CHAPTER 3

The Middle East:
Caught Between Involvement and Active Engagement

The demise of the Soviet Union left the United States as the only major outside power with leverage on the Middle Eastern developments. The Gulf war in 1991 changed the balance of power among the regional nations by eliminating Iraq as a regional power for some time to come. The peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians that began in the aftermath of the Gulf war brought further changes to the political landscape of the Middle East. In the words of Turkish scholar Soli Özel, “As Turkey undergoes the most profound economic, social and political crisis of the republican period, Ankara also finds itself involved in the affairs of the Middle East with unprecedented intensity.”

But contrary to perceptions at the beginning of the decade, no “new world order” and no “new Middle East” emerged. The Palestinian–Israeli peace process slowed down after the Netanyahu government took over in Tel Aviv. Saddam Hussain could consolidate his reign over Iraq and establish the country as a continuous troublemaker in the region. None of the conservative regimes on the Arab peninsula was able to stabilize its precarious internal situation, while Iran continued to support Islamist forces in the region contributing to instability in many countries. Any attempt at creating some type of region wise, multinational security, political or economic regime has been unsuccessful.

Under these conditions Turkey has had difficulties developing a comprehensive and consistent policy that would serve its national interests in the region. Although the

\[^{1}\text{Soli Özel, "Of Not Being a Lone Wolf: Geography Domestic Plays and Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East", in Geoffery Kamp and Janice Gross stein, eds. \textit{Powder Keg in the Middle East: The Struggle for Gulf Security} (Washington: American Association for the Advancement of Science 1995), p. 164.}\]
basis of its foreign policy—preservation of national integrity, modernization along western standards, and non-involvement in domestic issues of neighbouring countries that could endanger peace and stability—have not changed, policies for their realization in the Middle East have had to be adopted to fit their context.²

A much-debated problem has been in and how far Turkey should use its unavoidable involvement in crucial issues of Middle Eastern politics to actively influence the course of regional developments in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War. Political evidence suggests that president Turgut Özal favoured an active approach to regional affairs, using Turkey's economic potential as a catalyst for forging a new cooperative regional political structure.³ He hoped to replace the traditional contest between the contenders for regional hegemonic leadership with a political order in which Turkey could also be more prominent. As a by-product of such a development, Özal hoped, Turkey's standing with its western allies would improve.⁴ These aspirations came to an end after the 1991 elections returned the old political guard to power. Özal's successor preferred a return to traditional Turkish Middle Eastern policy, one that kept its established equal relations with all important states in the region.⁵ Many observers doubt, however, if and how far such a position is any longer feasible. These doubts are even strengthened by some elements of Turkey's regional policy itself that can only be interpreted as moves toward stronger regional engagement, such as the growing relationship with Israel.

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Four challenges are central to Turkey's Middle Eastern policy in the 1990s. First, the unwelcome but unavoidable deep involvement in northern Iraq has had repercussions not only for Turkish-Iraqi relations but also for relations with two other immediate neighbours, Iran and Syria. Second, a recently forged special relationship with Israel is dominated by rapidly growing cooperation in military matters that tends to complicate relations with the Arab countries. Third, Turkey has experienced persistent problems with Syria and Iraq over the use of the water in the Euphrates-Tigris basin. Finally, the nation has found it difficult to balance relations with Iran between ideological delimitation and neighbourly behaviour born of strong economic incentives in energy imports. These matters also affect Ankara's relations with the United States and to a somewhat lesser extent its European partners. Thus it must balance its Middle Eastern policy with its Western foreign policy.

Northern Iraq and the Future of the Iraqi Regime

The Gulf War was an important turning point in Turkey's involvement in the Middle East. Against the advice of most of his advisors, President Özal squarely sided with the United States in the war, allowing the United States fighter aircraft to fly sorties against Iraq from the Turkish air base of Incirlik. Özal's action was an important departure from Turkey's traditional policy of avoiding deep involvement in Middle Eastern affairs and provoked strong opposition, especially from the Turkish military.

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6 See also the lecture "Turkey and the Middle East: Policy and prospects," given by Öguz Çelikkol, a high official from the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington, April 6, 1998; (www.washingtoninstitute.org/media/celikkol.htm)

7 The Turkish Chief of Staff, Necip Torumtay, resigned in protest over Özal's policy so did foreign minister Ali Bozer.
For the first time in republican history, Arab neighbours were attacked from Turkish soil, although Turkish forces did not participate in military actions.  

Özal’s responses were very much in character. He disliked Saddam intensely and the way he ruled his country; more importantly, he felt Saddam’s policies possibly dangerous for Turkey’s fundamental national interests. In January 1990, seven months before the invasion of Kuwait, Özal told President Bush in the Oval office that Saddam was the “most dangerous man in the world”. Some months before the invasion of Kuwait, Saddam Hussain had threatened the visiting Turkish Prime minister, Yildirim Akbulut, that diminishing US. Middle East involvement would leave Turkey without an ally in the region. Thus “the war neutralized one of Ankara’s most serious potential security problems and consequently broadened its room for manoeuvre in pursuit of a new regional and international strategy.” From his days as a World Bank official in Washington in the 1970s, U.S. drive, openness, and technical innovation always dazzled him. Also, Özal wanted to show that at a critical time Turkey was not on the fence and was prepared to accept political and economic costs in the short term to support the United States in a vital joint strategic effort. He also thought that this policy would serve Turkey well in its relations with the United States and other allied countries after the war. In designing his policy with respect to the Gulf crisis, Özal had expected “a quick war and a decisive allied victory, followed by the replacement of Saddam Hussain’s regime by a democratic system in Iraq.”  

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8 There had already been use of Turkish bases for US activities in Middle eastern crises such as the rescue of American personnel from Lebanon in 1982, but Turkey had always been eager not to become involved in direct military activities.

9 For an explanation of domestic motives of Özal’s approach, see Nicole Pope and Hugh Pope, *Turkey, Unveiled: a History of Modern Turkey* (London: John Murray, 1999), pp. 198-244.


Unintended consequences always follow from major events. For Turkey the outcome of the Gulf War produced new uncertainties and economic grief when it became obvious that the alliance would not actively pursue removing Saddam Hussain from power. The situation deteriorated further when the US government refused to support the Shi’ite and Kurdish uprising in southern and northern Iraq, respectively, immediately after the military defeat of Saddam Hussain. The establishment of a protected zone for Iraqi Kurds returning from the mountains along the Turkish border, where a half million fled after their uprising against Saddam Hussain failed. (Another million fled to Iran) This allied effort came about because of the plight of the Kurds and the need to protect Turgut Özal from a political catastrophe if he allowed a half million Iraqi Kurds into Turkey. The United States and its allies sought to deter Saddam Hussain from moving against the Kurds by a continuous air cover (north of the 36th parallel) of the protected area, and that required the use of the Turkish bases. This allied air operation from Turkish bases (originally called Provide Comfort, later designated Northern Watch) created a very uncomfortable situation for Turkey, as did the prospect of having to get along with the Iraqi dictator.12

The Gulf War caused direct Turkish involvement in determining the unresolved fate of the Iraqi Kurds and in Saddam Hussain’s struggle with the United Nations and the United States. Ankara had to develop a delicate balance between the Turkish national security interests and alliance solidarity with regard to Washington’s halfhearted efforts to eliminate Saddam as a political force in the Middle East. Turkey’s involvement also complicated its relations with Syria and Iran.

Turkey did not much relish the allied air operation and the creation of the safe haven south of the Turkish-Iraqi border because it did not want to see an independently operated Kurdish entity emerge next door. But it also did not want to face another Kurdish refugee influx.\(^\text{13}\)

The attempt to establish autonomous Kurdish rule in the region based on a careful balance of competences and official positions between the two rival Kurdish groups, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) of Masoud Barzani and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) of Jalal Talabani, lasted for only two years. In 1993 the rivalry between them resulted in military clashes that finally ended in partitioning of the region among the parties.\(^\text{14}\) Turkey's leverage on US Iraq policy from this operation has been important because after Özal's death in 1993 the two countries held divergent views on the Kurdish protected area and on getting rid of Saddam Hussain. Turkish authorities mostly have viewed Saddam as the best barrier against Iraq's disintegration, a development that could lead to the establishment of a Kurdish entity in northern Iraq - with menacing impact on Turkey's own Kurds.

Even a social democrat like Bülent Ecevit has had kind words for Saddam. Despite the considerable Turkish evasions of UN sanctions on Iraq, the economic costs to Turkey from sanctions also turned out to be sizable in terms of lost trade, construction and transportation revenues.

The infighting between KDP and PUK constituted a continuous source of concern for Ankara because of the growing political and security vacuum in northern Iraq and its

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\(^{14}\) The history of this rivalry is described at some length by David McDowell, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (I.B. Tauris, 1996), pp. 302-91.
effect on the precarious situation in Turkey’s southeast. Already the creation of the safe
haven and the ensuing establishment of the autonomous Kurdish authority had disturbed
many in Ankara’s security circles. They feared that this could be the first step in
dismembering Iraq and establishing an autonomous Kurdish state from which bad effect
would spread not only into Turkey’s southeast but to the entire Middle East. Thus in
November 1992, Turkey had begun to hold a series of tripartite meetings with Iran and
Syria, the other two countries that have been affected by the development of the Kurdish
issue, designated to express the three countries determination to prevent the territorial
break-up of Iraq (implicitly, a criticism of US policy) which lasted until 1995. These
talks were evidently aimed at overcoming Arab and Iranian suspicions that the aim of
Turkey’s military intervention in northern Iraq was not just to destroy PKK bases, but to
take over the province of Mosul, with Kirkuk oilfield – an aim frequently denied by
Turkey.

However, five meetings, some at the level of foreign ministers, took place from
1992 to February 1994, when the endeavour came to an end because of growing political
differences among the three concerning the Iraqi Kurdish question.

The Gulf War and its aftermath, especially operation Provide Comfort to protect
the Iraqi Kurds, brought Ankara’s concern for its territorial integrity to a high level. It
was reflected mainly in the deep mistrust in the functioning of the multinational force.

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16 In May 1995 President Demirel proposed that the Iraqi Turkish frontier be altered in Turkey’s favour, but quickly withdrew this suggestion in the face of strong opposition from the Arab states and Iran. See Michael M. Gunter, “Turkey and Iran face off in Kurdistan”, *Middle East Quarterly* (Philadelphia), vol. 5 (1998), p. 36. As General Ihsan Gurkan concludes, Turkey ‘cannot file a claim to the region’ unless ‘northern Iraq is separated from Iraq in any way’ (presumably, as part of a general partition of the country). Ihsan Gurkan, *Turkish-Iraqi Relations: The cold war and its aftermath*, *Turkish Review of Middle East Studies* (Istanbul), vol. 9 (1996-97), p. 62.
Neither the Turkish authorities nor the public in general ever called it an operation to provide comfort; it was always named, with pejorative intent; Poised Hammer. In April 1991 Ankara made efforts to get the international community, especially the United States and the United Nations, to act to stop the flow of Kurdish refugees that had approached the Turkish border after Iraqi troops had invaded the Kurdish area in northern Iraq. Ankara did not want to repeat the experience of refugee camps in the southeastern border provinces that they experienced after a previous Iraqi incursion into the Kurdish region. Under the post-Gulf War circumstances such a situation could take on a Palestinian-like permanence with unforeseeable consequences for Turkey's internal stability and its international relations. Operation Provide Comfort was the only logical solution for this problem, however reluctantly the Turkish political leadership might have accepted the idea of leaving developments in northern Iraq to the political skills and ambitions of the Iraqi Kurds and of providing Turkish NATO facilities for allied air control.

The situation deteriorated in May 1994 when full scale fighting broke out between the KDP and PUK, further complicating the situation, and allowing the PKK to establish bases near the border with Turkey, in territory nominally controlled by the KDP.\footnote{For details see Michael M. Gunter, “The KDP-PUK conflict in Northern Iraq,” *Middle East Journal*, vol. 50 (Spring 1996), pp. 225-41.} This prompted the Turks to launch further cross-border operations in March and July 1995, the first being a massive operation involving some 35,000 soldiers, which was said to have been the biggest military operation outside its own borders which the Turkish army had launched since the start of the republic.\footnote{Michael M. Gunter, *Kurds and the Future of Turkey* (London, Macmillan, 1997), pp. 120-1, Aykan, ‘Turkey’s Policy’, p. 352 and Kemal Kirisci, ‘Turkey and the Kurdish Safe Haven in}
Kurds, who had not been informed of Ankara’s intentions, from the Iraqi government, which complained of the violation of its territory. And from Turkey’s Western, especially European, allies, who urged a quick withdrawal of the Turkish troops from the region.19

No lasting stabilization could be achieved, and Turkey was confronted with another challenge in August 1996, when the civil war between the two Iraqi Kurdish factions resumed. Barzani formed a brief alliance with Saddam Hussain and invited Iraqi troops to help him drive Talabani from Arbil and most of northern Iraq. Iran also became involved in the struggle, as it cooperated with the PUK against anti-government Iranian Kurdish forces of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) who were allied with the Iraqi Kurds of the KDP.20 Initially with Iraqi help, Barzani forces captured the PUK strongholds of Arbil and Suleymania, but in October the PUK recovered, apparently with Iranian assistance, and had recaptured the ground it had lost by the end of the month. A preliminary cease-fire was established under the guidance of the United States, Turkey, and Great Britain that was turned into the so-called Ankara process aimed at brokering a new arrangement between the two Kurdish groups.21 In the meantime the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) scheme to organize a domestic uprising against Saddam Hussain had suffered severe damage, and Washington had been forced to evacuate some thousand Kurdish collaborators from northern Iraq.

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This brought to the surface Ankara's fear that the US government had proven unable to devise a convincing policy of containing the Iraqi dictator, not to speak of ousting him. Operation Provide Comfort had lost its meaning after the Kurdish groups had reestablished their old habit of drawing in outside support from Baghdad or Tehran.\footnote{Harvey Sichemann, "America's Alliance Anxiety: The strange Death of Dual Containment," \textit{Orbis} (Philadelphia), vol. 41 (Spring 1997), pp. 223-40, Esp. pp. 236-38.}

And because the plan had never been fully supported by Turkey's political circles it came to an end on December 31, 1996, when the Turkish parliament refused to renew the allied mandate. The plan was however, replaced by a similar operation, Northern Watch, that continued the activities of OPC under a somewhat reduced mandate and without further French participation.\footnote{F. Stephen Larrabee, "US and European Policy toward Turkey and the Caspian Basin," in Robert D. Blackwell and Michael Sturmer, eds., \textit{Allies Divided: Transatlantic Policies for the Greater Middle East} (MIT Press, 1997), pp. 143-73, esp. pp. 153-54. See also "Operation Provide Comfort," \textit{Turkish Daily News} (TDN), December, 27, 1996, and Rasit Gurdilek, "US Emerges Chief Loser from Kurd Fight," \textit{TDN}, January 15, 1997.}

These developments changed the constellation of forces with respect to developments in northern Iraq. It further shows the inability of Iraq's Kurdish leaders to establish effective control in the area by themselves. In May 1997, Turkish forces carried out further operations in northern Iraq apparently, even bigger than those of 1995 with about 50,000 troops and strong air support for more than six weeks in which PUK and PKK positions were bombed. At one point Turkish ground forces approached the cities of Arbil and Kirkuk, causing protest from Iran. This time, KDP fighters were involved in activities against PKK targets because the latent KPD-PKK differences had flared up again.\footnote{Metehan Demir and Saadet Oruc, "Turkish Army's Annual Spring Clean in N. Iraq," \textit{Turkish Daily News Electronic Edition} (www. Turkishdailynews.com), May 26, 1997.}
In September 1998 the US administration succeeded in bringing Barzani and Talabani reach an agreement to end the fighting. The so called Washington Agreement called for a commitment to a federative Kurdish political entity within a “united, pluralistic, and democratic Iraq” that “would maintain the nation’s unity and territorial integrity”. The Kurds agreed on holding of “free and fair elections for a new regional assembly” that were to take place by July 1999. In this assembly the Kurdish, Turkoman, Assyrian, and Chaldean populations would be represented. It also made commitment on the part of both groups to deny sanctuary to the PKK throughout the Iraqi Kurdish region and to “prevent the PKK from destabilizing and undermining the peace or from violating the Turkish borders”.25

The Washington Agreement caused some concern in Ankara. Turkish political leaders, especially Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit, were embarrassed that Turkey had been left out of the final rounds of negotiations and the signing of the agreement. They had the barely concealed suspicion that the agreement would open the way to eventual establishment of a separate Kurdish state in northern Iraq and would complicate future Turkish military incursions across the border.26 Turkish-American cooperation and unity with regard to Iraq was further strained by the American military reaction to Baghdad’s renunciation of cooperation with the UN arms inspections teams. At the end of December 1998, United States and Great Britain punished Saddam with Operation Desert Fox, the bombing of Baghdad, for his repeated non-fulfillment of UN resolutions

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concerning the control and dismantlement of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. This ended the UN control regime in Iraq. The ensuring deepening rift between Washington and Baghdad was not at all to the pleasure of Turkey’s political leadership, which feared negative repercussions on Turkish-Iraqi relations. Prime Minister Ecevit was concerned at the growing militarization of America’s attitude toward Iraq, and Ecevit accused Washington of not having a policy.\(^\text{27}\) Turkey clearly preferred a political negotiation in dealing with an Iraqi regime, but it was restricted in its activity by the necessity of keeping good relations with Washington because of other vital Turkish interests. Ecevit however, tried to show his differing opinion by inviting the Iraqi deputy Prime Minister, Tariq Aziz, to Ankara in February 1999. This not only annoyed Washington but also failed to produce any political results because it coincided with Ocalan’s capture in Nairobi, which totally preoccupied Turkey’s government and the Turkish public.\(^\text{28}\)

Another source of Turkish unhappiness about US policy toward Baghdad was the Iraq Liberation Act. On September 29, 1998, a bipartisan group of eight US senators introduced a bill entitled the Iraq Liberation Act (ILA) to “establish a programme to support a transition to democracy in Iraq.”\(^\text{29}\) The bill, which the senate passed unanimously without amendment, outlines Iraq’s transgression from its invasion of neighbouring Iran in 1980 to its unilateral suspension of cooperation with UN special commission (UNSCOM) the previous August. The act stipulates that US policy should seek the removal of Saddam Hussain and assist in replacing his regime with a democratic form of government. The US is also to provide military assistance to the Iraqi opposition

\(^{27}\) TDN, January 31, 1999.

\(^{28}\) Saadet Oruc, “Ocalan Overshadows Tariq Aziz’s Visit,” Turkish Probe (Ankara), no. 319 (February 21, 1999).

in the amount not to exceed $97 million, in addition to funding the United States information Agency effort to publicize the opposition’s struggle. In November 1998, US assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs – Martin Indyk, met with a delegation of 17 representatives from Iraqi opposition parties, urging them to work jointly towards the goal of forming a new government in Baghdad. The Iraqi group identified by the United States to spearhead opposition is the London-based Iraqi National Congress (INC).

This move was followed with great concern in Turkey and other countries in the region, Ankara feared that the Iraqi opposition would not be able to establish a functioning political organization that could take over after the end of Saddam’s regime. Such concerns may have been strengthened by the visible reluctance of Iraqi Kurdish leaders and the most prominent Iraqi shi’ite organization to engage in too close a relationship with the INC.\(^\text{30}\) As long as the opposition groups cannot convincingly prove their ability to effectively replace the Iraqi regime, Ankara prefers Saddam to stay, which could at least for the time being, foreclose a breakup of the regional political balance and give some security for the realization of Turkish national interest in developments in and around Iraq. Developments in northern Iraq after the 1991 Gulf War left Turkey with mixed and somewhat contradictory interests. The establishment of a Kurdish state as a result of the weakening of Saddam Hussain’s regime had to be prevented because of its possible consequences of Turkey’s own Kurdish population. These conflicting concern were characterized by a Turkish diplomat in late 1997, “If the KDP and the PUK agree they risk creating a Kurdish entity, which is unacceptable to US. If they destroy each

other, as is the case at the moment, the fighting will allow the PKK to strengthen its presence in the zone. We would hope for the return of Baghdad into the region, but the US is totally opposed.31

So what are the options before Ankara in dealing with the prevalent situation? It would like to see the formation of a democratic Iraqi regime that accommodates sufficient degree of autonomy to its Kurdish population, one that doesn’t allow PKK using its territory for its activities and refrains from building up a large military arsenal. All this seems out of question at the moment. Ankara was faced with difficult choices. However, it tried to realize all of its interests to some extent with different degrees of success at different times. Renewal of the mandate for Operation Provide Comfort/Northern Watch should accommodate the United States. Keeping political contact with both Iraqi Kurdish groups should provide their support against the PKK and ensure Ankara’s control over developments in northern Iraq. Upgradation of diplomatic relations with Iraq to the ambassadorial level were aimed at preventing complete alienation between the neighbouring states for a possible economic benefits for Turkey from a lifting of the UN sanctions.

Turkey’s policy of not completely distancing itself from the Iraqi regime caused some problems in its relations with the United States. Turkey’s political and military leadership never really accepted the US policy of isolating Iraq and promoting the overthrow of Saddam Hussain for fear of threatening regional stability. There are also many in Ankara’s leading circles who believe that the United States and other western

powers, willingly or unwillingly are furthering, the creation of a separate Kurdish state in northern Iraq, a development Turkey will never be ready to accept.32

Turkish support for Operation Provide Comfort was always guarded, and debates in the parliament over its prolongation were full of suggestions for abandoning it.33 The Turkish armed forces welcomed the operations because the constant allied military involvement in northern Iraq could help soften public international reactions especially American ones, to Turkish military incursions into the area.

On a popular level suspicions about OPC were that “owing to the internationalised nature of the Iraq problem, Turkey has lost its freedom of action in the region. Turkey’s current dilemma is that while it is participating in the UN embargo against Iraq, in order to cooperate with the US and UN policies, it is actually working against its own interests.”34

The economic costs to Turkey from UN sanctions on Iraq also turned out to be sizable in terms of lost trade, construction and transportation revenues. Iraq had been an important trade partner and Turkey’s most important oil supplier. The economy in the southeast had been dependent on trade relations with Iraq and on income from the transit traffic to Iraq that mostly passed through the region.35


The Turkish political dilemma and the special position of the country came to the front whenever tensions arose between the UN and the Iraqi government over the UN demands for controlling the destruction of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. Whenever such situation arose tensions reached a point with the United States taking military actions against Iraq to enforce UN regulations, Turkey has been caught between its solidarity with the United States and the United Nations on the one hand and its interest in keeping smooth relations with Baghdad on the other. Furthermore, such situations have tended to create domestic political problems because of the divergent views of Turkey's various political forces. This was clear for instance, during the crisis in early 1998 when the coalition government of Mesut Yilmaz had difficulties in forming a united position. The prime minister's ideas were more in line with the harsh US approach toward Saddam, whereas his deputy and foreign policy coordinator, Bülent Ecevit from the DSP, seemed to display a more sympathetic attitude toward the Iraqi leaders. ³⁶

Thus the above observations make it clear that Ankara is interested in a lasting settlement of the Iraq problem without, however, having the means to bring about such a settlement on its own or to persuade its main ally to work for a settlement that would satisfy Turkish interests. There is a growing feeling in Turkey's political circles that sanctions against Iraq should end because the country does not pose danger to the regional balance any longer. Such an attitude clearly contradicts American policy, which increasingly seeks ways of toppling Saddam's regime. Thus Turkey will continue to be in

a situation in which "conflicting pressure from the allies and Turkey's basic need to have
good relations with Iraq, give rise to a perplexing foreign policy dilemma."37

Relations with Iran

In the post-Cold War and post-Gulf War period, the Middle East region has
remained in a flux, geopolitically as well as geoeconomically. As regional powers,
Turkey and Iran are crucial actors in the struggle for regional stability and prosperity.
Stable Turco-Iranian relations are essential to the stability of the region. However,
keeping Turco-Iranian relations on an even level has become difficult.

The 1979 Iranian revolution presented the first major challenge to the stability of
Turco-Iranian relations and since then the relations have been marked by mutual mistrust
because the two countries "have differing world views and ideologies that are probably
impossible to reconcile fully."38 However, both also have traditions of pragmatic foreign
policies that enable them to strive for neighbourly relations from which they may derive
mutual advantages as long as neither feels threatened by moves of the other. During the
1990s factionalism has persisted in Iran, while the tension between Kemalism and Islam
in Turkey has sharpened. The contending political forces in both countries have
contributed to competing tendencies in their regional foreign policies.

In Turkey, secular ideals no longer monopolize the political discourse.39 In the
1995 general election the political fortunes of Refah Party (RP) improved when it won
the majority votes, and in June 1996 its leader, Necmettin Erbakan, formed the first
Islamist government in modern Turkey's history. The ascendancy to power of RP

37 Birand, "Is There a New Role for Turkey?" p. 174.
38 Tschanguiz H. Pahlavan, "Turkish-Iranian Relations: An Iranian view", in Henri J. Barkey ed.,
Reluctant Neighbor, p. 76.
however, did not shatter the secular foundation of the Turkish state nor did it produce a radical shift in Turkey's foreign policy.⁴⁰

During the RP one year tenure in office, it shared power with the secularist True Path Party (DYP). While Mr. Erbakan's personal convictions and desire to hold together his RP constituency favoured Turkey's leanings toward Iran (and other Muslim neighbours) secular party leaders and the military served as brakes on how quickly, and at what cost Turkey could actually do so. With the expectation of Erbakan and his followers, the Turkish establishment is convinced that the Iranian government actively supported Islamist movements in Turkey. Turkey's Kemalist state elite noted with some concern the warming of Turkish-Iranian relations during the reign of Erbakan that culminated in a much publicized visit of Iranian president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani to Turkey in December 1996.⁴¹ The coming to power of the more moderate president Mohammad Khatami in 1997 did not lastingly change the Turkish perception of the bilateral relations.

Since the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, Iranian clerics have retained their firm grip on power. Nevertheless, dissension within clerical ranks on policy matters, which had existed prior to Hashemi Rafsanjani's accession to the presidency, was evident throughout his two terms of office. In the absence of Khomeini or someone of similar stature to serve as arbitrator, achieving a consensus within the ruling establishment appears to have been more difficult.

⁴¹ "Iranian President Arrives in Ankara," TDN, December 20, 1996.
Factional rivalry within clerical ranks has affected policy process. Differences over economic policy have spilled into the foreign policy sphere. In instituting economic reforms, for example, former president Hashami Rafsanjani faced some resistance, mainly from 'radicals' in the ruling establishment and from the non-clerical 'left'. These pressure led, among other things to a reduction of emphasis on Iran's integration with the world economy and an increase in the priority of forging regional economic links with Central Asia and the Caucasus. The nature and impact of factionalism on non-economic foreign policy matters is more opaque. One can tentatively suggest that discordant voices within the Iranian leadership have influenced where Iran has struck the balance between exerting pressure on and extending goodwill towards Turkey.

Mohammad Khatami took over as the president of Iran in the summer of 1997, just weeks after Mesut Yılmaz, leader of the Motherland Party (ANAP) became Turkey's prime minister. As in the Turkish case, the fact of new executive leadership in Iran did not displace entrenched political figures and institutions, nor set policy on an entirely different course.

Ankara carefully watches the power struggle in Tehran between moderates and hardliners and still sees forces at work there that try to interfere in Turkey's secular political system. The Turkish security establishment has repeatedly stated that they have solid evidences of Iranian attempts to undermine the secular order of Turkey via furthering Islamist propaganda and even training and support of Islamist terrorist organizations in Turkey such as the Hizbollah. This has led to mutual extradition of diplomats. In April 1996 eight Iranian diplomats were accused by Turkish security of
being involved in terrorist activities after testimony from a captured Turkish Islamist hit
man.42

The sharpening of the domestic debate over the role religion should play in
Turkish public life has fostered growing suspicion among Turkish secularists, especially
within the armed forces of Iranian attempts to disturb the constitutional order.43

Statements by Iranian diplomats, such as Ambassador Mohammad Reza Bagheri’s call
for the institution of sharia in Turkey, have also alarmed Turkish secularists.44 In
February 1997 the Iranian ambassador was forced to leave the country after he had made
a public speech during a so-called Jerusalem night event in the Ankara suburb of Sincan
in which he openly praised anti secular, fundamentalist positions.45 There are more
threatening signs of Iranian interference in Turkish domestic politics, ranging from
accounts of harassment of journalists to allegations of murder,46 although evidence of the
latter is far from conclusive. Iran has reportedly supported radical Islamic groups and
prohibited organizations, through institutions in Turkey like the Higher Education
Institute, the Institute of Clergymen, Missionaries and instructors, libraries, clubs and
associations.47

The Iranian government has, however, categorically denied these allegations.
Moreover, it has charged that Turkish agents have committed espionage and that Turkish

43 Fuelling these suspicions are radical pro-Iranian periodicals such as Tehuid (Unity), Istikal-
Schadet (independence), Dünüye ve İslam (The World and Islam) and Davet (The Call), which are
active participants in the debate on the role of Islam in Turkey.
44 Turkish Focus, March, 1997, p. 12.
46 By some accounts, the Iranian government had partial involvement in the murder of Cetin Emec,
editor of Hurriyet, which had published unflattering articles about Iran by converts, other services
have implied that Emec, death was possibly the work of a clandestine Turkish group.
47 See Al-Watan Al-Arabi, appearing in Foreign Broadcast Information Services (FBIS)-NES,

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authorities have failed to check the activities of the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MKO). In February 1996, the Iranian government lodged a diplomatic protest in response to an MKO rally in Ankara.\textsuperscript{48} Six months later, Iranian officials announced that they had uncovered and arrested the members of a 'Turkish espionage ring' in the Iranian province of West Azerbaijan.\textsuperscript{49} Without exception, accounts of these incidents in the Iranian press related them to the pressure by the United States to isolate Iran.

While the Iranian government might periodically sign mutual security agreements with Turkey, there were reciprocal suspicions on the Turkish side that militant sections of the Iranian regime were not above supporting ultra-islamist terrorists active in Turkey, and that the PKK was able to use some bases in Iran, even though this support was not so important or consistent as that given by Syria. The Turkish military, in particular, took a strong line against the Iranians-partly because of its strongly secularist commitments and partly because of it had to deal with periodic incursions by the PKK from Iranian territory. Military officials in Ankara have accused Iran of not implementing agreements on common measures to control the border against PKK activities, thus directly undermining Turkey's domestic security.\textsuperscript{50} This suspicion did not calm down even after the replacement of Rafsanjani by Khatami, which had been welcomed by the political elite in Ankara and had led to a marked thaw in political relations. There were reports in Turkish press that Ankara has intelligence reports that Iran stepped in as a main supporter of the PKK after Öcalan's expulsion from Syria and his subsequent arrest by the special Turkish forces in Nairobi. Osman Öcalan, Abdullah's younger brother and one of the

\textsuperscript{48} Tehran Times, 13, February, 1996.
\textsuperscript{49} Iran Focus, March 1997, p.12.
PKK's leading field commanders, is said to have his main base in the Iranian border area. These apparent differences of emphasis within the circle of Turkish policy-makers concerning Turkish-Iranian relations strained Turkey's relations with the United States—in particular, over Turkey's opposition to US economic sanctions against Iran under the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA), passed by congress in 1996, calling for sanctions on states or corporate entities that invest more than $20 million in the Iranian energy industry. Indeed many Turks smouldered at the notion that Turkey once again, as in Iraq, was being asked to bear the economic trust of what they saw as mainly a US foreign policy problem.

The Turkish military is also concerned about Iran's activities involving missile technology and weapons of mass destruction. The successful test of a medium-range Chehab-3 missile in July 1998 that could reach large parts of Turkey reminded the Turkish military of the country's insufficient anti-missile capabilities in the region where acquisition of medium-range missile seems to be a common element of armament programme. The evolving Iranian potential, which may soon be enhanced by the even more advanced Chehab-4, gains its full threatening meaning if one takes into account continuous rumours about Iranian efforts to develop a nuclear weapons capability.

The Turkish military establishment follow with great unease Russian support for the finalization of the Iranian nuclear complex near Busheer. It is assumed that the transfer of technology involved in this project could provide Tehran with the means to

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52 Aykan, "Turkish Perspectives", p. 353.
produce military nuclear material. Although one need not assume that Iran's armament efforts are directed at Turkey but serve a more general strategic purpose in the competition for hegemony in the Persian Gulf area as well as a deterrent against a perceived Israeli threat, Ankara's military cannot ignore these developments in a neighbouring country.

Political and security concerns of Turkey's leading circles with respect to Iran are to some extent balanced by cooperative efforts in economic relations. Commerce between post-revolutionary Iran and Turkey had flourished during the Iran-Iraq war. Although merchandise trade had contracted sharply in the early 1990s, this stemmed mainly from the accumulation of large debts by Iran to Turkish businesses and from the imposition of strict curbs on imports by Iran to conserve foreign exchange. Even in difficult times, Turkey's annual trade volume with Iran ran at an average of US$ 908 million during 1992-98, and Iran had the potential to become an important supplier of natural gas as well as crude oil to Turkey.

In 1996 Turkey and Iran signed two major economic agreements. First was a long-term US$ 23 billion natural gas supply contract and gas pipeline construction scheme. The second was a pledge to increase bilateral merchandise trade to an annual value of US$ 2.5 billion.

These agreements were concluded shortly after Necmettin Erbakan took office as Turkey's prime minister. This lent itself to the view that the accords were driven mainly by political factors and that, consequently, Turco-Iranian relations have embarked on a new course. In fact, the rise of the Refah Party to power in Turkey acted as a reinforcing,

rather than as a determining factor. It is true that strengthening economic cooperation with Iran was consistent with Erbakan’s platform of building ties with Turkey’s Muslim neighbours but, it seems likely that in this instance at least, he acted with the support of the Turkish establishment. US unhappiness with the deal was obvious. Clinton reportedly wrote to president Süleyman Demirel asking that the arrangements not be implemented. At one stroke Erbakan could demonstrate his care for Turkey’s energy need, emphasize the sincerity of his policy of Islamic brotherhood toward Iran, make a show of firm political principles toward his domestic follower ship and give a slap in the face to the United States. Since then, work on the project has continued, although somewhat slowed down after Erbakan was turned out of office in June 1997.

Although Erbakan got some criticism, the 1996 Turco-Iranian gas agreement was not a Refah initiative. The terms of the final accord contained only minor changes to the original version drafted by Mr. Erbakan’s predecessor, Tansu Çiller. Whatever, the deal as such was never seriously questioned in Turkey. It was considered a necessary step to preserve the country’s energy security and in this regard American embarrassment could not induce Turkey to fall in line with the US policy of dual containment. In Ankara, Iran is regarded as an important economic partner not only for its energy potential but also as

59 American embarrassment over the project also calmed down, and in summer 1997 Washington not only gave its consent to another gas pipeline project with which Turkmen gas would be transported to Turkey through Iran but also encouraged the American UNOCAL company to participate in the construction of the Turkish leg of the Turkish-Iranian gas deal. See Saadet Oruc, “Turkey’s BOTAS, US UNOCAL company to cooperate for the Transportation of Iranian Gas”, Turkish Daily News Electronic Edition, June 28, 1997, and Ügar Akince, “State Department supports Turkmen-Iran-Turkish Gas Line” Turkish Daily News Electronic Edition, July 30, 1997.
a conduct for Turkish trade relations with the Central Asian states. As long as instability prevails in the Caucasus, Iran provides the main access route for land-based Turkish transportation to the new republics. Turkey has also improved its railway connection with Iran since Tehran opened a new line to link up with the Turkmen railway network in May 1996. This connection will constitute the only functioning railway for the “new Silk Road” until plans for a trans-Caspian ferryboat-based railway connection can be realized. Consequently, transportation regulations are important to Turkish-Iranian official economic relations because Turkey is also the basic outlet for Iranian overland trade with Europe.

Turkish-Iranian economic relations, especially, with respect to energy, are somewhat clouded by links to regional policy in the Caspian region that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Turkey and Iran compete for political and economic influence, although this competition has never become as sharp as many observers had predicted in the early 1990s.60

One potential issue of contention is Azerbaijan, where both Turkey and Iran posses strong interests. This is because of the country’s unique combination of natural resource endowments, strategic location, and ethnic characteristics. For Turkey, Azerbaijan is a gateway to the Caspian Sea, and from there to the rest of Central Asia. As in the case of Uzbekistan in Central Asia, in the Caucasian context, the high levels of education and technical skill possessed by a broad segment of the Azerbaijan population have attracted Iranian and Turkish interest. Yet, unlike the Uzbekistan example,

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Azerbaijan shares a border with Iran, while its people possess cultural attributes in common with Iran's Azeri population. In fact, more Azeris live in northern Iran than in Azerbaijan proper. These geographic and ethnographic facts have accentuated the importance of Azerbaijan to Iran. Preventing, if possible, the domination of Azerbaijan by any foreign or regional power—especially a hostile one—is vitally important to Iran. Instigation for such a development could come from Turanist forces in Azerbaijan that might find support in Pan-Turanist circles of Turkey. The 1992-93 Elchibey government in Azerbaijan with its overt pro-Turkish and covert all-Azeri policy gave a warning signal to Tehran. Since then, Iran has joined Russia in its effort to keep Turkish influence at bay in Baku.61 On the one hand Iran tries to establish itself as a promising partner for the Azeri leadership under president Haydar Aliyev, and on the other hand it tries to keep the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict going by taking the Armenian side thus contributing to the continuation of difficulties for Turkey's position in the Caucasus.

Another area of potential Iranian threat to Turkey's aspirations of becoming the "natural" conduit for Caspian oil and probably, gas to the world market is the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline project. These plans would suffer severe blow, if Iran would become an active player, which at present is mainly prevented by the US government's continuing policy of isolating Tehran internationally.62 In case the policy of double containment is relinquished, Turkey's chance of tapping Caspian energy would be seriously weakened. Change in policy would also improve Tehran's choices of becoming a general outlet for

central Asian trade because “Iran, without having to depend on Turkey, has the potential to connect Central Asia to world markets”.

Turkey’s actively seeking American support for the realization of the Baku-Ceyhan project, although mainly driven by Turkish national political ambitions concerning central Asian and the Caspian Basin, is another confirmation for the Iranian leadership that Turkey is an agent of the United States in the region, working against the natural interest of all regional states except Israel. Therefore, Tehran has expanded its political and economic ties with Moscow to slow down developments that would go in Turkey’s and US favour.

**The Hydro-Politics of Tigris-Euphrates Basin**

In arid and semi-arid regions of the world where water scarcity is a fact of life, the search for water interrupts the history of communities and mediates their political relations. Fresh water is vital for human survival yet its availability is uneven and substitutes do not exist. The struggle for excess to and control over water supplies has consistently provoked tensions and conflict between communities and nations.

Water resource issues are critical in the Middle East. Not only is the region located in the arid zone, but it is experiencing increasing pressure on its scarce water resource, as the region has one of the fastest growing populations.

Co-operation, or lack thereof, is also the key to dealing with its Arab neighbours i.e., the use of the water in the Euphrates and Tigris basin. Turkey’s use of water and its development plans – usually exclusive domestic concerns have become important issues in the country’s foreign policy. The reason is that some of Turkey’s key water resources are also claimed in part by Syria and Iraq.

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63 Pahlavan, "Turkish-Iranian Relations," p. 85.
The Euphrates river is 1,675 miles long, 40 percent inside Turkey and the Tigris is 1,180 miles long, 20 percent inside Turkey. Turkey controls the main sources and the upper parts of this water system, which is of utmost importance for the economic development of Southeast Anatolia and parts of Syria and of Iraq whose population are concentrated in the basin. Increasing population and the economic development plans of all three for irrigation and the generation of hydroelectric power, severe problems in water use will soon arise for Syria and Iraq if there is no common water policy. Iraq is planning to extend its irrigated area to 4 million hectares by 2010, Syria may reach 400,000 hectares by 2015, and Turkey is about to extend its irrigable land in the southeast to 1.6 million hectares.

One of the most contentious issue between Turkey and its neighbours, has been the sharing and quality of water in the Euphrates-Tigris basin. In the late 1970s Turkey launched one of the most ambitious regional development project known as the southeastern Anatolian project (Güney Doğu Anadolu Projesi, or GAP) to turn its southeast into a “paradise”. GAP is the largest and most ambitious regional development project in the history of the Turkish Republic. With twenty-two dams, nineteen hydropower plants, and 1,000 kilometer of irrigation channels, it is intended to change the economic and social fabric of nine underdeveloped provinces in Turkey’s mainly Kurdish region. “The transformation of the backward local economy from subsistence to

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64 For geographical hydrological and economic details of the Euphrates-Tigris basin see Nurit Kliot, Water Resources and Conflict in the Middle East (Routledge, 1994) pp. 100-72.
65 With respect to the Tigris, Iran, too is of importance because of its control of some tributaries such as the lesser Zab. Until now, this has not caused any problems in Iranian-Iraqi relations. That could change, however, if Tehran would begin using the waters of the Lesser Zab for irrigation or hydroelectric energy thus curtailing the amount of Tigris water available to Iraq.
commercial agriculture would ... dilute potential Kurdish national aspirations for an independent homeland.\textsuperscript{67} In addition, GAP will increase Turkey's capacity for electric power generation 70 to 80 percent and bring some relief to the country's increasing energy needs.\textsuperscript{68} The project has received the highest political priority, which has also meant an immense financial effort undertaken by Turkey because international funds have been sparse in light of the potential for regional conflict associated with the project.\textsuperscript{69}

Howsoever important GAP may be for Turkey's socio-economic and political development, Syria and Iraq see GAP as a project to assert Turkey's claims over both rivers and control the water flow so as to ensure dominance over them. Although exact calculations are difficult to make because of the volatility of the many variables involved, there are estimates that in its final stage GAP will reduce the Euphrates flow by 30 to 50 percent. This would mean an almost unbearable loss of water for Syria and Iraq. Even taking into account the flow prospects of the Tigris would not change the situation very much. With the progress of GAP, Turkey's demand on Tigris water would rise as well. According to one assumption, "Iraq is most likely to face water shortages within a decade..."

\textsuperscript{67} Murhaf Jouejati, “Water Politics as High Politics: The Case of Turkey and Syria,” in Barkey, ed., Reluctant Neighbor, p. 133.
\textsuperscript{69} For instance, after Syrian complaints the World Bank decided not to become involved in financing the Atatürk Dam and its related Urfa tunnel system for the irrigation of the vast Harman plain south of Urfa. Turkey had to shoulder the financing for this core element of the project largely by itself. Given Turkey's severe budgetary problems, GAP runs constantly behind schedule. For details see Grag Shapland, “Policy Options for Downstream States in the Middle East,” in J.A. Allan and Chibli Mallat, eds., Water in the Middle East: Legal, Political and Commercial Implications (New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 1995), pp. 310-11.
and Syria will do so within twenty to thirty years".\(^7\) This situation may predate if Turkey does not increase the amount of water it normally releases to its neighbours.\(^7\)

Given the lack of trust and compatibility, between the three riparian states, the idea of developing the Euphrates – Tigris basin as a unified whole for the greater good of all parties seemed elusive. Syria and Iraq sought an explicit international agreement, which would guarantee them a secure share of water each year, but despite the agreements of the mandatory period. Turkey refused to discuss the issue of water discussion, arguing that it had no legal obligation to do so. Turkish political elites perceive these demands as an attempt to restrict Turkish sovereignty over the use of its national resources rather than as a useful opening for establishing a cooperation to satisfy the needs of all along the rivers' banks. For its part, Ankara has declared its readiness to look at a cooperative solution but under the condition that, it is Turkey's natural right to use these water sources according to its necessities and requirements.\(...) These two rivers are of vital importance for Turkey. Turkey will continue to take into consideration, as it has always done, in the use of the waters of these two rivers, the situation of the downstream countries. However, Turkey has no obligation to meet all the water needs of the downstream countries.\(^7\)

Tension over Euphrates question reached a critical point in January 1990, when the Turkish authorities interrupted the flow of the river to fill the storage reservoir behind


Some damage to Syrian agriculture occurred when Turkey stopped or greatly reduced the flow of Euphrates water in 1990 and 1991 while filling the Ataturk Reservoir. Although Turkish authorities argue that the average amount of water over a period of some months did not fall below the guaranteed level, the actual reduction caused environmental and production harm to agriculture on the Euphrates banks; see Philip Robins, *Turkey and the Middle East* (London: Pinter Publications for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1991), pp. 90-94.

\(^7\) Minister of State Mehmet Golhan in his opening speech of an international conference on Middle Eastern water issue in Ankara, 1993. See "Water as a Factor of Cooperation and Development in the Middle East", in Bagis, ed., *Water As An Element of Cooperation*, pp. 9,12.
the Atatürk Dam. During this one-month period, the cross-border flow was reduced to 22 cusecs, according to Turkish figures. However, during the previous 51-day period the flow had been maintained at about 770 cusecs, or well above the 500 cusecs obligation, allowing Syria and Iraq to accumulate extra water in their reservoirs. Nonetheless, this did not satisfy the downstream states, who won vide verbal support (though no positive action) from other Arab countries on this issue. However, Ankara look at it as a proof of their goodwill that they keep their guarantee of letting pass 500 cusecs water into Syria, as grated in a protocol in 1987, if Damascus takes effective measures against the PKK. Furthermore, the Turkish government is ready to discuss and solve any practical problem within a committee created in the 1980s in which experts from the three countries meet from time to time to exchange technical expertise on common water problems. Turkey is of the opinion that the complicated and somewhat ambiguous legal problems of transboundary watercourses could also best be approached in that manner. “The complexity of relation between the two legal principles of reasonable and equitable utilization of transboundary water courses and not causing appreciable harm to beneficiaries should be challenged by means of well-meditated technical approaches.”

There is also much controversy about the water requirements of neighbouring states (Table 1), both over methods of calculation and whether there has been political manipulation of these data. Land classification systems of Iraq and Syria differ widely from that of Turkey, which makes for disagreements about the amounts of agriculturally

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A purely economic analysis would propose a technical solution based on each country's long term agricultural and industrial needs and propose techniques for more efficient agriculture and water use. Once again, however, economic claims are made and needs are defined through political processes. Given both strategic preferences and internal pressure from farmers, each country insists on being self-sufficient in food regardless of cost or efficiency question. Mistrust among the countries also heightens demands for as much water and food production as possible.

The Turkish side questions whether lands included in Syrian and Iraqi calculations are really irrigable. Turkey wants a tripartite, systematic assessment of all parties' water needs for irrigation based on land resources and economically practical

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Table 1. Water potential of the Euphrates – Tigris Basin and Consumption Targets of its Riparian States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Euphrates Basin</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Tigris Basin</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Water Potential</td>
<td>Consumption Targets</td>
<td>Water Potential</td>
<td>Consumption Targets</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>31.58</td>
<td>18.42</td>
<td>25.24</td>
<td>6.87</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>88.70%</td>
<td>51.80%</td>
<td>51.90%</td>
<td>14.10%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>11.30</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11.30%</td>
<td>31.80%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5.40%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>23.00</td>
<td>23.43</td>
<td>45.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>64.60%</td>
<td>48.10%</td>
<td>92.50%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>35.58</td>
<td>52.92</td>
<td>48.67</td>
<td>54.47</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: The percentages of consumption targets are out of total water potential.

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74 Syria’s arable land is counted at, for instance, between 1.0 million to 1.7 million acres, depending on the calculations. But Syria has declared that it wants to use an annual average of 15 billion cubic yards from the Euphrates (which has a total water potential of 47 billion cubic yards) well above the water needed for irrigation of this amount of land. See John Kolars and Robert Mitchell, *The Euphrates River*, John Kolars, “Managing the Impact of Development: The Euphrates and Tigris Rivers and the Ecology of the Arabian Gulf: a link in forging Tri-riparian cooperation,” in Bagis, ed., *Water As An Element Of Cooperation*. 

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irrigation methods. Ankara suggests that “an equitable, rational and optimum utilization of water can be achieved through a scientific study which will determine the true water needs of each riparian country.76

Turkey’s cooperative rhetoric has hardly been backed up by substantial moves. Planning and implementing GAP has produced without any consultation with Syria or Iraq. Nor are there any starting points in the project for cooperation with regard to hydro economics, agriculture, or energy-related use of water. Syrian and Iraqi doubts on the sincerity of Turkish talk of expert cooperation is further nourished by political statements that draw foolish parallels between Arab sovereignty over oil and Turkish sovereignty over water. For instance, former Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel stated during a press conference that, neither Syria nor Iraq can lay claim to Turkey’s rivers any more than Ankara could claim their oil. This is a matter of sovereignty, we have the right to do anything we like. The water resources are Turkey’s, the oil resources are theirs. We don’t say we share their oil resources, and they cannot say they share our water resources.77

This statement can also be seen as a reply to the Syrian suggestion of developing a commonly agreed formula for sharing the water among the three countries and leaving decisions about the use of each share to the country concerned. For Turkey, this

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75 The first stage involved the inventory studies for water resources in which all sides exchange data on gauging stations, flows and quality of water. The second stage referred to the inventory studies for land resources in which data on land classification, soil conditions for projects planned, under construction, and operating, and drainage conditions are all exchanged among the three riparian states. The final stage is the evaluation of water and land resources, which includes activities that range from determining of water consumption and evaluation of the economic viability of the planned project. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/grupa/ad/adg/default.htm (water issues); Muttu, South-Eastern Anatolian Development Project”.


suggestion constitutes an unacceptable infringement on its national sovereignty that Ankara did not agree to the law of the Non-Navigational uses of international watercourses adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1997.78

The point of concern in water conflict is not the shortage of water but the perceived reduction of available water for downstream riparian once GAP is completed, especially its irrigation projects. Syria and Iraq fear that available water will also be of inferior quality because of salination, fertilizers, and insecticides used in Turkish irrigation areas unless Turkey is requested to make the water clean for downstream riparians. As a result, Syria and Iraq fear the crippling of their potential agricultural and energy production. This could affect Iraq’s oil production due to lack of necessary water.79

Turkey’s dispute with its neighbours over water are not isolated from other conflict and from the regional development of the Middle East. This holds true for Turkish-Syrian relations. The national security and the stability of Turkey were vulnerable to Kurdish sedition. So Syria decided to use this security leverage to encourage Turkey to take account of the demands of its downstream neighbours. This has not only been shown by the 1987 protocol on the release of water but on many occasions afterwards. Every time Syria raised the water issue, Ankara countered with condemnation of Syrian support for the PKK terrorism and asked for the extradition of PKK chief Öcalan. Syria and Iraq are well aware that Turkey’s huge expectation of the

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GAP project can only come true if peace and stability return to its Kurdish area. Thus there is a constant temptation to feed trouble in southeast Anatolia by direct or indirect support for the PKK. In this connection Öcalan expulsion by the Syrian government under Turkish military threat has diminished potential Syrian leverage on Turkish water policy.

What Syria and Iraq fear most is the emergence of Turkey as a regional power because of its command over the water plus the development of a huge economic and energy potential in the GAP area. For Turkey, GAP also means a steep increase in agricultural and energy exports to its Arab neighbours who will be in strong need of such imports if Ankara continues its transnational water policy. What in Turkish political rhetoric is designed as a huge potential for developing regional economic and political interdependence is perceived as Turkish straitjacket by Damascus and Baghdad because, as one Turkish official said, "in this region, interdependence is understood as the opposite of independence."80

This lingering suspicion among states is one of the greatest obstacle in the realization of Turkey’s various other plans to lessen the region’s water problems. President Özal during his term as prime minister proposed to transport fresh water from two rivers in southern Turkey via a bifurcated pipeline to the Persian Gulf and the Arab peninsula. This so-called Peace Pipeline Project never developed beyond a feasibility study because of the numerous political problems involved.81

80 Quoted in Joucjiati, "Water politics as high politics", p. 146.
81 Kliot, Water Resources and conflict, pp. 131-33.
Turkey's offer to provide fresh water to Israel has not only met with technical problems but has also had to overcome prevailing instability of Turkish-Arab and Israeli-Arab relations.

As the stalemate continues in the Middle East peace process, discussion on water issue has stalled between Israel and its Arab neighbours. Similarly, post-Gulf War situation impedes progress toward a solution of the Euphrates-Tigris water dispute. The longer the Iraqi stalemate continues and the more GAP develops, the more complicated a solution will become. Such a development does not work to the advantage of Syria and Iraq because the hydropower plants and irrigation schemes created on the Turkish side will inhibit Turkish flexibility with regard to concessions on water release. Thus an increasing potential for conflict must be expected among the three states of the Euphrates-Tigris basin.

Turkish-Israeli Relations

One of the most significant Middle East strategic development of the past decade is the flowering of Turkish-Israeli relations. Although Israel and Turkey secretly engaged in intelligence cooperation for many years, they openly began to pursue close ties after the signing of the 1993 Israel-PLO Declaration of Principles, which freed Turkey to cooperate with Israel while maintaining its declared sympathies for the Palestinians. Since that time, cooperation has blossomed at many levels. Most celebrated have been security relations, launched by a February 1996 "military cooperation and training agreement". In the civilian domain, 1996 witnessed the conclusion of a Turkish-Israeli free trade agreement. By 1999, increasing non-military trade volume approached $900 million, and Israel became Turkey's largest export market in the Middle East. Some
200,000 to 300,000 Israeli tourists have been visiting Turkey every year since the mid 1990s.

Intently focused on the Middle East peace process at the time, the United States may have been less than ecstatic when Turkey and Israel signed their first military cooperation agreement in 1996 since it raised suspicions in Syria and other Arab minds about Israeli regional intentions. Nevertheless, Washington has taken a supportive position toward its two friends-under-scored by its participation in trilateral search-and-rescue exercises in 1998 and 1999—while Ankara and Jerusalem direct the pace.

For Washington, Turkish-Israeli relations present far more opportunities than problems. From the standpoint of U.S. interests, Turkish-Israeli cooperation serves as:

a model of regional normalization between Israel and a Muslim-majority state, an opportunity for deeper trilateral cooperation, enhancing Israeli and Turkish security and increasing weapons interoperability for U.S. forces at times of regional crisis. The cooperation serves as a potential nucleus for pulling other pro-U.S. states, such as Jordan, into a wider Middle Eastern regional security regime. Finally it serves as a potential means for the executive branch to bypass congress in supporting Turkey. The main challenge for the United States will be to support development of Turkish-Israeli relations while seeking to ensure that those relations do not undermine other key regional objectives: Arab-Israeli peace and Greek-Turkish stability. For now, there do not appear any serous problems. After initial nervousness, Athens seemed reconciled to Turkish-Israeli cooperation and has even taken tentative steps of its own to develop ties with Israel. As long as Greek-Turkish re-rapprochement continues, so also will Greek calmness about Turkish-Israeli ties. Should the United States judge that deepening
Turkish-Israeli relations are adding to Greek-Turkish instability, it might seek to discourage high-profile manifestations of Turkish-Israeli security cooperation, such as military exercises, and might be less inclined to grant presidential waivers for Israeli sales to Turkey of weapons incorporating U.S. technology.

Nor has peace process diplomacy been compromised by Turkish-Israeli ties. If anything, Syria's concern about that cooperation has probably encouraged it to reengage with Israel. Although states bordering Turkey that feel directly threatened – Syria, Iraq and (non-Arab) Iran have complained loudly about Turkish-Israeli ties, overall Arab reaction has been relatively muted, at least at the official level. Egypt was an early critic but has backed off.

Turkish-Israeli cooperation also enhances Israel's legitimacy in the eyes of the Turkic states of the former Soviet Union, opening the prospect of new avenues of cooperation among states friendly to the United States. Washington should promote trilateral U.S.-Turkish-Israeli economic development projects in the Turkic states of the former Soviet Union, as it began to do in the mid 1990s. Such initiatives would enhance the attractiveness of both Turkey and Israel in the Turkic states while projecting a more pacific image of Turkish-Israeli relations in the region.

Praise for Turkey's regionally pacesetting role in building multidimensional ties with Israel, as well as the constructive role it plays in Israeli-Palestinian relations, would help Turkey politically in U.S. public opinion and in congress.