CHAPTER 2

Turkey’s Kurdish Dilemma and the United States

In November 1998, Turkey’s Kurdish question returned to the top of the international agenda with the seizure in Nairobi (Kenya) of Abdullah Öcalan leader of the rebellious Kurdistan Worker’s Party (with Kurdish Acronym, Partiya Karkaren Kurdistan-PKK). Demonstration in support of Öcalan’s release wreaked havoc throughout Europe and served as a reminder of the war between the PKK and the Turkish state that has claimed over 30,000 lives since 1984.

Despite his earlier reputation as a dictator-like, murderous terrorist, Öcalan in retrospect, had done more to re-establish a sense of Kurdish self-esteem and nationalism in Turkey than any other Kurdish leader in recent years. This was aptly illustrated by the disappointment most Kurds and their supporters throughout the world showed upon hearing that he had been apprehended by the Turkish authorities. In the process Öcalan once again illustrated the old saying that one person’s freedom fighter is another’s terrorist, because to most Turks, Öcalan seemed bent on destroying Turkey’s territorial integrity through organized terrorism.

For a short period in the early 1990s Öcalan actually seemed close to achieving a certain degree of military success. In the end, however, he over extended himself, while the Turkish military spared no excesses in containing him. Slowly but steadily, the Turks marginalized the PKK’s military threat. Öcalan’s ill-advised decision in August 1995 to attack Iraqi Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in northern Iraq, because of its support for Turkey, further undermined his strength. The final blow came when Turkey threatened to go to war against Syria in October 1998 unless Damascus expelled Öcalan from his longtime sanctuary in that country.
Throughout its republican history, the Turkish nation has had a difficult relationship with its Kurdish population. In all its great projects—such as state-building, the forging of a political ideology, creating a modern society, economic development, the Turkish state has met resistance from many of its Kurds. In part, these problems reflect the marginality of the Kurdish regions in Turkey—the prevalence of tribal politics, personal piety and social conservatism, low standards of educational achievement and a modest level of per capita income. In part they reflect a contrasting vision of how to think of state and nationhood. Whatever the causes, the reality remains that after more than seventy-five years the Turkish republic has failed to incorporate a substantial part of its Kurdish population. The fact that in both the 1920s and the 1990s the Turkish state met widespread, organized resistance, both violent and non-violent from among significant numbers of Kurds is an illustration of the enduring nature of these problems.

The Kurdish question is arguably the most serious internal problem in the Turkish republic’s eighty-year history and certainly the main obstacle to its aspirations to full integration with European institutions. Most westerners define the problem simply as a matter of oppression and denial of rights by a majority group (the Turks) of an ethnic minority (the Kurds). The civil war in southeastern Turkey that raged between 1984 and 1999 is accordingly viewed as a national liberation movement and enjoys widespread sympathy both in the west and in the third world. The Turkish political elite for its part, promotes an entirely different view of the problem, which is often misunderstood and ridiculed in the west. In official Turkish discourse, there is no Kurdish problem, but rather a socioeconomic problem in the southeastern region and a problem of terrorism that is dependent on external support aiming at weakening Turkey. In reality, neither the official Turkish view nor the dominant western
perception holds up to close scrutiny. A deeper study of the problem reveals its extreme complexity, with a number of facets and dimensions that tend to observe the essentials of the conflict.

One observation that should be made at the outset is that the Kurdish issue in Turkey differs in many respects from such recent ethnic conflicts as those in Bosnia, Chechnya, Kosovo, Liberia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Rwanda. Despite almost two decades of armed conflict and thousands of causalities, open tensions in society between Turks and Kurds remain, under the circumstances, minimal. Foreigners are surprised by the discovery that a significant portion of Turkey's political and business elite is of Kurdish origin, including three of the country's nine president's—something unthinkable for Kosovars or Chechens—and that Kurds' representation in the country's parliament is larger than their proportion of the population. At the same time, it is difficult to refute the assertion that there is an ethnic dimension of the conflict, in a sense that a portion of the country's population holds on to an identity distinct from that of the majority and feel discriminated against on the basis of that identity, resulting in at least a limited ethnic mobilization. In addition to the irrefutable ethnic aspect, the Kurdish problems contains oft-neglected social, economic, political, ideological, and international dimensions that have carried different weight at different times. The present chapter looks at the international dimensions of the Kurdish question. The Kurdish question has complicated Turkey's relations with Iraq, Iran and Syria. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the cold war signalled the beginning of a new era in international politics. In stark contrast with the past, western governments began to take a growing interest in Turkey's human rights

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1 Based on estimates, given that the ethnicity of members of parliament is not published, and that census data do not include ethnicity.
performance at a time when violence between the Turkish security forces and the PKK escalated.

**Operation Provide Comfort**

When Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, the Turkish government supported UN sanctions and allied military operations against Iraq. The decision was energetically advocated by Turgut Özal against considerable opposition and criticism inside Turkey. According to the US ambassador in Turkey during the Gulf crisis, it was Ozal himself who contacted Bush the day after the Iraqi invasion to suggest the closure of the oil pipeline running from northern Iraq to the Meditarranean sea through Turkey.²

The defeat of the Iraqi military by the UN coalition foreshadowed the Shia Moslems in southern Iraq and the Kurds in northern Iraq to rebel. The Kurdish nationalist uprising seemed to be successful until the Iraqi military turned against the Kurds after having crushed the shi’ite revolt. The collapse of the Kurdish uprising was sudden and complete. Thousands of northern Iraqi Kurds were forced to flee from their homes ahead of the advancing Iraqi army. A flood of refugees retreated up the mountains along the Iraqi-Turkish border. In these circumstances the Turkish National Security Council (NSC) convened an emergency meeting on 2 April, 1991.

The NSC decided to keep the border closed until the security council passed judgement. A letter was immediately sent to the Council calling for a meeting and noting that ‘the Iraqi government forces are deliberately pressing these people (refugees) towards the Turkish border in order to drive them out of their country. These actions violate all norms of behaviour towards civilian populations and constitute an excessive use of force and threat to the region’s peace and security’."³

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Those attending the NSC meeting acknowledged that most of these refugees were the kin of Kurds in Turkey, and that it was essential to come to their help for political if not humanitarian reasons. The then opposition leader Demirel and several Kurdish deputies called for the opening of the Turkish-Iraqi border. However, there was the fear that allowing the refugees on Turkish soil would intensify feelings of nationalism and separatism among Kurds in Turkey. The immediate concern, however, was to ensure that the problems caused by an earlier influx of over 50,000 Kurdish refugees in 1988 would not be repeated.

Meanwhile, efforts were on to secure a no fly zone and safe haven for the Kurds in northern Iraq. President Özal played a central role in the introduction of the idea of a safe haven. To President Bush he made it clear that Turkey was being overwhelmed, and that he expected to see the United States come to the support of a NATO ally that had proved its loyalty during the Gulf War.

When European efforts to create a UN-sanctioned safe haven failed as a result of Soviet, Chinese and Indian objections, Bush announced on 16 April that US troops would enter northern Iraq to create a ‘safe area’ in the plains around Zakhu. A safe haven in northern Iraq was thus created independently of the UN and in a form considerably different from that envisaged by Özal. In the words of The Economist, the Turks had decided that the emergence of some sort of a Kurdish enclave in Iraq would be a little less dangerous than the arrival of millions of Kurds inside Turkey itself.

This led to the dispatch of an international force to the region to be involved in an operation which became known as OPERATION PROVIDE COMFORT (OPC).

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4 Milliyet, 4 April 1991.
5 Newsweek, 29 April 1991.
Operation Provide Comfort, with the accompanying safe haven, provided the security
and protection that was needed to ensure voluntary repatriation.

Many in Turkey believed that OPC was paving the way for the establishment
of a Kurdish state. Some argued that the operation enabled the PKK to mount raids
more easily into Turkey. Opposition to and suspicion of the activities of the OPC led
to the Turkish government's decision in October 1995 to limit the future renewal of
the operation's mandate to three months. On eight previous occasions the Parliament
had renewed the operation’s mandate for six-monthly periods.

The operation, while alleviating one major security concern for Turkey,
triggered the emergence of another. The Iraqi loss of sovereignty above the 36th
parallel culminated in establishment of what one analyst has called Kurdish
'statehood by stealth'. This development would have significant repercussion for
Turkish policy-makers with regard to the Kurdish question.

Turkey and the Situation in Northern Iraq

During the Iran – Iraq war of 1980-88, Iraq permitted Turkey to pursue PKK
guerillas into its territory on a number of occasions. Such cooperation served the
interests of both states at that time, as Baghdad had its hands full with the Iranians and
thus had difficulty in controlling its northern provinces where the Iraqi Kurds were
permitting the PKK to enjoy safe-houses. Thus although the PKOK maintained bases
in northern Iraq, they did not have the permission of the host government as they did
in Syria and to a much lesser extent in Iran.

The understanding between Ankara and Baghdad against both the PKK and
the Iraqi Kurds began to unravel upon the conclusion of the war in 1988, when Iraq

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chased some 60,000 Iraqi Kurds over the border into Turkey, where they were reluctantly received as refugees.

Before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Kurdish tribes of northern Iraq and southeastern Turkey were able to maintain regular contacts with little difficulty across the frontier. In spite of a number of ethnic affinity links between these Kurdish tribes in southeastern Turkey and northern Iraq, trans-state ethnic co-operation between the Kurds was not always smooth. With regard to northern Iraq, however, the Kurdish supporters of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) led by Jalal Talabani, and especially the Kurdish followers of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) led by Masoud Barzani, have more recently clashed with PKK forces which sought refuge in territories controlled by the northern Iraqi Kurds. But since the death of President Özal, with the deterioration of relations between the PUK and Turkish government, Talabani’s supporters have become more tolerant of PKK activities in Iraq. The PKK has been able to extend its influence in northern Iraq as tensions between the KDP and the PUK have increased since 1994.

Officials in Ankara are mindful of the processes of ‘diffusion’ and ‘contagion’ in relation to Kurdish groups in Turkey and in northern Iraq. As regards diffusion, conflict in both Turkey and Iraq involving the Kurds has directly affected policy


10 The PUK was established by Jalal Talabani (1933- ) in Damascus on June 1, 1975, following the collapse of Mulla Mustafa Barzani’s revolt against Baghdad the previous March. It has been described as leftist, socialist, and progressive, and it is associated with the Sorani-Speaking area of Southeastern Iraqi Kurdistan. For further analyses, see Nader Entessar, Kurdish Ethnonationalism (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992), pp. 78-80, 130-33, and McDowall, Modern History of the Kurds, pp. 343-47. For a recent analysis of the KDP-PUK struggle in northern Iraq, see Michael M. Gunter, “The KDP-PUK conflict in Northern Iraq”, Middle East Journal, vol. 50 (Spring 1996), pp. 225-41.
making in each. In effect, 'spillover' has worked in both directions. The PKK has found sanctuary in northern Iraq, and northern Iraqi Kurds have sought refuge in Turkey to the alarm of the authorities in Ankara. Turkish officials are also particularly concerned about a possible contagion effect where the activities of the northern Iraqi Kurds may provide inspiration and guidance for the PKK in Turkey. Specifically, the government is apprehensive about the prospects of the possible establishment of an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq, owing to pressure from northern Iraqi Kurds, the creation of a real federal structure in Iraq. Kurds in Turkey could then be encouraged to lobby more vigorously for independence or the formation of a federal system for Turkey. At most, Turkish officials are prepared to support real autonomy for the northern Iraqi Kurds within a unitary Iraqi state. However, even that arrangement would set a precedent. Some Kurds in Turkey may then press to emulate the northern Iraqi model of autonomy within Turkey itself.

Turkish officials have been determined to ensure that northern Iraq would not be used by the PKK as a base for launching armed operations into Turkey. At the same time, Ankara has been concerned not to undermine Iraq's territorial integrity. The Turkish government is also keen not to upset its relations with Iran and Syria. In May 1988, after the KDP and PKK formally ended their alliance, the KDP and PUK officially announced the creation of the Iraqi Kurdistan Front (IKF), made up of their two parties and at one time or another six other, smaller groups in Iraqi Kurdistan. As the results of the Gulf war in 1991 began to bring the Turks and Iraqi Kurds together the IKF declared on October 7, 1991, its intention to "Combat the PKK". Although the Turkish bombing of PKK camps in northern Iraq—which also killed some Iraqi Kurds – momentarily caused Barzani to reconsider its decision, the logic of the

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Turkish connection prevailed. The authorities have been eager to make use of Turkey's role in Operation Provide Comfort to mobilize international support against the PKK. At regular intervals Turkey has renewed the mandate of the US supported OPC. For their part, the Iraqi Kurds felt dependent on Turkey. The double economic blockade imposed on them by both the United Nations and Saddam, the Habur (Ibrahim al-Khalil) border crossing point with Turkey just north of Zakho was the only legal entry point for commerce and customs revenues. Hoshyar Zebari, a foreign policy spokesman for the KDP, explained: "Turkey is our lifeline to the West and the whole world in our fight against Saddam Husayn. We are able to secure allied air protection and International aid through Turkey's cooperation. If Poised Hammer (OPC) is withdrawn, Saddam's units will again reign in this region and we will lose everything". 13 Talabani concluded that "Turkey must be considered a country friendly to the Iraqi Kurds". 14 The Iraqi Kurds supported the Turkish military operation to uproot PKK bases in northern Iraq in autumn 1992. Ankara and the Kurdish leadership in northern Iraq had become dependent on each other with regard to their security interests. 15

Masoud Barzani noted that since 1991 Turkey 'has become our only window to the outside world. We consider our relations with Turkey to be extremely vital. 16 Barzani also emphasized that OPC was his only security guarantee and spoke of Turkey's critical role in the area. This relationship also benefitted Turkey. Trade with

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13 Cited in "Iraqi Kurds Reportedly to Block Terrorist Attack," Ankara TRT Television Network in Turkish, 1600 GMT, April 8, 1992, as cited in FBIS-WEU, April 9, 1992, p. 43.
15 This interdependence was also noted in, W. Hale, Turkey's Time: Turkey the Middle East and the Gulf Crisis, International Affairs (London), vol.68, no.4, (Oct. 1992), p. 690.
16 Interview published in Al-Safir, 2 August 1994 as reported by Middle East Intelligence Review, 11 August 1994, accessed over internet (www.mei.org)
northern Iraq has become a useful source of income for south-eastern Turkey's otherwise depressed economy. But in no way could this compensate for the loss of the substantial trade turnover between Turkey and Iraq caused by the imposition of sanctions.

Relations between Turkey and the KDP, which has traditionally controlled the areas of northern Iraq bordering Turkey, have tended to be positive. Barzani’s greater willingness to cooperate with Turkey and his readiness to be pragmatic with respect to Kurdish aspirations in northern Iraq appeared to have gained to some extent the trust of many Turkish decision makers. Ankara has tended to be suspicious of Talabani’s commitment to respect Iraq’s territorial integrity and keep the PKK out of northern Iraq.

Relations between the PUK leadership and Turkey cooled particularly after the death of Özal in April 1993. He had seemed more willing to take risks and had shared Talabani’s opinion that Saddam Hussain should be removed from power. Since Özal’s death the Turkish government has come to base its policies on an acceptance that Saddam Hussain will not be removed and that Turkey would have to co-exist with a Saddam-led Iraq as its neighbour. Increasingly critical of Ankara’s policies, as of March 1996, Talabani had not visited Turkey since the death of Özal.

The PKK has advocated the establishment of a united, independent, Kurdish state and has supported the use of terrorism to achieve this end. An independent 'Kurdistan', according to the PKK leadership, could embrace parts of Turkey and Iraq. Both the KDP and the PUK have been opposed to the use of terrorism and have preferred to limit their political demands and call only for a democratic and federal Iraq. The northern Iraqi Kurds have condemned PKK violence and the KDP has regularly warned the PKK not to mount military operations against Turkey from
northern Iraq. In March 1995, though, Talabani announced that his organisation would use diplomacy rather than force to prevent the PKK from attacking Turkey. Talabani added: 'We do not view the PKK as a terrorist organisation but as a political organisation'. This was in stark contrast to the statement of Nechirwan Barzani, a nephew of Masoud Barzani, who had said that the 'PKK constituted a threat not only for Turkey but also to us'. In March 1996, seeking to consolidate its presence along the Iraqi-Turkish border, the PKK forcibly evacuated villages in northern Iraq which were inhabited by tribes closely associated with the KDP.

Most of the Turkish media and many politicians in Ankara were disturbed by developments in northern Iraq and looked upon the safe haven there as a threat to Turkey. In parliamentary debates over whether the mandate OPC should be extended, many deputies denounced the operation and claimed that it was a Western ploy which had as its aim the establishment of an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq. The most outspoken opponents of the operation have been the leaders of the DSP and the RP, Bulent Ecevit and Necmettin Erbakan, respectively.

By the mid 1990s, the continuance of OPC became a major political issue in Turkey, because many Turks believed that it was facilitating the vacuum of authority in northern Iraq that enabled the PKK to enjoy sanctuaries there. Some even argued that OPC was the opening salvo of a new Treaty of Sevres that would lead to the creation of a Kurdish State in northern Iraq which was seen as threatening to Turkey’s

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17 Turkish Daily News (TDN), 5 May 1995.
18 Ibid., 6 May 1995.
19 Ibid., 14 March 1996.
20 A brief summary of their views before the debate in December 1994 may be found in ibid. 29 December 1994. For an analysis of the growing opposition among deputies against operation Provide Comfort and Turkey’s policies in northern Iraq based on parliamentary debates see B. Oran, 'Kalkık Horoz': Cekic Guç ve Kürç Devleti (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi 1996), pp.99-144.
unity and territorial integrity. In March 1995, immediately after the completion of the Turkish military intervention in northern Iraq, Mehmet Gölhan, then Defence Minister in Ankara, remarked that Turkey’s security could only be guaranteed if Baghdad could reinstate its control over the north.

The Kurdish Question and Turkey’s Relations with its Middle East Neighbours

The negative impact of the Kurdish issue on Turkey’s external relations has not been confined to Europe, however. In fact, Turkey has discovered that its Kurdish problem has rendered it vulnerable to those neighbours with which it has had long-standing disputes by providing them with an opportunity to embarrass or even harass Ankara. In the power politics that so often typifies interstate relations in the region, Turkey’s immediate Middle Eastern neighbours (Iran, Iraq and Syria) have, to varying degrees, found the establishment of ties with the PKK to be irresistible. Motives for such steps have varied. For Damascus, sponsorship of the PKK has been viewed as a useful way of exerting leverage over the issue of the use of the water of the Euphrates river basin. For Tehran, relations with the PKK have been used to underline its displeasure at the presence in Turkey of members of the violent Iranian opposition group, the Mujaheddin-e-Khalq(MOK). In the case of Iraq, where the PKK’s room for operation since 1991 has been much more related to the political vacuum in the northeast of the country, Baghdad has also dabbled with the PKK as a way of demonstrating its antipathy toward trans-Atlantic policy.

The temptation for the different states to use their neighbour’s Kurds in pursuit of their regional ambitions is matched only by the willingness with which the Kurds

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21 For a forceful presentation of this thesis see M. Kocaoğlu, Uluslararası İlişkeler İğində Ordadöy (Ankara: Gnkur Basimevi, 1995) p. 289-400. This book, written by a colonel, was authorised for circulation by the Turkish General Staff as a reference work.

22 TDN, 5 May 1995.

have accepted assistance from neighbouring states as a means of eluding the limits imposed by state boundaries. Nearly all Kurdish leaders, when queried about the wisdom of consorting publicly with Turkey's enemies, reply that what Turkey is doing to the Kurds is so damaging to the Kurds as a people that they are determined to let Ankara know that the Kurds can hurt Turkey, too, if necessary. The presence of a Kurdish problem that its Middle Eastern neighbour could exploit has caused great difficulties for Turkey, dating back to 1987. It has contributed to strained bilateral relations with Syria, as five major initiatives from Ankara raised expectations of stabilization only to see such hopes dashed. In October 1998 the two countries almost came to war over the issue of Syrian sponsorship of the PKK. It has contributed to successive waves of Turkish frustration at the indeterminate situation in northern Iraq during the 1990s. A clutch of major cross-border military operations into northern Iraq in turn exacerbated Turkish relations with a range of countries in Europe and the Arab world. If the Kurdish and PKK issues have been less turbulent in the context of Iranian-Turkish relations, that is tempered by the widely held belief that Iran is currently Turkey's neighbour having the closest relationship with the PKK.

Of course, it must be admitted that the Kurdish issue is currently less problematic as far as Turkey's relations with its Middle Eastern neighbours are concerned than at any time since the late 1980s. Most graphically, Ankara can still point to the swift and ignominious climb down by Damascus in the face of Turkey's muscular diplomacy in October 1998. It might, however, be advisable not to overemphasize this experience in dismissing the harmful effects of the Kurdish issue on Turkey's relation with its neighbours. Ankara can hardly expect to be able to use

bellicose threats each time it has a Kurd related problem with its neighbours, nor can its 
expect such sweeping results as Syria's expulsion of Ocalan. The image of a powerful 
Turkey was soon replaced by the scenes of destruction and state immobility linked to 
the earthquake. Power relations can change, while the drift toward non-conventional 
weapons and missile delivery system will erode threat from conventional attack. 
Meanwhile, the uncertain future of northern Iraq shows no immediate sign of being 
resolved. Whatever happens, it would be naive to think that Turkey's Middle Eastern 
neighbours will not look again at the Kurdish issue as a potential asset in the cut and 
thrust of bilateral relations.

A discussion of Turkey's foreign policy toward the Middle East in light of the 
Kurdish issue also needs to encompass relations with Israel. Since 1991 bilateral 
relations have been flourishing across the boards, with military and strategic matters 
increasingly dominating since 1996. Only occasionally has this linear advance in 
bilateral ties been subject to public difficulty, remarkably, two of the most notable 
examples related to Turkey's Kurdish problem. The first was the eruption of Turkish-
Syrian tensions in September and October 1998 and the consequent fear of war, which 
prompted Israel to go out of its way to disassociate itself from the rise in tensions.25 
The second came in February 1999 with the capture of Abdullah Ocalan, the 
assumption that Israel had helped the Turks in bringing about this end was followed 
by a series of assaults on Israeli diplomatic missions across Europe, the attack on the 
Berlin consulate resulting in three Kurdish demonstrator being shot dead by security 
staff. Israel was surprised and disconcerted by these unexpected by products of its 
improving relations with Turkey. They did not results in any discernible revision of 

25 Israel did this both through high-level statements distancing itself from the Turkish stance and through the adoption of certain measures such as limiting routine exercises near the Syrian border in order to reassure Damascus. See, for example, the statements of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai quoted in AFP and AP reports respectively in *Jordan Times*, October 5, 1998.
Israeli policy towards Turkey, though they did help, together with the issue of Cyprus and Greece, to spark a robust debate within government political, and specialist circles as to the implications both positive and negative, of the development of such a relationship. With Israel keen not to assume an enmity with Turkey’s nationalist Kurds as part of its package of improved relations with Ankara, further negative experiences such as these may hinder Turkey’s pursuit of close ties with Israel.

**Relations with Europe.**

During the cold war, the West had remained relatively silent with respect to the Kurdish question in Turkey. The April 1991 refugee crisis and its aftermath and the increase of violence and human rights abuses in south-eastern Turkey forced a reassessment. Numerous political forums in Europe attributed the upsurge of violence in Turkey to the government’s repression of the Kurds. These groups pressed for the Kurds in Turkey to be granted ‘minority rights’. The Turkish public in general has received such ideas in negative. Hikmet Cetin, himself of Kurdish Origin, when Turkish Foreign Minister declared to the European parliament in May 1992 that the Kurds were not a minority. He argued that the Kurds enjoyed equal rights with all other citizens in Turkey.  

When the cold war ended and the Berlin wall came down, Europeans and Turks were confronted with one another much more as they are. Gone was the glue of the common external threat of the Soviet Union; gone too was the mutual dislike of communism. Shorn of this artificial solidarity, Europeans and Turks have had to confront their own reality, truth to tell, they have not much liked what they have seen. In 1990s Europe, there has been an embrace of the values of liberalism, humanism and pluralism; state power, now bordering on the distasteful, has been voluntarily

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26 *TDN.* 17 May, 1992.
constrained, national governments have increasingly shared ideas and tasks with both non governmental organizations and supra-state institutions, especially at the EU level; human rights have increasingly emerged as a central plank of foreign policy.

The European Parliament made it clear that it would not sanction Turkey’s accession to the customs union until certain basic modifications were made to the laws governing the criminalization of speech and constitutional provisions that represent roadblocks to furthering the democratization process.

Many among the Turkish elite have watched the assertion of such values with a mixture of suspicion, disbelief and contempt. Suspicion, in that many Turks regards these ideas as a European convenience for pushing Turkey away from the EU. While such slogans as “a Europe of the regions” take on a sinister connotations when transposed to the Turkish context. Disbelief, in that such institution as the European and Amnesty International are easy for Turks to dismiss as irrelevant, even though the former has increasingly acquired considerable power in terms of European external relations, while the later has emerged as a benchmark of conscience across much of Europe. Contempt, in that many elite Turks regards these normative developments as exuding weakness—in their eyes, only a strong state and a rigid ideological line are sufficient to ward off the chaos that would otherwise ensue. Still, given the importance of the customs union, Ankara was willing to pay the price to join. Although the Europeans no longer have the customs union as a carrot to dangle in front of Ankara, the fact remains that for Turkey this is an interim step. The ultimate goal is full membership. This very desire for membership in the custom union will render Ankara vulnerable to continued criticisms and pressure for human rights violations.27

27 *That membership in the custom union will increase European vigilance over Turkey’s human rights performance is also echoed by European diplomats: See İlmar Çevik, “Lobbying: Left wing Leaders in Britain and Germany are trying to convince their Parliamentarians to vote favourably”, TDN, November 15, 1995.*
After visiting Ankara in September 1994 Miguel Martinez, the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, prepared a report which expressed support for Turkey’s fight against terrorism. The report recommended the need to protect Turkey’s territorial integrity but criticized it for human rights violations and restrictions on freedom of expression. Already, Germany has been forced by domestic critics to suspend arms deliveries to Turkey, while these were eventually resumed, the suspension itself demonstrated the capabilities of domestic lobbies.

The situation become extremely bad when Kurdish deputies were sentenced to serve prison terms in December 1994. The EU postponed its decision on the signing of a custom union treaty with Turkey. The council of Europe threatened to consider the suspension of Turkey’s membership if the constitution were not reformed. However, on 6 March an agreement to activate a custom union between the EU and Turkey was signed. The agreement was ratified by the European parliament in December 1995.28

Russia’s decision to use force in Chechnya had reminded Western officials of the significance of Turkey’s geostrategic position. The US administration had thus pushed hard for Turkey to be included in a customs union with the EU to strengthen the country’s stability and security. Both the EU and the United States have given importance to the prospects of participating in a dynamic Turkish economy which commands more than 60 million consumers with expanding ties with Central Asian economies.

At the same time there have been concerned voices within Turkey for democratization which led to an improvement in relations between Turkey and Western Europe. After the closing of Democracy Party (DEP), the President of the

Turkish Grand National Assembly, Husamettin Cindoruk argued that the west had lost confidence in Turkish democracy. He added that it was not surprising that Europe had difficulty in understanding why a democracy would banish certain political expression from the parliament. He called for urgent efforts to bring about greater democratization within Turkey.29

Against a backdrop of such perceived divergence, Turks and European have repeatedly clashed over a series of different areas of public policy, with human rights at the forefront. For Europeans, as laid down in the Copenhagen criteria for membership, a good record on human rights is the acid test of whether a state and people are fit for inclusion in the European project. Turkey, for sure stands no where near, to say the least. Most notably, in December 1992 the council of Europe produced the “most critical report” ever on torture in a member state, just as Turkey. its subject was ending its presidency of the organization.30 It could be claimed that Turkey had been unfortunate to face the Kurdish insurgency during its phase of greatest intensity at the same time as the height of European idealism about building a better world. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Turkey’s human rights record has been poor for decades.

This strong European criticism does not find taste with the Turkish leadership. The 1990s have seen a growing overlap between human rights and the Kurdish issue. a trend that has not helped mutual understanding. In particular, the threat to suspend Turkey from the Council of Europe when it aspired to join the EU resurfaced the belief that Europe did not want a Moslem Turkey in Europe. Europe’s insistence on the need to find a political solution to the Kurdish question has intensified Ankara’s suspicions of a European hidden agenda. President Demirel himself articulated this

29 Millet, 29 June 1994.
viewpoint in a forceful manner in a widely watched talk show on Turkish television. During the interview the President quoted statements from the meeting he had with the French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe in March 1995. Juppe had remarked ‘we believe that the (Kurdish) problem is not just a military one, at the same time it also has political characteristic’ He added: ‘Among the public opinion of France, Germany, Spain and other European countries, there are people who believe that PKK terrorists are struggling for the social and political rights of Kurds’. These assertions were interpreted by Demirel as clear evidence of European plans to partition Turkey. The president argued that European demands for a ‘political solution’ were in reality calls for the granting of autonomy for the Kurds which he insisted would lead the country into a state of anarchy. Thus this overlap has intensified Ankara’s suspicions of a European hidden agenda while increasing Frustration on the European side at Turkey’s apparent unwillingness to change.

Turkey’s Kurdish Question and Human Rights

One of the biggest challenge confronting the Turkish nation in the 1990’s is political instability, which damaged Turkey’s capacity to develop sustained foreign policy objectives. At the same time domestic and foreign policies were also affected by the rising challenge of Kurdish nationalism. The campaign of violence, with terrorist attack against the civilian targets as well as the military which had been started by the PKK in 1984 gathered pace during the early 1990s. Throughout this period, the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan was an unacknowledged guest of the Syrian government, and benefited from Syrian logistic support and the use of training camps

31 32 Gün, TV programme, 8 May 1995. Subsequently the interview was covered In Yeni Yüzyıl 10 May 1995 and TDN, 10 May 1995.
32 The French Foreign Ministry insisted that Alain Juppe had never said anything that threatened the unity of the Turkish State. See Yeni Yüzyıl, 4 May 1995.
also won more international publicity after Saddam Hussain's brutal repression of the
Kurdish rebellion in Iraq, just after the Gulf was of 1991.

Turkish fight against PKK terrorism saw a turning point in 1999 with sudden
and dramatic capture of Abdullah Öcalan in Nairobi, Kenya on 16 February 1999. The
prospect of an end to the armed struggle against the PKK naturally caused
profound relief in Turkey, but it left the government with the job of deciding whether,
and how, it could tackle the broader political aspect of the Kurdish problem. The
struggle had also been fought at enormous cost. It was officially reported in March
1999 that around 4,400 soldier and police had been killed by the PKK since 1984,
plus over 1,200 'village guards' and around 5,300 civilians, mostly their fellow
Kurds, who had been murdered by the PKK in terrorist attacks. Accepting the
frequently quoted figure of 30,000 deaths since 1984, this suggests that around 19,000
PKK militants had been killed by the security forces. Between 500,000 and three
million people had been obliged to leave their homes, in many cases because their
villages had been forcibly evacuated and then burnt down by the army. These
evacuations had seriously alienated millions of Kurdish citizens from the Turkish
state, and this effect had been exacerbated by persistent human rights abuses by the
security forces. Apart from its domestic political effects, the struggle severely
weakened Turkey's foreign policies, since it badly undermined the idea that Turkey
could be presented as a democratic model to other Muslim countries.


34 Report by the Turkish General Staff, issue in March 1999: See *Briefing*, 15 March 1999, p. 17.

35 Figure from the Governor's Office of the 'Emergency Region' in the south-cast, issue in 1999, cited a total of 380,000 evacuations, but admitted that the real figure was much higher than this. Meanwhile, non-governmental organizations clarified there had been a total of three million 'internal refugees'. See ibid., 21 June 1999, p. 17.
damaged its chances of developing its links with Western Europe, and gave
unfriendly states a ready weapon for interference.

The U.S. State Department, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch
have all issued annoying reports of Turkish human right violations, many of which
directly concern the Kurdish problem. Although prone to be more lenient than the
others because of geostategically reasons, the annual U.S. State Department report
have devoted 36 pages to Turkey in 1995, more than any other country expect China,
which got 39. Only Iran, North Korea, Burma, and Cuba were listed as bigger
offenders.

In 1996, the State Department report declared that although “the human
rights situation improved in a number of areas...... very serious problems remain.”
Specifically mentioned were “torture”; “extrajudicial” or “mystery killings” that
occurred “mostly in the east and southeast of the country”; “evacuation and burning
of villages”; and “limits on freedom of expression”. The report added that “according
to (Turkish) government statistics during the first 9 months of 1995, 5893 persons
were under arrest charged with offence under the Anti-Terror Law, and 2,861 had
been convicted”. The law in question, claimed the report, contained a “broader and
ambiguous definition of terrorism”. The report mentioned that the PKK also had
“committed many human right abuses”.

Amnesty International accused the Turkish government of encouraging
torture, disappearance, and extrajudicial killings. Additional reports claimed that
human rights worked and lawyers in Turkey were subject to arbitrary arrest and

internet. The following citations were taken from this source.
detention, and that they then became victims of torture. Human Rights Watch made similar criticism, as did the Human Rights Association and Human Rights Foundation in Turkey itself. In its 1994 annual report, the Turkish Human Right Foundation declared that “Human rights and freedoms, including the primary right to life, were continuously abused during the year”. Extrajudicial executions, murders and torture were specifically mentioned. “The most vital issue for the country in 1994 continued to be the Kurdish problem… Dissenters were heavily penalized. Journalists and writers were arrested and sentenced…. The Kurdish problem caused great damage to the Turkish economy too… During the year, more than 1000 villages and hamlets were evacuated”. Albay Hacaloglu, the state minister responsible for human rights in Turkey, cautiously criticized the government for burning villages in the southeast to preempt the villagers from supporting the PKK.

Besides the Kurdish question, general restriction on human rights, especially the freedom of expression, also had serious effect. During the 1990s, some improvements in Turkey’s restrictive laws were admittedly enacted, and some moves were made to reduce the regular use of torture by the police. Inspite of some improvements in the human rights regime after 1995, by the summer of 1999


39 Human Right Watch Arms Project, Weapons Transfers and Violations of the Laws of the War in Turkey (New York: Human Rights Watch 1995); Helsinki Watch, “Free Expression in Turkey, 1993: Killings, Convictions, Confiscations”, August 1993; and Helsinki Watch, “The Kurds of Turkey: Killings, Disappearances and Torture”, March 1993. In October 1996, the Turkish translator and publisher of the 1995 Arms Project Study cited above were charged with “defamation and belittling the states security and military forces” under article 159/1 of the Turkish Penal Code.


numerous writers and human rights activists were still being imprisoned for the mere expression of oppositional views, especially on the Kurdish question, included those of Akin Birdal, chairman of the Turkish Human Rights Association, who received a ten-month prison sentence for a speech made in 1996 calling for ‘peace and understanding’ with the Kurdish minority and Oral Çalıslar a journalist on Cumhuriyet, who was sentenced to 13 months imprisonment for publishing an interview with Abdullah Öcalan six years earlier. The regular use of torture by police, and the presence of a military judge among the three judges in each of the State Security Courts, where most of these cases were tried, was also a constant source of criticism, both domestically and internationally.

On 18 June 1999, the newly installed Ecevit government succeeded in changing the constitution, so as to remove the military judges, primarily to avoid a prospective annulment of the verdict in the Öcalan trial by the European Court of Human Rights. The government also secured legislation to increase punishments for policemen found guilty of torture and facilitate their prosecution although the results of this were uncertain. A law passed in August 1999 provided that those who had been imprisoned for written published statements or statements on radio or television would be released, on condition that they did not repeat these supposed ‘crimes’ for the next three years. However, this failed to answer the criticism that undemocratic restriction on freedom of speech should simply have been removed from the statute book. A so-called ‘Repentance Law’ passed at the same time, granted an amnesty to those who had been members of the PKK and turned themselves in, but did extend the

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42 In March 1999, the Turkish Human Right Association-anything but a government source-reported that the number of unsolved murders and people imprisoned for ‘crimes of thought’ had risen between 1996 and 1998. However, there had been a substantial reduction in the numbers of deaths in custody and reported cases of torture. See Briefing, 3 May 1999, p.12.

43 Ibid., 24 May 1999, p.10 and June 1999, p.4
concession to those held responsible for attack on the security forces. Both abroad, and many liberal opinion in Turkey, there was clearly a growing realization that Turkey's human rights regime needed urgent improvement for both internal and external reasons, but achieving this had so far proved very difficult.

The Kurdish Question and Turkey's Relations with the United States

In the long run, the most critical factor in Turkey's geopolitical standing is its relations with the United States. President Özal was the first to clearly chart a new course in Turkish-American relations when he aligned his country, despite intense domestic opposition, along with the multinational coalition facing Saddam Hussain. Özal, just as in the Kurdish question, was more willing to pursue policy choices outside the conventional and - perhaps because he had resided in the US - was less willing to demonize the United States and the West. However, with his death, Turkish foreign policy assumed its previous stance of close and yet 'distant' friendship.

Despite the disappearance of the Soviet Union, US policy toward Turkey has remained very supportive, reflecting an appreciation not only of Özal's contribution but also of Turkey's key strategic location at the junction of many different economic and political zones of concern. Following the Gulf War, the United States pushed Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to compensate Ankara for the losses it had incurred during the war as a result of the shutdown of the Iraqi oil pipeline traversing Turkish territory and the collapse of transit traffic in the southeast. The United States provided significant military supplies to Turkey for free as it ran down its European stocks (Greece was another beneficiary of this policy) and, perhaps most important, it

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44 Milliyet. 29 August, 30 August 1999. The partial amnesty did not apply to those who made supposedly ‘illegal’ statements at public meetings and the like, rather than publish or broadcast them in the media.

45 Eric Rouleau, argues that Turkey's importance for the West actually increased with the end of the Cold War. "Turkey: Beyond Atatürk", Foreign Policy (Washington), 103 (Summer 1996), p. 84.
vigorously and successfully lobbied the European Union members to facilitate conditions for Turkey's accession to the customs union. The US Commerce Department has included Turkey in its list of the ten Big Emerging Markets that warrant special attention because of their potential for expanding trade relations. Recently, the US has moved away from its pro-Russian policy and supported Turkish demands that Azeri oil be transported not through the Russian Black Sea port of Novorossiisk but rather through the Anatolian main land to the Mediterranean.

Paradoxically, the Kurdish question may have helped Turkey's relations with the United States in the short run. The birth of the PKK in the late 1970s as a clearly Marxist-Leninist organisation at that time positioned it on the wrong side of the Cold War from the US point of view. Over time then, US policy has aped Turkey's views of the PKK: in branding the PKK a terrorist organisation at every possible occasion, the United States has demonstrated its unwavering support for Turkey's basic position in this regard. In Washington the PKK was regarded as a terrorist organisation. The Acting Director of the Central Intelligence Agency Admiral William Studeman argued during his address to the US House Judiciary Committee that the PKK was a threat not only to Turkey but the United States too. In particular, the PKK's growing involvement in drug trafficking was seen as an important threat to US interests. Robert Gelbard, Assistant Secretary of state for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, noted American concern on this topic during a press conference at the Foreign Press Center in Washington in October 1995. The administration has also been critical of the Kurdish 'parliament in exile', considering it a PKK financed operation which lacked popular basis and legitimacy.

46 TDN, 9 May 1995.
48 Ibid., 2 November 1995.
However, the administration has been critical of Turkish anti-terrorism policies. A number of American officials and members of Congress have visited Ankara to express their displeasure with the government's human rights performance in its fight against terrorism. The conviction and sentencing of the DEP deputies in December 1994 to prison terms drew sharp criticism both from the Congress and the administration. The Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, John Shattuck was dispatched to Turkey twice within six months. He noted that the United States was becoming increasingly concerned about internationally recognized freedoms of speech being curtailed in Turkey through prosecutions.\footnote{Ibid., 14 December 1994.}

Growing allegations in Congressional and human rights circles that Turkey was using cluster bombs against civilians in south-eastern Anatolia led to efforts to prevent the transfer of these weapons to Turkey. Many in Turkey had believed that an arms embargo was on the cards when in December 1994 Joseph Nye, an Assistant Secretary of Defence, visited Ankara.

In May 1994 the House Appropriations Committee drafted legislation which would not only reduce the amount of assistance available to Turkey, but would also make 25 percent of this aid conditional on an improvement in Turkey's human rights performance. In July amendments in the Senate also introduced restrictions on the use of any American military equipment acquired through the assistance programme for internal security purposes. Turkish officials responded by arguing that these restrictions would benefit the PKK and would have the effect of destabilising Turkey. Their sharp criticism along with Prime Minister Çiller's personal appeal to President Clinton seems to have led to the lifting of the restrictions on the use of the military assistance for internal security purposes. However, the final version of the legislation
nevertheless made the last ten percent of the aid conditional on an improvement in Turkey's policies on the Kurdish issue.

The US administration's reaction to the news of the Turkish military intervention in northern Iraq in March 1995 was much milder than the response declared that the operation had been necessitated by the PKK's threat to Turkey's security but stressed that the utmost care should be given to protect the civilian population. The United States was also concerned that the cross-border operation should be of short duration.

The reaction of the public opinion and the press in the United States to the cross-border operation was much harsher. The columnist William Safire wrote that Turkey was aiming to control petroleum facilities and occupy northern Iraq until Saddam Hussain's forces could return to the area. The American press also alleged that innocent civilians were suffering as a result of the operation. The harshest criticism came from John Edmund Porter, a Republican Representative for Illinois. At a meeting of the House Foreign Operations Sub-Committee, Porter alleged that Turkey was committing a genocide in northern Iraq.

On a visit to the United States in April 1995 Prime Minister Çiller stressed that Turkey was 'the only secular democracy among 52 Muslim states' and added that the states in the Middle East had either, 'the Iranian model' or 'the Turkish mode' to choose from. The Prime Minister went on to argue that Turkey needed to fight terrorism to protect the secular Turkish model from fundamentalism. She promised

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50 Ibid., 21 March 1995.
52 For a survey and summary of the American Press on this issue see Yeni Yüzyıl, 1 April 1995.
53 TDN, 8 April 1995.
that the cross-border operation would end very soon and pledged that her government was committed to continue with democratization programme.54

When the cross-border operation ended in May 1995 the US State Department spokesman reflected that administration's relief when he announced that: 'Prime Minister Çiller had assured President Clinton and Secretary of State Christopher that the operation would be of limited scope and duration. She kept her word'.55 Nevertheless, the administration and the Turkish government continued to view the future of northern Iraq differently. The United States favoured a solution that would allow the Kurds in northern Iraq to enjoy autonomy in a federally restructured Iraq. The continuation of OPC was viewed by American officials as essential in order to deter Saddam Hussain's forces from attacking the Kurdish safe haven. However, the continuance of OPC became a major political issue in Turkey, because many Turks believed it was facilitating the vacuum of authority in northern Iraq that enabled the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) to enjoy sanctuaries there. Some even argued that OPC was the opening salvo of a new treaty of Sevres (1920) that would lead to the creation of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq as almost happened after World War I. Thus went the argument, Turkey was facilitating its own demise by housing OPC.

To abandon OPC, however, would alienate the United States and strip Ankara of important influence over the course of events. OPC, for example, enabled the Turks to launch military strikes into Iraqi Kurdistan against the PKK at almost any time. If the United States refused to allow such Turkish incursions, Turkey could threaten to withdraw its permission for OPC. Although it might have seemed ironic that an operation that was supposed to protect the Iraqi Kurds was allowing Turkey to attack

54 Ibid., 21 April 1995.
55 Ibid., 7 May 1995.
the Turkish Kurds as well as inflict collateral damage on the host Iraqi Kurds, such was the logic of the Kurdish imbroglio and part of the dilemma for US foreign policy.

In May 1994, the two main Iraqi Kurdish parties-Barzani’s KDP and Talabani’s PUK-fell into a civil war that immensely complicated U.S. policy towards them. In late January 1995, U.S. President Bill Clinton sent a message to both Barzani and Talabani in which he warned; “We will no longer co-operate with the other countries to maintain security in the region if the clashes continue”.56 Finally, the United States attempted to play a mediatory role similar to the one carried out by the French a year earlier. It was decided that the warring parties to meet in Drogheda, a suburb of Dublin, Ireland from August 9 to 11, 1995, in the presence of senior U.S. officials. Turkey sent observers. As in Paris the previous year, a solution initially seemed possible, capped once again by a proposal to have Barzani and Talabani ratify the final settlement.

At this point Turkey’s security interests compounded the Kurdish division. When the U.S. brokered Drogheda talks appeared to be leading to a settlement of a Iraqi Kurdish civil war, as well as to security guarantees for Turkey in the form of the KPP policing the border to prevent PKK raids into Turkey, the PKK struck out at the KDP. For their own reasons such regional powers as Syria and Iran did so because they did not want to see their U.S. enemy successfully broker an end to the KDP-PUK strife and possibly go on from there to sponsor an Iraqi Kurdish state, while Talabani sought in effect to open a second front against Barzani. Given these complications, the second round of the Drogheda talks in mid September 1995 failed, as the KDP and PUK proved unable to reach agreement on such key issue as the demilitarization of Arbil-held then by the PUK and the collection of customs revenues by the KDP. In

the short run, as Plare Grossman, the U.S. Ambassador in Turkey, has noted, both the American and the Turkish governments were eager for Talabani and Barzani 'to end fighting and to focus on their responsibilities for peace and security in the area'.

Inspite of the infighting between the KDP and the PUK, the United States remained committed to maintaining a safe haven for Kurds in northern Iraq. The United States was thus dependent on Turkey's goodwill and cooperation in order to maintain OPC. Thus Turkey's permission and logistical support for OPC (Since January 1, 1997, operation Northern Watch) and the no-fly zone to protect the Iraqi Kurds proved indispensable. Without them, it would have been almost impossible for the United States to maintain the no-fly zone because there was nowhere else to base it. As Robert H. Pelletreau, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, and Joseph Nye, Assistant Secretary of Defence for International Security Affairs when addressing the Senate Foreign Relations committee in March 1995 stated. 'It would be very difficult to sustain the operation without Turkey'. As we have seen far from happy with the continuation of OPC in its current form, the new ANAP-DYP coalition government began talks in March 1996 with US officials with regard to the future of the operation.

For some time Ankara's continued unease with the Iraqi autonomous region had put the Turkish-American alliance under strain. Infact, Ankara has made its displeasure obvious at any arrangement that would secure a federal or even an autonomous region for the Kurds in a post-Saddam Iraq. It also seeks compensation for the losses it had incurred as a result of economic sanctions against Iraq. According to President Demirel, speaking in June 1994, the loss of trade with Iraq and the

57 TDN, 13 April 1995.
closure of the oil pipeline had cost Turkey between $15 and $20 billion. While Turkey has somewhat pulled back from an open disagreement with U.S. positions on Iraq, it is clear that it would prefer reassertion of Iraqi control over northern Iraq.

Turkish officials have also lobbied hard for a partial lifting of the sanctions on Iraq. Prime Minister Çiller during her visit to the United States in October 1993 had appealed for the partial lifting of the UN embargo. Strobe Talbot, Deputy US Secretary of State acknowledged in his visit to Turkey in April 1995 that 'Turkey has, of course, had to pay a price for its critically important role in the implementation of the will of the international community and in continuing imposition of the sanctions against the Iraqi regime.' In addition to asking the Gulf countries to help Turkey, the U.S. has also agreed, within the limits of the U.N. Security Council Resolution 986, to the limited use of the Kirkuk-Yumurtalik pipeline for Iraqi exports of oil to the Mediterranean. In order to help Turkey meet its domestic oil needs and alleviate some of the losses incurred because of sanction on Iraq, the U.S., in the negotiations leading to the passage of UNSC 986, insisted that a majority of Iraqi oil be transshipped through the pipelines to the Mediterranean port of Ceyhan. In the meantime, the U.S. administration allowed the economic embargo to be eroded by not objecting to the border trade between Turkey and Iraq. Infact, the U.S. administration has supported a number of economic initiatives favouring Turkey. Richard Holbrooke, the former Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs, has gone on record saying; 'As a democratic Muslim nation, a committed member of NATO, and a moderate, secular pro-western country in a politically unstable region our support for Turkey’s economic program will be critical in safeguarding important ongoing U.S.

41 For a fierce criticism of Çiller for making this proposal see the article by New York Times columnist William Safire in, 'Here's a Better Road for Turkey to Travel', International Herald Tribune, 29 October 1993.
61 TDN, 13 April 1995.
interests at the critical intersections of Europe, Asia and the Middle East. However, Ankara’s appreciation for the U.S. position not with standing, the basic interests of the U.S. and Turkey in Iraq are difficult to reconcile, for the U.S. Saddam Hussain remains the primary threat to the region and its interests, whereas from Turkey’s perspective it is the existence of the Kurdish entity that poses the greatest threat. Finally, the U.S. guarantees apparently would not apply against a post-Saddam Iraqi government hostile to the Iraqi Kurds. The U.S. concern for the Iraqi Kurds was largely motivated by its continuing animus toward Saddam. Once the Iraqi leader disappeared from the scene it seemed unlikely the United States would continue its support for the Kurds.

In contrast to its support given the “good” KDP and PUK as the representative of the Iraqi Kurds, the United States, has very strongly opposed the “bad” PKK. Turkey’s longtime and continuing geostategically important position as an U.S., NATO ally is clearly the main reason for this situation. Besides this, U.S. fear of Islamic fundamentalism and Turkey’s developing alliance with Israel. As a constitutionally secular state, Turkey is seen as a bastion against Islamic fundamentalism, while support for Israel, of course, remains a given for U.S. foreign policy. Clearly, these constitute powerful reasons for the U.S. foreign policy support for Turkey against the “bad” PKK. Although it continues to criticize Turkey in its annual human right report, as reflected in States Department reports on human right violations. However, the U.S. state Department maintains in the same report that the PKK are “terrorists” who “frequently kill noncombatants, and target village officials, village guards, teachers and other perceived representatives of the State.” The State

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Department has also placed the PKK on its list of terrorist organizations. "The PKK are indiscriminately killing their own people. They are not supported by the majority of Kurds," explained one official from the State Department. Other U.S. officials claims that they have compiled a thick dossier on the PKK that includes murder, drug trafficking, extortion, robbery and trafficking in illegal immigrants. Nevertheless, the State Department reports have become an important tool for those in Congress eager to reduce the level of aid to Turkey, or those opposed to Turkey because of its 1974 invasion of Cyprus or those simply uncomfortable being associated with levels of repression unbecoming of a U.S. ally and NATO member. Congress has focused on Turkey's human right violations and has been critical of Turkey's attempts to respond to the Kurdish insurgency by military means. The U.S. has been advocating a solution to express their ethnic and cultural identity. The State Department spokesman noted that the United States wanted the Turkish government to ensure 'that the human and civil right of the Kurds are protected, and indeed advance'. He added: 'We do not support autonomy for Turkish Kurds within Turkey'.

Similarly, nongovernmental human rights groups have accelerated their criticism of Turkish policies. The beginning of the Arab-Israeli peace process and the dissolution of the Soviet Union have also allowed human rights activists to focus more on previously neglected questions, such as that of Turkey's Kurds. Indeed, early in August 1999, the U.S. assistant secretary of State for democracy, human rights and labour, Harold Hongju Koh, visited Turkey and met with a wide variety of people. Although recognizing Turkey's right to defend itself against the PKK, he upset many Turkish officials with his strong and eloquent recommendations concerning the

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64 Cited in Toni Marshal. "Kurds call Turkey Hypocritical" Washington Times. April 9, 1999
65 accessed over the Internet.

7DN, 13 April 1995.
Koh argued, for example that "one can oppose terrorism and still support human rights". He added that "most Kurds in Turkey...want to remain Turkish citizens, while enjoying the basic human right guaranteed to all people under international law, including freedom to express one's language and culture, and freedom to organize political parties that represent their interests". He maintained "far from hurting Turkey's territorial integrity, an inclusive policy that acknowledged these rights would strengthen the Turkish State by giving the Kurdish community a genuine stake in their country's future.

In other words, Koh seemed to be saying that now that Öcalan had been captured and had offered to withdraw his fighters from Turkey, Turkey had no further excuses not to move forward on human rights and democratization. It was time for Turkey to reconcile with its citizens of Kurdish ethnic heritage by recognizing their linguistic, cultural, and political identity. Given the continuing U.S. alliance with Turkey, however, it remained to be seen how seriously the United States would choose to pressure Turkey on this issue. Nevertheless, the U.S. administration still regards Turkey as a country of considerable strategic importance. Since Kurdish issue evokes the worst fears among the Turkish public and leadership, the U.S. administration has chosen to pursue a policy intended to boost Turkey's confidence in the post-cold war environment with the hope that a Turkey more firmly rooted in both NATO and the European Union—even if only a customs Union will be able to take steps to accommodate some of the Kurdish demands. The administration has supported Turkey's efforts to join EU. It has used its influence with EU to obtain the ratification of the custom Union accord with Turkey. In this context amendments to

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the Turkish constitution and the anti-terror law were welcomed in the United States as important steps in Turkey’s further democratization process.

On the other hand, in Ankara, there was a growing feeling that Turkey is making huge sacrifices by maintaining sanctions against Iraq and supporting OPC (Operation Northern Watch Since January 1997) without adequate recognition. Despite U.S. efforts in Turkey’s behalf, Turkish suspicions linger that the U.S. may be harbouring a secret agenda. This fear is so deeply embedded that even the Turkish military regards the U.S. with suspicion. In spite of the fact that U.S. and Turkey have been allies for almost 50 years. In a book authorized and published by the Turkish General staff, Colonel Kacaoglu observed that: ‘The US under the pretext of protecting human right, is assisting the formation of a Kurdish State in northern Iraq which eventually will demand land from Turkey because the PKK received support from the US.’ This suspicion is bolstered by the conflicting messages that emanate from Washington, especially during periods of intense legislature/executive squabbling. This conflictual attitude is text captured by a foreign policy observer: “If we put aside the improvement in our relations with the U.S. since 1991. Western European and U.S. policies have given rise to the isolation of Turkey on the international scene.”

Turkey has always felt that it does not receive its fair share of attention in the West. On the other hand, Ankara has interpreted Western passivity as the abandonment of Turkey’s own core interest and it has also failed to demonstrate any awareness of inherent contradiction between Ankara’s Kurdish policy and its concerns for the fate of ethnic Turks in Bulgaria or Greece. Surrounded by states that

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67 For a forceful presentation of this thesis see M. Kocaoglu Uluslararasi Ilişkiler Işığında Ortadoğu (Ankara: Gnkur. Basimevi, 1995), pp.327,352. This book, written by a Colonel, was authorized for circulation by the Turkish General staff as a reference work.

they have troublesome relations with Turkey, Ankara has shown on occasions exaggerating its own vulnerabilities. The 1995 general elections were great indicators of this growing sense of isolation, since the only two parties who have scored substantially were those most opposed to the United States. At the very least, opposition to the US and the west will be even more vigorous than before in Turkey, irrespective of the composition of the Turkish government. Whereas US vital interests in the region surrounding Turkey have diminished somewhat with the end of the Cold War, Turkey’s own interests have grown and expanded across a much broader region and have become more vital. Ankara under almost any prime minister in the future is more likely than ever before to pursue its own interests more vigorously, with less attention accorded to US preferences. This may limit Washington’s ability to influence Ankara’s policy towards the Kurds.

During the Cold War Turkey had been regarded by the West as a reliable and valuable ally with the end of the Cold War. Some Turkish and Western statesmen began to portray Turkey as an island of stability and a model for many countries to follow. Turkey became a sought after partner as attempts were made to resolve the numerous ethnic conflict in territories near to Turkey’s borders.69 But the country’s inability to solve the Kurdish question is beginning to undermine this image; western governments policy have become increasingly critical of Turkey’s policies with regard to the Kurds. For the United States, Turkey’s Kurdish problem poses a moral and practical quandary. While the moral problems are obvious that the Turkish military is primarily equipped with US made material, at the practical level if this conflict continued then it could lead to chronic political instability or domestic unrest. Further, the US pins great hope on Turkey as a model for many countries in the region to follow. But any prolongation or intensification of the Kurdish question would undermine this image.