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LEBANESE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

THE BALANCER MODEL IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Turkey as a Power Balancer in the Middle East

By

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A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS
to the Department of International Affairs
of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences
at the Lebanese American University

**Beirut, Lebanon
June 2009**

Thesis approval Form (Annex III)

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Program : International Affairs

Division/Dept : Social Sciences

School : **School of Arts and Sciences**

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ABSTRACT

Since the end of the Cold War, the Middle East subsystem has been in flux marked by rivalry between states thriving for increasing their regional power and control. The Middle Eastern power structure can be understood in terms of a balance of power politics. Balance of Power theory posits a direct relationship between the structure of the Middle East regional system and the behavior of states within the system. Based on this framework, the thesis attributes to contemporary regional instability what it considers a power vacuum left by the collapse of the Iraqi Baathist rule and the profoundly weakened post-Cold War Arab regimes. It examines the emerging rivalry, and consequent regional instability, between two regional antagonists, namely the Islamic Republic of Iran, on one side, and the United States and its regional ally, Israel, on the other side, each aiming to fill the existing power vacuum. This thesis highlights Turkey's resurgence in the Middle East and describes the various components of its foreign and domestic interests within the escalating power struggle. It attributes to the Turkish Mideast role the characteristics of a "power balancer" founded on domestic and regional state interests. Accordingly, this thesis makes the general claim that the growing balancer role of Turkey is one of the most critical aspects of regional stability.

I dedicate this work to my parents,

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincerest appreciation goes to my advisor, Dr. Imad Salmey, for his advice and guidance throughout my research.

I am also deeply grateful to Dr. Sami Baroudi and Dr. Paul Tabar for agreeing to serve on my committee and for their invaluable help and support.

Heartfelt thanks goes to Dr. Huda Ayyash-Abdo for her constant concern and support.

I thank my father for his infinite support, direction and cheerful encouragement; my mother for her love and support that gave me the will to finish my thesis; to my brother and sisters.

Finally, I thank my friends for their support and constant feedbacks on my work.

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INTRODUCTION

Already high, international attention to Turkey's regional role is certain to increase.

Perhaps more than any time before, since 2009 Turkey has succeeded to grab headlines and to attract worldwide attention. In a short time interval, it has become the “rising star” on the regional political scene, owing this position to its growing activism in Middle Eastern affairs. After decades of passivity, Turkey is now emerging as an important diplomatic actor in the region. Yet this time it has become a more assertive and independent actor on the international stage. Where once Turkey primarily looked West, today Turkey is increasingly being pulled East and South as well, without, however, turning its back to the West.

The past few years have witnessed a multiplication of critical factors influencing, directly and indirectly, Turkish foreign and security policy. At the same time, Turkey's geopolitical environment was, and still is, in flux, creating new opportunities, as well as new risks and challenges. As a result, Ankara has been constantly redefining its foreign policy interests and rethinking its international relationships in accordance with the fast changing international, regional and domestic circumstances. In light of these continuous developments, analysts have come to realize that many of the traditional paradigms that characterized Turkey's regional and international role over the past decades are no longer valid. Ankara's new activism and shifting interest toward Middle Eastern politics have raised the speculations about the potential strategic relocations of Turkey's foreign policy in

the “New Middle East”. Hence, understanding and characterizing Turkey’s developing regional and international role in the region appears necessary.

This thesis analyzes Turkish foreign policy toward the Middle East and the changes in its strategic policy position in the context of the regional balance of power. Within this framework, I examine whether Turkey is repositioning itself in the Middle Eastern power structure as a “power balancer”. This study entails a comprehensive examination of the domestic and international circumstances shaping Turkey’s “balancing” role. It reveals that the significance of such a role lies in the maneuvering ability of the balancer to carry out active foreign policies and diplomacy as to avert confrontation when a power vacuum exists in a regional system between dyads. This thesis deduces from Turkey’s experience as “regional role model” critical political characteristics in order to sculpt a universal model in International Relations of a “power balancer”.

The study is organized in four chapters and a conclusion. A preliminary chapter is dedicated to present the theoretical framework that guided my research. This chapter gives a quick review of the literature relevant to the Balance of Power (BOP) as a central principle in the theory and practice of international relations. In this respect, I briefly cover three points: the use of the BOP concept to explain the behavior of states; the ideal behavior of states in the BOP system when a power vacuum exists; and the problems of traditional BOP analysis. However, my greatest attention is given to the notion of “balancer”, the focal point of my work. Hence, I try in this chapter to shape a silhouette of the “balancer” by providing a theoretical justification of the role, position, and function of a “balancer” within the system of balance of power.

This examination of the Balance of Power and balancer theories precludes the exploration of the balancer role in practice. Hence, after setting the theoretical ground, the first chapter is a prologue to the three following chapters that take up an analysis of several aspects of Turkey's balancing role and its driving circumstances. Accordingly, in the next chapters I highlight the driving forces that pushed Ankara to play a regional stabilizing and balancing role (the "*why*"); then I examine how this role has been performed and the mechanisms through which it has been put into operation nowadays (the "*how*"); before I end by anticipating where this role will eventually lead Turkey (the "*where*"); and until when Ankara will keep playing it (the "*when*"). This reasoning corresponds with three sequential phases. Thus, it makes sense to organize the material chronologically, distinguishing between the "pre-balancing" phase, the current balancing policy; and the "post-balancing" prospects.

In order to understand the current Turkish foreign policy toward the Middle East, we must look for its causative factors in history and examine the decision making in Turkey's foreign policy through the continuum of Turkish history. For this purpose, I consecrate the second chapter to provide a historical background for the analysis of historical continuities and reorientations in Turkish foreign policy towards the region. I present the historical environment in which the foreign policy is made, then, I evaluate the factors that have driven Turkish foreign policy and the changes thereto in different time periods, from the establishment of the republic until the end of the Cold War. This evaluation represents the pre-balancing phase and focuses on key areas where Turkish foreign policy has shifted given the various power struggles in the region. This historical review examines the implications of these changes in the formulation of the contemporary role of Turkey as a power balancer.

In order to understand the basic aspects of Ankara's balancing role, chapter 3 examines the regional environment that has nurtured the emergence of Turkey as a "balancer". In this chapter, I look at the Middle East as an international subsystem undergoing a power struggle between various poles amid the existence of a serious power vacuum. This has essentially characterized the Post-Soviet era where the region has encountered a major power gap leading to two wars: Gulf War I and Gulf War II. The period has also witnessed a growing presence of the United States in the Middle East coupled with the emergence of power dyads thriving for control, namely Iran and Israel, each aspiring to maximize its regional influence amid weak Arab states. Ideological pretexts (anti-Zionism vs. anti-Theocracy/authoritarianism) along with nuclear and military ambitions have pitted both poles on an antagonistic, clashing and conflicting course.

Further contributing to this urge for regional power expansion is the significant regional power vacuum left by weak Arab states, particularly after the demise of the Iraqi regime. In light of this power rivalry, as characterized by increasing ideological, political and strategic polarization between adversaries in the Middle East, the two regional powers seemed destined to clash, as expressed in two minor proxy confrontations (July 2006 war in South Lebanon and the 2008 war in Gaza) implying escalation toward open confrontation. Under these critical circumstances, Turkey found itself "at the epicenter of events" driven to fill the existing regional power vacuum and play the role of a balancer of power in order to avert an inevitable confrontation.

Chapter 4 makes an inward analysis of Turkey's unique and required characteristics that have positioned it to play a successful and effective role of a "balancer". In this chapter

I examine Turkey's geographical location as a crucial geo-political feature. I also look at the special domestic political factors that have made Turkey both a secular and Islamic at the same time. This chapter discusses how such a duality was emphasized under the rule of the AKP government (*Adalat ve Kalkınma Partisi* - Justice and Development Party) since 2002. This chapter underlines how these factors have allowed Ankara to play the roles of an acceptable mediator and power broker between Middle Eastern adversaries. Most importantly, it is through this role that Ankara has emerged as an essential power balancer whose presence in the Middle East has become a pre-requisite for its own domestic stability and that of the Middle East.

Nonetheless, it would be unrealistic to think that Turkey's role goes without provoking questions. In a region of instability, where would this role lead the country? At a time of uncertainty, for how long would Ankara be able to play the balancer role? Thus, the final chapter offers overall conclusions and observations of the prospects of Turkey as a regional power balancer. In this respect, the conclusion underlines what Ankara expects and awaits in return for playing this role. Hence, I first explore Ankara's aspirations and opportunities; then, I discuss the challenges that Turkey -the balancer- faces, as well as the limitations that would restrain its role. Based on these considerations, I aim to extract the lessons learned on this level in order to establish a balancer model with characteristics derived from the Turkish Middle Eastern experience.

The study is based on a case study research approach. It reviews a large amount of scholarly references and depends in its entirety on reading and analyzing printed materials, including but not limited to books and essays, in addition to benefiting from relevant online data, especially by extracting relevant events from LexisNexis collection of world events.

Additionally, two interviews with two prominent scholars, Turkish and Lebanese, specialists in Turkish-Middle Eastern relations, provided this work with more in-depth perspective and analysis. The validity and limitations of this study can be largely assessed through a possible comparative analysis of balancers in various regional subsystems.

CHAPTER ONE

THE BALANCE OF POWER IN POST-COLD WAR MIDDLE EAST

“If there is any distinctively political theory of international politics, balance-of-power theory is it.”¹

~ Kenneth N. Waltz

“Balance of power” is conceived as one of the most important concepts which, for centuries, has influenced both the study and practice of international politics.² Many scholars were immensely fascinated by the notion of balance of power that they believed it to be holding the key to understanding the recurrent behavior of states. However, this concept has been a source of great debate. While proponents tend to give it a central place and role in thinking about international politics, opponents, in contrast, tend to downplay or reject the balance of power as a way of organizing international relations.³ Yet, despite criticism, to the present day, the concept of balance of power continues to prevail in the study of contemporary theory and practice of international relations. It continues to play a crucial role in the explanation of the way in which systems operate. This is particularly

¹ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1979, p.117.

² The balance of power is believed to be the oldest concept in the study of International Relations going back at least to the work of Thucydides.

³ Organski is one of the key critics of the concept of balance of power. He declared firmly that “we must reject the theory of the balance of power. Its concepts are fuzzy, it is logically unsound and contradicts itself, it is not consistent with the events that have occurred, and it does not explain them.” See A. F. K. Organski, *World Politics*, 2nd ed, New York, 1968, p. 288. Richard Cobden also attacked the balance of power describing it as a “chimera ... a mere conjunction of syllables, forming words which convey sound without meaning” quoted in Moorhead Wright, “The Balance of Power: Controversial but Indispensable?”, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2, Special Issue on the Balance of Power (Apr., 1989), p. 211.

relevant in defining the current structure of the Middle East subsystem where the relations between different regional actors are weighed in terms of balance of power. The major advantage of the balance of power approach is that it posits a direct relationship between the structure of the Middle East state system and the behavior of states within this system. This chapter looks at the concept of balance of power as the basis to provide the theoretical analysis for my thesis. This theoretical framework is necessary to explain in the subsequent chapters the course and direction of the behavior of states and their interrelation within the Middle East subsystem.

Section 1: The Theory of Balance of Power

Balance of power thinking is usually regarded as belonging within a particular tradition of thinking about international relations, that of "Realism". Realists tend to believe that balance of power politics is a natural aspect of any international system. For instance, Waltz (1979) makes the balance of power explicitly the fundamental organizing principle of international politics. Schwarzenberger (1964) and Schuman (1969) argue that international relations, constantly driven by hostility between states, "leads almost instinctively to the emergence of balance of power politics and a balance of power system".⁴ The balance of power theory displays international society as unequal, characterized by "power versus weakness", thus resulting in a balance of power as the "necessary outgrowth" of this struggle for power (Morgenthau, 1973: 186). This assumption is founded on the Realist image of international relations as one of "inevitable clashes between nation-states as they seek to maintain their autonomy and increase their wealth and power" (Sheehan, 1996: 6). In an almost similar fashion, Gilpin (1981: 7) argues that "[i]nternational relations continue to be a recurring struggle for wealth and power among independent actors in a state of

⁴ Quoted in Michael Sheehan, *The Balance of Power: History and Theory*, Routledge, New York, 1996, p. 13.

anarchy". This latter point underlines a key feature in most balance of power thinking according to which the behavior of states is governed by the nature of the system. Realists used the concept of balance of power as a central tool to explain the behavior of states living in a condition of international anarchy. As a Realist, Morgenthau (1978) believed that the allegedly anarchic structure of the system drives all states to be involved in a continuous struggle to expand their own power. Waltz also places enormous emphasis on this particular aspect of state behavior theory. He argues that the anarchic nature of the system does not provide states with any protection or help which forces them to rely upon themselves, through their own means and resources, for the maintenance of their own security, thus forming a sort of a self-help system (Waltz, 1979: 111). In this context, he identifies two, and only two, requirements necessary for the balance of power politics to prevail: "That the order be anarchic and that it be populated by units wishing to survive" (Waltz, 1979: 121). Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff (1990: 81) expand further on this point. They list four requirements as descriptive characteristics of balance of power system: (1) a set of nation-states which participate as key individual actors (2) in an anarchical international system (3) in which they are engaged in a struggle for power (4) in order to achieve goals and defend national interests.

These formulations show a great emphasis on the concept of power as a defining characteristic of the international system.⁵ This concept appears as a cornerstone in Realist perspectives which underline the pursuit of power by states as the ultimate aim of all international politics. Most Realists assume that it is in the interests of states to acquire,

⁵ Sheehan op. cit., p. 78: "The desire to maximize power should not be explained in terms of the individual preferences of states, but rather as a function of the nature of the system". And Sheehan op. cit., p. 80: "States behavior is seen as being governed by the nature of the system. Regardless of individual differences between states in terms of culture and ideology, all states must act in a similar way, selfishly seeking to increase their own power."

retain and increase their power and to translate this power into defined national goals in order to establish a balance of power or preserve the existing one. For instance, Hans Morgenthau, regularly identified as the father of modern Realism and as a leading proponent of balance of power politics, asserts that “the aspiration for power on the part of several nations, each trying to maintain or overthrow the *status quo*, leads of necessity to a configuration that is called the ‘balance of power’” (Morgenthau, 1978:173).

The “obsession with power” is an obvious element of all traditional balance of power reasoning. Balance of power theory is, thus, closely in line with the traditional Realist image of international relations as based on the centrality of power. This statement is itself problematic because the concept of power opens the door to many interpretations. Some analysts explain power as the use of force, whether political, economic or mainly military,⁶ while others define it as the ability for one state to influence the behavior of other states by imposing its will despite resistance (Gilpin, 1981) and getting them to do something they otherwise would not do (Baldwin, 1989:1).

Schuman (1969) observes that “the primary objective of foreign policy in peace and in war is neither war nor peace but something common to both: the enhancement of power of your state to resist the will of others and impose your will upon them and the diminution of the power of others to resist your will and impose their will upon you”. Notwithstanding the confusion about the definition of “power”, what is clear is that the power of a given country is a relative variable that can only be measured in relation to the power of another country engaged in the same power struggle.

⁶ Mearsheimer is a strong advocate of military power. He believes that “a state’s effective power is ultimately a function of its military forces and how they compare with the military forces of rival states.” However, he also recognizes that, in the long term, there is a close relationship between military power and what he calls “latent power”, which is largely based on a “state’s wealth and the overall size of its population.” See John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, Norton, New York, 2001, p 55.

Nevertheless, the major predicament in the balance of power theory lies not in the definition of power but in the definition of the concept “balance of power” itself. One might think that defining an old concept such as “balance of power” would be an easy task. At its heart, the balance of power may seem a simple concept, but things are by far more complicated when it comes to seeking its essence. The difficulty does not consist in the fact that its meaning cannot be discovered, but rather, as Inis Claude (1962: 13) has noted, it has too many meanings. He indicated that the term can be used in at least four quite different senses. It has been used to indicate the type of policy a state is pursuing or ought to pursue; as a symbol of what is either considered good or bad in international relations; as a label describing a specific historical period - most notably the 18th and 19th centuries;- and finally, it refers to a situation in which the power relationship between states or groups of states is literally “balanced” by equivalent power (Claude, 1962: 13).

Morgenthau (1978:173) also suggested that the balance of power takes four forms: “as a policy aimed at bringing about a certain power distribution; as a description of an actual state of affairs in international politics; as an approximately equal distribution of power internationally; and as a term describing any distribution of political power in international relations”. For his part, Waltz concedes that there is no agreed or single definition of what is meant by “balance of power”. Thus, instead of trying to offer such a definition, he suggests to associate the concept with a number of conditions necessary to produce a balance of power. He acknowledges that the most “tranquil” and “morally desirable condition” to form a balance of power is “a world of many states, all of them approximate equals in power” (Waltz, 1979: 132).

Although these statements share a family resemblance, the definitions, however, reveal some significant variations. On the one hand, they highlight that the balance of power is used to define an even distribution of power while, on the other hand, they put forward an uneven distribution of power (or even “predominance”⁷). This suggests that the concept of balance of power does not always imply a rough or precise equality of power, but rather a search for hegemony.

Morgenthau (1978: 227) recognizes this contradiction and justifies it by the fact that, in practice, states involved in an anarchical system must not seek “a balance or equality of power, but a superiority of power on their own behalf”. This position is shared by Waltz (1979: 132) who believes that “extreme inequality is an inherent feature of the state system”. Mearsheimer (2001: 40) presumes that all great powers are consistently interested in becoming hegemonic, and that they are forced to act as such in order to survive.⁸ These findings are founded on the argument that the dynamics of balance of power politics constrain the behavior of states in such a way that forces each nation to maximize its power and leads it to seek constantly to increase its own capabilities (Spykman, 1942: 21; Waltz, 1979: 74).

⁷ Martin Wight identified nine distinct ways to employ the concept “balance of power”. According to him, the concept could mean one of the following: (1) An even distribution of power; (2) The principle that power ought to be evenly distributed; (3) The existing distribution of power. Hence, any possible distribution of power; (4) The principle of equal aggrandizement of the great powers at the expense of the weak; (5) The principle that our side ought to have a margin of strength in order to avert the danger of power becoming unevenly distributed; (6) (When governed by the verb “to hold”): A special role in maintaining an even distribution of power; (7) (Ditto): A special advantage in the existing distribution of power; (8) Predominance; (9) An inherent tendency of international politics to produce an even distribution of power. See Martin Wight, “The Balance of Power”, in H. Butterfield and M. Wight, *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Politics*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1966, p. 151. As for Ernest Haas, he uncovered eight different meanings of the phrase “balance of power”. See Ernest Haas, “The Balance of Power: Prescription, Concept or Propaganda”, *world politics*, Vol. 5, No. 4, p. 447-57.

⁸ Mearsheimer defines a ‘hegemon’ as “a state that is so powerful that it dominates all the other states in the system.” See John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, Norton, New York, 2001, p 40.

By contrast, Claude (1989: 79) considers this feature to be “perhaps the oddest thing about balance of power theory” and blames the “champions of balance of power” for not being able “to decide or to agree whether the theory calls for, and whether the successful operation of the system requires, an approximately equal or a conspicuously unequal distribution of power among states and coalitions.” For his part, Sheehan (1996: 9) asserts that this statement runs counter to the whole essence of balance of power thinking because “superiority is clearly not the same thing as equality”. He insists that, even though inequality may be an ineluctable aspect of state systems, this “basic inequality among states can be balanced”.⁹

This formulation is simple; however, reaching this condition of state in practice seems more complicated. If every player involved in the central balance of power attempts to divert the rules of the game by seeking to establish an inequality to its advantage, what or who ought to assure the balancing mission in this case? A new concept is thus introduced: the concept of the “balancer”.

Section 2: The Concept of Balancer of Power

While some theorists looked at the balance of power system as composed strictly of a roughly equal distribution of power between rival states, others insisted that one -or several states- must remain outside this equation acting as “balancers” in order to “hold the balance” of the system. This formulation implies that the balancer acts within a system characterized in terms of “a pair of scales” where each scale represents a state or a group of states pursuing the same policies, interests and objectives.

⁹ Sheehan considers that “all states can be kept in check regarding each other’s position, and this can therefore prevent hegemony, allowing states to preserve their identity, integrity and independence, and perhaps deterring aggression or war.” See Sheehan op. cit., p. 8

Morgenthau makes a good description of this situation using the metaphor of the balance. He argues that “[w]henver the balance of power is to be realized by means of an alliance two possible variations of this pattern have to be distinguished ... the system may consist of two ‘scales’, in each of which are to be found the nation or nations identified with the same policy of the *status quo* or of imperialism. The system may, however, consist of two ‘scales’ plus a third element, the ‘holder’ of the balance or the ‘balancer’” (Morgenthau, 1978: 200). Haas (1953: 371) also proceeds in terms of metaphor arguing that the system of balance consists of two powers represented by two scales and a third balancing power that must stay outside the match in order to “throw [its] ‘weight’ into whichever scale proved to be the weaker in the actual or potential conflict.”

As interesting the idea and role of a “balancer” may be, it is curious though that it has not received much attention in the writings on the balance of power.¹⁰ Thus, the picture of the balancer is extracted by abstracting descriptions of the balancer role from general literature on the balance of power. This, at least, would serve us to draw some conclusions about the nature of the balancer and its role.

¹⁰ Sheehan considers this as unfortunate especially that even authors like Padelford and Lincoln who saw the balancer role as critical, failed to devote more than a few paragraphs to the topic. According to Moorhead Wright one major problem involved in a study of this sort, as with balance of power theory generally, is that it is “such an ambiguous compound of abstract speculation and historical practice”. See M. Wright (ed.), *The Theory and Practice of the Balance of Power 1486-1914* (London, 1975), p. ix.

A great deal of the balancer references relate specifically to the historical practice of Britain. See for example N. Palmer and H. Perkins, *International Relations* (London, 1954), p. 312; G. Liska, *International Equilibrium* (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), p. 37; H. J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 4th edn (New York, 1967), p. 188; Organski, op. cit., p. 280.

The only previous attempt to produce a paradigm for the balancer role was distorted by the limitations of the particular case study used. Newman's 1968 book argued that “a study of British diplomacy in the 1930's is a study of the holder of the balance, which makes it possible to draw some conclusions about the nature of this role”. See W. J. Newman, *The Balance of Power in the Interwar Years* (New York, 1968), p. 188.

A- The Description of the Balancer: Definition and Function

Due to the quasi-silence of the literature, it is only natural to start by wondering/asking: *Who is the balancer and what purpose does he serve?* It is generally accepted that the “balancer” is a nation -or group of nations- specifically devoted to the preservation of the balance of power in a certain system. For this purpose, the balancer seeks to remain “aloof” from the rivalries of other states or alliances which are part of the central balance by keeping itself uncommitted to any of them. The balancer thus appears *ex hypothesi* a “third force” (Wight, 1966:156), yet also “a most powerful factor in international politics” (Morgenthau, 1978: 201). The existence of a balancer is regarded as one of several means in which a balance of power system can attain stability. As long as the system is deemed in balance, the balancer does not act.

However, when one state gains enough strength to tip the scales causing the balance to break down, or to come close to, the balancer intervenes by joining the weaker side in order to bring the scales back into balance. Richard Rosecrance's calls the balancer a “regulator”, a force within the international system which counters disruptive forces in order to produce “stability” (Rosecrance, 1963, 229)¹¹. This regulatory or stabilizing effect is derived from the balancer’s capacity to intervene at the right moment and halt any change that may upset the balance of the system. The balancer’s desire to keep the balance is primarily motivated by the conviction that “[i]ts interests are best served if the international balance of power is maintained” (Organski, 1968: 278). Hence, the ultimate purpose of the balancer is to ensure the maintenance of the overall equilibrium by resisting the hegemonic

¹¹ Rosecrance defined stability as an international system in which “outcomes fall within limits generally accepted by the major participants”. See Richard N. Rosecrance, *Action and Reaction in World Politics* (Boston, 1963), p. 231

aspirations of any actor in the system. By making it impossible for any state or alliance to gain preponderance over the others, the balancer preserves its own independence as well as the independence of all the other nations (Morgenthau, 1978: 201). By acting as such, the balancer prevents the occurrence of clashes and, thereby, ensures the survival of the system. Thus, the balancer appears as a kind of “safety net” for the whole system (Sheehan, 1989: 124).

In Morgenthau’s terminology, the balancer is “the ‘arbiter’ of the system” (Morgenthau, 1978: 201). According to him, “[t]he holder of the balance occupies the key position in the balance of power system, since its position determines the outcome of the struggle for power...deciding who will win and who will lose” (Morgenthau, 1978: 201). Organski (1968: 278) acknowledges that the concept of the balancer is “the keystone” of the entire balance of power theory. However, this role is certainly not given. The author asserts that “[i]t takes consummate skill to be a balancer, and the nation or group that fills this role must possess great power, for it must be strong enough to tilt the scales decisively in favor of the side it joins” (Organski, 1968: 278). This necessarily leads us to an examination of the balancer’s characteristics.

B- The Characteristics of the Balancer

The common belief is that the balancer must be a major power in order to accomplish the balancing mission and assure that its intervention to prevent the disequilibrium in the system is decisive.¹² By contrast, Kaplan (1969: 42) argues that “any

¹² Thus, commenting upon Italy’s attempts to act as European balancer in the decade before World War I, Hans Morgenthau noted that “it had not enough weight to throw around to give it the key position in the balance of power”. Similar failures for the same reason attended the efforts of Venice to act as balancer in Italy after the battle of Pavia in 1525, and of Sweden in the Baltic region during the minority of King Charles XI between 1660 and 1672. See Morgenthau, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

national actor is qualified to fill the role” of a balancer. What is certain, however, is that in both cases the balancer should have ‘prestige’, ‘influence’ and ‘strength’ which must be “adequate and accompanied by wisdom to discern when and how to employ the strength, and resolution to commit it” (Padelford and Lincoln, 1967: 301). This can be successfully achieved only if the balancer operates impartially. To fulfill this condition, the balancer is thus required to remain “aloof” and uncommitted to any actor in the system.¹³ It is presumed that “aloofness” is attained when the balancer has its major interests outside the area of the central balance.¹⁴

However, this assumption is not generally accepted. It is argued that if the balancer has interests outside the region covered by the central balance, “those interests will exert a centrifugal force on the balancer, pulling it away from involvement with the central balance” because these outside interests “will either divert the holder from his concern with that balance, or will bring about conflicts that cut across the alignments within the balance, thus weakening it” (Newman, 1968: 188).¹⁵ The decisive criterion is the way the balancer prioritizes its interests which, in turn, define its attitude toward the central balance. In other words, if the balancer takes the preservation of the central balance to be a fundamental objective that serves its interests, then the balancer would balance between its own interests. Consequently, the balancer’s outside interests would not affect its balancing activity. On the contrary, this is deemed beneficial to the credibility of its role since outside interests will

¹³ This feature is mainly defended by Hans Morgenthau.

¹⁴ Thus France under Louis XIV could not be the European balancer because her primary foreign policy objective was acquiring territory in Europe. Britain was a better claimant since her primary interests were overseas, in commerce and the colonies. See Morgenthau, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

¹⁵ For instance, Frederick Hartmann argues that the central balance itself is made more complex and flexible if the states involved have interests outside the central balance area which lead them to cooperate on occasion against the balancer. See Frederick H. Hartmann, *Readings in International Relations* (New York, 1952), p. 118.

make the balancer less inclined to have hegemonic ambitions inside the region of the central balance.¹⁶

Pushed to extremes, however, this situation could lead the balancer to become so obsessed by obtaining or protecting its outside interests that it would neglect its balancing role or become indifferent towards the central balance. Therefore, the balancer should take a moderate position towards the central balance. This requires it to be “aloof, but not unduly so” (Sheehan, 1989: 129).¹⁷

Nevertheless, to assume this role, the balancer must have remarkable qualities such as being “reserved, self restrained, humane, moderate and wise” (Organski (1968: 285). In asserting this position, the balancer renounces to its prerogative to acquire permanent friends and permanent enemies since it cannot afford to become identified with the aims or policies of any of the states involved in the central balance (Liska, 1957: 36-7; Organski, 1968: 287; Reynolds, 1971: 200). Morgenthau places much emphasis on this argument. He asserts that the balancer can only be guided by the permanence of its balancing strategy (Morgenthau, 1978: 201). The balancer reacts only to present danger regardless of any affinity of any kind. Hence, the preservation of the balance is the objective that overrides all other considerations such as “old alliances”, “ancient enmities”, “special relationships” and “past friendships”. Sheehan (1989: 130) goes further and considers that the balancer is “immune to appeals based on concepts like trust and loyalty” or, logically, ideological solidarity. Moreover, the balancer remains indifferent towards the real sources of contention

¹⁶ From the balancer's perspective this is valuable so long as it does not itself clash overseas with one of the major balance actors, since this might prejudice its attitude in the event of a crisis involving the central balance. Ibid., p. 129.

¹⁷ He even goes further by arguing that the balancer's role will be made easier if the major balance actors themselves are seeking expansion elsewhere. Ibid., p. 129.

between the antagonist states in the central balance, whether they are “fighting over power as such or over any other set of clashing motivations” (Haas, 1953: 375).

Nevertheless, the price of following a balancing strategy may prove high and costly in the long run. “The balancer may become in a relatively short span ... consecutively the friend and foe of all major powers” (Morgenthau, 1978: 201). In fact, anti-balancer resentment of states or alliances aspiring to hegemony may appear unavoidable. Reynolds (1971: 200) explains that “a policy involving shifting friendships is likely to earn one enemies”. This observation pushed some analysts to suggest that the balancer must have a certain degree of ‘strategic security’ to go with its power. This attribute smoothes the task of the balancer since it allows it to stay outside the central balance and to remain uncommitted until the moment when its intervention can be decisive.¹⁸ According to Sheehan (1996: 69) what is meant by ‘strategic security’ are “geographical security advantages such as might arise from mountainous frontiers, a desert hinterland, or sheer extent of territory”. The author gives Britain’s island position as an example, but acknowledges that there is “no logical reason why a balancer should have to be an island” (Sheehan, 1996: 69).

C- The Utility of the Balancer

If the function of the balancer is straightforward, the question of its relevance to balance of power systems is not. This issue has generated a strong division in the literature on the balance of power between proponents and critics of the concept of “balancer”.¹⁹

¹⁸ In this respect the utility of Britain's island position has long been recognized.

¹⁹ Sheehan believes that the division in the literature between proponents and opponents of the balancer may be to some extent a reflection of attitudes towards traditional British foreign policy. See Sheehan, op. cit., p. 126. In fact, a great deal of the writing on the balancer is colored by an idealistic commitment to the value of a balance of power. Richard Sterling has noted in this respect that there is a very high correlation between admirers of traditional British foreign policy and admirers of the balance of power system. See Richard Sterling, *Macropolitics* (New York, 1974), p. 55.

Some analysts advance that the presence of a balancer is a *sine qua non* condition for a balance of power system to operate efficiently and successfully. Padelford and Lincoln (1967: 300) clearly express this view affirming that “[i]n theory and practice any balance of power system, whether limited or global, requires balancers”, without which the whole idea of a balance of power is rendered unrealistic. This view is supported by Lerche (1956: 129) who argues that a balance can be sustained “only when a major state or bloc of states makes the preservation of the balance the major component of its policy”.

For his part, Berridge (1992: 150) sees in the existence of a “great power – ‘the balancer’- which is so detached from the conflicts between the others” a “useful feature” of a balance of power system. Yet opponents of the balancer role are also emphatic. They refute the previous analysis arguing that a balancer is not only an unnecessary element, but also that its very need would undermine the function of a genuine balance of power system because its existence contradicts many of the assumptions of the theory. This statement is founded on the “automatic” feature of the balance of power system where the balance is supposed to exist in the normal run of events and to be produced by the automatic processes of the system. This version of the system regards any supplementary element –such as the “balancer”- as a distortion to the whole mechanism of the balance of power.

Skeptical of the balancer role, Organski (1968: 288) asserts that “[t]here is no such thing as a ‘balancer’ and there never has been” because “[n]o single nation is motivated primarily by a desire to maintain the balance.” Henry Craik views the balancer as a destabilizing factor of the balance of power system, because this latter “ceases to be true as soon as its adjustment is entrusted to anyone. It must either be maintained by its own

equilibrium, or it becomes a pretence, sustained only by the application of arbitrary force.”²⁰ This “mechanical” conception of the balance of power is also shared by Waltz (1959: 38) who rejects the idea that “if a balance is to be formed somebody must want it and must work for it”.

Obviously, if the system of balance of power is self-regulated, the added refinement of a balancer would be unnecessary because there would be no place left for it. Thus, the intervention of the balancer requires another configuration of the system. Claude (1962: 49) calls it a “manually operated” balance²¹ in which one state pursues the holding of the balance of power in its hands as a goal of policy²² and conducts its foreign policy with this end in view through the use of skilled flexible multilateral diplomacy and if necessary even through “the use of military force” (Sheehan, 1989: 124).

Furthermore, opponents of the balancer concept have criticized it on another ground. They argue that not only the existence of the balancer disturbs the functioning of the balance of power system, but also its intervention “brings about the very thing it is said to be designed to prevent” (Organski, 1968: 286). According to Sterling (1972: 57), to become the balancer is to come “as close to achieving actual domination”. When the balancer intervenes to restore the balance in the system, its power is not balanced or neutralized

²⁰ Henry Craik, Selections from Swift, quoted in A. F. Pollard, “The Balance of Power”, *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs*, vol. 2 (1923), p. 59, quoted in Michael Sheehan, The Place of the Balancer in Balance of Power Theory, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2, Special Issue on the Balance of Power (Apr., 1989), p. 125.

²¹ Claude identified three types of balance of power system “manual, semi-automatic, automatic”. According to Claude, the “semi-automatic” system, in which the balance of power is assumed to be largely self-sustaining, but should a major danger threaten the balance, the additional power of the balancer is available to retrieve the situation.. admits that the semi-automatic conception adheres closely to “the historical model in which European equilibrium was actively and deliberately fostered by Britain in its role as balancer”. Ibid., p. 47-49.

²² Kenneth Waltz criticizes writers who advocate policies designed to preserve the balance on the grounds that it has proved to be “an unfortunately short step from the belief that a high regard for preserving a balance is at the heart of wise statesmanship to the assumption that states must pursue balancing policies if a balance of power is to be maintained”. See Waltz, op. cit., p. 38.

anywhere else in the system. This places the balancer in an exceedingly powerful position relative to the rest of the nations within the system. Quincy Wright (1942: 757-8) considers that, with such a strong position, the balancer would be tempted to aggression and aggrandizement in the area covered by the central balance and “to establish a hegemony, perhaps eventually an empire over all the others”.²³ The author goes further suggesting that, in order to achieve a position of influence, a state may hide its real intentions behind the mask of being a “balancer”, and thus, “may deliberately pursue a balancer policy in order to establish a hegemony through its capacity to mobilize a preponderant coalition”. In such a situation, one is no more looking at a balanced system but rather at an unbalanced one.

This conclusion was expressed by Daniel Defoe who sees that “every power which overbalances the rest, makes itself a nuisance to its neighbors.”²⁴ Sheehan (1989: 127) acknowledges that in terms of strict logic this argument is clearly right because “a preponderance is not a balance”. However, he affirms that equally clearly at certain periods in history some nations have successfully played the balancer role, thereby “imbuing the concept with a certain credibility” (Sheehan, 1989: 127). He gives the example of Britain who played the role of the balancer in the European balance of power and considers that its success in asserting this role was due to “an array of cultural and political values which have the effect of restraining her desire to gain political or territorial preponderance in the area for which she aspires to perform the balancer role” (Sheehan, 1989: 127).

Moreover, the nature and the object of the balancer’s power are additional factors that hold back any hegemonic aspirations it might pursue. This is true especially since the balancer’s power does not itself precede the power of the states of the central balance; on

²³ Quincy Wright, *A Study of War* (Chicago, 1942), vol. 2, pp. 757-8 quoted in Sheehan, op. cit., p. 126.

²⁴ Daniel Defoe, *A Review of the State of the English Nation*, vol. 3, no. 65 (1 June 1706).quoted in M. Wright, op. cit., p. 48.

the contrary, its influence is a result of adding its power to the power of one state or alliance (usually the weaker) within the system, for the sole purpose of rectifying the balance. The addition of the power –or weight- of the balancer to the weaker side allows this latter to “overawe”, or even prevail over, the other side that threatens the system. Once this has been accomplished, and the balance is restored, the balancer retreats back to its previous position of “neutral but watchful guardian” (Organski, 1968: 279; Palmer and Perkins, 1954: 319; Liska, 1957: 36; Morgenthau, 1978: 201; Claude, 1962: 47).

Clearly the balancer, counted separately, does not itself constitute a systematic preponderance. “The balancer's power therefore, while inflated by its diplomatic position, is still well short of hegemonial” (Sheehan, 1989: 128). The author offers an additional guarantee which is the fact that the balancer defends the *status quo* side because it is never in its interest to support the strongest or revisionist side since that would lead to the overthrow of the system and the loss of the balancer position. According to Sheehan (1989: 128), “[a] state which behaves in that manner would simply be an additional component of the anti-system coalition; it would not be a balancer”.

Notwithstanding all the ambiguities surrounding the concept of “balancer”, it remains certain that “the most desirable role for a great power to play is that of holder of the balance, and not as a major participant in the balance itself” (Palmer and Perkins, 1954: 312). It is true that this role exercises a strong attraction for states, but, it is also equally true that since the second half of the twentieth century no state has come close to achieving the kind of balancer position characteristic of Britain’s role in earlier centuries (Sheehan, 1989: 129). What explains the disappearance of the balancer is that, while many states possessed

some of the attributes required, no single state was able to simultaneously satisfy all the criteria appropriate to the balancer.²⁵

In addition to that, another factor seems to limit the emergence of the balancer. The general belief is that there is no need for a specific balancer in a multipolar system since the “*kaleidoscopic*” readjustments of the actors in a system of equal and genuinely unaligned states would obviate the need for a balancer. However, for a balancer to play a decisive and effective role the system must be bipolar or multipolar but with a tendency towards bipolarity in times of crisis (Waltz, 1979: 75).²⁶ Nonetheless, what seems clear is that “the current international system offers no scope for a balancer in the traditional sense” but rather “regional balancers for local balances of power are possible” (Sheehan, 1989: 132).

Conclusion

This final statement invites us to examine the prospect for the emergence of a regional balancer within the Middle East area. Does the current structure of the Middle East subsystem allow and/or require the emergence of a regional balancer? If positive, which regional actor is best suited to adequately fulfill the requirements for this role?

“The Middle East is arguably the epicenter of world crisis, chronologically war-prone and the site of the world’s most protracted conflicts. It appears to be the region where

²⁵ Organski considered that “the disappearance of the balancer is not so much an explanation as to why the balance no longer works as it is a challenge to the idea that it ever worked. It was to England’s advantage to act as balancer in the 19th century, why is it not to America’s advantage to as balancer today? If the balance of power is a permanent law, how can the balancer disappear? If he has disappeared today, the suspicion arises that perhaps he was never more than an optical illusion in the first place. This, indeed, is our view. It is the principles, not the conditions, that require revisiting.” See Organski, op. cit., p. 284.

²⁶ For example in the 1730s the European system was multipolar, but as the crises of 1739-40 and 1756 unfolded, the states took sides in such a way that two blocs emerged which dominated events. A similar bipolarization is evident in the decade before World War I.

the anarchy and insecurity seen by the realist school of international politics as the main feature of states systems remains most in evidence and where the realist paradigm retains its greater relevance” (Hinnebusch, 2003: 1). Hence, the regional politics can best be apprehended through the lens of classic balance of power politics. For decades, the military triangle in the region consisted of Iraq, Iran (under the Shah regime), and the United States which exercised a powerful influence from a distance through its regional allies. However the Iranian Revolution of 1979 ruptured this alliance causing an upset in the regional power equation that eventually led to the flare up of the Iraq–Iran war. These turbulent events constituted a major watershed in the politics of the region.

However, the end of the Cold War marked the beginning of a new era defined by a major change in the power equation with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The echoes of this momentous event reached the Middle East resulting in changes in the political map of the region. This new reality introduced new dynamics into the area, mainly on the level of the regional balance of power, especially since, for the first time, the United States had a direct strong military presence in the region. With the disappearance of the Soviet counterbalance, the American influence in the Middle East kept increasing, which was further emphasized by the fact that the region now assumed a secondary position in priorities on the post-Soviet foreign policy agenda. The power gap left by the demise of the Soviet Union led the region into two major wars: Gulf War I and Gulf War II.

These new realities paved the way for the emergence of middle range powers aspiring to win a bigger role and to occupy a greater position within the region. Furthermore, the Soviet disintegration resulted in the emergence of the new Muslim Republics of the former Soviet Union with close historical relations and cultural ties with

the Middle East which increased the complexity of the regional geo-political arena. This new development has “rekindled the ancient rivalries between the Turks and the Iranians for political influence in this region” (Dorraj, 1999: 16). At the same time, the Western support for Israel ensured it an increasing dominance in the Middle East through its conventional and nuclear arsenals. However, the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 constituted the main turning point in the history of the Middle East.

The fall of the Saddam Hussein regime completely removed Iraq from the regional power equation and overturned the regional balance of power in favor of Iran. This positioned the country as a direct regional rival to both Israel and the United States. With the absence of any Arab influence, the power struggle in the Middle East was thus rendered bipolar between Iran and the United States –and its counterpart, Israel. Each of these powers is thriving for more control and influence in the region which made the odds for consensual solutions between them almost impossible.

In this context, the power struggle between the regional power dyads seems destined to clash as expressed in two minor proxy confrontations (July 2006 war in South Lebanon and the January 2009 war in Gaza), which tipped the balance towards Iran. Furthermore, Iran’s nuclear program is not only regarded as an “existential threat” to Israel, but also alerted most of Iran’s Arab neighbors, mainly Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, Lebanon and Egypt, who are undoubtedly concerned at the rise of Iran. Thus in this era, the Middle East emerges as a “post-cold War region *par excellence*” (Spiegel, 1992: 166). It has three overlapping balances of power: Arab vs. Israel; Arab vs. Iran; Arab vs. Arab.

Presently, the situation is dangerous and confusing by any measure. Any Israeli-Iranian clash supported by the United States in Israel's advantage would not only cause a regional imbalance; it also has the potential to trigger a catastrophic regional war with devastating consequences on Arab, American, Israeli and Turkish interests. In the current configuration of the Middle East, Turkey seems to be the only regional actor who is not directly involved in the central conflict. Yet at the same time, Ankara's benefits are at risk because any growing regional influence of Iran or Israel would jeopardize Turkey's regional interests. These considerations force the country to intervene without necessarily taking part or sides in the central conflict.

Thus, Turkey's role has increasingly emerged as a third party aiming to divert major confrontations between the regional antagonists. This role is becoming a crucial factor for regional stability. Could there be a sort of "balance of power" forming in the Middle East that finally describes a role for Turkey as a "regional balancer" that everyone has to acknowledge? Perhaps it is time for Ankara to step up to its potential regional role as a balancer among all the regional actors: the Shia (Iran), Sunni (Arabs) and Israel/US. It is time maybe for Ankara to emphasize this role on its own agenda. But another question is posed: Does Ankara have what it takes to keep peace among the regional dyads and to hold the regional balance? This shall be answered in the later chapters.

CHAPTER TWO

TURKEY'S RESURGENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

**“The Turkish elite are like a man running West
on the deck of a ship heading East.”**

~Sakallı Celal²⁷

After reviewing the different theoretical approaches on the ‘balance of power’ and the ‘balancer’ concepts in the previous chapter, the following chapters will be dedicated to a more concrete and tangible study of Turkey’s foreign policy toward the Middle East as well as its actual role in the region.

History and International Relations are necessarily two inseparable disciplines. Historical data are essential for comprehending the development of foreign policy. This chapter provides a historical background for Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East. It presents the historical environment in which the foreign policy has been made through different time periods, from the establishment of the republic until the end of the Cold War. This evaluation focuses on key areas where Turkish foreign policy has been reconfigured throughout the various power struggles in the region.

²⁷ Sakallı Celal (1886-1962) is a famous Turkish journalist in Atatürk’s time.

To better assess the patterns of the republican Turkish foreign policy we must observe the evolution of Turkey's external relations since the late 18th century. In fact, the policies that have been adopted throughout the Ottoman period constitute the bases of the modern Turkish foreign policy. Therefore, a first section attempts to explore the factors that shaped the foreign relations of the Ottoman Empire and their inference in forming later attitudes and policies.

Section 1: The Ottoman Diplomacy

A general review of Turkey's historical record reveals that the country has been confronted with challenges from a wide range of international issues since the time of the Ottoman Empire. These challenges were mainly driven by the structure of the international order characterized by a balance of power among five European "great powers": France, Britain, Prussia/Germany, Russia and Austria.

During the 16th century, the Ottoman Empire occupied a central position within the rank of major powers, along with the European states, thanks to its military, technological and economic capabilities. However, by the end of the 18th century this reality changed dramatically when the Empire had fallen well behind all great European states on all these levels. At this time, "it was neither a great power, nor a minor one, but a former great power in gradual eclipse, whose future became a continuing problem for both its own rulers and the leading European states" (Hale, 2000: 14). Soon, the Ottoman state realized that its own survival depended on the maintenance of the balance of power between the European major powers. Yet, this task was not easy, especially since by this time the Empire was enduring internal problems as well as external pressures.

Internally, the Ottoman Empire had to deal with rebelling subject of peoples. The ethnic and religious heterogeneity of the Ottoman state constituted one of the major weaknesses that led to the fragmentation of its society coupled with administrative inefficiency.²⁸ In fact, and contrarily to most “modernized” and ‘secularized’ European great powers, the Ottoman state failed to assimilate its diverse subjects under one citizenry due to its “lack[ing] the technical, economic and institutional resources to integrate its diverse population into a single political community” (Hale, 2000: 15). All these elements contributed together to the feebleness of the Ottoman Empire and rendered it easily vulnerable to external events.

Externally, the Ottoman Empire was confronted by multiple adversaries and numerous foes. By the 1890s, the relationship between the major European powers was marked by extreme rivalry which threatened the existing balance of power. Thus, the surrounding environment had become so delicate for the Ottoman Empire to be able to survive on its own given its financial weakness and large dependence on foreign loans. These weaknesses were compounded by military deficiencies, which disabled the Empire’s capacity to confront or even repel any external threat and thereby to protect or even defend the immense length of its frontiers.²⁹ Furthermore, the great number and forces of its potential enemies excluded any attempt to enter a war with the European powers. In the light of these realities, the Ottoman state had “to resort to diplomatic maneuvering rather than risk unaided military resistance to any major European power” (Hale, 2000: 18). In

²⁸ In the 16th and 17th centuries, the Ottoman Empire expanded from Hungary to the Crimea and from Tunis to the Persian Gulf. By 1884, the population of the territories actually controlled by the Ottoman Sultan was estimated to be 26 million composed of Muslims (Turks, Arabs, Kurds, Muslim Slavs and Albanians), Christians (Slavs, Armenians, Greeks, Christian Arabs and Albanians), and a small Jewish community. As a consequence, the Ottoman society remained highly fragmented and its subject peoples retained their own languages and religions with some degree of formal political autonomy.

²⁹ The main deficiencies were the almost total reliance of the Ottoman army on imported weaponry as well as the lack of any logistical backup and modern transport.

effect, it was in the Empire's interest to stay neutral and avoid taking part in any war between the European states – unless it could “sell its friendly neutrality to whichever side offered it the most favorable terms” (Hale, 2000: 20).

Abiding by this general scheme meant that the Ottoman policy-makers were left with only two possible policies towards the major powers. The first policy consists of avoiding close relations with any of the great powers while relying on the balance of power between them to maintain the *status quo*. This policy could have spared the Empire the risk of seeing its interests subordinated to one or a group of the major powers as a result of firm alliances with them. The second policy, on the other hand, could have been stipulated through joining a stable alliance with one or a coalition of European states, thus reducing the number of its adversaries. Having to choose between these two strategies, the Ottoman government preferred the second strategy, aligning itself with European powers in order to secure its territorial integrity against external threats.

The Ottoman Empire sought “flexible alliances” with the major powers and adopted a foreign policy agenda based on careful diplomacy. This strategy was at the heart of Ottoman survival: it rested on “exploiting the balance of power between the main European states... and their mutual fear that if either one or a coalition of powers destroyed the Ottoman Empire, this would provoke a major war with their rivals” (Hale, 2000: 18). In other words, this policy involved “playing one great power against another for survival” (Aydin, 2003: 308). Eventually, the Ottomans succeeded in using the European worries against each other; but this was not to last for long. Although, the Ottomans' skillful diplomacy slowed the Empire's decline, it did not, however, prevent its eventual collapse.

By the end of the 19th century, the structure of the international system was changing with some new powers emerging in Europe on the expense of traditional hegemonic powers. This prompted Great Britain to establish new alliances and, hence, began to follow appeasement policies in order to balance against the rising powers in Europe. Yet, these policies led to arms races between inter-bloc rivalries and eventually disrupted the existing balance of power (Sözen, 2008). The Ottomans realized that their pre-WWI balance strategy based on the exploitation of the balance of power was no longer applicable. This was reflected in the Ottomans' foreign policy shift from a "flexible alliances" strategy to one of "permanent alliances".

The new Ottoman alignment with Germany led to its entry into WWI against the Allies. The end of WWI consequentially brought about the defeat of the Ottoman Empire. This drastic event was translated by the Sèvres Treaty (1920) signed between the Allied powers and the Ottoman Empire according to which it relinquished most of its vast territories.³⁰ The Sèvres Treaty had negative impacts on the Turkish people and was expressed as "Sèvres-phobia" or "Sèvres Syndrome," and claimed to have been responsible over the making of Turkish foreign policy under the Republic (Aydin, 2004; Jung, 2003; Mufti, 1998).

The period directly following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire constituted the most critical turning point in the history of Turkey: it witnessed the rise of nationalist sentiments among the Turks- as a reaction to the defeat of the Empire- and the emergence of a national resistance movement led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Inspired by their

³⁰ According to Sèvres Treaty : the Ottoman Empire relinquished its Arab territories to Britain and France, Eastern Anatolia was divided for Armenia and Kurdistan, Smyrna (İzmir) and all remaining European territories, except for the Turkish straits, were given to Greece. Britain, France and Italy were allowed to create zones of influence in Anatolia. A small part of Anatolian territory was left for the Turks, but under severe restrictions.

predecessor's strategy, the Turks under the Kemalist movement "profit[ed] from the diverging interests among the allies and play[ed] them against each other by concluding bilateral agreements" that guaranteed their national rights (Jung and Piccoli, 2001: 65). The most famous was the Lausanne Peace Treaty (24th July, 1923) which replaced the clauses of Sèvres, recognized the sovereignty and the independence of the Turkish state, secured its integrity, and marked Turkey's full integration into the system of states.³¹ For the first time since the last quarter of the 18th century, the Turkish state had finally reached a degree of security and international recognition that the Ottoman Empire had long aspired to achieve.

The birth of the Republic marked a new era of radical transformations from old Ottoman values to new and modern values.³² Indeed, Turkey moved from being a defeated and dismembered empire to a unified nation. Atatürk dedicated himself to building a new nation on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire and to "reconstruct the Turkish state on quite untraditional lines, as a secular republic, committed to modernism and a Turkish-ethnic rather than Muslim identity" based on the principles of "one and indivisible Turkish nation regardless of religious, ethnic and linguistic differences" and 'national unity' (Hale, 2000: 44). Obviously, these transformations marked a fundamental break with the Ottoman past. Nevertheless, "the attitudes of the new state's rulers, as well as its citizens, were inevitably shaped by the experiences of the Ottoman period, or what they learnt from them formally or informally" (Hale, 2000: 13). Indeed, the Ottoman heritage of the devastating interaction between the Empire's political power struggle and its financial dependence of external loans carved strong marks on the republican foreign policy. Hence, although the Ottoman Empire disappeared as a political unit, "it has survived in the political culture and the conflict

³¹ In return, Turkey had to renounce all rights over the Arab provinces and Cyprus and grant non-Muslims minorities full rights and freedom of emigration.

³² Systemic changes were accomplished in education, economy and military. Secularism was accepted following the abolition of Caliphate. Furthermore, women were allowed to participate in electoral process. On the level of the language, Arabic alphabet was replaced with Latin alphabet.

structures of ... the Middle East” and its decline was “simultaneously accompanied by the rise of a new order, which incorporated a multiplicity of patterns” developed under the impact of the Ottoman legacy (Jung and Piccoli, 2001: 56).

The following section will examine how the successor of the Empire, the Turkish Republic, has shaped the country’s foreign policy toward the region in terms of both the international structure and the domestic changes.

Section 2: The Turkish Foreign Policy under the Republic

A thorough examination of Turkey’s foreign policy towards the Middle East since the establishment of the Republic reveals four distinct patterns: neutrality, Westernization, rapprochement, and activism. These patterns correspond with different periods in Turkish history defined in accordance with changes in the international and regional contexts.

A- First Phase: Neutrality and Non-Involvement in the Middle East (1923-1945)

In the early years of the Republic, the internal and external consolidation of the new territorially-defined Turkish state was given the highest priority.³³ The main objective on the Kemalist agenda was to “raise Turkey to ‘the level of contemporary civilization’, and to

³³ In this consolidation process, Atatürk concluded a series of treaties aimed to secure the territorial and political integrity of the Republic. For instance, in early March 1921, during the War of Independence, the Turkish government signed a treaty with the Soviet Union in which both sides agreed to abstain from interference in each other’s internal affairs. On the 17th of December 1925, a treaty of non-aggression and neutrality extended this agreement. In February 1934, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Romania and Greece signed the Balkan Pact containing agreements on non-aggression, mutual friendship and assistance, judicial and arbitrated settlement of conflicts, and the protection of minorities. In 1937, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and Iraq concluded a non-aggression pact at the Saadabad Palace in Tehran which was meant to ensure peace and security among its members. The final step in Turkey’s territorial consolidation was taken few months after the death of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. In July 1939, the independent Republic of Hatay, the former Sanjak of Alexandretta, situated at the north-east corner of the eastern Mediterranean, voted to become a part of the Turkish state. The decision was based on a Franco-Turkish agreement of 1921, in which France acknowledged the existence of a relative Turkish majority in the Sanjak, which was inhabited by both Turks and Arabs. Although Turkey had approved Syrian claims at Lausanne, Ankara began in the 1930s to demand integration of Hatay on demographic grounds.

reinforce the power of the state and its rulers” both internally and externally (Hale, 2000: 57). Atatürk realized that, in order to achieve this goal and bolster the new direction, the new Turkish state must be first strengthened from the inside. Hence, he instituted a series of domestic reforms and, for years, the Kemalist regime was preoccupied with the internal reconstruction, the transformation of the country’s political institutions as well as the modernization and reorientation of the society and the culture on the basis of secular, nationalist and Western values, as stated by Atatürk’s ideology. As a result, foreign policy occupied a second place to internal reforms and was almost entirely influenced by domestic factors.

During the first decade of the establishment of the Republic, Turkish foreign policy was shaped around “the full independence and territorial integrity of the Republic” (Larrabee and Lesser, 2003: 16). The central focus of Atatürk’s regime was to establish Turkey as a respectable member of international society, “to see the country recognized as a respected European power, and to safeguard the hard-won security” that was grabbed thanks to the Lausanne Treaty (Hale, 2000: 57). Accordingly, Turkey followed “a policy of neutrality with a general outlook and anti-revisionist stand” (Jung, 2005: 4). It intended to skillfully reverse the defeat of 1918 by acting as a generally “conservative and anti-revisionist, rather than revisionist force in European politics” (Hale, 2000: 57-58). In order to successfully implement this agenda, the new Republic sought to resolve previous tensions, remnants of Ottoman legacy, with its European neighbors through peaceful ways and to avoid initiating any new problems that would hinder its modernization and westernization policies at home.³⁴ Two major factors smoothed this task. First was the external context of that time, since Russia, the traditional foe, was too isolated and

³⁴ In application of this overall strategy, the “Treaty of Neutrality and Friendship” was signed with the U.S.S.R. in 1925. With the Treaty of Montreux in 1936, the problems over Turkish Straits were also peacefully resolved.

overwhelmed by internal disruptions to constitute any serious threat to Turkish integrity and security. Second, ideological harmony and coherence of the ruling elite of that period, the defined and attainable objectives that they themselves had set, facilitated the implementation of this agenda.

Turkish foreign policy, with its neutral stance and non-interference strategy, had major implications on the country's relations with its Middle Eastern neighbors. After the traumatic loss of the Empire, Turkey chose to "disregard Ottoman heritage in its relations with Muslim states" (Martin, 2000: 86). The Kemalist policy-makers believed that "there was little to be contributed or gained by getting involved in the region's problems" (Ülgen, 2008). This passivity was driven by the belief that the Middle East is "a place that was backward and tradition-bound" and that "any contact with the [region] was basically dangerous" for the secular Western-oriented project (Sözen, 2008). Accordingly, Turkey has consciously moved away from the Islamic world and turned its face away from the Middle East with no intention to engage itself in the domestic problems of Arab countries. It adopted a policy based on the principles of non-intervention and limited involvement in its relations with the Muslim states in the Middle East and, thus, acted as a passive bystander in Middle Eastern politics (Larrabee, 2007).

Besides a certain degree of good luck, the more defensible territory and homogeneous population granted the Republic better chances to protect its security than its Ottoman predecessor. Nevertheless, new major powers remained suspicions toward the Turks' intentions in Europe and the Middle East. To rebuff these fears, Atatürk adopted a very conservative and cautious approach. His views on foreign policy were a "potent

combination of tactical prudence and brazen audacity” (Robins, 1991: 38).³⁵ His immediate successor, Ismet İnönü, was determined to maintain the country’s neutrality. His timid and over-cautious line in foreign-policy-making was expressed in his espousing principles of non-interference rather than alliances.³⁶ Early republican foreign policy was therefore “guided by detente without engagement, by a deliberate neutrality without being isolated” (Jung and Piccoli, 2001: 136).

This attitude had served Turkey well throughout the years of WWII. With the onset of the Second World War, the Turkish government endeavored to keep the country neutral and not to be dragged into war. It was indeed a natural reaction to the previous devastating experience during the WWI, as well as an outcome of Turkey’s limited military power. Saving the country from the death and the horrors of war, without sacrificing its independence or territorial integrity, was the leading national interest. Hence, balanced neutrality and skillful diplomacy during this tragic period had kept the Turkish state away from destruction of war or the loss of any of the territory it had won in 1923. Nevertheless, this policy seemed destined to change in the period directly after the Second World War, along with the changes occurring in the international environment.

³⁵ Since its establishment in 1923, the Republic of Turkey has consistently pursued a foreign policy aimed at international peace based on the principle of “peace at home and peace in the world”, laid down by the Republic’s founding father and first President, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

³⁶ Under Ismet İnönü, Turkey adopted an “over-cautious and timid posture,” See Ferenc A. Vili, *Bridge Across the Bosphorus: The Foreign Policy of Turkey* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), p. 310. Some see its policy toward Greece as characterized by a “reluctance to take risks and ... a lack of innovation” and toward the Middle East “cautious, even to the point of meekness,” Recalling the legacies of the Republic’s early years, and mainly its over-cautious policy, former President İnönü said in 1968: “We should refrain from making enemies as much as possible in our foreign policy. ... We should take care not to take any hasty step that might lead to incurring the enmity of any great state.” Quoted in Malik Mufti, “Daring and Caution in Turkish Foreign Policy”, *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (Winter, 1998), p. 45.s

B- Second Phase: Security-Based Foreign Policy: Western Integration and Isolation from the Middle East (1945- 1960)

The structural characteristics of the international system were a determinant factor of Turkish foreign policy between 1945 and 1960. The end of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War brought radical changes to the structure of the international system from a multi-polar system to a bipolar one. The emergence of the USSR revived one of the country's worst nightmares since the Ottoman times. Under such circumstances, Turkey realized that it would not be able to continue with its "balanced neutrality" in the face of growing Soviet military presence and increasing territorial disputes.³⁷ It became evident that its non-aligned strategy was no longer sufficient to protect its integrity and independent statehood against the Soviet threat. These developments "weakened Turkey's ability to remain aloof from a region whose security complex had indeed become more and more interwoven with the Turkish one" (Jung and Piccoli, 2001: 143).

With these changes in the international balance of power, the country found itself pulled to regional politics and forced to reconsider its foreign policy. Not able to confront alone its vulnerabilities vis-à-vis the Soviet danger, the only viable option for the Republic was to become engaged on the side of the Western allies to balance the Soviet threat. In the light of these new geopolitical realities, Turkey's decision to join the Western camp in the Cold War was virtually inevitable" (Hale, 2000: 137). However, this required the Turkish state to overcome its "deep-rooted suspicions against the West", a major obstacle inherited from its Ottoman past. With the Soviet Union becoming an increasing danger to the

³⁷ In March 19th, 1945 the Soviets formally denounced the 1925 Treaty of Friendship and Non-aggression with Turkey. On June 7th 1945, the Soviet government demanded Soviet bases in the Turkish Straits and a revision of Soviet-Turkish border, which would allow the return of the Kars/Ardahan provinces (of Turkey) to the Soviets.

continuity of the nation and its security, Ankara finally gave up its neutral stance and turned to the West, seeking to establish “permanent alliances”. Hence, the Western alliance (namely the US alliance), the full integration into the Western system, as well as the possible European Union membership became the heart of Turkish foreign policy during the Cold War. From neutrality, Turkey moved to the other extreme by “acting as if she was a cold war warrior”.³⁸

Thanks to its geographical proximity to the Soviet Union, Turkey assumed the task of counterbalancing the Russian power in the region. It was thus considered a strong strategic ally of the United States and represented an asset for the US in its war against Communism. Between the 1950s and early 1960s, “Turkeys’ commitment to ... the Western alliance was at its height” (Hale, 2000: 121). In practice, the engagement with the Western powers was translated by the establishment of close military, political and economic cooperation with the West, the recognition of Israel in 1949,³⁹ and the membership to NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). Hence, “the internal Westernization of the country has been completed with a Westernization of its foreign policy” (Jung and Piccoli, 2001: 137).

In this period, Turkish foreign policy was dominated by “security concerns”, and “Turkey’s policy towards the Middle East also was influenced by this reality” (Özcan, 2008: 108). Although the strategy of neutrality was completely abandoned toward the

³⁸ See R. Gözen, “The Turkish-Iraqi relations: from cooperation to uncertainty”, *Foreign Policy*, Ankara, Vol. 19 (3-4), p. 74, 1995, quoted in Jung and Piccoli op. cit. p. 137.

³⁹ Turkey was the only predominantly Muslim country to do so at that time. Although Turkey voted along with the Arab states in the General Assembly of the United Nations on 30 October, 1947 against the division of Palestine, but this was not a result of an Islamic solidarity with the Arabs, but the result of Turkish fears regarding the region. In fact, the reason behind the cautious policy of Turkey against Israel in the beginning was a the USSR’s support for the establishment of Israel and the migration of an important number of people from the USSR to Israel.

West, in parallel, the Western integration only accentuated the Turkish isolation and distance from its Arab neighbors. Turkey's relations with the Middle East in this era were characterized by "the factors of ideological differences" over the issue of the "Soviet threat, Pro- Americanism, [and] accepting the Arab countries as inferior to Turkey" (Özcan, 2008: 109). Although, the Middle East was not totally absent from the Turkish agenda, Turkey's relations with the Middle Eastern countries took a secondary seat to its relations with the West. Ankara had an eye on the region through the Western, and specifically American, lens and its concern with the Middle East was mainly derived from US policies. Indeed, the Turkish government abandoned the country's "heretofore aloof attitude toward the Middle East" (Mufti, 1998: 43). Nevertheless, it "viewed its Middle Eastern relations as a continuation of a policy in which Turkey dealt with the problems of the region through Western powers" (Karpas, 1975c: 115).

During this period, Turkey generally maintained a "nonactivist and low-profile posture in its approach to the Arab world" (Sayari, 1997: 45). Except for some initiatives like the Baghdad Pact, "Turkey's relations with the region were minimal" (Özcan, 2008: 107). The country consciously alienated itself from the Arab world by staying uninvolved in regional politics and conflicts such as inter-Arab disputes, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the Iraq-Iran War. This attitude was the result of three factors: first, "the advice and sometimes the pressures of the Western powers"; second, "the choice of Western-oriented dominant ideology" which emphasized the "backwardness of the Middle East in cultural terms" and defined it as an unstable and conflict-ridden "area of political risks that Turkey should refrain to intervene" or to get drawn into its swamp; and third, "the negative memories of World War I, especially related to the Arab revolt, still dominated the general feelings towards the region" (Özcan, 2008: 109). For their part, Arab countries largely viewed

Turkey in a negative light and were “highly suspicious of its intentions due to its close ties with the West ...and its memberships to the Western security and cooperation organizations (such as NATO and the Council of Europe)” (Aydin, 2000). Turkey's recognition of Israel in 1949 created an additional rift.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the rise of Arab nationalism led to the “othering” of Turkey by framing it as a “stooge” of the West, and succeeded in building on the negative historical legacy of the Ottoman Empire that existed in some parts of the Arab world, particularly in the Mashreq region.⁴¹

Although Ankara made efforts to improve cooperation with its Arab neighbors, all these attempts ended up to be unsuccessful because Turkey failed to present itself as a trustworthy partner of Muslim countries who considered it as “a spy among them”.⁴² Hence, “this Westernization brought Turkey back into the Middle Eastern affairs, but as a staunch ally of the West” (Jung and Piccoli, 2001: 138).

The Cold War brought Turkey back to the international scene; shifting from its previous “introverted stand”, some prospects of activism were growing in Turkish policies and Turkey finally gained an “extroverted position to the fullest extent”. However, this new activism was limited within the Western agenda and aimed at promoting Western foreign policy goals. In this period, decisions in Turkish foreign policy were “consciously western oriented” (Özcan, 2008: 109). This resulted in a total identification of the country's foreign

⁴⁰ For the negative images held by both sides about the other, see Dietrich Jung, “Turkey and the Arab World: Historical Narratives and New Political Realities”, *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 10 (2005), pp. 1-17.

⁴¹ The legacy of the Ottoman Empire is more positive in the Maghreb countries. This is mainly due to two reasons: First, they were further away from the central administration and thus experienced more autonomy under the Ottomans. Second, they came under European colonial rule much earlier than the Mashreq countries and thus ceased to be part of the Empire long before its demise. The Mashreq region, however, experienced the difficult and confusing process of disintegration and thus has a more negative historical memory in regard to the Empire.

⁴² Turkey attempted to pull the Muslim countries of the Middle East to Baghdad Pact against the Soviet threat. Yet, this step failed, since the Arab countries considered themselves nonaligned. According to Hale “Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East was misconceived and counter-productive” and the Baghdad Pact was a result of such policy. See Hale, op. cit., p. 138.

policy with Western policies. Nevertheless, Turkey's foreign policy during the Cold War could be characterized as “‘mono-dimensional’ where the main focus was its own security” (Sözen, 2008). This primary goal was the main guiding force of Turkish foreign policy. Hence, Western alliance strategy was not a consequence to changes in Turkish perspectives of the world, but rather a reaction to external threats and an urge to protect the country's integrity and to preserve its security.⁴³

C- Third Phase: Diversification of Foreign Policy: Western Disappointment and Arab Rapprochement (1960s - 1980s)

The relaxation of tension between the two superpowers in the early 1960s considerably affected the country's foreign policy behavior. The détente period came as a breathing space much needed by Turkey to reassess its perceptions and question its policy orientations. At that time, Turkey's relations with the West were experiencing a major decline, notably that the country was gradually losing its strategic value for the United States. As a consequence, Turkey felt isolated and inactive in the international system (Aydin, 2004). One way of responding to this new precarious situation was “to pursue a proactive policy in Turkey's adjacent regions while maintaining [its] traditional Western orientation” (Kalin, 2008). Hence, the diminution of the Soviet threat came as a golden opportunity. It meant that “Turkey now had more room for maneuver than it had during the earlier phase of the Cold War” and, precisely, that “it could take the risk of improving its

⁴³ Turkish perception of external threats is rooted in the events surrounding World War I and the subsequent War of Independence, when the Turks fought British, French, Italian, Russian, Armenian, Greek, and Arab forces, first in a futile attempt to maintain the Ottoman Empire and then to fend off the conquest and partition of Anatolia, as envisaged by the 1920 Carthaginian Treaty of Sevres. Among the many enduring legacies of that period are fear of Russian expansionism southwards, and frustration at the disappointing consequences of Turkish expansionism northwards; concern about Armenian territorial ambitions in eastern Anatolia, and Greek territorial ambitions in western Anatolia; dismay at the Arabs for joining the anti-Turkish coalition during World War I; and for Syria's unsuccessful claim to the Province of Hatay as well as Iraq's successful claim to Mosul; and suspicion that the Western powers might at any point be ready to sacrifice Turkish interests in pursuit of their own strategic objectives.

relations with the Soviet Union and the non-aligned nations without endangering its national security” (Hale, 2000: 146).

These shifting patterns were emphasized by the emergence of the Cyprus conflict as a decisive element of Turkish foreign policy. This event marked a radical turning point in Turkish-US relations and unveiled conflicts of interest between Ankara and Washington who refused to support the Turkish cause in Cyprus. As a consequence, the Turks felt that they had been betrayed and that their political loyalty had been exploited by the United States.⁴⁴

During that period, a chain of events weakened Turkey’s pro-Western posture and stimulated Turkish frustrations with American foreign policy -further fueled by traditional Turkish conspiracy driven sentiments toward the West.⁴⁵ Furthermore, Ankara’s suspicion of the unreliability of the Western Allies took concrete form when the US Congress imposed a four-year arms embargo on Turkey following its invasion of Cyprus in July 1974 (Mufti, 1998: 41-42).

As a response to these series of disappointments, the Turkish government realized the need for more independent, diversified and elastic policies in its region. Thus, Turkey’s foreign policy began “to [inch] closer to the Arab world and away from the West” (Liel, 2001: 206). This resulted in a Turkish rapprochement with the Arab and Islamic world. Indeed, Turkey sought to normalize its relations with its Middle Eastern neighbors as a way to gain their support over the Cyprus issue. In this context, the guiding principles of non-

⁴⁴ F. Ahmad, “La Politique extérieure turque”, *Les Temps Moderne*, 41 (456-7), p. 172 quoted in Jund and Piccoli op. cit., p. 139

⁴⁵ We cite the Jupiter Missile crisis of 1962-1963 and the Cyprus crises of 1964 and 1967. For details on these issues see Hale op. cit., p. 133.

interference in regional conflicts seemed to be less meaningful. Hence, Ankara moved from its previous “one-dimensional” pro-Western foreign policy to a more “multi-faceted” foreign policy. Such a diversified role in the Middle East would not have been made possible unless there was an Arab acceptance of Turkey and its role.

In fact, some regional developments, such as “the decreasing importance of Arab nationalism, in tandem with a deepening political and economic crisis which has led to a crisis of legitimacy, as well as the dilemmas created by the ascendancy of political Islam, have contributed to an environment conducive for rethinking Turkey. Similarly, developments in Turkey itself, particularly those having to do with political and economic modernization, improvement of relations with the EU and its parallel reform process, and the evolution of Turkey's political Islamist movement have increased interest in Turkey and made it relevant to the debates in the Middle East” (Altunisik, 2008).

The Turkish-Arab rapprochement was illustrated by the restoration of diplomatic relations with many Arab countries and the exchange of high-level visits with Arab officials. To gain more credibility vis-à-vis its Arab neighbors, Turkey displayed willingness to operate against Western policies and to pursue goals that conflicted with those of the United States in the Middle East (Mufti, 1998: 48). Until the mid-1960s, Turkey's position on the Arab-Israeli conflict was “fairly comfortable for Israel” and Turkish-Israeli “[b]ilateral relations were stable, whereas Turkey's relations with the Arab nations (except for Iraq for a few years) were rather vague, despite perfunctory Turkish periodic declarations of support for the Arab cause” (Liel, 2001: 191). However, after 1967, Turkey progressively shifted toward a more pro-Palestinian position and eventually recognized the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1976 and opened in 1979 the

PLO's representative office in Ankara (Gözen, 1975: 74-75). Moreover, Ankara did not allow the US forces to use the airbase in İncirlik to help Israel during the Arab-Israeli wars in 1967 and 1973 and also participated in humanitarian assistance to Arab states.⁴⁶

In parallel, domestic factors played a role in the Turkish-Arab rapprochement. The military regime that replaced the civilian government as a result of the 1960 coup d'état was in favor of improved relations with the Middle East along with Turkey's Western alliances (Aydin, 2001). The economic crisis that the country was undergoing during the 1970s also was another factor that favored the new Turkish policy towards the region and led to a greater importance of Turkey's Middle East policy.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the improvement in Turkish-Arab relations was believed to be only a reaction to Turkey's disappointment of Western (and especially American) policies.

Turkish leaders considered the rapprochement with the Middle East as an indispensable "adjustment" of its agenda in accordance with vital changes occurring in the international, regional and domestic contexts. This implied that, by adapting itself to new realities, the country did not entirely abandon its general Western orientation or the "dominant principles of the Kemalist worldview" (Jung and Piccoli, 2001: 141).⁴⁸

⁴⁶ It is worth noting that in 1958, Turkey supported the US intervention in Lebanon, allowing the use of the İncirlik military base in support.

⁴⁷ The 1973-74 oil crisis was accompanied with the decision of European states to freeze the recruitment of foreign workers. In this context, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, the Gulf states and Libya provided an alternative for labor migration and a huge market for Turkish contractors. This encouraged the opening of the country to Arab capital and the search for new markets in the Middle East. Hence, the aim of Turkey's policy towards the Middle East in this period was buying oil, paying the money for this oil as late as possible, attracting foreign investment and increasing Turkey's exports to Arab countries.

⁴⁸ Some voices inside the Turkish government were totally against staying in line with the Western direction. For instance, Necmettin Erbakan, a member and deputy prime minister of the several coalition governments during the 1970s voiced his demands for a withdrawal from the "Western Club".

D- Fourth Phase: The Search for a Balanced Policy: Activism (1980 - Present)

The end of the Cold War, which can be termed as a *paradigmatic shift* on the global level, marked the beginning of a new era characterized by historic systemic changes affecting the whole geopolitical landscape. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the bipolar balance of power based on the US–USSR struggle collapsed causing structural shifts in the international system and a reshuffling of regional and global alliances. The resulting chaotic system and power vacuum led the world into a phase of uncertainty and confusion. Along the way, Ankara was not immune from the dramatic changes affecting world politics. On the contrary, “Turkey is perhaps the country that has witnessed the most drastic transformations around its borders [in the aftermath of the Cold War]: change of regimes, dissolution of defense alliances, and ending of ideological confrontations” (Soysal, 2004: 37). These global changes seem to have reduced the country’s geostrategic importance for the West, yet at the same time, it generated new significant challenges.

This new environment provided Ankara with new and tempting opportunities mixed with lots of uncertainties with potential threats. “Once a distant outpost of NATO on the European periphery,” Turkey found itself now “at the centre of the problematic post-Cold War world politics” (Aydin, 2005: 2). Having built its whole foreign and security policies on “the strategic importance for the West of its location vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, Turkey, initially hardly welcomed the end of the Cold War” (Aydin, 2005: 30). In this context, the dissolution of the Soviet Union was simultaneously good and bad news for Ankara. Although this event eliminated the Soviet threat to Turkish national security, this also meant that Turkey lost much of its strategic significance *vis-à-vis* the United States, and thereby, the Western support for its security and survival was greatly reduced. Turkey has not emerged from the Cold War with a sense of “enhanced security,” unlike many other

members of the anti-Soviet alliance (Mufti, 1998: 33).⁴⁹ Indeed, the disappearance of the Soviet danger did not imply that the threats to Turkey's security vanished to no return, but that they have only shifted with new potential threats emerging from the East as religious and ethnic divisions came back full force around Turkey's borders as well as in previously frozen zones such as the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East.

Notwithstanding these security challenges, the post-Cold War period provided the country with new opportunities in these areas and thereby broadened the Turkish foreign policy horizons by expanding its "playing field of maneuver ... in terms of geography, number of issues and tools" (Sözen, 2008). As a consequence, "Turkey moved suddenly from a staunchly pro-western isolationist existence in its immediate neighborhood into a central posture with an intention to have an effect across a vast region" (Aydin, 2005: 2).⁵⁰ Hence, this was Ankara's chance to pursue a more activist and diversified policy in its neighboring regions in order to cope with the post-Cold War era (Mango, 1994; Mackenzie, 1993).

⁴⁹ Foreign Minister Hikmet Cetin, for example, stated in 1993 that "because its geopolitical and geostrategic location places Turkey in the neighborhood of the most unstable, uncertain and unpredictable region of the world, it has turned into a frontline state faced with multiple fronts. It is at all times possible for the crises and conflicts in these regions to spread and engulf Turkey." Others argued that "[i]n terms of foreign relations, our nation is experiencing what is perhaps the most problematic period of the last fifty years of the Republican era. ... Turkey is besieged by a veritable ring of evil." This gloomy consensus arises primarily from a series of concerns relating to four neighboring countries: Greece, Iran, Russia, and Syria. Not only does Turkey have strained relations with virtually all its neighbors, it is also confronted with an increasingly intertwined network of alliances between them. In addition to Russia's treaties with Armenia and Georgia, and the arms sales to the Greek Cypriot government mentioned earlier, Russia concluded an Agreement on Military and Technical Cooperation with Greece on 1 November 1995, during the first visit by a Russian defense minister to that country in modern times. Russia also remains Syria's main military supplier and diplomatic ally, while an even more significant relationship is crystallizing between Russia and Iran. Iranian foreign minister 'Ali Akbar Velayati praised that relationship in January 1996, expressing the hope that "Iran and Russia can be strategic partners." Greece too has been active in constructing alliances.

⁵⁰ In the first few years after the collapse of the Soviet Union Turkey set out to become the unofficial leader, sort of the big brother, of the Turkic states in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

However, “this change in Turkey’s stance and mentality was not accidental, but due to wider changes experienced within and around Turkey during the 1980s” namely when Turgut Özal came to power after the 1980s military coup (Aydin, 2005: 2).⁵¹ Özal played a central role in the formulation of a “multi-dimensional” foreign policy by placing more emphasis on economic and cultural relations along with security matters.⁵² Part of the diversification of Turkish foreign policy was “Turkey’s greater engagement in the Middle East” after the end of the Cold War (Larrabee, 2007). Thus, the Middle East assumed a major position on Turkey’s post-Cold War foreign policy agenda. In effect, Özal was convinced that achieving economic growth goes necessarily through greater rate of trade with Turkey’s neighboring countries which itself would come from a greater political involvement in the regional environment. Moreover, he believed that “Turkey could continue to be a valued ally of the West only by expanding its regional role and influence” (Sayari, 1997: 45).

“The Gulf War in 1990-91 was a critical catalyst for Turkey’s reentry into the Middle East” as well as an “opportunity to demonstrate Turkey’s continued strategic importance and cement closer defense ties with the United States” (Larrabee, 2007). This event “paved the way for a more active policy in the Arab world” (Sayari, 1997: 45). Indeed, Ankara’s foreign policy during the Gulf crisis marked a radical turning point in which Turkey abandoned its non-interventionist policy in regional conflicts and its low-

⁵¹ He occupied the positions of prime minister from 1983 to 1989 and then president until his death in 1993. Throughout the 1980s, he stood out with his “different ideas and ‘vision’ about various aspects of governmental policies, including foreign policy. Özal’s thinking and vision had a significant impact on Turkish foreign policy especially during the 1989-1991 period when he personally oversaw a number of critical policy decisions and new institutions.

⁵² Turkey’s trade volume has increased dramatically with the EU, the US and the Middle East. In addition, with the opening of new playing fields for Turkey in the post-Cold War era, Turkey, besides political and military relations, has entered into intensive economic and cultural relations with the newly independent states of Caucasus, Central Asia and the Balkans.

profile posture in the Middle East.⁵³ For the first time since the demise of the Baghdad Pact, Turkey was acting as a regional power (Hale, 2000, 223-4).⁵⁴ This regional power play will be further explored in Chapter 3.

Nevertheless, Ankara's Gulf War strategy had mixed consequences. Although "the Gulf War underscored Turkey's continued strategic importance to the West in Gulf contingencies, this did not necessarily translate into better relations between Turkey and the West nor did the expected economic benefits materialize since there was no significant rise in Turkey's exports in the Middle East" (Sayari, 1997: 46).⁵⁵ Moreover, the aftermath of the Gulf War "left great policy dilemmas for Turkey" limiting the foreign policy options of Turkey in the Middle East such as "threats against its security, US policy in the Middle East, problems with Syria (for supporting the PKK), Turkey's close ties built on strategic

⁵³ Against the advice of many of his advisers and of the Turkish military, President Turgut Özal threw Turkey's full support behind the U.S. military campaign to drive Iraq out of Kuwait. He enforced United Nations sanctions by cutting off the flow of Iraq's oil exports through Turkish pipelines, deployed 100,000 troops along the Iraqi-Turkish border, and allowed the United States to fly sorties into Iraq from Turkish bases. He hoped that Turkey's support would strengthen its "strategic partnership" with the United States and enhance its prospects of joining the European Community (as the EU was then called).

⁵⁴ Özal advocated that "Turkey should leave its former passive and hesitant policies and engage in an active foreign policy". the Gulf crisis of 1990-91 was a critical turning point, since it gave Turkey an important actual and potential role in US policy in the Middle East, which had been in abeyance since the collapse of the Baghdad Pact. The Gulf War also reinforced Turkish sensitivities regarding national sovereignty. Generally speaking, the Turks have been wary of allowing the United States to use their facilities for non-Nato operations; Özal's decision to allow the United States to use Turkish military facilities to fly sorties into Iraq was the exception, not the rule. After the Gulf War, Turkey allowed the United States, the United Kingdom, and France to use its bases to monitor the no-fly zone over northern Iraq, but under significant constraints, including the requirement that the agreement to use the bases be renewed every six months. In recent years, the Turkish government has imposed increasing restrictions on U.S. operations out of the İncirlik air base, in southern Turkey. Although Ankara has allowed the Pentagon to use İncirlik to transport troops and materiel to Afghanistan and Iraq, it has refused to permit the United States to station combat aircraft at the base or use it to fly combat missions in the Middle East or the Persian Gulf. by shutting off the twin pipelines that carried Iraq's oil exports and permitting US use of İncirlik airbase in southern Turkey for strikes into northern Iraq. Turkey played a key role in the UN-backed military and economic campaign against Saddam Hussein's regime. Özal followed a daring policy and was eager to play a major role in the US-led Coalition during the 1991 Gulf War. Speaking to the National Assembly on 1 September 1990, shortly after it rejected his request for extensive war powers, Özal insisted that "it is impossible for Turkey to pursue the hesitant, indecisive policy of waiting for others to make decisions first." He repeated the point on 2 March 1991: "My conviction is that Turkey should leave its former passive and hesitant policies and engage in an active foreign policy." This policy was opposed by some officials mainly General Torumtay who described Özal's militaristic stance as "a gamble, an adventure" that threatened to pull the "country into the Middle Eastern swamp" and concluded that foreign entanglements endanger Turkey's interests.

⁵⁵ Özal's hopes proved illusory on both counts. The strategic partnership with the United States never materialized, and Turkey's chances at membership in the European Community hardly improved.

cooperation with Israel and the problems with other countries caused by these relations, and general instability in the region” (Özcan, 2008: 116).⁵⁶ At the same time, the activist Middle East policy raised “concerns in Arab capitals about the reemergence of Turkish dominance in the region” (Sayari, 1997: 46).

It was at this point that Turkey realized it could not successfully adapt to the post-Cold War requirements, such as political and economic stability at home. During post-Gulf War I, Turkey stood at a crossroad with various foreign and domestic considerations to reckon with. Turkish foreign policy was challenged by the political instability of its weak coalition governments, successive economic crises, and Kurdish ethnic violence. All these chronic domestic factors prevented the emergence of a stable and coherent foreign policy.⁵⁷ As a consequence, Turkey spent the 1990s in “muddling through without a clear strategy in its foreign policy making” (Sözen, 2008, Larrabee and Lesser, 2003: 188). However, the rise to power of the AKP, led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, after the November 2002 general elections, marked a new phase in Turkey’s history on both the domestic and the foreign policies levels. The leadership of the AK party demonstrates a “renewed zeal for involvement in the affairs of the Middle East” (Murinson, 2006).⁵⁸ Once the party came to power, it started “to capitalize on the new horizons opened for it in the post-Cold War era”

⁵⁶ Turkey has always attributed utmost importance to stability and continuity in its neighborhood, and has been sensitive against to changes in the existing equilibrium within its surrounding region to the extent that the preservation of the current balance is usually considered as part of the Turkish national interest. In this context, the disintegration of the Soviet Union affected both Turkey's foreign and security policies.

⁵⁷ The 1990s witnessed an increase in the role of the army in the foreign policy making> security concerns legitimized the role of the army and limited the initiatives of the government to diversify the options).. the military normally plays larger role in determining what is in the 'national interest' of the Country.. and the importance it plays in Turkish political life. This period was marked by an increasing saliency of Islam in electoral politics which also influenced the foreign policy course. In contrast to the Kemalist vision, the Islamists have maintained that Turkey should identify itself as part of the Islamic community rather than as a member of the Western political, military, and economic organizations. The rise to power of the Islamist Refah party (which long has advocated closer ties with the Islamic states) in July 1996 in a coalition government (had) significant implications for the country’s identity and relations both with the West and the Islamic world. Public opinion polls underscored both the divisions among Turks on this issue and the trend toward increasing identification with the Muslim countries.

⁵⁸ As well as in the Balkans, Caucasus and Central Asia, but the AK party acts much more cautiously than its Islamist predecessor Refah (Welfare) party.

based on a “clear vision, a new direction, a set of principles and a new strategy which were put into operation in foreign policy making” (Sözen, 2008). Domestic factors shaping Turkey’s new power role in the Middle East will be further explored in Chapter 4.

Five fundamental principles have come to guide the new Turkish foreign policy: 1. Balance between freedom and security; 2. Zero problems with its neighbors; 3. Multi-dimensional and multi-track policies; 4. A new diplomatic discourse based on firm-flexibility; 5. Rhythmic diplomacy.

The implications of these principles on Turkish policies were reflected in a clear departure from the traditional positions, i.e., from “active defensive posture” to a more “assertive foreign policy”. This was most evident in Turkey’s active involvement in regional affairs -particularly in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine- and taking the lead in starting initiatives. In effect, Ankara expressed a more positive attitude toward its Ottoman past and realized that it could not turn its back on its history and geography. Accordingly, Turkey has “mended many of its fences with the Arabs”, established close ties with its Middle Eastern neighbors with which it had tense and troubled relations during the 1980s and 1990s (Iran and Syria), adopted “a more active approach toward the Palestinians’ grievances” and improved relations with the Arab and Islamic world more broadly (Larrabee, 2007).

However, the country’s recent focus on the Middle East does not mean that Turkey is about to turn its back on the West. Indeed, “the AKP government has so far showed its commitment to democratization and Turkey’s EU membership process by measurable deeds” (Sözen, 2005: 300-304). Nor is the shift evidence of the “creeping Islamization” of

Turkish foreign policy” (Larrabee, 2007). On the contrary, this new attitude reflects Turkey’s new strategy that consists in balancing, in its foreign relations, between all the regional players. This policy goes in line with a role that Turkey aspires to assume; the role of a prominent regional balancer, which will be further explored in the consecutive chapters.

Conclusion

This chapter described the process of Turkish foreign policy evolution from the defensive strategy adopted by the Ottoman Empire to Turkey’s current foreign policy activism. It highlighted changing international circumstances that led Turkey to redefine its regional role as a balancer within a turbulent regional environment. This historical account of Turkish foreign policy showed different strategy patterns with “many ups and downs” in Turkey’s policy towards the Middle East (Özcan 2008: 107). At the same time, this evaluation in its historical depth has revealed a general conceptual framework of consistent policy since Ottoman times all through the republican period based on the principles of protection of national borders, preservation of the country’s unitary structure and independence, and defense of its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Turkish foreign-policy-making is characterized by “responsiveness to structural attributes” according to which shifts in the international system have determined the path of Turkish foreign policy. Indeed, the geopolitics of Turkey has been a fundamental determinant of Turkish foreign policy since Ottoman times.⁵⁹ It has constituted “the link, in terms of continuity and consistency, between Ottoman and Turkish foreign policy” (Hale,

⁵⁹ According to Gallois (1990) and Boniface (2000) “geopolitics is the study of the relationships between the implementation of power policies internationally and the geographical context in which they occur.”

2000). The pattern of consistency appears again when Ankara began to play a more active Mideast role. Turkey's geopolitical significance and implication on the country's foreign policy will be further studied in chapter four.

How are the global and regional power structures shaping Turkey's new power role in the Middle East? The next chapter will look into the regional circumstances and their implications in shaping Turkish foreign policy and in forging Turkey's emerging role as a regional power balancer.

CHAPTER THREE

TURKEY AS A POWER BALANCER: REGIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

“The truth of matter is that states are interested only in a balance which is in their favor. Not equilibrium, but a generous margin is their objective... The balance desired is the one which neutralizes other states, leaving the home state free to be the deciding force and the deciding voice.”⁶⁰

~ Nicholas J. Skypman

Among the various meanings of the term ‘balance of power’ that have been discussed in the first chapter, ‘disequilibrium of power’ in favor of one given side “has consistently been the [term] applied to the Middle East in the post-World War II era” (Safty, 2000: 144). This chapter examines the regional politics through the lens of balance of power politics. It looks at the Middle East as an international subsystem undergoing a power struggle between various poles amid the existence of a serious power vacuum that characterized the Post-Soviet era where the region has encountered a major power gap leading to two wars: Gulf War I and Gulf War II. In the midst of the regional changes that occurred after the end of the Cold War, new actors emerged as major regional players thriving for control, namely Iran and USA/Israel, each aspiring to maximize their regional

⁶⁰ Nicholas J. Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics*, New York: Harcourt, 1942, pp. 21-22 quoted in Adel Safty, “Balance of Power and Nuclear Deterrence: The Middle East after the Gulf War” in Tareq Y. Ismael (Ed.), *The International of the Middle East in the 21st Century: Patterns of continuity and change*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000, p.144

influence amid weak Arab states. The evolving regional context resulted in significant shifts in the regional balance of power.

Hence, this chapter will explore how the different regional circumstances, in general, and the regional imbalance of power, in particular, has prompted the emergence of Turkey as a regional balancer between the different players to avert clashes and preserve the stability of the Middle Eastern system.

The regional disequilibrium was concretely translated by an external - mainly American- commitment to secure Israel's military supremacy in the region and to maintain the balance of power in the Middle East tipped in its direction.⁶¹ One of the key strategies to achieve this objective consisted in keeping Iran and Iraq, the region's most powerful actors and Israel's staunchest strategic adversaries, perpetually engaged in neutralizing each other's powers and balancing against each other - as it was manifested during the Iraq-Iran War- for the benefit of Israeli military pre-eminence in the Middle East. What has further made this objective sustainable was a series of global and regional developments whose outcomes granted the United States dominance in the region, and subsequently, ensured Israel, the US staunch ally, a militarily-hegemonic position in the Middle East.

⁶¹ During a presidential campaign speech in 1968, Richard Nixon reassured a standard American position when he argued that the United States should make sure that Israel had sufficient military power to deter an Arab attack, and insisted that this meant that "the balance must be tipped in Israel's favor. An exact balance of power . . . would run the risk that potential aggressors might miscalculate and would offer them too much of a temptation." For more details, see *New York Times*, 9 September 1968, p. 43. It is worth noting that Nixon was the American president who gave Israel the green light to develop nuclear weapons, a fateful decision that radiates across the Middle East to this day and every president since has lived up to that Israel-first strategy.

Particularly, between 1990 and 1991, three concurrent historic events shook up the region resulting in significant changes in the regional power balance: 1) the collapse of the Soviet Union as a superpower; 2) the end of the Cold War; and 3) the Gulf crisis of 1990-91. These circumstances created the propitious environment for the United States to assert its primacy in the Middle East through a more direct and strong military presence than it had in the past. The constant US presence in the region- whether indirectly before 1990 or directly after it- have both created a regional military imbalance and instability in favor of the United States and its most strategic regional ally, Israel. However, this reality was about to change after the Gulf War II when Iran emerged as a strong regional player with nuclear aspirations which enabled Tehran to tilt the balance to its advantage.

Section 1: The Balance of Power Tipped in Favor of the United States and Israel

A- Gulf War I

With the demise of the Soviet Union, Washington's primary foe was removed from the power equation leaving the United States as the sole superpower with no equal competitor. Militarily invincible, economically unrivalled and diplomatically indisputable, the United States was willing to fiercely preserve this position and defend its regional interests. Yet, when Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, the United States realized that some of its vital interests in the Middle East were at stake. "By attempting to take over the wealthy and oil-rich emirate, Iraq effectively launched a bid for regional hegemony" (Robins, 1991: 67). Nevertheless, given its dependence on the region for much of its oil supplies, Washington was not to allow Saddam Hussein to upset the balance of power by taking control of a quarter of the Gulf's oil".

This issue was a source of great anxiety for Ankara as well and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait constituted an alarming threat. Indeed, “[i]n view of its proximity to the area in general and Iraq in particular, the regional power balance was of critical concern to Turkey” (Robins, 1991: 68). The country feared that Iraq, with its “large and well-equipped armed forces ... its missile technology and non-conventional weapons capability”, would gain a sort of hegemonic dominance over the region and subsequently tilt the balance of power in its favor, especially that “the other regional powers were alone incapable of neutralizing Iraq” (Robins, 1991: 67).⁶²

In this context, the question for Turkey was “how best to go about curbing Iraqi power without upsetting the precarious balance in other directions” (Robins, 1991: 68). Although, this was “the least desirable of challenges” for Ankara (Robins, 2003: 15), yet at the same time, as noted in the previous chapter, it also offered the country “an opportunity to demonstrate its strategic importance to Europe and the United States in a post-Cold War environment” (Larrabee and Lesser, 2003: 134). Therefore, Turkey showed “little hesitation” in “throwing in its lot with the United States and the growing number of countries which favored confrontation with Iraq” (Robins, 2003: 16). Eventually, “Ankara adopted a very active stance as part to the Gulf War coalition” (Larrabee and Lesser, 2003: 134). It “had rendered important services to the coalition cause, without having itself fired a shot in anger” and, thereby, the country “had clearly demonstrated its strategic importance” (Hale, 1992). Similarly, Israel saw in the regional conditions created by the Gulf War a “window of opportunity” that must be seized. Accordingly, it strived for “reach[ing] peace

⁶² Israel appeared to have balked a surgical strike against Iraq during the spring of 1990 and Iran could not face a strong Iraq since the country was economically, militarily and psychologically weakened by the turmoil of revolution and the eight-debilitating war with Iraq. As for Arab regimes they were weak and fragmented: Syria was already burdened by Lebanon and the need to maintain vigilance against Israel, and the invasion quickly exposed the limits of Saudi armed and diplomatic power.

agreements with its immediate neighbors before the regional balance of power shifted again - if, for example, Iraq or Iran acquired nuclear weapons" (Gold, 2000).⁶³

As regional tensions escalated, "Turkey's Middle East threat perceptions ... increasingly [came] to resemble those of Israel" (Robins, 2003: 204). Ultimately, the new regional circumstances "provided ample incentive for [Ankara] and [Tel Aviv] to forge a new relationship;" and in fact, "they did not miss the opportunity" (Bir and Sherman, 2002).⁶⁴ What helped "to soften the context for Israeli-Turkish relations" was the fact that "the majority of Arab governments lined up with the pro-Western coalition against the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and then either took part in or supported the Madrid peace conference with Israel in October 1991" (Robins, 2003: 248). The emergence of the Israeli-Turkish alliance was considered one of "the most significant strategic developments in the post-Cold War Middle East,"⁶⁵ especially that their partnership "[set] the stage for a new balance of power" in the oil-rich Mideast" (Dibner, 1998).⁶⁶

The Gulf crisis constituted a dramatic turning point in the politics of the Middle East: it created a major split in the Arab world and constituted a significant watershed, not only in Turkish regional foreign and security policy, but also in US set of regional priorities.

⁶³ In fact, peace negotiations were launched after a regional shift in the balance of power caused by the Gulf War, and not earlier. It was hoped, although never fully explained, that a new set of peace treaties would withstand the shifting balance of power against Israel in the future that would come with the closure of the window of opportunity and the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

⁶⁴ For a very long time, Israel was eager to develop relations with Turkey but the latter was reticent. Israel played the suitor to a reluctant Turkey who showed little interest in any strategic relationship with Israel. Throughout the Cold War period, Ankara preferred to seek allies in the West rather than in the Middle East, opting for a policy of non-engagement in the region. Even in the 1970s, when several of Turkey's Middle Eastern neighbors started to acquire weapons of mass destruction and ballistic delivery systems, Ankara pointedly turned its back on the region.

⁶⁵ Alan Makovsky, quoted in "Special Policy Forum Report, The Turkish-Israeli-Syrian Triangle" *Peacewatch*, no. 249, Mar. 15, 2000, available at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/watch/Peacewatch/peacewatch2000/249.htm>.

⁶⁶ Turkey, because of this rapprochement with Israel had been much criticized by the prominent Arab and Muslim States. It is interesting to recall for example the harsh reaction of the Arab and Muslim States that caused the hurried departure of the Turkish President S. Demirel from the OIC summit of Tehran in December 1997.

So far, “the lion’s share of American attention” in the Middle East “has habitually gone to the Arab-Israeli conflict”. However, since 1990-91 developments, a new trend has taken place: “the eastern half of the Middle East host[ed] problems of increasing importance to the United States” and the “Persian Gulf theater” appeared to have “greater weight, in both economic and security terms, than the Arab-Israeli one” (Pipes and Clawson, 1992/93). This conviction justified the US 1991 military intervention in Iraq which eventually secured the United States a firm domination over the whole region.

Nevertheless, the US victory in Iraq came at a price. It is true that by destabilizing Iraq, the United States tamed the Baath regime and weakened one of Israel’s most important strategic foes; yet, it is also equally true that by eliminating Iraq as a regional power, Iran’s regional position was strengthened as well. Indeed, following the Gulf War, Iran reemerged as a major power and became the principal source of threat to US interests in the Persian Gulf region (Pipes and Clawson, 1992/93).

In parallel, the dramatic weakening of Iraq played both in favor and against Ankara’s regional interests. Not only did it bring Iran, Turkey’s geopolitical competitor,⁶⁷ back to the scene, but also Ankara had to face a “major escalation of its Kurdish problem” (Larrabee, 2007). In fact, by undermining the Baath rule, the Kurds in Northern Iraq gained more power which was translated by “the emergence in the spring of 1992 of what is in

⁶⁷ The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War era led to the emergence of a power vacuum in the Caspian Sea basin. These radical changes in world affairs have illuminated the geo-strategic importance of both Iran and Turkey in the Caspian Sea energy basin. Both of these countries consequently have gained invaluable geopolitical advantages that may lead them to increase their powers as important players in the region in the near future. Between 1991 and 1992, Turkey and Iran engaged in a competition to extend their influence over the Caspian Sea energy basin, Central Asia and the Caucasus. For more details see Ertan Efeğil and Leonard A. Stone, “Iran and Turkey in Central Asia: Opportunities for rapprochement in the post-Cold War era”, *Journal of Third World Studies*, Spring 2003 available at http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3821/is_200304/ai_n9173370/?tag=content;coll

effect an unofficial Kurdish government in Iraq” (Hale, 1992). This development was not welcome by Ankara who feared that “the establishment of an independent Kurdish state would probably weaken the Turkish government’s authority over its own Kurdish minority” (Hale, 1992) and would even foster “Kurdish aspirations” to “breakup the Turkish state” (Larrabee and Lesser, 2003: 135).⁶⁸ Turkish fears proved real because indeed “the establishment of a *de facto* Kurdish state in Northern Iraq under Western protection gave new impetus to Kurdish nationalism and provided a logistical [and political] base for attacks on Turkish territory by the PKK” - Kurdistan Workers’ Party- to operate across porous borders with Iraq, Iran, and Syria (Larrabee, 2007).

This chain of events has left behind a shattered Arabian Gulf, a greater power vacuum in the Arab world, a direct US presence in the region and a promising regional role for Iran. Subsequently, all these factors have only reinforced the regional imbalance of power. By the end of the Gulf War, the region was divided between two strategic camps: the United States, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey on one side; Russia, Syria and Iran on the opposite side, with the balance tilting towards the first scale. These developments have left “an enduring legacy in Turkish policy” in relation to the Middle East and represented a “firm break with the past” (Larrabee and Lesser, 2003: 133-4). In effect, “the Gulf crisis and the Kurdish question have given Turkey fresh impetus to become more actively involved in the Middle East” (Hale, 1992). “The Iraq-Kuwait crisis proved to be an important success for [Ankara] in reaffirming the predominance of the geostrategic

⁶⁸ Many Turks view the establishment of a Western protectorate and no-fly zone in the Kurdish areas of Northern Iraq as the catalyst for Turkey’s decade of conflict with the PKK in Southeastern Anatolia. According to Ian Lesser, the Gulf war was “the place where the trouble started”, cited in F. Stephen Larrabee, “Turkey Rediscovered the Middle East”, *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2007.

view of Turkey within policy circles of the United States” (Robins, 2003: 17). This in fact has raised hopes in Turkey that the country “could play an important part in helping to build a more stable, prosperous and democratic order in the Middle East” (Hale, 1992).

However, Turks progressively realized that “the Gulf War had two losers, Iraq and Turkey” (Larrabee and Lesser, 2003: 135).⁶⁹ In the aftermath of the crisis, “potential threats to Turkey originating in the Middle East began to grow at an alarming pace” (Bir and Sherman, 2002) which only “confirmed Turkish perceptions of the region as a source of risk” (Larrabee and Lesser, 2003: 135). Until this very day, the experience of the Gulf War continues to shape Ankara’s regional perceptions. It has revived Turkey’s interest in the region but, at the same time, it has clearly “reinforced traditional Turkish sensitivities regarding national sovereignty” (Larrabee, 2007). Hence, since 1990, and especially since the mid-1990s, “the tendency ... has been toward continued activism [in the region] coupled with greater independence and attention to sovereignty issues” (Larrabee and Lesser, 2003: 135).

The Gulf crisis “had brought about important changes in Turkey’s role in the Middle East, but it had raised more questions than it answered” (Hale, 1992). At least one certain lesson that Ankara has learned from this experience was that the country’s regional interests are best served when Turkey takes a middle stance *vis-à-vis* regional events, that is, by not being entirely and directly involved in the central conflict, without, however, being totally

⁶⁹ Turkey has lost billions of dollars in pipeline fees and trade revenue from the Iraqi sanctions regime, for which Ankara has never been adequately reimbursed. Moreover, Turkish policy during the Gulf War never produced the immediate benefits in Turkish relations with Europe and the United States that Özal had predicted. The neuralgic issues, from Cyprus to Human rights, remained as constraints in relations with the West. Prolonged conflict in Northern Iraq and Turkey’s own Kurdish areas hampered economic development plans and has even become a factor in discussions of the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline. For more details, see Hale W. (2000), *Turkish Foreign Policy 1774-2000*, p.225

disengaged from the Middle East - as was the case before 1990. This approach constituted the earliest phase in the genesis of Turkey's role as a regional balancer. Later on, the contours of this role will be further marked out in the context of the Gulf War II.

B- Gulf War II

The 2003 US invasion and occupation of Iraq was another episode of the regional imbalance of power. In the wake of 9/11, the Bush Administration declared the "war on terror" as part of a new plan for the region aiming to "intimidate anti-American actors in the Middle East, start a democratic chain reaction throughout the region, encourage Arab-Israeli peace, and reduce the threat of terrorist attacks against the United States" (Gause III, 2009). In order to attain these objectives, America's international strategy focused on "preventing rogue states from threatening the USA, its allies and its friends with weapons of mass destruction, and with fighting terrorism, if necessary through preemptive strikes".⁷⁰

Within the framework of this strategy, Turkey was seen as one of the most important forward bases through which these policies would be implemented. Indeed, Ankara immediately endorsed the US war in Afghanistan against Al-Qaeda's terrorist activities, and was in fact one of the first countries to demonstrate its "willingness to send its troops in support of the war" (Finn, 2003). However, the centerpiece of the grand Middle East design was to overthrow the authoritarian Baathist regime in Iraq, allegedly hiding weapons of mass destruction, and substitute it with a thriving democracy. At this point, the United

⁷⁰ For details of America's international strategy see the documents, "Overview of America's National Strategy" and "Prevent our Enemies from Threatening US, our allies, and Our Friends with Weapons of Mass Destruction", Speech by President Bush, West Point, New York, 1 June 2002, "Strengthen Alliances to Defeat Global Terrorism and Work to Prevent Attacks against US and our Friends", Speech by President Bush (Washington, DC, The National Cathedral, 14 September 2001). See Also C.L. Powell, "A Strategy of Partnerships", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.83, No.1 (2004), p.25.

States predicted a full Turkish support for the war in Iraq, as was previously the case in Afghanistan.

However, these hopes proved to be high, and Ankara's attitude towards a US-led invasion of Iraq did not meet the American expectations. From the very beginning, "Turkish leaders had strong reservations about the invasion" based on deep suspicion about Washington's war plans (Larrabee, 2007). Accordingly, Turkey was "reluctant not only to take part in the US-led war but also to ease the latter's military strike on Iraq by opening air bases and borders to coalition troops" (Güney, 2008).⁷¹ This stance constituted an unpredictable and "a surprising deviation, if not a break, in the tradition of Turkish-US relations, in a time of pressing need" (Çandar, 2004: 48). In fact, Turkey had no sympathy for Saddam; however, there were major reasons behind Turkish reluctance and readiness to sacrifice the country's 'strategic partnership' with the United States. Primarily, Turkey did not want to replicate its earlier misadventure during Gulf War I by getting directly involved in the conflict and enduring economic losses afterwards, especially that the enormous financial losses from the first Gulf War had never received adequate compensation by the United States.

Furthermore, another important element was that the regional context of the episode differed significantly from the times of Gulf War I when "there was a coalition of Arab

⁷¹ Turkish-American relations experienced an important crisis the period March-June 2003. Although Ankara has allowed the Pentagon to use İncirlik to transport troops and materiel to Afghanistan and Iraq, in recent years, the Turkish government has imposed increasing restrictions on US operations out of the İncirlik airbase, in southern Turkey. On March 1, 2003, the Turkish parliament blocked a motion that would allow the United States to deploy combat ground forces on Turkish territory on their way to Iraq to remove the regime of Saddam, and refused to permit the United States to use the base to fly combat missions in the Middle East or the Persian Gulf. Such a permission would allowed to Americans a Northern front, shorter and probably more secure, in the war against the Saddam regime.

states supportive of the war and a very clear cut case to be presented to the Turkish public because Saddam Hussein had invaded Kuwait” (Finn, 2003). Obviously, that was not the case this time. Nevertheless, what explains Turkish resistance to the war on Iraq had more to do with national security concerns than economic and regional ones. As much as Ankara had liked to see the overthrow of Saddam, it was also concerned about the stability of Iraq as well as its territorial integrity. These concerns stem from the country’s admission that the Baath regime in Iraq had “provided stability on Turkey’s southern border” (Larrabee, 2007) and that an unstable Iraq is not only a border problem for Turkey, but could pose a problem for Turkey’s security.

In effect, “in Turkish security perceptions, there is no real separation between northern Iraq and southeastern Turkey: they are the geographic and ethno-cultural extension of each other” (Çandar, 2004: 53). Hence, Turkey was “extremely sensitive to Iraq’s territorial integrity” (Kirişci, 2004: 313) as it “feared that a military strike on Iraq could lead the Kurds to establish an independent state next door” (Güney, 2008) and the country knew that any break-up of Iraqi territory and change in the status of the Iraqi Kurds “would rekindle similar yearnings in southeastern Turkey” (Çandar, 2004: 53).⁷² Moreover, there were also domestic factors that played a crucial role in opposing the war, such as the influence of the newly formed government of AKP which comes from an Islamic political tradition – which opposes declaring war against a fellow Muslim country- as well as the pressure of growing anti-Americanism in the Turkish streets after 9/11, which will be further discussed in chapter four.

⁷² In addition to that, a possible refugee flood was another serious Turkish concern. Following the first Gulf War, Turkey had to cope with an enormous influx of refugees and a Kurdish insurrection inspired by the events of the war. An additional concern was the possible Kurdish control of the oil-rich cities of Mosul and Kirkuk where a sizeable Turkoman minority lived.

The war in Iraq broke out on March 20, 2003 without Turkey's support and the country "seemed more a geographical nuisance than a trusted ally of the United States ... in attaining [its] strategic objectives" (Çandar, 2004: 49). Bush's 'forward strategy of freedom' eventually failed to achieve its goals.⁷³ Although the war in Iraq had profoundly restructured the Middle East subsystem and changed the regional political map, these changes did not, however, occur according to what Washington had anticipated or, at least, hoped for – at least not as much as Turkey did.

Since the invasion, Ankara's "worst fears have been realized": first, "Iraq has become a breeding ground for international terrorism", second "the Iraqi Kurds' drive for autonomy - and, eventually, formal independence - has gained momentum",⁷⁴ and third, "Iran's influence has increased in Iraq and in the region more broadly" (Larrabee, 2007).

⁷³ When the US government toppled Saddam Hussein in 2003, it thought regime change would help bring democracy to Iraq and then to the rest of the region. The Bush administration thought of politics as the relationship between individuals and the state, and so it failed to recognize that people in the Middle East see politics also as the balance of power among communities. Rather than viewing the fall of Saddam as an occasion to create a liberal democracy, therefore, many Iraqis viewed it as an opportunity to redress injustices in the distribution of power among the country's major communities. By liberating and empowering Iraq's Shiite majority, the Bush administration helped launch a broad Shiite revival that will upset the sectarian balance in Iraq and the Middle East for years to come. For more details on that see Vali Nasr, "When the Shiites Rise", *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2006. Available online at <http://www.mafhoum.com/press9/282S26.htm>

⁷⁴ As mentioned earlier, Turkish officials are concerned that the creation of a Kurdish state on Turkey's southern border could exacerbate separatist pressures among Turkey's own Kurdish population and pose a threat to the country's territorial integrity. This is a serious concern. Turkey has witnessed an upsurge of violence by the PKK over the past few years. For over two decades, the PKK has waged a guerrilla war in southeastern Turkey, killing Turks and Kurds. After the capture of its leader, Abdullah Öcalan, in 1999, the PKK declared a unilateral cease-fire, and the violence temporarily subsided. But the group took up arms again in June 2004. Since January 2006, it has launched repeated attacks on Turkish territory from sanctuaries in the Kandil Mountains, in northern Iraq, killing several hundred Turkish security forces.

On the international level, “the war in Iraq, the first military conflagration of the twenty-first century, reshap[ed] the entire international system” (Çandar, 2004: 49). Internally, it left Iraq geographically and culturally fragmented, militarily weak and politically instable. On the regional level, it destabilized the whole region, further deepened the power vacuum in the Arab world, and shifted the regional balance of power in Iran’s favor. This event was “registered in history as the most dramatic transnational period of post-Cold War Turkey”, and the decision not to join the war had “major effects upon Turkey’s foreign policy, strategic thinking, and the redefinition of geopolitics in the region” (Çandar, 2004: 48-9). This was one of the driving forces that inspired Ankara’s role as a balancing power in the Middle East.

Section 2: The Balance of Power Tilting to Iran’s Advantage

A- The Collapse of Saddam’s Regime

The withdrawal of Iraq, a powerful Arab country, from the regional power equation created a political, ideological and security vacuum in the Middle East. This, in consequence, had manifest implications on the regional stability as well as the regional power balance. The downfall of Saddam’s regime broke the long-standing Iraq-Iran balance of power and eliminated Iran’s deadly rival and the only regional power directly able to contain it. These new circumstances constituted the unique conditions for Tehran to increase its control inside Iraq and to extend its influence in the Gulf and beyond. Indeed, as soon as the lid of Baath rule was lifted, Iran tried to turn the events in Iraq to its advantage by moving into the power gap while benefiting from the fact that Arab regimes were still puzzled and shocked by the invasion of Iraq. However, the occupation of Iraq was not without cost; on the contrary, it “proved to be a bittersweet experience for Iran” (Ehteshami, 2004). The arrival of US forces in Baghdad brought Tehran’s archenemy to its immediate

borders and “left behind a bipolar power struggle between the United States and Iran”, both eager to fill out the regional power vacuum left by the swift fall of Saddam (Al-Dakhil, 2008).

These new developments brought the traditional Iranian-US enmity back to the surface. Since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the relations between Iran and the United States have been turbulent and largely marked by fierce hostility. Throughout the years, “Iran sought not simply to oppose the United States, but rather to chart its own course as a regional power, an industrial leader, an economic force in the region, and a diplomatic broker for its neighbors” (Feffer, 2009). Yet, consecutive events in the 1980s and throughout the 1990s have prevented the country from achieving these goals, especially that the regime came out exhausted from the Iraq-Iran War, in which the Americans did not want Iran to emerge victorious, and later on due to the US policy of containment - where “the United States and Israel...sought to inhibit Iranian influence in the region and check its efforts to play a larger role on the world stage” (Ward, 2005).⁷⁵

Ironically, however, both antagonists had a certain common cause and their interests overlapped on many fronts in Afghanistan and in Iraq (before and right after the fall of Saddam), and many of America’s war objectives have served Iran’s regional interests. This includes the suppression of terrorism as well as the opposition of Islamic extremists like al-

⁷⁵ The Reagan and two Bush administrations, very close to oil companies and Saudi Arabia, worked to strengthen this alliance by opposing traditional enemies of the Saudis such as Iran and (more recently) Saddam’s Iraq. Indeed, the US armed and supported Iraq in its 12-year war with Iran, thus weakening two Saudi competitors at once. When Saddam overreached, invading Kuwait and threatening Saudi Arabia, the US slapped him down.

Qaeda and Taliban who utterly reject Shiism;⁷⁶ the change of Saddam's regime and bringing to power Iraqi Shiite factions with closer ties with Tehran; and the elimination of potential weapons of mass destruction which constituted an immediate threat to Iran's national security. Although in many quarters the fall of Saddam was "greeted with considerable pleasure, lest Iran be seen to be endorsing an 'American war' and the suffering of the Iraqi people, or ... be accused of running counter to the mood of the region as a whole, in public Iranian officials adopted a skeptical line of analysis, questioning Washington's motives for the war, its military tactics, and its post-war ambitions for both Iraq and for the post-Saddam regional order" (Ehteshami, 2004). Hence, Tehran maintained its two-track diplomacy towards the United States characterized by strong criticism of the US regional policies coupled with pragmatic and realistic measures to protect its post-war benefits (Ramazani, 2004).⁷⁷

Nevertheless, the containment of terrorism and the removal of Saddam did not eradicate all danger for Tehran; on the contrary, it only transformed its nature and signaled the beginning of a new set of problems for Iran. The country rapidly found itself encircled by the presence of US troops on its east in Afghanistan, on its west in Iraq as well as off its

⁷⁶ After the 9/11 Al-Qaeda attacks, Iran offered support in a US-led war to topple Afghanistan's Taliban leaders, who were shielding Al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden. Other areas of potential cooperation include prevention of drug trafficking, environmental protection, health care, trade stabilization, and international transport.

⁷⁷ A streak of pragmatic national interest existed even in the earliest, most volatile, and ideological phase of Iranian foreign policy. Perhaps the most striking example of dominance of pragmatic factors over ideological influences in Iran's foreign policy during Khomeini's lifetime was the secret purchase of arms from the United States and Israel. Iran's defensive war against Iraq occasioned such a bold move. A deal was struck through intermediaries. American and Israeli arms were to be shipped to Iran in return for Iran's help with the release of Western hostages in Lebanon. Six shipments of arms went to Iran, several American hostages were released, each after Iran received a shipment of arms. Embarrassed by the disclosure of the secret deal, some Iranian leaders, particularly Hashemi Rafsanjani, tried to cover up the transactions by denouncing America and ridiculing the American mission which had arrived in Tehran with a Bible and a cake. For more details see R. K. Ramazani, "Ideology and Pragmatism in Iran's Foreign Policy", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 58, No. 4 (Autumn, 2004), pp. 549-559. It is worth noting that even on the social level, Iranian society is probably unique in the region for being both pro-American and for wanting close links with the United States! An isolated Iran is incapable of satisfying the appetite of the country's youthful population for intimate interaction with the outside world and the United States in particular.

southern shores. In this new context, Tehran had “to balance the welcome end” of its “most vociferous Arab adversary” against the deepening presence of “the Islamic Republic’s most persistent critic” (Ehteshami, 2004).

As Iraq descended into insurgency and sectarian conflict, the United States accused Tehran of backing the uprising by arming, funding and training Shiite militias that have attacked US forces in Iraq, while for its part, Iran refuted these claims blaming the US troop presence for the violence in Iraq and for the instability in the region.⁷⁸ Since then, US-Iran tensions have worsened, and their post-war visions have widely diverged and conflicted. In contrast, the war in Iraq offered Ankara and Tehran an occasion to reconcile their points of view, especially that both countries were faced with the common looming threat of Kurdish separatism. Indeed, “Turkey’s growing concern over Kurdish nationalism has brought Ankara closer to...Iran...which also contend[ed] with restive Kurds at home...[based on] shared interest in containing Kurdish nationalism and preventing the emergence of an independent Kurdish state on their borders” (Larrabee, 2007). Indeed, in 2003 relations between the two countries entered a new phase and “improved noticeably” on many levels (Cagaptay, 2004).⁷⁹ The unprecedented Turkish-Iranian rapprochement was not welcome by

⁷⁸ Ankara’s relations with Tehran were strained in the 1980s and 1990s, in part because Iran supported the PKK in its effort to destabilize Turkey. However, after the power vacuum left in Iraq, none of the two governments, joined by Syria, wanted to see the establishment of an independent Kurdish state out of fear that it would trigger nationalist sentiments within their own Kurdish populations.

⁷⁹ Throughout 2003, four high-level visits took place from Turkey to Iran, including two by the Turkish President Abdallah Gül, and six from Iran to Turkey, including one by Iranian foreign minister Kamal Kharrazi. Iran claimed to be cracking down on PKK terrorists within its borders, Ankara’s most pressing concern *vis-à-vis* Tehran. In the cultural sphere there were also advances. A December 2003 treaty on educational cooperation between Turkey and Iran stipulates mechanisms for Turkish students to study in Iran, paves the way for the two countries to share curricula (a difficult endeavor, given that Turkey has a secular education system and Iran does not), and provides for reciprocal scholarships. Turkey’s cooperation with Iran has intensified considerably, particularly in the security field. During Prime Minister Erdoğan’s visit to Tehran in July 2004, Turkey and Iran signed a security cooperation agreement that branded the PKK a terrorist organization. Since then, the two countries have stepped up cooperation to protect their borders. Like Turkey, Iran faces security problems in its Kurdish-populated areas: in 2006, an Iranian group affiliated with the PKK, the Party for a Free Life in Iranian Kurdistan, has launched attacks against Iranian security officials. Tehran has retaliated by shelling PKK bases in the Kandil Mountains. Energy has been another major driver behind

the United States, who was already dissatisfied with Ankara's attitude toward the events in Iraq.

Notwithstanding the challenges, the new regional environment offered immense opportunities for major powers to expand their influence in the Middle East. Each of Iran and the United States considered itself the most 'suitable candidate' for a greater regional supremacy. Hence, both countries adopted conflicting agendas which promoted clashing regional projects. On the one side, the Bush Administration sought to transform the Greater Middle East by enforcing the promotion of Democracy that necessarily went through a regime change in "rogue states" while sponsoring the Arab-Israeli peace process. Under the umbrella of the "war against terrorism", Washington emphasized that US missions in Iraq and Afghanistan were necessary to contain the threat "emanating from Iran" viewed as a member of the "axis of evil".⁸⁰ On the opposite side, "Iranian leaders have ... seen the US military presence in the region as a direct threat, which is heightened by the overwhelming superiority of US weapons and operational capabilities" (Ward, 2005). Hence, Iran continued to resist the US regional plans and to oppose the Arab-Israeli peace talks and upset it by attempting to spread its influence and ideology outside its borders through supporting and funding Shiite parties within Iraq and other Islamic groups in Lebanon (Hezbollah) and Palestine (Hamas and the Islamic Jihad).

the warming of Iranian-Turkish relations. Iran is the second-largest supplier of natural gas to Turkey (after Russia). In July 1996, shortly after taking office, Turkish Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan concluded a \$23 billion deal for the delivery of natural gas from Iran over 25 years. In February 2007, under Prime Minister Erdoğan, Turkey and Iran agreed to seal two new energy deals: one allowing the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (known as TPAO) to explore oil and natural gas in Iran and another for the transfer of gas from Turkmenistan to Turkey (and on to Europe) through a pipeline in Iran. (Turkey's pipeline deal with Iran is at odds with Washington's preference for avoiding Iran by transporting the gas through the Caspian Sea, and, if finalized, it could add a new element of friction to U.S.-Turkish relations.)

⁸⁰ Former US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld have stated in a 2006 transcript released by the Department of Defense: "We need to put Iraq and Afghanistan in that context so that those people in our country who are deeply concerned about Iran, which is understandable, recognize that success in Afghanistan and success in Iraq is critical to containing the extreme impulses that we see emanating from Iran".

Clearly, the power struggle in the Middle East had two antagonistic players: Iran, on one side, and the United States and its close ally, Israel, on the opposite side. In fact, Iranian leaders view the United States as “Iran’s principal enemy”- *the Great Satan*, while Israel is usually cited as “the next most likely foe”- *the lesser (or Smaller) Satan* (Ward, 2005). “[These] views of the Israeli threat are shaped by Tehran’s continued adherence to the anti-Zionist parts of its revolutionary ideology mixed with the recognition of Israel’s military superiority and nuclear capability” (Ward, 2005). Iran has made no secret of its animosity towards Israel and “formally rejects the Jewish state’s right to sovereignty” as well as its integration into the Middle East (Ehteshami, 2004).⁸¹

Israel, for its part, emphasizes that Iran constitutes a security challenge, not only to itself, but also to the entire “free world”. From the Israeli perspective, the Iranian threat derives from the Islamic Republic’s ideology, as well as its support of Islamic movements in the Palestinian territories (Hamas and Islamic Jihad) and in Lebanon (Hezbollah) which directly menace the Israeli regional and national security. As Hezbollah and Hamas gained political ground respectively after July War 2006 and Gaza War in December 2008-January 2009, Iran grew stronger and “gained a strategic edge.”⁸² Immediately, both Israel and the United States realized that Iran has the upper-hand in the regional struggle for power.

⁸¹ In Iran's view, Israel is an enemy of Iran and Islam, and a threat to mankind. Iran's revolutionary goal is unequivocal: Israel should be eliminated. The situation has worsened since the 2005 election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad who has questioned the Holocaust and called for Israel to be wiped off the map.

⁸² In fact, today Shia figures in Iraq, Lebanon and Bahrain have won a significant share in political power. As a result, Iran currently has something of an upper hand in the region. By this metric, Iran is doing rather well. In Iraq, its influence is greater than that of any other regional power; Iran's closest Iraqi ally, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, did not do well in recent provincial elections, but Tehran's ties to the political party of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki and to the Sadrist movement, a Shia party built around Muqtada al-Sadr - both of which fared better in provincial elections - remain strong. Meanwhile, Hamas, Iran's longtime supported by Iran, emerged from this winter's war against Israeli forces in Gaza bloodied but unbowed, much as Iran's ally Hezbollah did from its own war with Israel in 2006. Hamas and Hezbollah now dictate the course

A constant throughout all these changes in the regional dynamics of power is clearly the military powerlessness of Arab countries characterized by the lack of military weight as well as the lack of military capability *vis-à-vis* Iran, the United States and Israel. The fall of Saddam's regime attested again the stagnant attitude in the Arab world. While Iran and USA/Israel were/are engaged in the regional balance of power, Arab countries, short of capabilities, could not be full players in the game. Hence, Arab leaders realized that the only viable option for them in order to preserve the "independence" of their regimes was through allying with one of their powerful neighbors. Therefore, without being totally absent in this game, Arab countries turned into proxy regimes whose actions were prompted and alternately controlled by the two main players in order to simultaneously satisfy the antagonistic powers of the United States and Iran. Thus, Tehran and Washington urged to exploit Arab weakness, each to its own advantage, by involving them in their bipolar power struggle.

In this respect, attempts have been evident, mostly on the part of the United States, to tilt the balance of power away from Iran and in its favor by using the Sunni Arab card. As Iran's regional position strengthened, concerns have raised among Sunni Arab states, mainly Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan, over the emergence of a "Shiite Crescent", stretching from Pakistan to Lebanon, under Tehran's sway. These concerns stem essentially from the radical shift that an increasing Shiite influence might cause in the balance of power

of politics in the Palestinian territories and Lebanon, respectively -- far more so than the central governments controlled by "moderate" Arabs with pro-Western inclinations.

between Sunnis and Shiites in the Arab world especially that the political Shiite Crescent is at the same time an “oil crescent” (Nasr, 2006).⁸³

The United States has exploited the Arab anxiety over the Shiite Crescent as a strategy to sharpen the past deep-seated tension in Arab-Iranian relations. As a response to the US moves, Tehran immediately announced its keenness to cooperate with the countries of the Arabian Gulf on the issue of regional and collective security as a way to prove its good neighborly intentions.⁸⁴ However, Iran’s strategy did not work since Arab fears were confirmed after Hezbollah, a Shiite Lebanese party father-founded by Iran, succeeded in forcing Israel to withdraw from Lebanon in May 2000 and later on in defeating the Israeli forces in July 2006. These landmark events, in addition to the resistance of Hamas, a Sunni Palestinian movement supported by Iran, against the Israeli military operations in December 2008-January 2009, earned these groups the applause of the Arab masses. As a consequence, the Iranian line, in general, and the Shiites, in particular, gradually won a significant share in political power and soon became dominant players in the Arab world.

In the context of the new regional realities, the Sunni leadership realized that such victories could inspire the Islamist opposition and thereby threaten the stability and the legitimacy of their regimes. As Iran’s regional aspirations increased, the United States and its regional allies realized that the balance of power in the Middle East is overturning to

⁸³ Most of oil fields are under the Shiite control stretching in the axis of Iran, Bahrain, the eastern province of Saudi Arabia, and southern Iraq.

⁸⁴ The Iranian leadership dispatched high-level officials as former president Hashemi Rafsanjani and the speaker of the Majlis (parliament) to the GCC region, assuring them of Iran’s good-neighborly intentions. Thus, during his trip to Kuwait, Rafsanjani stated that a nuclear Iran is a common good for all Muslim states. A 1991 conference on Persian Gulf security held at the Institute for Political and International Studies, a Tehran think tank, then-president Rafsanjani unveiled for the first time Iran’s idea of “collective security” in the Persian Gulf. Iran has signed low-security agreements with Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain calling for cooperation against smuggling, and implicitly envisaged some future cooperation on broader security issues.

Iran's advantage. However, Washington's several attempts to restore the regional balance, whether through its own presence in Iraq or through forming anti-Iranian coalitions with the neighboring Arab countries, have not been successful. Still, the worst was yet to come, almost two years after the US-led invasion of Iraq, when Iran declared its intention to develop and acquire nuclear weapons.⁸⁵

B- Iran's Nuclear Ambitions

The Iranian nuclear program is the last chapter in this story of the imbalance of power in the region. The transformation of Iran into a nuclear power is both a cause and an effect of the region's current power equations. Iran's nuclear ambitions appear as a natural response to policies of isolation and containment that have been instigated by the United States and its regional allies in order to thwart Iran's emergence as a regional power. From Tehran's viewpoint, the acquisition of a nuclear weapon would allow the country to regain international legitimacy and, thereby, would strengthen its political and diplomatic position in negotiating with the West with much greater confidence. Furthermore, a nuclear-armed Iran imposes a regional recognition of the Shiite regime among the Arab Sunni majority and promotes the country as the "indispensable regional power". Iranian nuclear aspirations are also nurtured by the existing power vacuum left by weak Arab regimes. These considerations further stimulated Tehran's ambition to seek more influence, not only in Iraq, the Persian Gulf or in relation to the Arab-Israeli conflict, but also in Afghanistan, the Caucasus and much of Central Asia.

⁸⁵ On January 2005, Iran codified that the Islamic Republic would be holding presidential elections that summer. One of the major policy issues that were affected by this election were Iran's development and acquisition of nuclear weapons.

However, Iranian desires have prompted Turkish reservations especially that “Turks take Iran seriously as a regional actor, and despite points of common interest, Turkey and Iran are essentially geopolitical competitors in the Middle East and Central Asia, including Afghanistan” (Larrabee and Lesser, 2003: 149).⁸⁶ Nevertheless, in its “new proactive regional diplomacy”, Ankara would like to consider Iran more as a partner, in trade and energy exports, than a competitor, since any “impending Iranian crisis or accommodation can ignite a series of long-term economic, domestic and external security, as well as foreign policy challenges for Turkey” (Ögütçü, 2007). Yet, Ankara’s constructive attitude was not shared by other regional players. Tehran’s quest for nuclear weapons constituted a “clear and intrinsic threat both to the US and its regional interests and allies”, mainly Jordan, Egypt, the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)⁸⁷ and Israel, who are largely “affected by Iran’s drive towards nuclear weapons” (Freiser, 2005).

1- The Position of Arab Countries

Like the United States, Arab policy toward the Islamic Republic, “seems to be driven by regional balance of power concerns” (Gause III, 2007). Iran’s persistence on acquiring nuclear weapons has confirmed Arab doubt about Tehran’s plans for regional hegemony. Particularly, the GCC countries fear that Iran is trying to emulate in the Gulf region the strategy of dominance that Israel maintained in the Middle East through its conventional and nuclear arsenals. This belief further alienated conservative Arab regimes and made them more distrustful of Tehran’s regional aspirations. Concerned about the

⁸⁶ The origins of the Turkish-Iranian rivalry lie in the competition for hegemony in the Middle East between the Ottoman and Persian empires under Persia’s Safavid (1501-1724) and Qajar (1795-1925) dynasties. The Soviet Union’s collapse left a power vacuum in Central Asia and Azerbaijan that was quickly filled by Iran and Turkey. The rivalry between the two countries has two-dimensions: firstly, each promotes its own form of government i.e. Turkey advocates secular democracy, while Iran promotes its model of Islamic government. The second dimension involves the exploitation of ethnic and linguistic ties. Turkey promotes Pan-Turkism, patronizing the Turkic-speaking populations of Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan; Iran has attempted to extend its influence into Tajikistan, whose inhabitants are culturally Iranian and speak an eastern dialect of Persian.

⁸⁷ The countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council are Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman.

growing power of Iran, yet at the same time acknowledging their lack of capacities to counterbalance a potential Iranian nuclear capability, the GCC countries sought to protect themselves by using alternative approaches. While some policies consisted in combining containment and diplomacy in the hope of restoring the regional balance of power, others consisted in forming coalitions as well as forging an opposing camp aimed at blocking Iran from further increasing its power and to reestablish the balance between the Arab states and Iran, prior to the fall of Saddam.⁸⁸

2- The Position of Israel

While the main strategy of Arab states was to avoid open confrontation with Tehran, Israel's reaction to Iran's nuclear program differed fundamentally from that of its other Middle Eastern neighbors since it is alone in overtly portraying a nuclear Iran as a threat to its very survival. Iran's insistence on pursuing its nuclear power program has only deepened Israel's antipathy towards the Islamic Republic. "In spite of its own vastly superior nuclear capability", Israel "regularly depicts Iran's nuclear program as an 'existential threat'" (Seale, 2009). Furthermore, a nuclear-armed Iran would alter Israel's stance as a regional nuclear hegemon, a strategic feature which for long has served it as an infrastructure for its national insurance policy.⁸⁹ Yet, Israel seems willing to defend this prerogative and to

⁸⁸ There are many indications that Arab countries are seeking their own ways of dealing with Iran. President Ahmadinejad was invited in December 2007 to attend the meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council in Doha. While the invitation was apparently less than full-hearted, and all Gulf countries remained extremely worried about Iran's nuclear problem, the invitation also was one more sign that Iran's neighbors were shunning confrontation. Also, Saudi Arabia seeks to balance, if not roll back, Iranian power—in Lebanon, among Palestinians and in Iraq. However, Riyadh is pursuing its balance of power strategy in a nuanced rather than overtly confrontational way. King Abdallah publicly received Iranian National Security Advisor Larijani in Riyadh, and dispatched his diplomatic trouble-shooter, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, former Saudi Ambassador to Washington, to Teheran in January 2007 for consultations on the Lebanese issue. The King emphasized in the interview that he advised Larijani that Iran should be careful to observe limits in its dealings with outside powers, but at the same time assured the Iranians that Saudi Arabia had not joined a bloc against them nor would Saudi Arabia support any efforts to interfere in Iranian domestic politics.

⁸⁹ The fundamentals of Israel's nuclear capabilities and policies, though never officially confirmed, are accepted as fact throughout the world. Israel initiated a nuclear program in the mid 1950s and crossed the weapons threshold about a decade later. Today, remaining outside the NPT, Israel is considered to be a *de facto* nuclear weapons state with an advanced and sizeable arsenal. Crucially, however, Israel has not

prevent the chance of future deterrence at any cost. Hence, on many occasions, Israeli officials have made clear their commitment to doing everything possible to abort any Iranian nuclear plans that “must be eliminated by force, if necessary” (Seale, 2009).⁹⁰ Accordingly, Israeli strategies range from establishing diplomatic ties with Iran’s neighbors,⁹¹ to inducement, by intensifying its diplomatic activity with international partners, mainly by pressuring Washington to harden its attitude toward Iran, to explicit intimidation, by threatening to launch a “preemptive” military strike on Iran.⁹²

From the Israeli perspective, “Turkey should be on Israel’s side” in its plans to prevent Tehran “from becoming a nuclear power” and that within the framework of the Defense Cooperation Agreement between both countries, Ankara should “play a coordinating role with other Arab countries in Israel’s policy of targeting Iran” (Ögütçü, 2007).⁹³

acknowledged its nuclear-weapons status and maintains a strict policy of nuclear opacity, often called “nuclear ambiguity”.

⁹⁰ Since before being elected, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has continued to escalate his campaign rhetoric threatening military force against Iran, sometimes framing it as “what Israel will have to do if the US does not prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon”. Netanyahu demands that the US agree either to attack Iran if Obama’s potential nuclear diplomacy does not work, or agree to support an Israeli attack on Iran. There are reports in the Israeli daily Haaretz that Obama sent an urgent message to Netanyahu just days before his visit in May 18th, 2009, demanding that “Israel not surprise the US with an Israeli military operation against Iran”.

⁹¹ In May 2009, Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, despite recent budget cuts, has arranged to open a new Israeli embassy in Turkmenistan, a Muslim state which shares a border with Iran.

⁹² During the last few months of 2008, it was reported that Israel have asked the United States for large number of “bunker-buster” bombs, as well as the permission to use an air corridor to Iran, an advanced technological system and refueling planes in order to use them to attack nuclear facilities in Iran. Yet, the Bush administration had turned down an Israeli request for certain security items that could upgrade Israel’s capability to attack Iran. The US administration reportedly saw the request as sign preparations were moving ahead for an Israeli attack on Iran. For more details see <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1019989.html>

⁹³ This what Former Israeli Prime Minister Olmert implied in one of his visits to Ankara in 2007, which was later on repeatedly pronounced from the Israeli side. Israel is seeking Turkish cooperation against Iran’s nuclear program beyond diplomatic efforts by trying to get Ankara to share Israel’s determination to “prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear power”, by emphasizing Turkey’s role as “a leading Muslim state which remains at the centre and which may constitute a bridge to Arab countries”. What Israel aspires to is to use Turkey’s airspace to launch an attack on Iran’s nuclear installations.

3- The Position of Turkey

In fact, Turkey's reaction to Iran's nuclear ambitions seems a complicated matter at best.⁹⁴ To some extent, Ankara is more concerned about "the clear [short-term] and present danger of PKK terrorism than a future [long-term] threat of Iranian nuclear program" (Kalin, 2008). "At the same time, Turkey does not wish to undermine the recent improvement in bilateral relations with Iran" especially that "Tehran's enhanced cooperation in combating Kurdish rebels, who are also active in Iran, at a time when Washington and Tel Aviv turn[ed] a blind eye" (Ögütçü, 2007).⁹⁵ Moreover, Ankara considers that the country is only indirectly threatened by Iran's nuclear program because it "perceives ... that it is not the reason Iran has sought to 'nuclearize' in the first place. [Accordingly], in the face of a nuclear-armed Iran, Turkey will not likely seek out nuclear programs of its own" (Freiser, 2005).⁹⁶ However, this does not imply that Ankara supports Iran's nuclear plans. On the contrary, "Turkey does not want to see a nuclear Iran, but that's chiefly because Turks are more afraid of the regional repercussions of such a development than of the [direct] threat it would pose to their own country" (Ülgen, 2009).

⁹⁴ The Turks had always been wary of Iran and of its nuclear ambitions, but in November 2008, Erdoğan told a Washington crowd that "countries that oppose Iran's nuclear weapons should themselves not have nuclear weapons". However, it should be noted that at least some in the AKP leadership still view Iran with suspicion due to its Shiite nature. See S. Çağaptay, "The AKP's Foreign Policy: The Misnomer of "Neo-Ottomanism", *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, 24 April 24 2009. Available at: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/print.php?template=C06&CID=1270>

⁹⁵ Ankara and Tehran have been collaborating on the Kurdish issue since the 1930s until the mid-1960s, and now they are in full collaboration on the issue of PKK terrorism. In other words Turkey sees the possibility of a nuclear Iran as a long-term threat; the short term threat for Turkish political and military elites is the PKK terrorism, and possibility of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq. In all these issues, Turkey needs the help or support of Iran.

⁹⁶ In fact, a longstanding member of NATO, Turkey is formally protected by the collective security guarantee in application of Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty. Furthermore, the country's ties to the West are further strengthened – at least in theory – by its ongoing accession talks with the European Union. Both these factors make it less likely that Turkey would respond to a nuclear capable Iran by seeking to acquire nuclear weapons itself. However, the Turks have a lingering skepticism about NATO guarantees, which they did not feel were properly honored in the First and Second Gulf Wars. Hence, for Ankara, NATO has become more of a symptom of the past than a solution to the future, and Turkey's geopolitical and strategic situation *vis-à-vis* a nuclear Iran capitalizes on this new landscape.

Turkey realized that “the prospects of a nuclear Iran would encourage other states to follow suit” (Inbar, 2004). In fact, if Tehran’s nuclear program is unchecked, there is reason for concern that it could trigger a regional arms race among Iran’s neighbors who would seek their own nuclear deterrents programs in order to provide a counterbalance to Iran.⁹⁷ Of course, Turkey does not want to consider this eventuality, because the consequent nuclear proliferation would have dangerous consequences not only for the region’s stability, but also for Turkish national security. Nevertheless, Ankara’s key concern seems to lie elsewhere. It is the case where the US and its allies lose patience and decide to resort to violent responses such as sabotage, or in the worst case, a US-acknowledged Israeli preventive military attack on the Iranian nuclear plant that could possibly lead to a form of direct or indirect American military intervention in Iran. These considerations are a source of serious concern within official circles in Ankara.

Besides the possibility of immense economic costs for the country, Turkish political and military elites believe that a US military attack and intervention in Iran will come at the expense of Turkey’s national security and integrity interests. Given its proximity to Iran, Ankara fears that any military strike on Iran might turn Turkey itself into a target. Furthermore, Turkish leaders have always considered the destabilization of Iran through a foreign military intervention as a security threat for Turkey, because it would lead to a disintegration of Iran. This would, first, strengthen Kurdish nationalism or facilitate the

⁹⁷ If any one of Iran’s neighbors were to seek to acquire nuclear weapons in response, this would put additional pressure on others to do the same, because of intra-regional security and status considerations. A proliferation cascade would become more likely if Israel felt obliged to relinquish its long-standing doctrine of nuclear ‘opacity’ or ambiguity, whereby it refuses to confirm or deny any aspect of its nuclear activities. It has been reported that at least 13 countries in the Middle East announced new or revived plans to pursue or explore civilian nuclear energy. For more details see <http://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-dossiers/nuclear-programmes-in-the-middle-east-in-the-shadow-of-iran/nuclear-programmes-in-the-middle-east-in-the-shadow-of-iran-press-statement/>

establishment of an independent Kurdish state; second, it would spread terrorism, increase militancy and embolden hard-liners in the region; and third, it would further radicalize the Arab and Muslim worlds. Moreover, any “military action against Iran would also drive the price of oil to new heights, increasing the chances of an international economic crisis and a global recession” (Ögütçü, 2007).

Such occurrences would jeopardize the country’s national integrity and security, challenge its economic development, and undermine its democratic secular system. Ankara has already gone through a hard experience after the dramatic developments in Iraq since 2003, when Turkey endured economic difficulties and suffered from terror attacks by the extreme Islamic organizations. Hence, the country certainly does not want to see this happening again- simply, it “does not want a new war and destabilization along its borders and in the region (or a new “Pandora’s Box”)” (Çetinsaya, 2008).

Therefore, the Iranian nuclear question creates a series of dilemmas for Turkey in the pursuit of its national interests in the region. Iran’s growing nuclear capability will not only “change the [strategic] balance that has existed between the two nations since the Treaty of “Qasr-i Shirin”⁹⁸ in 1639 in favor of Iran (Kibaroglu and Caglar, 2008) but will also “have a destabilizing impact on the Persian Gulf region” (Larrabee, 2007) and consequently upset the delicate balance of power in a combustible region, where no single country looks dominant which would eventually creates a new security environment. This is bound to reinforce the country’s sense of insecurity and thereby “force Turkey to take countermeasures for its own security,” a phase that Ankara does not wish to reach

⁹⁸ The Treaty of Qasr-i Shirin (also called the Treaty of Zuhab) of 1639 brought an end to 150 years of intermittent warfare between the Ottomans and Safavids and established a boundary between the two empires that remained virtually unchanged into modern times.

(Larrabee, 2007).⁹⁹ Hence, the Iranian question will no doubt generate further complexities and uncertainties for Ankara. Turkey's leadership has already faced a serious dilemma in responding to growing pressure from both Washington and Tehran.

Ankara will feel further heat to make a critical choice in what promises to be a "permanent state of crises" in its region (Ögütçü, 2007). This is of particular importance because an indecisive stance, as was the case with Iraq - which had cost Turkey dearly in Northern Iraq- is no longer an easy option. In the light of these realities, Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons will stay at the top of the agenda for the foreseeable future. Turkey realizes that it is not in its benefit to see Iran gaining a hegemonic posture through its nuclear power which would prompt a regional cascade of proliferation among its neighbors -something that is not in Turkey's benefit- nor is it in its interest to witness a regional clash between Israel/USA and Iran.

As noted earlier, Ankara will recognize that the country's regional interests are best served when Turkey takes a middle stance *vis-à-vis* regional events; that is, by not being entirely and directly involved in the central conflict, without, however, being totally on the sidelines. This was translated by Ankara's increasing active role in working to resolve conflicts across the Middle East in generally, and precisely, its persistent efforts to help find a solution for the tensions over Iran's nuclear aspirations.¹⁰⁰ This aspect of Turkey's active

⁹⁹ If Iran refuses to comply with the demands of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Ankara will theoretically have essentially three options: 1) A nuclear Iran is likely to heighten Turkey's interest in missile defense and lead it to expand its cooperation on missile defense with the United States and Israel; 2) beef up its conventional military capabilities, especially medium-range missiles; or 3) develop its own nuclear capability. Turkey would consider developing the nuclear option only as a last resort -- if, say, its relations with the United States declined, Ankara no longer saw NATO's guarantees as credible, and the EU rejected Turkey's membership. A serious effort by Iran to develop a nuclear capability could undercut its rapprochement with Turkey and drive Ankara to strengthen its ties with the West, especially the United States.

¹⁰⁰ In July 2008, Iran and the six world powers - Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States- requested Turkey's help in negotiating a settlement to the standoff over the Islamic state's nuclear

balancer policy took a decisive turn when Ankara insisted not to allow Washington to wage any strike on Iran from the İncirlik airbase.

Conclusion

The US Administration had assured America's regional allies that before Bush leaves office Iran would be radically weakened and its nuclear program only a "symptom of the past". However, American estimations proved wrong. The Bush Administration's "preventive measures to slow Iran's quest for power- such as economic sanctions policy to slow Iran's growth- have not been entirely effective" and efforts to tame Iran and get it to abandon its nuclear plans have completely failed leaving the region far from stable (Freiser, 2005).¹⁰¹ "Iran [still] enjoys great wealth, is the most powerful external influence in Iraq, holds considerable sway over both Hamas and Hezbollah, [and above that is still pursuing nuclear enrichment]. The recent surging influence of Iran in the Gulf, Afghanistan, Iraq and Central Asia has made Tehran a major force to reckon with in any equation regarding this region" (Ögütçü, 2007). In the light of these realities, the Obama Administration specified more realistic goals in the Middle East, specifically with regard to Iran. Although it is

programme. All actors turned to Turkey since it is a NATO member and a candidate for European Union membership and at the same time it has good ties with eastern neighbor Iran.

¹⁰¹ For instance, the United States led efforts to toughen U.N. sanctions on Iran over its nuclear program and in March 2008 the Security Council adopted a third sanctions resolution. Iran says the program is lawful, peaceful and designed only to generate electricity, but it has failed to convince the West. Iran's economic sectors remain heavily reliant upon its energy resources. While its energy industry is ineffectually managed due to haphazard state control, questionable oversight procedures, as well as murky forms of regulation, these inadequacies and potential liabilities make little difference to thirsty states such as China and India that have a growing demand for energy resources. Because of this, Tehran is able to compensate for US economic sanctions through its growing relations with China and India. Further, in the case of China, it is not in Beijing's present interests to see Iran weakened and for the US to be strengthened, since increased US influence in the Middle East and Central Asia is looked upon by Chinese policymakers as a threat to China's growth as a regional power. These geopolitical interests are intrinsically linked to pipelines and other infrastructure investments through Central Asia that have everything to do with China's and India's interests in Iran. In sum, the Iranian leadership recognizes the energy demand realities that limit the consequences of US economic sanctions, regardless of US sanctions, countries experiencing high growth rates and/or rapid industrialization (China and India) or countries that have large populations with no indigenous hydrocarbon resources (Western Europe) will trade with Iran, regardless of the "war on terrorism". In addition, the current insurgency in Iraq, along with the consistent insurgent tactic of targeting oil pipelines there, has an impact on the markets and will continue to place countries such as Iran - regardless of the regime's nature or ideological affiliation - on the VIP list of oil and gas dealers.

difficult for the new administration to accept Iran as a nuclear power, however, it soon realized that “the Iranian leadership has to be engaged rather than isolated in the hope that it might just go away” (Gause III, 2009). Thus, the new administration is trying to balance previous US policies by approaching Iran through pursuing a nuclear diplomacy and a “carrots and sticks” policy.¹⁰²

Indeed, President Obama “has inaugurated a new rhetoric” on Tehran according to which “the United States does not assume an automatically hostile posture toward Iran” -or the Muslim world in general- “but will base its actions and reactions on deeds and “mutual respect” rather than perceptions of ideology” (Feffer, 2009). Nevertheless, Obama’s position *vis-à-vis* Iran remains ambiguous and has not gone beyond a mere willingness to unconditional talks which came across as tremendous events – namely the War in Gaza in December 2008–January 2009 - revealed the depths of their past mutual resentment.¹⁰³ These developments lead us to wonder about the possible connection between Obama’s pullout plan from Iraq and agreeing to hold talks with Tehran without preconditions and whether Obama will use this arrangement as a bargaining chip in talks with Iran ensuring US troops withdrawal from Iraq, international security guarantees for Iran, acceptance of the growing Iranian influence in Iraq and of its regional role, all in exchange for a halt to its nuclear program. However, Tehran is most likely to decline the offer because these are only provisional and temporary guarantees that would subordinate Iran to US arrangements.

¹⁰² President Obama declared that the United States is prepared to offer Iran economic incentives to stop its nuclear program, but he also warned that sanctions could be toughened if it refused. He said his administration would work with international partners to present a set of carrots and sticks to encourage Iran to halt its nuclear development program. “In terms of carrots, we can provide economic incentives that would be helpful to a country that despite being a net oil producer is under enormous strain, huge inflation, lot of employment problems”, Obama said, without specifying what form the incentives would take. “But we also have to focus on the sticks. In order for us to change Iran’s behavior we may have to tighten up those sanctions”.

¹⁰³ New U.S. President Barack Obama said in January 2009 that America was prepared to extend a hand of peace to Iran if it “unclenched its fist”. In return, Ahmadinejad said Tehran was ready to talk but demanded a fundamental change in US policy.

Today, despite worldwide optimism, Tehran remains skeptical of Washington's plans in the Middle East and of Obama's political direction in the region. Iranian authorities considered that Obama's policies did not significantly differ from those of his predecessors since the new president is following the same "wrong path" by supporting Israel at the expense of the Muslim World. Accordingly, if Iran insists on pursuing its nuclear plans, the current power equation and the chronic regional power imbalance will be maintained.¹⁰⁴ This will give Washington a valid excuse to justify a strong US military presence in the region and to forge a stronger alliance with some Arab countries, namely Saudi Arabia and Egypt, to counterbalance the rising Iranian threat. This will only accentuate the already existing polarization in the Middle East.

Recent years have seen the emergence of a new division, or a new "cold war," in the Middle East: on the one hand the so-called radicals (or anti-American actors: Iran, Syria, Hamas, Hezbollah); on the other, the so called moderates (or pro-Americans: Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait) (Çetinsaya, 2008). Within this regional structure, "the traditional contest for influence" has been played in political terms as well as "in military ones by the stronger regional powers (Egypt, Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Syria) and the playing fields [have been] the weaker powers (Iraq, Lebanon, and the Palestinian territories) whose governments cannot prevent outsiders from interfering in domestic politics (Gause III, 2009). In their struggle for power over Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine, both sides fight proxy wars as has been expressed in July 2006 war in South Lebanon and December 2008-January 2009 war in Gaza.

¹⁰⁴ Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said, "We are closely pursuing all the current developments in Washington's policies. However, we have seen no revolution as a result of Barack Obama's change motto". Iranian leaders see the US attitude as aggressive. Mottaki describes the differences in approach between the United States and Iran with an analogy to American football and a game of chess. "We have no interest in American football. Rather, we are interested in a fair chess match, which requires fortitude and patience because in chess an unnecessary or illogical move will lead to defeat".

In its attacks in the Gaza Strip, Israel has used “brute force” to retouch its reputation that has effectively been damaged by Hezbollah’s successful resistance in Lebanon, and in a bid to change the balance of power in the Middle East to its favor. Nevertheless, Hezbollah and Hamas’ consecutive successes in facing the Israeli military operations kept the regional balance of power tilting towards Iran. This signaled that no single power of the pro-American camp, or coalition, is able to restrain Tehran’s regional aspirations or, at least, to counterbalance them. This fact has made Iranian leaders “remarkably self-confident”.

To the extent that this attitude prevails, it will be harder to persuade Iran to impede its nuclear enrichment and to cooperate with the international community regarding its nuclear program. Furthermore, there seems to be a lack of harmony among the international powers on how to deal with Iran’s nuclear power plans. Indeed, “while the US, the EU, Russia, and China are in broad agreement that the advancement of a military nuclear program in Iran is unacceptable, they have not yet reached a consensus on how to stop Iran. However, Russia and China seem genuinely to believe that the most effective means is inducement, not pressure. Nevertheless, so far, strategies of incentives did not totally appeal to Iran, and the most recent example is Obama’s “carrots and sticks” policy which did not succeed in convincing Iran to desist from continuing in its nuclear enrichment activity or to suspend its nuclear-enrichment program.

To the present date, the situation in the Middle East has shown little signs of progress, if any. The United States remains Iran’s principal enemy and the country’s antipathy towards Israel is uncompromising. Despite US and Israeli warnings, as well as the European condemnation, Tehran has shown no intention of retreat regarding its nuclear

enrichment. Given that the US military presence in the Middle East was “one of the elements that provoked Iran’s nuclear ambitions” (Al-Dakhil, 2008), this implies that, as much as the United States tightens its grip on the region and as long as Iran is surrounded by regional nuclear powers, such as Pakistan, India, and Israel, Tehran will carry on with its nuclear plans. These considerations suggest that the Iranian nuclear weapon is turning into an inescapable reality with a high potential to drive the region into a new war.

Today it is clear that, if none of the main regional players are willing to compromise, they will remain involved in a continuous power struggle which inhibits any chance for cooperative and consensual solutions. These regional circumstances pave the way for a potential conflict escalation which eventually leads to an ineluctable clash and to an open direct violent confrontation between USA/Israel and Iran as each seeks to maintain its autonomy and increase its influence in the Middle East. In this new picture, all groups look to Turkey, and all groups want Turkey in their camp, because they recognize that “Turkey, Iran’s next door neighbor, long-standing historic rival and the largest military/economic power in the region, remains the only country, which can genuinely engage or confront Iran in the region” (Ögütçü, 2007). If everybody wants Turkey on its side, the critical question remains: what does Turkey want?

In fact, Turkey does not want to join any group or to be a salient contributor in kindling regional clashes and ripping the region apart. Turkey does not want to be part of the core struggle or to get involved in the central conflict between both camps; nor does Turkey want to stay a silent witness of the regional fragmentation. Turkey is extremely anxious over these developments in the region. Turkey does not want confrontation or a new cold war in the Middle East between the Shiites and Sunnis or pro-Americans and anti-

Americans; rather, Turkey wants an engaging dialogue, security-building measures, peace and stability, cooperation and integration. Turkey wants discourses based on confrontation to be abandoned, and an active, constructive and multidimensional discourse and policy which emphasizes peace, security, democracy and stability to be developed.

In one word, Turkey wants to play a constructive, facilitating and balancing role in the new Middle East. Turkey wants to establish balanced and equal relations with all actors on all levels. In the context of the new regional realities where the main regional powers are not able to balance against each other, Ankara increasingly emerged as a third party aiming to divert major confrontation between the regional antagonists through playing the role of the “balancer” in a heavily-polarized area. What facilitated Turkey’s intervention as the “holder” of the regional balance is the current multipolar structure of the Middle East subsystem with its tendency towards bipolarity in times of crisis. This configuration allows Ankara to play a decisive and effective balancing role by consecutively adding the weight of its diplomatic position to the power of one state or many with the “weaker” stance within the system in order to restore the balance and preserve the regional stability. By the use of wise diplomacy, Ankara is preventing the occurrence of clashes, and by that, it is maintaining its own independence as well as the independence of all the other regional players.

If the regional circumstances incontestably call for the emergence and intervention of a “balancer”, and if Turkey, by default of other actors, is the best-suited to play this role, the question is to know whether Turkey can fulfill the balancer role by definition. In other words, it is to answer the question of whether Ankara meets the requirements of the

balancer mission, if it has what it takes to keep peace among the regional dyads, to hold the regional balance, and to carry the fate of the region in its hands.

The next chapter looks into the domestic factors, as well as the unique and required characteristics that have positioned Turkey to play an acceptable and effective role of a regional “balancer”.

CHAPTER FOUR

TURKEY AS A POWER BALANCER: DOMESTIC FACTORS AND INTERNAL REQUISITES

**“In the traditional conception ...
the domestic structure is taken as given;
foreign policy begins where domestic policy ends...
Of course, the domestic structure is not irrelevant in any
historical period. At a minimum, it determines the
amount of the total social effort which
can be devoted to foreign policy.”¹⁰⁵**

~ Henry A. Kissinger

A significant and growing literature on International Relations argues that domestic politics constitute necessarily a central part in the explanation of states' foreign policies. This holds particularly true when it comes to understanding Turkey's foreign policy preferences. The evaluation of Turkish foreign policy events, examined in chapter two, revealed a consistent pattern of policy since Ottoman times defined primarily in terms of external factors. While these factors have become more influential in shaping the country's foreign policy course in the aftermath of the Cold War, this time domestic factors gained predominance and could not be overlooked in understanding Turkish foreign policy behavior. Hence, the interplay between external and domestic factors affects significantly Turkish foreign policy decision making.¹⁰⁶ In the context of the recent events in both the

¹⁰⁵ Henry A. Kissinger, "Domestic Structure and Foreign Policy", *Daedalus*, Vol. 95, No. 2, Conditions of World Order (Spring, 1966), pp. 503-4

¹⁰⁶ On the interactions between Turkey's internal factors and the external factors in shaping the country's foreign policy see Lesser, Ian O., "Turkey in a Changing Security Environment", *The Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 54, No. 1, Fall 2000, pp. 183-198.

international and the regional systems, Turkey's foreign policy occurs, once again, at the intersection of regional circumstances and domestic considerations.

After exploring in chapter three the regional conditions that drive Turkey to act as a regional balancer, this chapter looks into the domestic factors that have inspired, justified and motivated this role. As noted in chapter one, it must be reminded that the role of balancer is not given, on the contrary, it requires a set of features, factors and forces that allow the country to fulfill this task effectively and successfully. Accordingly, this chapter explores Turkey's intrinsic characteristics that make it apt to play the role of a capable regional balancer. This includes Turkey's geographical location, the nature of its political system, the quality of its leadership, as well as the country's economic strength and military might. At the same time, while studying these factors, ethnic and religious considerations are examined as driving forces behind Turkish foreign policy. The set of these fundamental features constitute the domestic environment that facilitated Ankara's mission as a regional power balancer. Finally, this chapter concludes that Turkey's balancer role heavily depends on domestic considerations which affect both the formulation and the execution of the new Turkish foreign policy.

Section 1: Strategic Geographical Location and Important Geopolitical Position

Turkey is often noted for the 'uniqueness' of its geographical location as "the gateway from Europe to Asia" (Jung and Piccoli, 2001: 1). Apart from Russia, "Turkey is the only state ... with territory in both Europe and Asia, and is affected by and affects international politics in both south-eastern Europe and the eastern Mediterranean, in Transcaucasia and the southern regions of the former Soviet Union, and in the northern part of the Middle East" (Hale, 2000: 7). Not surprisingly, this strategic geographical position

has traditionally been a major factor in the determination of Turkish foreign policy since the Ottoman times (Larrabee and Lesser, 2003; Robins, 2003; Jung and Piccoli, 2001; Hale, 2000). For instance, Ottomans used the geographical assets as a political means for expansion. After the demise of the Empire, the Republic's attention shifted from Middle Eastern connections towards developing Western ties and seeking European affiliations. Accordingly, Turkey's geopolitical factor "played an increasingly crucial role in [its] relations with Western European institutions and in its incorporation into the Atlantic security system" (Aybak, 2002: 221). Today, in the light of the changes occurring around Turkey's borders, its geographic dimension is, once again, a significant input for the country's policy planning and appears as one of the most important factors allowing Ankara to play the role of a regional power balancer.

The importance of Turkey's geographical position stems first and foremost from what such location represents in terms of strategic value as well as in regard to its impact on the country's position on both the international and the regional geostrategic map. However, Ankara's emergence as a geopolitical and strategic actor in world politics is not a novel development; for one thing at least, Turkey's geographic position at the crossroads of the East-West and North-South power axes has been a constant factor. Yet, the implications of this special feature varied in time as a result of alterations in the international and regional power balances, changes in the regional political context, economic factors etc. Historically, "Turkey's most strategically significant asset has been its control of the straits of Dardanelles and Bosphorus, on which Russia had depended for direct maritime access to the Mediterranean, and the only route through which Britain, France and later the United States could challenge Russia in the Black Sea (or try to assist it, during the First World War)" (Hale, 2000: 7). It was not long until Turkey realized the evolving importance of its

geographical location in the eyes of the West. Given its easy access to strategically important economic regions and major energy resources, Turkey represented the necessary entry ticket for Western powers to the region especially that it “stands at the nexus of three areas of increasing strategic importance to the United States and Europe: the Balkans, the Caspian region, and the [oil rich] Middle East” (Larrabee and Lesser, 2003: 2). Well aware of its geostrategic potentials, “Turkish diplomacy effectively used the country’s geopolitical assets in its approach to the West” (Aybak, 2002: 221). Throughout the Cold War, Turkey’s “geopolitical influence was used as a ‘trump’ of the Western Block”: extending to the East while being at the edge of the West and institutionally part of the NATO, Turkey was considered a “frontier country” and acted as a instrument of control in the South among the Western powers (Davutoğlu, 2001). Nevertheless, after the collapse of the USSR and the ensuing elimination of the Soviet threat, it was necessary to reinterpret Turkey’s geopolitical role. At that period, a new perception of Turkey emerged as a “bridge” country. Accordingly, Turks portrayed the country’s role as that of “a bridge between East and West, North and South, and between Muslim world and Europe (Larrabee and Lesser, 2003: 150). Furthermore, thanks to its capacity to maintain stability amid the chaos and turbulence affecting its neighborhood in the post-Cold War era, Turkey earned the status of a “pivot state” (Larrabee and Lesser, 2003: 2).¹⁰⁷ Notwithstanding the European inclination “to see Turkey as a ‘barrier’¹⁰⁸ - a strategic glacis on the European periphery, holding Middle Eastern risks at bay” (Larrabee and Lesser, 2003: 150), “the international community began

¹⁰⁷ This image of Turkey as a barrier in security terms is reinforced by recent descriptions of Turkey as the West’s new “front line” state. The “bridge versus barrier” debate continues to have a central place in Turkish strategic discourse. See Lesser, *Bridge or Barrier? Turkey and the West After the Cold War*. For a reassessment at the end of the decade, see Ian O. Lesser, “Beyond Bridge or Barrier: Turkey’s Evolving Security Relations with the West,” in Makovsky and Sayari, *Turkey’s New World: Changing Dynamics in Turkish Foreign Policy*, pp. 203–221.

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to look to Turkey as an island of stability and a bridge country between East and West” (Davutoğlu, 2007)¹⁰⁹ which combines “being Western oriented though Turkish and Muslim at the same time” (Eralp, 1996: 93).

In the aftermath of 9/11 tragic events and in the light of the US decision to invade Baghdad in 2003, Turkey’s geopolitical location placed it, once again, at the epicenter of the regional power struggle. Given its previous positions in similar contexts, Turkey seemed to have two viable options. First, it could get involved in regional confrontations as a geopolitical actor and cause a radical shift in the regional power balance, or, as an alternative, it could simply follow a passive policy of opting out of regional politics as used to be the case before 1990s. However, neither situation appeared to be beneficial for Ankara’s interests. Taking the first stance would place the country in an uncomfortable position. In fact, Turkey realized that any war in the region would risk destabilizing the Middle East and by that means threaten Turkey’s security and economic interests. Moreover, from a geostrategic perspective, it would bring back Ankara’s previous status as a front line state in the Western confrontation with Iraq, not to mention that it would also revive or “encourage European tendency to see Turkey as a barrier to Middle Eastern insecurity, rather than as an integral part of the European security system” (Larrabee and Lesser, 2003: 139). As for the second option, it would clearly damage what Turkey has so far achieved thanks to its geographical location in terms of geopolitical advantages as well as its increasing international and regional weight. These considerations made it quite unrealistic for Ankara to adopt a passive posture *vis-à-vis* any new regional development. In this context, Turkey found itself bound “to redefine its position [...] and gain a new understanding within the international [and the regional] framework[s]” (Davutoğlu, 2001).

¹⁰⁹ http://www.insightturkey.com/Insight_Turkey_10_1_A_Davutoglu.pdf

Accordingly, Ankara's new geopolitical position has "both an ideational and a geographical basis [and] has to be seen as a means of gradually opening up to the world.... In terms of geography, Turkey occupies a unique space. As a large country in the midst of Afro-Eurasia's vast landmass, it may be defined as a 'central' country with multiple regional identities that cannot be reduced to one unified character... Turkey cannot be explained geographically or culturally by associating it with one single region" (Davutoğlu, 2007). Indeed, "one important characteristic that distinguishes Turkey from [other countries] is that at the same time it is a Middle East and a Caucasus country. [...] Turkey is as much a European country as it is an Asian one... Turkey is as much as a Black Sea country as it is a Mediterranean one" (Davutoğlu, 2001). Such diverse regional composition "lends [Turkey] the capability of maneuvering in several regions simultaneously, in this sense, it controls an area of influence in its immediate environs" (Davutoğlu, 2007).

Therefore, given its optimal geographic position as a central state at the intersection of the world's three continents, Turkey cannot define itself in a defensive or a passive behavior, nor should it be depicted as a bridge country which only connects two regions, nor a frontier country or a barrier, nor indeed as an ordinary country, which sits at the edge of the Arab/Muslim world or the West, but rather an increasingly capable and independent actor, following a balancing mission and able, thanks to its geopolitical position and geographical location, to balance between the different regional actors. Hence, Turkey's geographical asset is, in theory, both a motivator and a catalyst for playing a balancer role. However, the possession of assets is not by itself enough to render the country a regional power balancer, in practice. In fact, there should also be the political will to act according to a balancing agenda. This requires knowing whether the current Turkish leadership has the

will to turn geopolitics into a foreign policy tool and orient this policy in favor of a balancing mission.

Section 2: Open-Minded Policy and Constructive Strategy

November 2002 signaled the beginning of a new era for the Turkish Republic and marked at the same time the dawn of incredible transformation in Turkish foreign policy characterized by the assertion of Ankara's regional role as a power balancer. For the first time after eleven years of coalition governments from 1991 to 2002, Turkey was ruled by one party government (Sözen, 2008). After its overwhelming victory in November 2002 elections, the AKP - only a one and a half year old party then - expressed its commitment to secularism and democratization in Turkey (Ayata, 2004: 247; Sözen, 2008).¹¹⁰ Soon after its arrival to power, the young party "demonstrated a willingness to actively participate in regional and international affairs" (Raptopoulos, 2004). Accordingly, it "sought to revitalize Turkey's EU membership process and increase Turkey's engagement in the Middle East at the same time" (Kalin, 2008). These steps indicated a first sign in the new government's balanced policy toward both Western and Eastern actors and constituted as well a departure from the traditional, exclusively pro-Western orientated, foreign policy characterized by

¹¹⁰ The AKP won the November 2002 general election with the two-thirds of the seats in the Turkish parliament. There were mainly three important domestic factors that fostered AKP's victory. Firstly, more than a decade long coalition governments – a sort of lack of political stability - in Turkey during the 1990s and early 2000s were not successful enough in transforming Turkey in line with the post-Cold War requirements, such as political and economic reforms at home. In fact, it was almost impossible to design and apply a rational structural economic program, let alone designing a concrete foreign policy strategy, in an environment where there was political instability due to several different coalition governments. Throughout these years, Turkey just "muddled through" in a political instability. For further details, see Z. Öniş, "The Turkish Economy at the Turn of a New Century: Critical and Comparative Perspectives" in M. Abromowitz. (ed) *Turkey's Transformation and American Policy* (New York: The Century Foundation Press, 2000), pp. 95-115. Secondly, the financial crises of November 2000 and February 2001, which resulted in the voters to discredit all the ruling parties and the erstwhile tried parties in the opposition at the November 2002 general election, pushed AKP to the forefront.

Thirdly, Turkey's then almost two decade long fight against PKK terrorism was nowhere near to end, which drained Turkey's energy and financial resources and costed the country billions of dollars. For further details, see S. E. Cornell, "The Kurdish Question in Turkish Politics" in M. S. Radu (ed) *Dangerous Neighborhood: Contemporary Issues in Turkey's Foreign Relations* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2003), pp. 123-142, and M. S. Radu, "The Rise and Fall of the PKK", *ibid.* pp. 143-164.

timid and over-cautious approach towards regional politics. This balancing policy find its roots in a new doctrine, known as the *Strategic Depth* doctrine,¹¹¹ conceived by Ahmet Davutoğlu, the current Foreign Minister - then the chief foreign policy advisor of Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan.¹¹² The main thesis of this doctrine is that “the value of a nation in the complex web of international relations depends on its geostrategic location” (Kalin, 2008) and that “strategic depth is predicated on geographical depth and historical depth” (Murinson, 2006).¹¹³ When applying this concept to Turkey, the ‘natural heir’ to the Ottoman Empire, Davutoğlu (2001) argues that the historical Ottoman legacy offers the country a great geographical depth which “places Turkey right at the centre of many geopolitical areas of influence”. Indeed, “situated across the different geopolitical and civilizational fault lines that unite the Euro-Asian landmass with the Middle East and North Africa... a good part of world politics related to energy and security, among others the two vital issues of the current international order, is destined to be shaped in Turkey’s immediate neighborhood” (Kalin, 2008).

This doctrine provides the intellectual and theoretical frameworks for Turkey’s foreign policy. However, in order to practically capitalize on its strategic depth, “Turkey

¹¹¹ This concept is eponymous with the title of Ahmet Davutoğlu’s book *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye’nin Uluslararası Konumu* (Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2001) [The Strategic Depth: The Turkish International Location] which came to be seen as the new bible of Turkish foreign policy, giving an intellectually authoritative voice to Turkey’s new aspirations. The origins of this doctrine can be traced to Özal’s neo-Ottomanism, “the multi-dimensional” foreign policy of the Erbakan government and Davutoğlu’s innovative approach to geopolitics. According to Philip Robins, ‘multi-dimensional’ foreign policy doctrine during the Erbakan period (1996–97) constituted a pursuit of improvement bilateral relations with Asian countries such as Iran, Pakistan, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia and African countries such as Egypt, Libya and Nigeria. The conceptual content of this policy was to ‘build ties with significant middle powers to the east, without jeopardizing Ankara’s traditional ties with the West’. For further details see P. Robins, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, Madeleine Feher Annual European Scholar Lecture, publication of Begin-Sadat for Strategic Studies, August 1999, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan.

¹¹² Davutoğlu, dubbed “the Turkish Kissinger” by former US ambassador Mark Parris, is the “behind the scenes” and the main architect of AKP’s foreign policy strategy. He has now come to the forefront of Turkish politics. A veteran Turkish diplomat described him as having the capability to fill old wine in new bottles.

¹¹³ In his book, Davutoğlu explains why historical and geographical aspects are so important during periods of transition such as the post-Cold war period: “It is important to make a rational evaluation from a historical and geographical perspective when it comes to evaluating a country or society’s potential and its ability to adapt to new conditions”.

needs to rediscover its historic and geographic identity and reassess its own position *vis-à-vis* regional and global issues” (Murinson, 2006). In this respect, the ‘strategic depth’ doctrine “calls for an activist engagement with all regional systems in [Turkish] neighborhood”.¹¹⁴ Echoing this argument in practice, the newly elected government maintained pragmatic and positive relations with Turkey’s neighbors and developed “a balanced approach towards all global and regional actors” (Walker, 2007).¹¹⁵ This balancing strategy was manifested in all aspects of Turkey’s national security and foreign policy decisions and became more evident when the Erdoğan government endeavored in every occasion to cast Ankara as a regional balancer and exerted all efforts to bring together West and East as well as different regional players. In this regard, Turkey seems to be applying the “principles of good neighborliness” which derive from the broader principle of “zero problem policy toward Turkey’s neighbors” (one of the five principles shaping the AKP Turkish foreign policy) according to which Turkey should end its long-term hostilities with its neighbors.¹¹⁶ These principles materialized in developing good ties with its neighbors, mainly Syria and Iran, comparable to those it shares with the West, and also by the a noticeable improvement of its relations with the United States after they have cooled following the war in Iraq.

A- Relations with Syria

Among Turkey’s Muslim neighbors, its relations with Syria have always been “the most problematic [and critical] because of the many points of friction between the two

¹¹⁴ This is what Davutoğlu claimed in an interview with the Turkish daily *Vatan*. *Vatan*, 7 January 2004.

¹¹⁵ When Recep Erdoğan became prime minister in March 2003, as a result of the overwhelming victory of his AK party in November 2002, he again assumed an activist prime-ministerial role in Turkish foreign policy. In the same interview Davutoğlu declared that “2003 was the year of ‘making up for a loss’ in foreign policy; 2004 will be a year when Turkey will be brought onto the international agenda.” Ibid.

¹¹⁶ According to Davutoğlu, the new Turkish foreign policy is based on five principles that position Turkey as a “center-country” in its region. These five principles include a “balance between security and democracy”; “zero-problem policy with neighbors”; “developing relations with neighboring regions and beyond”; “multi-dimensional foreign policy” and “rhythmic diplomacy”.

nations” (Liel, 2001). Turkish-Syrian relations have been historically “clouded by general Arab suspicion dating back to the Young Turk era and institutionalized during the Cold War when the two [countries] were positioned on opposing sides” (Carley, 1995).¹¹⁷ The main bone of contention between them goes back to 1943 when Syria, newly independent, started to claim back the Alexandretta area (or the Hatay province as the Turks call it) which was transferred by the French mandate to Turkey in 1938.¹¹⁸ The tension between Syria and Turkey heightened between 1970s and 1980s when additional acute problems were added to Syria’s historical grievance over the annexation of Alexandretta. While Iraq and Turkey joined forces to suppress the Kurdish resistance, Syria, in contrast, supported the PKK and provided it logistical and guerrilla trainings. The conflict intensified when Turkey launched its large dam project on the Euphrates River (*Guneydogu Anadolu Projesi* (GAP) for electricity generation and irrigation which, once completed, limited the flow of water into Syria to whom it was a vital resource.¹¹⁹ As a response, Damascus further supported anti-

¹¹⁷ Like all Arab countries, Syria has always suspected Turkey of being a gendarme, serving western interests in the region.

¹¹⁸ Although included within the boundaries of the French mandate over Syria, the Alexandretta area was annexed to Turkey with French consent. At the time, Syrian resentment was bitter but was directed mainly against France. Once independent, Syria redirected its demands toward Turkey, claiming the province was historically and geographically part of the Syrian homeland and that its population was largely Arab. For the Turks, it was just another province with an Arab minority. Syria has still not dropped its demand to reclaim Alexandretta, and Turkey has been unwilling to consider the demand. When diplomatic relations were established in 1943, the Turks demanded that in return for their recognition Syria would give up any claim to Alexandretta. The Syrians refused, and it took lengthy mediation efforts by Iraq before the Syrians agreed in 1946 not to put up any *formal* demand for the area. Nevertheless, public opinion as well as the press continued to express the sentiment that Alexandretta was an indivisible part of Syria. In the 1950s and 1960s many anti-Turkish demonstrations and even a few border clashes took place in Syria. Later, the Syrians gave their 1946 agreement a narrower interpretation; for instance, they published official maps in which the area was shown as a Syrian territory. They also approached Turkey, seeking to open negotiations on the issue, but the Turks flatly rejected the overtures, warning Syria “not to play with fire”, as Prime Minister Menderes put it in 1955. In this conflict Syria has enjoyed the support of several Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia; during the 1980s, for example, the Saudis refused to grant entry visas to residents of the area who wanted to go on pilgrimages to Mecca. See *Hürriyet*, 10 April 1986.

¹¹⁹ Water issues were particularly contentious with Syria. Turkey claimed that the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers are “trans-boundary” water courses that belong to one country while the river flows through it and become the property of another after crossing the border. Syria, however, views these vital arteries as international waterways belonging to no one. Syria claimed that Turkey drains off an unfair share of the water before it crosses the border and charges that Ankara lacks the political will to reach an equitable agreement on sharing water rights.

Turkish terrorism and provided safe-haven to PKK groups.¹²⁰ Hence, during the 1980s Turkey's policy toward Syria was characterized as one of "water for security" (Liel, 2001). In response, Syria "used the PKK as a foreign policy tool" and a bargaining chip in negotiations over the water conflict (Jung and Piccoli, 2001: 145).¹²¹ However, "as usual, the relationship with Syria proved once again to be the most difficult to handle" (Hale, 2000: 173). In fact, antagonism between the two countries peaked when Syria gave shelter to Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of PKK, which extremely irritated Ankara who thus accused Damascus of waging an "undeclared war" (Makovsky, 1999: 99). The conflict reached crisis point in October 1998 when Turkey threatened Syria with military consequences if Damascus did not cease supporting the PKK and expel Öcalan (Jung and Piccoli, 2001: 145).¹²² "In the face of Turkey's overwhelming military superiority, Damascus backed down, expelling the PKK leader ... [This shift in Damascus' behavior] opened the way for a gradual improvement in relations [between Syria and Turkey], which has gained considerable momentum since then" (Larrabee, 2007).¹²³

¹²⁰ For further details see Hale W. (2000), *Turkish Foreign Policy 1774-2000*, pp. 302-307.

¹²¹ In 1987, as Turkey was beginning constructions of the giant Atatürk dam, Özal visited Damascus and secured an agreement with Syrian President Hafiz al-Assad under which Turkey would continue supply a minimum average of flow into Syria of 500 cusecs (cubic meters per second) in return for a Syrian commitment that neither country would support violent resistance groups operating in the territory of the other. On paper this was a satisfactory conclusion for Turkey, but Syria later insisted that the figure of 500 cusecs was acceptable only while the dam was being filled, and that an average flow of 600-700 cusecs would be demanded once it was completed. In theory, the agreement should have provided the basis for the settlement of both the Euphrates waters dispute and Syrian support for PKK. It failed to do so, partly because the Syrian government could not believe that the Turks would not in fact restrict or cut off the supply of water in the Euphrates. On the other hand, Syria did not halt its support for the PKK, in spite of constant denials. As a result, in 1989 Özal threatened that if Syria did not stick to its side of the bargain of 1987, then Turkey might not adhere to its promise to maintain the cross-border flow of the Euphrates at 500 cusecs. It is worth mentioning that the dam project threatened the supply of water not only to Syria but also to Iraq. For more details see Suha Bölükbaşı, "Turkey Challenges Iraq and Syria: The Euphrates Dispute", *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 16 (1993), pp. 22-3.

¹²² See "Turkey Warns Syria Again Not To Support Rebel Kurds", *International Herald Tribune*, 6 October 1998; "Syria Calls Turkish Threat a Plot", *The Washington Post*, 2 October 1998; S. Kinzer, "Syria Agrees to Stop Supporting Kurds, Defusing Crisis With Turkey", *The New York Times*, 22 October 1998; and "Turkish-Syrian Discussions", *Al-Itihad* (Abu Dhabi), 30 October 1998.

¹²³ Whether the existence of a Turkish-Israeli military cooperation at this time was influential in inducing the Syrian president Hafiz al-Assad to expel Öcalan from Syria in October 1998 must remain an open question, since the Israeli government stated at the time that it was neutral on this question, but the possibility is still there.

When the AKP came to power, it adopted a new vision in approaching Syria by stressing the two countries' common interests and historical links as basis for their new relationship. Hence, after decades of animosity, "the Erdoğan government initiated a diplomatic [strategy] to reach a new understanding with the Syrian government" (Murinson, 2006). Accordingly, in July 2003 both countries signed a significant number of bilateral agreements in the Sixth Turkish–Syrian Protocol, which covers the economic sphere, duty-free trade, tourism and educational exchange.¹²⁴ This was followed in December 2003 by the visit of Turkish parliamentary delegation to Syria to relaunch bilateral negotiations on the controversial issue of Hatay province as well as on terrorism.¹²⁵ Furthermore, the Turkish-Syrian rapprochement was manifested by the exchange of high-level visits¹²⁶ and was "underscored by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's visit to Ankara in January 2005[which was] the first trip by a Syrian president to Turkey since Syria's independence" (Larrabee, 2007).¹²⁷ This visit signaled that both countries entered a new phase of cooperation on shared concerns at many levels mainly the question of Kurdish aspirations for autonomy in Northern Iraq, the preservation of the territorial integrity of Iraq,¹²⁸ and the struggle against terrorism to ensure peace and stability in the Middle East.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ See the Protocol of the Sixth Session of the Turkish–Syrian Joint Commission for Economic, Scientific, Technical and Commercial Cooperation, Ankara, 24–29 July 2003.

¹²⁵ With a toned-down version of more strongly worded Syrian statements on the issue, Assad described the Hatay issue as simply a "problem in need of a solution".

¹²⁶ The improvement of relations between Ankara and Damascus was marked by high-level visits: Gül visited Damascus in April 2003; his Syrian counterpart, Farouq al-Shara, traveled to Turkey in January; and Syrian Prime Minister Mohammed Mustafa Miro went to Ankara in July of the same year.

¹²⁷ Bashar Assad described this dramatic improvement after meeting with Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer during this three-day visit: "Our relations are ready to reach the highest level". The Syrian leadership also recognized the international legal framework of the acceptance of Turkish borders and the territorial integrity of Iraq.

¹²⁸ At a press conference held in Damascus, the Syrian president pointed out that they had also reached a consensus about Iraq, 'We want Iraq to exercise its right of national self determination'. *Zaman*, 7 January 2004.

¹²⁹ On Syrian support for the PKK, Assad told CNN-Turk (an affiliate of CNN) that "the PKK has no presence and activity in Syria". Assad's remarks seemed to complement Gül's earlier comment that "Syrians are being extremely helpful in tracking down terrorists". Before leaving Ankara, Asad summarized his successful trip to CNN Turk: "We have moved together from an atmosphere of distrust to trust".

The establishment of harmonious relations between Syria and Turkey constituted a departure in their foreign policies traditionally marked by suspicion and bitterness.¹³⁰ Indeed, Ankara and Damascus have overcome their old differences and improved their political, economic, and socio-cultural ties and moved together from distrust to confidence building to establishing mutual trust. Perhaps the most recent and important development on the level of Turkish-Syrian bilateral relations is the April 2009 joint military exercise. On 27 April, Turkey and Syria launched three-day long land exercises between border forces which were followed by signing a technical military cooperation agreement to intensify collaboration between their defense industries.¹³¹ This event was not only the first time experience of military cooperation between both countries, but also the first ever for an Arab army with a NATO member. However, while mostly symbolic in its military significance given its relatively small size compared to past Turkish-Israeli exercises,¹³² the Turkish-Syrian joint military exercise has necessary political implications for Syria, Turkey and the region. Syria's decision to carry out a military exercise with Turkey was certainly guided by Damascus constant effort to assert itself as a strong regional player *vis-à-vis* Washington and Tel Aviv by deepening its relations with another major regional actor, Turkey.¹³³ By conducting the military exercise, Turkey aimed to enhance the protection of its borders against Kurdish infiltration, as an immediate and short-term goal, while at the

¹³⁰ According to the Turkish daily Zaman, the newly obtained shared regional perspectives caused the Arab press to describe the Turkish-Syrian rapprochement as the 'Strategic Convergence'. 'Strategic Convergence', Zaman, 26 December 2004. The Lebanese Daily Star reported on the visit with the headline 'Is it a new era between two states?' The article commented that there were war clouds between the two states until 1998 but Turkey is now prepared to play a significant role in Syrian politics with the political convergence developed between Ankara and Damascus alongside the free trade agreement. M. Young, 'Lebanon: Clueless on Iraq', Daily Star, 25 January 2003.

¹³¹ The exercises involved an exchange of units to enhance joint training and operability.

¹³² As described by Turkey's Chief of the General Staff General Ilker Basbug.

¹³³ Aside from developing defense relations with Turkey, the joint military exercise mainly serves two purposes for Syria: it sends a strong message to Washington and makes Israel nervous about its relationship with Turkey. At a time when Syria is expecting the Obama administration to embark on a policy of rapprochement, Damascus will employ a classic tool of diplomacy: raise the ante. Emboldened by its enhanced relationship with Turkey and its strong partnership with Iran, Damascus will increase its demands in its negotiations with Washington. Furthermore, by conducting a military exercise with Turkey, Syria is hoping to add to Israel's serious concerns over Turkey's foreign policy adjustment under the AKP, which has seemingly brought it closer to Arab-Muslim interests.

same time developing a more constructive and pragmatic relationship with its Arab-Muslim neighbors, as of a long-term goal.¹³⁴ Although this exercise reveals further strengthening of mutual friendship, cooperation and confidence between the two countries,¹³⁵ it remains, however, insufficient to form a new strategic alliance between Turkey and Syria or to be defined that Turkey is cutting its relations with Israel by getting closer to Syria. In fact, this rapprochement demonstrates Turkey's intention to play the role of an autonomous balancer in the Middle East, able to balance, within the framework of its own relations with its neighboring countries, between the different antagonists, and to balance these players between each other. This is particularly true since, in its new relationship with Damascus, Ankara is clearly not following an American or a European agenda; it is actually following its own agenda which was manifested by Turkey's resistance to side with former US President Bush's policy of isolating Syria, and served instead as a "conduit" for opening Syria to the outside world. While Turkey is Syria's "window to Europe and the US",¹³⁶ Syria is "Turkey's door to the Middle East".¹³⁷

B- Relations with Iran

"To a lesser extent than in relations with Syria ... Turkish relations with Iran have also shown a propensity for assertiveness" (Larrabee and Lesser, 2003: 147). Historically, the relations between the two regional actors have been driven by geopolitical and

¹³⁴ Turkey wants to develop its relations with Syria for a number of reasons. First, it wants to have an honest and productive dialogue with Syria over Iraq and its territorial integrity, which has implications for Turkey's domestic Kurdish issue (Ankara is concerned about Kurdish separatists in northern Iraq given the potential spillovers into Turkey). Second, it wants to boost trade with Syria which will greatly benefit the fragile Turkish economy (Turkish officials believe that Syria could become a gateway to the Arab world for Turkish goods, while Turkey could become a gateway for Syrian goods to the European Union and the West in general).

¹³⁵ The Turkish Daily *Zaman* 26 April 2009. Available at: <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=173556>

¹³⁶ According to Turkish Military Expert Bahadır Koch, Syria considers Turkey as a "window to Europe and the U.S.", regarding Ankara's close ties with western countries.

<http://www.turkishweekly.net/news/76054/-turkey-is-syria-s-quot-window-to-europe-and-u-s-quot-.html>

¹³⁷ Turkish Abdullah Gül declared prior to its three-day visit to Damascus on May 15th 2009. *The Daily Star*, 16 May 2009.

http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=2&article_id=102028

economic competition in the Middle East¹³⁸ Although, perturbed by the Shah's exaggerated ambitions in the mid-1970s to turn Iran into a dominant power in the region, Turkish-Iranian relations were in general "reasonably cooperative, and institutionalized through CENTO (Central Treaty Organization) and its sister organization the RCD (Regional Cooperation and Development)" (Hale, 200: 172). What has in fact contributed in maintaining good relations between Turkey and Iran was in part due to "their mutual hostility to communism" (Carley, 1995). However, the relationship was damaged by the 1979 Islamic Iranian Revolution which "turned Iran into a militantly Islamist and anti-Western state, in direct opposition to Turkey's alignments, both domestic and international" (Hale, 200: 172). Aware of the regional power equation of the time, Ankara was careful not to adopt an overtly anti-Iranian stance in fear that Tehran would join the Soviet camp which would harm Turkey's interests and threaten its security. Hence, Turkey preferred to keep its relations with Tehran "balanced and on a rational level" (Sözen, 2008). Accordingly, in November 1980 Ankara did not conform to the US-imposed trade embargo on Iran following the taking of US embassy hostages in Tehran. However, during mid-1980s, Iran's support for the PKK aggravated the already cautious bilateral relations. While Ankara "accused Iran of allowing PKK to use its territory to launch attacks on Turkey" (Aydin, 2005), Tehran, for its part, "complained about the presence of Iranian opposition groups in Turkey, including elements of the *Mujahiddini-I Khalaq*" (Larrabee and Lesser, 2003; 147). Still, when the war broke out between Turkey's close neighbors, Iraq and Iran, Ankara chose to "sit on the fence" and stay uninvolved. Eventually, Ankara's neutrality turned to be profitable since "Iran and Iraq [became gradually] heavily dependent on Turkey economically, both as a source of supply of non-military imports, and as transit route to the outside world" (Hale, 200: 173). This dependence was another reason for Turkey and Iran

¹³⁸ In fact, Sunni-Shiite tension also contributed to this competition, with predominantly Sunni population of Turkey and a mostly Shiite population of Iran.

to continue “a correct if often frosty relationship”.¹³⁹ These relations elevated to the level of formal agreements when Ankara and Tehran signed a series of security agreements in the 1990s aiming to cooperate in fighting against Kurdish terrorist organizations.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, economic ties, established during Iraq–Iran War, were strengthened by signing in 1996 a gas pipeline agreement.¹⁴¹ Despite these developments, the bilateral relations remained “neither black nor white, but a shade of gray”.¹⁴² However, under the AK leadership this relationship experienced a “turnaround”. Indeed, in congruence with the new foreign policy doctrine, the Erdoğan administration attempted to follow a new path in Turkey’s relations with Iran. Shortly after taking office, the new government signed several treaties and agreements with Tehran on educational cooperation¹⁴³ as well as on trade and energy related issues.¹⁴⁴ In addition to culture and economy, Turkish–Iranian cooperation has intensified noticeably in the security field. After the War in Iraq, Ankara and Tehran saw “a common enemy in the Kurdish militancy, in particular the PKK, which found a safe haven in Kurdish-dominated Northern Iraq” (Murinson, 2006). Hence, during Prime

¹³⁹ For more details see Suha Bölükbaşı, “Turkey Cops with Revolutionary Iran”, *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 13 (1989), pp. 95-9; John Calabrese, “Turkey and Iran: Limits of a Stable Relationship”, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 25 (1998), pp. 77-8.

¹⁴⁰ Accordingly, in 1993 both countries agreed to cooperate against terrorist organizations posing threats to their security. Following the agreement, Iran captured and handed over a group of PKK terrorists to Turkish officials. According to a second agreement between the countries, the Iranian government declared their intention to prevent the PKK from using Iranian territory for transit passage.

¹⁴¹ Upon completion of the gas pipeline, the pumping of Iranian gas to Turkey started in December 2001. In May 2000, Turkish Undersecretary of Foreign Trade Kürşad Tüzmen visited Iran to participate in negotiations for the establishment of a Turkish–Iranian Business Committee and the prevention of the illegal fuel trade. The Committee of Turkish–Iranian Business Cooperation was established on November, 2001. The Committee held its first meeting during Turkish president Ahmet Necdet Sezer’s Tehran visit in 2002.

¹⁴² According to what a former Turkish prime minister, Tansu Ciller, stated in May 2001. In particular she cited Iranian support for terrorist activities of the PKK inside Turkey and the pursuit of WMD as persistent causes for tension in Turkish–Iranian relations.

¹⁴³ A December 2003 treaty on educational cooperation between Turkey and Iran was signed stipulating mechanisms for Turkish students to study in Iran paved the way for the two countries to share curricula and provided for reciprocal scholarships.

¹⁴⁴ In October 2003 a trade agreement was signed between Ankara and Tehran concerning the reduction of customs and tax barriers on trade and the establishment of border trade centers. Energy was a major driver behind the warming of Iranian–Turkish relations. Iran is the second-largest supplier of natural gas to Turkey (after Russia). Economic cooperation involved agreements about deliveries of Iranian gas to Europe through Turkish territory and of a pricing dispute over natural gas supplied by Iran to Turkey. Furthermore, both countries exchanged high-level visits among which four high-level visits took place from Turkey to Iran (two by Gül), and six from Iran to Turkey, including one by Iranian foreign minister Kamal Kharrazi.

Minister Erdoğan's visit to Tehran in July 2004, Turkey and Iran signed a "multi-dimensional" cooperation agreement that "branded the PKK a terrorist organization" and included a mutual commitment to protect their borders (Larrabee, 2007).¹⁴⁵

As is the case in its relations with Syria, Ankara is determined to follow its own agenda in establishing its new relationship with Iran despite American criticism.¹⁴⁶ Referring to the Strategic Depth doctrine, the Turkish Prime Minister asserted that "just as all other countries in the world develop relations with their neighbors, so too will Turkey develop its relations with its neighbors... Before [AKP] came to power, [the party] promised that [it] would develop relations with [Turkey's] neighbors and included this in [its] action plan. [The government] did not make any discrimination among [Turkey's] neighbors. The regional peace will be set up in this way. Just like how all the world's countries develop relations with their neighbors, Turkey will also develop its relations with its neighbors. It is determined about this".¹⁴⁷

C- Relations with the United States

Turkey's new activism in the Middle East has been controversial in Washington. Particularly, Ankara's overtures to Damascus and Tehran, has raised serious concern in official circles in Washington about the "Islamization" of Turkey's foreign policy. In fact, the Bush Administration feared that Ankara's new rapprochement with the Middle East

¹⁴⁵ Like Turkey, Iran faces security problems in its Kurdish-populated areas: over the last year, an Iranian group affiliated with the PKK, the Party for a Free Life in Iranian Kurdistan, has launched attacks against Iranian security officials. Tehran has retaliated by shelling PKK bases in the Kandil Mountains.

¹⁴⁶ Also against American diplomatic warnings that business contracts with Iran were punishable by sanctions under US law.

¹⁴⁷ See "Turkey's Iranian Relations Unaffected by US", 29 July 2004, available at <http://www.Turks.us>; and "Iran, Turkey set to boost cooperation", IRNA (Iran News Agency), 30 July 2004.

could come at the detriment of its relations with the West.¹⁴⁸ “But these concerns are misplaced. Turkey’s greater engagement in the Middle East is part of the gradual diversification of Turkish foreign policy since the end of the Cold War” and which became more apparent when the AKP administration rose to power (Larrabee, 2007). By building up closer ties with Iran and Syria, Turkey’s foreign policy goes in line with its regional “strategic depth” doctrine which advocates opening up to all actors and counterbalancing, rather than replacing, Ankara’s already deep connections with the West. Nevertheless, these fears stemmed from the fact that US-Turkish relations came under severe strain after the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. What blew up the longstanding “strategic partnership” between the United States and Turkey was the latter’s reluctance to endorse the US war in Iraq and its refusal to open airbases and borders to coalition troops. The Turkish leaders insisted that such a decision would “require authorization from the Turkish Parliament and emphasized it would be hard to get this in the absence of a clear resolution from the UN Security Council allowing the use of force against Iraq” (Güney, 2008). This position was severely criticized by Washington who considered such stance an indication of uncertainty or even a defect in the long-established alliance and, thus, viewed it as “unacceptable” and “even unthinkable” (Çandar, 2004: 48).¹⁴⁹ Though the Turkish Parliament refused in March 2003 to authorize the deployment in Turkey of coalition troops and to send Turkish forces

¹⁴⁸ These tensions were not so strong under the Clinton administration, which maintained a dialogue with Damascus despite disapproving of many of its policies. However, they have intensified under the Bush administration, which has sought to isolate Syria. In fact, in 2005, as the United States sought to isolate Syria over Damascus’s alleged responsibility for the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri and its central role in funneling jihadis into Iraq, the Turkish government continued a policy of deepening its diplomatic and economic ties with the Syrians. Accordingly, strains became particularly visible when U.S. officials failed to convince Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer to cancel his visit to Damascus. Sezer, with Erdoğan’s backing, stood firm -- a show of Turkish independence that caused considerable consternation in Washington.

¹⁴⁹ The United States reassured Turkey that Congress was willing to pass legislation that would help Turkey absorb any economic shocks by providing a line of credit worth as much as 14 billion \$. Yet this “carrot policy” was not welcome either in Turkey or in the US. The offer fueled skepticism in Turkey since similar, but, unfulfilled promises of compensation had been made before the Gulf War of 1991. On the US side, the view was generally that an alliance with a price tag was no alliance at all. If Turkey acted like a strategic ally rather than a nervous renter of bases, it would have an unwavering superpower on its side for decades to come. See “The New York Times author William Saphire Threatens Turkey”, *Turkish Daily News*, 16 January 2003.

to Iraq, it amended this decision a year after. "Realizing the serious security risks of non-involvement in Northern Iraq, Turkey decided... to give partial support to the US to open a northern front against Iraq... however, the US would not be able to use Incirlik airbase" (Güney, 2008). At the same time, the Parliamentary bill empowered the Turkish government to send Turkish troops into Northern Iraq in order to protect the country's national security interests against any Kurdish violence. This issue became a major source of discord between the two countries: while Ankara insisted on dispatching troops to Northern Iraq, Washington did not welcome this plan claiming that it would lead to clashes between Turkish forces and Kurdish groups.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, the crisis of confidence further deepened when the Turkish government requested a US military assistance to help eliminate PKK training camps in Northern Iraq which was met by a US reluctance to take any military action (Larrabee, 2007).¹⁵¹ On the contrary, the United States showed tolerance towards the PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) and the KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) who in turn tolerated the PKK.¹⁵² Accordingly, Ankara "complained strongly about what it saw as 'preferential' treatment given to Iraqi Kurds by Washington" which would give them a representation far in excess of their real standing, and would eventually risk reviving

¹⁵⁰ Bush said: "We have got more troops up north, and we are making it very clear that we expect [the Turks] not to come into northern Iraq". Bush made it clear that a Turkish incursion would lead to further strains in Turkey-US ties. See "Bush Warns Turkey off Iraq", BBC News, 24 March 2003.

¹⁵¹ With its forces already stretched thin, the Pentagon claims it cannot spare the troops, which it needs to combat the insurgency elsewhere in Iraq. Moreover, U.S. officials fear that intervening against the pkk could unsettle northern Iraq, which is more stable than the rest of the country. The Kurds have been the staunchest backers of U.S. policy in Iraq, and without their support, hope for keeping the country together is slim. See J.E. Kapsis, "From Desert Storm to *Metal Storm*: How Iraq has spoiled US-Turkish Relations", *Current History*, November 2005.

¹⁵² These problems are compounded by the potentially explosive situation concerning the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk, which is predominantly populated by Kurds and sits atop one of the world's largest oil deposits and whose status is to be determined by a referendum before the end of the year. Over the past several years, hundreds of thousands of Kurds who were evicted during Saddam's campaign to "Arabize" Kirkuk in the 1970s and 1980s have returned to reclaim their homes and property. Now, the Kurds of Iraq are seeking to make Kirkuk the capital of the Kurdistan Regional Government in northern Iraq. But Turkish officials are concerned by the city's increasing "Kurdization". Ankara wants power to be shared by all ethnic groups in the city and the referendum to be postponed in the hope that the city's status can be clarified another way. If the Iraqi Kurds try to force the issue, Ankara could be provoked to take military action, which would exacerbate instability in Iraq and the region as a whole. See D. Filkins, "Turkey Assesses Question of Kurds", *The New York Times*, 21 February 2003. See also "Turkey Wants Say Over Kirkuk", *Agence France Presse*, 14 October 2004.

similar aspirations among the Turkish Kurds.¹⁵³ This chain of events has led to a large wave of criticism of the US policy ineptitude and has also contributed to an “alarming rise in anti-American sentiment throughout Turkey... [In fact] many Turks consider[ed] Washington’s position to be tacit support for the PKK and evidence of a double standard: as they see it, the United States has invaded two countries - Afghanistan and Iraq - to eliminate terrorist safe havens but now refuses to help Turkey do the same” (Larrabee, 2007).¹⁵⁴

Despite several attempts to bring back their bilateral relations to the level of strategic partnership and in spite of the AKP policy of “damage control” (Özcan 2003), ties between Turkey and the United States under the Bush Administration never fully recovered from the events that accompanied the war in Iraq that shook the confidence between both countries.¹⁵⁵ Perhaps one of the reasons that contributed in keeping the bilateral relations unstable is the fact that “Turkish activism in the post-war Iraq put Turks on a collision course with US” (Murinson, 2006). Nevertheless, “both Ankara and Washington need[ed] to accept that the war in Iraq has created new realities and unleashed new forces that must be accommodated¹⁵⁶... And mainly, US policymakers will... have to get used to dealing with a more independent-minded and assertive Turkey” (Larrabee, 2007). The Obama Administration seemed to recognize and admit Turkey’s position as an increasingly assertive regional power that has a significant influence in the Middle East. Hence, soon

¹⁵³ “Dangers in Northern Iraq”, *The New York Times*, 2 March 2003. United States and Great Britain made a commitment to support the Kurdish regional autonomy in northern Iraq. See *Guardian*, 7 January 2004.

¹⁵⁴ According to a poll conducted by the German Marshall Fund in September 2006, 81 percent of Turks disapproved (and only seven percent approved) of President George W. Bush's handling of international policies.

¹⁵⁵ In this effect, a “Shared Vision” document was released in July 2006 by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül, which identified concrete areas where cooperation between the two countries could be enhanced.

¹⁵⁶ Two new realities in particular must be accepted. First, the chances that a strong central government will emerge in Iraq -- the outcome favored by both Ankara and Washington -- are almost nil. The differences between the various Iraqi political forces are too strong, and the Iraqi Kurds would not accept a strong central authority anyway. At best, a weak central government will emerge; at worst, Iraq will break up into several entities. Second, northern Iraq is already a de facto quasi state. It has a functioning government perceived as legitimate by the population, its own army and national flag, and a strong sense of national identity.

after taking office, the new administration expressed its willingness to reverse the relationship that soured during Bush's administration. Accordingly, President Obama chose Turkey for his first presidential visit to the region.¹⁵⁷ Unlike the previous administration, the Obama administration appeared to welcome innovations of the Turkish foreign policy under the AK Party government and expressed readiness to cooperate with Turkey as a regional power.¹⁵⁸

The adoption of a flexible and open-minded policy and the determination to build constructive and positive relations with the different actors clearly indicate a firm will to play the role of a regional balancer. However, in order to truly achieve this mission, Turkey needs, more than its own desire, the recognition of this role by the main players involved in the regional power struggle. Hence, Ankara should also have credibility in the region. This credibility is contingent upon Turkey's ability to be accepted as a reliable candidate for this role and a trustworthy role model.

Section 3: Trustworthy Role Model and Credible Diplomacy

When the AKP came to power, the debate on its identity and on the orientation of its foreign policy were issues of great concern. Scholars and practitioners have used different terminologies in describing the policies of the AKP government: while some called it the rise of "neo-Ottomanism",¹⁵⁹ others called it the "re-Islamization" of the country, and yet

¹⁵⁷ During Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's visit to Ankara on March 7th 2009 she stated that "Never in history has a U.S. President visited Turkey so soon after taking office". See "Barack Obama visit puts Turkey at center stage in US policy" *Today's Zaman*, 9 March 2009 available at <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=169059>

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ The "neo-Ottomanism" in its origin in the mid 19th century was a movement that loosely gathered intellectuals from different branches of literature, journalism, arts and politics and so forth, where the main drive of the members of the movement was to implement reforms in the Ottoman Empire through internal dynamics. In that regard, the advocates of this movement were criticizing the superficial and imitative (imported) modernization reforms of the Tanzimat (1839) era. The neo-Ottomans were liberals who

others called it the “Middle Easternization” of Turkey (Sözen, 2008). From the very start, “the AKP leaders contended that they are a mainstream party adhering to conservative center-right credentials... [They] underscored continually that they were the successors of liberal/conservative Democrat Party of the 1950s and Motherland Party of the 1980s rather than Islamist Welfare Party (WP) and its successor Virtue Party. Truly so, readings of the party documents and official statements suggest that the AKP is determined to take a different approach in foreign affairs than the Islamist tradition from which the leaders have hailed” (Özcan, 2003).¹⁶⁰ Moreover, even in practice “the AKP tends to accept fundamental liberal views and values to a greater extent than its [Islamist] predecessors” (Ayata, 2004: 263).

By adhering to moderate (or modernist) political Islam while operating under democratic norms, the AKP “[is] willing for Turkey to play a role model” in the Muslim/Arab world (Altunisik, 2008).¹⁶¹ Indeed, the coming to power of a party with

romantically emphasized the idea of freedoms. For more details on neo-Ottomanism see Sedat Laçiner, “Özalism (Neo-Ottomanism): An Alternative in Turkish Foreign Policy?” available at: <http://biibf.comu.edu.tr/sedatlaciner/mak.pdf>

¹⁶⁰ A comparison one can draw with the WP’s experience in foreign affairs, in which many AKP leaders such as former FM Abdullah Gül as State Minister had taken part, is of particular relevance. Despite the fact that the WP had to share power with another party, which was having foreign ministry in its portfolio, PM Necmettin Erbakan stamped its ideological print over foreign policy. Determined to challenge the establishment, Erbakan made his international debut visiting Iran as a first leg of his *Eastern Safari*. Later, in order to exhibit his resoluteness, he turned deaf ears to the warnings coming from the Foreign Ministry not to include Libya in the itinerary. Although he was not allowed to scrap February 1996 Agreement with Israel, his party missed no opportunity to display its reluctance to improve relations with Israel. Only after his party and himself were banned from politics in 1998, he had changed his views of the EU, which he considered to be part of the Zionist plot striving to put the whole world under the Jewish domination. AKP, however, behaved remarkably different from the outset: They obviously avoided challenging the established foreign policy line. They have seemed to be susceptible to critics on sensitive issues from the military. When they met resistance for instance, after party chairman Erdoğan raised questions on the “national policy over Cyprus” toying with different formulations for solution, they did not hesitate to make a volte-face. In contrast to WP’s avowedly anti-Western stance, the AKP made it clear that it would be following a different course than did Erbakan’s WP in power. Both Gül and Erdoğan reiterated that they would not deal with issues through “sentimental perspectives”. The visits were not geared to satisfy ideological expectations. It was quite symbolic that Erdoğan’s first international debut was staged in the White House. In September 2003, when PM Erdoğan was planning to visit Iran, he reportedly followed up the advice by the Foreign Ministry that it was not the most suitable time to travel to Tehran.

¹⁶¹ The speeches of Prime Minister Erdoğan and former Foreign Minister and current President Abdullah Gül in different forums attest to this. In their speeches in both Western and Islamic countries, Erdoğan and Gül give the message that Islam and democracy are very much compatible. For example, in his address at Harvard University on 30 January 2003, Erdoğan said: “I do not subscribe to the view that Islamic culture and

Islamic roots challenged beliefs long-held by Arabs and Muslims about Turkey. For a long time, Arab and Muslim countries held a very simplistic view of Turkey as either a “secular Westernized alien in the Middle East or the inheritor of an Ottoman legacy which aroused mixed feelings among Arabs”.¹⁶² Yet, Turkish “experiment” had a positive effect on Ankara’s perception in the region and constituted an asset for the Turkish model on the compatibility of democracy and Islam, a model that Muslims and Arabs look up to.¹⁶³ Within this framework, formal and informal links between the Turkey and the Arab/Muslim world have been easier to forge. Nevertheless, “it would be ... too simplistic to explain Turkey’s rising profile in the Arab world and the Middle East with the so-called Islamic credentials of the AKP leadership alone” (Kalin, 2008).¹⁶⁴ Indeed, other factors further

democracy cannot be reconciled. As a politician who cherishes religious conviction in his personal sphere, but regards politics as a domain belonging outside religion, I believe that this view [i.e. of irreconcilability] is seriously flawed. I should like to repeat what I stated recently in the Jeddah Economic Forum in Saudi Arabia: It won't be the religion, but rather the world-view of some of its followers that shall be made current.” For further details see Address by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, “Democracy in the Middle East, Pluralism in Europe: the Turkish View”, Harvard University, Kennedy School of Government, 30 January 2003. It is worth noting that the traditional elite, reflecting their general reluctance to get involved in the Middle East, has been arguing that Turkey has no desire to be a model.

¹⁶² They viewed Turkey as perceiving a binary opposition between a “small secular elite” and “populous but powerless Islamic masses”. See “Arabs discuss Erdoğan’s role in the Middle East”, *Today’s Zaman*, 7 January 2009.

¹⁶³ The Turkish experience and the AKP’s coming to power are particularly relevant to two groups in the Middle East. The first is the cluster of so-called moderate Islamist groups. These are Islamist groups that have learned their lessons from such experiences as the Algerian case, and are increasingly willing to play according to the rules of the game. They are eager to participate in electoral politics and have denounced violence as a political method. The AKP has credibility among them. With their roots in the Islamist tradition in Turkey, most of the AKP politicians have personal contacts with the leadership of the Islamist parties of the Arab world. Furthermore, the AKP experience itself provides the moderate Islamist groups in the region with an example of a way to engage in legal politics without abandoning their conservative agendas. The second group in the Arab world that closely follows the AKP experience is the collection of reformist, liberal and secular groups. Although these groups do not necessarily share the AKP’s ideology, they see its experience in Turkey as a possible way out for their own dilemma. The political Islamists are the main opposition parties in all Arab countries. Therefore, if political reforms are implemented these parties are poised to benefit from them the most. This reality poses a dilemma for the secular reformists in the region, one which led them to side with the regimes that they criticize throughout most of the 1990s as the lesser of two evils. Increasingly, however, Arab reformers are more inclined to cooperate with moderate forces in the Islamist parties and movements to bring about a transition to a more democratic rule. The AKP experience thus presents them with a model that demonstrates that, through institutional limitations and democracy, Islamists parties can be managed and moderated.

¹⁶⁴ Political personalities play a significant role in international relations. The personal investment and engagement of a political leader makes a difference in times of normalcy as well as crisis. To their credit, both President Abdullah Gül and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan have taken risks to open up new venues of engagement and influence for Turkey. But it is equally true that strong personalities do not come out of the blue. They emerge at the intersection of a number of factors. Their strategic role goes beyond their personal geniuses and individual heroisms.

reinforced Ankara's acceptance in the wide Muslim/Arab world. For instance, "the Turkey-EU process has also become an interesting case for Arab reformers to consider. [In fact,] The reform process that deepened in Turkey as a result of its relationship with the EU presents a stimulus to political reform in the Arab world as well" (Altunisik, 2008).¹⁶⁵ Moreover, "the Turkish parliament's refusal to allow the [United States] to station its troops on Turkish soil to open a second front against Iraq increased Turkey's credibility in the Arab world ... [and] challenged [Ankara's] image as a stooge of the US in the region" (Altunisik, 2008).¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, "Ankara did not raise the spectre of Shii Islam, allowing it to pose as neutral party in the Sunni-Shii conflict raging in the region and thus enhance its stature in the Muslim world" (Bengio, 2009). Interestingly, almost the same characteristics have also played in Ankara's favor in its connections with the West. At first, the arrival to power of political Islam in the form of the AKP caused great concern in Western quarters. However, these fears faded away when the West soon realized that the new government is willing to operate under a secular constitutional order rather than aspiring to impose a political system organized around the principles of Islam. The shift in views were particularly evident on the part of the United States who used to depict Turkey as being "simply an American geostrategic 'barrier', 'bridge', or 'bulwark'. [Nevertheless, today it conceives Ankara as] an exemplary model of a Muslim-majority, secular, and democratic nation within [the] new geopolitical environment" (Walker, 2007). The change in US perceptions emphasizes the recognition of Turkey's independent policies and more

¹⁶⁵ According to Fares Braizat of the Center of Strategic Studies of the University of Jordan: "Turkey is seen by Muslim countries as a role-model that has successfully balanced tradition and modernization. The Arabs looked up to Turkey as a model for bringing modernization and democracy ... This could inspire Arab countries that if you introduce democratic reforms, it would mean you have the advantage of being considered for a better partnership with the European Union. See Ayse Hakim, "The Middle East Needs Turkey's EU membership", 2 October 2005, www.ankarapost.net/comments.php?id=1775.

¹⁶⁶ This new credibility was especially prevalent on the Arab street and among intellectuals critical of their own government's secret dealings with the US in support of the war, irrespective of public sentiments.

precisely the acceptance of its balancing role between all players with whom Ankara shares common values.¹⁶⁷

By adopting a moderate reformist Islamic discourse; implementing liberal economic and political values; promoting democratization and secularism and affirming the adherence to Turkey's Euro-Atlantic integration, the contemporary Turkish leadership seeks to assume a more assertive role of regional balancer. Indeed, the combination of these elements not only enhanced Ankara's relationship with its neighboring countries and improved its image in the Arab/Muslim world but also earned it growing international acceptability and garnered it respect as an independent actor following its own agenda. Hence, whether viewed from a Muslim/Arab standpoint or from a Western perspective, Turkey has got all what it takes to be a trustworthy role model and a credible balancer: Turkey is the only Muslim country in the Middle East with a democratic political system based upon secular principles and is the "only country who can speak from the region in terms of European values of democracy and freedom" while, at the same time, being able to communicate with Arab and Muslim countries based on shared history, faith and culture as well as religious and familial ties (Davutoğlu, 2007). Thanks to these exceptional characteristics, Turkey's attractiveness has increased and this in turn enabled the country to play the role of a reliable and neutral regional balancer.

With the purpose of successfully and effectively achieving its balancing mission, Turkey "has diversified the tools and the strategies it deploys". In addition to "prestige", "influence" and "strength", Ankara uses "soft power", wise diplomacy, and especially "its

¹⁶⁷ During Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's visit to Ankara on March 7th 2009 she stated that "[Turkey and the United States] share a commitment to democracy, a secular Constitution, respect for religious freedom, belief in a free market and a sense of global responsibility". See "Barack Obama visit puts Turkey at center stage in US policy" *Today's Zaman*, 9 March 2009 available at <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=169059>

potential for playing a third-party role in the management [and, if possible, the] resolution of regional conflicts” (Altunisik, 2008). Accordingly, “Turkey extended new diplomatic efforts to bringing peaceful resolution to the Syrian–Israeli conflict, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict” and the Lebanese conflict, with the potential to play a significant role in resolving the conflict between Iran and the United States (Murinson, 2006).

A- The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Since the beginning of the Peace Process at the Madrid Conference in 1991, and particularly after the Oslo Accords of 1993, “Turkey advocated an even-handed approach to the resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict” (Murinson, 2006). However, since 1996 the strategic relationship between Turkey and Israel took precedence over the Palestinian cause. Yet, in 2000, when al-Aqsa intifada started, the Turkish government was forced by domestic pressures to “distance itself from Israel’s heavy-handed response to the new intifada and take a role in ameliorating Israeli-Palestinian relations” (Martin, 2004: 185). Since then, Ankara has been involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in many different ways.¹⁶⁸ When the AKP came to power, the Palestinian question became a prominent issue on the new government’s agenda. Hence, when Prime Minister Erdoğan made his first official visit to Israel on May 1st, 2005, he discussed with his Israeli counterpart Ariel

¹⁶⁸ As other examples of Turkey’s involvement as a third party in structural prevention and in creating a conducive environment for peace we cite its participation many projects concerning structural prevention projects, i.e. attempts to increase resources for settlement and capacity building. One such attempt has been the TOBB-BIS Industry for Peace Initiative, which is led by the Turkish Chambers and Commodity Exchange. Part of this initiative is the Ankara Forum, which consists of representatives from the Chambers of Commerce of Israel, Palestine and Turkey, based on the understanding that private sector dialogue is good for confidence-building. The Forum has so far had seven meetings. One of the specific projects proposed by the Forum has been the establishment of the Erez Industrial Zone. This project recognizes that there is a close correlation between economic development and peace; it thus aims to contribute to the Palestinian economy by creating up to 7,000 jobs. The project offers profit for the Turkish companies involved and security for Israel on its borders, making it a win-win project for all those involved. However, the implementation of the project had been slow, due first to the worsening security situation in the area and then to the problems of signing a security protocol with Israel. When Hamas came to power in Gaza, the project was moved to Tarqumia in the West Bank. In addition to the TOBB Initiative, projects involving pipelines for energy, water and power supplies are also under discussion.

Sharon a possible Turkish assistance in the Israeli–Palestinian peace process. At the same time, the new Turkish government sought to establish closer ties to the Palestinian leadership. Accordingly, following Hamas’ victory in the Palestinian legislative election of January 2006, Khaled Mashal, the official representative of Hamas in Damascus, was invited to Ankara.¹⁶⁹ However, this bold step was intensively criticized by Tel Aviv and caused consternation within the Israeli government.¹⁷⁰ Turkey, on its part, rejected the Israeli criticism and explained the meeting with Mashal as part of Ankara’s role as a third party in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Indeed, Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan defended his government’s decision by affirming that Turkey’s aim was to urge Hamas to abandon violence and adopt a conciliatory attitude towards Israel.¹⁷¹ Despite negative echoes it remains that, as a democratic and peaceful country and a neutral credible regional balancer, Ankara sought to demonstrate its commitment to regional issues by applying democratic norms which dictate to deal with all regional players, even if the player was Hamas, as long as it was a democratically elected government. Furthermore, as a balancer, Turkey advocates a win-win solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by supporting a two-state solution and urging mutual dialogue to achieve the goal.¹⁷² It is worth noting that, in the context of the legitimacy crisis in the Palestinian territories, Hamas has requested Turkey’s intervention between themselves and Fatah in the wake of their victory in the elections in

¹⁶⁹ Mashal, however, made no announcement of moderation or a change in policy while he was in Turkey, and thus the whole saga served only to legitimize Hamas.

¹⁷⁰ Israel was deeply concerned by Turkey’s holding talks with Hamas as this provided Hamas with undeserved legitimacy and this invitation really irritated the Israeli government which wanted to isolate Hamas until it met a series of specific conditions, including acceptance of Israel’s right to exist. Raanan Gissin, the spokesman of the Israeli Prime Minister’s Office, commented during an interview on Turkish television: “It is a serious mistake; this visit could have consequences for our links that could be hard to repair.” He asked what the Turkish reaction would be if Tel Aviv had invited Abdullah Öcalan, the now imprisoned leader of the pro-Kurdish terrorist group the PKK, to Israel for talks. The Turkish Foreign Ministry described the comparison as “completely groundless and wrong”.

¹⁷¹ Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül said the meeting with Hamas “fulfilled the government’s international responsibilities in trying to steer the Palestinians towards peace”. See “Turkey Rejects Israeli Criticism”, *BBC News*, 17 February 2006.

¹⁷² At a joint news conference with visiting Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni in May 2006, Foreign Minister Gül declared “Our views are obvious. We are in favor of a plan that will lead Israel and Palestine to live side by side in peace and cooperate as two independent states”. Livni, on her part, said that two-state solution was the best method to put an end to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute.

Gaza.¹⁷³ Ankara's balancer role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict became even more assertive during 2008 Gaza crisis when Turkey assumed the role of a peace promoter by helping secure the cease-fire that ended hostilities between Israel and Hamas. By playing an active role in Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, Turkey entered new diplomatic territory and its role as a balancer in the Middle East has grown significantly. This mission was further boosted when Ankara took on its new role as a balancing force between Syria and Israel.

B- The Syrian-Israeli Conflict

"Following the gradual improvement of Turkey's relations with Syria after the October 1998 crisis, and after the collapse of Syrian-Israeli talks in 2000 and the deterioration of US-Syrian relations, Turkey has been trying to restart negotiations between Israel and Syria" (Altunisik, 2008).¹⁷⁴ Particularly, after the arrival of AK Party to power, the Erdoğan government "gave a new impetus to Turkish efforts, [in which Turkish Prime Minister is involved personally], to mediate conflict between [the warring parties]" (Murinson, 2006).¹⁷⁵ Starting in 2007, after several failed attempts,¹⁷⁶ Turkey succeeded in

¹⁷³ The request was made by Mahmoud Zahar, the number two man of Hamas and former foreign minister of the Hamas government, after Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas ruled out dialogue with Hamas. Palestinians are being dragged into a civil war and Turkey can assist the sides to reach an agreement, Zahar said "Turkey can help the Palestinians, who have been pushed into a corner by gas restrictions, embargos and poverty. It can mediate between the groups in Palestine and prevent unfair international embargos on Palestine", Zahar added, and lashed out at Abbas for rejecting dialogue and describing Hamas as "murderers and terrorists". See "Hamas requests Turkish mediation in dispute with Fatah", Today's Zaman, 22 June 2007. Available at: <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=114737>

¹⁷⁴ The conflict dates back to the Six Day War of 1967 when Israel occupied the Golan Heights. The Syrian government intends to exchange peace for the return of the Golan Heights situated right down to the Sea of Galilee, Israel's main water source. See S.G. Hajjar, 'The Israel-Syria Track', *Middle East Policy*, Vol.VI, No.3 (February 1999), pp.22-3.

¹⁷⁵ During the first summit in January 2004 between Erdoğan and Bashar al-Assad, Israel used the good offices of Prime Minister Erdoğan to pass a message to the Syrian leader. The Turkish Prime Minister personally got involved in the diplomatic effort. After Bashar al-Assad's visit, he met the Israeli ambassador to Ankara, Pinhas Avivi and relayed that, "Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said he is serious in his intention to renew peace talks with Israel, and intends taking all the necessary steps to reach a peace agreement in the Middle East". Furthermore, Israel itself was very interested in Turkey's intercession with Syria. With reference to an emerging reality in the post-Saddam Middle East, the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu commented on the prospects of the Syrian track: 'I think there is the opportunity today to explore possible contacts with Syria'. See A. Benn and A. Harel, "Turkish PM to Israel: Assad serious about renewing talks", *Haaretz*, 8 January 2004.

arranging and hosting several rounds of secret indirect peace talks between the two countries in Istanbul and Ankara under its auspices.¹⁷⁷ Ankara, which has close ties to both Israel and Syria, aimed to engineer the start of direct talks between Syria and Israel and hoped that low-level talks between the two parties would constitute a prelude to direct Syrian-Israeli negotiations. However, the 2008 Israeli assault on Gaza Strip prompted Syria to formally suspend the Turkish-mediated indirect talks as they were heading for a breakthrough,¹⁷⁸ “without, [however], killing off Syrian interest in an eventual deal or ruling out the resumption of negotiations, even if a right-wing government is formed in Israel”.¹⁷⁹ Still, as the negotiations were placed on hold, former Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan expressed Ankara’s readiness to relaunch indirect Israel-Syria peace talks if there was a request from both sides.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ The preliminary contacts between both countries were clouded by Israel’s insistence that peace requires full normalization of relations, including an end to Syria’s alliances with Israeli foes Iran, Hamas and Hezbollah. Damascus retorted that such demands had nothing to do with the principle of the exchange of land for peace set out for Middle East talks by an international conference in Madrid in 1991.

¹⁷⁷ Initially secret, the talks’ existence was made public by Israel and Syria in early 2008.

¹⁷⁸ In an interview on 28 April 2009 with pan-Arabic *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, President Assad said that Turkish mediated talks had stopped just as Syria was waiting for an Israeli response to Damascus’s definition of what constitutes the Golan boundary, which would have set the benchmark for any Israeli withdrawal.

¹⁷⁹ According to Paul Salem, director of the Carnegie Institute’s Middle East Centre, “Certainly for a period of time [Israel’s offensive attack on Gaza] changes the mood, the public rhetoric and the tensions, but in the end it doesn’t change the strategic options of any of the players”. http://www.javno.com/en-world/gaza-carnage-brakes-syria-israel-peace-moves_219194

¹⁸⁰ Diplomats in Damascus said in May 2009 that Turkish President Gül has been urging Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Netanyahu to resume the talks. See “Turkey: We’re ready to relaunch Israel-Syria talks”, *Haaretz*, 9 March 2009. See Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on 20 May 2009 after talks with US President Barack Obama that Israel was ready to immediately open peace talks with Syria without preconditions. However, he made clear “that any peace settlement ... must find a solution to Israel’s security needs.” It is worth mentioning that Netanyahu, who took office in April 2009, had appeared cool to the idea of reopening stalled talks with Damascus. He has repeatedly voiced opposition to pulling out of the Golan Heights to ensure that Israel has a strategic advantage in case of conflict with Syria. See “Netanyahu: Israel ready for talks with Syria, no preconditions”, *Haaretz*, 21 May 2009. Available at <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1086928.html>

Responding cautiously to the Israeli offer to open the talks without preconditions, the Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualem reiterated Syria’s calls for an Israeli commitment to restore the Golan and described it as “not a pre-condition, but a requirement for peace”. Similarly, Assad told a gathering of foreign ministers representing the Organization of the Islamic Conference states in Damascus on May 23^d, 2009 that “The failure of the peace process is a blatant demonstration that Israel is the major obstacle to peace”. He added “How can a state that was founded on illegal occupation and continues to murder the original inhabitants work toward peace? How can a country that has chosen the most extreme government in its history be a partner for peace?” See “Assad: Israel is the major obstacle to peace”, *Haaretz*, 23 May 2009. Available at <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1087501.html>

C- The Lebanese Conflict

Turkey's involvement in the Lebanese conflict is another example that illustrates the country's motivation to play the role of third party in regional crises. Ankara's intervention in the Lebanese crisis came at two levels. "First, the Turkish parliament took the decision to send forces to UNIFIL II ... despite some domestic criticism.... On the second level, Ankara was instrumental in bringing about an end to Lebanon's factional strife. Turkey attempted to mediate between different parties in the political crisis within Lebanon" (Altunisik, 2008).¹⁸¹ Turkey's active involvement in the stability efforts was also evident during the Lebanese-Syrian crisis in 2005 when the Turkish President Ahmet Sezer visited Damascus in April of that year and conveyed a message to his Syrian counterpart that Syria must implement the United Nations resolution and pull out all its troops from Lebanon by the end of April 2005.

D- The US-Iranian Conflict

On the eve of possible negotiations between Washington and Tehran, Turkey is talking the Iranian leadership into seizing the opportunity for peace and stability now that the new American administration, unlike its predecessor, favors dialogue.¹⁸² This position reflects Ankara's readiness to act as a go-between in bringing together both antagonists and goes in line with Turkey's multiplied diplomatic efforts that the country has been conducting to help ease the nuclear standoff with the West. At the same time, it seems that both players are willing to entrust Turkey with this mission. On her visit to Ankara on

¹⁸¹ Although not without risks, Erdoğan's decision to contribute troops to the UN peacekeeping mission in Lebanon had a number of important benefits. It both underscored Turkey's European credentials and showed that Ankara is an important regional player. It earned Erdoğan accolades in Washington, which helped reduce strains with the United States. And along with Erdoğan's criticism of Israel's military action, it allowed Turkey to demonstrate its solidarity with key Arab governments in the region, which supported the peacekeeping mission.

¹⁸² *Today's Zaman*, 10 March 2009.

March 7th, 2009, the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton praised Ankara's achievement as a successful regional third force in the Middle Eastern conflicts. Accordingly, Clinton stated that "the United States would ask Turkey to help push forward President Obama's plan to engage Iran".¹⁸³ As for the Iranian side, Tehran's position is still unclear about talks with the United States; however, the Iranian leaders declared that if any US-Iranian talks were to take place, they want Turkey to play the role of a third party.¹⁸⁴

Turkey was able not only to defuse the tensions in the region, but also to provide productive and peaceful solutions in ways that ensure regional security and stability. Hence, when Washington asked Ankara to be the "exit route" for the US withdrawal from Iraq, Turkey, who previously did not allow US troops to pass through it on the way in to Iraq, expressed its readiness to allow them to transit its territory on their way out.¹⁸⁵ Such position does not only serve the United States' interests, but also receives the acclaim and appreciation of the Arab and Muslim world and earns Ankara further respect and trust as a third force aiming to preserve peace and stability in the Middle East.

Conclusion

These examples concretely demonstrate that Turkey has the assets, the will and the credibility to be a successful power balancer in the region. Furthermore, they reveal a shift in Turkey's regional foreign policy from a "crisis-oriented" approach to a "vision-based"

¹⁸³ *Today's Zaman*, 7 March 2009.

¹⁸⁴ According to Turkish PM Erdoğan "Iran does want Turkey to play such a role... And if the United States also wants and asks us to play this role, we are ready to do this. [The Iranians] said to us that if something like this would happen, they want Turkey to play a role. Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ When it comes to Iraq, Turkey has also adopted a strategy of opening dialogue with all groups within Iraq, including the Kurds with whom Ankara had troubled ties. And this position goes in line with Turkey's new role as a regional balancer. Moreover, Turkey played a positive role in Afghanistan, and brought together the leaders of Pakistan and Afghanistan for talks which seemed to produce a better dynamic between Kabul and Islamabad.

one allowing Turkish policymakers “to identify potential crises before they erupt [or emerge] and devise appropriate [strategies] to tackle them”.¹⁸⁶ As part of this vision, Ankara abandoned its defensive foreign policy and adopted a proactive and comprehensive policy. Accordingly, Turkey is no longer a source of problems nor a country which only reacts to crises, but rather a problem-solving country, an “order-instituting” and a balancing country that intervenes effectively at the right moment to halt any change and control any conflict that may upset the balance in the region. “Since the end of the Cold War, several Turkish governments have played with the idea, and yet only the current AKP government has made the peace-builder role an important element of its policy towards the region, and Turkey’s main asset in this regard is its position of having good relations with the parties to different conflicts. This rather unique situation positions Turkey well to be a third party” appraised as a reliable player by all the parties involved in the conflict (Sözen, 2008). However, Ankara’s appeal “cannot be limited merely to the AKP or the moderation of Islam”, as we have seen it is rather the whole product of the country’s unique characteristics. “Turkey sets as a Muslim nation that is democratic, secular, economically well-integrated with globalization, an accession country with the European Union, and one historically belonging to key Western institutions such as NATO, OSCE, the Council of Europe, and OECD” (Altunisik, 2008).¹⁸⁷ Within this framework, the country benefits from dual Western-Muslim acceptance of its role as a third force in managing regional conflicts and in balancing between the different regional players. More than approval, Turkey has also earned the trust of the different actors which stems from their confidence that Ankara is capable of reaching win-win situations between all players involved in the power struggle and by that be able to create a conducive environment for peace and stability. An additional

¹⁸⁶ An interview with Ahmet Davutoğlu, Zaman, 4 May 2008.

¹⁸⁷ It is worth mentioning that Turkey is also a member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) whose Secretary General is Professor Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu from Turkey.

illustration confirms this point: when the Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU, Javier Solana, and the Iranian nuclear negotiator, Ali Larijani, wanted to convene in April 2007 to negotiate over Iran's nuclear program, both parties found in Ankara a safe space and a trusty place for meetings. "What has made Turkey's [position so special and its] participation in the convoluted politics of the Middle East different from that of other actors who have involved themselves in the region in the past, remains its singular commitment to working with all groups, and factions- including Israel and even Hamas - to find amicable solutions to the conflicts at hand" (Beng, 2008). The country's accessibility and openness to all parties reveal its desire to play an active regional role as a just and impartial arbiter, a role inspired by the new spirit in Turkish foreign policy.

Consciously or otherwise, the assertion of Turkey's balancing power in the Middle East began as soon as the doctrine of "strategic depth" was put in place. The 2003 Iraq crisis constituted the first important test for Turkey's role as a regional balancer and, at the same time, offered Ankara the chance to attest to its aptitude to fulfill this mission in practice. And since, regional developments following in succession have served as political opportunities for the new Turkish role in the Middle East. Dealing with complicated regional crises required the Turkish government the greatest of diplomatic prowess and the most delicate of balancing acts. In this context, Ankara pursues all avenues to prevent the occurrence of clashes in a highly polarized region.¹⁸⁸ Hence, Turkish involvement in

¹⁸⁸ For instance, the Turkish leadership took the initiative to convene Iraq's neighbors in Istanbul on 23 January 2003 as a last resort tool to urge Saddam Hussein to cooperate with arms inspectors from the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission and the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency). The foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, Iran, Syria, Jordan, Egypt and Turkey were invited to Çırağan Palace Hotel in Istanbul. The symbolism of a convention of representatives of Muslim states in an Ottoman-era Palace was not lost on the Middle Eastern audience. For instance, the Lebanese Daily Star commented, "Turkey's Prime Minister, Abdullah Gül, may look like a budget version of Rafic Hariri, but he hosted an old-fashioned Ottoman parley on Wednesday at Istanbul's Çırağan palace". See M. Young, "Lebanon: Clueless on Iraq", *The Daily Star*, 25 January 2003. Addressing his counterparts, Turkish Foreign Minister Yasar Yakis

regional politics appears as a regional necessity to ensure peace and stability in the Middle East. However, at the same time, it is a must for Turkey since it better serves its domestic energy and trade needs, as well as its security imperatives, and its regional interests in general.

Thanks to its unprecedented policy initiative, Turkey is no longer “labeled as ... a “bridge” or a “barrier” between the Middle East and the West [nor is it] confined to being simply a staunch ally of the United States [that replicates] Washington’s line in key issues” (Walker , 2007). Among other things, this means that Turkey now has become a more assertive and regional player with a greater weight in regional politics. Moreover, Turkey now maintains optimal independence and leverage on the global and regional stage which allows it to successfully play the role of a neutral balancer. “The Middle East and its current realities represent the most malleable and exciting frontiers for Turkish foreign policy” and offers the country immense opportunities on many levels, politically, diplomatically, economically and even culturally (walker, 2007). Nevertheless, as much as this path is attractive, appealing and holds new openings to Turkish foreign policy, it is, at the same time, rife with difficulties and uncertainties. “Turkey lives in a difficult and unstable neighborhood of weak states prone to ethnic and religious conflicts” (Keridis, 2004: 324). Hence, Ankara faces “varying levels of conflict in its backyard and [an increasing] focus on military security and armament buildup” (Altunisik, 2008). In this new Middle East,

warned about the impending war: “There is a fire which is moving towards our homes. Praying to Allah to spare us from a war is an approach, but exerting all our efforts to prevent war, knocking on all doors and exploring every possible means that could prevent a war is another approach”. At the conclusion of this conference the Turkish Foreign Minister stated “We call solemnly on the Iraqi leadership to move irreversibly and sincerely towards assuming its responsibilities in restoring peace and stability in the region”. See “Iraq told to actively cooperate with UN: Regional conference in Istanbul”, *Dawn* Internet edition, 24 January, 2003, available at <http://signs-of-the-times.org/signs/signs70.htm>. Iraqi Vice President Taha Yasin Ramadan was secretly brought to the meeting at the Çırağan Palace hotel, but he did not accept the demand for “political restructuring in Iraq” and this caused the failure of Ankara’s initiative. Hence, Ankara sought to prevent the occurrence of the war by rejected a bill aiming to allow US troops to pass through Turkey on their way to Iraq.

Turkey has unexpected opportunities however coupled with many risks and challenges. Thus, Ankara, in its aspiration to play the role of a regional balancer, may involve itself in greater conflicts, with overwhelming implications on its own security and economy. Is Turkey ready to take on the political and the moral responsibility of these challenges? Till when will Ankara be able to play this role in terms of its capabilities as well as in regard to changes in regional circumstances? Till when will Turkey be willing to fulfill this mission? What are the prospects of this role? This will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

TURKEY AS A POWER BALANCER: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

While ideological preferences have kept Turkey away from playing any considerable role in Middle Eastern politics for a long time, regional circumstances and domestic considerations in recent years have invited it back to the backyard of the Ottoman Empire. For six years now, Ankara has been assuming the role of a regional balancer between rivals in an extremely volatile region. This new role did not only constitute a break with traditional Turkish foreign policy but also underlined Turkey's unique characteristics that make it the only regional actor able to fulfill this mission. This fact, however, has placed a political responsibility on Ankara for effectively achieving this mantle by devoting itself to the preservation of peace and stability in the region. So far, Turkey has been heavily and successfully invested as a neutral third force in the management and the resolution of Middle Eastern conflicts, and its role has been accepted by different regional and external actors. As a result, Ankara enjoys more respect and trust and has greater political and economic spheres than any time before. This fact has also placed a moral responsibility on Turkey for maintaining good relations with the West and the East, while staying uncommitted to any actor. At the same time, these diplomatic and political successes have enabled the country to optimize the benefits of its geographical location by developing close economic relations with its neighboring countries. Nevertheless, the balancer role is certainly not given, and Ankara's greater involvement in the Middle East has not been cost free. When we evaluate the whole picture, what we see is that this role has offered Turkey

great advantages and opportunities, yet, at the same time, these openings are coupled with challenges that complicate Ankara's balancing mission. In fact, the emergence of Turkey as a regional balancer is an evolving process whose sustainability can be subject to many obstacles. Indeed, there are in practice several constraints upon Turkey as a balancer some of which originate from domestic difficulties and at the same time, Ankara faces troubled environments both regionally and internationally. Hence, Turkey must overcome these defies to bring about an effective balancer mission.

To some extent, Turkey's balancing power is a factor of its capacity to solve its own domestic problems. The Kurdish issue is one of the country's most vexing.¹⁸⁹ However, to remain a stable and democratic country that can act as a credible balancer among other actor, Ankara should start by resolving the conflicts within its own boundaries. Accordingly, it has to confront the Kurdish question in a more constructive approach even if accommodation with it appeared to be a lengthy and delicate process. The Erdoğan government seemed to recognize the urgency of the issue. Hence, over the last years it has taken several small steps by opening a dialogue with the Iraqi Kurdish leadership hoping to reach a solution for the PKK violence and appease the internal Kurdish problem.¹⁹⁰ The Turkish military, however, opposed such dialogue; which resulted in escalating tensions between the government and the military authority who assume a more confrontational position on the Kurdish challenge. In fact, the dynamics governing the AKP relationship with the military as well as the polarization between the secularists and the AKP government are yet other internal problems that undermine the balancer role. Given the

¹⁸⁹ The problem stems in part from Atatürk's dictum that, despite the presence of millions of Kurds, only the "Turkish nation" lived within the borders of the Republic. To uphold this tenet, the Turkish government has suppressed any display of Kurdish linguistic or cultural distinctiveness and encouraged full assimilation.

¹⁹⁰ Erdoğan's government has authorized charter flights to two Kurdish cities and reopened the Turkish consulate in Mosul. There is vigorous cross-border trade with the Kurds in northern Iraq, particularly in crude oil and gasoline

importance of the military- which has close ties to the secular elite- in Turkish politics especially on sensitive issues of national security, the government needs its support, or at least its acquiescence, if any solution to the Kurdish question is to succeed. The political instability and the periods of crises that Turkey goes through challenge the country's balancing power capabilities. Indeed, if its domestic politics were to go wrong, Turkey's image in the Arab world as a democratic success story and a thriving example of political modernization will cease. These developments would have negative implications on Ankara's status as a balancer and instead of having a stabilizing effect it could become a destabilizing factor in the Middle East. Moreover, the prospects for the future of the AKP experience will have an impact on Turkey's balancing status, giving that the rising to power of this party and its doctrine of "strategic depth" have profoundly contributed in shaping the new Turkish foreign policy and in defining the country's balancer role.

Regionally, things seem to be also complicated. Turkish foreign policymakers are confronted with challenges of great variety and complexity. Despite the positive echoes in Arab streets about Turkey's growing role as a regional balancer and a stabilizer, some skeptical voices can still be heard. These countries have been deeply suspicious of the Turks, who once ruled them as part of the Ottoman Empire. Hence, for some skeptics, Ankara's interest in the region masks some disguised imperialist expansionist Ottoman ambitions in the region and reflects an old dream to re-establish its rule over the Arabs through reaffirming Turkey's historical and geographical depths. Others perceive Turkey as the "tongs" of Western powers who want to shape the Middle East from within" and that the balancer role is only a prelude to this project. Yet, that is hardly an exclusively Arabic perception. In effect, this view is also shared by some Turks who undermined Turkey's new role considering as part of the US' Grand Middle East Project where, supposedly the United

States puts Istanbul as the capital of the Grand Middle East. Hence, to reinforce its balancing role, there is a need for Ankara to reconcile with its history (including the Ottoman history) where, while aware of its virtues, it should also acknowledge its sins in the history. Therefore, Ankara will have to be careful in picking its moves in order not to provoke the hundred-year-old anti-Turkish sentiments among Arabs. Other regional phenomena may affect the balancer role that Turkey seeks to play. For instance, growing radicalization and division within the Arab and the Muslim world as well as increasing “Islamophobia” in the West, complicates its role as a promoter of cooperation and harmony rather than conflict between the West and the East.

The echoes of PM Erdoğan’s fiery remarks on Israel during the World Economic Forum at Davos have reached international political milieus. According to some observers, Turkey’s stance during Gaza War undermined the country’s chances to EU. In case true, this would spoil one of Turkey’s most desired dreams. With EU accession in mind, the country has adopted dramatic political reforms which were reflected by its increasing activism in working to resolve tensions across the Middle East. Towards this end, Ankara sought to satisfy EU accession criteria by treating its southern neighbors *à la Europe*. Accordingly, trust, “engagement and dialogue, rather than confrontation and containment”, appeared to be the “*leitmotifs*” of the Turkish rhetoric”.¹⁹¹ Hence, Turkey should be watchful of its policies in the region as well as its internal reforms in order to optimize its chances to EU accession, which are already depending on its policy towards issues such as Cyprus that the Turkish military considers sensitive. Hence, as Ankara seeks to promote its role as a regional power balancer in the Middle East, it should be also mindful of its relations with its other neighbors such as Armenia and Greece.

¹⁹¹ S. Çağaptay, “A Turkish Rapprochement With Middle East Rogue States?”, *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, 9 January 2004.

Notwithstanding these challenges, Turkey's intervention in the region as a balancer between the different actors remains a necessity as long as the regional context requires a third force to hold the balance of power and avert potential clashes. Nevertheless, Ankara cannot overlook these problems for they impede the successful accomplishment of its mission. Clearly, dealing with these issues means that some difficult tasks are awaiting Turkey both inside and outside. So far, Turkey seems to be willing to take risks in the convoluted Middle Eastern affairs. This holds particularly true since Ankara is balancing between antagonists promoting clashing regional projects while none appears willing to easily renounce his prerogatives without definite guarantees. The country's expanded awareness and appreciation for the significant role it can play in the Middle East and beyond, pushes Turkey to realize the full potential that it has for being a versatile multiregional. This suggests that Ankara's role as a balancer is not a permanent role, but rather a transitory one. It is no secret that Turkey's increased engagement in the Middle East reflects its desire to become a self-confident regional superpower. Hence, by playing the role of the balancer, Turkey is paving the way and preparing the conducive atmosphere and propitious environment that prelude its role as a major regional power. Therefore, it is in Ankara's advantage to prevent the occurrence of clashes between the regional players, and to ensure the survival of the system, because its interests as well as its aspirations are best served if the regional balance of power is maintained and if regional peace and stability are preserved.

Today, Turkey has shifted from being a secondary player in a global conflict to a principal actor in regional conflicts. The clock cannot be turned back. Thus, Ankara will continue to pursue its EU membership project, and will maintain good connections with the

United States in particular and the West in general. Even more, Turkey will most likely enhance its relations with the United States and maybe enter a phase of strategic partnership, however, only in the limits of the intersection of their interests. This does not suggest that Ankara will deny or renounce its Western face, yet as long as this does not conflict with its Eastern face. Turkey will be a more independent and assertive player, following its own agenda in its foreign policy making without replicating Western policies in the region as used to be the case in the past. At the same time, Ankara will preserve its good ties with its eastern neighbors and will call upon them to undertake political and economic reforms. This reflects Ankara's desire to preclude further Western interference (mainly American) in Middle Eastern affairs and thereby secure itself a bigger regional role and a greater leverage in the Middle East and beyond. As it seems, the new American administration has understood these changes and has admitted this promising role by asking Turkey for its cooperation in solving Middle Eastern conflicts (in Afghanistan, in Iraq...).

“In its new foreign policy openings, Turkey is responding to the fundamental changes taking place in the international system and in its immediate neighborhood. [The current Middle Eastern subsystem is in the midst of a dramatic phase of upheaval, at the same time the regional] order is functioning without a center or with multiple centers, which amounts to the same thing. Hence, the center of the region is up for grabs, and there are no guaranteed winners on the horizon” (Kalin, 2008). Amid the power vacuum, Ankara has no regional competitor who could combine at the same time strategic geopolitical position, good relations with all neighboring countries, military might and strong economy and mainly the will to fulfill this role.¹⁹² Hence, Turkey has got all what it takes to be a

¹⁹² The only real competitor could have been Turkey's bitter friend Iran, who has also a strategic geopolitical position, military might and strong economy. Yet, it certainly lacks good connections with regional actors. still one of the major powers in the middle East with its army and now its nuclear program which is a plus compared to Turkey. Yet, Iran does not have the soft power that Turkey possesses, nor the good relations with

multiregional player. Willingly or unwillingly, Turkey will be a central country standing at the fault-lines that unite the Euro-Asian landmass with the Middle East. Napoleon observed that “a country’s fate is determined by its geography”. Whether a blessing or a curse, Turkey is destined to be a major player on the regional level and perhaps one day on the global level. As we approach 2023, the one hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the Turkish Republic, should Turkey prepare itself for a global role?

its neighboring or western powers. Above all that, it does not have the will to play the role of a major trustee of the wide Sunni Muslim and Arab world (even this point is a plus for Turkey and makes it more accepted by the arabs to be in this position). As for Iraq, a previous strong Arab country, it has enough internal problems to take care of. As for the rest of the Arab countries, the KSA and Egypt (in addition to its lack of geopolitical .. economic weakness), even if they will to have some role in the region, the problem of legitimacy of their orders, the lack of democracy make them weak candidates vis-à-vis Turkey. what remains is Israel which can also be a competitor of Turkey in its western connections, its “democratic” orientation, however, not to mention the geostrategic position, it lacks many other elements, above all the good relations, the history and the common values, and mostly the will to play this role. The Jewish state is still looking for recognition.

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