kurdish alliance helped Maliki to evade from numerous political challenges in 2006 and 2007. They provided military assistance to his government even when the latter confronted with militia groups of young Shiite cleric Moqtada al Sadr in Basra in 2008, claiming this move demonstrated Maliki's impartiality. Besides, Kurdistani alliance stood alongside with mainstream Shiite Islamist parties, including Maliki's Dawa Party and Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq headed by Ammar al-Hakim. However, the period of good relations ended

⁴⁴ The text of the constitution is at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/10/12/AR2005101201450.html>.

⁴⁵ Iraqi Constitution, p.33.

⁴⁶ Iraqi Constitution, p.35; Article 117 which allows Kurdish authority to maintain internal security forces and open embassies abroad have been usually a source of tension between regional administration and central government. For instance, in a response to Kurdish criticisms on concentration of power Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki accused KRG of implementing "unconstitutional" policies, such as deploying peshmerga outside the KRG region and opening representative offices in foreign countries despite the related article.

⁴⁷ Iraqi Constitution, p.3.

⁴⁸ Londono, Ernesto "Kurds in N. Iraq Receive Arms From Bulgaria." Washington Post, November 23, 2008.

once Sunni Arabs took over the control of Ninevah provincial parliament which was dominated by Kurds in 2008. Afterwards, Kurdish deputies sought to mobilize a campaign of no-confidence vote against Maliki. KRG president Barzani did not meet with Iraqi Prime Minister until he embarked an official visit to Erbil in August 2009⁴⁹.

The Kurds' aggressive stance against Maliki is mostly based on the prime minister's insistence on stronger central state. However, progressively strengthening position of Iraqi Kurds in national politics since 2003 could be safely interpreted as a restoration process in which their long denied democratic rights are granted. Though, there is a certain consensus among observers of the region on Kurdish groups' dependency on US political support and military backing for their current stronger position.⁵⁰ As expected challenges against Kurds would be likely to be posed by Arabs after US withdrawal, Kurdish administration have been in an effort to ensure their gained rights and sought to remain US support. Moreover, it is clear that surrounded by potentially hostile Arabs and countries having heavy suspicions over their quest for independence, the KRG would ultimately be subjected to forge a regional alliance with regional powers, Iran, Turkey and Israel.

Turkey which demonstrates certain willingness to interject itself as a regional power have to be more influential in Iraqi politics. Locating between Saudi Arabia, Iran, Syria and Turkey, Iraq has inevitably strategic position in regions' power balance. Moreover, its vast natural resources cement strategic significance. Kurd's strengthening position in political area makes them the efficient party to ally with in order to have influential position in shaping Iraqi politics and acquire a powerful place in the region. Taking the need for establishing peace and security subsequent to US withdrawal into account, Turkey would have to intensify its involvement with Iraqi Kurds.

⁴⁹Arraf, Jane. "The Iraqi Premier Is Increasingly At Risk As Cracks in His Shiite-Kurdish Coalition Grow in the Waning Days of the Bush Administration, His Other Main Ally." *Christian Science Monitor*, December 11, 2008.

⁵⁰ Kenneth Katzman, *The Kurds in Post-Saddam Iraq*, Congressional Research Service, October 1, 2010, p.6.

2.2.2. Regional Reflections: Kurdish Geopolitics

One of the driving forces lying behind Turkey's new discourse and intensified engagement to Kurdistan Regional Government is absolutely the geopolitical significance of Kurdish populated areas dispersed to four neighboring countries, its advanced geo-economic importance along with its geo-ethnic and geo-cultural structure.

In geographical terms, Kurdish populated territory in the Middle East stands south of Caspian Sea which makes this area one of the most strategic continental passing of Eurasia. Secondly this area binds Caucasus, one of the four strategic passing bands binding Eurasian steppes to the Mediterranean, to Persian Gulf. From a closer geopolitical perspective KRG's territory which is a part of larger Kurdish inhabited area, serves as a transit passing from Anatolia to Mesopotamia. Particularly, for Turkey it is located on the crossing roads to Central Asia through Iran. While Turkey is considered as an opening gate to Europe from Erbil's lenses; reversely KRG should be viewed as Turkey's gate to Middle East, Red Sea and Central Asia. Fourthly, Kurdish area is positioned at the heart of terrestrial connection of maritime bindings between eastern Mediterranean, the Persian Gulf, the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. Taking these brief geo-strategic identifications into consideration, it could be safely argued that the region attracts the attention of global and regional powers whose political competition reflects inevitably on local contest and radically shape occasional alliances.

Regarding Kurdish area, Ahmet Davutoğlu points out that the reason behind the absence of internal geo-political consistency in this geography is its land-locked geographical character. He further argues that the deficiency of a maritime connection requires this territory's integration to one of the adjunct countries having coastline, namely Turkey or Syria and objected that security guarantee provided by a global power does not lonely suffice for the establishment of internal geopolitical consistency.⁵¹

Related to geo-political background, Kurdish territory's geo-economic balance put on oil-water-oil⁵² triangle. One more aspect turning the region a sphere of severe power struggle is the Kurdish region's position on the geo-economic band connecting Caucasus and Caspian oil resources to Gulf oil resources through Mesopotamian river basin. Another critical point to

⁵¹ Davutoğlu, 'Stratejik Derinlik', p. 438.

⁵² This term is used by Davutoğlu in the same chapter

mention is that Turkey's long aspiration to accomplish Southeastern Anatolia Project⁵³ (GAP) would definitely spark radical altering on regional balances between natural source and power.

In geo-cultural and geo-ethnic terms, the Kurdish population is spread to Syria, Turkey, Iraq and Iran the countries which are under political control of three traditional power-holders in the region; Turks, Persians and Arabs. Thus, Kurdish minorities in each country constitute determining parts of strategic calculations about the region. Their positions in each country differ fundamentally but the common characteristic they have is being subject to ethnic and to some extent religious discrimination which has motivated Kurdish nationalist movements seeking separatism with the help of foreign interventions. Over the course of decades of 20th century, Kurds have been utilized as a tool to interfere into host countries' domestic politics by regional or superpowers. During the Iran-Iraq war, Tehran extended immense support to Iraqi Kurds to reinforce their staunch opposition to Saddam. For similar purposes, U.S. and Israel also backed Kurds to mobilize and empower militarily by supplying training and artillery. Soviet Union tried to preserve its influence by standing behind pan-Kurdish movements in Iran. The best example fitting Soviet goals about Kurds is the Kurdish state which was created in Iranian city of Mahabad mostly by Soviet support under the leadership of Gazi Muhammad who failed to get the support of Kurds in other Iranian provinces and later encountered harsh reaction from Britain who was at that time determined to counter balance against Soviets.⁵⁴ Furthermore, Syria and Greece publicly provided support to PKK on the grounds of counterweighing Turkey.

This multi-national demographic structure of Kurds and their vulnerability to foreign intervention has complicated political efforts to generate a comprehensive course of action to approach the Kurdish issue. The ongoing uncertainties regarding Kurds in the Middle East may lead international disputes. Kurdish question which has remained to be open to international manipulations could not be handled in a widespread manner, as a result of fundamental differences among regional and global powers' methods to tackle it. Whereas Washington administration views Iraq and connectedly Kurds as one part of its grand Middle East strategy which prioritizes ensuring Israeli security, European countries are usually in a

⁵³ A useful analyzes on Turkey's GAP Project and its regional implications could be found : John C. K. Daly, "Turkey's GAP Project: A Mixed Blessing For County and Its Neighbors", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Volume: 5, Issue: 135.

⁵⁴ For a broader history of Iranian Kurds and Mahabad Republic see: <http://www.unpo.org/members/7882>

tendency of associating Kurdish question with Turkey.⁵⁵ The potential that geo-ethnic composition of Turkey's surrounding region in its south compounded with the region's geo-strategic implications would Kurds make defenseless to be exploited in the case of any political, economic or armed conflict between Persian, Turkish and Arab elements of the region or among global powers. Davutoğlu reaffirms a dramatic transformation in the perception of Middle Eastern question which was associated with Israeli-Palestinian conflict and power struggle over distribution of oil resources in the second half of the 20th century to a novel understanding which focuses on an emerging Arab-Turk-Iran dispute stemming from basically Kurdish problem and distribution of water sources.⁵⁶

All of these factors showing Kurds' geo-strategic significance and the larger role they can play in the Middle East have pushed Turkey whose eagerness to strengthen its position in regional power balance is apparent to engage with Iraqi Kurds. Increasing engagement with the KRG has helped Turkey not to be labeled as "enemy of Kurds". Because of Turkey's long fight against ethnic terrorism and armed conflict with PKK which has successfully presented itself to be the follower of Pan-Kurdish ambitions, Kurds living not only in Iraq but also in Iran and Syria have been always suspicious against Turkey. Explaining the public support PKK has been able to garner in Northern Iraq, an observer noted the traditional hostilities toward the Turkish state prevail among Kurds. Khafaji interprets the presence of PKK in Northern Iraq as a reflection of Iraqi Kurds' negative stance against Turkey.

"The Iraqi Kurdish guerillas (the peshmergeh) did not oppose the PKK presence, given the traditional hostility of the Turkish state to the Kurds, and the close relationship between Baghdad and Ankara. Although the PKK declared itself a party for all Kurds, it was widely regarded by Iraqi Kurds as a Kurdish-Turkish party until the mid-1990s, when disappointment with the PUK and KDP induced some young Iraqi Kurds to join the PKK."⁵⁷

Emergence of Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) as the only internationally recognized and autonomous administrative body of Kurds in the Middle East should be handled as an exceptional case which provides the opportunity of finding a direct interlocutor partially

⁵⁵ Davutoğlu, p.444.

⁵⁶ Davutoğlu, p. 440.

⁵⁷ Isam al-Khafaji, "Almost Unnoticed Interventions and Rivalries in Iraqi Kurdistan" January 24, 2001 available at: <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero012401>

representing the Kurds. Improving relations with the KRG and simultaneous armed struggle against PKK, implicitly give the message that Turkey stands only against terrorist organizations seeking separatism like PKK and more substantially, Ankara has not problems with Kurds including those living in Turkey on ethnic grounds. Therefore, Turkey takes a major step to develop its image throughout the region by gaining hearts and minds of Kurds in the Middle East.

The substantial political benefits of forging strong relations with the KRG are not limited to the gains on the side of Turkey for its aspirations to rise as regional power. Moreover, Ankara's decades long ambition to acquire full-fledged membership to European Union (EU) is also closely related to Turkey's relations with Kurdish administration. The border problems of EU candidates constitute a major burden for being qualified as full-fledged EU member.⁵⁸ Today one of the most outstanding problems that EU has to tackle with is the border security and prevention of illegal migration along with drug smuggling.

Unsettled situation in Turkish Iraqi borders and Turkey's military intervention into Iraqi territory are the obstacles whose resolution is considered to be indispensable for Turkey's EU membership. Thus, diplomatic involvements with Kurdish politicians to impose control on the border and growing pressure on PKK to leave Northern Iraq and finally turn down arms would eventually support Turkish bid for EU. Taking KRG's geographical location into consideration, one would closely observe that the region serves as a passing station for illegal migrants and smugglers who use Turkish territory as a transit passing to Europe. To give an astonishing example, it is claimed smuggling has turned to be a well-functioning industry.

“(Mesud) Barzani's nephew and Prime Minister Nichervan Barzani is known to operate front companies holding a monopoly on the import of several lucrative products. These and other companies control tobacco and alcohol smuggling networks stretching from Europe to Pakistan and India. Trade alliances tying Nichervan to Saddam's son Uday in Baghdad ensure tidy profits for both.”⁵⁹

⁵⁸ For instance, Macedonia which has historically rooted border problems with EU member Greece has faced severe difficulties in joining EU. Moreover, a similar case is valid also for Slovakia who has border problems with EU member Croatia.

⁵⁹ Isam al-Khafaji, “Almost Unnoticed Interventions and Rivalries in Iraqi Kurdistan” January 24, 2001 available at: <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero012401>

The settlement among Ankara-Erbil and Baghdad, hence, is expected to remarkably limit smugglers relative latitude in Northern Iraq which would be appreciated by EU and strengthen Ankara's hand in EU negotiations.

2. 2. 3. Turkey's Kurdish Question, AK Party and Kurdish Opening

One of the best examples for the interdependence between foreign policy and domestic affairs may be the link between Turkey's developing relations with the KRG and its efforts to resolve Kurdish question. Turkish state's way of tackling the Kurdish issue has led disruption among the Kurds living outside of Turkey. Reversely, the presence of PKK and the support given to the organization by Turkish and Iraqi Kurds caused Turks to have tensional relations with the Kurds. This interconnectedness which stems from the effect of transnational Kurdish identity actually provides an opportunity for the current Turkish government who –unlike the previous ones- has a distinguished way of tackling the matter and is determined to put an ultimate end to the Kurdish question.

Similar to other nation states, Turkish Republic followed the policy of attempting to have a unified and homogenous society without any notable ethnic, religious, cultural diversions. Therefore, ethnic minorities have long been target of Turkish Republic.⁶⁰ Kurds, who constituted the large minority group, although they are not officially recognized as minority, have suffered from state pressure and official assimilation policies aiming to eradicate Kurdish language and culture.⁶¹ The pressure aimed to redraw a large ethnic based community caused to armed crash which paved the way of outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). However, the public perception to Kurds and Kurdish question has changed as a result of global and domestic transformations in Turkish politics. As it is underlined above, advance telecommunication technologies and ongoing globalization process compounded with Turkey's democratization and EU membership process; has accompanied by a proliferation of ideas regarding the national security. It should be also added that the arrest of Abdullah Öcalan has also a moderating impact on hard-line politics concerning PKK and

⁶⁰ Mustafa Akyol, "Kürt Sorununu Yeniden Düşünmek", Doğan Kitap, p.265.

⁶¹ Hasan Cemal, "Kürtler", Doğan Kitap, p.170.

Kurdish question.⁶² As a result ‘talking and acting about the security’ have been pulled out of military’s monopoly.

The proponents of the idea that the PKK is an outcome of a set of non-democratic and discriminative policies have increased and this argument gained ground among the public especially after 2000. As a sign of differentiation from previous governments in tackling with the Kurdish question, Prime Minister Erdoğan reaffirmed that the Kurdish question could not be solved only by military means. During a visit to Diyarbakır, in August 2005 he said, “A great and powerful nation must have the confidence to face itself, recognize the mistakes and sins of its past and march confidently into the future... ready to consult anyone... Turkey will not retreat from the point we have reached. We will not step back from our process of democratization.”⁶³

It may be safely concluded that, the AK Party government has pursued double track diplomacy for a sustainable resolution to Kurdish question. On the one hand, it gears up democratic reforms which give Kurds more freedom and on the other, intensifies relations with the Iraqi Kurdish authority with the aim of taking their support against PKK.

Civilian attempts for a resolution to Turkey’s Kurdish question and the fundamental altering in Turkey’s KRG policy would not have been possible without significant progress of a pro-democracy and anti-establishment movement in the domestic institutional context. The consequence is the formation and success of AK Party who after a few years has taken the initiative of launching diplomatic ties with the KRG and ‘Kurdish Opening’ in a concerted manner. Although there have not been concrete steps since its announcement; the government’s initiative to find a comprehensive resolution to the problem itself has proven to the fact that the market of ideas about Turkey’s national security has been diversified. The participation of several academicians, journalists and political scientists were invited to the first meeting of ‘Kurdish Opening’ which aimed to draw a road map for the initiative is significant in this regard. Despite some security experts in the meeting what was astonishing is there was no one from Turkish army.

⁶² Kemal Kirişçi “The Kurdish Question and Turkish Foreign Policy” in D. Kerides and L. Martin (eds.) *The Future of Turkish Foreign Policy*, M.I.T Press, Cambridge, 2004, pp. 274-75.

⁶³ David L. Phillips, “Disarming, Demobilizing and Reintegration of Kurdistan Worker’s Party”, National Committee on American Foreign Policy, October 15 2007, p. 22.

AK Party has taken watershed steps in order to enlarge democratic freedoms. Moreover, it has taken some significant initiatives to provide more rights to Kurdish citizens. Before the announcement of ‘Kurdish Opening’, in January 2009, the state owned television channel Turkish Radio Television (TRT) opened one television and one radio station for Kurdish broadcasting which has generally been welcomed by Kurds. One further step in November, a new law passed to allow privately owned televisions and radio stations to broadcast in languages other than Turkish. Later, the Parliament passed another law permitted election campaigns to be carried out in non-Turkish languages. This permits to open departments in universities for teaching Kurdish and Zazaki languages and provides them the opportunity of making research on these languages’ literature.⁶⁴ Moreover, after the initiative it became possible for Kurdish prisoners to speak their mother language in the jail with their visitors.

Yet, it was not only the AK Party who thinks Turkish military do not need to take the whole responsibility in struggling against terrorism. Particularly in Kurdish issue and fighting against the PKK, key actors within the Turkish military have come to the point that a strategy solely on violence is not helpful to tackle the PKK and resolve Kurdish question. For instance, former chief of general staff İlker Başbuğ, who was known as a hard-line general, articulated an open message on Kurdish identity in a wide-ranging speech he gave in April 2009. “Those who formed the Turkish republic are the people of Turkey,” stated he, and added that it has nothing wrong to have a sub or secondary identity.⁶⁵ Moreover, he accepted that these secondary identities may be constitutionally recognized. For the first time in the last thirty years, a high-ranking military official in Turkey referred to Kurdish citizens in a comprising manner and made a clear distinguish between PKK militants and ordinary citizens having Kurdish ethnicity. In addition to Başbuğ’s personal assessments, Turkey’s main civil-military coordinating body, the National Security Council (MGK) in which top generals attended, endorsed government’s program on the Kurdish issue and encouraged it to continue. This was commented by Barkey as “the clearest possible endorsement of the policy that civilians could get from the Turkish military.”⁶⁶ It should be underlined that these changes do not necessarily mean a policy shift, however, the fundamental change in the discourse clear the way of civilian government to take bolder steps. Besides, it is also an outcome of the change in

⁶⁴ “Kurdish languages to be offered at Tunceli University” <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=kurdish-languages-to-be-opened-in-tunceli--university>, February 28, 2010.

⁶⁵ See www.tsk.mil.tr/10_ARSIV/10_1_Basin_Yayin access date: March 24, 2011

Faaliyetleri/10_1_7_Konusmalar/2009/org_ilkerBasbuğ_harpak_konusma_14042009.html, April 14, 2009

⁶⁶ Barkey, Ibid, p.11.

civilian-military relations in favor of civilians. Nonetheless, the military is perceived to be essential in Turkey's fight against PKK. Given the view that there are two camps in Turkey when it comes to Kurdish question having opposing ideas⁶⁷, it can be safely maintained that the common goal they have is to prevent the emergence of an independent Kurdish state in the region. Yet, the methods they pursue differ fundamentally. As Taşpınar named it⁶⁸, the nationalist-Kemalist position is strictly against any dialog with Kurdish authorities, but on the other hand the AK Party holds a pragmatic and flexible attitude without any ethnic discrimination and improves relations with Kurdish entity in Northern Iraq. Yet as far as Turkey's cross-border operations concerned, Turkish traditional security elites and those liberals advocating integrationist policies share the same opinion to fight PKK despite it would disturb Kurdish authority and draw their ire. This consensus between two competing stances seems to provide the military the opportunity to keep its primary position in the relations with the Kurds.

2.3. Security Dimension

2. 3. 1. The problematic border and its reflections on Turkish Iraqi relations

The relations between Turkey and Iraq could be truly described as the one dominated by security considerations. The national border dividing two countries has been a source of threat because of its inconsistencies with natural geographic boundaries, ethnic and cultural divergences. Mountainous character of Turkish southeastern province and Northern Iraq has complicated the efforts to provide a full control of the border for decades. Bordering provinces of Turkey and Iraq have overwhelming Kurdish populations and there have been intense cultural ties between them despite some linguistic differences stemming from use of different Kurdish dialects.⁶⁹ From the very formation of Turkish Republic, Iraqi border have constituted a strategic part of Ankara's foreign policy agenda largely because of the British drawn border's characteristics of not being in concert with geopolitical realities and requirements. As a result of this insecure situation, smuggling activities has continued and

⁶⁷ In "Turkey's Northern Iraq Policy: Competing Perspectives" Tarık Oğuzlu categorized the different views in engaging with Iraqi Kurds. On the one side there is 'liberal integrationists' who advocate them more engagement with the KRG is for Turkey's interests and on the other there are 'realist exclusivist' who think Turkey should marginalize and isolate the KRG.

⁶⁸ Taşpınar, Ibid. p.5.

⁶⁹ There are four different Kurdish dialects and their subgroups. Kurds living in Iraq, Syria Turkey and Iran have fundamental linguistic differences and Kurds in a particular country cannot share the common dialect. For instance, two main Kurdish groups- Zazas and Kirmanchis- in Turkey using different dialects even find hardships to understand each other.

become one of the main sources of income for the region. For preventing illegal actions, Turkey and Iraq signed an agreement in 1926 for the return of criminals to other country once they were captured on the other side of the border. In 1946 this agreement extended to cooperate in intelligence sharing. Oil smuggling which has continued to a larger extent to the current time on the border pushed Turkey to mobilize security units there and build patrols to put an end to illegal and untaxed oil to enter the country.

More threatening than smugglers, problematic border could be counted as one of the major factors curbing Turkey's ability to effectively counter against terrorist attacks since militants could easily find roads to escape and cross the other side of the border due to the geographical obstacle hardening to control the area. In February 1983, Ankara and Baghdad signed a Frontier Security and Cooperation Agreement and on 15 October 1984 a Security Protocol. With these diplomatic moves both countries agreed to allow Turkish troops to go into Iraq border 5 kilometers without any obligation to inform or get permission from Baghdad⁷⁰. Although the protocol granted the same right to Iraqi security forces, once Saddam regime did not hesitate to use chemical weapons against Kurds in 1988, Turkey unilaterally did not allow Iraqi troops to enter into Turkish territory to forestall further crackdown on Kurds. Subsequently, the protocol was not extended by Iraq despite Ankara's demand in this direction. Since then, Turkey has justified its cross-border operations with its right to self-defense in accordance with international law.⁷¹

Security priorities in Turkey's relations with Iraq has developed an adverse structural understanding which has undermined any effort to diversify economic and political links in addition to cement the cultural, ethnic and religious proximity between societies.

The balance in favor of security policies does not necessarily mean that Turkey has put immense efforts to achieve controlling the border and to expand its intelligence networks in Northern Iraq in a manner that anticipate further attacks. In contrast to generating long-term, well-prepared strategies, it could be fairly maintained that Ankara has intransigently adopted a responsive security attitude instead of a preemptive policy. Anti-terrorism strategy should not be based on occasional large-scale military operations but a set of plans struggling terrorism

⁷⁰ William Hale, "Turkey, the US and Iraq", London Middle East Institute, 2007, pp. 32-37.

⁷¹ For a chronological brief of Turkish operations into Iraq see: Ümit Özdağ, "Türk Ordusunun Kuzey Irak Operasyonları", Istanbul, 2008

before bloody assaults happen. In Northern Iraq, terrorist groups generally and PKK in particular have found receptive and appropriate environment in a multitude of platforms including media, academia, economy and politics to legitimize their activities and downgrade Turkey politically. Thus, not abandoning military measures, Turkey at the same time should set a more comprehensive policy in motion to prevent attacks. The history of Turkey's fight against terrorism provides numerous military operations against militants in Northern Iraq following provocative assaults in Turkey. For instance, the Kurdistan Worker's Party's (PKK) simultaneous raid to eight border outposts in Hakkari's Çukurca district in October 2011, killing 24 soldiers which triggered vigorous reaction against the terrorist organization both among public and high-ranking state officials, sparked Turkish army to amass on the border and conducted long lasting operations including cross-border ones.⁷² However, Turkey's passive stance against ethnic terrorism which could only be activated following brutal attacks is intolerably questionable. One logical explanation of this responsive approach seems to aim to alleviate public reaction and prevent it not to turn harsh criticisms directing military and the government. This policy culminated with Ankara's strong determination to continue to use its right under international law for self-defense by conducting cross-border operations to Iraq as long as Iraqi government is unable to exterminate terrorist enclaves in its territory.

2. 3. 2. PKK presence in Northern Iraq

From the very establishment of PKK, the organization has found a safe harbor in Northern Iraq. The lack of political authority in the region has become an opportunity for terrorist organization to carry out its activities freely. Starting in 1960's, Iraqi governments and Saddam regime had been unable to form state authority in the country's overwhelmingly Kurdish populated Northern areas. The Iran-Iraq war and Gulf-War, subsequent to Iraqi invasion to Kuwait in 1991 has reduced the possibility of a state authority, have left the region under control of two main Kurdish parties', Barzani led KDP and Talabani led PUK. Instability and absence of state authority worsened the situation for Turkey as the PKK increasingly found receptive environment for garnering support and a secure atmosphere to empower its military strength.⁷³ Taking advantage of international protection and Iraqi forces' withdrawal in October 1991, Kurdish groups extended their reach over most of the area of the

⁷² A detailed report about the cross-border operation into Iraq: "Türkiye'nin 26. Sınır ötesi Operasyonu" <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=1192922>, October 21, 2011

⁷³ For more detailed analysis on PKK's activities in Northern Iraq see, Aliza Marcus, "Blood and Belief: The PKK and Kurdish Fight for Independence" New York University Press, 2007

1974 Kurdish autonomous region⁷⁴. After their strengthening in Northern Iraq, Ankara embraced both of KDP and PUK, tried to forge alliance against PKK. Talabani and Barzani received Turkish diplomatic passports and opened representative offices in Ankara⁷⁵. However, Turkey's new alliance with the non-state actors depended heavily on conjuncture. The KDP and PUK seemed unapologetic to reverse its stance towards Turkey and PKK occasionally, especially following Turkish military operations. This political fluctuations and absence of adequate security forces enable PKK presence in Northern Iraq to flourish and diversify into many parts of life.

For years, PKK militants have infiltrated from Iraq to Turkey with the aim of conducting attacks to military outposts and safely returned to encampments in Northern Iraq. PKK can easily recruit new members among Iraqi Kurds and provide those military training and ideological indoctrination in the camps. Besides, the terrorist organization has had a considerable media network and used hospitals for treatments of wounded terrorists.

There are not certain figures showing exact number of PKK militants either they are in Turkey or abroad. But it is sure that PKK has achieved to have a wide range existence in Northern Iraq. The organization has not only military encampments there but it has also run hospitals and schools. Many PKK members inhabited as embedded into civil life and they have engaged several activities to expand PKK's influence in media and civil society.

The U.S State Department which lists Kongra-Gel (KGK)/PKK as a Foreign Terrorist Organization estimated that of 4,000-5,000 PKK militants about 3,000-3,500 are believed to be in the Kandil Mountains of Northern Iraq.⁷⁶ However, slightly different figures was released by Turkish Army suggesting there are between 2,800 and 3,000 PKK terrorists in Northern Iraq out of total 5,150 to 5,650.⁷⁷ A comprehensive report by International Strategic Research Organization (ISRO), about PKK's presence and activities in the region however, claims the

⁷⁴ Robert Olson, "The Kurdish question in the after math of the Gulf War: Geopolitical and geostrategic changes in the Middle East", Third World Quarterly, 1992

⁷⁵ Åsa Lundgren, "The Unwelcome Neighbor: Turkey's Kurdish Policy" New York, 2007, pp. 85-86.

⁷⁶ U.S State Department, Country Reports on Terrorism 2008, <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2007/> November 2008

⁷⁷ Press briefing by then Turkish Land Forces Commander General İlker Başbuğ, June 27, 2007

number of PKK militants differed from 3000 to 5000 and approximately 2000 militants resided in border villages along with 1500 ones within Turkish borders.⁷⁸

According to the ISRO report, PKK has controlled more than 20 encampments 10 of which were established after US invasion in 2003. Military training in addition to ideological indoctrination have given to PKK militants in these camps which expanded through various parts of Northern Iraq. It is noted that these encampments are not immovable instead, with the aim of protection from attacks; the militants are mobilized in a manner to facilitate escaping.⁷⁹ This strategy of having portable establishments contradicts with Turkish public's general assumption that PKK militants do not have large maneuver zone once air-strike or cross border operations are conducted. These kinds of misinformation have wrongly led a rise in criticisms towards Turkish state and in particular reduce the confidence on the army. Moreover, a considerable part of PKK militants do not inhabit in the camps founded mountains areas whereas they continue their activities as camouflaged in Kurdish villages so that they could not be differentiated by ordinary citizens.⁸⁰ As it is publicly known, the large set of PKK encampments are in Kandil Mountains which is located critically on the crossing of Turkish-Iraqi-Iranian borders. PKK camps in Kandil have served mostly for giving training to new member of the organization. ISRO report unveils that there are two large institutions in the mountains called Mahsum Korkmaz Military Academy and Haki Karer Ideological Education Academy.⁸¹ The camps which are protected by tightened security measures and heavy weapons like Dotchka antiaircraft systems, harbor also large stocks for ammunitions.

Another crucial note to point at is that the distance from Turkish border to Kandil Mountains is nearly 90 kilometers. Ironically the closest Turkish air base which is in Diyarbakır to the largest PKK encampments is 456 kilometers far from it. It is a legitimate question why Turkey, a country struggling against terrorism for decades, has not built a closer military base to the most threatening source of insecurity.

Moreover, PKK has involved several activities not only its camps in the mountains but also almost 30 villages surrounding the Kandil region. Considerable number of armed militants is

⁷⁸ International Strategic Research Organization, "Kuzey Irak Operasyonu Raporu", (ISRO's report on Northern Iraq Operation) June 13, 2007, Ankara

⁷⁹ ISRO report, p.11.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p.13.

⁸¹ Ibid, p.33.

living in these villages where PKK has run schools decorated with PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan's posters and its flags. In these schools education has been given in accordance with curriculums which are prepared by PKK. There are some hospitals where some European citizens are working voluntarily⁸² and the organization attempts to provide some public services such as creating farming opportunities and presenting theaters. As a sign of the extent which PKK's presence reaches, it has its own graveyards and orchards. Electricity is procured by generators and small sized powerhouses linked to two rivers named by PKK as Martyr Ayhan and Martyr Harun, probably two late senior PKK members⁸³. Foods are regularly provided from Raniya, a nearby village. In the way PKK organized the public life in the encampments and controlled villages demonstrates that it approaches these establishments as if they are a prototype of an idealized communal way of life. The inhabitants are consciously instructed that they are living a PKK run state, thus the ideological indoctrination is not given only in courses and conferences but also with the pre-determined practices of daily life. The terrorist organization has also taken an active role in KRG's media and civil society. ROJ TV is among popular TV channels broadcasting in Northern Iraq along with PKK's radio station which is very active in the region.

ISRO report on Northern Iraq includes some particular and detailed information about PKK encampments. According to the information which is said to be taken from Turkish military officials, 10 villages in the Northern Iraq have served as PKK bases. In Tang-i Shiwadiza, where there are food and fuel stores, political and ideological education is given to new members similar to the Camp of Kenicenge. Apart from encampments PKK is able to forge small-sized networks established in politically neutral villages. For instance, there are seven houses where military training are given in Bokrisan area just like village of Levje which hosts 30 PKK houses working for intelligence gathering. The Kurdistan Democratic Resolution Party, a PKK affiliated political party which could legally take part into provincial elections, is based in the village of Enze. The PKK units established in the villages of Zargali and Kurtak are responsible for ensuring public order and security and informing senior PKK members about suspicious people.⁸⁴

⁸²A German doctor, Medya Avyan (nickname), works at the hospital in Kandil Mountains. She has no Kurdish roots, but volunteered to help the Kurdish cause after learning of it from friends in the 1990s. This information acquired on November 8, 2011 from: <http://atwar.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/01/05/with-the-p-k-k-in-iraqs-qandil-mountains/>

⁸³ ISRO report, Ibid. p.34.

⁸⁴ ISRO report, Ibid. pp. 36-37.

2. 3. 3. Makhmur Refugee camp and Northern Iraq's importance for underground organizations

Another critical issue regarding Northern Iraq and Turkey from a security point of view is the Makhmur refugee camp, located between Mosul and Kirkuk. Established in 1998, the camp hosts nearly 12,000 refugees who fled their homeland due to the harsh clashes between Turkish army and PKK militants in the early 1990's. Ankara views the camp as a legitimized base for PKK to recruit new members and provides the organization a safe haven for their border raids. On the other hand, the camp's leadership claims that they no longer support PKK violence and says they want to return to Turkey.⁸⁵ After a search in the camp conducted by US and Iraqi forces in 2007, a cache of mortar rounds was found whereas there were no guns or other weapons. Barzan Sayeed Kaka, Iraqi Kurd mayor of the camp, refused Turkish claims by saying "Makhmur is not a terrorist camp, but a perfectly normally refugee camp, which is supervised by the United Nations."⁸⁶ The refugees constitute an important problem for an ultimate resolution to Kurdish problem in Turkey. Yet, Ankara's efforts to close down the camp have not concluded mainly because of the absence of any authority in the region and uncertainties clouding over the future of refugees once they would decide to come back to their homeland. An alternative solution might be granting Iraqi citizenship to the Kurdish refugees since a remarkable part of them possibly refuse to return Turkey due to security concerns and lack of confidence on Turkish state. However, Iraqi authority does not seem to be eager to provide citizenships instead they want the refugees to return to avoid jeopardizing new rapprochement with Turkey.

Apart from PKK facilities, the political instability in Northern Iraq has also created other security complications for Turkey. Striving for upgrading its democratic standards, enlarging freedoms and guaranteeing rule of law, Turkey has encountered various challenges coming from underground organizations having links to state bureaucracy, military and economy. Northern Iraq has served these groups as a safe haven where they can freely contemplate assassination plans and other illegal actions without any intervention. The lack of sufficient state authority enables these underground units to perform money transfer and arm smuggling free from any legal restrictions. Taking Turkish intelligent services and military members'

⁸⁵ Hermione Gee, "Forgotten Refugees in Northern Iraq", 27 May, 2007, available at <http://www.rnw.nl/english/article/forgotten-refugees-northern-iraq>

⁸⁶ Daniel Steinworth, "Peace Process raises hope of end to Kurdish Conflict", August 19, 2009, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,643611,00.html>

existence in Northern Iraq into consideration, an appropriate environment for illegal mobilization has emerged, a disadvantageous situation for Turkey's perennial drive for democratization.⁸⁷

As an example, in 2006, an underground network called 'Atabeyler' which had illegal ties with state bureaucracy, government and army, was revealed by Turkish police and alleged that its members were planning to carry out assassinations to pro-government figures. The related part of the story is that after police raids into bases of the gang numerous notes having seals of Iraq Regional Government's Zaho District Administration and some other documents titled Iraqi Turkmen Front were found which raised suspicions over a probable link to Turkish security forces based in Northern Iraq.⁸⁸

For a more striking case to the extent which Northern Iraq turned to a platform where underground organizations operate without any legal constraints is the alleged link between PKK and Ergenekon, an illegal network alleged to plot a military intervention to overthrow the AK Party government. Some reports suggest that a group of senior PKK militants had regular meetings with some "Ergenekon members" in Northern Iraq. They reportedly gathered two times in 2010 April and May to discuss the plans of provocative "illegal activities" with the aim of paralyzing national election process.⁸⁹ The meetings occurred in The Zorgali Camp a PKK base near Kandil Mountains and in Northern Iraq's Zap province. Participants agreed on facilitating PKK members' infiltrating into Turkey and providing them logistic assistance to reach western provinces to provoke violent protests. However, this alleged connection was seen a part of AK Party's election campaign. As a reaction to this reports, Cengiz Çandar expressed his criticisms to the report and claimed this might be a disinformation operation by intelligent services prior to national election, in parallel to Prime Minister Erdoğan's discourse which presents PKK, The Republican People's Party(CHP), main opposition party, the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), pro-Kurdish party and

⁸⁷ Following a US brokered ceasefire between KDP and PUK in 1998, Turkey deployed a small contingent of troops into Northern Iraq aiming to monitor the ceasefire, yet covering the main purpose which is to gather intelligence against PKK and Kurdish political ambitions. It is assumed that there is still a residual Turkish force of about 2,000 at three locations in Dohuk.

⁸⁸ Lale Sarıbrahimoğlu, "Atabeyler Çetesinde Kuzey Irak Bağlantısı", February 6, 2006, Bugün Daily, available at: <http://www.habervitrini.com/haber.asp?id=223437>

⁸⁹ Sabah Daily, May 24, 2011

Erdoğan's main rival in Kurdish populated south-eastern province and Ergenekon, in serving for the same purpose to downgrade his opponents.⁹⁰

2. 3. 4. KRG's changing attitude against PKK

Apart from the absence of strong political authority in Northern Iraq, one of the main factors leading PKK's empowerment in the region is the support given by the KDP and the PUK. For an ideological closeness, having leftist ideals, the PUK and the PKK have not had very strong confrontation with the exception of the PUK's occasional alliance with Turkey against the PKK.

On the other hand, despite conjectural cooperation with Turkey, the KDP and its leader Mesud Barzani supported the PKK in many ways. It could be maintained that Barzani allowed Northern Iraq to be partially transformed into a safe harbor for terrorists benefiting the area's logistic advantages. When Barzani became the president of Kurdistan Regional Government he continued to shield PKK militants and did not hesitate to challenge with Turkey who pressured for ending assistance to PKK. KRG has been long subject to harsh accusations from Turkish officials of furnishing passports to PKK members for whom Ankara issued arrest warrants. Another Turkish complaint stems from Barzani's indifferent stance to six PKK bases operating in the territory controlled by his party. Besides, it is argued that the KRG and the KDP ignored as the PKK favored arms smuggling and acquired weapons and ammunition from illegal ways. Micheal Rubin's analogy is enlightening in this regard:

“Just as weapons supplied by the Clinton administration to Palestinian security forces ended up in the hands of terrorists, so too have arms supplied by the U.S. government to Kurdish fighters, the peshmerga, found their way into PKK hands.”⁹¹

Rubin goes further to claim that Barzani does not imply any restriction on PKK militants to travel within Northern Iraq and allow PKK leaders to receive treatments in the region's hospitals. Moreover, the Kurdish leader refused to stop weapons trafficking and did not let Iraqi security forces to intervene the border. Majority of PKK members are wearing peshmerga uniform which hardens to distinguish them with each other. There are also claims

⁹⁰ Cengiz Çandar, “PKK=Ergenekon, Doğru mu bu?”, May 25, 2011, Radikal

⁹¹ Michael Rubin, “Enabling Kurdish Illusions” Weekly Standards, March 19, 2007, available at <http://www.meforum.org/1670/enabling-kurdish-illusions>

that a remarkable part of PKK members who choose a normal life joined peshmerga forces of Barzani led KDP.⁹²

From 2007 on, however, the KRG has pursued a reversed strategy toward the PKK and Turkey. Developing relations with KRG has been accompanied by a considerably more cooperative attitude standing alongside with Turkey. Diversifying the areas in which Turkey-KRG relations cooperate and the relations become more de-securitized, public reaction from Iraqi Kurds against Ankara have remarkably reduced. Formerly, Turkish air-strikes and cross-border operations was exploited by Kurdish leaders in their efforts to demonstrate Turkey as the common enemy of Kurds. Reversely, enlarging economic dependency on Turkey, KRG leaders do not seem to be assertive while commenting on Ankara's Northern Iraq policy.

For instance president of Kurdish autonomous region Barzani spoke in a threatening manner in 2007 by saying:

“Turkey has no right to intervene into Kirkuk's domestic affairs. Once Ankara intervenes to Kirkuk, this will automatically provide us the right of intervention to Diyarbakır and other Kurdish cities in Turkey. 30 million Kurds are living in Turkey. We do not meddle to them. If Turkey interferes to Kirkuk for protecting a few thousands Turkmen we will take action for the name of Kurds in Turkey.”⁹³

Cooperation with the KRG has had a positive impact on changing Iraqi Kurds' protective stance on Turkish Kurds. Barzani's stance has transformed to a more compromising point. In an interview for a Turkish daily in 2009, Mesut Barzani underlined non-violent methods for tackling Kurdish question in Turkey and advised Kurds to live in harmony with Turks⁹⁴. He later clearly opposes PKK terrorism and cooperates with Ankara in its struggle against ethnic separatism. As a result of dependence on Turkey mostly in economic terms and American pressure on Kurdish leadership; Iraqi Kurds toned down their criticisms of Turkey's cross-border operations and air strikes.

⁹² ISRO report Ibid. p. 36.

⁹³ Barzani's interview with Al Arabiyya TV, April 18, 2007,

⁹⁴ “Barzani: Kürtler Uzlaşısı İçinde

Yaşamalı”http://www.sabah.com.tr/Gundem/2009/08/02/kurtler_uzlasi_icinde_yasamali, August 2, 2009

Former unattainable goals have been achieved through more pressure on the KRG's dominant political groups which have started to impose weight on PKK to some extent. Unlike the pre-2007 period, Mesud Barzani appears to be the closest ally of Turkey in its fight against PKK and started to condemn PKK attacks as opposed to past when he remained in silence.⁹⁵ Barzani and other senior KRG officials, who regarded Turkish incursions to Northern Iraq as a major threat for their political sovereignty, changed their stance and publicly cooperate with Ankara. The KDP officials closely negotiated with their Turkish counterparts on Turkey's military operations. Moreover, the KRG; though slowly, started to take some steps in order to root the PKK out of its area. For instance, the Kurdish administration decided to shut down the Kurdistan Democratic Resolution Party, the PKK's political fraction in Northern Iraq, in 2007.⁹⁶ Furthermore, the most concrete step from Iraqi Kurds is the decision to evacuate villages near PKK bases in Northern Iraq.⁹⁷ As those examples offer, the KRG has come to recognize that the PKK military existence and terrorist attacks provide Turkey to conduct military operations to Northern Iraq and legitimize them. When the PKK would be destroyed there will be no reason for Turkey's military operations which politically destabilize Northern Iraq and create disruption among Iraqi Kurds.

Turkey's deepening and steadily de-securitized relations with the KRG which have created an economic interdependence and empowerment of Turkey's hand in political bargain, have also helped Turkey to make an unequivocal distinction between ongoing disputes in Iraqi relations and PKK terrorism. There are abundant of cases in which PKK's increasing attacks have been utilized as a secondary tool to create pressure on Turkey to bring Ankara to a certain point for some political concessions regarding Iraqi politics. As a successful example of coherent implication of soft power and military power, Turkey was able to manage the crisis in 2007 once increase in PKK attacks coincided with overheated debate on Kirkuk. Commenting on the subject Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, then the chief foreign policy adviser to prime minister states:

⁹⁵ For one of several examples that KRG administration and Mesud Barzani personally condemned PKK attacks see: <http://kurdistantribune.com/2011/kg-says-pkk-attack-will-not-serve-cause/>

⁹⁶ "The Offices of Kurdistan Democratic Resolution Party are closed", <http://bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/102685-kurdistan-demokratik-cozum-partisinin-ofisleri-kapatiliyor>, accessed on October 22, 2011

⁹⁷ "KRG starts evacuating villages near PKK camps" accessed on October 22, 2011 at [http://www.kurdpress.com/En/NSite/FullStory/News/?Id=268#Title=KRG starts evacuating villages near PKK bases](http://www.kurdpress.com/En/NSite/FullStory/News/?Id=268#Title=KRG%20starts%20evacuating%20villages%20near%20PKK%20bases)

“As a matter of fact, the ascendance of violence during 2006-2007 and its prolongation until October 2007 had a pretty clear target: Kirkuk’s rise to the agenda. The apparent plan was to set Turkey initially against the communities in Northern Iraq, and then against the Iraqi government, and finally against the Arab World and America, thus ensuring Turkey’s isolation. Turkey’s ensuing diplomacy to counter this scheme has been the following. On the one hand, Turkey legitimized hard power through parliamentary resolution. On the other hand, Turkey hosted almost all of the regional leaders between September and December, following the presidential nomination. When the resolution was approved in parliament, the Syrian President visited Turkey and gave his full support to Turkey’s possible operations against the PKK. Following the approval, Turkey engaged in intensive contacts with the Palestinian, Israeli, Jordanian and Saudi Arabian heads of state, and their supports were secured.”⁹⁸

⁹⁸Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Turkey’s Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007”, *Insight Turkey* Vol.10 No.1 2008, pp.86-87.

Chapter 3. Regional and International Aspects of Turkey-KRG Relations

As Turkey and the KRG have intensified their ties since 2007, this development cannot be interpreted in isolation from regional and international implications. In this chapter, the regional repercussions of Turkish-KRG relations are analyzed from the perspective of Turkish Iranian rivalry and Washington's Iraq policy with a special emphasis on Kurds' position after the withdrawal of American troops. Turkey and Iran have historically had conflicting interests about region and aspired to acquire regional leadership. This contest has impacts on their relations with Iraq and the KRG. Due to the strategic role of Iraq in the Middle Eastern power balance, the more influence either Turkey or Iran have on Iraq would help them to nullify the other in regional level. The historical rivalry on Iraq seems to accelerate with US withdrawal as the war-torn country is expected to face power vacuum and security insufficiency. Taking the Iran-Turkey rivalry and US withdrawal into account, the KRG has an important role to determine the delicate equilibrium in Iraq and broadly in the region. Kurdish leadership has increasing effect on Iraqi national politics and thus their relations with Iran and Turkey have a determining impinge on Iraqi foreign relations. One more aspect of this international political balance is of course the dispute between Iran and US. While pulling its troops out of Iraq, the Washington administration does not want Iran to fill the power gap in Iraq. Therefore, a reliable Turkish-Kurdish alliance and its continuity are perfectly in parallel with US interests.

3. 1. The place of KRG in competition with Iran for regional leadership

It can be safely argued that the traditional rivalry between Iran and Turkey has recently centered on expanding their sphere of influence in Iraq by shaping the post-withdrawal political balances. As Turkey's increasing engagement in the region has pushed Tehran to work for counterbalancing Ankara in a wide range of platforms, Iraq surely constitutes the most tensional point of competition¹. Given the pre-dominantly Shiite country's predicted inclinations toward Iranian regime, the Kurds most of whom is conservative Sunni turns into natural ally for Turkey. However, Iraqi Kurds' possible attempt for independence is perceived as a major threat both for Iran and Turkey. Thus, the struggle over Iraq transforms to a source of cooperation when it comes to Kurdish independence and specifically the Kurdish ethnic

¹ Sean Kane, "The Coming Turkish-Iranian Competition in Iraq" United States Institute of Peace, Special Report 276, June 2011, p.3.

separatist organizations, namely PKK and the Free Life Party of Kurdistan (PJAK) which carry terrorist operations in Turkey and Iran respectively.

3. 1. 1. Iranian Influence and Activities in Iraq and KRG

Iranian policy toward Iraq undergoes swift changes after US invasion and fall of Saddam Hussein. By toppling down Saddam regime, US did not only destroy a threat for its security interests, but also assisted Iranian regional ambitions. Having been in serious hostility and strategic competition, Saddam's Iraq served as a counterbalance against Iran which has sought to take the lead of Muslim nations, a goal shared also by Saddam who put special emphasis on pan-Arabism and Islamic elements. On the other hand, after the invasion, Iran is supposed to be concerned with his new practical neighbor, US who has tensional relations with Tehran since 1979.

Iraq's majority Shiite population (roughly %60 of its population) has been regarded by Tehran administration as a potential strategic asset and a democratic process reflecting majority's political preferences ensures Iraq to be a potential Shiite ally. Strangely enough, although Tehran and Washington have been in tense relations and escalating confrontation due to Iranian nuclear program, these conflicting parties have adopted same attitudes and had similar overall goals when it comes to Iraqi democratization.

This demographic situation virtually guarantees Shiite dominance on Iraqi politics when a representative democratic system can be established even it has not well-functioning components. In this sense, Iran's purpose has not contradicted with US goal in Iraq; thereby Tehran administration puts serious efforts for a unified Shiite bloc and provided backing to Shiite Islamic factions in Iraq. As a result, the elections in December 2005 concluded with an undisputed victory of Iraqi Shiites. United Iraqi Alliance composed of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), the Da'wa Party and followers of Shiite cleric Muqtada al Sadr won 128 of the 275 seats in the parliament. In addition the leader of Da'wa Party Nuri el Maliki was selected as prime minister and several senior Shiite figures in the coalition were appointed to strategic ministerial positions. However, differing interests between Shiite groups in Iraq and their conflicting political interests challenge with Iranian ambition for leverage politics in Iraq.

Tehran's influence on important Iraqi politicians, who are not surprisingly Shiite, has resulted from Iranian hosting of them when they were expelled from their own country. For instance, ISCI's leader Ayatollah Mohammad Baqr Al Hakim, who was assassinated in August 2003 in Najaf and many others, spent their exile years in Iran. During this period Iraqi dissidents established strong ties with Iranian politicians and were given certain financial and material support for their opposition campaign against Saddam regime. Moreover, ISCI's armed branch 'Badr Brigades' was recruited, trained and by Iran's Revolutionary Guard. In return, Iraqi Shiite militias attacked Baath Party officials based in southern Iraq during Iran-Iraq war.²

In contrast to ISCI senior figures, it is difficult to maintain that Sadr family's relation with Iran is as strong as those of ISCI. The reason lies again behind the place where the family spent their hard times during Saddam era. Despite most of the family members were hung by Saddam, they chose to stay in Iraq, did not follow the same path with other influential Shiite political groups and religious leaders. Yet, this does not mean Sadr faction has no political ties with Iran. Historically, Mohammad Baqr al Sadr, Moqtada's cousin, was a political ally of Ayatollah Khomeini once he escaped from Shah's pressure from Iran to Najaf. This alliance seems to be empowered after US invasion of Iraq. Sadr's armed group called Mahdi Army conducted several attacks to American forces as a part of their challenge against the invasion, despite US forces have made them to suffer in many times. US officials in Iraq reiterate their claims that Mahdi Army enjoyed considerable Iranian support in many areas. They usually presented reliable evidences for their arguments and accused Iran of being behind of many attacks against US forces in Iraq.³

In April 2008, Iraqi army was sent against Mahdi Army in Basra by Shiite Prime Minister Maliki and cleared Sadr militias with a determined support from American and British forces. After growing pressure both militarily and politically, Sadr was weakened and applied a fundamental policy change, advising his followers to abandon violence and follow peaceful means to eradicate US presence in Iraq. As a result of fray with Maliki, Iraqi prime minister

² Kenneth Katzman, "Iran's Activities and Influence in Iraq", Congressional Research Service, June 4 2009, p.1

³ For some instances: In August 2007, Gen. Raymond Odierno, then the second in command, said that Iran had supplied the Shiite militias with 122 millimeter mortars that are used to fire on the Green Zone in Baghdad. On July 2, 2007, Brig. Gen. Kevin Begner said that Lebanese Hezbollah was assisting the Qods Force in aiding Iraqi Shiite militias, adding that Iran gives about \$3 million per month to these Iraqi militias. He based the statement on the March 2007 capture of former Sadr aide Qais Khazali and Lebanese Hezbollah operative Ali Musa Daquduq. They were allegedly involved in the January 2007 killing of five U.S. forces in Karbala.

ousted five Sadrist ministers from cabinet in 2008. In December, US Lt. Gen. Thomas Metz said that there was a marked decline in the number of explosive devices coming into Iraq from Iran.⁴ But these developments did not end Iranian backing to Sadr. Moqtada al Sadr was believed to stay in Iran and more significantly Tehran also slightly shifted its policy toward the militia groups. According to US official sources, Iran continues to support Sadr's religious studies in Iranian city of Qom and changed its support in military terms: "Tehran has selectively reduced the number of militants it supports. However, Tehran has also simultaneously improved the training and weapons systems received by the proxy militants."⁵

The 2008 military operation against Sadr has concluded with several political outcomes which have particular reflections on balances between international actors in Iraq. Firstly, the break in Shiite front has unleashed the fact that Iraqi Shiite groups should not be treated as if they are no internal divergences. Moreover, Maliki tightened his grip on the country which triggered concerns that he is unquestionably favor of loose federalism. Despite Kurdish support to Maliki's offensive, they recognize Maliki's intention on concentration of power in Baghdad which contains the risk of losing some gains in terms of federalism. Internationally, Iran recognized that Maliki government and other Shiite groups- like ISCI who supported Maliki against Sadr- are not under complete control of Tehran and they could act in accordance with their own political interests.

Maliki, once received marked political and financial support from Iran, now seems to be strong proponent of centralization and Iraqi nationalism embedded in Pan-Arabism. His achievement not in the elections but in coalition negotiations with the victorious al Iraqiya list brought Maliki again to premiership in 2010. Although it is apparent that Iran prefers a Shiite at the office, Maliki would be the last of them. Drawing on the issue, on the rise of Iraqi nationalism related to victorious Maliki's discourse, the 2009 report of Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq⁶ states that 'Iraqi nationalism may act as a check on Iran's ambitions.' Thus, political significance of Kurds is expected to rise in the eyes of Tehran since further divisions among Shiites and Maliki's empowerment would oblige them to seek alliance with non-Shiite factions and most probably with Kurds.

⁴ Barnes, Julian. "U.S. Says Drop in Iraq Deaths Tied to Iranian Arms Cutback." Los Angeles Times, December 12, 2008

⁵ The Defense Department's "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq" report, published March 2009, p.6.

⁶ Ibid. p.5.

Attaching greater importance to Iraqi Shiites since the invasion, Iran was surpassed by Turkey in establishing ties with Iraqi Kurds. However, growing Kurdish appetite to attract foreign investment to their region and Iranian fear of isolation in addition to their needs for proliferation of alliance create the appropriate environment for Iranian KRG relations to boost.

Diplomatic relations have intensified bilaterally and many high-ranking officials from both sides paid visit to Tehran and Erbil. They always underlined the need for further cooperation and larger trade relations. As a result of deepening ties, in 2005 Iraq and Iran agreed to open Iranian consulates in Erbil and Suleymaniye along with Basra and Karbala. As a sign of prestige given by Iranian side, KRG president Barzani was generally invited to Iran by not the president but the top cleric of the Islamic Republic Ayatollah Khamanei.

Aside from improving diplomatic relations, there are also some clear evidences that Iran has extended its relations with armed groups to Northern Iraq. According to US reports, a total of 20 Iranian citizens alleged to be members of Quds Forces, a militia group operating in Iraq and having ties with Iran, were arrested in Erbil in 2006 and early 2007⁷. It is unusual for Iraqi security forces to arrest Iranian citizens in Northern Iraq as opposed to southern provinces. This may be a sign showing Iranian ambition to expand its influence towards north.⁸

Encountering serious internal and external pressures, Iraqi Kurds have acted strategically and tried to strengthen relations with Iran and Turkey in a well-balanced manner. At the same time KRG administration carefully avoids to creating discomfort for both countries accepting their sensibilities for an independent Kurdish state. For these reasons, Barzani abandoned his inflammatory language toward Iran and Turkey especially when they conduct cross-border military operations into Northern Iraq. Moreover, this sensitive balance has determined Kurdish choice in internal political stances at the cost of severe accusations from their own local Kurds to make Iraqi interests prior to those of KRG's. But still, for the purpose of thwarting any deterioration with Iran, Barzani led Kurdistani list accepted to support Maliki

⁷ Katzman p.5.

⁸ There are numerous reports alleging Iranian ties with Kurdish Islamic groups in Northern Iraq. Many observers claim Iranian role in supporting such a group Ansar al Islam. See "The Hidden Hand of Iran in the Resurgence of Ansar al-Islam" Terrorism Monitor Volume: 5, Issue:11, June 7, 2007

which put an end to political abyss in the aftermath of 2010 national elections. However, the growing centralization tendency of Maliki government could potentially rouse tension with the country's only autonomous region and lead a break on the fragile Kurdish support to Shiite prime minister. In the eve of American withdrawal, the last development Iran wish to see is the breakup of Iraqi government and launch of hard negotiations to compromise on a new one. Therefore, Iran sees Kurds as the guarantor for Maliki government, indeed prevention of a Sunni government and attaches growing value to relations with the KRG.

Another complex issue related to Iranian Kurdish relations is the ongoing conflict over Kirkuk between Iraqi central government and the KRG. Sharing Turkish concerns over KRG's incorporation to oil-rich province of Kirkuk would fuel Kurdish aspirations for independence; Iran has pushed Iraqi governments to stall the referendum process for an ultimate settlement in Kirkuk simply because it believes the referendum would likely to conclude with a result in parallel with Kurdish intentions. On the other hand, there is increasing pressure from Kurdish nationalists on KRG to reinitiate the process and accomplish Kirkuk's incorporation.⁹

On ideological bases, KRG and Iran has fundamentally different points of view on state identity and the place of religious implications in daily life. The secularist character of KRG is far away from Iranian *mullah* regime and does not seem to be transformed easily into a religiously defined system due to the strong public support to the KRG's secular character despite Kirmanchi speaking Kurd's conservative identity.¹⁰ During the preparations of Iraqi constitution, Kurds strongly resisted against Shiite's attempts to add religious and sectarian affiliated articles to the document. Although this resistance was an outcome of their Sunni character, still Kurds' insistence on secularism is considered as essential for preventing a potential sectarian civil war to spill over toward the most stable part of Iraq.

Iranian KRG relations have also an international aspect which makes Iraqi Kurdistan a strategic player in regional balance. With unfolding mass movements engulfing the entire Middle East would by no means effect Iranian-KRG relations. The KRG stands also on the center of very delicate balance in terms of regional power politics as pro-democracy uprisings

⁹ For instance Shorsh Haji, a UK-based Kurdish writer, reflected broad elite discontent by saying that if the Kurds lose Kirkuk, the leadership should be held responsible, and that if it fails in joining Kirkuk to the Kurdistan region, the people should stop voting for their leaders in elections and never again fall for their promises. Hawlati (independent weekly), August 9, 2008.

¹⁰Barkey, p.5.

spread over the region. While anti-regime demonstrations in Syria has raged, Iraqi Kurds' preference whether to side along with Asad regime or join the camp of proponents claiming a regime transformation in Syria has strategic importance. Amidst the mass demonstrations, Barzani received an official invitation from Syrian President Bashar Asad but decisively rejected it. Besides, most of senior KRG officials strictly condemned the killing of a Syrian Kurdish activist, Micheal Taamo in the Kurdish town near Turkish border, Kamışlı.¹¹ Given the KRG's serious influence on Syrian Kurds, Kurdish administration's open position against Asad regime creates disturbances in Tehran which backs Asad family to survive due to sectarian ties. Syria's strategic importance for Iranian regional ambitions would enable Iraqi Kurds to have a more attractive position in the eyes of Tehran. Thus, in the further phases of mass demonstration in the Middle East, the KRG and personally Mesut Barzani would have a more significant role in regional politics and particularly in Iran-Turkey rivalry. Furthermore, one can argue that in the case of a similar uprising in Iran, the Iranian Kurdish minority would be also vulnerable to be effected by Erbil. Taking the Sunni and religiously conservative character of Kirmanchi Kurds and Barzani family, it is predictable that they are not likely to stand with Shiite Iran. In such a possibility, Iran makes efforts to thwart the KRG to use its leverage over other Kurdish minorities. Since Kurdish participation into the opposition movements in Syria and in a potential one in Iran will be detrimental for the survival of regimes, the more dependency of the KRG on Iran would restrain the first to act hesitantly to instrumentalize Kurdish minorities as a pressuring policy component and have a larger regional role. Second strategic element what signifies Iraqi Kurds for Iran is the KRG's location between Syria and Iran. A possible Iranian military support to Syria would make the region crucial for Tehran administration to deliver ammunition and weapons to Damascus, a regime struggling to stand up again by suppressing opposition movements. In this hypothetical scenario for post-Assad era, the establishment of the KRG-like autonomous Kurdish region in Syria does not seem to be impossible for some analysts who think such a development remarkably consolidate the status of the KRG and soar Turkish and Iranian concerns to face a unified Kurdistan.¹²

From an economic point of view, trade relations between Iran and Iraq have increased remarkably after the fall of Saddam Hussein. As of the beginning of 2009 the total trade

¹¹ "Critical Tehran Visit" <http://www.kurdishglobe.net/display-article.html?id=08AF8E3E31E07B3F3234FE971B11BF1C>, accessed 21 November, 2011

¹² "Kurds look beyond Assad, with dreams of Autonomy" <http://www.kurdishglobe.net/display-article.html?id=7E000F5E797E4A43F594C083053426AF>, accessed on 14 November, 2011

conducted between these two, reached 4 billion dollar. Tehran and Baghdad agreed also to establish a free trade zone around Basra which buys electricity from Iran.

Trade volume between Iran and Iraq stands at approximately \$7 billion annually for 2010, of which the share of the Kurdistan Region alone is 65 percent, or \$4.5 billion. As important, it should be noted that Iranian investors has long benefited from the privileges granted them in southern Iraq, thus dominated a remarkable part in the market. On the other hand, trade relations between Iran and the KRG tend to rise as a result of Tehran's efforts. According to official figures trade volume is expected to exceed 5 billion dollar in 2011.¹³

Similar to other actors involving trade with KRG, Iranian administration has also put its emphasis on relatively stable and secured atmosphere achieved in Northern Iraq. For instance Iranian Consul General in Erbil, Azim Husseini reaffirmed this stance by stating: "Based on Iran's new policy, we are planning to increase the share of KRG investments in Iraq, as it is more stable than other parts of Iraq in terms of security." He further attracted attention to Arab-Kurd rivalry and underlined Iranians' non-Arab ethnic background like Kurds "These ties are expected to be even stronger than ties Iran has with other neighboring and regional countries, especially with the Arab countries."¹⁴

3. 1. 2. Contending perspectives on Iraq and KRG between Turkey and Iran

As it has been historically the case, control over Baghdad has still centered on regional competition between Turkey and Iran which put immense efforts to increase their leverage on Iraqi decision making and its international relations.

American invasion in Iraq and establishment of AK Party government in Turkey helped to start of new era in Turkey Iran relations. AK Party intensified efforts to develop political and economic relations with Iran. Yet, at the same time its ambition to strengthen Turkey's image of regional power pushes Ankara to confront with Iran. Some concrete examples of this competition could be found in their differing stances towards post-Saddam Iraq. Removal of hostile Saddam regime has changed regional balance of power in favor of Iran. Furthermore, Iran has worked for ensuring its influence on Iraqi affairs through dominant Shiite populations in the country which may incite the danger of widening internal Shiite-Sunni divide. Whereas

¹³ Iran Daily, September 7, 2011

¹⁴ Iran Daily, September 8, 2011

Ankara and Tehran's policies toward Iraq differ fundamentally in some aspects like Shiite dominance over Iraqi governments, they compromise on some particular issues such as Iraqi territorial unity and rooting out separatist Kurdish organizations in Iraqi soil. Thus, it could not be claimed that Iraq has totally turned to be a field of severe competition between Turkey and Iran. Yet, it is also not conceivable to maintain that both countries have harmonious policies regarding the country.

The approaches of these two toward Northern Iraq and its Kurdish autonomous administration fit well as an evidence for their dual strategy. Turkey and Iran, having predominantly Kurdish populated areas bordering with Northern Iraq, perceived a Kurdish independent state as an existential threat since they think such a development would have demonstrative effect over their own Kurdish populations and encourage them for secession. In struggling with Northern Iraq based terrorist organizations, they are in close cooperation and have common interest. Turkey and Iran has put continuous pressure on the KRG to play more active role in fighting against separatist terrorism. But at the same time, both of them wrestle to be influential in Kurdish politics and economic life as they aspire to increase Kurdistan Regional Government's dependence on them.

Moreover, due to the fact that having weight on Kurdish politics would directly translate into being influential in Iraqi politics, relations with the KRG mean more than fighting against terrorism and selling goods to Iraqi Kurds but also more broadly having larger maneuver zone in Iraqi politics. Last but not least, political reconstruction of Iraq after US withdrawal would have strategic effect on regional balances; therefore a Shiite dominant and pro-Iranian government in Baghdad would absolutely create major disturbances for Ankara. With the purpose of preventing this outcome, Turkey has allied with Sunni Arabs and Kurds while keeping in close touch with all Iraqi Shiite groups regardless of their positioning toward Iran. As Sunni Arabs are supported by Turkey and some Arab states to counterweight Iran, Iraqi Shiites have received certain backing from Tehran. This situation increases the strategic value of Iraqi Kurds both for Iran and Turkey and results in more heated competition to have larger impact on Erbil. Reversely, Kurds, the constant US ally, are concerned potential Arab frustration after American troops' total withdrawal. Therefore, remaining without any superpower support steers Kurdish politicians toward forging strong regional alignments.

Comparing Turkey and Iran's efforts to modify Iraqi politics and having more influence on KRG, Barkey notes:

“Ankara's ability to influence events on the ground is greatest on Northern Iraq. In central Iraq Turkey has to handle with severe Iranian competition. Tehran has long-lasting and well-established networks of influence as well as an American presence that will in the medium term continue to exercise a great deal of authority in decision making.”

However, it should be noted that Iran has more comprehensive ties with Iraqi Kurdish parties than Turkey has. Focusing on Turkmen rights and struggle against the PKK Turkey centered its politics on forming a balance between the PUK and the KDP. Barkey also reminded the historical ties between Kurdish parties in Northern Iraq and Iran by stating: “Even in Iraqi Kurdistan the Iranians, unlike the Turks quite adept at cultivating both Kurdish parties.”¹⁵

One of the main differences between KRG's relations with Turkey and Iran is that the latter has been lesser concerned with KRG's institutional presence within its boundaries and visibility of Kurd's distinguishing cultural characteristics. For instance, the KRG has a representative office in Tehran which facilitates direct contact with Kurdish administration. However, Turkey's domestic political atmosphere is far from tolerating a diplomatic representative of KRG which would potentially spark a fray between proponents of an integrationist policy toward KRG and those of isolationist. Although Turkey has launched a consulate in Erbil and abandoned to establish links with Kurds via Iraqi central government, a representative office in Ankara may have the potential to steer Turkish ultra nationalist circles to pull out their trump card by condemning the government to help KRG for independence. So far, it seems that such kind of domestic concerns have been well received by Iraqi Kurds. For instance, during his visits to Turkey, Mesut Barzani who knows visibility of components of Kurdish daily life and culture are disturbing for some parts of Turkish public, has not raised any objections when the KRG flag was not presented in joint press conferences.

¹⁵ Henri J. Barkey, Turkey's New Engagement in Iraq Embracing Iraqi Kurdistan, United States Institute of Peace Special Report no:37, May 2010, p.6.

3. 1. 3. PKK and PJAK, a source of enmity or cooperation?

The most important issue in the relations between Turkey, Iran and the KRG is rightly claimed to be the Kurdish separatist organizations; PKK and the Free Life Party of Kurdistan (PJAK) which carry terrorist operations in Turkey and Iran respectively.

During the 1990's Iran was not only alleged to provide support to religious fundamentalist groups operating in Turkey but also giving considerable logistic and military backing to Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK)¹⁶. Turkish claims of Iranian harboring to PKK had frequently led diplomatic fray with Tehran and blocked economic integration between these two regional powers. Both countries accused each other for espionage and support for terrorism. Deep crisis erupted when PKK militants conduct attacks in Turkish soil after infiltrating from Iranian border which frustrated Ankara and consolidated anti-Iranian elements in Turkish public. At the peak of deterioration, rumors surrounded that Turkish government considered a cross-border military operation on PKK bases in Iran in May 1995.¹⁷ Besides the books of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan were published in Iran with the permission of Iranian Ministry of Culture and a Kurdish institute was established. Tehran went further to discuss the plans for establishment of a new Kurdish city called Mokriyan on Turkish Iranian border. All these steps are interpreted as a part of Iranian policy to weaken Turkey which it sees as a regional contender.¹⁸

A myriad of factors should be employed to elucidate the changes in Iran's policy toward PKK and its cooperation with Turkey against Kurdish separatist organizations based in Northern Iraq. However, the most visible factor which makes Iran to feel more sensitive about Kurdish separatism and position itself closer to Turkey is increasing attacks of 'The Free Life Party of Kurdistan (PJAK)' to Iranian targets from its bases in Northern Iraq. PJAK, formed in 2004 and known as Iranian branch of PKK, is a militant Kurdish group aiming to topple the clerical administration in Tehran and establish a federal system to grant broad autonomy to Iran's ethnic minorities including Kurds¹⁹. Along with PKK, the organization is listed as a terrorist group by the United States. Facing with increasing PJAK attacks, Iran has gradually come to

¹⁶ For a detailed analysis of Iran's relationship with the PKK, see Nihat Ali Özcan, "İran'ın Türkiye politikasında ucuz ama etkili manivela: PKK," *Avrasya Dosyası*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Fall 1999)

¹⁷ *Tempo* (Turkish magazine), No. 18, May 1, 1996

¹⁸ Arif Keskin, "PJAK: PKK'nın Bölgedeki Yeni Misyon Arayışı", *Türksam*, 2008, <http://www.turksam.org/tr/a1377.html>

¹⁹ For more information about the organization see <http://pjak.org/eng/about.php>

the point that it accuses the KRG administration and Mesut Barzani of dragging its foot in taking necessary measures to root out PJAK from its territory. Moreover, it conducted a cross-border military operation into Northern Iraq in July 2011 which was met with silent discomfort by KRG. Worth to note that; along with PJAK, Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan and Komala, a socialist party, have also striking presence in Northern Iraq which provides Iran sufficient excuses for its operations.²⁰

It could be argued that Iran has followed a similar carrot and stick strategy like Turkey. On the one hand, improving trade and political relations with the KRG constitutes a major strategic goal for Iran but at the same time Tehran has frequently showed its sticks to Erbil and Baghdad when it conducts military incursions into Northern Iraq targeting PJAK's encampments in Kandil mountains. At this point, Kurdish separatist organizations PKK and PJAK are argued to serve much closer cooperation between Iran and Turkey. The former Turkish General Staff İlker Başbuğ publicly called attention to Turkish-Iranian military coordination during each other's operations into Northern Iraq and sharing intelligence regarding the terrorist groups.²¹ This step was welcomed by Iranian side and reciprocated during Iranian leader Mahmood Ahmedinejad's visit to Turkey when he offered a Syrian-Turkish-Iranian and Iraqi concord to handle such regional problems.²²

Despite the improvements in Turkish-Iranian relations and a prospect for security cooperation to conduct a joint military operation to Kandil mountains, it is still predictable that complete elimination of PJAK as a threat against Iranian regime would lead Iran to return to old courses of actions by creating stronger ties with PKK again. Iraqi Kurdistan is not Iran's first priority in its Iraq policy. Tehran has rightly focused on southern parts where it has multiple clients and effect. However, divergence among Shiites and their differing approaches toward Iran makes Iran to engage more with Iraqi Kurds who have increasingly empowered its political position. Far away from competing with Turkey in economic terms, Iran may seek alternative ways to counter Turkey including to start providing support to PKK for the aim of playing down Turkish involvement in north.

²⁰ Alex Vatanka, "Probing the Reasons behind Iran's "Pre-emptive" Military Offensive against Kurdish Rebels", *Terrorism Monitor* Volume: 9, Issue: 36, September 22, 2011

²¹ CNN-Türk, June 5, 2008. Başbuğ's statement was generally regarded as a warning to US which at that time hesitated for larger cooperation with Turkey in its fight against terrorism.

²²Taraf, August 16, 2008

3. 2. US view on Iraqi Kurds, Kurdish Question and PKK

US approach towards Iraqi Kurds and Turkey should be examined in three different level of analysis. This policy shift cannot be analyzed in separation from Turkey-US relations. Washington wanted always form close links with Iraqi Kurds to use this alliance against Saddam Hussein but at the same time was constantly concerned by Turkey since Ankara was of the opinion that any official links with Iraqi Kurds would help them to gain legitimacy. Secondly, American approach towards Kurdish question was often under the shadow of PKK terrorism. Although some US policy makers criticized Turkey's stance on Kurdish issue by condemning its human rights accord, the general policy US administrations pursued was to put strategic considerations ahead of human rights issues. Therefore, US has assisted Turkey to fight against PKK but at the same time encouraged to provide more rights to Kurds. Yet, after US troops' withdrawal changing regional dynamics, Turkey's attempt to find a resolution to Kurdish question and ongoing rapprochement between Turkey and the KRG along with their US-supported cooperation against PKK have strengthen the interconnectedness between Turkey's Kurdish question, disarmament of PKK and relations with Iraqi Kurds. For a stable Iraq, US needs Turkey-KRG rapprochement to continue; aiming to eliminate PKK, Turkey requires US support and more importantly the KRG's cooperation; lastly Iraqi Kurds need regional protection when US leaves Iraq.

Regarding United States' general Kurdish policy Ahmet Davutoğlu believes that Washington's long term strategy is based on uncertainties and internal power contest in Northern Iraq. He thinks US strategy to remain divisions within Iraq which constitute three de-facto ethnic-based political entities is for realization of two goals. Firstly, by prompting more segregation within the country, US wants to limit regional countries' capabilities to concentrate their influence on Iraq. Secondly, Washington plans to remain its mediation position between these smaller political units so that it has always interference opportunity into Iraqi affairs²³.

As opposed to suggest one constant strategy without any flexibility, Michael Gunter offers five stages of American policy towards Iraqi Kurds, historically summing up the evolution of US policy experienced though the years:

²³ Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, p.443.

“One might discern five stages of American foreign policy involvement with the Kurds. The first brief stage followed World War I and American president Woodrow Wilson’s famous Fourteen Points, the twelfth of which held out the possibility of Kurdish independence. The second stage occurred during the time of American support for Mullah Mustafa Barzani’s revolt in Iraq during the early 1970s, and ended when U.S. and Iranian aid for this revolt were terminated in 1975 after a deal with Saddam Hussein was reached. The third stage began with the Gulf War in 1991 and led to the creation of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) for the “good” Kurds in Northern Iraq. The fourth stage began with the second American war against Saddam Hussein in 2003, which led to what might be called the stage of a de facto U.S.-KRG alliance, and continues today. The fifth or PKK stage overlaps with the third and fourth stages and concerns U.S. support for its NATO ally Turkey against the “bad” Kurds of the PKK.”²⁴

3.2.1. Reasons for the inevitable alliance between Turkey and the KRG

US invasion of Iraq in 2003 with the aim of destroying mass destruction weapons alleged to be in the hands of Saddam Hussein became a widely discussed issue in terms of its effect in international power balance and regional politics. After 8 years in Iraq, it is sure that American withdrawal has more regional influence than the invasion itself. Having found nothing related to mass destruction weapons, Washington’s success in bringing democracy which is the second important goal of the US military operation against a sovereign country under control of a tyrant, were also open to be questioned. Without any concrete results for post-Saddam era, American troops started to leave Iraq in the summer of 2010 and accomplished withdrawal at the end of 2011. One of the predictions about the conclusions of withdrawal is that it would lead a regional power vacuum which will gradually create further destabilization and jeopardize state building efforts in Iraq.

The fall of Saddam regime does not mean a decrease in US policy makers’ interests in Iraq. Equally, pulling out its military presence from Iraq is not the end of American engagement to this country. The oil-rich country bordering with a hostile regime in Iran and a US ally-Turkey, has maintained its primary position in Washington’s foreign policy agenda. Regime change in Iraq brought an end the need for a containment policy which had been in use after Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Yet, it replaces with stabilization efforts, military training activities,

²⁴ Michael M. Gunter, “Five Stages of American Policy Towards the Kurds”, *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 13, No.2, 2011, p. 93.

regional counterterrorism attempts and counterbalancing Iran which are regarded as components of the principal strategy drivers of US in Middle East.²⁵

As Gunter suggests, US has changed its relations with Iraqi Kurds especially after Turkey rejected US offer to use Turkish territory for transportation of troops and ammunition to Iraq in 2003. After this decision, in sharp contrast to the policy avoiding any open engagement with Iraqi Kurds, US has allied with them as far as its interests overlapped with Kurds' ones. Iraqi Kurds have benefited well from US' need for a strong and well-organized dissident group within Iraq which should be ready to be a part of every American step in Iraq to overthrow Saddam. After the regime change in Iraq, the alliance has continued so far and it is argued that American sponsored Kurdish autonomy's sustainability against several threats depends on the effectuality of US' policies for post-invasion period.

Providing constant support for US in Iraq, the situation of the KRG is one of the most ambiguous issues in post withdrawal period for Washington. The political advances and guarantees in terms of security, Kurds have acquired since 2003 have heavily depended on American military presence and political influence in the country. In the absence of American power in Iraq, Kurds seek a reliable regional power to play the role of protector for Kurdish entity.

Kurds need regional protection for several reasons. First, giving unlimited support to American actions which has made most of Iraqi population to suffer in various ways leads a disruption in Iraqi Arabs and fueled anti-Kurdish sentiments in the public. Secondly, by creating Iraq's only regional autonomy, the KRG draws ire of Shiites a remarkable part of which aims to have a similar political status and Sunnis who make Iraqi unity a policy priority. Moreover, Northern Iraq's relative stability and economic welfare make the region a source of attraction for the rest of Iraqis who usually face the threat of instability and insecurity. For instance, when attacks targeting Iraqi Christians rose in 2010 and 2011, most of the Christians who lived in central Iraq preferred to move to Iraqi Kurdistan for security reasons.²⁶ This inevitable tendency would result in more problems for Kurdish administration in handling with a growing population and may, in the short term, undermine its economic

²⁵ Congressional Research Service, "Iraq: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy" October 6, 2009, p.2.

²⁶ "More Christians Flee Iraq After New Violence" December 13, 2010
<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/13/world/middleeast/13iraq.html?pagewanted=all>

success. Last but not least, in a possible sectarian war or other chaotic situations stemming from power vacuum in the country, the political fragile balance would be easily broke up in central and southern Iraq. A wave of destabilization and conflict would by no means spread to Northern Iraq and harm the region's security and relative political comfort. More threatening, having its own armed militia, the KRG would see it as a necessity to protect itself and join the chaos.

Iraqi Kurds requires a regional ally to compensate US support for not only domestic political reasons but international and regional causes are also effective for this need. Concerning international and regional circumstances, the KRG has the risk of not only facing an Iraqi Arab frustration. Oil-rich Gulf countries are very concerned about emergence of another non-Arab state at the heart of Arab geography. From an Arabist perspective, a possible non-Arab state other than Israel, though KRG has demographically Muslim character, is likely to be perceived as a defeat and lead a psychological catastrophe.

In addition to Arab opposition, it is possible for the KRG to encounter serious resistance from Syria, Iran and Turkey once it will want more decentralized Iraq which will be immediately perceived as an attempt for further autonomy and ultimate independence. Without an American military presence in Iraq, Turkey and Iran will feel themselves much freer to intervene into Iraqi affairs. Therefore, the KRG must ensure them that it has nothing to do with an independent Kurdish state in the region.

On the other hand, as Iraqi Kurds require a regional protectorate, reversely they are needed for regional political calculations. Politically strong Sunni non-Arab demographic component of Iraq is essential for counterweighing Iran for Arabs as well as Turkey and the US. Taking into consideration Iranian influence over Iraqi Shiite politicians despite some conflicts between them, Arabs-US and Turkey should side with Iraqi Kurds by not ignoring Sunni Arabs and not excluding Iraqi Shiites for the aim of thwarting Iranian aspirations.

For these external and internal reasons, it is argued Washington is in favor of stronger Turkish role in Iraq and more engagement with the KRG. Barkey argues a correlation between American pressure which provided a political cover and Turkey's engagement with Iraqi Kurds and maintains 'Turkish government would have faced fiercer domestic opposition to

extending any olive branch to Iraqi Kurds.²⁷ There is legitimate number of reasons for Washington to support Turkey and pressure on Iraqi Kurds to create an engagement. The basic reason seems to be leaving a stable Iraq after withdrawal. Having enormous political differentiation and lack of confidence, Iraq parties have been in a deep need of external mediation. Ankara is likely to be more impartial while seeking a mediator for compromise between diverse Iraqi political factions. Key disputes between regional and federal governments including the hydrocarbon law, disputed areas along with the final status of Kirkuk and US policies for their resolution would shape not only to what extent Iraq would be a federal state but also giving vivid signals whether Kurds want independence or are sufficed with the status-quo. As long as Turkey distances its engagement to Iraq from being only the protector of Turkmen and Sunni Arabs in Iraq and enlarge it to all parties, it would be able to reinforce its neutral position and contribute resolutions of these problems. Moreover, stronger ties with the KRG have helped Ankara to strengthen its hand in mediation for preventing internal disputes since engagement with the Kurds eliminate the view that Turkey is against them. More mediation power of Turkey would provide the opportunity to be more influential in Iraqi affairs which is perfectly serves to Turkey's aim of being a regional power. This would also contribute Turkey to be more persuasive over Iraqi Shiites and compete with Iran.

In limiting Iranian aspirations in Iraq, there is less possibility US could find more cooperative ally than Turkey. Currently, without any doubt Turkey has the leading role in the opposition of a Kurdish independent state and counterbalancing Iran. In spite of the fact that preventing the repression of Iraq's Sunnis by dominant Shiites and limiting the regional influence of a potentially hostile Iran are among Saudi Arabia's policy priorities to Iraq²⁸, however, Riyadh has been reluctant to actively involve Iraq and embark efforts to develop political and economic ties. This situation is not unique for Saudi Arabia. Other regional powers like Jordan and Egypt only blamed Iran of providing support to Shiite militias targeting Sunni Arab civilians in Iraq but have not taken concrete steps.

Counterbalancing Iran would alleviate Arab states and reduce their pressure on US to be more active in containing Tehran's involvement in Iraq. Although many analysts expressed their concern that US withdrawal would make Iraq more vulnerable to Iranian influence, some

²⁷ Ibid p.5.

²⁸ For the Saudi cabinet's statement of its key principles for Iraq, see Saudi Press Agency (Riyadh), "King Abdullah Chairs Cabinet's Session," November 20, 2006

other claimed that the total end of American invasion in Iraq will strengthen Iraqi nationalism and “will also allow the Iraqis to focus on negative Iranian influence in their country without another occupier”²⁹Therefore, Turkish impartial position and neutral mediation reinforce Iraqi nationalism and Iraqi parties’ will for a united Iraq.

3.2.2. US role on putting aside the main obstacle: PKK

Realization and continuation of Turkey-KRG rapprochement has been dependent on the more cooperative stance KRG holds. It should be underlined that US assistance to Turkey in struggling against PKK is significantly important and related to Turkey’s relations with the KRG. If PKK continues to be a source of insecurity and instability in Turkey, Ankara will have to conduct military incursions in Northern Iraq and ostensibly the relations would face the risk of re-securitized like in 1990’s. For this reason, US have encouraged both sides to cooperate more on eliminating PKK which is the main obstacle for Turkey-KRG relations to empower more in the near future.

As a matter of fact, US administrations have sided with Turkey and presented more cooperative attitude than European countries in Turkey’s fight against terrorism. In sharp contrast with European approach toward PKK and Turkey’s Kurdish problem, United States has chosen to make a clear distinction between PKK and Kurds’ rights in Turkey. Washington has never demonstrated an ambiguous stance over criticizing Turkey’s human rights violations yet, on the other hand staunchly supported Ankara’s fight against PKK, remarkably more after September 11 attacks. In addition to concrete formal steps like listing PKK as a terrorist group, US has been claimed to play constructive roles in some crucial times of fight against PKK. For instance PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan’s capture in Kenya has been also attributed to American intelligence services.

However, US governments have been insistent on vocally expressing their criticisms against Turkey in regard with human rights violations and denial of minority rights. For example, a report prepared for the Congress claimed that US weapons were used against Kurds in Turkey³⁰ which complicated issuing export licenses for Super Cobra helicopters to Turkey.

²⁹YoelGuzansky, “The Day after the US Withdrawal from Iraq” INSS Insight No. 288, October 23, 2011

³⁰ See Report on Allegations of Human Rights Abuses by the Turkish Military and on the Situation in Cyprus (U.S. State Department Report, June 1, 1995).

More strongly, Then US President Bill Clinton sent a letter to Turkish general staff condemning Turkey's human rights accord.³¹ Another example in this regard is U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott's speech in October 1998 in which he underlined Turkey's failure to protect freedom of expression but adding that US is firmly behind Turkey's right to fight against terrorism. Talbott also advised that for an ultimate resolution to Kurdish problem Turkey should take not only military measures but also political steps.³² Although such kind of numerous other condemnations and heavy criticisms against Turkey overshadowed Turkish US relations, interdependence on various strategic issues between two countries have constituted a serious preventive factor from becoming the relations completely strained.

Turkey's geographic location along with strategic importance for US regional policies have often exceeds the priorities Washington attached Turkey's human rights accord. Still, Turkish government's conspicuous commitment to introduce political reforms aiming to upgrade the level of democracy and eliminate human rights violations have sparked considerable tone down in US officials' criticisms in this regard and resulted a marked warming in relations. Kirşiçi attracts the attention to the minimized situation of Kurdish problem in Turkish American relations especially after Bill Clinton's visit to Turkey.³³ Besides, the war on terrorism since 9/11 in 2001 has inevitably reinforced Turkey's strategic importance for US. In spite of these positive developments the relations contains the potential risk to be deteriorated once American side does not extend sufficient assistance to the Baghdad government to preserve territorial integrity of the country or leaving pressuring Iraqi Kurds by not curbing their determination for independence. Secondly, when US does not continue to support Turkey in its fight against PKK and will not take effective steps aiming to destroy the organization, the US-Turkish relations will decline and the strategic partnership will be hardly damaged.

By pushing for Turkish-KRG relations to improve, Washington aims to ensure preventing the conflict between its two non-Arab allies and keep its influence on Iraqi affairs to intervene whenever it needs. Thereby, Kurds will have the necessary regional protection and at the same time a Turkish threat will be mostly eradicated by turning it an ally. For accomplishing

³¹Yeni Yüzyıl, November 19 and 21, 1996

³² Strobe Talbott, "U.S.-Turkish Relations in an Age of Interdependence," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, October 14, 1998, <www.washingtoninstitute.org>.access date: 25 November, 2011

³³ Kirişçi, Ibid. p.298

this strategic purpose the biggest difficulty is stemmed from PKK whose encampments in KRG will continue to deteriorate Turkish-Kurdish relations. Therefore, with a shift its previous policy US will probably engage with disarming, demobilizing and reintegration of PKK militants directly.³⁴

Turkey's stick and carrot policy since 2007 towards the KRG compounded with clear US pressure on Iraqi Kurds to cooperating with Turkey on PKK issue are considered as fruitful since the KRG prefers to remain in silence when Turkey attacks to PKK camps in Northern Iraq. Although Turkey pushes hard for concrete steps from KRG against PKK, the relative moderate position KRG has come so far may be deemed as a short term success.

Moreover, for sustaining strategic partnership between US and Turkey, it is almost an obligation for US side to ensure Iraqi territorial integrity and contain KRG with certain economic and political steps so that the emergence of a Kurdish independent state is prevented. As important, for strengthening stability in Northern Iraq and provide political stability and security for the rest of the country, foreign military interventions to the region should be suspended. Therefore, the presence of PKK and PJAK camps which provoke Turkey and Iran to conduct military incursions ought to be destroyed within the borders of KRG. Furthermore, US should put more of its weight for complete eradication of PKK.³⁵

There are various ways US help the process to go ahead. Barkey suggests, for instance, that US should mediate between PKK and Turkish authorities in which PKK militants hand over their equipment to US officials³⁶. Furthermore, US may also assist KRG authorities to launch a public relations campaign to convince the Kurdish population in Northern Iraq to suspend supporting PKK and disassociate them from the organization.³⁷ Improving Turkey-KRG relations will help effective Iraqi Kurdish contribution to the process as KRG will effectively engage with reintegration of former PKK militants and with US assistance checkpoints throughout the Hakurk, Zap and Kandil regions may be formed in order to prevent PKK movements and supplies. Washington administration's contribution to the process is not limited to help Turkey and KRG. It may also pressure on some European countries to shut

³⁴ For a set of US proposals aiming to eliminate PKK see, David L. Philips, "Disarming, Demobilizing and reintegrating the Kurdistan Worker's Party", National Committee on American Foreign Policy, 15 October 2007
³⁵ Reşat Ödün, "ABD'nin Irak'tan Çekilmesinin Türkiye ve Orta Doğu'ya Muhtemel Etkileri", ASAM web page, 6 October, 2008

³⁶ Henry Barkey, 'Preventing Conflict over Kurdistan', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009 p.36.

³⁷ Ibid. p.37.

down PKK offices and introduce stricter regulations on PKK's infrastructure and financial sources.

It should be also noted nor is the eradication of PKK neither KRG's collaborative stance with Turkey the primary target to be pointed at. As clearly suggested by Cengiz Çandar PKK should be firstly seen as the outcome of Turkish Kurds disturbances resulting from immature democracy, inadequate freedom of speech, conscious discrimination by state and insufficient implications of rule of law in the country.³⁸ Thus, in the long term, resolution of Kurdish question through political means such as enlarging freedoms will have larger effects on regional policy. If the Kurdish question will be able to be solved by Turkish government, PKK will lose its political ground and as a result, its dismantling will fasten. Relatedly, Turkey's relation with KRG will become most probably much healthier since there will be no safe haven for militants in Northern Iraq which means the very reason for Turkish incursions will be eliminated.

³⁸Cengiz Çandar 'Dağdan İniş- PKK Nasıl Silah Bırakır?' TESEV Report 2011

CONCLUSION

It would be underestimating when one identifies Turkey-KRG relation as simply diplomatic ties between two neighboring political entities. Turkey's relationship with Kurdish autonomous region has unique characters in many ways. What essentially differentiates this relation is its major effect on domestic political affairs, determining role in re-construction of Turkish and Kurdish identities along with regional power balance in a period of time in which the Middle East is going through a transformation process.

The importance of Iraqi Kurds for Turkey has both domestic and foreign aspects. In domestic politics, no other regional actor can play the role of Kurdish administration to help Turkey to resolve Kurdish question. Strong transnational ties among Kurds create risks and opportunities, thus, Turkish foreign policy makers should be aware of the fact that any deterioration with the KRG will possibly damage attempts to find an ultimate solution for Kurdish question. On the other hand, by enlarging ties with Iraqi Kurdistan, Turkey does not benefit only the economic prospects and larger political maneuver zones in the region and beyond but also strengthens its hand to restore the image of Turkish state on its Kurdish citizens. By improving relations with the KRG and fighting against PKK at the same time, Turkish state has proven that it struggles against 'the terrorists not the Kurds.' It should be underlined that enlarging freedoms and providing higher democratic standards are main pillars of working to stop Kurdish problem. Stronger ties with the KRG are complementary parts of the process due to the solid interconnectedness of foreign policy issues and domestic affairs in this case.

The KRG is not crucially important for Turkey just because its role in resolution of Kurdish problem. The US invasion of Iraq has shaken the region and altered the actors' effectiveness in policy making which has strengthened the role of Iraqi Kurds. In 2005, Kurds acquired constitutional status of regional autonomy and control three provinces in Northern Iraq. The emergence of legal political entity in Northern Iraq pushed Turkey to engage Iraqi Kurds as the direct interlocutor in fighting against PKK. Turkey-KRG relations has reached an unprecedented level that Turkey on the one hand, carries out military operations into Iraqi Kurdistan which is normally defined as a violent act against political sovereignty; and on the other puts serious initiatives to cement its ties with the Kurdish autonomous region. More interestingly, it may be claimed that Turkey's 'zero problems with neighbors' strategy can only survive with the Kurdish administration as problems started to emerge in the relations

with most of the surrounding countries. Relatedly, when cooperation with the KRG would bear fruits such as effective combat against PKK; this would facilitate to initiate new openings towards the countries with which Turkey has complicated relations including Armenia and Greek Cypriots.

At this point, it is important to highlight that establishing official relations with Kurdish authority is itself an outcome of Turkey's internal democratic transition. Democratization provides the appropriate ground for Turkish foreign policy makers to form new relations as a result of visionary foreign policy. This process also freed the security related issues from the monopoly of security elites. Therefore, proliferation of actors who publicly declare views on security-related issues –like relations with Kurds- leads de-monopolization which is inevitably accompanied by de-securitization. Nonetheless, the Kurdish issue cannot be handled in isolation with security concerns. Yet, it is notable that the measures have been changed. Today, security-oriented approach has apparently lost its primary position in ensuring security in the Kurdish issue, instead 'economic means' aiming to create and empower the 'asymmetric interdependence' are seen as more effective tool to acquire political bargaining power.

To the extent which the relations with the KRG have reached is significant but not sufficient. The more democratic standards will be applied in Turkey translates more de-securitized approach in the foreign policy. Besides, as long as the PKK's terrorist activities are not allowed to harm the relations, the relative political stability in Northern Iraq seems to continue to attract Turkish investment and increase trade volume. The geo-political conditions in the Turkish-Iraqi border and the demographic situations have already obliged Turkey to cooperate with the KRG. Then it is arguable that if Turkey keeps its determination to realize democratic reforms and establish a 'healthy' civil-military balance and the economic dynamism with Northern Iraq is to hike, ensuring Iraqi territorial integrity may not be among Turkey's security priorities. To elaborate this point, the KRG's separation from Iraq may not pose a 'national threat' for Turkey.

What makes Kurdish separation a national threat for Turkey is its potential to create a demonstrative effect on Turkey's own Kurdish population. If Turkish government would be successful in attempts at finding an urgent solution to the domestic Kurdish problem, in other words when Turkey's Kurds feel themselves comfortable and prosperous, Turkey would not have the fear the political gains of the Iraqi Kurds.

The comprehensive approach in Turkey's Iraq policy which tries to embrace all the factions in Iraqi society would be successful when Turkish state who considers the Turkmen minority in Iraq as a group of people who should be protected at the very heavy costs, would achieve to generate a similar view to the Iraqi Kurds by regarding them as relatives. As the more powerful party in terms of economy, diplomacy and military, Ankara could success to produce such a point of view only when it takes steps to make Iraqi Kurds do not fear Turkey's power, rather see it as a protector.

The inconsistency between geo-political frontline and national borders could be overcome with political determination and stability, economic integration and democratization. As Turkish Consul General in Erbil, Aydın Selcen confirms by saying "Our prime minister's vision is full economic integration. One day you won't notice the frontiers between Turkey and Iraq."¹ Realization of these conditions would enable the political authorities to transcend the national borders and adjust their policies in accordance with geo-political frontlines.

¹ Abigail Fielding-Smith. "Turkey Finds a Gateway to Iraq." Financial Times. 14 Apr. 2010.

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