CONCLUSION
During the period 1970-85, the foreign policy behaviour of Turkey, particularly towards the Arab Gulf states revealed a distinct pattern. In substance, it was non-interventionist and risk-averse. In style, it was low-key and predominantly incremental. Rather than contesting or competing for influence in the region, Turkey opted for a policy that could be loosely described as constructive engagement. It was constructive when compared to Turkey’s pursuit of pro-Western alignments (i.e. CENTO) in the previous decades. Further, unlike Turkey’s relative aloofness in the past, it was meant to be an active engagement based on such cardinal principles as non-interference in domestic affairs, neutrality in intra-regional conflicts, reliance on diplomacy for the resolution of conflicts and enhancement of bilateral relations through economic cooperation.

As a result, Turkey’s relations with the Arab Gulf states underwent a qualitative change. Together with a rapid expansion in trade and cultural ties, including a surge of academic interests in identifying integrative elements in their long long history of Islamic fraternity, Ankara’s active role in the OIC and anti-Israeli assertions in the UN underlined a pro-Arab tilt. This shift in the Turkish foreign policy orientations towards the region has been generally attributed to Turkey’s growing dependence on the oil-producing Gulf states.¹

¹ Philip J. Robins, "Avoiding the Question" in Henri J. Barkey (ed.), Reluctant Neighbour: Turkey’s Role in the Middle East (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 1996), pp. 179-181. Also, Prof. Eron Manisali of the Institute of Middle East Business & Banking holds similar view. According to Manisali, “only economic interests that motivated Turkey’s attitude towards Arab states”. Because, no cultural or political ties with them would be possible as in case of the western Europe where Turkish workers were absorbed culturally. In the Gulf, they continue to live separately from the local people despite a common religious background. Interview with the author, (Istanbul, 11 September 1990).
It is true that Turkey facing a serious shortage of hard currency due to the oil crisis of 1973-74 and the global recession turned towards the Gulf states both for financial assistance and supply of oil. Besides, Turkey also derived considerable material benefits in the form of remittances, aid and investments, which along with an unusual boom in exports contributed to the rise of Turkey as the region’s new “trading state”. All the same, economic considerations or material orientations do not adequately explain the Turkish rapprochement with Arabs.

This has, on the contrary, more to do with the dramatic changes in the country’s external arena, notably, the onset of super-power détente and strains in its relations with the US over the issue of Cyprus. Furthermore, domestic pressures, including the growing saliency of Islam in electoral politics accounted for Turkey’s pro-Arab bias. It is, therefore, argued that Turkey’s Arab Gulf policy need to be viewed in a larger context pertaining to an overall restructuring of its foreign policy during the mid-1970s.

Most crucial to the process of restructuring was Turkey’s experience during the Cyprus crisis in July 1974, when the hostile reactions from its western partners, especially the U.S. Congressional imposition of arms embargo revealed cruelly the

2 Trading states are those, who according to Rosencrance, give increased attention to their balance of payment and develop policy instruments to encourage exports and to keep manufacturing enterprises competitive. Richard Rosenerance, *Rise of the Trading State: Commerce and Conquest in the Modern World* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), p. 185. At the end of the 1980s, Turkey with an average GNP growth of 5% and an increased export capacity of merchandise products, telecommunication and construction services, directed its diplomatic efforts at expanding trade rather than seeking economic aid. Turkey’s exports to the West Asian countries, for instance, rose from the meager 12.55% in 1977 to 42.8% in 1985, whereas exports to the Wedst dropped from 75% in 1979 and 49% in 1981. See, *State Institute of Statistics (SIS), Foreign Trade Statistics* (Ankara, 1986); Erdogan Alkin, “Economic Factors Influencing Turkey’s Relations with Middle East and Western countries” in Ali Karaosmanoglu and S. Tasha (ed.), *Middle East, Turkey and the Atlantic Alliance* (Ankara: Foreign policy Institute, 1987), pp. 182-203.
limitations of its pro-Western alignment. In effect, the Cyprus crisis "challenged the basic assumptions upon which Turkish defence and foreign policy had been bounded". Consequently, Turkey began to move away from an exclusive reliance on the West and adopted a multi-faceted foreign policy giving its diplomacy a broader outreach. Although the multi-dimensional approach shaped by what then Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit termed, "historical and geographical realities", did not lead to a fundamental shift in Turkish foreign policy as such, its Arab Gulf policy ceased to be a function of the East-West balance of forces. In other words, while Turkey clung steadfastly to Atlantic alliance, its regional foreign policy appeared to be divorced from a formal commitment to the NATO framework.

**Turkey in the 1980s: Bridging Role**

Not only did this enable Ankara to develop constructive relations with the neighbouring Arab states, but also "weakened the demagogic appeal on the Turkish domestic scene, of such themes as Islamic fundamentalism or neutralism". By the middle of the 1980s, however, Turkey's approach to the region showed signs of a perceptible change. From a close identification with the Muslim-Arab world, Turkey began to emphasise its new role as a "bridge" between East and the West. Succinctly

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5 D. Rustow, "Turkey's Liberal Revolution", *Middle East Review*, vol. 17, no. 3 (Spring 1985), p. 11.
stated, projection of bridging role in Turkey's conduct of external policy until the outbreak of the Second Gulf War might be attributed to the following developments:

1. restoration of Turkish-US relations with the onset of a new Cold War that prompted Washington to sign with Turkey the Defence and Economic Cooperation Agreement (DECA) in March 1980; 6

2. Ankara’s growing reliance on the American Jews to counter the powerful Greek and Armenian lobbies active in the US Congress to undermine Turkish image; 7

3. lack of the expected support from Arab countries in condemning the Bulgarian government’s atrocities against the Turkish minority during 1986-89; 8

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6 After the lifting of the US arms embargo, American assistance to Turkey quadrupled between 1978 and 1981, reacting an all time peak in 1985. In addition, the US undertook modernisation of airfields in the east of Turkey, and Incirlik airbase in Southern Turkey, aside from its nuclear inventory, was the main command and communication centre linked to the global US strategic network. In 1988, the Pentagon decided to modernise Incirlik with shelters against chemical weapons. Omer Karasapan, “Turkey and the US Strategy in the Age of Glasnost”, Middle East Report (September-October, 1989), pp. 4-10.

7 Until the latter half of the 1980s, the Jewish lobby in America had been pro-Greek. Because of its pressures in May 1982, for instance, the US Congress reduced military aid to Turkey by $100 million. In contrast, the Jewish lobby played an instrumental role in August 1987 in combating the Congressional efforts at introducing commemorative resolutions on the alleged Turkish massacre of Armenians during the World War I. This experience convinced policy-makers in Ankara the necessity of maintaining diplomatic relations with Israel so as to mobilise Jewish lobby in the US. Since the mid-1980s, Ankara also had an annual lobbying budget in the US of more than $2 million. Aware of what Ozal called “the strength of the Jewish lobby in the US”, then Prime Minister in an interview in 1984 clearly stated, “Turkey’s relations with Israel will be maintained. They will neither improve, nor deteriorate ...” Sami Cohen, Jewish Chronicle March 2, 1982. For more on Turkey and pro-Israel network in Washington, see Hakan Yavuz, “Turkey’s Relations with Israel”, Dis Politika (Ankara), vol. V, no. 3-4 (1990), pp. 49-50; Amikan Nachmani, Israel, Turkey and Greece (London: Frank Cass, 1987), pp. 52-59.

8 At the fifth Islamic Summit meeting in Kuwait in January 1987, the PLO along with Syria and Algeria expressed reservations over a resolution condemning the Bulgarian
4. decline of the Arab Gulf markets in the Turkish trade profile following the oil-price collapse in 1986, and a steady relative shift in Turkey’s trade links towards the OECD countries; 9

5. the Turgut Ozal government’s application for the full membership of the European Community (EC) in April 1987, and its decision to stick to the policy even after the rejection of its application. 10


9 The economic slowdown of the Arab countries had a positive effect on Turkey in terms of reducing the import costs of oil since 1986, and increasing its trade surplus (nearly $1.4 billion in 1988) with the region. This also led to a progressive decline in Turkey’s exports to Arab states; in the late 1980s it accounted for between 25% to 30%, while 45% of Turkish exports were absorbed by the EC. After a brief period of its trade diversion from Europe to the Arab gulf region, Turkey in the mid-1980s turned to the comparatively more stable and reliable European markets. See Erol Manisali, “Turkey – Middle East Economic Relations and their Impact on Turkey – Western European Relations” in Erol Manisali (ed.), Turkey’s Place in the Middle East (Istanbul: M.E. Business & Banking Magazine Publications, 1989), pp. 53-58.

10 Given Turkey’s organic links with the West since the end of the WW II, its modernization project and finally, its export-oriented economy of the 1980s, seeking membership of the new European community (EC) was only a logical extension of the overall pro-Western approach. The EC was regarded by the Turkish policy-makers as the economic axis of the Western alliance, supplementing and cementing the political pact. Turkey formally applied for full membership in 1987 eight years prior to the scheduled date. Prime Minister Ozal’s decision seemed to generate widespread support among political groups ranging from the left to right. The EC’s decision to defer Turkey’s membership for an indefinite period was greeted with deep resentment. For details, see Atila Eralp, “Turkey and the European Community in the changing post-war International system” in Canan Balkir and Allan M. Williams (eds.), Turkey and Europe (London: Pinter Publishers, 1993), pp. 24-43; Erol Manisali, “Turkey and European Community: Problems and Prospects” in E. Manisali (ed.), Turkey’s Place in Europe: Economic, Political and Cultural Dimensions (Istanbul: The M.E. Business & Banking Magazine Publications, 1988), pp. 64-68.
Inevitably, much of Turkey’s external behaviour in the second half of the 1980s was dictated by these developments. Indicative of this was Turkey’s self-defined role as a “bridge” between the Muslim East and the Western Europe. Although it sounded more like a vision than a policy with any operational significance, the ‘bridging role’ concept provided the rationale for maintaining a balanced and pragmatic relations with all sides. It appeared to rest on the conviction that Turkey because of its geo-cultural location at the crossroads between Europe and West Asia could act as a balancer or moderator without being identified with either of them. In evaluating Turkey’s “bridging functions during the late 1980s, a Turkish analyst writes “Turkish foreign policy does not see the Middle East as an alternative to the West. On the contrary, both are considered complementary for Turkey’s security and economy”.

Ironically, however, Turkey’s bridging role was neither properly understood in the West, nor did it prove attractive enough to find acceptance in the Muslim East. In case of the former, Turkey continued to be viewed, as before, an important “strategic asset” rather than a political model capable of projecting western values in the Muslim world. In the latter, Turkey’s claim either as a representative of ‘East-West synthesis’ or a viable broker in regional affairs evoked little admiration. If Turkey’s expanding

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13 The ambition to play peacemaking role in the region was expressed in the statement of then Prime Minister Ozal in January 1984, “It is impossible for us to refrain from
relations with the Jewish state, including the restoration of diplomatic representation in 1986 to the pre-1980 level\textsuperscript{14} alienated large segments of Arab public opinion, its recognition of the new Palestinian state in November 1988\textsuperscript{15} turned the Israelis sceptical about Ankara’s peacemaking role in the region. That Turkey could do precious little either in moderating the behaviour of radical Arab regimes (i.e. Syria and Libya), or in bringing Iraq and Iran closer to a solution through its mediation efforts revealed the hollowness of its bridging functions.

In practical terms it was not easy for Turkey during the period of East-West tensions to maintain a harmonious balance between its self-defined role in the area and obligations arising out of its membership to the Western Alliance. On closer scrutiny, one identifies two major limitations to Turkey’s ambitious balancing role conceived by its policy-makers in the early 1980s. Firstly, notwithstanding the Turkish government’s

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\textsuperscript{14} Israel’s new representative to Ankara with the rank of Charge d’affairs was appointed in 1985, which was followed by appointment of a senior Turkish diplomat Ekrem Guvendiren to Tel Aviv with the similar rank in 1986. Kessing’s Contemporary Archives, 1987, p. 35136. The restoration of the level of diplomatic relations set the stage for the entente that blossomed during the 1990s especially after the Madrid Peace Conference. During the late 1980s, Turkish-Israel’s trade also grew from $29 million in 1986 to $140 million at a time when Ankara’s trade with Arab states was on the decline. This explains why Turkey in 1988 voted against the Arab resolution which called for the rejection of Israeli diplomatic credentials in the UN. See M. Hakan Yavuz and Mujeeb R. Khan, “Turkish Foreign Policy Toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Duality and Development (1950-1991)”, Arab Studies Quarterly vol. 14, no. 4 (Fall 1992), p. 81.

\textsuperscript{15} Turkey was the first NATO member to give official recognition to the new Palestinian state on 15 November 1988 soon after the Palestine National Council made this announcement in its meeting in Algeirs. See Aykan, “The Palestinian Question”, pp. 103-104.
reluctance to assume responsibility outside the NATO area, the possibility of Turkey being drawn into a US-led Gulf operation could not be all together ruled out had the Soviet undertaken military moves directed at the Gulf.\(^\text{16}\) In fact, the signing of the DECA and the Reagan Administration’s pledge to restore the US-Turkish ties “back to the period of the fifties” underscored Turkey’s critical role in case of such contingencies.

Secondly, as an integral part of the West Asian state system, Turkey’s security is intimately linked to the stability of the overall order in the region. It is, in other words, not immune to the systemic disturbances either caused by the non-state entities active in the area, or by those states pursuing what an observer termed “unattainable goals”.\(^\text{17}\) Throughout the cold war, Turkey refrained from acting alone or in concert with its allies to pre-empt revision of the status quo, though it was opposed to any change in the regional balance of power favouring Iran or radical Arab regimes.

There were, however, occasions particularly during the Gulf War when Turkey’s balanced policy of benevolent neutrality was difficult to maintain. Had the Iranian offensive of February-March 1986, for instance, been successful leading to the seizure of the Mosul-Kirkuk area in northern Iraq, Turkey could not have possibly avoided its involvement to deter Tehran from creating a situation detrimental to its national security.\(^\text{18}\) Despite these structural constraints and episodic security challenges that

\(^{16}\) This was pointed out by Duygu B. Sezer in her analysis. D.B. Sezer, Turkey’s Security Policies Adelphi Papers, No. 164 (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1981), p. 60.

\(^{17}\) Quoted in Karasapan, “Turkey and the US”, p. 4.

Turkey did not waver in its adherence to the Kemalist credo of non-intervention and power projection beyond its borders was, indeed, remarkable.

**Turkey in the 1990s: Regional Power Role**

During the second Gulf War (1990-91), Turkey’s unreserved alignment with the US-led coalition against Iraq\(^\text{19}\) marked a sharp departure from its past policy of constructive engagement and avoiding entanglements. In contrast to the subdued pattern and low-key style of its diplomacy, the Turkish commitment to a Western military endeavour signified in the country’s foreign policy role conception. Rather than emphasising its bridging role, Turkey set out to project itself as a regional power capable of bearing the costs to maintain the status quo and prevent those seeking to revise it. Nowhere was this new pro-active role of Turkey more evident than in the strategic vision of then President Turgut Ozal. In his words, “... my conviction is that Turkey should

\(^{19}\) Turkey’s interest in the Mosul-Kirkuk area was three fold. Firstly, Turkey received 35% of its total oil need from Iraq through the 1000 km pipeline passing through Turkish territory to reach the Mediterranean. Secondly, Turkey was concerned about the status of nearly a million of ethnic Turks, called Turcomans. Moreover, many in Turkey never reconciled themselves to the loss of oil-rich province of Mosul to Iraq in 1926. Finally, collapse of Iraqi authority in the area would not only encourage the Kurdish separatist guerrillas to carry out cross-border attacks also conduce to the rise in Kurdish irredentism on Turkish border. Wary of these dangers, Turkish Prime Minister in November 1986 indicated the possibility of Ankara adopting a more active policy if security were threatened. *Anatolia*, November 11, 1986, in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service/Western Europe*, (hereafter cited as FBIS/WU) November 12, 1986, p. T1. The relocation of an unprecedented 60 per cent of the country’s land force along the length of Turkey’s Syrian-Iraq-Iran border indicated the seriousness of the developments for Ankara, See, *Middle East International*, December 5, 1987, p. 17.
leave its former passive and hesitant policies and engage in an active foreign policy. The reason why I made this call is because we are a powerful country in the region.”

Although Ozal’s expansive vision was not shared by much of the Kemalist establishment, in shaping an assertive foreign policy behaviour of Turkey he played an important part. Partly because of his long tenure first as Prime Minister and later, as President, and partly, his style of conducting politics without much regard for the bureaucratic mechanisms, Ozal dominated national policy-making structure until the Turkish Parliamentary elections on 20 October 1991, when the new coalition government led by Suleyman Demirel was formed. That President Ozal committed Turkey to the US-led anti-Iraq coalition during the Second Gulf War despite firm opposition from the traditional Kemalist elite, including the army, pointed to the predominance of


22 Much of the Kemalist establishment as well as the media opposed Ozal’s risky set of policies. Apprehensive of what constituted a departure from the past cautious policy of non-involvement in the Gulf affairs, they wanted a more neutralist approach. The Turkish Parliament on 12 August 1990 granted the President war powers only if the country was attacked. Frustrated by Ozal’s style of making decisions, then Foreign Minister, Ali Bozer and the defense Minister, Safa Giray resigned. So did the Chief of Staff of the Turkish armed forces, General Necip Torumtay, who had reservations against Turkey’s participation in any multilateral military action against Iraq. General Necip, like the two Ministers, resented Ozal’s personal managing of foreign affairs, accusing him of over-stepping constitutional authority as President. For a detailed discussion of the crisis inside Turkey, see Turkish Daily News (Ankara), 13 August, 1990, p.1 & p.6, “Review of the Turkish Press”, Turkish Daily News, 30 August 1990; “Review of Turkis Press”, Turkish Daily News, 6 September 1990.
“Principal decision-maker”. His decision to close down the pipeline transporting Iraqi oil through Turkish territory, and allow the use of bases by coalition planes for launching “out-of-area” NATO missions not only overturned the substance of past Turkish policy towards the region, but also challenged the Kemalist concept of an “isolated fortress Turkey”.

It would be, nevertheless, misleading to attribute Turkey’s aspiration for regional power role to the idiosyncratic nature of Ozal’s foreign policy alone. For the evaluation of Turkey’s foreign policy directions was under-way much before the developments in the Gulf actually had assumed crisis proportion. At a meeting in Vienna in December 1989, for instance, Foreign Minister Mesut Yılmaz along with 17 Turkish ambassadors examined the effects on Turkey of: the developments in Eastern Europe and

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24 As discussed before (See Chap. V), Turkey was among those members of NATO who were strongly opposed to the formal acceptance of the “out-of-area” concept by the Alliance despite Washington’s insistence to maintain it in the NATO agenda. This concept means NATO’s intervention in areas outside of its defense parameters which is mainly confined to North America and the territories of Alliance’s European members. During the Gulf crisis, because of the Soviet Union’s support for the UN sanctions against Iraq, Turkey allowed the use of its bases by the US under a separate bilateral agreement. See, FBIS/WE, 12 January 1991, P. 37.


the implications of East-West détente. The meeting laid down a broad outline of Turkey’s future foreign policy, which, among others, underlined the need for asserting Turkey’s regional importance so as to overcome its impending marginalisation.

In short, what prompted Ankara to reassess its conduct of regional foreign policy in the early 1990s was the fear of losing the intrinsic real estate value of “bulwark Turkey” in the geostrategic calculus of the Western powers, especially the U.S. Needless to add, Turkey during entire cold War period derived considerable military and economic benefits from its geographic location as a neighbour of the Soviet union, and its strategic function as the linchpin of NATO’s southeastern flank. But, with the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and along with it, the vanishing raison d’etat of NATO, Turkey’s vital relevance to the West was substantially reduced. Furthermore, as the Cold War began to wind down, Turkey’s Western friends concentrated more on the economic reconstruction and political reforms in Eastern Europe than modernisation of Turkish armed forces. To make matters worse, momentous changes in Eastern Europe coincided with European Community’s rejection of Turkey’s application for early membership.


Downgraded in one Western club, and excluded from the other, Turks increasingly became apprehensive of possible isolation from the emerging “fortress Europe”, as in the early post-World War II period. Eager to maintain Turkey within the Western sphere of strategic interests, the decision-makers in Ankara sought to “establish Turkey as a major regional power and to ensure that in every international crisis it is always treated as such by powerful countries of the West”. It is against this backdrop of Turkish attempts to adapt itself to the global-systemic changes that its reaction to the developments in the Gulf since Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 need to be analysed. If Turkey sided with the US openly and decisively, it was because the leadership of the country regarded the crisis as an invaluable opportunity to re-establish Turkey’s strategic saliency to the west. Turkey’s contribution to the anti-Iraq coalition included: a) effective closure of Iraqi pipeline through which Iraq exported 54% of its oil a day; extension until December 1991 the DECA, which gave the US access to military bases in Turkey; deployment of over 100,000 troops along the Iraqi border, which forced Baghdad to deploy substantial troops to the north, raising prospects of a two-fronts war. 

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30 Turkey, however, did not join the multinational forces, nor did it deploy army abroad, especially in Saudi Arabia as proposed by Washington. Turkey’s limited involvement in the US-led War efforts entailed the following financial losses: 1) $1 million per day as transit fees; 2) loss of supply of crude oil from Iraq on special terms designed to offset Iraqi debt to Turkey, estimated at $800 million; 3) cost of freezing exports to Iraq was estimated at $400 million; 4) Turkish contractors lost nearly $3 billion, 5) 5000 Turkish workers lost their jobs causing another $100 million; 6) loss of revenue on tourism rose to $1.5 billion. In addition to all this, the UN economic sanctions on Iraq cost Turkey nearly $20 billion between 1990 and 1995. See Ozay Mehmet, “The Impact of the Gulf Crisis on the Turkish Economy”, M.E. Business & Banking, vol. 10, no. 1 (January 1991), pp. 7-12; Sabri Sayari, “Turkey and the Middle East in the 1990s”, Journal of Palestinian Studies, vol. xxvi, no. 3 (Spring 1997), p. 46.
In asserting Turkey’s regional importance as the guardian of the Western security interests in the area, Ozal sought to forge long-term "strategic cooperation" with the US so as to deter threats posed by any state that might wish to emulate Iraq. The strategic vision of president Ozal may not accord with the principles underlying Ankara’s Gulf policy for the past two decades, but the successive Turkish governments showed no inclinations to renounce it either. Instead, diplomatic efforts continued to be focused on securing western compliance to Turkey’s claim as the "local boss" in the post-Cold War global security structure.

Thanks to Ozal’s activism, Turkey emerged as “one of the greatest winners of the 1991 Gulf War”. Not only did it earn Turkey a new strategic role at the expense of its Arab neighbours, also gave many real and potential benefits. Whereas on the trade front, the most tangible benefit was the Bush Administration’s announcement to raise Turkish textile quotas by 50 per cent, on the economic aid front, Turkey was promised a total of $2.2 billion in oil, grants and loans from the Gulf states, EEC and Japan. With regard to the military assistance, Turkey received a comprehensive package of advanced arms worth $8 billion from the US and Germany. This package included 1000 tanks, 700 armoured personal carriers and a range of missiles. More importantly, the Defence and

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Economic Cooperation Agreement (DECA) which expired in 1985 was renewed in 1992 for another year.

Aside from securing Western military and economic assistance, Turkey also recorded the following achievements on the diplomatic front:

a) Washington’s informal commitment to put pressures on the EC to help ensure Turkey’s admission as full-fledged member;[^33]

b) the US government’s recognition of validity of Turkey’s grievances against the Seven-to-ten ratio of US aid to Greece and Turkey, and its pledge to reduce Turkey’s debt incurred as a result of US credits related to foreign military aid programmes.

c) suspension of the discussion on the issue of the Ottoman Government’s alleged massacre of the Armenians in the US Congress, which, had it been passed, would have attached to the Turks a terrible stigma comparable to the NAZIs;

d) Western countries’ refusal to draw parallel between Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the 1974 Turkish military incursion in Cyprus, and an American tilt towards Ankara evident in the approval of the latter’s proposal for convening an quadripartite conference instead of what Greek-side demanded, an international peace conference.^[34]

[^33]: It is generally believed in the Turkish political circles that US lobbying played a critical role in ensuring the eventual signing and ratification of the Custom Union Treaty with EU in 1995. For Turkey and EC in the immediate aftermath of Gulf War, see Juliette Rossant, “Europe land Turkey in the Nineties”, *M.E. Business & Banking*, vol. 9, no. 12 (December 1990), pp. 23-25.

e) Western powers' recognition of Turkey as a key regional player, deserving of a place in the post-Gulf War West Asia peace process;

f) the personal attention paid to Turkish leader by President Bush during the crisis raised Ankara's regional standing in the eyes of the international community;\(^{35}\)

All this, doubtless, transformed the image of Turkey from a “forgotten ally of the West” and “marginalised part of West Asia” to a “steadfast and strategically vital ally of US”.\(^{36}\) Reflecting Turkey’s new status was the centrality of its strategic role in the continuation of Operation Provide Comfort (renamed as Northern Watch in December 1996) to protect northern Iraq above the 36 parallel from Iraqi military incursions, and in containing Iran through the US policy of sanctions. The significance of Turkey in the eyes of its Western allies was further reinforced by the dissolution of the former Soviet Union leading to the emergence of independent Turkic states of Central Asia and

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\(^{35}\) It is reported that President Bush had over 50 times telephonic conversations with the Turkish President until August 1991. Whether it was the US decision to liberate Kuwait or the belated Western move to provide the so-called “safe-heaven” to the fleeing Kurdish refugees after the war, Ozal played a crucial role. See, Turgut Ozal, “Turkey: An unwanted War “Became unavoidable””, International Herald Tribune, 23 January 1991; Ozal, “An Inevitable War”, FBIS/WE 20 February 1991, pp. 36-37; “Turkey’s Little Big Man”, Observer (London), 7 April 1991.

\(^{36}\) The Clinton Administration’s West Asia Policy, which was formally unveiled in May 1993, for example, envisaged an “increasingly important role of Turkey in our regional calculations”. In the post-Gulf war period, Washington relied heavily on Turkey for combating fundamentalism, promoting democracy and containing spread of Iranian influence in central Asia and maintaining sanctions against Iraq. See, Charles Snow, “The Clinton Blueprint for the Middle East: American Interests”, Middle East Economic Survey, 31 May 1995, pp. C3-C4. Also, see Z. Brzezinski, Brent Scowcroft and Richard Murphy, “Differentiated Containment”, Foreign Affairs, vol. 76, no. 3 (May/June 1997), pp. 20-27.
Azerbaijan, endowed with energy resources estimated to be worth between $2.5 to $3 trillion.\textsuperscript{37}

\textbf{Limitations}

In the years following the Gulf crisis of 1990-91, Turkey came to be seen in the West as a strategic asset and also a secular democratic model for the Muslim countries in the Greater West Asia (inclusive of Central Asian states).\textsuperscript{38} But, in assuming responsibilities to safeguard the Western security interests in the area, Turkey ran the risk of destroying the bridges it had painstakingly built over the years with the Arabs. In fact, by the mid-1990s Turkey lost much of its credibility as a viable broker in regional affairs and as a role model for Arab states. Briefly, some of the major implications of and limitations on Turkey’s quest for a regional power role in West Asia are highlighted.

First of all, Turkey’s drive for leadership role triggered a general Arab fear of “neo-Ottomanism”\textsuperscript{39} suggesting the revival of Turkish imperial domination of the region. This, in great part, explains why President Ozal’s ambitious $21 billion peace pipeline water project (See the Table), which involved the transportation of surplus water from its two medium-sized eastern rivers, the Ceyhan and Seyhan to the Arab world never got off the ground. So did the massive South East

\textsuperscript{37} For an assessment of Turkey’s role in central Asia, see Aswini K. Mohapatra, “Turkey’s Quest for Regional Role in Central Asia”, International Studies, vol. 38, no. 1 (2001), pp. 29-52.

\textsuperscript{38} Morton I. Abramowitz, “Dateline Ankara: Turkey After Ozal”, Foreign Policy no. 91 (Summer 1998), pp. 178-183.

\textsuperscript{39} For a critique of Turkey’s “neo-Ottoman” aspirations see Graham E. Fuller, “Alternative Turkish Roles in the Future Middle East” in Barkey, Reluctant Neighbour, pp. 213-214, and Tunander, “A New Ottoman Empire”, pp. 415-418.
Anatolian Project, popularly known in Turkey as the GAP project (Güney Anadolu Projesi), which provoked furious reaction from the Arab world in July 1992 with the opening of the Ataturk Dam, the fifth largest rock-fill dam in the World.\textsuperscript{40} The GAP project is though portrayed by the Turkish government as the “potential instrument for regional cooperation”\textsuperscript{41}, it has failed to alleviate the anxiety of other two riparian states – Iraq and Syria – about the possibility of Turkey using its control of Euphrates as a lever of its foreign policy to establish regional dominance.

Second, in spite of the important role that Turkey played during the Gulf crisis, its exclusion from the post-Gulf War Security arrangement underlined its marginality. Although president Ozal strongly stressed the need for “regionalisation” of the Gulf security,\textsuperscript{42} Turkey did not figure in the security set-up proposed in the March 1991

\textsuperscript{40} According to a Turkish estimate, nearly 400 articles were printed by the Arab press on the issue, which prompted the officials of the Foreign Ministry to travel to Arab countries to explain Turkish position and correct some of the perceived inaccuracies in the local press reports. \textit{Interview with the Ministry officials in Ankara}, 2 October 1990. Following the opening of the Ataturk Dam in 1992, the Arab media described it as an example of Ankara’s “Water imperialism”. For Turkey’s water consumption patterns and its attempts to regulate water resources from the two rivers, Euphrates and the Tigris would pose significant threats to the agricultural plans of both Iraq and Syria. Moreover, the insistence on ‘Turkishness’ of the rivers is regarded by these states as an infringement on their riparian rights. For details, see Joyce Starr, “Water wars”, \textit{Foreign Policy}, vol. 82 (Spring 1991), pp. 17-36; Ali Carkoglu, Mine Eden and Kemal Kirisci, \textit{The Political Economy of Regional Cooperation in the Middle East} (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 205-210.

\textsuperscript{41} Kamran Inan, “The South eastern Anatolian Project and Its Contribution to Regional Cooperation in the Middle East”, \textit{Studies on Arab-Turkish Relations} (Annual 1989), pp. 47-55; also see “SAP will change a lot in Turkey and the Middle East”, \textit{Middle East Business & Banking}, vol. 8, no. 11 (1989), pp. 4-8.

\textsuperscript{42} For Turkish President Ozal’s views on the Arab Gulf security after the Kuwaiti crisis, see \textit{FBIS/WE}, 4 March 1991, p. 54; \textit{FBIS/WE}, 8 March 1991, p. 23 and \textit{FBIS/WE}, 12 March 1991, p. 43.
Damascus declaration. That the Gulf states opted for an all-Arab entity comprising six GCC states plus Egypt and Syria showed the limited importance of Turkey in preserving stability or guaranteeing security in the Arab Gulf region.

Third, Turkey’s attempt to play a regional power role entails the danger of it being drawn into intra-Arab conflicts. For the aftermath of the Gulf war was marked by two major developments in the Arab system: a) the end of Arabism and recognition of sovereignty as the basis of inter-Arab relations; b) the US penetration of the system through bilateral security agreements. Whereas the former might encourage greater interstate conflict among Arab states, the latter has created incentives for competitive security, which would stimulate a region-wide arms race. Together they undermine the


45 Competitive security is defined by the reliance on abject force and explicit balancing mechanism to maintain inter state stability. As the states attempt to increase their security and respond to security threats, they generally do two things: internal mobilisation and external alignments that concern the construction of strategic alliances. However, as the states seek to maximise their relative power in order to maintain a balance of forces and a credible deterrent posture, they experience what is termed by critics as the “security dilemma”, meaning absolute security for none. See, Kenneth Waltz, The Theory of International Politics (Reading; M.A.: Addison Wesley, 1979); Robert Jervis, “Cooperation under the Security Dilemma”, World Politics, 30 (January 1978), pp. 167-214.
prospects of constructing security regime patterned on the model of the conference on Security and cooperation in Europe.  

Fourth, in an interpenetrated West Asian system, imbalance in one area would have implications for another. Thus, building up the Turkish military too much – already one of the largest in the Middle East – would force Iran and Syria toward greater militarisation. An unreasonable build up of Iranian forces, partly in response to Turkey, would exacerbate smaller Gulf states security dilemmas. Moreover, the American efforts to prop up Turkey as a “regional pillar” may encourage Turkey’s hegemonic behaviour, which would inevitably bring it into conflict with such revisionist powers as Iran.

Apart from contending for leadership in the region, Iran represents both military and ideological challenge to Turkey. In addition to its conventional military build-up, Iran’s quest for a nuclear weapons capability constitutes a serious long-term threat to Ankara’s regional supremacy. Besides, the most enduring source of tension between the two countries is Iran’s relentless support for Islamic fundamentalist movements in the region, including those inside Turkey. “Though raisan d’etat has usually governed Iranian foreign policy towards Turkey”, Robins notes, “the regime in Tehran has periodically tried to undermine the secularist values of its neighbour.”

Finally, their

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46 Aykan, “Turkish Perspectives on Turkish-US Relations”, p. 348.
48 Philip Robins, “Turkey: Europe in the Middle East, or the Middle East in Europe” in B.A. Roberson (ed.), The Middle East and Europe: The Power Deficit, (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 160. The ideological incogruity between a formally secular state and the cradle of revolutionary Islam has an intimate bearing on Turkish-Iranian relations. While Turkey refrains from interfering in the internal affairs of Iran to promote its brand of secular Islam, there are instances of the Iranian regime interfering in Turkey’s internal issues such as the constitutional court’s ban on the wearing of Islamic
rivalry in Central Asia, especially Ankara’s Pan-Turkic pursuit has exacerbated Iranian anxieties about the rise in irredentist tendencies among its large Azeri population. In fact, Iranian attempts to promote Islamic solidarity in the area according to an analyst, represent “partially a defensive strategy dictated by the threat of Pan-Turkism.”

While Iran represents a geopolitical challenge of greater magnitude and complexity, a territorially and politically divided Iraq constitutes Turkey’s constant source of security concerns. The power vacuum, for example, created in the post-Gulf

head-scarves by women students in March 1989. During a visit to Ankara in summer 1987, Iranian Prime Minister Hussain Musavi refused to pay homage at Ataturk’s mausoleum – a protocol requirement for visiting dignitaries. However undiplomatic his actions may have been, he simply demonstrated the Iranian regime’s contempt for the Kemalist philosophy. No wonder, this was repeated in November 1988 when the Iranian embassy refused to lower its flag to half-mast to commemorate 50th anniversary of Ataturk’s death. In contrast, then Turkish Premier Ozal instructed all flags to be lowered to half-mast as a mark of respect for the deceased Ayatollah Khomeini. On top of all this, there have been accusations in Turkish press about Iran’s more sinister activity like sponsoring Islamist terrorism against secular intellectuals, including the assassination of a prominent Turkish Journalist, Uğur Mumcu in 1993, and use of Turkish soil for settling scores with the opponents of the regime such as the involvement of Iranian diplomats in an attempt to kidnap a Mujahiddin-i Khalq member in Turkey in November 1988. Fuat Borovali, “Iran and Turkey: Permanent Revolution on Islamism in one country” in M. Rezun (ed.), Iran At the Crossroads (Westview Press, 1989), pp. 87-91; Atila Eralp, “Facing The Challenge: Post Revolutionary Relations with Iran” in Barkey, Reluctant Neighbour, pp. 96-103; Ken Mackenzie, “Flag Fueds”, Middle East International, 11 July 1987, p. 14.


50 Interestingly, post-Gulf war developments confirmed, to an extent, the fear expressed by some Turkish analysts as regards Iraq. For example, the editorial of Middle East business & Banking warned, “Neither a weak, divided Iraq nor a Iraq which has annexed Kuwait ... will be to Turkey’s advantage. For the “problem that would emerge with the division of Iraq would exceed any advantages that would be gained. Moreover, a constant source of instability would be established in the region”, “What is important for Turkey in the Gulf crisis?”, MEB&B, vol. 9, no. 9 (Sept. 1990), p. 12 & 13. However, Turkey’s cooperation with the West in establishing safe haven for Iraqi Kurds in northern
war period by the absence of a strong central authority combined with factional fighting among Iraqi Kurds has conduced to the growth in anti-Turkish separatist activities of the PKK guerrillas. Though Turkish state has mounted numerous military operations to destroy the Syria-sponsored PKK bases in northern Iraq, such military campaigns have proven financially costly and politically risky, particularly in terms of Ankara’s relations with its neighbours as well as its Western allies. Furthermore, Turkey’s own initiatives in helping to create the “safe haven” for Iraqi Kurds and to bring about the deterrent force, operating under the code name provide Comfort 2 have contributed to the internationalisation of Turkey’s Kurdish dilemma.

The spatial distribution of Kurds, spanning as they do at least five states in the area, means that the Kurdish issue is not an exclusively domestic one for Turkey. It is, instead, a function of a regional power struggle, as the rival powers use the fractious Kurds to promote their respective geo-strategic interests. Consequently, northern Iraq has become a political twilight zone, where shifting alliances and factional fighting continue to threaten regional stability and Turkey’s own territorial integrity. As long

Iraq was motivated by necessity rather than by choice. First of all, what alarmed the Turkish authorities was a massive influx of refugees into Turkish territory consequent on the Iraqi military onslaught on Kurdish rebels. This triggered a favourable public opinion in the West for an independent Kurdish state to which Ankara was strongly opposed. As an alternative, President Ozal settled for a federal Iraqi state with or without Saddam Hussain by giving autonomous status to the Kurds in the north. Secondly, Turkey was averse to the ‘Palestinisation’ of the Kurdish refugees that would have adversial effect on its own Kurdish population, as was the case in autumn 1988 following the flight of nearly 100,000 Kurdish refugees. Omer Karasapan, “Gulf War Refugees in Turkey”, Middle East Report (January-February 1989), pp. 33-35; Nader Entessar, “Kurdish conflict in Regional Perspective”, in M.E. Ahrari (ed.), Change and Continuity in the Middle East (London: St. Martin Press, 1996), pp. 62-71.

as the Iraqi state authority is not firmly re-established there, the PKK-led insurgency in Turkey’s south-eastern provinces would attract outside interference to deflect Ankara from pursuing an activist foreign policy in the region.

Fifth, despite Turkey’s diplomatic focus on the promotion of regional economic cooperation and efforts to portray itself as a model, the image of Turkey as the “watchdog of the US” or NATO’s ‘arm’ in West Asia has not changed in the popular Arab perceptions. In the past few years, Turkey has, in fact, become the target of Arab nationalists and Islamic fundamentalists, in part because of its strategic partnership with Israel. Through various economic and military agreements since the elevation of the level of diplomatic representation in 1986, they have emerged as the pre-eminent security axis in the area. Although policy-makers in Ankara tend to believe that an alliance with Israel would help to establish some measure of stability in West Asia chiefly by neutralising the influences of such rogue states as Iraq, Iran, Syria and Libya, this is likely to distance Turkey further from the region where it seeks to carve out a central role for itself. If the sharpeners of Arab leaders’ criticism in the two-day Damascus summit in

52 Relations between Turkey and Israel improved dramatically after the Gulf War for three reasons: 1) shift in Turkey’s pro-Arab policy of the 1970s; 2) progressive decline in Turkey’s exports to Arab countries, falling from 47% of total exports in 1992 to only 12% in 1994; 3) the PLO’s recognition of Israeli existence in 1988 and October 1991 Madrid Peace Conference resulting in the Oslo Peace process since September 1993 Israel-PLO declaration of Principles (DOP). The PLO-Israel agreements in particular served as “facilitating factor” in Turkey’s rapprochement towards Israel that began with the signing of Secret Security Agreement between them on 31 March 1994 and culminated in the 1996 military and defence agreements including the Joint Military exchange of personnel and granting mutual rights to the use of ports and air bases. The consideration of Turkish-Israeli relations in the mid-1990s is suggestive of Israel’s “peripheric strategy” during the 1950s and 1960s. For details, see Alan Makovsky, “Israeli-Turkish Relations: Turkish ‘Periphery Strategy?’” in Barkey, Reluctant Neighbour, pp. 147-170. Robert Olson, “Israel and Turkey – Consolidating Relations”, Middle East International, 4 April 1997, pp. 16-17.
June 1996 is any indication, Turkey appears to have lost its credibility considerably as a regional stabiliser or a viable peacemaker.

Finally, Turkey’s expansive role in West Asia may lead to a progressive dimension of state capacity to combat the rise of radical Islam within the country. Already an exponential growth of Islamist activism is widely seen as the most enduring source of systemic challenge to the Kemalist establishment. A new concept of national Military strategy (CNMS) formulated in April 1997 has, for instance, branded Islamic movements as “Enemy No. 1” along with the Kurdish separatists. Indicative of re-Islamisation trend in Turkey is the steadily expanding neo-Islamic Refah (Welfare) Party, which trippled its electoral showing from 7 to 12 per cent between 1987 and 1995. For the first time in June 1996, Turkey had a Prime Minister whose political philosophy was based on Islamic solidarity rather than national solidarity of Anatolian Turks, as defined by the founder of the Republic. Under pressures from the military in what the Turkish press has termed “soft coup”, Prime Minister Erbakan resigned in June 1997.

In explaining the growth of political Islam in Turkey, Binnaz Toprak has identified a variety of factors, including that of Turkey’s close interactions with Arab Gulf states between the period 1974 and 1985. “Closer commercial and cultural ties with


other Muslim countries in the region”, she writes, “in turn necessitated a parallel change of state policy on secularism. State elites gradually abandoned strict secular norms and came to view Turkey as a bridge between the West and the Middle East.”\footnote{Binnaz Toprak, “The Reception of the Iranian Revolution by the Muslim Press in Turkey”, in David Menshri (ed.), Iranian Revolution and Muslim World (Westview & Oxford, 1990), p. 252. Toprak does not consider the Islamic movements as purely local phenomenon. She attributes the rise of an urban-based new “Muslim entrepreneurs” to the ruling Motherland Party’s religious constituency and its links with Muslim companies in West Asia. A good example of the new Muslim entrepreneurs was Prime Minister Ozal’s brother, Korkut Ozal who because of his connections with Muslim Development Bank and Muslim World League came to own ten firms in a partnership with Al Baraka Corp. within a period of 5 years. These medium-sized Muslim entrepreneurs largely from the Anatolian provinces later formed the Independent Association of Industrialists and Businessmen (MUSIAD) in 1990 that grew fast with about 3000 members by 1997. They provided the “Islamic capital” and formed the basis of Refah’s electoral suppport. For details, see M. Hakan Yavuz, “Political Islam and the Welfare (Refah) Party in Turkey”, Comparative Politics, (October 1997), pp. 64-81; Nilufer Gale, “Secularism and Islamist in Turkey: The Making of Elites and Counter-Elites”, Middle East Journal, vol. 51, no. 1 (Winter 1997), pp. 46-57.}

In their efforts to attract investments, financial assistance or to secure construction contracts, the state elites played up Turkey’s Islamic heritage so as to project a culturally sympathetic image to the newly wealthy oil states.

With the adoption of a more Islamic bent of policies, Islamist groups operating outside the state control were not merely tolerated, also encouraged to establish links with religiously oriented institutions based in Saudi Arabia. Consequently, large sums of money poured into Turkey from Saudi Arabia to fund a range of activities from mosque-building and religious schools to the religious training and publication networks. Besides, there have been recurrent accusations that Turkey’s main Islamist political party, Refah was financed by the Saudis.\footnote{See Emin Colasan, “Para ve Refah” (Money and Welfare), in Turhan Dilligil, Erbakançılık ve Erbakan (Erbakanism and Erbakan), (Ankara 1994), 294-295. In the early 1980s, there was also revelation in Turkish press that the government had obtained}
While injection of Saudi petrodollars precipitated the process of re-Islamisation of Turkish society, the sponsorship of radical Islamist groups by Iran posed a formidable challenge to the state security. In a televised speech, then president Kenan Evren in January 1987 branded Islamic resurgence as a subversive threat comparable to communism. The Islamic extremists, he warned, had infiltrated the armed forces, resulting in the expulsion of nearly 100 cadets from military academies.

The Islamic movements in Turkey appear to be muted now, partly because of erosion of their electoral support, and in greater part, the military crackdown in 1997. However, attempts at rolling back re-Islamisation may backfire since Islam continues to be seen by a section of population as inextricable part of Turkey’s identity and its culture. This is what arguably explains why the Islamist-led anti-Israeli rallies have attracted massive participation even in smaller Turkish towns. Turkey’s identity crisis no longer remains solely a domestic political issue, it begins to spill over into the realm of Turkish foreign policy. With the gradual consolidation of a liberal democratic polity, Turkey’s

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58 The activities of the Turkish pro-Khomeini groups have been carefully documented by a prominent journalist Ugur Mumcu who was assassinated in 1993 by Islamist militants trained in Iran. According to Mumcu, pro-Iranian militant groups are small in size and mostly confined to young people in large metropolitan centres of Turkey and abroad. The leader of these groups is a certain Cemalettin Kaplan based in Germany and heads an organisation called Islami Cemiyet ve Cemaatler Birliği (Union of Islamic Associations and Communities”). This group believes in the establishment of the Sharia state in Turkey through Jihad or an Islamic revolution. See Ergun Ozbudun, “Khomeinism – A Danger for Turkey”, Menashri, Iranian Revolution, pp. 243-245.


decision-making elite has increasingly become responsive to domestic pressures and popular opinion. In this context, it is imperative to note that an overwhelming majority of Turks (80 per cent of the respondents) in a monthly opinion poll survey favoured the idea of Turkey having good relations with the West Asia countries excluding Israel.61

Given the structural constraints in the region and mounting internal pressures, Turkey appears to be left with a few foreign policy choices vis-à-vis West Asia in general and the Arab Gulf states in particular. While the traditional Kemalist policy of aloofness from the region is no longer possible, its ambitious regional power role is politically risky and potentially destabilising. Conceivably, Turkey’s long-term national interests would be better served by encouraging positive interactions among all the principal regional actors, including Iran and Iraq, so as to evolve “cooperative engagement” based on reassurance rather than containment or deterrence. Recent developments such as the conclusion of a 23-year natural gas agreement with Iran in May 1995 and reopening of the Kirkuk Yumurtalik Iraqi oil pipeline in December 1996 are, if anything, a definite pointer towards Turkey’s realist, rational foreign policy behaviour.

### Table 6.1

**Turkey’s Peace Pipeline Project**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Western Pipeline</th>
<th>Gulf Pipeline</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td><strong>Assumed water delivered (Cubic meters per day)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
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<td>Syria</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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**Source:** Seyfi Tashan, “Water problems in the Middle East And How They could be Alleviated” in Eron Manisali (ed.), *Turkey’s Place in the Middle East*, p. 70.