

**SOFT BALANCING IN TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY:
THE CASE OF THE 2003 IRAQ WAR**

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Abstract

This paper argues that soft balancing theory provides the best framework to understand Turkey's foreign policy towards the US in terms of its unilateral policy on the issue of Iraq in the post 9/11 era. To put the matter bluntly, Turkish foreign policy regarding the Iraqi crisis can be examined through the lens of soft balancing - in order to prevent the war and minimize its negative effect on the region as well as its own interests. I argue that Turkey's soft balancing policy is a strategic effort in overall structural terms to increase influence vis-a-vis the US via non-military means. In this respect, this article is divided into two sections. The first section will give an overall explanation about the theory of soft balancing. The second section will examine Turkish foreign policy regarding the Iraqi crisis as soft balancing against the US before the 2003 Iraq war. This being said, the second section will treat Turkish foreign policy as three soft balancing strategies which are composed of diplomatic soft balancing at the regional level, institutional soft balancing at the international level, and territorial denial as an instrument of soft balancing at the national level.

Key Words

Soft Balancing, Hard Balancing, Unipolarity, Turkey, United States, Iraq War, Middle East.

Introduction

The invasion of Iraq by the United States-led coalition in 2003 brought out two kinds of conflict in the international system in the post 9/11 era in terms of macro- and micro-level politics. At the macro-level, while the

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first conflict was indicating the challenge of the US towards second-tier states in order to maintain and maximize its interest in the Middle East and beyond, the second one was indicating the resistance of the second-tier and regional powers against the US which can be defined as the politics of soft balancing. Debates on soft balancing not only explore the nature of the international system after the Cold War, but also evaluate the international response to the unilateralist foreign policy of the Bush administration starting in 2001. Analyzed from this perspective, French, German, and Russian opposition to the US invasion of Iraq brought to the fore a question that has been a staple of scholarly and policy debate since 1991: Is the international system on the brink of a new balancing order? By the turn of the millennium, the puzzling absence of a balancing coalition against the US became the focus of the debate.

Now the question is whether a balance of power politics is emerging in a new and subtler guise. Related to this question, a growing number of analysts argue that expecting “hard balancing” to check the power of the international system’s strongest state is a mistake, because, under unipolarity,¹ countervailing power dynamics first emerge more subtly in the form of “soft balancing,” as it is typically called.² In this context, soft balancing is an action that does not directly challenge hegemonic state military preponderance, but uses non-military tools to delay, frustrate, and undermine aggressive unilateral hegemonic military policies or increase the costs of using that extraordinary power.³ The most prominent examples of this behavior are: Sino-Russian rapprochement, the Russian-Iran alliance, the

¹ There are two obviously related definitions of unipolarity. The first one is a system in which one state has significantly more capabilities than any other. The second one is a system in which the unipole’s security and perhaps other values cannot be threatened by others at all. On the significance of unipolarity see, William C. Wohlforth, “The Stability of a Unipolar World”, *International Security*, Vol. 21 (Summer 1999).

² Stephen G. Brook and William C. Wohlforth, “Hard Times for Soft Balancing”, *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Summer 2005), p. 72; Robert A. Pape, “Soft Balancing against the United States”, *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Summer 2005); T. V. Paul, “Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy”, *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Summer 2005).

³ Pape, “Soft Balancing against the United States”, pp. 10-17.

defense cooperation of European Union, and the anti-American coalition before the 2003 Iraq war. As a result, the conventional wisdom started to change and “soft balancing” became a way of describing this kind of state behavior.

Two main sets of problems need further consideration. First, from the perspective of alliance formation and the structure of international system, Turkey’s position before the 2003 Iraq war was very critical of the US demands from the Turkish Government to overthrow Saddam Hussein. Therefore, the pressure of the US as a global actor was important to the implementation of Turkish foreign policy regarding the Iraq crisis, much more than other factors. In this respect, the US pressure affected Turkey’s reception of US foreign policy towards the 2003 Iraq War, but it has not been determinant in the absolute sense. The main point to be emphasized here is that the US cut diametrically Turkey’s alternatives pertaining to the Iraq crisis. On the one hand, most of the studies examine this relationship from the perspective of a constant and unchangeable structural relationship between a superpower (US) and a regional power (Turkey), and on the other hand, they analyze Turkey’s foreign policy alternatives either as an option to be attached to the superpower or vice versa. In this regard, the main point to be emphasized here – as this present study is embracing – is that it is necessary to examine the Turkish foreign policy pertaining to the Iraq crisis by referring to multiple variables to identify the relationship between Turkey and the US, without reducing constant and unchangeable factors.

Second, in the context of soft balancing debates, while most of the studies usually pay attention to the foreign policy of powerful second-tier states such as Russia, China, France, and Germany by stressing that they are following a soft balancing policy against the US, especially after 9/11, few studies have examined Turkey’s foreign policy towards the US as a soft balancing before and during the 2003 Iraq War. This paper, first of all, argues that soft balancing theory provides the best framework to understand Turkey’s foreign policy towards the US in terms of its unilateral policy towards the Iraqi issue in the post 9/11 era. Secondly, Turkish foreign policy regarding the Iraqi crisis can be examined through the lens of soft balancing used to prevent the war and minimize its negative effect on the region as well as its own interests. I argue that Turkey’s soft balancing policy was a strategic effort in overall structural terms to increase influence vis-a-vis the US via non-military means. In this respect, this article is divided into two

sections. The first section will give an overall explanation about the theory of soft balancing. The second section will examine Turkish foreign policy regarding the Iraqi crisis as soft balancing against the US before the 2003 Iraq War. This being said, the second section will treat Turkish foreign policy as three soft balancing strategies which are composed of diplomatic soft balancing at the regional level, institutional soft balancing at the international level, and territorial denial as an instrument of soft balancing at the national level.

Soft Balancing in the (Uni)multipolar System

The balance of power has been the kernel of realist international relations theory. The soft balancing argument rests on the same assumptions as neo-realism's balance of power theory and is not only seen as a subtler form of this behavior but also as a precursor to "hard" power balancing. In other words, states that choose to soft balance can, at any time, change their minds and start balancing the US in the more traditional sense. For realists, states maintain security and stability at the systemic level largely through balancing. Throughout the history of the modern international system, balancing has been the key strategy employed by major powers to achieve their security goals.⁴ In the mainstream realist theories of international relations, soft balancing or hard balancing refers to a state joining a weaker coalition to counter the influence of power of a stronger coalition. In hard balancing, the alignment of smaller states with opponents of the most powerful state is more common. Thus, states adopt strategies to build and update their military capabilities, as well as create and maintain formal alliance and counter-alliances, to match the capabilities of their key opponents.⁵ Since the end of the Cold War, neither "external" hard balancing through the formation of alliances nor "internal" hard balancing through efforts of competitors to arm themselves has taken place, but the debate has not ended because the realists' prediction of counterbalancing had not come

⁴ On the significance of balance of power, see Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1967; Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 1979; L. Claude Jr., *Power and International Relations*, New York, Random House, 1962.

⁵ T. V. Paul, "Introduction: The Enduring Axioms of Balance of Power Theory and Their Contemporary Relevance", in T. V. Paul, James J. Wirtz, and Michel Fortmann, (ed.) *Balance of Power; Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*, Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 2004, p. 3.

to a conclusion. That is to say, the counterbalancing did not take place within the time frame as predicted by the self-declared realists in the early post-Cold War era. And more recently the debate in the US has shifted to the question whether, in the absence of hard balancing, great powers could be engaged in soft balancing to counter US primacy.⁶

According to the soft balancing scholars, traditional balance of power theory fails to explain state behavior in the post-Cold War era. According to this theory, since the 1990s, the US has been expanding both its economic and political power in the international system and more recently, it has begun to engage in increasingly unilateralist military policies. As a result, second-tier⁷ major powers have not balanced against the US and they have had to prefer soft balancing instead of hard balancing during this period. The main problem behind challenging the US is the fragile structure of the international system which is defined as unipolarity. Under unipolarity, second-tier states do not fear direct conquest by the US, but they do not have enough structural power to prevent the US from pursuing unilateral policies.⁸ Under these circumstances, the key strategy employed by second-tier states is soft balancing. Besides, in the early 1990s a number of scholars argued that major powers would rise to challenge US preponderance after the collapse of the Soviet Union and that unipolarity was largely an

⁶ Franz Owald, "Soft Balancing Between Friends: Transformation Transatlantic Relations", *Debate: Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (August 2006), p. 146.

⁷ On the significance of the second-tier states see K.R. Adams, "New Great Powers: Who Will They Be, and How and When Will They Rise?", *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Hilton Hawaiian Village, Honolulu, Hawaii, 25 May 2009.*

⁸ G. John Ikenberry, "Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Persistence of the American Postwar Order", *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Winter 1998/99), pp. 43–78; Charles A. Kupchan, "After Pax Americana: Benign Power, Regional Integration, and the Sources of a Stable Multipolarity", *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Fall 1998), pp. 40–79; Michael Mastanduno, "Preserving the Unipolar Moment: Realist Theories and U.S. Grand Strategy after the Cold War", *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Spring 1997), pp. 49–88; William C. Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World", *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Summer 1999), pp. 5–41; Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "American Primacy in Perspective", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 81, No. 4 (July/August 2002), pp. 20–33; Ethan B. Kapstein, and Michael Mastanduno (ed.), *Unipolar Politics: Realism and State Strategies after the Cold War*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1999; G. John Ikenberry (ed.), *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power*, Ithaca, N.Y. Cornell University Press, 2002.

“illusion” that would not last long.⁹ In the eyes of these scholars, unipolarity will turn into multipolarity rather than being the permanent structure of the international political system. Additionally, Samuel Huntington also has pointed out that the present world order cannot be classified as unipolar, but rather, has special aspects that one might call “unimultipolarity”, characterized by the fact that the US enjoys a general power to veto important international proposals or anything that affects vital American interests.¹⁰

Soft balancing scholars are not directly interested in the structure of the international system, but, rather, they point out the behaviors of states under the unipolar system. For example, T.V. Paul mentions that balance of power politics are possible in the contemporary world politics, but that balancing may take different forms, like soft balancing, that are different from those in past periods, where hard balancing was the norm both due to the drastic material imbalance enjoyed by the US, and to characteristics unique to US unipolarity. Paul also provides a concise definition of the concept of soft balancing:

*“Soft balancing involves tacit balancing short of formal alliances. It occurs when states generally develop ententes or limited security understandings with one another to balance a potentially threatening state or a rising power. Soft balancing is often based on a limited arms build-up, ad hoc cooperative exercises, or collaboration in regional or international institutions; these policies may be converted to open, hard-balancing strategies if and when security competition becomes intense and the powerful state becomes threatening.”*¹¹

In this sense, according to the scholars who are interested in soft balancing, since the end of the Cold War, second-tier major powers such as China, France, Germany, and Russia have mostly abandoned traditional “hard balancing” – based on countervailing alliances and arms build-up – at

⁹ Christopher Layne, “The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise”, *International Security*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Spring 1993), pp. 5–51.

¹⁰ Samuel P. Huntington, “The Lonely Superpower”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 78 No. 2 (1999), pp. 35-49.

¹¹ Paul, “Introduction: The Enduring Axioms of Balance of Power Theory and Their Contemporary Relevance”, p. 3.

the international systemic level. This does not mean that they are helplessly watching the resurgence of US power. Instead, these states prefer to follow a foreign policy based on multi-dimensional facets of diplomacy against the superpower.¹²

In the first place, the theory of soft balancing claims that traditional balancing and alliance formation have changed, and hard balancing policy has been withdrawn from the great power politics because of the unipolar structure of the international system after the Cold War. Importantly, soft balancing differs from hard balancing not only in methods, but also in goals.¹³ This claim identifies three kinds of reasons that are political, economical, and military in nature. According to the political reasons, because of the liberal character of the international system, non-liberal states such as Russia and China are incapable of balancing US power because they cannot find allies to join them in such struggle.¹⁴ On the other side, liberal states such as France and Germany do not perceive the need to counterbalance the US since they do not consider its growing power to be a threat. According to John Ikenberry, other states – both liberal and non-liberal – have also eschewed traditional balancing because of their ability to influence American foreign policy in the US and international institutions.¹⁵ According to the economic reasons, due to economic interdependence, second-tier states abstain from engaging in balance of power politics. Because these powers – especially China, India, and Russia – are linked by trade, investment, and commercial exchange with the United States, it concerns them that military competition with the US could disrupt their economies.¹⁶ With regard to economic reasons, for the second-tier states, directly confronting the US preponderance is too costly for any individual state and too risky for multiple states operating together.¹⁷ On the other side,

¹² Paul, “Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy”, p. 47; Pape, “Soft Balancing Against the United States”.

¹³ Judith Kelley, “Strategic Non-cooperation as Soft Balancing: Why Iraq was not Just about Iraq”, *International Politics*, Vol. 42 (2005), p. 154.

¹⁴ William C. Wohlforth, “Revisiting Balance of Power Theory in Central Eurasia”, in Paul, Wirtz, and Fortmann (ed.), *Balance of Power; Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*, pp. 214-238.

¹⁵ G. John Ikenberry, “Liberal Hegemony and the Future of American Postwar Order”, in T. V. Paul and John A. Hall, *International Order and the Future of World Politics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 123-140.

¹⁶ Paul, “Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy”, p. 48.

¹⁷ Pape, “Soft Balancing against the United States”, p. 9.

the military capability of second-tier states is not powerful enough to struggle with that of the superior state.

Within this context, according to Paul, soft balancing policy occurs under the following conditions: first, the superpower's position and military policy are of growing concern but do not yet pose a serious challenge to the second-tier powers; second, the dominant power can be a major source of public good in both the economic and security areas that cannot simply be replaced; and third, the hegemonic state cannot easily retaliate because the balancing efforts are not overt.¹⁸ In this case, soft balancing is not a structural feature of international system, but rather the principle result of aggressive US unilateral policy towards Iraq as well as other international issues.¹⁹

Within these debates, the concept of soft balancing has been accurately illustrated by Pape, who states there are four most common soft balancing strategies used by second-tier states today. The first and most important strategy used in soft balancing is a multidimensional diplomacy between states and at the institutional level. These institutional strategies, which are intended to constrain US power, constitute a form of soft balancing. The veto power that these states hold in the United Nations Security Council is very important to this strategy. According to this strategy, states may use institutions and *ad hoc* diplomatic maneuvers to delay a superior state's plan for war and thus reduce the element of surprise and give the weaker side more time to prepare; delay may even make the issue irrelevant. Especially if the superior state is also a democracy, entangling diplomacy can also affect the domestic politics within the superior state.²⁰ This strategy can also affect the other state's policy, which does not embrace all kind of policy towards the crisis at the regional and international level. So, this strategy can be defined as *diplomatic soft balancing*.

According to Pape, the second strategy of soft balancing is *territorial denial*. In this strategy, the superior state often benefits from access to the territory of third parties as staging locations for ground forces or as transit

¹⁸ Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy", p. 59.

¹⁹ Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States", p. 10.

²⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 36-37.

for air and naval forces. If third party states do not accept the demands of superior states, they can reduce the superior state's prospect for victory, such as by increasing the logistical problems for the superior state.²¹ On the one hand, this kind of balancing can increase the cost of war for the superior state; it can also delay the war.²²

The third strategy of soft balancing is *economic strengthening* which can be defined as *economic soft balancing*. According to Pape, "militarily strong, threatening states that are the targets of balancing efforts usually derive their military superiority from possession of great economic strength. One way of balancing effectively, at least in the long run, would be to shift relative economic power in favor of the weaker side."²³ The most obvious way of doing this is through regional trading blocs that increase trade and economic growth for members while directing trade away from non-members.

The fourth strategy is *signals of resolve to balance*, i.e. attempts to overcome concerns that collective action among second-tier states will not materialize by repeatedly acting in ways to increase their trust in each other's willingness to challenge the U.S.²⁴

Additional to this debate, Judith Kelley also defines a different type of soft balancing that is called *strategic non-cooperation*. According to Kelley, strategic non-cooperation happens when a weak state seeks to increase future influence vis-a-vis a strong state by deliberately rejecting inequitable cooperation. The logic of strategic non-cooperation rests on maximizing absolute gains by building a status that increases negotiating power over future outcomes.²⁵ The weak actor can also reject the superior state's demands, because accepting highly asymmetrical gains is in and of itself a poor long-term optimizing strategy and therefore the weak actor

²¹ Ibid.

²² Henrik Bergfeldt, *Is Soft Balancing the Driving Force Behind Sino-Russian Cooperation in Central Asia? An Empirical Test of the Soft Balancing Theory*, Master Thesis, Lund University, Spring 2008.

²³ Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States", p. 36.

²⁴ Ibid, pp. 36-37.

²⁵ Kelley, "Strategic Non-cooperation as Soft Balancing: Why Iraq was not Just about Iraq", p. 156.

wants to avoid a reputation as a “pushover.”²⁶ As a result, in the debates on soft balancing, the point is not blocking the US from the conquering second-tier states, as in traditional balancing, but to increase the influence of second-tier state over the US. According to Jervis, such efforts will not be automatic and their occurrence will depend on complex calculations of costs, benefits, and the possibilities of success.²⁷ Thus, instead of combining military forces or conducting joint operations, soft balancers combine their diplomatic, economic, and geographical assets in order to defend their interests. It should be noted that the strategies employed in the soft balancing are directly against specific US policies rather than the overall distribution of power itself.²⁸

The Politics of Soft Balancing in Turkish Foreign Policy Regarding the Iraq Crisis

When the US plans for Iraq started to unfold, a simultaneous debate began on Turkey’s position regarding the operation. Turkey was strategically important to a low-cost strategy for defeating Iraq. Turkey’s status in the NATO alliance and claims that Turkey is a ‘strategic partner’ of the United States in the Middle East, as well as its location on the northern border of Iraq, made it key to the operation in Iraq. The US hoped to invade Iraq from Turkey in the north and from Kuwait in the south, thus attacking Saddam Hussein’s overstretched military forces from different directions to quickly overwhelm them. Therefore, Turkey’s cooperation was critical. The United States wanted to send its troops to the northern front via Turkey; however, the Turkish Parliament rejected a motion on 1 March 2003 which would have allowed the deployment of up to 62,000 US troops in Turkish territory.²⁹ Then the United States needed to use Turkish airspace for the northern front. This time, negotiations were marked by uncertainty and tension. The underlying reason for Turkey’s ambivalence is that it was caught between its political priorities and strategic relationship with the United States. It should be noted that the two sides obviously had different

²⁶ Ibid, p. 157.

²⁷ Robert Jervis, “Unipolarity: A Structural Perspective”, *World Politics*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (January 2009), p. 208.

²⁸ Stephen M. Walt, “Alliances in a Unipolar World”, *World Politics*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (January 2009), pp. 103-104.

²⁹ “Meclis ‘Savaş’ ı Reddetti”, *Radikal*, 4 March 2003.

priorities regarding the Iraq issue. Thus, Turkey decided to stand outside of the “coalition of willing” in Iraq by not allying with the US.

Before the March 1 motion, the tendency of Turkish foreign policy was to vehemently oppose the war, which was treated as a definitive solution by the Bush administration in order to control Iraq. In this sense, Turkish opponents of the war argued that the primary concern of Turkey during the decision-making process that culminated in its anti-war policy cannot be reduced to any single factor, but rather, it can be analyzed at three levels of policy based on three different pillars representing different instruments of soft balancing against the US: a) Turkey’s foreign policy orientation at the regional level, [diplomatic soft balancing], b) Turkey’s international and institutional orientation to seek legitimacy in the framework of international law [institutional soft balancing], and c) Turkey’s internal political balance, decision-making process, and national costs [territorial denial as an instrument of soft balancing].

Turkish policymakers treated the Iraq crisis as a source of instability for the Middle East and Turkey’s national security rather than treating it as an opportunity to advance Turkey’s national interests. More to the point, when considered from the perspectives of Turkish foreign policy principles, both international/regional positions and domestic public opinions were against the US intervention in Iraq and they ultimately wanted a diplomatic solution. The main concern for Turkey during the crisis was to provide stability to the region as well as protect its national security.³⁰

Therefore, Turkey supported diplomatic solutions under the United Nations umbrella, but in the case of an inevitable war, Turkey would have followed a foreign policy protecting its national and regional security priorities. Within this framework, there were two possible scenarios. The US-led operation would either succeed or fail. In the first case, if the US was able to carry out its stated goals, the fate of both Turkey and the region would be dependent strictly upon US intentions due to its uniqueness in the international system.³¹ In the second case, the failure of the US-led coalition

³⁰ Şaban Kardaş, “Turkey and the Iraq Crisis: JDP Between Identity and Interest”, in Hakan Yavuz (ed), *Emergency of New Turkey*, Salt Lake City, The University of Utah Press, 2006, pp. 306-330.

³¹ Hasan B. Yalçın, “*Alliance Formation under the Unipolarity: The Case of Turkish-US Relationship*,” Unpublished MA Thesis, Chapter 3, Koç University, 2006, p. 92.

might have brought a process of conflict near Turkey's borders. Both scenarios were highly sensitive for Turkey. In this context, Turkish foreign policy towards the Iraq crisis was shaped by four multi-dimensional alternatives: Turkey's position regarding the global balance towards the crisis, international law and the organizational orientation of Turkey; the foreign policies of regional states and regional balance towards the crisis; and the national and domestic decision-making process and opposition actors in Turkey. All of these factors affected Turkey's policy of soft balancing against the US during the decision-making process.

Diplomatic Soft Balancing against the United States at the Regional Level

Just after the end of the Afghanistan invasion, the possibility of a war in Iraq began to be voiced louder by the Washington administration.³² Although Turkey was aware of the US plans for Iraq, it was only faced with detailed and official US demands in September 2002. On 1 September 2002, during Tarik Aziz's high level visit, the warnings of the Ecevit Government was a good indicator of at what level Ankara was cognizant of the seriousness of the US intentions. Turkish authorities warned the Iraqi regime to cooperate with the UN decisions for both their own well-being and for that of the region; otherwise the US might have acted even without the UN Security Council decision.³³

On 4 November 2002, Chief of General Staff Hilmi Özkök went to the US and met with a large number of US authorities. General Özkök was expected to confer with US officials on the Iraq issue and reiterate Turkey's sensitivities and requests on the matter.³⁴ The UN resolution four days later, "recognizing the threat Iraq's non-compliance with Council resolutions and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and long-range missiles poses

³² Raphael F. Perl, "Terrorism, The Future, and U.S. Foreign Policy", *CRS Issue Brief for Congress*, 2 (November 2001), p. 1-2.

³³ Meliha Benli Altunışık, "Turkey's Iraq Policy: The War and Beyond", *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 2, pp. 183-185.

³⁴ "ABD Irak Savasından Kacınmalı", at <http://www.voanews.com/turkish/archive/2002-11/a-2002-11-06-6-1.cfm?moddate=2002-11-06>.

to international peace and security,”³⁵ was far from paving the way for a military operation against Iraq.

In this period, Turkey adopted and proposed a diplomatic solution to the Iraq crisis in order to avoid possible negative effects of an imminent war in the Middle East as well as on its national security. Therefore, Turkey stressed that it would wait for the UNSC’s ultimate decision about Iraq. More to the point, international and regional public opinions were strongly against the US’s unilateral intervention in Iraq. Both international and regional consensus brought out a kind of pressure on the Turkish Government that could not be ignored from the perspectives of Turkish foreign policy principles. Therefore, Turkey adopted an “open-ended diplomacy”³⁶ towards the US during the decision-making process regarding Washington’s demands to use Turkey’s territory.³⁷ When Abdullah Gül came to power as Prime Minister on 28 November 2002, new teams started to participate in the negotiations with the US authorities. In this context, three committees of the political, economical, and military kind were established by the Justice and Development Party (JDP) government to carry out the negotiations with the US. While Turkish authorities were continuing negotiations with the American authorities, Prime Minister Gül was visiting some regional countries, especially those in the Middle East, in order to balance US pressure on Turkey. There were two reasons for this policy. First, Turkey did not want to be affected by the negative results of the war as in the 1991 Gulf War. Second, Turkey wanted to convince the US of the possibility of a diplomatic solution and include regional countries within this process.³⁸

³⁵UN Security Council Resolution 1441, 8 November 2002, at <http://www.un.int/usa/sres-iraq.htm>.

³⁶ Kardaş, “Turkey and the Iraq Crisis: JDP Between Identity and Interest”, p. 306.

³⁷ Deniz Bölükbaşı, *I Mart Vakası; Irak Tezkeresi ve Sonrası*, Doğan Kitap, İstanbul, 2008, pp. 29-31.

³⁸ Republic of Turkey, Office of the Prime Minister, Directorate General of Press and Information, at <http://www.byegm.gov.tr/YAYINLARIMIZ/AyinTarihi/2003/ocak2003.htm> [last visited 2 January 2003].

Turkey feared that it would encounter three possible risks in case of a war in Iraq.³⁹ First and foremost, was a probable increase of the aspiration for autonomy among its own Kurdish population within Turkey. According to Turkish policymakers, the overturn of Saddam Hussein might give rise to the autonomy of Iraqi Kurdish groups and such a process might encourage Kurdish separatists inside Turkey to resume their old war with the Turkish army to establish an independent Kurdish state. Previously, the authority vacuum in Iraq had led the separatist PKK to use the region as a rear base to conduct terrorist activities inside Turkish territory.⁴⁰ The second set of factors was related to the financial implications of the war. Turkey had a bad experience from the Gulf War in 1991. During and after the first American operation in Iraq, it is argued that the Turkish economy suffered a \$50 billion loss of revenue.⁴¹ Finally, Turkey was also concerned that too close ties with Washington during the US-led action would damage its relations with its Middle Eastern neighbors and might affect the policy of “zero problem with neighbors” which was developed by the JDP government. Given that the JDP had ascribed these countries greater priority, the probable invasion from Turkey might transform JDP’s Middle East Policy into a stillborn policy.⁴² Given that Washington tried to lessen Turkey’s economic concerns by formulating an ambitious aid plan to make as much as \$14 billion available to Turkey through low-interest loans in case the conflict would give rise to reductions in tourism incomes and investments,⁴³ it can be argued that the other two factors were more determinative of the JDP’s Iraq policy.

On the other hand, there was an additional factor making the JDP’s support for US operation in Iraq difficult. The Turkish public was against the

³⁹ Ali Balci and Murat Yesiltas, , “Turkey’s New Middle East Policy: The Case of the Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Iraq’s Neighboring Countries”, *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. XXIX, No. 4 (Summer 2006), pp. 18-38; Jon Gorvett, “Turkey Finds Itself on Seismic Fault Between Peace, Pressure for Iraq Conflict”, *Washington Report on the Middle East Reports* (March 2003), p. 36.

⁴⁰ Kardaş, “Turkey and the Iraq Crisis: JDP Between Identity and Interest”, pp. 310-312.

⁴¹ Mesut Ozcan, *Harmonizing Foreign Policy: Turkey, the EU and the Middle East*, Ashgate, London, 2008, pp.131-133.

⁴² Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Turkey’s Foreign Policy Vision: An Assesment of 2007”, *Insight Turkey*, Vo. 10, No. 1 (2008); Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Türkiye Küresel Güçtür”, Interview by M. İbrahim Turhan, *Anlayış*, Mart 2004; Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Türkiye Merkez Ülke Olmalı”, *Radikal*, 26 February 2004; Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Türkiye Küresel Güçtür”, (Interview), *Türkiye Söyleşileri I Avrupa*, Küre Yayınları, İstanbul, 2007.

⁴³ Karl Vick, “After Calls on Turkey, U.S. Put on Hold”, *Washington Post*, 8 January 2003.

use of Turkish territory as a launching pad for a US attack on Iraq and the government had promised to oppose the war during the November 2002 elections. Public opinion polls suggested that more than 80 percent of the Turkish people were opposed to a US-led war against Iraq. Such a high level of public opposition to this war drove the government into a corner and thus by taking regional-level initiatives, the government would demonstrate to the Turkish public as well international public opinion that it was doing everything possible to avoid war.⁴⁴

In this period, although two different groups had competed over policy issues, the main foreign policy strategy of Turkey regarding the Middle East was mostly shaped by a government advisor, Professor Ahmet Davutoğlu. According to Davutoğlu, Turkey is a “core” country in the broader region of Europe, Asia and the Middle East, not a peripheral country to those areas and it has a great capacity to affect the developments in these regions as well as those at the international level. Davutoğlu examined particularly this strategy in his book “*Strategic Depth: Turkey’s International Position*,” which was published in 2001. He expressed the view that “Turkey has no chance to be peripheral; it is not a side-line country of the EU, NATO or Asia.”⁴⁵ He also stated that Turkey cannot maintain its traditional “passive” foreign policy in the Middle East as well as in the international arena. It should undertake a central role, especially in its neighborhood, and apply an active foreign policy.⁴⁶ To put the matter bluntly regarding the Iraq crisis, Davutoğlu was opposed to Turkey’s support for the US war effort and used all means to try to stop the war and prevent the use of Turkish territory.

All these factors forced the Turkish government to search for new balance policies which would prevent the war, and Prime Minister Abdullah Gül started his visits to Syria, Egypt and Jordan to discuss ways to avert US military strikes against Iraq. The main aim of these visits was to balance the US pressure on the government and convince Washington of other diplomatic solutions under the UN umbrella.⁴⁷ Gül first paid a visit to Syria

⁴⁴ Pew Research Center, at <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?PageID=825>.

⁴⁵ Interview with Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Turkishtime*, April-May 2004.

⁴⁶ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik; Türkiye’nin Uluslararası Konumu*, Küre Press, Istanbul, 2001; Davutoğlu, “Turkey’s Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007”, *Insight Turkey*, Vo. 10, No. 1 (2008), p. 78.

⁴⁷ “Gül: Demokratik Yollar Denenmeli”, *Hürriyet*, 5 Ocak 2002.

on 4 January 2003 and stated that “Iraq is like Pandora's box. This box should not be opened because it would be impossible to put everyone back in that box again,”⁴⁸ by which he pointed out his determination to prevent the prospective war in Iraq. Gül reiterated his stance against the war the following day when he arrived in Cairo. Stressing that a war would harm all countries in the region, Gül stated, “[w]e agreed to struggle, to the very end, to prevent the war.”⁴⁹ Having completed his three-nation Middle East tour, Gül stated that “[w]e are very concerned about the issue of Iraq. We are together in this region and we have to work together and exert every possible effort to solve this problem in a peaceful way.”⁵⁰

Within the framework of the ongoing efforts to prevent the war, Gül started a second Middle East tour to meet Saudi and Iranian leaders on 11 and 12 January 2003, respectively. In Riyadh, Gül stressed the enthusiasm of Turkey in preventing the war by articulating that there was only one goal for Turkey and that was a peaceful resolution under the UN umbrella.⁵¹ On his final stop in Iran, Gül repeated his previous concerns. He also called on all regional countries to increase their efforts to delay the war by saying that “the whole region will pay a heavy price if an attack takes place against Baghdad, so all the regional countries should try to prevent the war... the greatest responsibility falls on Iraq.”⁵²

As result of Turkey’s efforts, foreign ministers from six Middle Eastern countries (Egypt, Turkey, Iran, Jordan, Syria, and Saudi Arabia) met in a summit, called the “Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Iraq’s Neighboring Countries,”⁵³ in Istanbul on 23 January 2003 with the aim of preventing Washington from launching a war to overthrow Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. The meeting was in reaction to Washington’s desire to

⁴⁸ Republic of Turkey, Office of the Prime Minister, Directorate General of Press and Information, at <http://www.byegm.gov.tr/YAYINLARIMIZ/AyinTarihi/2003/ocak2003.htm> [last visited 4 January 2003].

⁴⁹ “Savassiz Cozum için Yapilacak Cok Sey Var”, *Yeni Safak*, 6 January 2003.

⁵⁰ Dina Ezzat, “Very Daring Ideas” *Al Ahram Weekly*, 9-15 January 2003, Issue No: 620.

⁵¹ “Gül: Barış için çaba”, *Radikal*, 13 January 2003.

⁵² Republic of Turkey, Office of the Prime Minister, Directorate General of Press and Information, at <http://www.byegm.gov.tr/YAYINLARIMIZ/AyinTarihi/2003/ocak2003.htm>, [last visited 12 January 2003].

⁵³ On the significance of this meeting and its transformative affect on Turkish foreign policy, see Balci and Yesiltas, “Turkey’s New Middle East Policy: The Case of the Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Iraq’s Neighboring Countries”, pp. 18-38.

resolve the Iraqi crisis militarily. The common concern of all these countries was that the potential US intervention in Iraq to remove President Saddam Hussein would lead to ethnic and sectarian conflicts, resulting in a Kurdish state in northern Iraq and a Shiite-dominated state in the south. This potential intervention would especially risk damaging Turkish and Iranian strategic interests in the region in terms of their territorial integrity. Overall, this meeting represents the best example of soft balancing policy in order to delay war.⁵⁴

Despite these common concerns about possible scenarios after the war, there were disagreements over Saddam's future and the reaction to US plans about Iraq. While Turkey championed an unforced exit of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, Syria and Iran refused this proposal. Regarding this disagreement, Turkey insisted on not mentioning any direct reference to the US. In this context, Turkey's policy was not against the US itself, but it was against the unilateral intervention in Iraq and the war itself. Despite Turkey's objections, the final message of the meeting was addressed to the international community and the UN Security Council as a result of the efforts of the governments of Turkey and Jordan.⁵⁵ In a nutshell, this first meeting on the Iraq crisis at the regional level, and Turkey's effort to prevent the war, clearly indicated that the regional governments did not want a transformation imposed by a unilateral force such as the US. This meeting and Turkey's diplomacy showed that, even if a transformation was needed in the region, that this transformation should occur in a peaceful and evolutionary way through regional dynamics which would not require the use of force.

In this meeting, the participating countries had two main goals. The first was to form a regional forum, if possible, in order to take all the necessary steps for a peaceful solution. The second was to take the steps necessary to bring stability back to Iraq and the region, in the event of a

⁵⁴ Gülden Ayman, "Bir Güvenlik Sorunsalı Olarak Türk Amerikan İlişkilerinde Irak Çıkmazı", in Gülden Ayman, *Irak Çıkmazı: Türkiye Açısından Temel Parametreler*, Bığart, İstanbul, 2008, pp. 51-85; Gülden Ayman, "Turkish-American Relations and Future of Iraq", *Private View* (Autumn 2007), No 12.

⁵⁵ Salih Boztas, "Bicak Sirtinda Baris Arayisi", *Aksiyon*, 27 January 2003, Year: 8, Number: 425; Gareth Jenkins, "Keeping the Peace," *Al Ahram Weekly*, 30 January- 5 February 2003, Issue No. 623; Salih Boztas, "Bicak Sirtinda Baris Arayisi," *Aksiyon*, 27 January 2003, Year: 8, Number: 425; *Zaman*, 24 January 2003; *Cumhuriyet*, 24 January 2003.

failure to find a solution. The first one can be attributed to a balancing effort that could not be attained; the second one was an effort to decrease the possible negative effects of the instability. More to the point, under these circumstances, the Turkish initiative contributed to the rescue of neighboring countries and the main concern of the Arab states was the possibility of a war resulting in long-term political instability throughout much of the Arab world that might open the door to widespread, and potentially uncontrollable, public anger.⁵⁶ On the other side, the meeting aimed at preserving Iraq's territorial integrity, if it was unable to do something to stop the war. One of the most important fears of the regional states was the possibility of the occurrence of a process which could divide Iraq as a result of the competition among the regional states in an unstable environment.

Institutional Soft Balancing against the United States at the International Level

According to Pape and Paul, as mentioned earlier in this paper, institutional balancing states may use institutions and ad hoc diplomatic maneuvers to delay a superior state's plan for war. The best example of this soft balancing strategy regarding the Iraq crisis is the veto power in the UN Security Council. Within this context, the Turkish government did not only deal with soft balancing at the regional level, but the government also followed a type of soft balancing policy at the institutional level by seeking legitimacy within the UN and NATO frameworks. While the government was establishing contact with the members of the UN Security Council, Tayyip Erdoğan, who was then the leader of the JDP, was visiting Russia on 24 November 2002 and China on 14 January 2003, respectively, in order to figure out the best solution to the Iraq crisis under the UN umbrella while complying with international law.⁵⁷ On the other hand, while Erdoğan was visiting permanent members of the UN such as Russia and China, Foreign Minister Yaşar Yakış was visiting European Union countries. The main aim of these visits was to express Turkey's desire for peaceful solutions

⁵⁶ Balci and Yesiltas, "Turkey's New Middle East Policy: The Case of the Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Iraq's Neighboring Countries", pp. 18-38.

⁵⁷ "Turkey: Erdogan, In China For Trade Talks, Likely To Be Sounded Out On Uyghur, Iraq Issues", *AM Central Standart Time*, 15 January 2003.

regarding the Iraq crisis within the framework of the UN.⁵⁸ Within this context, Turkey wanted to use the UN decisions in two ways: firstly, as a basis for its anti-war and pro-stability attitudes and secondly to see if the UN would pass a resolution legitimizing a war against Iraq.⁵⁹ Also, Turkey aimed to use the absence of the UN resolution as an alleviator for a possible rejection of the alliance against Iraq, which the US was trying to form. More importantly, within the context of the domestic political balance, President Ahmet Necdet Sezer and Speaker of the Turkish Grand National Assembly Bülent Arınç insisted on the necessity of a UN resolution.⁶⁰ Therefore, seeking a UN resolution was very important to the decision-making process with American authorities in terms of providing bargaining power to the government.

The second base of institutional balancing was through NATO. Although Turkey did not seem to be convinced of the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, the Turkish government was warned by the US of a possible missile attack, by which the US was actually trying to convince Turkey of necessity of this war. For this reason, on 15 January 2003, the US demanded AWACS early warning planes and Patriot missiles from NATO for the defense of Turkey against a possible Iraqi missile attack. However, the US could not find the support it had expected from the other NATO members. Germany, France, and Belgium believed such a step was premature, and that planning for war would undermine UN attempts to broker a peaceful resolution to the Iraq crisis.⁶¹ While the joint opposition of those three countries was exasperating the US, Turkey declared its understanding of their attitude. NATO was demanding the cooperation of Turkey, but Turkey was not complying. This was also very important, because Turkey did not want to seem to be willing to invite the NATO

⁵⁸ Republic of Turkey, Office of the Prime Minister, Directorate General of Press and Information, at <http://www.byegm.gov.tr/YAYINLARIMIZ/AyinTarihi/2003/subat2003.htm>.

⁵⁹ Yalçın, “*Alliance Formation under the Unipolarity: The Case of Turkish-US Relationship*”, p. 117.

⁶⁰ Balbay, *Irak Bataklığında*, p. 63; Republic of Turkey, Office of the Prime Minister, Directorate General of Press and Information, at <http://www.byegm.gov.tr/YAYINLARI/MIZ/AyinTarihi/2003/ocak2003.htm>, 17 Ocak 2003.

⁶¹ “NATO Rift Countries Ahead of Security Council Meeting”, at http://www.pbs.org/news/hour/updates/nato_02-13-03.html, 13 February, 2003.

system of collective defense by accepting American claims that Iraq was a threat to its neighbors.⁶²

By participating in the internal disagreement within NATO, Turkey provided itself an opportunity to share the burden of US pressure with the other NATO members. In particular, NATO's rejection (especially by France, Germany and Belgium) of providing security for Turkey was presented by Ankara as a reason for the difficulty of supporting the US. Therefore, Turkey emphasized that it needed at least the support of NATO to legitimize the Turkish support for the US and thus, this disagreement within NATO gave more time to Turkey. Even though the additional time and partners could not offer a solution to address Turkish concerns that were obstructing the war, Turkey did acquire an excuse for future rejection of the US requests.⁶³ More to the point, even though Turkey does not have a veto right in the UN Security Council, it used disagreements between the NATO members as an instrument of the soft balancing at the institutional level in order to spread the US pressure on the Turkish Government over time. This represents an obvious example of Turkish efforts against a unilateral intervention in the Middle East.

Soft Balancing as Territorial Denial: Negotiations with the U.S. and the March 1 Motion

Turkey pursued three aims during the negotiations with the US. First and foremost, Turkey did not seem to be willing to submit to US demands and unilateral intervention in Iraq without a UN Security Council resolution but this did not mean that Turkey directly rejected dropping the negotiation process with American authorities about the U.S intention to send troops to northern Iraq via Turkey. Second, Turkey tried to gain the time needed to reach a more acceptable solution and preferred to follow an open-ended diplomacy in the negotiation process. Third, if Turkey were to be unsuccessful in the first two alternatives, it would support the US on the condition of maximum protection of Turkey interests.

⁶² Murat Yetkin, *Tezkere; Irak Krizinin Gerçek Öyküsü*, Remzi Kitapevi, Istanbul, 2004, p. 133.

⁶³ Yalçın, "Alliance Formation under the Unipolarity: The Case of Turkish-US Relationship", p. 119.

Within this context, after the vote of confidence for the Gül Government, on 5 January 2003, Marc Grossman and Paul Wolfowitz arrived in Ankara, but Prime Minister Abdullah Gül demanded more time by claiming that “we have just won the vote of confidence.” After this visit, the first American committee arrived in Turkey and started exploratory work regarding the US entrance to northern Iraq via Turkey.⁶⁴ A short time after this committee’s visit, USAF General Richard Myers, who was the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (equivalent to the Turkish Chief of the General Staff) arrived in Ankara and met with his counterpart Hilmi Özkök. While Myers was expecting Turkey’s open support, Ozkok avoided declaring definitive support to the US and expressed that the authorization of this kind of decision belonged to the Turkish Parliament and the politicians. On the other hand, while the US was embracing the prospect of certain support, they expressed the view that limited support from Turkey was unacceptable. On the contrary, Turkey adopted a “principle of support without force” instead of giving the indication of certain support to the US.⁶⁵ However, the US pressure was increasing and it eventually reached the level of a threat. The words of Mark Parris, the former US Ambassador to Turkey, were of a threatening tone. Parris explained that “Turkey must support the US; otherwise, Washington will not even answer your phone calls.”⁶⁶ Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, during his trip to Ankara in December 2002, declared at a press conference that “Turkey has been with us always in the past and will be with us now.”⁶⁷

When the negotiations were continuing between Turkish and American authorities, the Turkish Government decided, in the meeting of the Council of Ministers on 4 February 2003, to divide the motion of permission into two parts. This decision, which was accurately defined by Kardas as a “salami tactic,”⁶⁸ was somewhat necessary due to the open-ended diplomacy regarding the negotiation process with the US.⁶⁹ For this reason, while the

⁶⁴ “ABD’li yetkililer Türkiye’de”, *Hürriyet*, 13 January 2003.

⁶⁵ Murat Yetkin, “Kuzey Cephesi: yeni bir şey yok”, *Radikal*, 21 January 2003; “ABD’den nazik mesajlar”, *Radikal*, 21 January 2003.

⁶⁶ “Asker pazarlığının iç yüzü”, *Radikal*, 25 January 2003.

⁶⁷ Stephen F. Hayes, “Wolfowitz Talks Turkey, The Serious War Planning is under Way”, *Weekly Standard*, 16 December, 2002.

⁶⁸ Kardas, “Turkey and the Iraq Crisis: JDP Between Identity and Interest”, p. 316.

⁶⁹ Murat Yetkin, *Tezkere; Irak Krizinin Gerçek Öyküsü*, Remzi Kitabevi, Istanbul, 2003, s. 147; Republic of Turkey, Office of the Prime Minister, Directorate General of Press and

Turkish government, on the one hand, was continuing the negotiations with the US, it was, on the other hand, exploring ways to alleviate the pressure on the government. Nevertheless, the National Security Council made a recommendation decision in order to be able move quickly to protect Turkey's national interests if an unexpected situation developed. After this decision, the Turkish Grand National Assembly approved the first motion in the Parliament on 6 February 2003 regarding the modernization of bases in Turkey to be used by American soldiers for three months. It should be noted that this motion did not provide a guarantee for the US to enter Iraq through Turkish territory, and Prime Minister Gül also stated that it did not mean approval of Turkey's direct support to a US unilateral intervention in Iraq, nor did it mean that Turkey had jumped on the US bandwagon.⁷⁰ Gül also explained that "this notion provided us at least fifteen days and we would struggle for peace to the very end."⁷¹ The real aim of the Gül government, in accordance with the other aspects of Turkish foreign policy, was to avoid allying with the US position on the war.

Another important issue in the negotiation process between Turkey and the US was Turkey's intention to enter northern Iraq with the American soldiers at the same time. This issue was also suggested at the appropriate time by the government in order to implement peaceful solutions to the Iraq crisis. However, the US did not accept Turkey's demands regarding the deployment of Turkish soldiers in northern Iraq alongside US soldiers. Because of this disagreement, while Turkey was talking with international actors at the institutional and state level, the Turkish authorities were continuing negotiations with the American committee at the same time.⁷² Thereby, Turkey gained the necessary time in the negotiation process.

Within this context, towards March 1, even though Turkey did not successfully prevent the war, it stimulated at least regional dynamics against

Information, <http://www.byegm.gov.tr/YAYINLARIMIZ/AyinTarihi/2003/subat2003.htm>, 4 February 2003.

⁷⁰ Republic of Turkey, Office of the Prime Minister, Directorate General of Press and Information, <http://www.byegm.gov.tr/YAYINLARIMIZ/AyinTarihi/2003/subat2003.htm>, 6 February 2003; Mesut Taştekin, "Türk Dış Politikasında 2003 Irak Savaşı", (ed.) Mesut Taştekin and Mehmet Şahin, *II. Körfez Savaşı*, Platin Publication, Istanbul, 2006, p. 269.

⁷¹ *TBMM Tutanak Dergisi*, 32. Birleşim, 6 February 2003, at http://www.belgenet.com/yasa/tbmm_759.html, [last visited 02 June 2008].

⁷² Bölükbaşı, *I Mart Vakası; Irak Tezkeresi ve Sonrası*, pp. 39-42.

the war. So after the long negotiation process, the government had to send a motion for the Parliament to discuss. In the end, the vote resulted in the TGNA denying American troops from staging an invasion of Iraq from Turkish territory. Actually, the conclusion of the voting was not a direct “rejection.” Interestingly, it was actually something between rejection and ramification. Although the number of the votes for approval were higher than number for rejection, according to the Assembly internal regulations, three more votes for approval were required to make an absolute majority. This meant that “the decision is not formed.” Note that it was not a direct rejection but it was a decision that “I want, but I cannot.”⁷³ According to the results of the vote, it can be said that the TGNA did not reject the US demands, but rather it did not approve them.

Regarding the March 1 motion, according to William Hale, Soner Çağatay and Mark Parris argued that Turkey’s position outside the war was an accident rather than a planned policy.⁷⁴ On the other hand, Kapsis argued that three main factors contributed to the “failed vote” in the Turkish Parliament: first, an overconfident US that asked for more than it should have from its Turkish ally; second, a divided JDP; and third, a conflicted Turkish military establishment.⁷⁵ To put the matter bluntly, for Yavuz, the inexperience of the Gül government was critical in the failure of the March 1 motion in Parliament.⁷⁶ On the other hand, according to Kardas, division within the JDP’s top leadership and the divergent opinions between the JDP and its party organizations were very crucial in this process.⁷⁷ Within the context of the soft balancing perspective, as mentioned earlier in this paper, it has been argued that the decision by the Turkish Parliament was affected by at least four factors which cannot be analyzed in terms of an accidental or unmanageable policy.

⁷³ Yalçın, “*Alliance Formation under the Unipolarity: The Case of Turkish-US Relationship*”, p. 128.

⁷⁴ William Hale, *Turkey, the US and Iraq*, London: SAQI and the London Middle East Institute at SOAS, 2007, p. 172; Çağatay, Soner, “Where Goes the US-Turkish Relationship?”, *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (2004), pp. 43-52.

⁷⁵ James E. Kapsis, “The Failure of US-Turkish Pre-War Negotiations: An Overconfident United States, Political Mismanagement, and a Conflicted Military”, *The Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (September 2006), p. 1.

⁷⁶ M. Hakan Yavuz, *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 232.

⁷⁷ Kardas, “Turkey and the Iraq Crisis: JDP Between Identity and Interest”, pp. 306-328.

First, one of the most important reasons behind this decision was the systemic level of developments towards the Iraq crisis which can be defined as soft balancing against the US at the institutional level, such as the UN. Turkey definitely was a part of this policy and insisted on the necessity of the UN Security Council resolution in the process of negotiations with the US.

Second, the decision might not be considered to be an accident, but rather can be evaluated as a part of international institutional soft balancing, and a regional consensus of opposition to the war. Turkey's denial to allow the use of its territory to invade Iraq was a manifestation of its regional foreign policy based on its respect for territorial integrity towards its neighbors and the maintenance of stability in the Middle East.

Third, when considered from the point of national security concerns and interests, this motion demonstrated that Turkey did everything necessary to try to achieve a peaceful solution, and it ultimately had to protect its own interests from the US intervention in Iraq. Consequently, in the case of an imminent war, Turkey identified five important points: a) security of Turkey's south border, b) preventing a terrorist attack from northern Iraq, c) the possibility of ethnic and sectarian conflict in the case of any power vacuum within Iraq, d) massive migration risk to Turkey's borders like after the Gulf War, and e) protecting Iraq's territorial integrity. Therefore, the government thought that the motion and "limited support" to the U.S were absolutely necessary in order to prevent the above risks and to compel the US to heed a reasonable position in northern Iraq.⁷⁸

Fourth, considered from the national and domestic costs, it can be argued that three factors affected the decision of Parliament and Turkish government behavior regarding the Iraq crisis and the US demands. First, in case of an unexpected war, the Kurdish groups in northern Iraq might declare an independent state, potentially threatening Turkey's territorial integrity. Therefore, the possibility of a Kurdish state created strong pressure on the domestic political balance. Second, the possibility of the negative results of war would be a burden on the Turkish economy. Third, a large

⁷⁸ Şaban Kardas, "Türk Amerikan İlişkilerine Teorik Bir Bakış: Neo-Klasik Realist Bir Açıklama, *Demokrasi Platformu*, Vol. 4, No. 13 (Winter 2008), pp. 9-12.

majority of the Turkish population was against the war and they did not want to be in an alliance between Turkey and the US against a Muslim country. On the other hand, as can be seen in Table 1, there was strong opposition from the Republican People Party against the March 1 motion, as well as from other political parties which had no seats in the Parliament at the time.

Table 1: Positions of Major Political Actors in Turkey before the Iraq War Started⁷⁹

| Agency | Position |
|-------------------------------|---|
| The President | Turkey should act according to international norms. No foreign troop deployment in Turkey; no support for the US military campaign. |
| Government | Turkey should act according to international law. Conditional support for the U.S. requests if inevitable in order to protect national interests. |
| TGNA | |
| JDP (AKP) | 363 seats. It was estimated that 40 percent of party members were against the war. There was no block decision taken by the party board. |
| RPP (CHP) | 178 seats; block “No” vote; no foreign troops; conditional cooperation with the US. |
| Turkish Military (TSK) | No clear public declaration. There was “limited support” in order to balance and limit the U.S in northern |

⁷⁹ Baris Kesgin, “Not so much of a Straightforward Task: Finding the Decision- Maker in Foreign Policy.” Paper presented at the annual meeting of International Studies Association-Midwest in St. Louis, MO, 7-9 November, 2008; Baris Kesgin and Juliet Kaarbo, “When and How Parliaments Influence Foreign Policy: The Case of Turkey’s Iraq Decision”, *International Studies Perspective*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2010), pp. 19-36.

| | |
|---|--|
| | Iraq. |
| Bureaucracy | There was a perception of a threat based in northern Iraq and they tended to support the U.S. |
| Economic-Based Civil Society Organizations | Due to the economic concern they were pro-war and generally tended to support the U.S. |
| Civil Society Organizations | Anti-war |
| Public Opinion | 90% were against the war and 80% were against the deployment of US troops in Turkish territory |

After the March 1 motion, the government came up with a new motion on March 20; there was no doubt about the executive's position on the issue. Yet this motion did relate to the US's previous requests regarding to use Turkish territory. However, by March 20, the US had attacked Iraq and the war had already begun. In that case, the new motion passed with a 332-202 vote and 1 abstention. The March 20 motion received the highest number of votes in favor. Thus, the U.S. was granted the very crucial overflight rights with this motion⁸⁰ and interestingly the Washington administration announced Turkey as a member of the "coalition of the willing" on March 20. From March 1 to 20, there were no more negotiations taking place between the two sides and the initial agreement was no longer on the table. As a result, it should be noted that March 20 motion cannot be evaluated as an instrument of soft balancing.

Conclusion: Can Turkey be a Soft Balancer?

As is argued in this article, instead of hard balancing, state efforts to counter US power or to limit US influence have generally taken the form of soft balancing. More to the point, instead of combining military forces, a soft balancer state combines its diplomatic assets in order to protect its interests. Within this context, Turkey's soft balancing sought to limit the ability of the US to impose its will on Turkey during the Iraq crisis before the Iraq war started. Especially at the regional level, *The Meeting of the Foreign*

⁸⁰ Republic of Turkey, Office of the Prime Minister, Directorate General of Press and Information, at <http://www.byegm.gov.tr/YAYINLARIMIZ/AyinTarihi/2003/mart2003.htm>, 20 March 2003.

Ministers of Iraq's Neighbouring Countries, which has been held since 2003, was obviously successful in terms of protecting the territorial integrity of Iraq as well as other actors' attitudes towards the Iraqi government. So, these meetings were a reaction to Washington's will to resolve the Iraq crisis militarily. Analyzing the result of the meetings in the context of the relations between Turkey and the Middle East countries, it can be said that all of the subsequent meetings provided an opportunity to solve regional issues among them. This can also be treated as the use of the soft balancing instrument after the Iraq war. In addition to the regional level, the Turkish Government has also used institutional soft balancing by seeking the legitimacy of the UN Security Council. Although Turkey does not have a right to veto in the Council, by using disagreements among the permanent members of the Council about the Iraq crisis, the Turkish government tried to coordinate diplomatic action against unilateral US action. At the national level, rejecting the March 1 motion was also a part of soft balancing against the US, by not allowing the US troops to be deployed in Turkish territory.

The crucial question in this discussion is whether Turkey can be a soft balancer against US foreign policy regarding the Middle East and beyond in a possible crisis. To put the matter bluntly, how can we examine the relationship between Turkey and the US in terms of Turkey's soft balancing policy, especially in the Middle East? Can Turkey be defined as a soft balancer country? As mentioned in this paper, the strategies employed in the soft balancing were directed against specific US policies rather than against the overall distribution of power itself. Within this context, Turkey's structural power might not be enough to become a soft balancer in terms of distribution of power in the entire system, but its soft power and cultural power influence in the Middle East region and beyond are very important to become a soft balancer against great powers.