

TURKEY'S SECURITY CULTURE AND POLICY TOWARDS IRAQ

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Recently there has been some emphasis on ideational foundations of Turkish foreign policy and the elements of Turkey's strategic culture.¹ Building on that literature, this article aims to focus on the elements of this culture as they relate to Turkey's Middle East policy in general and Iraq policy in particular. One can identify four entrenched norms in Turkey's strategic culture in relation to the Middle East policy: First, there is the inclination towards the status quo. Since the establishment of the republic, Turkey has largely been a pro-status quo power, aiming to preserve the existing distribution of power and territory. Once the state system was established after World War II in the Middle East, Turkey emerged a status quo power upholding the norms of territorial integrity and non interference in internal affairs. Furthermore Turkish policies in the region aimed to keep the existing distribution of power and disturbed when that balance was shifted. During the Cold War years these concerns were closely related to the distribution of power at the systemic level. However, it became increasingly difficult for Turkey to pursue this policy in the face of constantly shifting environment in the Middle East after the end of the Cold War. The Gulf Crisis of 1990-1991 and the developments afterwards have presented a major challenge to the status quo in the region. The weakening of Iraq as a result not only upset the distribution of power in Turkey's neighborhood, but also reopened the questions of borders in the region with particular emphasis on Kurdish aspirations. Furthermore, the US, the sole superpower and the main external power in the region, also started to adopt revisionist foreign policy in the region especially after 9/11. This was manifested not only in Washington's Iraq policy, but also in an open adoption of the objective of regime change in the region. These developments were clearly challenging long held Turkish policy of maintaining the status quo. To make matters worse for Ankara some of these new developments had direct implications for Turkey.

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¹ See, for instance, Ali Karaosmanoğlu, "The Evolution of the National Security Culture and the Military in Turkey," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.54, No. 1 (Fall 2005).

Second, Turkey's strategic culture has been dominated by the tradition of *realpolitik*. According to Karaosmanoğlu this tradition has evolved, especially after the changing military balance between the Ottoman Empire and European powers, "from a dominant offensive character into a dominant defensive one."² Since then the defensive *realpolitik* has been inherited by the republic. The culture of *realpolitik* in the modern history manifests itself in the security-focused and state-centric foreign policy perspective.³ This perspective highly colored Turkey's policies toward Iraq. The developments in Iraq since the Gulf War of 1991, the involvement of the external powers in the conflict, and the implications of these developments for Turkey's Kurdish question contributed to the sense of encirclement and vulnerability. Turkey's response to this environment was largely reactive. The challenges were defined and therefore the responses were formulated largely in military terms.

Third, and particularly specific to the Middle East, has been the inclination of Turkey's foreign and security policy makers of not to get involved in the affairs of this region. The cognitive map of the Turkish elite towards this region has been based on an enduring reluctance to get involved with a region that is characterized by conflict. This understanding was also an extension of Turkey's quest for locating itself in the European state system, rather than the Middle East, a policy that has its roots in the 19th century Ottoman Empire. Thus when Turkey got involved in the Middle East, this was either as an extension of its Western-oriented policy (as in the 1950s) or as it was 'dragged into the region' (as since 1990s). Although Turkey's strategic culture has evolved towards more activism in the post-Cold War era, such an activism in the case of the Middle East to a large extent continued to define not as Ankara's own design, but as a reluctant involvement forced upon Turkey by the circumstances. Therefore, in the face of Iraq crisis Turkey found itself with few tools and experiences, except the well established policy of historically close cooperation with all Iraqi governments to uphold the status quo.

Fourth, the perception of the national historical experience, which is marred by the traumatic experience of making the transition from an empire

² Ibid.

³ Pinar Bilgin, "Turkey's Changing Security Discourses: The Challenge of Globalization," *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 44 (2005), pp. 40 and 43.

to a national state, has been an important element of Turkey's security culture. Although Turkey was never colonized, the great power competition over and involvement in the history of the late Ottoman Empire have left its scars. Turkey was able to fight against the Sevres Treaty that was imposed on it after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, but the conviction that the great powers still conspire to weaken and divide Turkey and thus revitalize the Sevres, never died completely.⁴ The involvement of major external powers in the Iraqi issue seemed to bring back the traumatic experience of the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, the war of independence in 1919-1923, and the establishment of the republic of Turkey. At the heart of this historical memory was the security aspect of the Kurdish question. Not only was the early history of the modern Turkish republic marked by series of Kurdish rebellions against the unitary, centralizing and secular regime in Ankara, but the rebellions were thought to have an external dimension in the form of British support as part of its imperial designs.

These entrenched norms of the Turkish security culture explain how Turkey has responded to the developments in Iraq since the Gulf War in 1991. Yet there have always been strategic sub-cultures that remained outside this general framework. For instance, the Islamists generally ascribed to the ideology of neo-Ottomanism which emphasized Turkey's increasing involvement in the Ottoman space, including the Middle East. Similarly, Turgut Özal, both as the prime minister and the president, advocated Middle East policy that focuses on interdependence, increasing economic relations and Turkey's leadership in the region in the late 1980s and early 1990s. His policies during the Gulf Crisis in 1990-1991 clearly reflected an alternative vision. Finally, since its coming to power the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – AKP) has also been trying to develop a slightly different vision of Turkey's relations with the Middle East. Within that context the AKP also aimed a shift in Iraq policy by putting less emphasis on security issues and more emphasis on cooperation rather than conflict. However, despite the existence of these sub-cultures, the elements listed above for a large part remained as the dominant strategic culture in Turkey. More importantly the developments since the mid-1980s to a large extent reinvigorated and reinforced these norms. Turkey did not emerge from the end of the Cold War with an increased sense of security. On the contrary, Ankara felt more insecure due

⁴ On Sevres Syndrome see for instance Kemal Kirişçi and Gareth M. Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey: An Example of Trans-state Ethic Conflict*, Portland, Oregon, Frank Cass, 1997

to new domestic and international challenges. Domestically the rise of power of political Islamists and Kurdish nationalists was seen as a threat to Turkey's secular identity and unitary nature. In the 1990s the parties representing the traditional Islamist line in Turkish politics began to demonstrate more strength in the polls. In subsequent elections in the 1990s the Islamist Welfare Party (RP) got several municipalities, including Istanbul and Ankara, and became the number one party in 1996 elections. Similarly Kurdish nationalist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) began to escalate its attacks against the state and continued the challenge Turkey's unitary nature. The National Security Policy Document was modified in 1997 and Islamism (*irtica*) and Kurdish separatism were identified as major threats to Turkey's security. These 'internal threats' were then tied to their external support bases. Within this context it was argued that in the post-Cold War era main threats to Turkish national security came from the south, i.e. the Middle East. The uncertainty that emerged in Iraq after the Gulf War was considered as an important part of this new threat perception.⁵ The tensions about these issues subsided in the late 1990s and most of the 2000s. Domestic developments such as the capture of the Abdullah Öcalan and the cessation of PKK terrorism contributed to this atmosphere. Yet the conflicts reemerged in the mid-2000s when the PKK started to gain momentum. Therefore, overall the internal conflicts have negatively affected the way Turkey perceived itself and its relations with Iraq.

Internationally Turkey's regional identity as part of Europe or Asia came under increasing debate at home and in Europe. For many Turks and Europeans, Turkey's NATO membership was no longer enough to make Turkey part of 'the West' in the post-Cold War era. The rejection of Turkey's application for membership in the European Community (EC) in 1987 had already underlined this confusion about regional identity. NATO's refusal to consider protecting Turkey from attack under Article 5 during the Gulf Crisis in 1990 created an intense frustration in Turkey and led to the questioning of Turkey's Western identity. The debates were subsided with the decision of the European Council to accept Turkey officially as a candidate country at its Helsinki Summit of December 1999. The relationship got more serious with the decision of the Council in December 2004 to start accession negotiations in October 2005. However, despite these positive developments Turkey-EU relations continued to have

⁵ Şadi Ergüvenç, "Turkey's Security Perceptions," *Foreign Policy*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (1998), pp.32-42.

its ups and downs and thus keeping the worries in Turkey about its possible membership constantly alive. Ironically, as Turkey has come closer to the EU, it set itself apart. Those who are against Turkey's membership on both sides have mobilized to create further problems. In the meantime, Turkey's relation with its NATO ally, the US has become more problematic mainly over Iraq. Therefore, Turkey's international relations have been very much affected by the developments in Iraq as well as the problems in Turkey's relations with the EU and the US have had implications for how Turkey perceived the developments in Iraq.

In sum, Turkish political and military elite increasingly found themselves operating in an environment of uncertainty and ambiguity. The developments in Iraq after 1991 further contributed to this atmosphere. As Holsti argues uncertainty and ambiguity prompt a reliance on pre-existing beliefs.⁶ The foreign and security policy establishment and the political parties increasingly invoked the elements of Turkey's security culture. This culture as a set of shared assumptions and decision rules framed choices and policies by predisposing elites toward certain decisions over others. The norms of the security culture are deeply institutionalized. In addition to the bureaucracy, the dominant security culture permeated most of the political parties, albeit in varying degrees. Thus the debate around the Iraq issue since 1991 has been framed within this context.

The Problem of Northern Iraq: 1991-2003

Right after the Gulf War of 1991 a refugee crisis erupted when Saddam launched a military campaign to suppress the Kurdish rebellion in the north of the country. About 500,000 Iraqi Kurds escaped to the Turkish-Iraqi border. As a response to the humanitarian crisis that erupted, and within the context of the UN Security Council Resolution 688, the US, the UK and France created the Operation Provide Comfort (OPC) to conduct humanitarian operations and to return refugees to their homes. This force gained a permanent status as OPC II (later as Operation Northern Watch-ONW). The aim was to deter a new attack of the Iraqi central government on the Kurds and to enforce a northern no-fly zone. Turkey was playing a central role in all of these developments as the operations were being conducted from the Incirlik airbase in southern Turkey. However, at the

⁶ Ole Holsti, "Cognitive Dynamics and Images of the Enemy," F. John and A. Smith (eds) *Image and Reality in World Politics*, NY, Columbia University Press, 1976.

same time Ankara was very much disturbed by what was going on. Turkey's worst fears were becoming reality. The whole saga had internationalized the Kurdish issue and the major powers established political and military presence in northern Iraq which was no longer under the control of the central government. Turkish policy makers were concerned about the possible implications of these developments on Kurds of Turkey. This was a particularly pressing problem as since 1984 the PKK was waging a war against the Turkish state. The PKK began to use the vacuum in northern Iraq to establish itself there and thus to be able to launch attacks against Turkey.

Thus a new era started in Iraq- which would last till the US invasion in 2003. During those 12 years northern Iraq became almost an independent entity under the protection of the US and UK forces. In May 1992, legislative elections were held for the Kurdish regional assembly. This assembly formed the first Kurdish regional government in June and approved the creation of a 'federated state' in northern Iraq in October. Thus a new dynamic was set in motion by the creation of a northern enclave. The progress in northern Iraq was harmed by a civil war between the two main Kurdish parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) of Massoud Barzani and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) of Jalal Talabani. Nevertheless, the Iraqi Kurds escaped the control of the central government and thus were able to strengthen their separate identity.

These developments in 1991-2003 highly disturbed Turkish political and military elite. They feared that the dynamic set in motion would lead to the disintegration of Iraq and the establishment of a Kurdish state. This was something that they were against because of expected spillover effects for Turkey's own Kurdish population. The Iraqi Kurdish experience of self government might attract Turkey's Kurds and/or KRG (Kurdish Regional Government) might engage in irredentist discourse and activities.⁷ In addition to such worries, it was also disturbing for Ankara that the PKK, using the power vacuum in northern Iraq, had already established itself in the region. As result there had been a clear increase in the PKK activities in Turkey. Thus, Ankara started to consider northern Iraq as a national security issue. To make matters more complex, throughout the 1990s Turkey found itself in an awkward position of supporting the US's Iraq

⁷ Bill Park, "Strategic Location, Political Dislocation: Turkey, the United States, and Northern Iraq," *MERIA Journal* Vol. 7, No. 2 (June 2003) at <http://meria.idc.ac.il> .

policy and yet deeply resenting it for its implications for Turkey. The US's Iraq policy in the 1990s was at odds with the status quo.

The developments in northern Iraq were further unsettling for Turkey due to great power's involvement. During this period many in Turkey began to voice suspicions about the motivations of these countries in the region. The critics focused on the Poised Hammer force, as OPC II came to be known in Turkey. The periodic renewal of its mandate in the Turkish parliament became a very contentious issue. In fact, all the political parties voted against the extension of the mandate when they were in opposition. In addition to the political parties, OPC II was regularly criticized by the news media, and public opinion polls showed an increasing opposition to its existence.⁸ The military was also said to be sensitive to the claims that "the force might, even unintentionally, extend help to the Kurdish separatists and that supplies might be reaching them accidentally."⁹

Despite these sometimes quite serious accusations and criticisms, the parliament continued to extend the mandate of the Poised Hammer. The foreign and security bureaucracy was in fact maintaining the position that Turkey's support to and participation in the force was providing several benefits to Turkey: such as having a free hand in northern Iraq to pursue the PKK; preventing another refugee flow to Turkey; and maintaining good relations with the US, a critical ally in other areas and issues. However, the interesting point was that although Ankara felt pragmatically the necessity of cooperating with the US, it continued to be suspicious about the intentions of Washington and thus increasingly became critical of its Iraq policy.¹⁰

The developments in Iraq after the Gulf War reinforced the main elements of Turkey's strategic culture. Turkey was very much disturbed by the changes in status quo. Ankara's perspective on Iraq was limited to northern Iraq and the Kurdish issue. The issues in northern Iraq and southeastern Turkey were seen as one and the external powers involvement and presence brought back the memories of the last years of the Ottoman

⁸ Baskin Oran *Kalkık Horoz* (Poised Hammer), Ankara, Bilgi Yayinevi, 1998, pp.117-118 and 140.

⁹ Mahmut Bali Aykan, "Turkey's Policy Toward Northern Iraq, 1991-1995", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 4, (October 1996) p. 348.

¹⁰ Meliha Benli Altunışık, "Turkish-U.S. Security Relations: The Middle East Dimension" in *Turkish-American Relations: 200 Years of Divergence and Convergence*, in M. Aydın and C. Erhan (eds.), London, Routledge, 2004.

Empire.¹¹ It did not matter that the Ottoman Empire was at that time a party to a war and defeated. Neither the fact that the countries that were on the opposite side at that time have long been allies and there were intense institutional, political, economic and cultural ties with them. Despite several statements coming from Washington on the US commitment to the territorial integrity of Iraq, the suspicions lingered in Ankara. Turkey assessed what has been happening in Iraq through the lens of the Kurdish issue and security perspective dominated the policy as the issues were defined as existential. It is within this framework that Turkey's policy aims and instruments were defined. Ankara was against the disintegration of Iraq and establishment of a Kurdish state. In order to deal with these challenges Turkey used several policy means, diplomatic and military. As to the latter Turkey launched several military incursions into northern Iraq and eventually established a military contingent there. Diplomatically Ankara aimed to get the US to support to its objectives. Turkey also established ties with the Iraqi Kurdish groups at times and enlisted their help against the PKK, while at the same time building its relations with the Turkmen, Iraqi Turkish community.

The War of 2003 and Post-Saddam Iraq

In 2002 when the first signs of US mobilization for war emerged, Turkey became particularly concerned about possible consequences of this war for the territorial integrity of Iraq. Thus Ankara initiated a two-tier policy: On the one hand, Ankara was launching several diplomatic initiatives in the hope of resolving the conflict between Baghdad and Washington without resort to a war. To this end Turkey tried to bring together regional countries, including Syria and Iran, as well as initiated several diplomatic efforts to convince Saddam regime to back down. On the other hand Turkey was negotiating with the US for its role in a possible US attack against Iraq. The negotiations between Washington and Ankara focused on three issues: "First was economic compensation Ankara should seek to extract in return for its cooperation. The second issue was the terms under which Ankara might permit its territory to be used by US and allied forces. Third, Turkey's military drew up plans to insert substantial forces into northern Iraq so as to keep the lid on the situation if necessary. Throughout the second half of 2002 and into 2003, Ankara's negotiating

¹¹ Cengiz Çandar, "Turkish Foreign Policy and the War on Iraq," in Lenore G. Martin and Dimitris Kerides (eds.) *The Future of Turkish Foreign Policy*, Cambridge: The MIT Press 2004, p. 53.

approach was to interconnect these issues, using Washington's needs as a lever to ensure Ankara's own needs were satisfied."¹²

Turkey had serious distress about the consequences of such a war. In general, the possibility of ethnic and religious strife in post-war Iraq was considered to create an enormous instability in the region. In addition there were worries about a potential upsurge of Kurdish nationalism with significant implications for Turkish national security. In fact, Turkey at that time frequently voiced its displeasure with the developments in northern Iraq, such as the announcement of a constitution for a federal Kurdish region with claims to Kerkuk as the regional capital. In that atmosphere Ankara even went as far as declaring the establishment of a Kurdish state and the expansion of Kurdish control to oil-rich Kerkuk as *casus belli*.

While continuing its own negotiations with Washington, Ankara was watching with increasing suspicion "the discussions that had begun taking place as early as May 2002 between the PUK/KDP leadership and the US officials."¹³ In the meantime, the Iraqi Kurdish leadership's public warnings and threats against any Turkish military involvement in northern Iraq were adding to the resentment. In the light of these developments US officials' assurances for their support of the territorial integrity of Iraq fell into deaf ears. The Turkish public also appeared totally unimpressed with the US's arguments about Iraq being a threat to world peace. Public opinion polls showed that almost about 90 percent of the Turkish public opposed to a war against Iraq and Turkey's involvement in it.

Against this background, on 1 March the Turkish parliament rejected the motion send by the newly-formed government by Justice and Development Party (AKP) and thus blocked the creation of a northern front. Of the 533 parliamentarians in session, 264 voted for the motion, 250 voted against it, and 19 abstained, bringing the motion only three votes shy of a constitutionally mandated simple majority since there were 19 abstentions. In addition to all the deputies of the opposition People's Republican Party (CHP), 99 AKP deputies also voted against the motion. Thus Ankara took one of the most hotly debated foreign policy positions in Republic's history.

¹² Park, 2003.

¹³ Ibid.

The unfolding of Turkish-US negotiations and the final decision of the parliament in fact exposed once again deep ambiguities about Iraq issue in Ankara. Turkey was mainly concerned about the disintegration of Iraq and was highly suspicious as to whether this war was going to cause that. From *realpolitik* perspective it would have been wise for Turkey to get involved in the war and cooperate with the US to safeguard its interests in Iraq. Yet several other dynamics worked against such a decision. Those who supported the involvement within the political and military elite did so grudgingly due to the prevailing pro-status quo culture and deep suspicions about great powers' involvement in the region. Even those who supported Turkey's involvement seemed to believe that this was not a win-win scenario and that the aim was to cut Turkey's losses as far as possible. Those who were against the involvement, such as the president, did so with the belief that this was an unjust war and that they did not want Turkey to drag into a Middle Eastern conflict. In the parliament there were additional dynamics. Although the opposition party represented the dominant strategic culture, the ruling AKP members in the parliament were to some extent reflected the sub-culture. Identity politics mattered in determining the votes of some AKP deputies. The deputies with roots in the previous Islamist parties and movements as well as those that represent mostly the Kurdish populated regions of the country voted against the motion.

Turkey's non-involvement did not prevent the Iraqi invasion as some in the Turkish political elite hoped. The fact that the regime toppled without a protracted war relieved Ankara as it was anxious about such a possibility that could easily led to disintegration. However, Turkey continued to face important challenges in post-Saddam Iraq. The continuing presence of the PKK in Iraq remains a serious worry for Ankara. The state estimates that most of the approximately 5,000 PKK militants are located in northern Iraq, including some top leaders.¹⁴ This situation complicates Turkey's relations with the US and the governments in Iraq. The US considers the PKK and its successors to be terrorist organizations.¹⁵ Thus, the Turkish government has been calling on Washington to keep its promises to combat the organization in Iraq and yet feeling that the US does not seem to take seriously Turkey's concerns into consideration.¹⁶ The

¹⁴ Turkish Foreign Ministry, available at

www.mfa.gov.tr/MFA.tr/DisPolitika/AnaKonular/Terörizm/Pkkkongragel.htm (Accessed on 5 April 2006).

¹⁵ The PKK changed its name to KADEK (Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress) in 2002. That name was once again changed to Kongra-Gel (Kurdistan People's Congress) in late 2003.

¹⁶ For instance, in an interview with a Turkish TV channel, CNNTurk, U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz said that the PKK will no longer remain in northern Iraq and that the United States is determined to clear the PKK completely from there. "Wolfowitz: We Will Completely Remove Kurdish Group from Northern Iraq," *Turkish Daily News* (Ankara), 1 February 2004.

situation became more complicated in early September 2004 when the PKK renounced the unilateral cease-fire it had declared in February 2000. Since then, PKK activity and violence in Turkey have escalated.

On the other hand, Turkey has maintained a military presence of about 2,000 forces in Iraq since 1996.¹⁷ Ankara argues that as long as the PKK remains in Iraq, it should be able to keep its military presence there. However, soon it became clear that in post-Saddam Iraq their existence was open to provocations and may lead to a crisis. In July 2003, 11 members of the Turkish Special Forces in Suleimaniyah were apprehended by the American troops on the grounds of an open conspiracy. They were only released after two days of detention. The whole ordeal, including the images of the Turkish soldiers hooded by the American soldiers, led to a humiliation and anger in Turkey and created another crisis in Turkish-US relations. The participation of Kurdish *peshmergas* of the PUK in the affair further contributed to the fervor.¹⁸ Many in Turkey suspected that the US was taking 'revenge' for the Turkish parliament's refusal to allow the US to move troops through Turkey into Iraq in 2003. The Suleimaniyah incident, as the event came to be known in Turkey, became the opening scene of a highly nationalist anti-American movie set in Iraq, the *Valley of the Wolves: Iraq* (2006), in which the fictional hero set out for revenge.

Concern about Iraq's political survival as a united state is also having a significant impact on Turkish security policy. Turkey initially opposed the kind of federal structure proposed by Iraq's Kurds, believing that a loose federation could be a transition to the establishment of an independent Kurdish state in the north. Ankara argued that federalism based on ethnicity or sectarian differences would only invite problems for Iraq- and possibly Turkey- as such a structure could lead to Iraq's disintegration and/or ethnic and sectarian conflict. Later, Ankara readjusted its position to support a form of administrative federalism as it realized that a federal structure could in fact be the most feasible way to keep Iraq's territorial integrity. Turkey however remains uneasy about a fully autonomous Kurdish region. Within that context Turkey adamantly opposes Kurdish control of the multi-ethnic Kerkuk region, in large part because of the

¹⁷ The Office of the Chief of the General Staff briefing to the Foreign Relations Committee at the Turkish Parliament. Murat Yetkin . 2004. *Tezkere: Irak Krizinin Gerçek Öyküsü* (The Motion: The Real Story of the Iraqi Crisis), Ankara, Remzi Kitabevi, 2004, p. 128.

¹⁸ Ümit Özdağ. "Türk-Amerikan İlişkilerinde Irak Krizi," (The Iraqi Crisis in Turkish-American Relations) *Stratejik Analiz* (August 2003).

assumption that Kurdish control of the region and its resources could contribute to Iraq's ultimate disintegration. In any case, Ankara advocates exploration and administration of Iraq's natural resources by its central government. Kerkuk also represents a national interest for Turkey, namely protection of the rights and interests of the Turkmen, a Turkish minority in Iraq.¹⁹ As part of its effort to develop a post-war policy justification for its interest in Iraq, Turkey began to show interest in Iraq's Turkmen population in the mid-1990s. This interest was not based on expansionist designs, but rather on the desire to increase Turkey's influence over developments in Iraq and counter the weight of Kurdish groups in the north.

The year 2007 became quite conflictual as to Turkey's interests in the developments in Iraq mainly due to the escalation of tensions as regards the status of Kerkuk region. The current Iraqi constitution's stipulation about the resolution of this issue led to increasing tensions in the region as well as Turkey's relations especially with the Iraqi Kurdish groups. The fact that Turkey was going to hold two elections this year-one presidential and one parliamentary- complicated the issue further. Due to these characteristics, the Kerkuk issue has come to represent all the complexities and the problems of Turkey's relations with Iraq. It has been one of the main elements of Turkey's Iraq policy to oppose the integration of the Kerkuk region with the Kurdistan Regional Government. Instead Turkey has been advocating a special status for this multi-ethnic city. Turkey has been arguing that the reversal of Arabization policies should not lead to Kurdification of the Kerkuk region. There are concerns that the Kurdish groups, having the power and the means, have been trying to change the demographic structure of the city. During the war, despite the assurance to the contrary, the PUK militias had entered the city and there were reported destruction of land records. Since the war Kurds have been pouring back into the city and encouraged to do so by the Kurdish political parties that have given them money or building supplies to help them reclaim their land. But this process has not been transparent and based on legal cases which create questions as to the reliability of these claims. All these developments were considered problematic by Turkey.

¹⁹ As is the case with all ethnic and religious groups in Iraq it is impossible to know the exact size of the Turkmen population. Estimates vary widely, ranging from 600,000 to 3 million. The last Iraqi census was taken in 1957, when Turkmen represented a higher percentage of Iraq's population, particularly in the Kerkuk area, than they do today because of internal and external emigration.

In the meantime however, Turkey concentrated its efforts on the postponement of the referendum which was put in the constitution with a deadline of December 2007. The Turkish government has been arguing that imposing a referendum of which the results are already known would not solve the problem but on the contrary would create tensions and instability in the city. It is also clear that the requirements cited in Article 140 of the constitution, namely normalization and census, have not been met by the constitutional mandated deadlines.

However, a very important aspect of a growing row between Iraqi Kurdish parties and Turkey which has been culminated in the Kerkuk issue recently has been the atmosphere of non-dialogue and mistrust between them, to which domestic considerations and politics in both sides have contributed tremendously. The inflammatory rhetoric by the Iraqi Kurdish leaders against Turkey and their exclusivist discourse and acts as regards to Kerkuk issue have led to deterioration of relations. The zero-sum mentality led to increasing opposition coming from the other communities in the Kerkuk region, including the Turkmens, to their plans. In response, increasing nationalist atmosphere and the start of the election year in Turkey led to emotional politics around the issue. The existence of the PKK in northern Iraq further contributes to the radicalization of discourse in Turkey. For instance a recent suggestion by the Prime Minister Erdoğan that Turkey should be talking to the Iraqi Kurdish leaders (something which Turkey had been doing since 1991 up until recently) got a negative reaction from the Joint Chief of Staff on the grounds that they would not talk to those who support and harbor the PKK militias.

More important in the long run however are the problems that the discussion around Kerkuk reflects as regards to the Iraqi Kurdish politics: First, is the dangerous evolution of Iraqi Kurdish politics which involves “otherization” of Turkey in its quest for building national identity as well as in competition between two groups of the KDP and the PUK. Although the same malaise sometimes affects Turkey’s policy as well, this dimension of Iraqi Kurdish politics in the long run may be more detrimental for northern Iraq as Turkey is in fact the main artery for this region. The trade volume is increasing and hundreds of Turkish companies are operating in northern Iraq. Turkey is also one of the main electricity suppliers to this region. Therefore, there are clear benefits to reap for both sides and to construct an anti-Turkey discourse would not further these interests.

Second, as the recent ICG report²⁰ demonstrates there has been a mishandling of the whole process by the Kurdish parties as they failed to engage in a meaningful dialogue with the other stakeholders in the city and thought that since they have the power they can impose their will. But the developments in Kerkuk have demonstrated that the problem for the Kurdish plans was not only the Turkish opposition, but more importantly the opposition from other communities in the region.

Proliferation of Policy Instruments

Whatever the merits or disadvantages of Turkey's decision of not to get involved in the war, the result of it was that Turkey's influence and role in post-Saddam Iraq was significantly curtailed. Since then Turkey has engaged in efforts to change that as it would like to have a role in Iraq so that it can prevent developments that it considers harmful to its interests. The use of military means to achieve this goal was highly limited after the decision of the Turkish parliament. A second attempt to achieve Turkey's objective through the use of military power came when Turkey and the US agreed to send approximately 10,000 Turkish troops to Iraq as a Stability Force. The Turkish Grand National Assembly passed a motion authorizing the deployment of troops in Iraq in early October 2003. Turkish troops were to be deployed in the so-called 'Sunni triangle' where the American forces faced the fiercest resistance. However, that initiative failed when opposition from Iraq's Governing Council forced the United States to back down. The Kurdish groups as well as most Arab Iraqis opposed the presence of Turkish troops in Iraq as a challenge to their sovereignty. The Kurds feared, as well, that the Turkish forces would use northern Iraq as a military base and a staging ground for operations against them, and as a supply route. The Arabs, on the other hand, opposed involvement by the neighbors in Iraqi internal affairs.²¹

Another aspect of the debate about the use of military force has been the possibility of Turkey doing so unilaterally if and when it feels that its interests in Iraq are being threatened. In the 1990s Turkey established 'red lines' in its Iraq policy and threatened to use force if they were violated.

²⁰ International Crisis Group, *Iraq and the Kurds: Resolving the Kerkuk Crisis*, No 64, 19 April 2007.

²¹ Ibrahim al-Marashi, "A New Chapter in Iraqi-Turkish Relations? Examining Iraqi and Arab Reactions to the Turkish Deployment to Iraq" *Insight Turkey*, Vol.6, No.1 (January–March 2004), pp.119–28. It is also argued that Paul Bremer was also opposing Turkish military involvement. This is interesting in terms of showing that how the local US officials developed different views and relations.

These red lines included the establishment of an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq; a threat to the safety of the Turkmen living in Iraq; and any change in the status of Kerkuk. Ankara also announced that it would not tolerate giving the PKK a free hand in Iraq to restart its war against Turkey. Crossing these red lines would be regarded by Turkey as reason for unilateral military intervention. Since the toppling of Saddam's regime, several developments have seemed to challenge Turkey's 'red lines,' but Ankara's response has been to tone down its rhetoric. Critics of Turkish policy, especially among the Turkish nationalist camp, argue that the red lines have simply vanished or 'turned into pink.' The question then remains, is there still a possibility of unilateral Turkish military intervention in Iraq? It is clear that such an action might possibly endanger Turkey's relations with the United States and the EU, and thus highly unlikely. However, the possibility is being raised from time to time in Ankara to signal the determination to act if serious threat emerges to its interests from Iraq.²²

Especially since 2003 two lines of criticism of Turkey's Iraq policy have become quite pronounced: First, the nationalist front has been criticizing the official policy for being too timid and advocating a tougher policy including the use of military force in order to protect Turkey's interests. For those groups not only an actual independence but even the current status of Kurdish autonomy is unacceptable. The possibility of endangering Turkey's relations with the EU or the US over a tougher policy in Iraq does not also factor into their analysis because in their worldview these actors are also seen as working against Turkey's interests and even trying to divide Turkey up.²³

Second, the liberals criticize the official policy for being too focused on the Kurdish issue and the use of military means. Thus unlike the nationalists, they see the policy as being unnecessarily tough. They advocate more cooperative approach, particularly with the Kurds of Iraq. Such a policy is seen necessary not only to achieve stability in the southeast of Turkey, but also to continue the EU process and close relations with the US.²⁴

²² It has been reported in the press that in fact the recent summit of top civil and military leadership in Ankara on 14 October discussed this issue in the face of what it considered as attempts to change the status of Kerkuk. It is also argued that Turkey would be discussing such an option with the United States. *Milliyet*, 1 November 2004.

²³ See for example, Tuncay Özkan, *CIA Kürtleri* (CIA's Kurds), Istanbul, Alfa Yayınları, 2004.

²⁴ For instance, see Hasan Cemal, 'Hot Zotla Olmuyor!' (Bullying Does Not Work!) *Milliyet*, 4 February 2005.

The official policy entails some elements of both of these positions and arguments. However, as a trend there has been a proliferation of means, particularly a shift towards non-military means, in Turkey's Iraq policy. This has been partly due to a realist understanding that the use of military means are limited and that new tools are necessary to increase Turkey's influence and leverage in Iraq. The interesting question here remains whether and to what extent the AKP government has contributed to this shift. On the one hand, as a largely 'anti-systemic' party, AKP was expected to redefine some of the elements of Turkey's Iraq's policy. On the other hand, domestic limitations put restraints on such a redefinition. These domestic limitations not only include the systemic restraints, both in terms of bureaucratic resistance and policy instincts, but also the largely nationalist constituency of the AKP.²⁵ As a result AKP government's Iraq policy has remained equally ambiguous. In their statements both Prime and Foreign ministers have been giving different signals. At times the government seems to be responding to nationalist themes when it comes to Turkmens or emphasizing tougher language. At other times there are messages of cooperation with different actors and groups in Iraq and thus signs of a shift in emphasis.

Nevertheless, overall there has been a further emphasis on political and economic cooperation with the Iraqi actors, as well as relying on diplomatic means in recent years. Among the Iraqi actors, the two Kurdish parties have been central to Turkey's Iraq policy and Turkey's relations with these groups have been complex. In the 1990s Turkey provided diplomatic passports to both Barzani and Talabani and became their link to the outside world. The two parties opened offices in Ankara. Turkey allowed border trade through Kurdish customs posts and provided salaries to some *peshmerga* fighters. In return the KDP at times worked with Turkey in its war with the PKK in northern Iraq. Most importantly, however, by allowing U.S. and U.K. forces to use Incirlik airbase during Operation Provide Comfort and Operation Northern Watch, Turkey was key to the continuation of the north's *de facto* independence from Baghdad.

Despite this history of cooperation, in the months preceding the War of 2003 Turkey's relations with the two Kurdish leaders deteriorated. The

²⁵ Thus it is argued that there is "no electoral incentive for the JDP (AKP) to enter into this controversial domain." Hakan Yavuz and Ali Nihat Özcan. "The Kurdish Question and Turkey's Justice and Development Party," *Middle East Policy*, 13, 1 (Spring 2006), p. 115.

Turkish parliament's refusal to allow US troops to open a second front in Turkey undermined Turkey's relations with the U.S. and strengthened the hands of the Kurdish leaders, who now also began to cooperate with each other to reap the benefits of the war. The Kurdish leaders used their increasing strategic clout to limit as far as possible any Turkish role and influence in post-Saddam Iraq. Their discourse against Turkey became highly inflammatory. Some of the discourse of the Iraqi Kurdish leaders seems to be directed towards domestic consumption and aims to garner support through the antagonistic position against a 'common enemy'.

These developments heightened Turkey's concerns and led to an equally negative discourse on Iraqi Kurds and Kurdish aspirations in Iraq. The state discourse was very much intermingled with the discussions on national identity in Turkey. The escalation of PKK attacks on soldiers and civilians contributed to the negative atmosphere and further linking of what was happening in Turkey with the developments in Iraq. As the PKK stepped up its attacks and the political process progressed in Iraq, Turkey once again began to intensely debate how to solve its Kurdish question and to deal with the PKK. The transformation of Iraq into a federal state, with Iraqi Kurds having extensive rights, gave further urgency to the discussion. The escalation of PKK violence despite several reforms on the Kurdish issue and the failure of Kurdish leaders to distance themselves from the PKK, whether for reasons of ideology and/or fear, strangled the progress in these issues. Therefore mutual mistrust and domestic politics in both sides of the border continues to make the relationship between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds a difficult one.

The AKP government recently emphasized that Turkey's policy towards Iraq is not based on groups in Iraq, but rather is a policy that takes the whole of Iraq into consideration. Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül stated in a June 2004 interview that Ankara "will maintain equal distance with all ethnic and religious groups in Iraq who are all relatives."²⁶ Turkey has also been careful to establish contacts with different actors in Iraq, particularly with several Shiite and Sunni groups. Significantly Turkey hosted a meeting in Istanbul between four Sunni groups in Iraq and the US ambassador to Iraq, Zalmay Khalilzad, to persuade these groups to participate the upcoming elections.²⁷ In May 2005 then Iraqi Prime

²⁶ Şahin Alpay, "Türkiye'nin Irak Politikası Değişiyor Mu?" (Is Turkey's Policy Towards Iraq Changing?) *Zaman* (Istanbul), 5 June 2004.

²⁷ Milliyet, 5 December 2005.

Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari made his first foreign visit to Turkey. Based on their sources in the Turkish Foreign Ministry, several journalists reported that the visit was a very successful one and underlined al-Jaafari's support to the importance of territorial integrity of Iraq and granting a 'special status' to Kerkuk.²⁸

Similarly Turkey launched an effort to increase economic relations with Iraq. Turkey's Foreign Ministry has launched an initiative with public and private companies to support Turkey's involvement in food and construction sectors as well as the revitalization of transportation in southeastern Turkey.²⁹ Initially the instability in Iraq limited trade and reconstruction work and cut operations at the Kirkuk-Yumurtalik oil pipeline for a sustained period of time. Employees of Turkish companies working in Iraq were kidnapped, leading the companies to withdrawal from Iraq. Despite these problems the Turkish companies persisted and the trade between the two countries reached to three billion dollars by 2006.³⁰ The investment by Turkish companies mostly in infrastructure in northern Iraq has increased in the last few years. Gaziantep, a city in southeastern Turkey, hosted two Iraq trade fairs in the last two years with extensive participation from Iraq to further encourage economic relations between the two countries. In March 2007 Turkey also hosted the 5th Donors Conference of the World Bank-UNDP Iraq Trust Fund underlying Turkey's eagerness to play a strategic role in Iraqi reconstruction and opening to foreign markets.

Turkey has also been talking to regional countries about Iraq and the possibility of initiating a regional security alternative. This policy, called the Neighborhood Forum, originated with the Ecevit government and was intended to galvanize Iraq's neighbors before war. The initiative failed largely because most of the countries in the region did not want to be seen as opposing the United States and did not want to accept Turkey's activism.

Turkey's efforts continued after the war. The AKP launched a regional states' initiative that focuses on fostering dialogue and cooperation with regional countries on the issue of Iraq. The Neighbouring Countries Initiative started in 2003, stemming from the common interest of preventing

²⁸ Fikret Bila, "Caferi'nin Ziyareti," (Caferi's Visit) *Milliyet*, 21 May 2005.

²⁹ *Hürriyet* (Istanbul), 4 May 2003.

³⁰ Speech by Ambassador Oguz Celikkol, Special representative for Iraq. "Türkiye'nin Irak'a bakışı" (Turkey's View of Iraq" http://setav.org/document/Oguz_Celikkolun_Konusmasi.pdf

the war. It has persisted however after the war and turned into a forum where particularly the situation in Iraq and its implications for the region are being discussed. In the fifth foreign ministers' summit of, which was held in Kuwait on February 14–15, 2004, the participation of the Iraq's foreign minister Hoshiyar Zibari for the first time further strengthened the initiative. So far nine meetings of foreign ministers have been held. There is also a parallel series of meetings of interior ministers.³¹

Conclusions

Iraq has constituted a significant foreign policy challenge for Turkey, with equally important domestic implications. Turkey's security culture acted as a distinct national lens to shape perceptions of events. This culture is characterized by beliefs and values, including deep skepticism about great power involvement in the area; clear preference for status quo; *realpolitik* perspective; and reluctance to get involved in Middle East affairs. The environment of ambiguity and uncertainty no doubt invoked these perspectives more forcefully. The difficulties and challenges of internal transformation, particularly the inability to effectively deal with the Kurdish issue and the PKK, further exacerbated these beliefs and values.

As other states, Turkey's security culture is also a product of historical memory and geopolitical circumstances. Thus the question is to what extent these deeply embedded perspectives can change. The literature on security culture generally argues that these beliefs and values are at least 'semi permanent'³² partly because some elements of strategic culture are very difficult to disconfirm.

However, in the short and medium term several factors could have a significant impact on Turkey's Iraq policy. In the short term the entanglement of Turkey's relations with Iraq from the domestic politics and conflicts would be crucial for the development of a more relevant foreign policy strategies and tools. Although the debate, both public and at the state level, about such an important foreign policy issue is essential, the way the Iraqi issue has been domesticated in Turkey by largely making it part of power struggles between different groups and ideologies have been detrimental for Turkey's interests.

³¹ The UN and the EU have been sending observers to the meetings.

³² Jack Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Nuclear Options*, Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1977, p. 8.

In the medium term the possibility of reaching an understanding with Iraq and its neighbors could help reduce regional security uncertainties. The new strategic setting that emerged after the Iraq War of 2003 created a new sub-regional security sphere with Iraq as its center. The main actors in this new setting are no longer just the countries of the Gulf; they now include Turkey, Syria and Jordan. The question, then, is how the states of this particular sub-region can achieve security in the new strategic environment. In the Iraq-centered security space the states share a common interest, namely preventing the total failure of Iraq. In the current environment characterized by uncertainty and fear, some states are behaving as if they are pursuing policies that may be working against this common interest. However, this does not change the fact that if Iraq fails, if it disintegrates or becomes bogged down in civil war, then all of the countries in this sub-region will suffer. If the conditions of uncertainty and fear are mitigated through establishment of a security regime, they would not be pursuing policies that are undermining their security interests in the long run. Countries like Iran and Syria, who worry about American use of military force against them, would have a stake in cooperating with a new security regime. Finally, all the states in this sub region have an interest in containing the transnational radical terrorist groups. These common interests should be sufficient to build a limited multilateral security regime. Agreement on a collective set of basic principles, such as respect for territorial integrity, peaceful resolution of disputes, on minimal confidence building measures, and on mechanisms for dialogue can be a start. The external actors, including the United States, the EU and the UN, should act as guarantors of the system and work to create a conducive environment and incentives for such a system without being part of it. The most important achievement of such a regime would be the recognition of the legitimate security rights of all and the unacceptability of the use of military force. As such it may act as a building block for a more comprehensive and institutionalized common security framework in a region facing daunting challenges to security and political stability.