CHAPTER V

ISSUES OF TURKEY’S NATIONAL INTEREST AND THE GULF WAR

Power and influence are employed in support of foreign policy objectives that are commonly said to reflect ‘national interest’. Foreign policy involves the use of different resources for achieving various kinds of advantages from relations with other states. Governments also employ political and military means towards achieving economic as well as political and military ends. And they use economic means toward serving political and military as well as economic ends. It is simplistic to think of foreign policy only as national policy, it can also be class or clique policy, since the values pursued in the external environment depend on the interests of those who have political influence, and their number is primarily a function of the political system. The conduct of foreign policy also requires resources that must be released from domestic uses. And the manner of their release again depends on the domestic structure of influence “Every society organised in a sovereign state uses various inputs for producing a variety of material and non material values - such as physical security, political participation, foreign policies and distributes them or their results to its members.”\(^1\)

\(^1\) Klavs Knorr: ‘The Power of Nation’; Basic Books; USA; 1975; p.28.
composition of value output depends on the supply of inputs and on the structure of effective demand for various values. The national interest of a Nation reflect a sum of coalescing interests. It is clear that the foreign policies of states do not necessarily reflect the interests of all members of society. And only a fraction of the population participates in determining foreign policy and those who participate have unequal influence. And foreign policy will serve chiefly the perceived interest of those who win out in the competitive process. And, above all, “national interest is by however, the only factor to be considered when making or ascertaining policy. The relative power of the parties concerned is the other primary element and we must also consider such factors as personalities of the members of the decision-making groups, national traditions and situationally-based opportunities that may suddenly appear.”

The features of Turkey’s topography most relevant to foreign-policy are “the straits connecting the Black Sea with the Aegean and the mountain-ringed Anatolian high plateau. These are the routes from the Russian plains to the Mediterranean and to the Persian Gulf, as well as routes in the opposite direction.”

Turkey lies in Asia, and yet its best-known part and business capital is in the European landmass. “Turkey does not fit into any of the neat geographical categories which Western scholars have

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3 Ference A. Vali : Bridge across the Bosporus : Foreign Policy of Turkey; London; Baltimore, 1971; p.43.
formulated to organize a spatially messy world. The geographical facts indicate wider uncertainties about the placing and role of the country." It has been said that Turkey’s historical role and relative political importance rest in large measure on her incomparable geographical location. The history of the ‘Ottoman Empire’ and ‘Ataturks’ Turkey demonstrates the delicate interplay of political variables and geographical constraints. The fundamental goals of national-policy, as determined under Ataturk, have not changed, although they have become better defined and updated to meet the more exacting requirements of the world today. Policies for the promotion of these goals have been modified and from this narrower point of view, it may be rightly stated that the foreign-policy of Turkey has undergone considerable change since the death of the founder of new Turkey. All of her foreign-policy moves must be appraised - in terms of the national interest. But the evaluation of what is in the interest of the nation is often controversial and so beset with nuances that decision-making is rendered highly individual. And particularly, in the case of Turkey, in view of her ‘far-reaching national goal, greater reliance was placed on foreign policy devices than in the case of many other nations. Turkey shares with all independent nations the security aim of preserving national territory, national wealth and sovereign independence.

Because of her exposed geographical location, past historical experiences and

cultural ‘isolation’, she is more conscious of independence than most other nations. That is more sensitive to any real or implied encroachment on her sovereignty. That is why, “Ataturk believed that an uncommitted posture would best suit Turkey’s security needs but the ‘Soviet threat’, which arose in the post-World War II period, persuaded Ankara’ to seek politico-military alliance.”

Turkey, a long-standing U.S. ally and staunch member of NATO, has played a pivotal role in the defense of Europe and West Asia. Its value as a western ally has hinged on its geographic reach, it spans two continents and two theaters of cold war conflict with the Soviet Union. Until recently, “Turkism in the study of modern Turkish foreign policy has been a forgotten subject. But with the dismemberment of Soviet Union, many observers particularly in the Western world have begun to think about the importance of this ideology particularly when they faced the dilemma of the decline of communism and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the region.” And this trend seemed to be dangerous for the West because it meant the replacement of a rival ideology with a new but more anti-Western, fanatical and emotional one. In order to contain the development of such a trend, the Turkish experts of the U.S. have suggested that Turkey could be a model country for the

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5 Ference A. Vali : n.3; p.69.
others in that area. And a modern and secular country which complies with the standard of Western countries, would never contradict Turkey’s aspirations to become a European country.

Turkey’s immediate sphere of concern in the West Asia must be with the states adjacent to it, that is Syria, Iran and Iraq. For Turkey’s point of view, all three share certain characteristics which are potentially problematic. And all the three states have regional leadership aspirations. This means that each state is actively working towards establishing itself as the dominating influence in the area. It also means that because Turkey itself is a regional power there is a tendency on the part of the other three to regard it as a competitor for regional influence.

Even since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, it has been, the generally accepted judgement that Turkey is in the Middle East, but not fully part of it. Culturally and politically, Turkey and other West Asian countries have tended to follow separate paths. By the ‘1990s’, and in comparison with the rest of ‘Eastern Europe’ and West Asia, Turkey has become economically successful, democratic and stable. Hence, its “position has sometimes been compared to that of Japan-as a potentially powerful actor which prefers not to play a commensurate regional role and stays on the edge of a regional
On the other hand, the end of the cold war and the collapse of the Soviet Union, have made it possible for Turkey, like other former Soviet neighbours, to adopt a more flexible regional polices, and the Gulf-crisis of 1990 demonstrated that. Even if the superpower conflict has ended, the West Asia is still a prime source of global instability. In recent times, Turkey has also emerged as an important actor in the politics of ‘Central Asia’ and the ‘Balkans’. Especially Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait provided a new challenge to the principles of Turkish policy on West Asia. Turkey has developed its relations with regard to the region in general with having some principles to follow and they are --

* “Non-interference in the domestic affairs of the Middle Eastern states,
* non-interference in disputes between states in the area,
* the development of bilateral relations with all the states in the region,
* Continued fragmentation of the Arab states system,
* the maximization of trade and economic relationships,
* the separation of the Middle East from Turkey’s role within the Western alliance,
* scrupulous balance in its approach to the Israel-Palestine question.”

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7 William Hale: Turkey, the Middle East and the Gulf Crisis; *International Affairs*, vol. 68, 1992; p.679.
It is very clear from the policy which Turkey pursued with regard to that region that, interference in the internal affairs of an Arab state would intensify broader Arab fears of Turkey assuming a 'neo-Ottoman policy towards the region. And such an action would of course also legitimate interference by West Asian states in the domestic affairs of Turkey. And the division of the Arab world into a plethora of states has created an important arena of competition within it. And also serving to undermine its cohesion and so weakening Arab influence on the regional and international stage. Even, Turkey might be pursuing a careful path between the West and the Arab states with regard to Israel, through its policy of 'balance-approach'.

Furthermore, a somewhat natural extension of the end of the cold war has been the diminishing importance of old East-West division of the international system. Being replaced with a new line dividing North and South', in such an emerging division, where bipolarity of the cold war era had disappeared, it seems inevitable that regional concerns will play a more important role in the future. Turkey will exploit this opportunity to its advantage. The Gulf-War, proves the value and importance of Turkey in the foreseeable future and it eroded the misconceptions of Turkey's limited role within the framework of the 'Atlantic Alliance'. In the Gulf-crisis, the cooperation between the West and Turkey with regard to the latter's consent to station the US-led coalition forces on its soil improved the image of
Turkey. And the western countries would never contradict or oppose Turkey’s aspiration to become a European country.

After the World War II, Turkey, the only Islamic country with a secular democratic government was viewed as a bulwark against Soviet designs in the West Asian region. Along with Iran, it provided a massive land barrier to Moscow’s ambitions in the oil-rich Persian Gulf. But in the changing circumstances “Turkey would play an important part in the defense of the West and make its facilities available.”¹⁹ The West provides Turkey, a deterrent against any evil design in that region and outside. Today Turkey’s relations with its allies continue to be informed by the notion of reciprocity and are coloured by shifting security concerns. Ankara did play an important role in the allied coalition against Iraq. Despite diminishing for the Soviet threat, Turkey’s strategic significance is once again being assessed chiefly in its West Asian context.

Turkey’s Western-oriented leader, President Turgut Ozal, has taken up the challenge of Ankara’s role in the post-cold war world, perhaps sooner than most observers would have guessed. And in this process Ozal has precipitated a vigorous debate within Turkey over his role as president and the extent of his authority. Ozal moved with alacrity to commit the country

¹⁹ Bruce K. Kuniholm: ‘Turkey and the West’; Foreign Affairs; Vol. 70, No. 2-3, 1991; p.34.
as a staging ground for U.S. and coalition forces against Iraq. It was a politically calculated move that went beyond immediate national security concerns. Indeed, Turkey has never been willing to commit itself wholeheartedly to a Western military endeavour without some form of reciprocity. Turkish President Ozal did “hope for a substantial return on his country’s investment in the war effort”\(^\text{10}\) from the US and its allies.

Historically, “Turkish security concerns have been focussed on the perceived threat from Tsarist, and then Soviet Russia, rather than on the Middle East.”\(^\text{11}\) After the Second World War, the danger of an attack by the Soviet Union dominated Turkish foreign policy thinking and defence planning, leading to Turkey’s accession to full membership of NATO. This focus is supplemented by a continued attempt to enter the European community. And “Turkey became an associate member in 1964, and in 1987 made a formal application to Brussels for full membership.”\(^\text{12}\)

Turkey is adopting a cautious policy towards the Commonwealth of Independent states, (CIS) balancing its relations with Muslims and concentrating on building up economic and cultural links with the Muslim republics. Hence, Turkey’s political interests will probably remain focused

\(^{10}\) Ibid., p.35.

\(^{11}\) Willian Hale: n.7, p.680.

\(^{12}\) Ibid.
on its relations with the Western powers, as the main component of a broad regional strategy. For most Turkish foreign policy-makers the principle enunciated by ‘Ataturk’ in 1923 is still a dominant theme. Iraq’s occupation of ‘Kuwait’, came as a great shock to the whole world. And although Turkey remained neutral during the ‘Iran-Iraq’ war, such neutrality was not possible in the case of Kuwait because it was a matter of principle involving the maintenance of peace in the region and the world. Therefore Turkey took the lead in implementing the UN resolutions and also incurred great costs because of the embargo and the war in neighbouring countries. Now Turkey should look forward beyond the ‘Persian Gulf crisis’ rather than to the past. The confrontation between capitalism and communism has now ended and extremists in the world are looking for new areas of confrontation. The historical conflict between Islam and Christianity may be revived. An extreme ‘right’ and extreme ‘left’ in both the Islamic and western countries are trying to use the Gulf crisis for their purposes.

After the crisis, great care should be taken to uphold the long-term interests of stability rather than seeking short term benefits. Turkey is well aware about the normalcy in that region and this fact will serve its interests and prove Turkey to be a ‘model state’ in that area. In a broader context any issue in that region will be solved by the people of that region and outside powers should play a stabilizing role. The USA, a friend and ally to Turkey
for half a century, today plays a new role. The US administration has correctly identified Turkey as the new "front-line state" in global conflict. Turkey is at the major cross roads of the religious, social and nationalist fractures of new era politics and is gateway to the oil fields of Central Asia, Iraq and the Gulf. The US offers diplomatic opium to the Turks, suggesting that the answer to their problem is quick membership in the 'European Union'. There is nothing wrong with the US goal of Turkish membership in the 15-member club of Europe's most affluent nations. In the Gulf-crisis, for several weeks Turkish war-planes had been bombing Kurdish guerrillas in Iraq on a near daily basis" by using the US warplanes. The Turks, after the crisis, were weary of the vacuum that the US had let develop in northern Iraq, a US protectorate after the Gulf war. They were also understandably upset about the heavy financial sacrifices that the long US-led economic blockade on Saddam had imposed on them. Frustrated and confused about US goals, the Turks followed policies that would result in both Kurdish groups reconciling with Saddam, who would resume operational control of the north.

On top of this disastrous scenario, the brutal Turkish campaign against the Kurds pushes further away the day when Ankara would be accepted by the European Union. The US abdication in northern Iraq and its self-imposed blindness to the regional consequences of that abdication, undermine its

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13 International Herald Tribune : 3 November 1997; Paris; Jim Hoagland.
proposed solution for Turkey’s problems. Washington needs to acknowledge the damage its vacillating policy on Iraq has caused Turkey and often financial compensation to Ankara. During the crisis, “Ankara was expecting Washington’s support Ozal clearly expected military and economic assistance and wanted a softening of resistance from the European community to its application for membership.” 14 Indeed, before the escalation of the crisis, no foreign policy issue had been more important to Ozal than securing ‘EC’ membership. And on the other, the European Union should look beyond its habitual concern over trade and European integration and focus on the geopolitical role it wishes Turkey to play. Above all, the West must restore to Turkey a sense of belonging. The changing circumstances in the West-Asian region provides a new outlook, a desire on the part of Turkey to ensure for itself a place of its own in the world, not as a part of a larger body. And at present, the trend seems to be in favour of a place, within the natural fraternity. To be sure Turkey, ‘NATO’s’ strategic anchor in the eastern Mediterranean, is still the West’s loyal partner. And as a Muslim country in a region full of Islamic dictations, it is still committed to secularism and democracy.

In the Kurdish issue also, the Turkish army is known to worry that granting Kurdish cultural demands will inevitably lead to the country’s

14 Bruce R. Kuniholm : n.9; p.35.
dismemberment which Atatürk overcame in the designs against Turkey. And in the Gulf crisis, the Kurds were also affected by continuing discon

Kurdish minority. And a renewed campaign of attacks by the PKK (Kurdistan Worker's Party). During the 1991, the PKK inevitably exploited the collapse of Saddam's power in 'northern Iraq' as well as the availability of arms from retreating Iraqi troops. And the bombing of Kurdish concentrations by Turkey had "triggered off a round of protests in Western Europe and further complicated Western efforts to aid the Kurds. By the autumn of 1991 the Kurds, Turkey and the coalition powers seemed to be stuck in a messy and potentially dangerous impasse, in which agreement between the Iraqi Kurds and Baghdad appeared to be postponed indefinitely, and a renewed campaign by Saddam against the Kurds could not be ruled out." 15 Now the Iraqi Kurds fearing for their own survival, were cooperating with the regular Turkish forces to defeat the radical PKK. President Ozal met an Iraqi opposition coalition that Kurdish leaders hoped to establish as a 'US-backed provisional government in northern Iraq though he was quick to support the preservation of Iraq as a unitary state and the maintenance of Turkish-dominated land in northern Iraq. And it was abundantly clear that the West was more concerned about the Kurds in Iraq rather than the

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15 William Hale: n.7; p.683
repression of Kurds by the Turkish armed forces inside Turkey. In addressing the problem of Kurdish violence, the Turkish state has not flinched from confronting violence with violence and terror with terror. It had "also introduced an uncompromising policy aimed at the secondary activity of suspected PKK collaborators and sympathizes. Activity by the intelligence services has increased."16 In this process, mass arrests of suspected PKK collaborators demonstrators took place. Detainees had often been kept in custody for days before being released. Torture and beating were common place. Collective punishment was also on the increase, with action against villages suspected of helping the insurgents. Indeed under cover of the Gulf crisis, a more hardline policy was introduced with the systematic razing of rural settlements.

The efficacy of the widespread use of such crude methods of coercion is highly debatable. The measures appear to have politicized and then radicalized different segments of the Kurdish people, particularly the young who had been at the forefront of the demonstrations. This radicalization also extended spatially from the border areas to some of the principal Kurdish towns. If the Kurdish community has indeed been radicalized and polarized by the repression, the Turkish state apparatus would have aided the cause of the PKK which has presumably used violence both in order to polarize the

16 Philip Robins: n.4; p.33.
Kurdish community and to produce an indiscriminate backlash on the part of the Turkish military authorities. Instability and discontent in the Kurdish rural areas were however likely to damage the 'Kemalist ideology of the Turkish state. The growing alienation of large numbers of Kurds from the institutions of the Turkish state and the Turkish identity which pervades them from highlighting the myth of a 'national consensus' based on a Turkish cultural foundation. The polarization of Turkish and Kurdish cultural and even political aspirations could lead to further uneasiness and confrontation. If this comes about, Turkey risks completing the process of creating a Kurdish national movement out of a set of disparate tribes. In case of such a movement takes hold, outbreaks of unrest could spread to Kurdish communities elsewhere in 'Anatolia', especially in the big cities.

The Turkish state could face more far-reaching reverses than even those being sustained by its ideology. The reputation of the Turkish military, both the creator and the guarantor of the state is at stake. Respect for the army in Turkey would hinge increasingly on the level of violence in the Kurdish areas as the military steps up its involvement in the suppression of the insurgency. If the "army is shown to be largely ineffective against a guerrilla campaign its reputation could be tarnished." And to some extent, deep divisions could also emerge both within the army and between the

17 Ibid., p.37.
civilian government over the conduct of its security campaign. The reputation of Turkey abroad could be further damaged if increasing emphasis is placed on a solution based upon coercion and its corollary, the infringement of human rights.

But let's hope that the Turkish state will try to take the political sting out of such a movement by conceding a package of cultural and linguistic concessions to its Kurds. Inside Turkey, the political and intellectual elites appear to have a long way to go before they accept such a compromise. Even then a cultural package could be too little, too late. In view of all these developments Ankara was placed in a difficult position. On the one hand, it did not wish to appear an accessory to the deed in the eyes of the west, which was critical of Iraq's action. On the other hand, it did not want to offend Iraq, with which it has some empathy over the Kurdish threat. Turkey's solution was an uneasy and unconvincing compromise but it brought criticism from both sides. The "Iraqis felt that Turkey had trifled with its security in an attempt to curry favour with the US and the 'European Community (EC)." 18 And the truth that Turkey and Iraq have a serious 'Kurdish problem' is not sufficient to guarantee good relations on policy humanization. It is clear that Iraq and Turkey are subject to very different constraints in formulating their

18 Ibid p.64.
response to the Kurdish threat which is, however, broadly the same in both states. While Iraq had been able to use weapons of mass destruction against its dissident Kurdish population without incurring serious international condemnation. But Turkey is more vulnerable to criticism of its policing methods because of its aspirations for full integration into Western community of states. Nevertheless, the fact that Kurdish opposition is such a threat to both states means that each can not but be affected by the other domestic policies on this subject. Ironically, the intensity of the convergence of interest remains a factor capable of bringing the two states into renewed conflict over the practical policies adopted to combat this threat.

Turkey’s economic relations with the West Asian States, is not very significant or encouraging but in other way it improved its political relations. And Turkey has tended to adopt a very cautious approach to the region. Its "main features are strict adherence to the principles of non-interference and non-involvement in the domestic politics and interstate conflicts of all countries in the region. And to the development of bilateral political and commercial relations with as many states in the region as possible." On the other side, most of the other regional states have tended to adopt a rather wary and suspicious attitude towards Turkey mixed with recognition of its important strategic situation. These approaches have been determined by

19 Willian Hale: n.7; p.20.
modern historical experiences as well as current political and economic interests on both sides. And since the end of the 1950, "successive governments also tried to detach their role in the western alliance system from their Middle East policies and to preserve a balance in their relations with Israel and with the Arab states."20

Ideologically, Turkey's separation from the West Asia after 1923 was largely the result of Atatürk's determination to end the link between the Turkish state and the national leadership of the world Islamic community, symbolized by the abolition of the caliphate. And in the Gulf crisis it contributes a powerful factor in public reactions to the crisis and made it difficult for the government to apply an activist policy. But on the other hand, Turkish governments were anxious to convince both domestic opinion and the Arab regimes that Turkey's alliance with the West did not pose a threat to its West Asia neighbours. And keeping this in mind, Turkey would not allow itself to act as America's policeman in West Asia.

In the Gulf crisis, the determined effort by Ankara to bolster the allied coalition's interests in the Gulf involved substantial risk. It involved exposing the country to attack by the Iraqi forces, equipped with long-range missiles deployed following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Another major risk stems from the fact that Özal government's commitment to the anti-Iraq

coalition was not well received inside Turkey. And the way, the decision was taken, "triggered the resignation of the chief of the Turkish general staff."\(^{21}\) The Turkish media rallied against the country’s involvement in the war. The opposition parties clamoured both for an end to what they perceived as the nation’s over enthusiastic role in support of the allied coalition. The issue is that a nation struggling to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the west despite having a poor ‘human rights’ record and suffering from a substandard economy. The assumption of a strategic role in the gulf is a tight rope walk to security and prosperity which led to serious debate inside Turkey about ‘Ozals’ single-handed policy in the crisis.

Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, introduced a new regional dimension to the balance of power in West Asia and constituted the most serious threat to vital US and Western oil interests in the Persian Gulf. The crisis underscored once again the geopolitical value to the US of the US - Turkish alliance and corroborated estimates both within the Turkish government and the US Department of Defense of Turkey’s continuing importance.

Turkey’s contribution to the anti-Iraq coalition included, “effective closure” of the Iraqi pipeline to the Mediterranean, extension until December 1991 of the Defense and Economic cooperation Agreement, which gave the US access to military bases in Turkey, deployment of over 100,000

\(^{21}\) Bruce R. Kuniholm: n.9; pp.36.
troops along the Iraqi border which forced Iraq to deploy substantial troops to the north and raised the prospect of at least a two-front war and use of NATO airbases within striking range of military targets in northern and central Iraq.\textsuperscript{22} But such a commitment obviously did not come without substantial costs. Turkish financial losses from the war are difficult to calculate, but include fallen trade with Iraq and Kuwait, fallen tourism revenues and increased oil prices. To compensate for these losses and to reward Turkey’s quick response to the crisis, President Bush along with the European communities, Japan, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, has sought to put together a multibillion-dollar assistance package to the so called frontline states.\textsuperscript{23}

In return for Ankara’s military assistance, US officials explored the possibility of supplying the Turks with extensive military equipment as a quid pro quo. The American aid, in conjunction with a German arms package included tanks, Leopard tanks, Phantom fighters as well as a complement of ‘Cobra helicopters etc. Such a comprehensive package of advanced arms however would not arrive overnight. As a stop gap measure intended to serve as a symbolic deterrent, NATO deployed some out dated combat jets from Germany, Italy and Belgium at Turkey’s request. Batteries of US Patriot

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., pp.36-37.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid. pp.37.
missiles were also sent to Turkey on an emergency basis. But no Iraqi scud missile attacks against Turkey were reported.

On the economic aid front, President Bush also pledged to review Turkey's textile quotas with a view toward increasing its access to the US textile and apparel market. Other assistance packages, however, had been slow to materialize. Turkey lost over some billion revenue over the initial phase of the crisis and the losses of revenues went on increasing day-by-day with regard to the crisis. And the then ruling Motherland Party was severely criticized by leaders of the rival Social Democratic Populist Party, (SDPP) and the True Path Party, (TPP) for having given too much for too little.\(^24\) In reality, the threat to Turkey was not adequately compensated by the benefits, even if they were substantial. The Gulf-war and President Ozal's determined support for the allied coalition's effort seemed to bolster their (west) argument, even if Ozal's support for the US policies troubled his own domestic critics.

In the Gulf crisis President Ozal wanted to take the opportunity to bolster what had become a mercurial bilateral relationship with the US. This was a correct short-term calculation in that it yielded speedy and positive results at the strategic, trade, military, diplomatic and even personal levels. Ozal seemed to have regarded the crisis as a chance to prove Turkey's

\(^{24}\) Ibid. p.38.
strategic regional importance to the USA, a fact which appeared to be enthusiastically acknowledged. With regard to the military Turkey so badly was in need of a qualitative overhaul of hardware, benefited through the supply of billion worth of modern arms. On the diplomatic front, Turkish officials were clearly under the impression that their chances of getting into the EC would be more bright, as a result of the crisis.

There was also deepening concern within Turkey over Iraq’s growing military power which induced Ozal to accept the US and British agenda for the crisis which comprised one publicly avowed strategic objective, the “full and unconditional withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait and an additional hidden agenda, the removal of Saddam Hussain and the neutralization of Iraqi military power, notably its non-conventional weapons.”25 And for Ozal West Asia was in the midst of irreversible change. It was therefore vital for Turkey to be in a position to take full benefit from future opportunities.

The style and substance of President Ozal’s intervention in the Gulf crisis was in keeping with the man, a controversial one within Turkey. The initial consensus over the dispute broke down as positions became markedly more polarized. The Kemalist traditional elite, which took a more orthodox view of Turkish foreign policy in the region, balked at both the style and

substance of Ozal’s brash partisan action.\textsuperscript{26} There was widespread feeling within the establishment that Turkey should have adopted a more neutralist approach, retaining the possibility of playing a mediatory role between Iraq and its immediate adversaries in the region.

And the somewhat unusual internal position of the Turkish government at the time of the Gulf crisis needed to be noted, since it had some important effects on the Turkish reactions. In “November 1989 Turgut Ozal, the founder and leader of the ruling Motherland Party, had succeeded ex-General Kevan Evren, as President of the Republic. Constitutionally, his election was perfectly legal but it broke with political tradition in that Ozal was the first president of Turkey since 1960 who was an important politician in his own right, rather than a retired military commander”\textsuperscript{27} which also threatened to produce a change in the constitutional balance in which the President had normally played a military figurehead role and the main political power was wielded by the Prime Minister. To conform to the constitution, Ozal was obliged to sever all his official links with the Motherland Party on assuming the presidency. However, it was clear from the start that, in practice, he would continue to exercise a predominant power over the government from behind the scenes. And the then Prime Minister was never regarded as much

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., pp.70-71

\textsuperscript{27} William Hale : n.7; p.683.
more than a colourless stand-in for the President. This situation set up tensions between the president on the one side and the cabinet and government backbenchers on the other which led to enormous frictions with regard to the crisis. In this process two foreign ministers and one army chief resigned. And the policy decisions of the Turkish government during the gulf crisis were predominantly handled by the President which led to protest demonstrations inside Turkey against the government.

In the Gulf war, the main concern for the Turks was that if Iraq did decide to attack in the North, they would have insufficient planes and anti-aircraft defences to hold off the far superior Iraqi air force. Hence, it was important to secure a pledge from NATO that, if Iraq attacked Turkey, then the other allies would come to its assistance under the NATO treaty which was confirmed in principle at a NATO summit held in Brussels on 11 August 1990. Turkey officially asked for the defensive deployment of NATO air forces on 30 November 1990. And on 2 January 1991 it was announced that Germany, Italy and Belgium would be sending 40 aircraft as part of an allied mobile force. However, most of the planes sent were obsolescent F-104 and Alpha-Jet aircraft. And the move triggered off complaints in Germany, where there was strong opposition to any military involvement in the Middle East. On the other hand, it was clear that the far larger and more modern

28 Ibid., p.685.
American and British squadrons which were in any case stationed at "Incirlik, near Adana, which is the main NATO air base in Turkey, would be brought into action if Turkey was attacked."\(^{29}\) This was the most powerful deterrent facing Saddam Hussain and illustrated the value of Turkey's membership of NATO—both to itself and to the alliance as a whole. As NATO's only Muslim country, Turkey also provided a cultural bridge between Europe and the West Asia. If the US eventually reestablishes ties with Iran, those ties will have been facilitated by the relationship it shares with intermediaries, such as Turkey. Turkey's relationship with NATO, of course, is not one sided and many Turks recognize the necessity of having a strong NATO deterrent force on their soil. Apart from this the Turks occasionally recognized the desirability of exploring alternative means for assuring their security. They have been willing to examine a more neutral stance between East and West. But three major developments—the decline of the Soviet Union, the emergence of a resurgent EC and the advent of a long-term threat posed by Iraq—have led President Ozal to check what, in different circumstances, might have been a drift toward neutrality or non-alignment.

However, in the past, Turkey appeared increasingly reluctant to allow the US use of its territory as a staging ground in non-NATO contingencies. Such reluctance to engage in non-NATO contingencies reverberated in many

\(^{29}\) Ibid.
official Turkish quarters after Saddam’s troops rolled into Kuwait. In addition to criticisms of ‘Ozal’s “one man rule, other detractors asserted that to commit to a US-led war against Saddam would give the US the capacity to permanently damage Turkey’s economic and diplomatic relations with Iraq.”

But within ‘Ozal’s inner circle, there were indications of a readiness to take a tough’ stand against any potential aggression from the south. The groundwork had been laid at a meeting of “Turkish emissaries in Vienna in December 1989, well before the gulf crisis. Mesut Yilmaz, then Foreign Minister, met with 17 Turkish ambassadors to examine the effects on Turkey of development in eastern Europe and the implications of better relations between East and West”. In that meeting, “the broad outline of a future foreign policy for Turkey was devised. Turkey, the ministers concerned, would definitely remain in NATO.” It would, however, establish closer ties with the Soviet Union and the other Warsaw Pact countries. Turkey recognized that, to be accepted as a member of the EC, it would have to take greater steps toward democracy and improve its human rights record. While vigilance would still have to be maintained against the southeast, Iraq and Syria. This shift would be reflected in Turkey’s new defense strategy. And it should be noted that while Turkey’s strategic importance was lessened by

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30 Bruce R. Kuniholm : n.9; p.40.
31 Ibid
32 Ibid
East-West detente, it was not eliminated. Its geographical location would dictate its continuing strategic importance to the alliance. And no less important, even if Turkey were not granted full membership in the EC, it would not be totally excluded.

In the West Asian region, the economic integration scheme include the ‘Gulf Cooperation Council’ and the Arab Maghreb Council, however the Turkish government looks to Europe and fears the consequences of rejection - Particularly the real reason stems from cultural and religious prejudice against Turkey’s Muslim heritage. They have sensed such prejudice in the Wests’ relatively weak reaction to the treatment of Turks in eastern European countries. In the context of their perceived rejection by Europe, the Turks looked to their bilateral relationships. The US, because of its interests in the West Asian region has continued to cooperate with Turkey. And the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait reinforced the US impression about Turkey’s potential role in the Persian Gulf.

Prior to the gulf crisis, the Turk’s main security concern was an emerging Islamic terrorist threat within the country and increased confrontations with the separatist Kurdish movement. And in the current context of a possible disintegration of Iraq, Turkish concern over the Kurdish nationality problem has again surfaced. The difficulty of incorporating even more Kurds into the Republic of Turkey would, of course, pose serious
problems. It would in some ways be similar to the problem of Israel occupying even more Arab territory and coping with the additional Arab population. If Turkey has to improve its human rights record and become more democratic to win acceptance by the EC, the incorporation of more Kurds would hardly facilitate that goal. And Turkey along with Iran and Syria would prefer to see Iraq keep its own borders in the crisis. The territorial integrity of regional states has been one of Turkey’s long-standing policies. On the other hand, if the local Kurdish insurrection in north eastern Iraq were to become widespread, consolidate its gain and evolve a separate Kurdish rump state, Ankara would see such a development as unacceptable. In the near future if any changes are to be made in West Asia, with regard to the Kurdish problem Turkey will expect to have a seat at the table when such decisions are made. The Turkish government is already facing a growing terrorist threat to its ‘secular and democratic credentials in some of their major cities. The rise of terrorism by some radical groups were attributed to their support for Saddam.

A country that has a serious internal insurgency and is surrounded by potentially hostile countries and has ambivalent allies must ultimately rely on itself. Turkey shares borders with countries that support religious and ethnic terrorist activities and that do not participate in negotiations on disarmament and arms control. And that is why, President Ozal was mindful of the larger
context within which Saddam Hussain’s actions were to be seen. He emphasized that “his stand was one of principle, it concerned the norms of international behaviour and the fundamental tenets of the UN Charter.”

However, Ozal was also mindful of the very serious threat Saddam posed and of the necessity of taking risks to effect Turkey’s interests. Even while granting NATO allies to use Turkish installations for operations against Iraq, Ozal said he would not attack Iraq unless Turkey was attacked. He correctly calculated that Saddam, preoccupied with the ground war in the south, would not risk a second front. Throughout the war, Ozal downplayed the harm that could be caused by Iraq by its missiles.

A more cautious role in the allied coalition would not have earned Turkey the same measure of respect from its allies. And it would not have given the Turks so many real and potential benefits like economic assistance from a substantial number of coalition forces, military assistance and support for the modernization of Turkish forces from its NATO allies. The recognition of Turkey as a leader and potential source of stability in the region, one deserving of a seat at whatever peace conference take place in the post war era. And the gratitude of its allies the most clear expression of which would be admission to the European Community.

33 William Hale, n.7; p. 689.
After the crisis, there is the possibility of a greater role for the non-Arab states, that is Turkey and Iran. The eclipse of Iraq, however temporary, will correspondingly increase the importance of Iran in the Gulf. If Iran's rulers continue to think in terms of national interests rather than Islamic revolution, that increase might become permanent. Turkey too may find itself obliged to abandon its long-maintained policy of avoiding any involvement in Arab affairs and a more active part. And the "length of the war and the manner of its ending will also vitally affect the future role of the US in the Middle East. There is a tendency among many in the region, because of the resemblance of language and institutions, to assume that the US is the British Empire starting up business again with a new management and a new address.\textsuperscript{34} However, a "recent discussion paper produced by the Turkish Foreign Policy Institute, Ankara, notes that 'in Turkey's relations with Middle Eastern states, gestures of religious solidarity and support for the Arab cause have not yielded particularly positive results'\textsuperscript{35} and it's due to the non-cooperation of the West Asian States with Turkey in the time of grave diplomatic need. This ultimately goes against the national interest of Turkey to follow a 'pro-Arab' line. However, relations with the newly-independent

\textsuperscript{34} Bernand Lewis: 'Who'll Win, Who'll Lose in the Gulf', \textit{Strategic Digest}, Vol. 21; 1991; pp 689.

\textsuperscript{35} Andrew Mango, 'The Turkish Model', \textit{Middle Eastern Studies}, Vol. 29, 1993; p. 728.
Turkic republics of the former Soviet Union, which Turkey is certainly doing its best to foster can yield benefits only in the context of Turkey’s wider relationship with the advanced industrialized nations.

And the disputes over the waters of Euphrates are also a potent source of friction between ‘Turkey, Syria and Iraq’, since the river rises in central Turkey and then flows across Syrian and Iraqi territory to the Gulf. All three countries rely on the Euphrates for irrigation and electricity generation. And this water dispute between these countries creates some sort of tension which is not conducive for a good normal intercourse amongst the states.

While the Turks recognize the necessity of self-reliance, they clearly will not leave NATO, even as its military role is subordinated to a more political one. To do so without a countervailing force against regional enemies whether the Russia or the Iraq would be fatuous. The Bosporus has been and continues to be one of the Russian lifelines. To leave NATO would eliminate a critical deterrent, threaten to eliminate the substantial assistance that the Turks receive and give the Greeks an unnecessary advantage in their differences with the Turks. It would also lessen the likelihood that Turkey will ever become a full member of the EC. Within the framework of NATO, however, particularly if it is rejected by the EC, Turkey will pursue its own course. Turks are sensitive to the fact that NATO is now considering a post-crisis regional defence arrangement in the Persian Gulf and Turkey’s
participation would be essential to such a structure. Turkey is cognizant of its vulnerability to both East and West, sensitive to the capricious character of its relations with them and aware of the necessity of walking a delicate line between power blocs and cultures and surrounded by countries that are undergoing massive upheavals and which are often antagonistic toward each other.

The Turks increasingly realized that cautious diplomacy leaves them out in the cold, while an activist diplomacy - consistent with their self-image as an emerging regional power requires tough choices about their friends and enemies. This holds true whether in the Black Sea, Caspian Sea or the Persian Gulf. Such choices always involve risks because one's allies tend to determine one's enemies. Nonetheless such risks must sometimes be taken, as was the case in the Gulf War. Hence Ozal has asserted that Turkey has an important economic and political role to play in the Middle East, not the least of which involves the so-called Middle East Peace-Water Project that would include countries from the eastern Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf.\textsuperscript{36} And here the issue is not Turkey's relationship with the West Asian region but whether that relationship will be established in concert with its European allies or without them. This is a reality that Europeans should ponder as they

\textsuperscript{36} Bruce R. Kuniholm, n.9; pp.48.
attempt to safeguard vital interests in the Persian-Gulf with a security framework anchored in partially in Turkey.

Turkey has earned the right to join the EC. The strategic reasons for its accession to NATO, moreover, still hold, although they have undergone a substantial reorientation. Just as Turkey’s post war geopolitical importance depended on its being seen in a European as well as a West Asian context, its importance in the aftermath of the cold war and the Gulf crisis will depend on its being accepted as a full-fledged member of Europe. Having based it’s whole post-war foreign and security policies on the strategic importance for the West of its location vis-a-vis the Soviet Union, Turkey, initially, hardly welcomed the end of the Cold War. As the function and relevance of NATO in the Post-Cold War order was opened up to discussion, Turkey suddenly found itself in a ‘Security limbo’ and realized that the end of the ‘threat discourse was fundamentally damaging to its Western security connection, and to the military and the economic benefits derived from it. And at the same time, it was painfully observed in Turkey that the fundamental paradigms of the bipolar system were radically altered by the fast-changing scene of international politics. It also became clear that Turkey could no longer follow its traditional foreign policy posture based on the relatively safety and stability of the cold war politics. In fact, as the disintegration of the Soviet Union came to the fore, Turkey was going through a process of
reassessing its foreign policy orientation and some of its essential ideological underpinnings. At this juncture, Turkey was getting increasingly uneasy about its post-cold war posture regarding its foreign and security politics. However, Turkey is an “important stabilizing actor in this emerging new world order, or disorder, because of its strong historical, cultural, ethnic and linguistic bonds within that region. Thus, the positive role Turkey may play in this region has been extensively discussed not only within Turkey but also in the West, whose fear that radical Islam might fill up the power vacuum created by the collapse of the USSR, led to strong encouragement to these states to adopt a ‘Turkish model’ of secular democracy combined with liberal economy”.

And its fair enough to assume that President Ozal has a vision of Turkey’s involvement in the determination and execution of the post war security arrangements, and the desire to take advantage of whatever changes in the region the crisis ultimately brings. This was a key factor in his conviction that Ankara should play a proactive and pro-Western role within it. This further suggests that President Ozal, who regularly demonstrated his gift of strategic vision, was unwilling to be tied down by under-lying principles simply because they had been inviolable in the past. However “much of the Kemalist establishment, whether at the political party, bureaucratic or military levels, had shown itself to be deeply discomforted by

37 Mustafa Aydin: ‘Turkey and Central Asia: Challenges of Change’; Central Asia Survey; Vol.15; 1996; p.171.
Ozal the visionary. Their innate caution contrasts with his apparent impulsiveness, their dourness with his penchant for cutting a dash; their rigorous adherence to carefully defined principles with his flexible pragmatism". It can be easily presumed that the Kemalist traditionalist elite is more at ease with the old principles of Turkish regional policy. Indeed, it would seem that there are few men with the strategic vision of an Ozal capable of elaborating and implementing a more imaginative and inevitably more risky set of policies. It therefore seems likely that if Turgut Ozal left the political scene there would be an attempt to reorient Turkish policy towards a more conventional approach. But ultimately, the fate of the new approach would in large measure depend upon the legacy of the current president and the changes that are taking place in that region. It seemed likely that if Turkey were to play a part in any new regional grouping, then this could only be realized with the active support and cooperation of all the main West Asian states, and not just the Western powers. Yet, how this could be achieved was quite unclear. Potentially, the Gulf crisis had brought about important changes in Turkey's role in West Asia, but it had raised more questions than it answered.

38 Philip Robins: p.73.